

## 20 Minute Sermons Today

### A Runner In A Race

"If Paul were alive on earth today, he would probably read the sports page of the daily newspaper and use what he read somewhere in his sermons."<sup>1</sup> The Romans considered sports a good source of entertainment, while the Greeks saw athletic events as a means of enrichment.

Famous Runners in the New Testament

1. **John the Baptizer**—Acts 13:25. To fulfill a course is to finish running the race. Did John succeed? What did people think of his course? What did he think of it? What did Christ say?
2. **Paul the Apostle**—Acts 20:24, Gal 2:2, Phil 2:16, 3:12-14, 2 Tim 4:7-8. What did he describe running is like? What do people think of the ministry? As something easy? As some scheme of making money?
3. **Christ the Lord**—Hebrews 12:1-2, Phil 2:1-11. What was his goal? Isn't that contra-culture? According to Luke 9:51, what character did Jesus show? [He set out resolutely.]

**The essentials for winning the Christian race include:**

1. **Enjoying the game**, Ac 20:24, Heb 12:2. The joyful runner has already won on the inside.
2. **Understanding the demands of discipline**, 1 Tim 4:7-8. Spiritual discipline pays dividends in this life and in the life to come.
3. **Obeying the rules of the race**, 2 Tim 2:5. Greeks not only had rules for the games, they had rules for the way they trained. "I have kept the faith" also meant "I have obeyed the rules" too! Faithfulness is true success. Succeeding or winning may not always mean you followed the rules.
4. **Sticking to your calling**, Phil 3:12-14. Can you run well if you're looking backward? Find that one thing you do that God blesses and stick with it and do your best with it.
5. **Focusing on the prize**, 1 Cor 9:24-25. What is the prize? [Growing in grace, becoming more like Christ is the reward.] Against whom are you competing? [We are not competing with each other; we are competing with ourselves. God will not judge me on the basis of what Charles Spurgeon did, but on the basis of what I did with the opportunities and gifts he gave to me.] What will be your entrance like in heaven? [2 Pet 1:11.] Think of a winner—how his homies might welcome him? What's more important is to end well. Are there people in the Bible who started well but ended not so well?
6. **Knowing to practice teamwork**, Phil 1:27. "There are about 70 people mentioned by name in the NT of whom we should never have heard were it not for their association with Paul"—F.F. Bruce. *Ateleo* where we get athletic, means strive together.

**Conclusion:** Very few athletes win by accident. Winning is the result of hard work, and that includes long hours of practicing and a life-style of serious discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be What You Are: 12 Intriguing Pictures of the Christian from the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 125.