

## Week 9 Day 4 | *Running the Race: The Pace*

For those new to running races, the rookie mistake is to start too fast. And who can blame them? After 18 long weeks worth of training, it's finally race time. When the gun goes off, a gush of anticipation overwhelms them. All the pent-up nerves. The pre-race jitters. The flashbacks of smacking the snooze button before that 5:30 a.m. tempo run. The communal adrenaline spike from the thousands of other runners feeding off one another. It all results in an impulse to come out of the gate all-systems-go. The newbie thinks, "Why not capitalize on this burst of energy? I feel amazing."

At first, "amazing" sustains you. You're doing something you never thought possible. The crowd is cheering you on. Runners are still smiling. You look fantastic in all your running garb. At this speed, you'll crush your goal time.

Somewhere along the road, though, "amazing" betrays you... at mile four, or six, maybe mile eight, if you're lucky. Now you just feel "good." You think, "'Good' will do." And it does . . . until it doesn't. Then, "good" tags out for "okay," but "okay" doesn't last long either. "Okay" vacates to make room for "not great."

Soon you are feeling more bad than good. Eventually, the evil cousin of amazing—"miserable"—claims squatter's rights in your calves, quads, and hammies for the remainder of the race. If you finish at all, you swear off ever doing another race again. This downward spiral could have been avoided had you learned the fine art of pacing.

Throughout the Bible, we are trained with example after example on how to live the Christian life. Paul recaps a handful of them in Hebrews 11 and in 12:1. He implores us to use their examples to spur us on before giving us this sage advice on running:

*"... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*  
—12:1b–2a (NIV)

Sin hinders us. It trips us up and weighs us down. Strap a dumbbell to each foot and try to run. That is sin. Cast it aside, however, and you're more free not only to survive the race, but thrive in it.

As for our strategy, we have but one pace to run the race. It's not, however, so much a speed, such as fast, slow, moderate, or swift. Our pace is a mindset and that mindset is, as Paul tells us in Hebrews, "with perseverance."

Some translations say "endurance" and others say "patience." The point is we never give up. Races are long, hard, and grueling. Therefore, it's not about how fast we run, but about how we run . . . period. We should run with determination, purpose, and single-mindedness. Our pace is perseverance.

Keep in mind that although we're all running the same race, we all will have different routes. My race will look different than yours. Yours is different than your best friend's. Our goal, however, is the same: consistently surrendering our heart to God and following Him in obedience.

We can only do this, as we talked about yesterday, by setting our hearts and minds on things above. By "fixing our eyes on Jesus." Only He can direct our paths. Only He can supply our needs. Only He can perfect our faith.

There are two things that kill most people's fitness progress. The first is the inability to be honest with themselves about their efforts. The second is lack of perseverance. People start fast but burn out faster. They lack the determination to keep going no matter what. The truth is that most exercise and nutrition plans work for most people. People just quit the race too soon. People don't persevere.

However, when we adopt the mindset that our bodies do not truly belong to us (1 Corinthians 6:19), things change. Our goal becomes to consistently honor God with the body He gave us and trust Him with the results. We do this regardless of how slowly the mirror seems to change. We do this no matter how much change the bathroom scale reports to us. We do this no matter how good it feels, how fun it is, or how fast it happens.

When we commit to honoring God with our body no matter what, it is much easier to establish a healthy lifestyle. When we fix our eyes on Him, we no longer focus on the obstacles in the way. Or on the false timetables we create. Or on getting as fit as possible as quickly as possible. Fixing our eyes on Him enables us to persevere and to want to persevere.

If we trust Him with the race, we can trust Him with the pace.

### Prayer

*Father, thank You for Your promise to keep me going. Will You forgive me when I fail to run with perseverance? Please help me to be empowered by You and for You, that I might win the race You've designed for me. Amen.*

### Meditation

Only by You can I persevere.

### Daily Spiritual Exercise

There is only one pace that produces a sustainably healthy lifestyle: perseverance. For the Christian, there is only one source that can sustain that perseverance.

Read Hebrews 11–12:3 out loud as part of your Bible reading for the day. You'll read example after example of the persevering faith of some of the Bible's greatest heroes.

As you read it, let it serve as a reminder that the gun has sounded. The race has started. If we are to run in such a way as to get the prize, we will have to persevere. Only He can empower us to run without growing weary . . . without losing heart.