

Week 9 Day 1 | *Running the Race: The Purpose*

Of the many components to a race, the one that most often goes unexamined is the purpose—more specifically, your purpose for participating. You might love group events, or you're the competitive type who loves a good challenge. If it's really intimidating, maybe you just want to prove to yourself that you have what it takes to finish. Or maybe you just like trying new things. There is no shortage of great reasons for doing a race.

In my case, the purpose was more insidious.

Years ago, my wife was bitten by the running bug and decided to do her first full marathon. She, unfortunately, ended up getting injured during her training. This was a bummer for a number of reasons. Of course, she was disappointed as she had trained so hard for so long. She was also sponsored to help raise money for a non-profit. Plus, the hotel reservation in Chicago was non-refundable.

So, I decided that if she couldn't run it, I would. I just couldn't bear the thought of the money for registration, sponsorship, and hotel going to waste. I trained the best I could in what time was remaining. On race day, I joined tens of thousands of others and didn't stop until I crossed the finish line. In fact, I did surprisingly well for someone who didn't like road running, especially road running for 26.2 miles.

A handful of years later, the feeling of being a “one-and-done” marathon hack was getting to me. I wondered how well I could do if I had a full 18 weeks of training. In my first marathon, I only had six. Thoughts crept into my head. “I have long legs. I can handle a fair amount of suffering before I quit. I'm reasonably disciplined. I bet I could qualify for Boston!” The running started up again and was going quite well . . . save for one small detail: I hated it. Remember, I don't like this sort of thing! It's long. Boring. Monotonous. Yuck.

Even still, I persisted with one thought propelling me: “It will be pretty impressive if, in only my second marathon ever, I qualify for Boston. I don't even like running!” That's a pathetic motivation that's hard to admit, but I'm being real.

Well, three weeks before the marathon, the Lord allowed me to have a hamstring injury. I couldn't race. All that training down the drain. All that dread the nights before long runs for naught. All my Boston-qualifying hopes dashed. To add insult to injury, wasted registration money. Ugh.

As Christians, the purpose for our fitness should be no different than the purpose for all areas of our lives: to honor God, to bring Him glory. This was certainly not the purpose for what would have been my second marathon. My purpose was my disgusting pride:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”—Psalm 139:23–24 (LB)

For many people, pride is the purpose behind their fitness. Others might be motivated by guilt. Or influence. Or . . .

Of course, the Lord was gentle with me. In His loving way, He searched my heart, tested my thoughts, and pointed out where I was wrong. That conviction led me to not only ask for forgiveness, but to write about the experience here. Now, not only am I more aware and on guard against pride, He has allowed my example to teach others to do the same. He has taken an ugly situation and turned it around for His glory.

Don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with being pleased with the results of your fitness. Nor is there anything wrong with having fun racing. We just need to keep God at the forefront of our intentions. We need Him to test our thoughts and to lead our paths.

There's no better motivation for our fitness than pleasing our Father. Keep your purpose pure by keeping your eyes on Him.

Prayer

Father, thank You for your loving-kindness to me. Will You please forgive me for my pride? Please guide my thoughts, my heart, my path, and my purpose back to You. Amen.

Meditation

You are the purpose of my fitness.

Daily Spiritual Exercise

There are wonderful benefits for us when we take our fitness seriously. We look and feel better. We can serve and do more. We will likely live longer, more enjoyable lives. All great things. That said, the physical results we are hoping for with our fitness should not be synonymous with our purpose for it. Our purpose should be to glorify Him. The results are secondary.

Today, read Psalm 139 as a part of your out-loud Bible reading. As you hear yourself asking God to search your heart, listen to what He uncovers. Confess it to Him and pray for pure motives. Then rely on Him to direct and align your heart to His.