



World Christian Fellowship

www.wcflondon.com
wcflondon@gmail.com

Athlete

2 Timothy 2:5, *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

- Run according to rule
- Aim for prize
- Self-Discipline
- Coach/ Teacher
- Fear
- Right Training

Sports is a language that is spoken by people around the world. It was certainly a familiar subject to Roman citizens in the first century.

Athletes were the iconic figures of the ancient world, the heroes of young boys, and the craze of the culture. Drawing on this popularity, the New Testament writers chose to convey many important aspects of the Christian life through athletic metaphors.

They used sporting events to depict important truths related to our sanctification. Here are some specific aspects they teach us about our pursuit of holiness.

Paul's personal dedication in what follows in **1 Corinthians 9** as he describes his commitment to his calling by using imagery associated with athletics.

Paul's use of such imagery is in harmony with other early sources, such as the Greek philosophers, "who commonly used athletic illustrations to describe their striving for truth and wise living."

Paul begins his discussion by turning to the key athletic event in the Greek games—the foot race. Although several different races of various lengths were developed in later games, the earliest event was termed a "stadion," which was the length of the track (630 feet).

There is one form of running I am magnetically drawn to, and that's the marathon.

The Christian life is often compared to a race.

Paul tells the Galatians they were running well and wonders how they got off track.

Galatians 5:7, *You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

Paul says he did not run nor toil in vain with the Philippians.

Philippians 2:16, *holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.*

The Bible clearly uses athletic events as metaphors for your Christian life—teaching you that following Jesus is not passive, easy, comfortable, or a complacent road, but an aggressive, diligent, and sacrificial journey.

Many see the Christian life as a game, crutch, or a religion, when actually it's a marathon race.

In our culture, many are tempted to view the Christian life as

- fun instead of a fight,
- comfortable instead of a commitment,
- dream instead of a discipline,
- game instead of a gruelling athletic event.

In our culture, we are tempted to embrace the idiocy that living for Christ is a piece of cake instead of an agonizing marathon.

The Christian life is not a 100-yard dash, it's a long-distance race—26 miles, 385 yards.

Success in this race is not merely determined by how you begin, but by how you finish!

Not simply your entrance in the race, but your endurance in the race.

That is why Paul could say at the end of his life and ministry saying he had finished the race.

2 Timothy 4:7, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”*

Timothy is in trouble, Paul told Timothy to fire up his race by using his spiritual gifts and relying on God's resources. **1 Timothy 1:6-7**.

Don't be intimidated by the pressure of Rome threatening to kill Paul, even though it may mean if you, Timothy, support Paul and the true Gospel, you also might be killed.

Paul says, “Don't be ashamed of the Gospel, nor of me His prisoner.” **1 Timothy 1:9-11**.

Timothy must stand firm on the truth of sound doctrine and relying on the Holy Spirit to uphold only Apostolic teachings. **1 Timothy 1:12-14.**

Timothy was struggling battles over doctrine inside the church and fear of lethal persecution outside the church were wearing him out.

Young Timothy is fading in the stretch. Timothy is intimidated by the other competitors. So, Paul challenges Timothy in chapter 2 to rely on God's grace to train men who will be able to train others.

Paul challenges Timothy to be a soldier who is focused and ready to suffer in spiritual warfare.

Paul challenges Timothy to be an athlete who never stops competing for Christ while obeying the rules of the contest.

1. The Contest

"Also if anyone competes as an athlete."

There are some who disdain competition and mock athletic endeavour, but the New Testament writers did not.

Not so you and I would idolize sports or miss Sunday worship, but so we would embrace that our relationship with Christ requires aggressive effort.

Do you remember that time you swung a bat a thousand times a day?

Paul says to Timothy “competes as an athlete” is continual, ongoing, never-ending competition.

Athleo is where we get our English word, athletic.

In general, this verb means to compete for something or to engage in a contest. This specific verb form literally means you actively might wrestle.

Competes describes the determination to do your best. It’s the motivation to win. Competes as an athlete is talking about the internal striving for winning and fighting for excellence. Competes is to never stop engaging in competition.

Do you remember Christ example?

Jesus Christ is preaching, teaching, healing, ministering to the multitudes, and it is so late at night, but He continues serving, helping, healing, and teaching.

Why?

Because Christ is the ultimate example of an athlete.

He is determined.

If Christ is the only true God, the one Creator, the Lord of lords and all others are false.

If Christ is the only way of salvation, the only way to be made right with God, the only way to be forgiven and Heaven bound then there ought to be in our lives a determination like His own. To make His Gospel message known, along with a striving to be obedient to His Word with a heart of excellence.

To put athletic effort into following Christ.

What does that athletic endeavour in your faith look like?

Hebrews 12:1-3, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Here the author of Hebrews describes the Christian life like a race involving four elements.

Inspiration:

The cloud of witnesses refers to **Hebrews chapter 11** and all the examples who have gone before. Some say the cloud of witnesses is those in Hebrews 11 who are looking down from Heaven on us here on Earth that is inaccurate. The correct interpretation is that those who have run their race by faith give us an example to follow. They are the forerunners to demonstrate how you are to run and compete.

