

Lessons Learned while Running (or, How to Think Clearly while Gasping for Breath)

I am weird. I actually *enjoy* running. This strange affliction did not attack me until my forties. I am now 46 and just completed my second San Antonio Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon. I finished in 6,961st place and I could not be happier! For me, the important part of the previous sentence is not the place number, but the word "finished." I made it to the finish line.

Each time I cross the finish line I think of Paul's words to Timothy, written toward the end of the apostle's life as he saw his "finish line" approaching: "The time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:6b-7 HCSB). Paul is looking forward to the finisher's reward he will receive from his Savior. This started me thinking about the lessons I have learned while running and how they apply to life, especially to living life in such a way as to have a good finish. So here are a few insights that have been gained through much sweat and labored breathing.

1. *All things are created twice.* What I mean is that I had to see myself finishing a half-marathon before I actually did it. I had to want it and imagine it and develop a plan for it before I could run it. This speaks to the importance of vision. Do you have a vision for your life, a sense of what kind of life you want to lead and what a good finish would look like? The picture comes before the accomplishment. All things are created twice – first in the mind and heart, then in actuality.

2. *The main battle is between the ears.* My heart and lungs and hamstrings might beg to differ, but I submit that a good finish is mainly decided inside that little bone box where your brain resides. Have you made up your mind about finishing? Are you committed to whatever it takes to get there? Issues of planning, patience, perseverance, and personal disciplines are decided in the mind. Where your thoughts reside – that is the main battleground.

3. *You race like you train.* What I mean here is that you cannot show up on race day and expect to do any differently than what your training has prepared you for. Habits trump hopes. You can hope all day long for a good finish in life, but are your habits capable of getting you there?

4. *All endeavors have their inglorious aspects.* It is glorious to cross the finish line, have the finisher's medal hung around your neck, and bask in the accomplishment with the other runners. It is NOT glorious to have toe cramps, chafed body parts (I'll spare you the details), stinky shoes, and snot on your shirt. As my daughter once said, "The real story never is very pretty." But it is all part of getting to the finish line. Do not let the inglorious aspects discourage you from a good finish.

5. *Crossing the finish line is worth the effort.* At the finish you do not care about the aches and pains because your spirits are too high. A good finish transforms the whole experience.

6. *Coaching someone across the finish line is just as much fun.* This year in San Antonio Susan completed her first half-marathon. I was her “coach” during training and I was there to celebrate with her at the finish line. I would not trade that for anything. Seeing the joy on her face was as big a hoot as crossing the finish line myself. You know, we are not in this race of life alone. Those we help have a good finish will be there at the end to celebrate with us.

Brothers and sisters, whether you are a runner or not, my prayer for your life is that you will have a good finish. When you cross the finish line into the arms of Jesus, I pray that you will be able to say with no regrets, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Do not quit! Go all the way in your life’s race.