

Running With Certainty

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (I Corinthians 9:24). *“I therefore so run, not as uncertainly...”* (I Corinthians 9:26). *“...I have finished my course...”* (II Timothy 4:7). Observe the definitions I obtained from four dictionaries for the word “uncertain”: not able to be relied on; not known or definite; not completely confident or sure of something; likely to change; not known or established; unsteady; not sure, unsettled; irregular. We are admonished to run with certainty. Using my same resource of dictionaries I found these definitions of “certain”: assured in mind, established beyond doubts, unfailing, fixed, determined, regular, from the Latin word *certus* meaning settled or sure. We are admonished to run not uncertainly but with certainty. How then shall we run with certainty?

1. To run with certainty we must see how running benefits us.

I have always enjoyed running. I used to do it regularly, but due to a heel spur with ongoing plantar fasciitis, my running days have been curtailed drastically. One day, I hope to get it repaired to enjoy again the daily run. Jim Fixx wrote in his secular book, *The Complete Book of Running*, “Every runner is a closet mystic.” His point was that when you are running, you get into this zone; it usually comes after what we call the second wind. Let me explain. When you begin a long run, you eventually find a point of fatigue and exhaustion, but you stay with it and a burst of energy comes, you inhale the fresh air more deeply and you receive that second wind strength to finish the course. After you capture the second wind, you enter a zone of elation; science would explain this phenomenon as the activation of endorphins. Endorphins are any of a group of hormones secreted within the brain and nervous system and having a number of physiological functions. They are peptides that activate the body's opiate receptors, causing an analgesic effect. The analgesic effect alleviates pain. This (for the runner) could include the psychological pain of worry and stress. Sustained, strenuous exercise releases endorphins. For the Christian, I suggest it's more than this; the late Jim Fixx was touching close to it when he referred to the runner as a closet mystic.

Running takes you somewhere else. I have talked to other Christians who run and they talk about creative juices being released in the run. Some of my preacher friends will talk about getting sermon ideas and soon after the run writing down ideas. Many times we get so caught up in this busy world that we don't realize how tangled our thinking has become in the activity. Running untangles the mind and increases our ability to concentrate. The diversionary effect we all need, whether supplied by running, walking or finding that special place to meditate will take you somewhere else. I like to think of “somewhere else” as the secret place. And the promise of God is *“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”* (Psalm 91:1). As we run the race God has set before us, we will do so much more effectively if we see the benefit of the run itself.

2. To run with certainty we must be unhindered.

The writer of Hebrews said, *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”* (Hebrews 12:1). In my youth when the track team would prepare for a race, the runners would often wear heavy weights around their ankles to train them for the race. Just before the race they would remove the weights and feel as light as a feather. They would definitely not try to run the race with those weights about their feet. By the same token, a Christian will be tripping over life’s hurdles and losing should he or she attempt to run the race with the hindrances of besetting sins. Let us confess and forsake our sins and run with patience the course God has assigned to us.

3. To run with certainty we must be disciplined.

If a man has not been keeping himself in shape by much exercise, he cannot win the race. The Bible says, *“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost”* (Jude 1:20). The runner must be able to withstand a run of five miles working himself up to 10, 15, and 20 miles before he can run a marathon race of 26 miles. He eats and sleeps properly. He just doesn’t decide one day to run a marathon without proper and responsible training. He invests long hours of painstaking, vigorous preparation. We, too, must be built up in prayer and Bible knowledge to run the race God has set before us.

4. To run with certainty we must keep our eye on the prize.

One of the most rewarding memories of my youth happened on the last day of school in the sixth grade. When I attended school, first through sixth grade was elementary school, seventh through ninth was junior high school and ninth through twelfth was high school. So ending our sixth year of school marked a very defined change. After that, we became teen-ager types. It was a goodbye to childhood, hello to adolescence. It was a time you considered your values, met new friends and contemplated your future. It was a mixed emotion day on the last day of sixth grade. We had all been through so much together. Our school, Lake Morton Elementary burned down in our sixth grade February 21, 1963. We finished our spring semester out at the First Methodist Church located about three blocks from our old school.

On the last day of our elementary existence, our teacher, Mrs. Jones announced that we had been challenged to compete in some field sports by the opposing sixth grade class. I remember the contrast of those two classes. The other teacher was a lady who was just completing her first year of teaching. She was young, dressed colorfully and drove an MG sports car. Mrs. Jones was in her hundredth year of teaching (maybe I exaggerated some), dressed nice but old fashioned, conservative in principle and was overtly a Christian lady. I remember being taught to memorize Scripture in her class. A public school, mind you! The last event of the last day was the relay race. In the tradition of the relay race the order of running was second fastest, third fastest, slowest, then fastest (anchor). My class voted me to be the anchor. What an honor! As we lined up for the race, I

saw the fastest boy in the other class; Tommy Mueller had been chosen to anchor his team. We looked at each other and I remember his confident smile. I couldn't believe it, the batons were handed to us at the exact time and we ran like the wind. I didn't look back until I had finished my course. I didn't have to ask who won, because the next thing I knew was I was being hoisted by my fellow sixth graders into the air. I felt like Eric Liddel in the 1927 Olympics! Even after all those years, that was a high moment and a learning experience. I learned if you give it your best, keep your eye on the prize or goal, don't be shaken up by your opposition, you could win! God's Word says, *"...Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14). Let us all run with certainty!

-Pastor Pope-