

#19 “Is the Christian Life More Like a Sprint or a Marathon?”

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There is absolutely nothing wrong with eagerness, zeal, a burden for righteousness, and a passion for advancing the kingdom of God. Christ Himself was consumed by zeal for the house of God (John 2:17). In Revelation 3:19, the church at Laodicea is told to “be zealous and repent.” Their sin was at least in part a lack of passion. Jesus said that we are blessed if we hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). It is time that we hunger for truth and righteousness as much as we do our next breath. It is time that we are so broken over the state of those outside of Christ that we can’t even sleep because of it. It is time that we hunger more for the daily bread of Christ than we do for our next meal. It is time to be the passionate Christians that God desires us to be.

Here is what happens. A person gets really excited about the things of God, and He begins to read the Word of God, taking it in as his food. He sees that God draws near to us when we draw near to Him, and so He pursues knowing God through His Word and through prayer. He calls to Him to move, to increase his faith, and to strengthen him. He prays that God will make him a usable vessel for the kingdom. He wants to get into the battle for the souls of men. Then he begins to realize that there are not too many who are willing to fight alongside of him. They believe he is doing a good thing, and they shout a few words of encouragement toward him while they sit on the bench. The person battling realizes that he is on his own, and he gets frustrated. He wonders why others won’t join in the fight of faith? Why do they make doctrinal compromise? Why don’t they evangelize? Why do they take so much time in church meetings rather than doing actual ministry? Why don’t they believe and pray for revival? Why do they not have the sensitivity to the things of God that he feels that he does?

Yet he prays more, and tries to do what he can to make a difference. Eventually some conversations transpire with those who think that they are fighting but who are really sitting on the sidelines. He vents his frustration to said persons, and they gently remind him that the Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon. He agrees that the Christian life is a race and that it is a long race. It requires perseverance, and in that sense it is most definitely a marathon. But what he is unable to convince the other persons of is the fact that marathons are races just as sprints are. *Races are meant to be run to be won.* Races are competition. Races are fierce, intense, and those who want to win had better train, practice, and execute on race day. As the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:24, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.” We are not to be like a boxer who flails about, throwing punches in the air and never landing a single blow. We are to be like the runner who knows exactly where he is going and who tries to get there as fast as he can, sustaining his pace over the long haul.

The question is not so much whether the Christian life is more like a sprint or a marathon. *The issue is that we understand that the Christian life is a race and a race that is to be run as if we want to win it.* Just like what happens in a real race, some train and finish well while others are in it for the free T-shirt and suntan. We are to be those that want to win and who train accordingly.

So how do we run in a way to win? We don't merely sit about and talk about doing ministry. We get our hands dirty and do it. We don't merely pray about people coming to know Christ; we get out and share our faith. We don't get comfortable with the status quo, but we constantly seek vision from the Lord. We don't get sucked into mindless routine, but we look to the Lord for divine opportunities for advancing His kingdom. We train ourselves in the Word of God so that we can be mature and thoroughly equipped to do the work of the Lord. We labor in prayer, interceding on behalf of others. We love others and do what we can to demonstrate it. We don't bury our spiritual gifts and talents underground, but we let God empower us so that He can showcase His power and grace in and through us. We don't stop having faith in the impossible. With man, even one little iota of spiritual gain is impossible, but with God a citywide or nationwide revival is possible. The issue comes down to what we believe and ask God for. Whatever God ordains, we must be a part of the answer, rather than just thinking about, analyzing, and reflecting upon various answers. We cannot be mere hearers of the Word, but we must be doers of it.

Unbiblical traditions and unbiblical church government structures can really slow the progress of the gospel. Poor preaching can leave a person's soul parched. A lack of corporate prayer can leave a church powerless. *Yet at some point, we must look inward and ask ourselves what we are doing.* Each person will get recompensed according to his own deeds, not for the deeds of the pastor or for his church (2 Corinthians 5:10). Though the Christian life is all about fellowship, family, and building up the body of Christ, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will be rewarded individually. In that sense, the Christian life is an individual sport. Of course, we want our teammates to succeed, and our helping them to succeed in Christ is part of our winning the race. We win the race by enabling others to win the race. In God's rulebook, there can be multiple winners, as long as each person is faithful and runs to win.

It is time that we are bold and intentional in our faith. It is time that we put words and legs to our faith. It is time that we get zealous for the things that God is zealous about, like the lost coming to Christ and the work of His church. The race is underway, and the finish line is imminent, closer for some than others. Let us cross the line, whenever it may be, running as hard as we can, expecting to win. May God make us passionate for Him and for His kingdom.