

Week 9 Day 5 | *Running the Race: “The Wall”*

Endurance athletes hit what is called “the wall” at one time or another. The wall is when your reserves of glycogen—the energy used for intense exercise—are almost depleted. The result is a sudden, total loss of energy. This kind of fatigue seemingly strikes you out of nowhere. When it does, it feels like you’ve run into a brick wall and can no longer go on. Everything feels heavier. Harder. Slower.

The wall isn’t just what happens to you biologically. It’s equal parts physical and emotional. When you hit it, your mind starts playing tricks on you. You hear the devil on your shoulder telling you that you can’t go on. Making matters worse, you often hit the wall when you’re about four-fifths through the race. Although there are many miles under your feet, the light at the end of the tunnel is still around several more corners. Over some hills. Through some shadeless long stretches and across some side streets. You are still far enough away from the finish line that the temptation to quit is both logical and justifiable.

Experienced athletes know there are ways to forestall the wall. The first step they take is to make sure their glycogen reserves are topped off before the race even begins. This is done by increasing the consumption of complex carbohydrates leading up to the race, which is known as “carb-loading.” Secondly, taking in carbohydrates during the race will help replace some of what is spent during it.

The next thing they do to combat the wall is, of course, slow their pace. Lowering the intensity will cut down the amount of energy coming from glycogen. This gives them more mileage, but at a slower rate. Lastly, skilled runners are mentally equipped, knowing what to expect. This isn’t only demonstrated by pre-race preparation and intra-race performance. Additionally, they are psychologically readied for the wall before it comes. They have an emotional game plan in place to combat the onslaught of negativity that floods the mind during the race’s hardest stretch.

What’s interesting about the wall is the mental aspects of it are not confined to athletic endeavors. You can hit the wall while working on reconciling your bank account, parenting the kids, or a long road trip. You can hit it while preparing for a final exam, cleaning the house, finishing a home improvement project, or writing a fitness devotional. You can hit it on most any long, drawn-out endeavor. Certainly, that includes a 90-day fitness journey. I’ve seen this not only in my own programs, but in most of the people I coach. When people hit the wall, they slow down, get discouraged, and want to give up.

What’s also interesting about hitting the wall during a fitness journey is that it’s mostly mental. At this point, completing the program is not an ability-based decision. After all, you’ve just demonstrated you can work out consistently or stick to the diet for nine weeks. It’s now a character-based decision. Do you have the willingness, fortitude, and conviction to keep putting one foot in front of the other? To choose salads over chocolate. To choose yoga over TV. To go to bed early rather than surfing the web. Can you continue doing this day after day, but still taking it one day at a time?

As with the endurance athlete preparing to hit the wall, we can take similar precautions in this fitness journey. We do so not just to delay the wall, but knock it down altogether. By starting the journey with our spiritual tanks filled, we start the race fully equipped. In order not to run dry, we also are refilling our tanks every day, by prayer and by Scripture. We’re mindful of God’s ability to keep us going, knowing

we’ve properly paced ourselves with perseverance from the beginning. Since we’re focused spiritually, not just physically, we get the added benefit of His guidance mentally, as He renews our minds in Christ.

That’s where it gets especially exciting for Christians. We don’t have to rely on the character we were born with to determine if we will break through the wall. Instead, we can rely on the character we are *born again with*; the character of Christ in us can propel us forward. The character that gives us power and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). The character that will complete the good work He began in us (Philippians 1:6). The character that will be with us always (Matthew 28:20). The very same character that enabled Paul to say confidently:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”—2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)

Besides, God specializes in walls. He held up the walls of the Red Sea as Moses and the Israelites escaped the Egyptians. He tore down the walls of Jericho for Joshua’s army. Through a hole in a wall, He saved the life of a reformed Saul. Then, by the sacrifice of His perfect Son, He destroyed the wall of sin that separates us from a perfect eternity.

When the wall hits, your response should really be no different from when you started this journey, or when you finish it. Check your motives. Align your will to His. Pray for His strength. Expect Him to give it. Praise Him when He does. Rely on Him solely. Give Him glory for working in your life.

Do this and you’ll see something amazing: the walls you face in the race of life become the ways you grow in your walk with Christ.

Prayer

Father, thank You for the walls even though I don’t always like them. Will You forgive me when my motives change, my will is misguided, or my strength is my own? Please help me to rely solely on You both now and when walls come. Amen.

Meditation

My walls are merely opportunities for God’s strength to prevail.

Daily Spiritual Exercise

Read Philippians 1 out loud as part of your Bible reading today. Notice that Paul’s chains, a wall in their own right, were used by God for His glory. Paul urged the church to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Amazing words coming from someone imprisoned for the very thing He is urging.

Setbacks in fitness, like those in life, are inevitable. Your responses to them will determine how quickly you recover. As a Christian, you can use these obstacles as reminders to check your purpose and your focus. Hitting a wall is really an opportunity to grow deeper in Christ.