Now that God has saved you and changed your life, you have models to follow and be inspired by Christ and His saints.

So, when you become fainthearted or want to quit, or are struggling like Timothy, you can get inspired by the examples of those in the past.

As you view the gallery of faith in Hebrews 11 and elsewhere, looking at those who have lived their lives by faith that it should inspire you to live by faith as well.

For you, it could be a parent, or friend, pastor, or spiritual leader.

It could be David, Daniel, Isaiah or Paul, or the heroes of Hebrews 11—but they are there to inspire us to keep running. It could be Luther or an Early Church Father.

To become determined in our faith like an athlete means to be determined to win.

To grow determined, you can be inspired by spiritual heroes by others.

Relationships are seldom neutral!

Our relationships are either a help or a hindrance.

Your relationship to others is either a help or hindrance.

What kind of inspiration are you being to others?

Are you inspiring them for Christ?

What would those who know you best put on your tombstone if they were to write it today?

What have you done for Christ now that would inspire others later?

You must recognize, you have a short slice of life to make an impact for Christ and the time it takes to get from 20 to 60 is fast.

Suppose tomorrow you will be 80. But what you are becoming today will dictate the kind of impact you will have tomorrow.

Look around at the gallery of Hebrews 11.
Church history.

Your life for those who inspired you.

Would you inspire others to determinedly strive for Christ?

Preparation.

Hebrews 12:1b, *“Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.”*

Inspiration on its own is insufficient.

You can get really inspired, but nothing happens.

You can come to this camp or go to a conference, get really inspired, then come home and do nothing.

You were inspired to grow, repent or mature.

You were inspired to become more like Christ, but you didn't, because you didn't prepare.

Inspiration devoid of preparation equals stagnation.

Inspirational messages are only good if they are followed by empowered action.

James 1 is an illustration of the man who looks at himself, then forgets! Inspired but no actions.

What is the preparation?

“Lay aside every weight.”

In the Greek, weight is excessive, bulky, useless, weight. Runners would train with weights then when they ran their race, they ran without them.

Understand, the writer of Hebrews was bringing the people from a legalistic, useless ritualism to genuine dependent faith in Christ—leading them from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Anything that bogs you down in running the race needs to be thrown away. The writer is not talking about sinful things here, but things that slow you down.

Is there anything in your life that is a hindrance?

Someone you are in love that could be lovely, but if they are a hindrance.

The question is not, “Can I do this?” but, “Should I do this?”

Sports, entertainment, movies, reading, shopping, food, drink, family demands, credit cards, pleasure, or comfort.

The question is, “As a Christian, will this slow me down in my race?”

The Scripture says here, if it is weighing you down in your pursuit of Christ, throw it off.

Preparation must also entail laying aside “the sin which so easily entangles us.” God knows and you know, and maybe no one else knows what you are dealing with.

You may be enslaved to a habit, but if anybody found out, you would be dreadfully ashamed. But if you don’t “lay aside the sin which entangles” you, then you will not make progress in spiritual fitness.

These sins don’t necessarily have to be big stuff, they can be little things.

What does it take to trip up a runner?

Just a small, untied shoelace.

Are there untied shoelaces in your spiritual life that you need to deal with today?

The preparation is clear, but it must relate to a resolution.

Resolution.

Hebrews 12:1c, *“and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*

Endurance means to remain under.

There will be moments in your Christian life which will be painful and bring you to a point where you will consider quitting. You may even try to quit.

Some stop going to church, can't find the right church, have been burned by a church.

Others start attending an entertaining church or one without any biblical expectations.

Those who remain in continual, intentional, unrepentant sin, like never going to church, eventually manifest they were never really saved in the first place.

Jesus confirms this in the parable of the soils.

Matthew 13:20 -21, *But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.*

They were never saved in the first place.

Those whom God has saved, He will keep and protect and get you back in the race.

John 6:39, *“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”*

Along with His promise to keep you and lose nothing, comes our resolute endurance.

Even when it’s difficult, you are to endure!

Exercise patience!!

Remain steadfast!!!

Motivation.

Hebrews 12:2-3, *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

The writer of Hebrews just shut down all whiners.

Whenever you are tempted to say, “Following Christ and obeying the Bible, is just too tough,” you are looking at yourself and not fixing your eyes on Christ.

Remember what our Lord did for you and you will be motivated to keep on running.

You will not grow weary or lose heart. Christ endured the cross, massive shame and abuse by sinners in order to rescue you.

So, what if sinners are cruel to you—you keep running and enduring. You are in a spiritual athletic contest.

2 Timothy 2:5, *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

In the New Testament, whenever athletics is used for the Christian life, you are never being asked to compete against others.

Comparison to others is not the goal here!

We do it in sports all the time compare one player against another. But not in Christ.

There are two problems when you compare.

1. You will always find somebody who is doing a better job than you and get discouraged.
2. You will always find somebody you are doing a better job than, and you will get proud.

Either way, you will be on discouragement or pride will both kill you.

