

# LOSERS DON'T FAIL TO WIN; LOSERS FAIL TO PARTICIPATE

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## SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 9:11, 'I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all' (MKJV).

## INTRODUCTION

Wally Hayward won the Comrades marathon for the first time on his first attempt in 1930 at age 21. Twenty years later he competed again and won it from 1950 to 1954, except for 1952 when he chose to rather represent South Africa at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki.

In 1954 he broke the up-run record and became the oldest man to win the race at age 45. In 1988 he returned once again to participate. He beat half the finishers with a time of 9h44m.

Wally's most dramatic moment came the following year, in 1989, when he completed the down run at the age of 80. There was hardly a dry eye in the stadium as he staggered across the line, making the cut-off time by 1min 57sec. To this day, he has the distinction in the record books of being the oldest finisher in the history of the Comrades Marathon.

In 1988 and 1989, Wally was a winner, and like Wally, hundreds, if not thousands, enter races with no expectation of actually winning it, but to finish it.

This morning, our attention falls onto "the race is not to the swift."

And as we work through this sermon, please keep in mind the sermon title, 'losers don't fail to win; they fail to participate.'

## BODY

### 'Quickest'

It may seem illogical when Solomon wrote that the race is not to the quickest. Yet at the same time, the one who crosses the line first, is – on the day – the quickest and therefore, the race is to him/her. And the quickest person from point A to B may not win the race because of any number of things, including injury, tiredness, obstacles etc. So now, at the same time, we have 2 "quickests."

In order to appreciate having 2 “quickest” we have to instead turn our attention to what it means to win the race. To win, simply means that someone crossed the finish line first. He/she was the first one to complete the race. So in a sense, the goal is not to win, but to complete the race that you started.

### **What if Your Life is an Evangelical Statement?**

The first to cross the finish line is Jesus Christ. It is written in 1 Corinthians 15:57, ‘But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Furthermore, Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24 writes, ‘Do you not know that those running in a race all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain.’

In times gone by, the president or judge of games held onto the prize who gave it to the winner. Paul is speaking into your and my journey though this life, that we should run it like racers in a race.

And as people in a stadium would have seen runners run, so too will the manner in which you participate and complete your life’s journey hopefully be, an evangelical statement.

Most people might be able to sprint a short distance in a straight line, but the race of life is anything but a short and uncomplicated journey. Do you realize that the rest of your life is going to testify to your integrity, perseverance, courage, endurance, faithfulness, character and motives?

### **The Future into the Present**

As with a marathon that takes much planning, life requires planning. As we have said, the race of life is anything but a short and uncomplicated journey. Planning, according to Alan Lakein is ‘...bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it.’ The key is “future into the present.” The same is true when you run a marathon.

Think about Noah’s “race” for a moment:

- It was not raining when he built the ark, yet the One who instructed him to build the ark was the only one who knew exactly what the future holds.
- Noah may or may not have understood the task at hand – why build a boat – but he faithfully followed God’s instructions and trusted God with the outcome.

- The story of Noah is as much about the ability to build as it is to keep on building.
- I can imagine that he felt like giving up and that there were many trials along the way.
- Noah completed the race set before him; the ark was built before the great rains.

What about Nehemiah's "race?"

The wall was about 4km long, 12m high and 2.5m thick with 34 watchtowers. 52 days later; done! From rubble to completion in 52 days!

- No matter how much opposition there was, Nehemiah kept his eyes on the goal. He was not distracted, discouraged or depressed.
- He trusted God to build it not himself. He didn't put his trust in his own abilities but in his availability to God, all the while focussing on a future event – a completed wall.

### **The Example of Jesus**

Read with me, Hebrews 12:2, "looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right of the throne of God."

- For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross. Jesus didn't give up, because he could see past the pain, past the cross, past the grave, into the glory that awaited Him. So he endured and climbed up Calvary's hill.
- As Christians, we realize that Jesus is the forerunner, the first one in. But just as He did, we must endure for the joy that will be revealed through us.
- We will never fully know how much it cost to see His blood upon the cross. Jesus did it out of love; He endured.

### **1 or 2?**

This brings you and me to a basic choice in terms of participating in and completing the race of life: (1) with or (2) without God.

Brother and sisters, the road on which you run the race of life will have potholes, twists, turns, uphill and downhill.

Our lives will have obstacles and diversions and yes, at some point we will face our own mortality and we will see loved ones be born and die. On the one hand, we will experience joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, altruism, satisfaction, relief, inspiration, awe and love. On the other hand, we will also experience anger, annoyance, sadness, guilt, fear, anxiety, discouragement, despair, apathy, disappointment and frustration.

How do you choose to run the race of life? (1) with or (2) without God?

## **CONCLUSION**

According to Frederickson, we actually need a 3:1 ratio of positives to negatives in order to have a good life.

Yet the fruit of the Spirit are all positives: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility and self-control. Negativity, for us who are busy with our life's race, is not an option, but an opportunity to evangelically testify about integrity, perseverance, courage, endurance, faithfulness, character and motives because Jesus has finished the race and we – in Him – too will cross that finish line.

I started this sermon by stating that we will only focus on, 'the race is not to the swift.' And this did not make natural sense, and I pray that it now makes perfect sense as long as we remain in Him. So:

- Stand in a living and trusting relationship with God.
- Be willing to start over, in the power of God and not in the power of self.
- Keep your eyes on God and the goal He has placed before you.
- Look past your current pain and difficulty.
- Persevere.

After all, losers don't fail to win; they fail to participate. In and by the grace of God, we will cross that finish line.

Amen.