

Finish Line

The Apostle Paul speaks quite frequently about running the race. He speaks of the need for commitment, stamina, and discipline (1 Cor 9:25-26), as well as the urgency to finish (2 Tim 4:7), and the aim to win the prize (Phil 3:14). But what exactly is Paul referring to when he uses the metaphor of a race?

In the simplest of terms, the “race” is the Christian life. With that in mind, it should be noted that life is a marathon, not a sprint. Since we are called to stay the course and remain faithful to the end, the race demands a consistent tempo and tenacious drive. As a matter of fact, Paul used the following terms to describe the race metaphor near the end of his life: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

While our ultimate example for running the race is Jesus (see Heb 12:1-3), we can certainly learn from others like the Apostle Paul or faithful God-followers like Nehemiah. And even though we may have little information about the end of Nehemiah’s life, all indications are that he ran a race that included a successful finish. The first half of the book that bears his name shows him to be a man of prayer, organization, courage, care, humility, insight, and decisiveness. It concludes with the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls and the hanging of its gates:

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that **this work had been accomplished with the help of our God**. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

Even casual readers of the Bible will notice that life’s race is best run by setting goals along the course. Similar to a marathon, life is filled with continual interruptions, strenuous climbs, unexpected turns, and inevitable aches and pains. The historical account of Nehemiah doesn’t conclude in chapter 6 or at the beginning of chapter 7. The completion of Jerusalem’s construction project is simply a marker indicating Nehemiah’s progress and God’s faithful guidance. With the help of Ezra, Nehemiah will have more to do in consecrating God’s people. Yet, for now he was assured of being on the right course, keeping his eyes on a good and faithful God.

Whatever God has given you to do, do it with all your might. Along the way, exhaustion will set in and interruptions agitate. **Remain committed!** Some stretches will seem easy and self-confidence will rear its ugly head. **Remain humble!** A hill will appear insurmountable and intimidating. **Remain bold and trust the Lord!** Loneliness will occasionally lead to carelessness. **Remain watchful!** Keep your eyes on Jesus who is waiting for you at the finish line!

Hebrews 12:1-3 (ESV) - *“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. **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**”*