



## Running

Paul asks us to race towards a prize. What if we are continually running away from that prize? Think about it. I have seen this in my life and the lives of others. We run from fellowship. Why are men's groups so sparsely attended? I love going to sporting events with men. Yet, I like going with my wife just the same. Certainly, I would have no problem going alone. Yet, it is not my preference to go alone. However, time after time I do shrug my shoulders at calling up a friend to go out with. Instead, I tend to do life alone. In-fact I love running alone.

I fear there are more things that we run from than towards. In Christian circles the pastor stands up at the pulpit declaring that we cannot come to God without an offering. People think that he is talking about money exclusively. Yet, what if an offering included things like repentance, confession, and prayer. Jesus asks us to "*leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift*" in Matthew 5:24. The blessings of God are found within these things. There is relief in letting hidden sin go. We can find joy in answered prayer. Why is it that so many of us refuse to give these things to God regularly.

How do I know people refuse to give repentance, confession, and prayer often? It is because if I struggle with it then others probably struggle too. Do you really think you or I are the only ones? Hebrews 12:1 "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*" Paul knew we are not alone in this race. In-fact this

race is marked out for us.” Someone is there helping us win! All we must do is throw off the things that hinder our running. Why is it that we are more willing to carry heavy burdens alone? Especially, when we do not have too? Tough to run a good race when we are bogged down. People can help us lessen the burden.

Gal 5:7 “*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth.*” Who you might ask? It is ourself that usually cuts in God’s plan and sets a different path. Oh, we run! Yet, where are we going? It is strange that we love to repeat the Bible verse “*the truth shall set you free.*” Yet, do we believe it? Doctor Phil’s wife says Phil tends to not take his own advice. He laughs it off knowing full well it is true. So do we. The truth is there. We even believe it. Yet, for some unknown reason we run from that very truth. A truth that says Gods way is harder but strangely lighter. Why? It is simple. Sharing repentance, confession, and prayer with others miraculously frees us from running towards God slowly. Knowing the truth and using the truth are vastly different things.

Isaiah 40:31 “*but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.*”

Running from God is harder. You are carrying your understanding, your sin and maybe even the burden of being found out. What if your burden is that (all you claim to be) is a lie? Is it that important to run around fake carrying some heavy burden? Psalm 119:32 says “*I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.*” That is, it! Why do I run from God? Is it that I really don’t want to expand my knowledge? I can hear it ringing in my ears: *the truth shall set you free.* In my life, I have had enough. In many ways I have tried to set up my Christian world to suit me. I will not take prayer from others. I do not tend to confess my sins to

a friend. I have felt a strong urge in my soul to run a different path these days. A lighter one towards Gods blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 *“Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*

I do think it is important to run your race your way. I am a long-distance runner. In the first year I just ran. Then I realized that I could run faster. Yet, the trainers warned me against injury. But it felt so good to run. The tricky part of being an athlete is hidden damage. It is just so small. Yet, when it blows up, you are at the doctor not running at all. I spent the second year fighting two injuries. In the end I learned to train. I learned what to do so that running stayed easy. It is hard work! Yet, here I am on the eve of a half marathon. I put in the work. However, along the way, I needed help from people. I have realized that I cannot run alone.

Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:25 *“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”*

At times, I have avoided chasing the blessings of God. Why? Is it to avoid the truth? How about the embarrassment of repentance or confession? Yet, I claim to be running the race with God. It has been slow and tedious. I have not run that well. Look at what the Wizard gave Dorothy’s companions: courage, knowledge, and a heart. What has God promised would come out of His blessings? Yes, you guessed it: courage, wisdom, and a heart for others. It is time you and I put in the training to run a good race. To do it with repentance, confession, and prayer. To run with people holding us up along the way. We are running life’s race either alone or with

someone. There are blessings to be found doing life with God and with people. Which shall it be: towards God's blessings or towards our own blessings? Which blessing would be most satisfying if we were honest?