

A gold medal with a blue ribbon. The text "RUNNING TO WIN" is written on the medal in a bold, black, sans-serif font. "RUNNING" is on the top line, "TO" is on the middle line, and "WIN" is on the bottom line.

**RUNNING  
TO  
WIN**

It's not just about showing up, but  
finishing and finishing strong

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“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.” 1 Corinthians 9:24-27  
NLT

Apostle Paul likens the Christian journey to running a race, knowing there’s an eternal prize at the end. The beauty of the way God has designed this race is that everyone has the opportunity to win their own individual race, so we’re not competing with one another. Rather we can win by working together.

Even though we are all in a race, the truth is not everyone is necessarily running to win. Some are content with just participating. However, if your desire is not just show up, but to finish and finish strong, then there are some spiritual disciplines that can’t be ignored.

This series we’re looking at those disciplines and how to be consistent with them.

May we all finish strong.

## Day 1 Spiritual Nutrition

*'For someone who lives on milk is still an infant...' Hebrews 5:13*

Athletes know that their nutrition is one of the most critical things that impacts their performance. You don't see high performance athletes eating carelessly, they're very particular about their diet. If we're to apply this principle to our spiritual lives, we also need to watch our spiritual nourishment.

'Solid food is for those who are mature...' Hebrews 5:14

The digestive systems of new babies lack the capacity to take anything other than milk, moving to semi solid and then solid food as they grow. The same applies to us as we run the race. In the early days of our race, we're easily sustained with 'milk' – largely represents messages, scriptures that are basic. The thing with milk is that it runs through the system fairly quickly so an adult cannot be sustained by this alone.

'So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding...' Hebrews 6:1

Remember the race is a marathon not a sprint and with maturity comes the capacity for more substantial nutrition that can nourish the body for a longer period. Spiritual food is the same, the scriptures, messages, disciplines that have the capacity to transform our lives consistently may not necessarily feel good, but they're critical for our long-term sustenance. This speaks to how we engage the Bible the type of messages we choose to listen to, how we choose to entertain ourselves. We may start off at milk, but we must be intentional about moving to semi-solid and solid food.

'And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.' Hebrews 6:3

The same way an athlete watches the nutritional components of his/her meals we need to be discerning about the quality of the spiritual food we eat. Not every message is necessarily meant to be consumed especially in times when what is popular may not always be in alignment with what is Biblical.

**Prayer:** Lord help me choose the right nourishment so I can grow in maturity.

## Day 2

### Spiritual Disciplines – Prayer

*'...train yourself to be godly. "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come." ' 1 Timothy 4:7-8*

In running to win, there's a significant amount of intentionality required on our part. The same way an athlete has a training schedule, there are specific spiritual disciplines we need to engage and commit to so we can actively train in godliness. Today we're looking at the discipline of Prayer.

'...He (Daniel) prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.' Daniel 6:10

'But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.' Luke 5:16

Prayer is non-negotiable for a believer. It's our primary mode of connection with our Father in heaven and critical tool for navigating the spiritual realm. Daniel had developed the discipline of having an active prayer life which was ingrained into his system to the extent that when faced with a life-threatening issue he did not hesitate to pray. We also see that prayer was the mainstay in the life of Jesus during His earthly ministry, praying regularly, fervently, in the early hours of the day and sometimes through the night.

There's a management saying that it's what gets measured that gets done and we can apply this principle to all our spiritual disciplines. Do we have a dedicated prayer time that we focus on keeping daily or do we keep things fluid? Remember high performance athletes are disciplined about their training. Likewise we should look at prayer as a critical discipline we must actively engage and determine to grow in.

Jesus' ministry was based on significant times of dedicated prayer. His life gives us a template for how to train ourselves making prayer a priority and committing to improve on the amount of time we give to God in prayer. One growth step could be to add 15 minutes to whatever we're currently doing per week so there's steady progress.

