**All IN: Running the Race**

The Winter Olympics just finished last week.

We are really inspired by the amazing achievements of all the athletes—especially the American ones.

We were so sad for American Mikayla Shiffrin that she missed a gate in three separate races and failed to medal.

But we were super inspired when skater Brittany Bowe gave up her spot in the Olympics so that Erin Jackson, the American champion in the 500 M speed skate (who stumbled in the US trials) could complete. When Erin Jackson became the first black female to win any medal in speed skating—and took the gold, we were so inspired, both by the sacrifice of Bowe and the achievement of Erin Jackson

What is it that we like so much about the Olympics?

It is because people go all in—they devote their entire lives to achieving a goal, and become the best in the world.

Well, Paul uses the Greek Olympics as a way to teach us about the Christian life and about our going all in for God.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

In this passage Paul is giving us some great admonitions about the Christian life. In the context, he is talking about his mission to save as many as possible for Christ. (read 1 Cor 9:19-23)

Point #1 Paul’s admonition: Run so as to get the prize.

The closest analogy between an Olympic event and the Christian life is a Marathon race.

How does an athlete “run so as to get the prize” in an Olympic race?

1. They make maximum overall effort.

2. They pace themselves.

3. At the end of the day, they are utterly exhausted because they were “all in.”

Question: Is that how you are living your Christian life?

Illustration: Josh gives an illustration here.

Point #2 The Christian race is not like the Olympics in one very important way.

Who wins the prize? Answer: All those who “run so as to win the prize.”

So, it is not competition except, perhaps with yourself. All the finishers who give it their all win! Eve gets the prize. Tonesha gets the prize. Jerry gets the prize.

Illustration: Josh gives an illustration here.

Point #3 Their prize was a laurel wreath that lasted for a couple of days. They did this on purpose to make a point. They did NOT get gold medals!!! Our prize is eternal. Oh, it is worth it, yet so few people “run so as to get the prize.” Again, what about you????

Point #4 Paul is admonishing us to “go into strict training.”

Paul “beats his body.”

Do the Olympic athletes go into strict training? Yeah!!! Junk food: Right out! They pace themselves, but they do not skip training sessions.

They always have a trainer and they listen to their trainer. Do you have a trainer? Is there a spiritual mentor in your life, helping you to train for the spiritual race?

Here is an easy question: Which is more important: going to heaven or winning a football game/soccer tournament/cross country race?

Do we act like we actually believe this?

Illustration: Josh gives an illustration here.

Are you in strict spiritual training? What are you doing to prepare yourself for fruitful life as a Christian? Are you skipping your practice sessions (prayer, Bible study). Are you eating a lot of junk food (many hours indulging yourself in video games, parties, etc.)

Point #5 Paul admonishes us to not run aimlessly.

We need to have a plan.

I have this goal: I want to go on a mission team. I want to help one person to be baptized this year. I want to master the book of Galatians and write my own little lesson on the book. I want to help establish a new local HOPE program this year.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

Do you agree with Paul here?

Yes, it is true. For a Christian, physical training is of some value.

We will live longer.

We will be more productive. We will have more energy.

We will be a more inspiring example to others.

Being in shape is not a top Christian priority. It is not #2 or #3. It is probably not even priority #5 for a Christian, but it is in the top 10. How are you doing on that?

But also yes, it is also true that the dividends of spiritual training are vastly greater--that spiritual training is far more valuable. Do you agree with Paul on this?

Great!!! So, what are you doing? Are you all in for training yourself to be godly?

What does that entail for you?

Josh: Feel free to use the following additional passages if you like, or skip to the final passage instead. Either way, do not skip 2 Tim 4:6-8!!!

*2 Timothy 2:5*

*Q: In what sense is the Christian life like a race here? What is the application?*

*Galatians 5:7*

*Q: In what sense is the Christian life like a race here? What is the application to us?*

*Hebrews 12:1*

*Q: In what sense is the Christian life like a race here? What is the application?*

*2 Cor 4:16-18*

*Q: What is the advice here for us as we run the Christian race? How can we do this in practical terms?*

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul is giving us a really helpful perspective here. He is at the end of the race, looking back on his own personal Christian Marathon race. He is in his sixties, but his race is about to come to a close.

How is he feeling?

Was it worth it?

Did he ever get tired during the race? Are you kidding?

Did he ever feel like quitting? Sure he did.

Did he sometimes think he was crazy to be running this race while everyone else was sitting back and “enjoying” life? Probably.

So, how is he feeling?

Let us take some time right now to imagine you are in your twilight of your life. You are looking back at your Christian journey. Will you regret missing seeing a superbowl? Will you regret not having the newest gadget or that really beautiful decorating item for your home? What will you be thinking about?

Paul is thinking about the thousands who were saved from hell because of his effort. He is thinking about the spiritual companions who shared his journey.

Paul: I have fought the good fight. I am about the get the crown.

Oh yes, brothers and sisters, it is worth it!

Let’s run so as to win.

Let’s go into strict training.

Let’s have a plan.

Let’s train ourselves to be godly, because godliness has value for all things.

And let us be encouraged, that as long as we “run so as to win.” Like Paul, we will receive the crown of righteousness that will never spoil or face.

Let’s be all in for the Christian race.