

## **The Race of life**

The first time we come across a word in Scripture is important and seminal. In this case it is in Psalm 19:5 where the sun coming up to move across the sky is likened to a bridegroom coming out of his changing room in anticipation of his imminent marriage and a runner who has trained and is joyfully ready and strong and glad to run his race (be it 100m or a marathon).

In Ecclesiastes 9:11 “a spanner is thrown in the works,” as we read that the race “is not to the swift,” but “time and chance happen to them all.” The fastest runner may fall or get tripped just before the finishing line. He may get “spiked” or his shoe may come off.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul has his eyes on the race in the stadium and the fact there is only one winner. He exhorts us to be those who strive to win.

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12:1 exhorts us to lay aside excess baggage, which might be cumbersome clothes like the flowing robes of a man in a middle eastern costume, or baggage we are carrying, so that we can run. Have you ever seen a runner in a heavy coat carrying a briefcase? What he is referring to are weights or hindrances to our Christian lives, which may be inordinate relationships, inordinate worldly cares, wrong priorities, time-wasting, or besetting sins that slow us down and hinder us from running the race that is set for us individually and is lifelong, i.e., requires endurance. Why is the Christian life likened to a long distance race? Because unlike short distances, which are over in seconds or minutes, the temptation is to stop or give up. Running a long distance is a prolonged effort, and pain has to be endured for perhaps hours. What should encourage us? First, our election in Christ. Our forerunner, Jesus Christ, has already finished (Hebrews 6:20). Second, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—the heroes of faith, a cheering crowd, who have finished their race (Hebrews 12:1). Finally, we have in us the guarantee we will finish—the Almighty Spirit of Christ (Ephesians 1:14). So let us lay aside every impediment and run!

Note that Jesus has finished his race, and Paul could say the same in 2 Timothy 4:7: We must finish; we cannot step off the track or stop and get a cab or buggy, and by God’s grace we will. Those of us who jog or run will particularly appreciate these metaphorical allusions to running the race in the Bible. Running, and indeed any physical sporting endeavour requiring discipline has important lessons to carry over into the life of the Christian disciple! How’s your training? See table below.

## A comparison between running a race and the Christian race of life.

	<b>Running a race</b>	<b>The Christian Race of life</b>
Recruitment	Decision to run	Effectual call
Rest	Rest/easy recovery days	Sabbaths
Training	Daily training alone and also periodically in a group.	Daily devotion, Church attendance (praise and preaching), Bible studies.
Trials	Inclement weather. Injury. Illness.	Tribulation. Battle versus world, sin and Satan. Times of trial.
Fuel	Good balanced diet.	The Word.
Clothing	The lightest possible/club or country colours	Righteousness of Christ.
Coach	Club coach	Christ's Spirit/church office bearers
Objective	Race day-to win.	Last day (of judgement)
Start	Gun fires	Conversion
Running	Correct pace. Speed, plus or minus stamina.	Dependence on God (Prayer) Wisdom. Patience.
Hindrances	(a fall, obstacles, adverse incidents)	Cast off every weight (hindrances/sin)
Finish	Crossing the line.	Death
Fellow runners	Competitors	Brethren
Reward	Perishable wreath/medal	Imperishable wreath/crown, reasure in heaven, 'Christ's well done', crowns.