Don't compare yourself to others.
Each of you here are so unique.

God has given you your own race to run, your own competition to pursue.

You are a spiritual snowflake. No one was created like you, saved like you, gifted like you, or given a heart desire like you.

You are not in competition with other believers, but your goal is to become like Christ, not others.

But Paul does make it clear that you are continually in the game. The tense of the Greek verb, "competes as an athlete," is present, continual, ongoing athletic endeavour.

You don't stop this contest until you go home to be in Heaven.

2. The CROWN

2 Timothy 2:5, *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

2 Timothy 4:8, *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

There are crowns coming to those who serve Christ. The word crown means wreath, garland, **diadem**, the victor's wreath.

It seems that those actual crowns will be cast at the feet of Christ, since He is the one who made it possible for us to do anything worthy of eternal reward.

That idea comes from the elders of the Church, who seem to be representative of those in the church.

Revelation 4:10-11, *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:*
¹¹ *“You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”*

This could be a literal event, or possibly a symbolic event describing a greater capacity to worship Christ for all eternity.

Paul makes it clear that you don't get your prize, but the prize is given to you.

Paul uses the passive voice, meaning this reward is given by another.

2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

On the heels of a fire that just devastated Corinth, destroying the wooden buildings but leaving the marble buildings.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15, *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

Those works, deeds, ministries or actions which are offered to Christ in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God, are gold, silver precious stones—remained and will be rewarded.

Those actions or ministries accomplished in our own strength or for our own glory are wood, hay and straw, which will burn and not be rewarded.

Be motivated to remain determined in your race with Christ through the promise of reward.

What you do in this life matters for all eternity!

Stay with it, Timothy.

3. The Condition

2 Timothy 2:5, *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

Paul says to Timothy, stay within the safety of biblical boundaries.

Do only that which is according to apostolic teaching to God's Word.

In the Greek games, which continued for centuries under Roman rule and were still being held in Paul's time, every participant had to meet three qualifications.

a) Birth,

- b) Training,
- c) Competition.

- First, he had to be a true-born Greek.
- Second, he had to prepare at least ten months for the games and swear to that before a statue of Zeus.
- Third, he had to compete within the specific rules for a given event.

To fail in any of those requirements meant automatic disqualification.

Compare that to your own spiritual athletic contest.

- First, you must be born again, transformed by God, and empowered by God's Spirit.
- Second, you must be committed to the spiritual disciplines of corporate worship, prayer, the study of God's Word, and the other means of grace, like discipleship, body life, worship and more.
- Third, God's Word provides the laws directing your spiritual race and gives you the boundaries. The Bible tells you how to function properly in your family, work, service, pastime, priorities, emotions, and relationships.

The Bible also exposes when you violate the rules of any aspect of your spiritual race and everyday living. The path to

blessing and fruitfulness is to live within the boundary of the Bible.

Are you living within the safety of the Scriptures in your marriage? Parenting? Purchases?

Are you parenting according to the Bible?

Responding to your spouse biblically?

Do you budget His money, your paycheck so it's spent for God's glory not your pleasure?

You don't win the prize unless you live according to God's rules.

Your spiritual athletic life may alter with age and circumstances, but Paul says you are still in the game.

Are you?

Conclusion:

Are you Determined and disciplined in your spiritual life?

Most of you put disciplined effort toward your health that which is not eternal. But Paul asks Timothy and you today, do you put determined effort into your walk with Christ?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."*

Paul says that for the sake of the Gospel, "I am willing to be all things to all men so that all might hear the Gospel."

In the context after these verses, Paul says, "I am willing to give up anything that might distract or disqualify me from winning my spiritual race."

Are you determined in your walk with Christ?

Be honest and answer this question today.

What kind of efforts, discipline, and determination is being expended in your relationship with Christ by you?

What is the Focus of your spiritual life?

The focus of your life is not your lifestyle, fun, recreation or your friends, fame, service, or your family—or even your testimony.

The focus is Jesus Christ Himself.

You endure, you discipline, you put effort into your walk to be closer to Christ and to be more and more like Him.

We empty ourselves of the world, self, extra weights, and sins which trip us up in order to grow closer to Christ in order to enjoy Him forever when our race is done.

Can you say this?

I have one passion and it is Christ!

Is Christ your Satisfaction?

Is Jesus enough?

Not theologically but practically!

If you lost all your things—family, friends, even your church—would Jesus be enough?

Is it Christ you are pursuing?

Is Christ the one who satisfies you?

Is He your finish line?

What do you find yourself pursuing—money, fame, a spouse, kids, or security?

If you are not pursuing Christ, then you are pursuing something else. Because we were made to run, to pursue, to compete in spiritual athletics.

If it is not Christ, loving Christ first, then you are loving the world.

1 John 2:15, *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, [what?] the love of the Father is not in him.”*

If you are loving the world, then you are not loving God your Father.

Christianity is nothing special unless you know the creator of Christianity, the painter.

The Christian lifestyle is a bunch of rules unless you know the creator of the lifestyle.

Unbelievers turn to Christ today.

Believers restore your first love today.

