
RUNNING A MARATHON

Read: Philippians 3:14

The Comrades Marathon, which began in 1921, is the oldest ultra-marathon. Covering 90 km (56 miles), it is held annually in South Africa. Bruce Fordyce completely dominated this marathon in the 1980s, winning it nine times between 1981 and 1990. His 1986 record of 5 hours 24 minutes and 7 seconds stood for 21 years before it was finally broken in 2007. It's amazing to me that he has continued to run in this race every year.

In a sense, we as Christians are all in a marathon. It takes endurance to run and finish the race of life. When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he spoke of how he was “reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (3:13) and pressing on “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v.14). Our Lord Jesus has set an example of how to run life’s marathon. The Bible tells us that Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” ([Heb. 12:2](#)). Despite “hostility from sinners,” He completed His race (v.3).

The secret to finishing well is to look forward to the joy that awaits us after life’s race—eternal life with Him.

Application:

1. How can you develop endurance for the race of life today?

2. What should your ultimate goal in the race of life be?

Past, Present, Future

Read: Philippians 3:15-17

In his painting “An Allegory of Prudence,” the 16th-century Venetian artist Titian portrayed Prudence as a man with three heads. One head was of a youth facing the future, another of a mature man eyeing the present, and the third, a wise old man gazing at the past. Over their heads Titian wrote a Latin phrase that means, “From the example of the past, the man of the present acts prudently so as not to imperil the future.”

We need that kind of wisdom to overcome the anxiety created by our past failures and the fear of repeating them in the future—an anxiety that can keep us from enjoying life to the fullest right now. Paul was able to “forget” his past and anticipate his future ([Phil. 3:13-14](#)). This doesn’t mean that his memory was erased; it means that because God had forgiven him, Paul was free of any guilt or pride he may have felt from his past. As he lived in daily fellowship with Christ, trials could only make him more like his Savior. So he had one driving passion—to know Christ better.

As we close the chapter of 1994, let’s rededicate ourselves to Christ in 1995 and follow Paul’s example. Jesus will enable us to live fully in the present as we gain wisdom from the past and face the future with courage.

Application:

1. What is a life choice/decision that you would take back if you could?

2. How can you move beyond the embarrassment/shame from that decision and live life fully again?

Contrasts

Read: Philippians 3:18-19

A popular rap singer who died in 1995 at the age of 31 took pride in the profane language and violent imagery of his productions. If you listened to his music, you had the feeling that he was shaking his fist at God. It's a tragic story. The singer's godless philosophy of life deprived him of hope and led him into a lifestyle that caused his death at a young age. But far worse than an early death is the fact that God's judgment awaits all who reject Him ([Phil. 3:19](#)).

The apostle Paul, though he was a very religious man, was also on a road to self-destruction until the Lord graciously sent him to his knees ([Acts 9](#)). After he put his trust in Jesus and accepted the gift of salvation, Paul had a far different view of life's purpose. Now he saw Jesus as his only hope, and his highest goal was to become like Christ ([Phil. 3:7-14](#)). He could face death fearlessly because he looked forward to the conclusion of it all—perfect conformity to Christ in heaven (vv.20-21).

What a contrast! Man's way produces harmful, evil conduct that ends in destruction. God's way promises inner peace, victory over enslaving sins, and eternity in heaven. The right choice is obvious! Have you made it?

Application:

1. Take a moment to write out your salvation testimony:

2. Take a moment to write out how your purpose in life has changed since accepting Christ as your Savior:

We Will Be Like Him!

Read: Philippians 3:19-20

One fall my grandsons gathered cocoons they found in a swamp. The boys hung the dry, unattractive, and motionless objects in a cool place for the winter. The following spring they moved the cocoons to a place in the warm sun. Soon there emerged from the tomb of one cocoon a gorgeous creature—a luna moth, gracefully unfolding its drying wings in readiness to take its flight into the sky. Its colors were indescribable, and it was unspeakably graceful in its unhurried stretching and folding of its delicate wings.

Yes, springtime is resurrection time. The emergence of the moth, though, is not a true resurrection from death but a metamorphosis of life. It is a change in form because of its inner life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, was life from the dead. But it was also a metamorphosis. As Jesus was changed into an infinitely more beautiful form, so shall our resurrection be. The Greek word translated “fashioned” or “conformed” in [Philippians 3:21](#) is *summorphon*, meaning “to change form” or “metamorphose.”

Because Jesus rose from the grave, we can be confident that our bodies will be changed and fashioned to be like His glorious body.

Yes, one day we will be like Him!

Application:

1. Name one thing that you are looking forward to when you get to Heaven:

2. What is one way that salvation has changed you?

Serve and Be Served

Read: Philippians 4:1

Marilyn had been ill for many weeks, and many people had encouraged her through this difficult time. *How will I ever repay all their kindnesses?* she worried. Then one day she read the words of a written prayer: “Pray that [others] will develop humility, allowing them not only to serve, but also to be served.” Marilyn suddenly realized there was no need to balance any scale, but just to be thankful and allow others to experience the joy of serving.

In [Philippians 4](#), the apostle Paul expressed his gratitude for all those who shared “in [his] troubles” (v. 14). He depended on people to support him as he preached and taught the gospel. He understood that the gifts provided for him when he was in need were simply an extension of people’s love for God: “[Your gifts] are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (v. 18).

It may not be easy to be the one on the receiving end—especially if you’ve usually been the first one to help other people. But with humility, we can allow God to gently care for us by a variety of means when we need help. Paul wrote, “My God will meet all your needs” (v. 19). It was something he had learned during a life of trials. God is faithful and His provision for us has no limits.

Application:

1. Is it easier for you to receive gifts or to give gifts?

2. How can you prepare yourself to receive the gifts that God has promised to give to us if we trust Him?
