



FINISHING WELL

The Start

- **WEEK 1... THE START:** Every race starts somewhere. The Apostle Paul refers to races 7 times in his letters to the churches. This metaphor of the journey we are on being like a race seemed to be a favorite of Paul's. When he was at the end of his time here on earth, Paul used the illustration of his life with God being like a race that had a beginning, middle and end seemed like a fitting representation of a life of faith; his life of faith in the person of Jesus. As with every race, you have to start somewhere. If you've ever competed in a race yourself, you know that it all begins well before you put your foot on the starting line and wait for the gun to go off...

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs,
but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

1 Corinthians 9:24 NLT-SE

- ◆ **Everyone runs...** Much of the time, we feel like we're the only ones in the race. Like we're actually racing ourselves. Either that, or we are fixated on comparing ourselves to others, constantly re-evaluating our race because of what we see others doing. Both are extremely distracting. We would be much better off keeping our focus on the race we have envisioned for ourselves and making adjustments to those expectations.
- ◆ **Only one gets the prize...** In spite of the fact that many others in the race have prepared well, there's only one first-place. No second place. No honorable mention. No participation award. This doesn't mean that we beat ourselves up before the race is even finished. A lot can happen along the way, both good and not so good.
- ◆ **Run to Win!...** There is a way to run. It involves a plan, the execution, the mid-race adjustments, the kick, and the finish. All this is the "way" you run. The encouragement is to not run without a plan. "We'll see..." may work with some things, but in a race it will likely only lead to mediocrity.



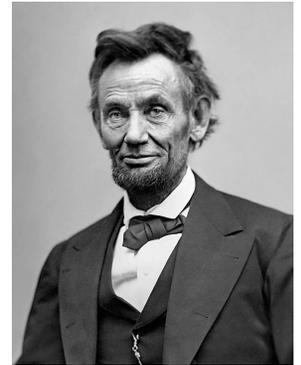
I don't really think about the degree of difficulty or the possibility of making a mistake. I just try to relax and let my preparation and training take over.

Simone Biles

- SOME KEYS TO STARTING WELL

• Prepare well

- **The key to finishing well...is to start well.** When you think of your journey with God, where do you think it really began? At the moment you gave your heart to Jesus? Or was it before that? When did the Holy Spirit first start pursuing you? If you really think about it, your race didn't start with you, it started with the Father's heart for you. What a great place to start a race that will last a literal lifetime!
- **Reading is fundamental.** Get a good Study Bible and start devouring it. It sounds so old school, but learning what God wrote in his book is that key to a great start to your race. Read books as well, and not only the ones that interest you, but books you think will challenge you as well. Read the classics, Read biographies. Read history. Podcasts and video teachings are good, but they don't take the place of books that give you the freedom to mark them up, underline the good stuff and circle the things you want to go back to some day.
- **Start the discovery process of what you do well.** This could take up to ten years, so don't be in a hurry, but pay attention and take good notes. The more you discover what you're good at, the easier it will be to build a team around you of people who excel in the areas you are weak. No one can do this alone, even in the beginning.
- **Serve the Lord now and ask the Him to put you in over your head.** If you really have a heart to "serve the Lord" with your life, start doing it today, with what is right in front of you. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you more than you can handle. Get a sense of what it's like to need the empowering of the Holy Spirit to be able to pull off the task at hand. Many of us only attempt the things we can accomplish in our own strength.
- **Educate yourself.** If you ever stop learning, you're finished. Determine, right here at the beginning of your preparation for ministry, that you are going to be a lifetime learner. We deceive ourselves when we think we "know enough" to be a good Christian. We know what we know. We may even know what what we don't know. Rarely will you find someone who will admit that they don't know what they don't know. Even Paul was willing to admit this. He even had a name for these things he didn't know he didn't know...he called them "the mysteries of God" and he knew that God wasn't hiding these mysteries **from** him, but **for** him.
- **Warning: Nearly all of the preparation will target your character.** Most of us think that what God is after most is our obedience. Not so. What he is targeting is our heart. He wants to form us into the image of his Son, Jesus. There's really only one way that happens. Romans 12:2 says it best, "*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*" What God is really after is the inner you. He wants your heart. The you that will trust him with your life.



