

RUN TO WIN PART THREE: WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF THE RACE AND HOW TO PREPARE TO RUN?

FOUNDATIONAL VERSES:

“You know that in a race all the runners run but only one wins the prize, don’t you? You must run in such a way that you may be victorious. Everyone who enters an athletic contest practices self-control in everything. They do it to win a wreath that withers away, but we run to win a prize that never fades. That is the way I run, with a clear goal in mind. That is the way I fight, not like someone shadow boxing.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-26 ISV)

*“Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up.”
(Hebrews 12:1-3 ISV)*

Run To Win Part Three focuses on some of the elements that you will encounter while running the race of life and how to prepare to run the race.

Before going forward, as a brief review, we saw in parts one and two, that the race that we’re in, is both natural and spiritual. We’re born into the natural race and born again into the spiritual race. We’re in the race to love God, love ourselves and love others.

The power to run our natural race is based on natural resources - the help of other people and knowledge and wisdom that can be obtained through our senses and study of purely human material. The power to run our spiritual race is based on spiritual resources that come from the Holy Spirit.

Elements of the Race

The fact that our race is both natural and spiritual and is run on earth in a world of tribulation, means that the race will have natural and spiritual challenges. Some elements we will encounter in our race are:

1. Sin with its accompanying entanglements
2. Distractions and lack of focus
3. Tiredness, Exhaustion and Fatigue
4. Disgrace and Shame

Based on our foundation verse from Hebrews 12, we will encounter sin. In this context, sin is defined as, "to miss the mark, to wander from the path of righteousness and honor, an offense." By its very nature, sin takes someone off the path. But, not only does sin take a person off the path, it also gets the person entangled in habits, emotions and thoughts that can keep them off the path.

Sin has the ability to entangle us in various things that will cause us to, not only get off target, but to also keep us off target. Sin also has the ability to put a weight on us which can make us tired, drain our endurance and tempt us to give up on the race.

12 God will bless you, if you don't give up when your faith is being tested. He will reward you with a glorious life,[a] just as he rewards everyone who loves him. 13 Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others. 14 We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. 15 Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead. 16 Don't be fooled, my dear friends. (James 1: 12-16)

Two more elements of the race that we encounter are disgrace and shame. Disgrace is being defined as the “loss of grace, favor, or honor” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disgrace>). There are times during the race when we will lose the grace, favor and honor of others. We have to realize that it’s a part of running the race of life.

We will also have to deal with shame. And shame is defined as “1. a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety; 2. a condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shame>). Having hurt and painful feelings due to a “fall from grace” and being seen as less honorable than we are, have to be endured and worked in spiritual ways.

How we handle the elements of the race will determine how well we navigate the race that we’re running.

Preparing for the Race

As 1 Corinthians 9: 24 states, “You must run in such a way that you may be victorious.” Again using the foundational verses, we have to:

1. Practice self-control in everything
 - a. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training...
(1 Corinthians 9: 24 NIV)
2. Have a clear goal in mind
 - a. That is the way I run, with a clear goal in mind....
(1 Corinthians 9: 26 ISV)
3. Throw off everything that hinders us
 - a. We should remove from our lives anything that would slow us down...
(Hebrews 12: 1 ERV)
4. Fix our attention firmly on Jesus
 - a. We must never stop looking to Jesus. He is the leader of our faith, and he is the one who makes our faith complete
(Hebrews 12: 2 ERV)

To prepare to run our race, we have to first have a clear primary goal in mind, which is eternal life as a member of God's family with co-rulership with Jesus. That goal is centered around loving God, loving ourselves and loving others. This goal is both spiritual and natural.

When we're born naturally, that primary goal should be given to us by our parents or guardians. Then as we grow and mature that goal should become more firmly established as our own. However, since that is not our initial motivation, we generally pursue other goals as our primary goal.

In general, the preparation to run our race toward our primary and secondary goals is the same. In order to reach our goals, both primary and secondary, we have to practice self-control and self-discipline. Without self-control and self-discipline, we wander off the path and miss the mark, which is sin.

As part of practicing self-discipline, we have to get rid of anything that hinders us or weighs us down. We have to take account of whatever is in our lives that doesn't move us toward our goals. One way to do that is to write out a personal purpose statement. We can then use that purpose statement to access what may be in our lives that doesn't align with that purpose.

In order to complete our preparation, we need an example. That example is Jesus. He already ran the race on both the natural and spiritual level and He obtained the prize. We have to do what He did.

While that preparation will help us reach our secondary goals, obtaining the primary goal requires not only fixing our eyes on Jesus as our example, it also requires that we, "become acquainted with by experience." (Thayer definition). As John 15: 4-5 says,

“ 4 “Abide in me, and I will abide in you. Just as the branch cannot produce fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who abides in me while I abide in him produces much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

It's only through Jesus Christ can we obtain the eternal prize - the crown that lasts forever.

Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3: 13-14)

Bible Study Questions:

Do you feel that you're adequately prepared to run your race?

1. All of the time? _____
2. A lot of the time? _____
3. Most of the time? _____
4. Some of the time? _____
5. None of the time? _____

If loving God, loving ourselves, loving others and obtaining an eternal crown is your primary goal, do you feel like you're pursuing your primary goal?

1. All of the time? _____
2. A lot of the time? _____
3. Most of the time? _____
4. Some of the time? _____
5. None of the time? _____

What element of the race is the most challenging for you ?

What aspect of the preparation is the most challenging for you?

What aspect of the preparation do you enjoy the most?