**Prayer:** Lord let the spirit of prayer and supplication rest on me to help me grow in the discipline of prayer.

### Day 3 Setting the Mind

*“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Colossians 3:2 NKJV*

When the Bible talks about setting our minds, it means we are to consciously focus on things above not on things we see. The challenge is that the things above aren't visible to the naked eye while we're confronted daily by what we see and are surrounded by. What we choose to focus on is critical because what we focus on becomes amplified in our life and powers us through as the days go on.

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true... noble... just... pure... lovely... of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”  
Philippians 4:8

To meditate means to consciously take our thoughts in a specific direction, it's not a passive action. It means in spite of the way we may have been conditioned to behave we have to put the things in Philippians 4:8 front and centre of our minds. By doing so we're training our minds to think the way the Lord thinks. As with all spiritual training, we can't do it on our strength alone – we have to engage the Holy Spirit and ask Him to constantly help reshape our thoughts.

“Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.”  
Psalms 119:37

There will always be many pressing and attractive things competing for our attention. But as pressing as these things appear, we have to discern which ones have eternal value. It doesn't mean we shouldn't acknowledge our world and our daily responsibilities, but we shouldn't be consumed by what's around us. Because guess what, only things that have eternal value will last.

Turning away from or towards anything is always preceded by an intentional thought process. Discipline isn't automatic, it's the result of doing something consistently for a long period until it becomes part of us. Let's try and build up the discipline of fixing our minds and hearts on things that have eternal value, asking the Holy Spirit to constantly filter our focus.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me refocus my thought process so I'm not overwhelmed by all that's going on around me and help me fix my mind on things above.

## Day 4

### Powering Up With Seclusion

*“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide...” 1 Kings 17:3 NKJV*

There are times athletes must go through periods of intense training in order to get to a higher level of peak performance. Those periods may include personal coaching, evaluating past progress and charting new exercise plans for the new level. Similarly there will be times when the Lord calls us away to ‘train’ in private - these are periods of seclusion that are needed for us to continually develop capacity for new levels.

During these periods of seclusion, we quieten anything other than what’s absolutely necessary so we can spend time with Him and get direction and strength for the new. Each new season demands a specific spiritual discipline from us so we can build the full capacity needed. Imagine a runner used to running 100-meter sprints training for a marathon. Yes both are running activities, but the preparation differs. Likewise as we mature spiritually, our disciplines also have to be stepped up.

“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.” Isaiah 54:2

Periods of seclusion sharpen our spiritual sensitivity and we’re better able to discern the Holy Spirit’s instructions and strategies for us. The Lord is always speaking, but our activity filled lives tend to overwhelm our senses so we can’t really pay attention to what He’s saying. The Bible show us that significant steps in people’s lives were always precluded by periods of seclusion. Moses stayed with the Lord on the mountain and returned with tablets written by God Himself. Jesus spent time in the wilderness and when He emerged He began a ministry that turned the world upside down. Elijah went into seclusion and received supernatural sustenance during a terrible famine.

Seclusion also strengthens us for the future as our sacrifice of time to give God maximum attention gives the Lord the opportunity to do a deep work in us which wouldn’t happen if we were trying to fit Him into an already busy schedule.

**Prayer:** Lord help me develop the discipline of setting aside extended focused time for You alone. I know I can never be the same afterwards.

## Day 5

### Avoiding Complacency

*"...but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us." Philippians 3:13-14*

Have you ever watched a race where a runner who's been ahead for the most part starts slowing down close to the finish line and then someone comes from behind, overtakes and wins the race and you wonder: why did the runner who was initially in first place slow down? Sometimes we act like that runner in our walk with God as we get satisfied with the level of progress we think we've made and become comfortable. The difference here is that the person we risk overtaking us isn't another person, but an old version of ourselves. Once we're not pressing forward, we're not actually standing still but moving back, because God's always moving.

