

# Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

## Run the Right Race

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I recently had to tweak my jogging schedule and run on Sunday instead of Monday. I awoke that morning to discover God had blessed me with perfect running conditions; sunny and about 65 degrees. I had been working to get my per mile average under 10 minutes and I felt good about my prospects, given the conditions. I was really enjoying the run until I looked at my GPS watch at the one-mile mark. It said – 11 minutes and 11 seconds. Oh well, I was still enjoying the run. Then it happened.

A runner averaging what I would guess was about seven-minute miles blew past me and quickly disappeared out of sight. Suddenly the glorious morning I was enjoying moments earlier had been almost entirely obscured by disappointment. I was slower than my own expectations and I was tortoise-like to the hare that left me in the dust. Fortunately, I came to my senses and realized that it was silly to be disappointed by how fast (or slow) I was running, especially compared to someone else. I just needed to enjoy the amazing morning God had provided. After all, I wasn't in a race with the other runner. The experience reminded me of the danger when Christ-followers compare their faith journeys to those around them.

Have you ever compared yourself with another Christ-follower when it comes to their mastery of the Word, or how they pray? Have you felt some followers are more generous than you or just plain nicer than you? Paul addresses the dangers of such comparisons in 2 Corinthians 10:12:

*“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”*

Paul is warning of the danger of comparing ourselves to others to make us feel superior. But the reverse is equally dangerous: making ourselves feel inferior because we don't seem to measure up to those around us. We are each on our own faith journey and God has no interest in how your human performance compares with anyone else's. Yet, Paul himself uses the metaphor of a runner in a race to describe our faith journey:

*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”* 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Such athletic competitions were common in Paul's day and he knew his audience would understand the analogy. We need to be prepared; we need to train for our faith journey. But the goal Paul wants us to prepare for is a heavenly reward. We need not concern ourselves with the race others are running.

What does this mean for us? It means we shouldn't read the Word because we feel others in our study group have a greater mastery of scripture than we do. It means we should study the Word to be closer to God and to better hear Him when he speaks to us through the Word. We should craft our prayers to effectively communicate with God, not impress others.

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:1-3*

God blessed me with perfect running conditions and I spent the rest of that run soaking in the beauty of His creation. And I felt blessed that He used a faster runner than I am to remind me of Who really matters in the race I’m running. When you experience moments of discouragement in your spiritual race, remember Hebrews 12 and fix your eyes on Jesus and what He endured for you, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.