**Fight the Good Fight and Finish the Race**

The book of 2Timothy was written by the apostle Paul around 67 A.D. and is probably his last letter. Paul writes this letter to Timothy from prison, arrested as part of Roman Emperor Nero’s persecution of Christians. After writing this letter Christian tradition has Paul being beheaded within a year.

The Apostle Paul met Timothy during his second missionary journey and Paul became Timothy’s mentor and Timothy became Paul’s companion and co-worker.

This letter was written by Paul to give Timothy direction and urge him to visit him in prison one final time. From the somber nature of this letter, it is apparent that Paul knew that his work was done and that his life was nearly at an end.

2Timothy 4:1-4 (ESV) I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths**

In other words: People will find teachers to teach them what they want to hear

We see this happening today with scientist telling us about evolution and the creation of the universe. There is little evidence for what they are saying but they gather around each other and convince themselves it is truth. Then they tell the rest of the world you are stupid if you believe anything else knowing that it takes just as much, if not more, faith to believe in what they are saying than it does to believe in God.

But people still want to believe it because in evolution there is no king of all kings judging your actions so you can do what you want. You are free to sin

Paul continues to say

2 Timothy 4:5-8 (NIV): As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Paul states here that he has finished the race and won his crown

If you have ever run a marathon or know someone who runs marathons then you know it is very easy to make them angry by asking them one simple question: “**Did you win?”**

Apparently you don't ask a marathon runner that question and if you do they will explain that just finishing a marathon is the win.

You are competing against your own body, fatigue, the weather, and the clock. Everyone there has different bodies, skills, strengths, and finishing a 26-mile marathon at all is considered a victory.

A typical marathoner might take four hours; the fastest come in closer to 2 hours and slow times can be anywhere from 8 hours to days (A Guy dressed in a snail costume took 26 days)

* The IAAF marathon world record for men (As of 1/1/2016) is 2:02:57, set by Dennis Kimetto of Kenya on September 28, 2014 at the Berlin Marathon.
  + Many marathon top runners are from Kenya or Ethiopia where they come from poor backgrounds and therefor train with incredible heart, motivation and intensity in hopes of a better life.
* Fauja Singh. On the other hand, came in last at the 2011 Toronto Waterfront Marathon It took Singh more than eight hours to complete the race — but he was 100 years old.

As Christians we are all in a marathon. We need to work with God day by day to remove the bad areas and improve the good. Take it one day at a time and wait for God to tell you what is on the to-do list. Walking with Jesus is not a sprint, it is a marathon, and He works with us individually and at our own pace. Don't compare yourself to others that are moving at different paces. Some people move faster than others. Some take a slower pace. How fast you run does not matter. It is staying the course and completing **'your'** race and receiving **your** crown of righteousness. And like the Kenya runners we should train with incredible heart, motivation and intensity by studying God’s word, attending church, and youth groups and on our knees in prayer. There is no greater reward!!!

Luke writes in Acts 20:24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself**, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord** **Jesus**, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

When you are in a race your mind always has to be on the finish line! You can’t be distracted by the things going on around you. Could you imagine a marathon where people on the side lines are tempting you with pizza, chairs maybe a bed with a comfy pillow or even worse putting obstacles in the way. (Sounds like a Reality show)

When you are running God’s race you are guaranteed to run into obstacles & temptations placed in your path, by the enemy, to lure you away from your finish line. So you have to stay focused on the path God gives you to follow. There will be times in your life were the finish line will become hard to see and if you don’t get back on track you may not be able to see it at all. You may even forget you were running a race.

Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Proverbs 4:25 Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

Now In dog racing, they have a mechanical rabbit that runs along a rail. At the start of the race, the dogs line up to chase this rabbit around the track, but they never catch the rabbit. When the next race comes, the dogs line up again and chase the rabbit. If they were to catch it, they would find that it was not as satisfying as they thought it would be.

Many of us line up each day to chase an uncatchable rabbit: Success, money, career but these are the obstacles we are chasing and not the real goal. When your goal is an earthly goal you will find that you can never be satisfied and the rabbit will always keep moving. You just keep lining up to run another race day after day.

Do not fall into the rut of chasing a mechanical rabbit day after day while running past the most important things in your life. When your focus is on the Lord, all these things will be added to you. The things that you desire will chase you instead of you chasing them.

Psalms 37:4 first, delight yourself in the Lord and then He will give you the desires of your heart

Our focus in life should be to finish the one race God has set out before us. There will be many distractions and your own desires will call you to leave the race. Other people will constantly try to discourage you but you need to stay focused on the finish line.

In your marathon you are competing against your own thoughts, desires, hardships, frustrations, temptations, weariness, and not against others. Take your time, set goals, and most importantly, if you fall, get up. No one finishes a marathon by lying on their face. Get up and keep putting one foot in front of the other one, and you will finish this marathon just as Paul did.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The best part is if we can persevere and stay focused on the things of God and not on all the temptations this world has to offer then we will receive God’s reward in the end

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has withstood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

My goal in this life is to receive that crown and I look forward to the day we are all there rejoicing together in the glory of God Almighty.

I have heard people say it is just too hard to follow Christ. If you look at your life I am sure there are many things you have had to put considerable effort into (School, Work, Friendships). Those things we find value in are the things we put the most effort towards. It's like being a marathon runner, weightlifter or any sport. If you want to be the best it takes effort. You have to set a goal and be willing to put everything else aside to reach those goals. It takes a lot of effort to building yourself up to be able to have the resiliency to complete in any sport. That doesn’t mean you can’t have fun along the way but you don’t want to go out and eat 6 cheeseburgers before the race so you may have to change a few things to stay focused.

Many of you may remember the story of Derek Redmond. He was runner and in good form for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. He posted the fastest time of the first round, and went on to win his quarter-final. In the semi-final, Redmond started well, but in the back straight about 250 meters from the finish, his hamstring tore. He hobbled to a halt, and then fell to the ground in pain. His race should have been over and most people would have quit. Stretcher bearers made their way over to him, but Redmond decided he wanted to **finish the race**. He got up and began to hobble along the track. His father, Jim Redmond, barged past security and on to the track to help his son. Jim and Derek completed the lap of the track together, with Derek in pain leaning on his father's shoulder for support.

Derek’s story is a perfect example of our race to eternal life with Christ. First every runner requires training and good coaching just as we need time in God’s word and with fellow believers and mentors. Even then many of us will fail miserably in our race but when we do Christ comes along and gives us a shoulder to lean on to get us across the finish line. But first we need to make the decision to get up and finish the race despite any and all obstacles!!!

Are your eyes on the Finish line?

Don’t go through life focused on the obstacles and lose site of the finish line. Every obstacle is an opportunity to see God at work in your life. So, keep your eyes on God