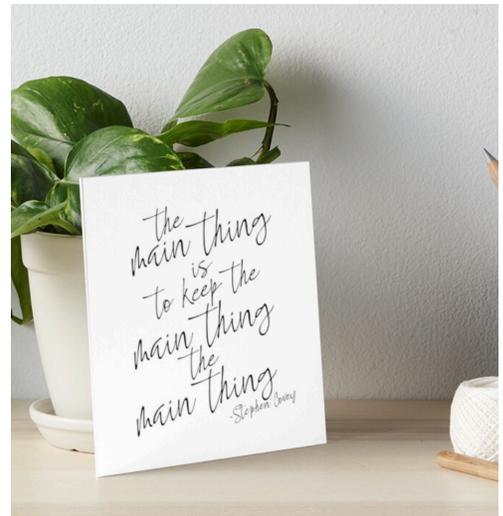
Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

Abraham Lincoln

• Have a game plan

- **Evaluate what you have.** It's much too easy when developing a plan to focus on what you DON'T have and spend an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out how to get it. Our game plan should focus on what we DO have. *For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?* (Luke 14:28 NLT-SE) Know what you have to work with and use it. Know what season you are in and go with it.

- **Work with a specific God-given vision.** If you don't have a vision, ask God for one. It is a terrible mistake to move forward with a, "I'm just trusting the Lord" attitude. The key word here is "just." Since when is trusting in God something we "just" do? *"We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps. (Prov. 16:9 NLT-SE)* A true vision (game plan) from God is not a step-by-step process, but it lays out expectations for how you will intentionally follow God's lead as he moves you towards his outcome. It's really God's vision, not yours. So, leave the outcome up to God and let your game plan be to focus on the path before you. (Ex 15:14)
- **Lead with God's wisdom and not your emotions.** According to the first chapter of James, we have open access to God's wisdom. We only need to ask. But, we must ask and not assume that this kind of wisdom is automatically given to believers. This kind of wisdom is given to those who realize their need and ask for it. (Pr 19:2, 8 TPT) Leading with Godly wisdom leading with emotions only. **Erwin McManus** calls us to not only be prepared, but that our preparation will lead us to become "battle ready."
 - So many of us are trying to get "there," wherever "there" might be. But when we get there, we're not ready for it. If we take shortcuts, we're going to get there before we're ready. Whatever God has planned, we need to get prepared for it. When we finally get there, we need to be ready. We need to be ready for those unexpected moments when we're called to elevate, those moments so much bigger than we are that we can hardly breathe. We must be battle ready. ~ **Erwin McManus** in his book, *The Last Arrow: Save Nothing for the Next Life*
- **The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing!** Thank you, Stephen Covey. Again, our tendency is to "say yes" to God only when we know we can accomplish the task before us in our own strength. Find a scripture verse that really speaks to you heart and park there for, oh, let's say five years! (I've been a frequent flyer in Romans 12:2 and John 15 for over 10 years.) Do you think you will change. Do you think you will grow? The "main thing" is all about God's love for you and his expression of that love through you to those he bring into your life. This is the Great Commandment, and the Father wants the First Commandment back in first place in our lives.



- **Make needed adjustments**

- **Cultivate an agile (able to move quickly and easily) ministry style.** Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe writes, "Nothing paralyzes our lives like the attitude that things can never change. We need to remind ourselves that God can change things. Outlook determines the outcome. If we see only the problems, we will be defeated; but if we see the possibilities in the problems, we can have victory."
- **Anticipate adversity and determine to grow through it.** As believers, we are continually being shaped and molded to be more like Christ. That process is hard and messy. The adjustments He calls us to at times may seem impossible and terrifying. Making those adjustments requires obedience. If you refuse to make the adjustment, you could miss what God had in store for your life. As **Woodrow Kroll** from *Back to the Bible* says, "Our quitting point is God's beginning point."
- **Don't let a set back become a shut down.** Every time God spoke to people in the Scripture about something He wanted to do through them, major adjustments were necessary. They had to adjust their lives to God. Once the adjustments were made, God accomplished His purposes through those He called. We have story after story in the Old and New Testament of people the Lord called to make huge, life-altering adjustments.

- STARTING WELL

- Paul literally felt “**imprisoned**” by his calling...
 - *¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. (Eph. 4:1–6 NLT-SE)*
- Your race, or calling, is not really about you. It's not about you chasing after something you think will impress God and people. Your race is about Jesus (I know, you saw that coming a mile away!). So, if it's really about him and not you, why are you in such a hurry to finish the race, get the prize and start another race? This race is your life in him? This race is your life.
- **Starting well** is what Paul was writing about in his letter to the church in Phillipi...
 - *³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. (Phil. 1:3–6 NLT-SE)*
- **What is “the good work” that Paul is talking about in verse 6?** It's the same good work he has started in you. Apparently, we aren't “finished” when we stop working, but when Jesus returns and initiates a brand-new race, one that will last an eternity. Maybe this life here on planet Earth is preparing us for “the race of a lifetime?” Either way, the best way to insure you finish well...TODAY!