

Running The Race

Introduction. On April 15, 2019, Micah Herndon crawled across the finish line at the Boston Marathon. He didn't win the race, but he won the hearts of everyone who saw the video that went viral.

Herndon, a 31-year-old Marine veteran from Tallmadge, Ohio, was running the 26.2-mile race to pay tribute to three Marines who he served alongside. Matthew Ballard, Mark Juarez, and British journalist Rupert Hamer died in 2010 from an improvised explosive device's blast in Afghanistan.

"I run in honor of them," Herndon said. "They are not here anymore. I am here, and I am able. I am lucky to still have all my limbs. I can still be active. I find fuel in the simple idea that I can run. Some cannot."

When his Achilles tendon starting giving him trouble during the race and his legs "gave up" near the end, Herndon told a reporter that he chanted his fallen comrades' names aloud to help himself focus on finishing. "I kept repeating those names," Herndon said. "The thoughts of their memories and their families flowing through the mind just like they always do."

When I saw the video and heard Herndon's story I thought of Paul's analogy of running a race in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Consider these three lessons.

I. If You Want To Win, You Must Register For The Race

- A. No one shows up for the Boston Marathon and says, "I want to run." You must qualify. There are entry requirements including forms to sign and fees to be paid.
- B. The same is true in running the race as a Christian. Paul entered the race when he devoted his life to Christ. He had been a violent persecutor of Christians, but came face to face with Jesus on the road to Damascus.
- C. A quick summary of the book of Acts will show several examples of what people did to be saved, including Saul:
 1. Those at Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41).
 2. The Samaritans (Acts 8:12).
 3. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38).
 4. Saul (Acts 9:17-18).
 5. Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48).
 6. Lydia (Acts 16:14-15).
 7. The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31-33).
 8. The Corinthians (Acts 18:8).
 9. The Ephesians (Acts 19:4-5).
- D. If you want to run for the Lord and cross the finish line in heaven, you must register and make proper application of these soul-saving truths (Matthew 7:21-24; Acts 20:32; James 1:21).

II. If You Want To Win, You Must Resist Discouragement

- A. When Herndon started hurting he could have quit. His legs quit but his heart didn't.

- B. All runners know they have to endure aches, pains, and strains. A dedicated runner persists in hot weather, cold weather, and rainy weather — whether he feels good, bad, or somewhere in between. He runs with purpose, passion, and perseverance.
- C. The Christian race requires that same self-control and self-discipline that defies discouragement. The devil is devious and will devise all kinds of excuses why you should quit. Temptations, trials, and troubles will emerge at the worst possible time. Some of the greatest people in the Bible suffered:
 - 1. Discouragement — Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
 - 2. Anxiety — Daniel (Daniel 2:17-18).
 - 3. Persecution — Daniel (Daniel 6:10).
 - 4. Distress — Jonah (Jonah 2:1-9).
 - 5. Temptation — Jesus (Matthew 26:39, 42).
 - 6. Sickness — Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
- D. Like Herndon, dedication and dogged determination are required for us to cross the finish line when faced with despondency and distress. Paul was fearful that, if he did not control himself with everything the devil could throw at him, he would be a castaway or disqualified.

III. If You Want To Win, You Must Remember Why You're Running

- A. Herndon was running to honor his fallen friends. He was focused on his purpose. His passion drove him. His pursuit supplied the strength he needed to push forward.
- B. The Corinthians participated in the Isthmian games and received a wreath made of celery. Christians run recognizing that they have an eternal reward.
 - 1. The goal of winning determines an athlete's lifestyle.
 - 2. When you're hurting rely on Jesus. Renew your focus. Remember your loved ones who've finished the race and are waiting for you at the finish line. And pray for strength and courage to keep on going.
- C. We want to be wearers of the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4), and the crown of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). Heaven is worth every sorrow, setback, and suffering (Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-5). Its reward is imperishable (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Conclusion. One final important point needs to be made. Our striving for the incorruptible crown must be according to the rules of the New Testament (2 Timothy 2:5). Everything I do must have the stamp of Christ's authority on it, for He is the ultimate authority on earth now (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17). There is no room for "I believe" or "I think so" when I'm striving for my crown. Jesus makes the rules ("the law of Christ," Galatians 6:2), and I follow them or else I'll be rejected.

Dean Karnazes, a well-known ultramarathon runner, said, "Run when you can, walk if you have to, crawl if you must; just never give up." Keep on going, for the reward is worth it!

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