

## Week 9 Day 3 | *Running the Race: The People*

If you've ever run or attended a large-scale marathon, you know just how great the people can be. Their encouragement rivals the camaraderie you share with strangers at baseball games. An unspoken trust occurs as you pass your hard-earned money down the row to the hot dog vendor. It's a rare moment as our collective selflessness provides a brief glimpse at what could have been, if not for our collective sinfulness.

Marathons are the same way. From the organizers and the volunteers, to the crowd and even the other racers, support is everywhere. Clangs of cowbells and random shouts of *"atta boy!"* Funny homemade T-shirts and witty signs. "Eye of the Tiger" blares on the loudspeakers, and children cheer from their parents' shoulders. It's a barrage of constant encouragement. It's why racers race . . . right?

Well, not exactly . . . at least not the sane ones. Yes, the people at the races can be inspiring and can give a well-needed boost when the event gets hard. Yet that's not why the runners are out there. The runners aren't running for the amusement of the crowd. They're mostly out there because of their own goals or dreams, to have fun or because they have a death wish. Whatever the reason, it's not to make the crowds or other racers happy.

Yet how often do we find ourselves working to impress others? How often do you catch yourself seeking approval from those around you, rather than from God? Our ugly pride can compromise the purpose for our fitness goals. Pride is also at the root of our intentions when we're performing for people as we run our races.

Nowhere in Scripture are we told that the purpose of obeying, pleasing, or working for man is *solely* for the sake of man. We ultimately do these things as unto the Lord. We want to reflect our faith in His purposes for our lives and bring Him glory.

For instance, we give "unto Caesar" not because we want to please our government. We do it because as Christ-followers, it pleases Him that we be law-abiding citizens. We aren't told to submit to one another so that we'll impress one another. We do it out of reverence for Christ.

Two different times Paul gives the same instructions to workers, once in Ephesians and again in Colossians:

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters . . ."—Colossians 3:23 (NIV)*

Admittedly, this can be easier said than done—both the "all your heart" and the "for the Lord" parts. A lot of times it's one or the other. When we work for the Lord, however, we should want to work with all our heart. Conversely, we have to be on guard that when working with all our heart, we do so for the Lord.

This can get pretty tricky where our fitness is concerned. Even if we're authentically working with all our heart, we have to be careful. What begins as "for the Lord" winds up as "for men." What starts off as appreciating encouraging compliments regarding our progress quickly becomes the energy gels we feed on to keep us going. When this happens, we're running for "the people."

In Galatians 5:7, Paul says, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" Here he's explaining the freedom we have in Christ, as we live by the Spirit. This holds true for the fitness race you're running as well. Most of the people you're running with may be positive, well-meaning racers. However, a few will cut in on you and trip you up with their remarks: "You'll never lose that weight." "You'll always be scrawny." "Wow, you're ripped." These become the impetus for your running. Either "I'll show them" or "I'm a big deal" becomes your underlying mindset for your fitness. Without even realizing it, you're running not for the eyes of the Lord, but for "the people."

In the races we live, we'll always be running *with* people, but that's not the same as running *for* people. The good news is that God can help us recalibrate our motives. As Paul says to each of us in Colossians 3, "set your hearts on things above, where Christ is." We need to "set [our] mind on the things above..." We need to refocus our hearts and minds on Him. When we do, we take our eyes off the crowd. Off the racers. Off "the people."

If our primary purpose is to honor God with our fitness, then He should be the one on whom we are focused. Comments from outsiders, whether good or bad, should not be allowed to usurp His rightful place as our motivation.

Ultimately, we always win when we run for an audience of One.

### Prayer

*Father, thank You for allowing me to run for You. Will You forgive me when I look to people for my source of encouragement and motivation? Please help keep my mind set on You and You alone. Amen.*

### Meditation

You are the motivation for my fitness.

### Daily Spiritual Exercise

Setting our minds on Christ is the best antidote to being negatively influenced by people. Of course, reading Scripture is a great way to align our minds to His.

Read Psalm 119 out loud as part of your reading today. This passage is an amazing reminder of God's faithfulness amid our struggles. As you do, ask the Lord that He and He alone would be the reason for your hope and comfort.