What causes this complacency? It could be comfort with the strides we think we've made in God so we're not willing to press further, disappointment in some things we expected God to do for us, or the accolades of others who think we have a stronger walk with God than we really do. Pressing on isn't going to be easy. It will require us accepting how far God has brought us, but at the same time acknowledging that the journey's far from over.

'As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.' Psalms 42:1

'And he (Moses) said, "Please, show me Your glory.'" Exodus 33:18

With all that Moses experienced he still asked to know more of God. Paul received so many revelations yet he kept pushing for more. The devil tries to rob us of getting deeper into God by placating us with wherever we may be, while the truth is the vastness of God cannot be fully exhausted in our lifetime. There are too many depths and dimensions to Him. The danger of complacency is that we can very quickly become lukewarm and Jesus has already told us what He will do with lukewarm believers. It's critical we keep fanning the flame of our hearts for a deeper walk with God so we don't miss out on experiencing more of Him.

**Prayer:** Lord keep me hungry for more of you.

## Day 6

### Remember the Rewards

*'...Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame...'*  
*Hebrews 12:2*

Commitment is sticking to something long after it stops feeling good or exciting to do so. Many times we start a journey with a lot of zeal and excitement, but over time when the flush of excitement fades, how do we stay committed especially when times get tough? One way is to keep in mind the rewards ahead of us which was an example Jesus gave us.

'Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.' Revelation 22:12

The Lord didn't call us to seek Him in vain, there's a reward promised to every believer who stays faithful to the end. Following the example of Jesus who kept the joy awaiting Him as a constant motivation for staying committed. If Jesus needed to keep something in front of Him then so do we.

'And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness...' 2 Timothy 4:8

'...Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.' 1 Corinthians 9:25

'God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.' James 1:12

'and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.' 1 Peter 5:4

'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?' 1 Thessalonians 2:19

Beyond whatever the Lord may bless us with here, there are crowns waiting for us in heaven!! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this when life tries to distract us, or the enemy tries to sidetrack us. Earlier in the series we talked about fixing our minds and one of the things we need to fix our minds on is what is ahead of us, so we don't get overwhelmed by what is around us right now.

**Prayer:** Lord, when the times get tough and I get weary strengthen me and help me remember that you are a rewarder of those who sincerely and diligently seek You.



## Day 7

### Plan to Finish Well

*'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.'* 2 Timothy 4:7

Not everyone who runs plans to win, some just want to participate. Paul who was exceptionally intentional about his race, fully intended to finish well so he didn't leave things to chance. Rather we see him deliberately creating systems around himself to stay consistent. Let's look at some of those systems for our guidance and emulation.

'Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...' Philippians 3:8

He was eternity minded. Remember Paul was very well educated and left a high-profile role when he chose to serve Jesus. Yet he realized that the things he initially thought were important didn't carry much weight in comparison to knowing Jesus. In fact he called it all worthless in the context of eternity – this tells us that Paul kept his eyes fixed on one thing only – Jesus and everything He represents.

'...Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?'" Luke 2:49

He was laser focused on expanding the frontiers of God's kingdom as he preached, taught, pastored and disciplined many across different geographies. Obeying God regardless of the personal cost and inconvenience because he saw himself first and foremost as a citizen of heaven before anything else.

'I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything...' Philippians 4:12

Paul learned how to deny himself, so he didn't get caught up in the legitimate distractions of life, pleasing people or swayed by different opinions. He prioritized prayer, fasting and study of the scriptures to ensure that he was consistently productive in good times or bad.

'Never stop praying.' 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Paul didn't joke with his prayer life because he understood that nothing meaningful can be achieved without the help of the Holy Spirit. It's in the place of consistent prayer we receive transformation, strength, direction, wisdom and all that we need to finish and finish well. Have you prayed about your spiritual development plan? If you have one what are you doing to keep to it?

**Prayer:** Lord help me stay committed to You so I finish well.



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