

For Today's devotional I have decided to put up an extract from my upcoming devotional book...365 Days With Jesus.

**“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)**

Today we look at perseverance. The ability to keep on keeping on. The determination to not give up, even when it gets difficult. Paul gives the analogy of the runner in a race. I'm not a runner. I used to 'run' a bit before I got ill and would love to do it again one day, but the analogy works for anything that involves difficulty that needs to be overcome, whether that difficulty is illness, injury or sheer exhaustion. Everyone has to overcome something and push through to reach their goals. The same is true of the spiritual life, that of being a christian.

To be a christian isn't all sunshine and roses. We don't all get to have everything we want. The bible talks about the narrow gate (see Matthew 7:13-14) through which few enter. This means that sometimes we have to go against the flow. Just because 'everyone else is doing it' doesn't make it right. Equally, just because our fellow christians are doing 'it', doesn't make 'it' right either. We have to remember that we all make mistakes or misinterpret the bible sometimes, but that isn't the point here, just a side note. Once we get through this narrow gate, that is where the race begins. Paul tells us that only the winner gets the prize, but that we should be focused as if we are trying to be that winner. There will be many before us and many after us, but to run a race needs focus, determination and for long distance races, sometimes, special types of drinks/foods to give a quick boost at the key points. A good athlete will also try out the equipment and any snacks they need prior to the race to reduce their chances of having stomach issues or blisters etc on the race day. Paul doesn't talk about the preparation for the race and, back in the 1st Century there was a lot less preparation in terms of equipment testing to do, but training still needed to be taken.

Lets take this a little further from a spiritual perspective...

The preparation for the race is things like equipping our minds, bodies and spirits with the tools we need to succeed in our calling. Things like prayer (including silent time to listen for God's response), reading and studying the bible and filling our minds with Spiritual knowledge until it becomes natural. Yet, unlike with a physical race, the preparation for our spiritual race doesn't stop when we take to the starting block.

So we have got prepared. God has provided us the tools we need for our purpose, we've entered that narrow gate and the even narrower road behind it. Some people may be discouraged and leave the race at this point. But we aren't going to do that. We see that road, we see the narrowness as a challenge worth taking on. So we make a start. We see others making a great start but we also watch some of them falling off and turning back as we continue through the road. Our determination starts to waiver. If so many are turning back then is this race really worth it? Can any prize be worth this? Hopefully we have continued to pray and read the bible and this is sustaining us through the negative feelings that are starting to come to the forefronts of our minds. If not, this is the point we really need to be focusing on that determination to keep going. Grab the bible, sit in prayer for a while, throw up an arrow prayer even, sing a hymn or worship song that reminds you of God's goodness. Like an athlete running a marathon, spiritual journeys

also need sustenance. Sometimes that can be taken on the go, sometimes you just need to stop for a moment to let this 'food' do its work before carrying on.

But what is this prize that's worth all the effort? Why might we need to put the pleasures of this world behind us? Why should we be willing to go against our friends and families?

Is salvation not enough of a prize? It should be. Can you consider anything greater than the prize of being in God's presence? I can't. Everyone's race will be different while traversing that narrow road. Each person who travels it will have different obstacles at different times. You may have the same call at the same time as another person and they may get to discover that call coming into fruition while you're falling flat on your face and learning to get up and how to not fall that way again. That person may discover their falling face down is down the road at a place where you wouldn't even stumble. But because of the different stumbles taken, and different knocks and scrapes that happen on the way you and the person you saw get their calling first will bring different strengths to that same role.

So which gate are you going to take? Are you going to go through the narrow gate and follow God's path, or take the easy, wide road? Might I encourage you to take that narrow gate. It may feel like walking alone sometimes, but never underestimate the encouragement you can get by watching those ahead as they overcome obstacles. Don't undervalue your own race either. Even if you find yourself completely alone, God is always there and willing to guide us to the right place. Let's all begin running towards the prize as if we are the only one who can get it.

#### PRAYER POINTS

- \* Pray for all those who are considering turning away from Christ because of the difficulties they've encountered on the narrow road
- \* Pray for those who make traversing the narrow road of life look easy by not allowing others to see their struggles - pray that they learn these struggles are as important as the things they over came more easily
- \* Pray for our own races. That we may keep our eyes on the prize that is Salvation through Jesus, the Christ, and that He will help us to remain steadfast and sure
- \* Pray that we will be able to assist those who are also walking, or running, or even crawling, down the narrow path by sharing our experiences and being a shoulder to support and carry them until they're on their own 2 feet again.