



FINISHING WELL

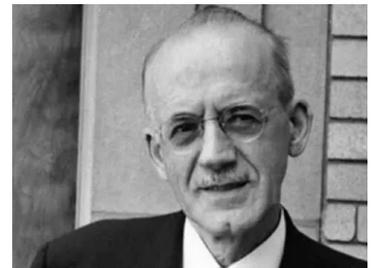
Establishing Your Race Pace

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. (Hebrews 12:1 NLT-SE)

- **We are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses...** We tend to operate out of context we ourselves create. Trouble is, it may not be accurate or helpful. It's best to realize early on that others have gone before you and no matter where your race is starting, you are working off someone else's foundation. Who's foundation have you benefited from? (Heb 11:36-40)
- **The life of faith...** Another word to describe this spiritual reality might be the "family of God." There is an interconnection that exists between believers throughout history. Our most solid foundation is the "life" we share in Christ and that life is expressed as faith in him. Again, this is a spiritual reality, not just something we hope is true. (John 1:4, Rom 5:18)
- **Strip off every weight that slows us down...** We certainly feel "weight" that comes from our relationship with Jesus. It is a good weight, a healthy weight. This weight reminds us of the price that was paid for our freedom and is a great benefit to our faith. The weight the writer of Hebrews is pressing us to strip off is the weight that other people, or even ourselves, put on us that slows us down. That particular weight is a burden to us. It gets in the way of us finishing the race strong and needs to come off now! (Matt 11:27-30)
- **The sin that so easily trips us up...** Here's a not-so-veiled inference to what that burden might look like. The writer calls it sin. He doesn't say that the sin takes us out of the race, but that it impedes our progress. Some areas of "sin" that may trip us up would be fear, doubt, and pride. The more success we have of at getting rid of these hindrances, the more effective we will be at running the race set before us. (Luke 17:1-4, 1 Cor 8:9)
- **Let us run with endurance...** The dictionary defines endurance in this context is, "the ability to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity." This is a description of the race we find ourselves in, maybe not every day, but over the course of months and years. Here, we are encouraged to run this way. We are to run, knowing that it will be stressful, painful, confusing and overwhelming at times. This is not a trick. We are not being lured into something hard, being told instead that it will be easy. God isn't tricking us into running this race. He knows we can finish well if we don't give up! (Gal 6:9, Rom 5:3-4)
- **The race God has set before us...** This is YOUR RACE. Comparing yourself to others who are running with you will only serve to confuse and discourage you (Unless you plan is to run over the top of people!). More on this later, but when each of us is trying to determine what our best "race pace" is, that should always be done when we are running solo. If you can be disciplined to run at your own pace, not either speeding up or slowing down to accommodate others racing along side you, you sill finish strong. This is your race and God is the one who set it before you.

- KEYS TO SETTING YOUR PACE

- **Anticipation without experience.** You may be all excited about the race God has set before you. That excitement could range anywhere from fear and dread of failure to delusional overconfidence. The best place to start when trying to determine your most effective race pace is to tap into the experience of someone who has gone before you.
 - **You don't know, what you don't know...** If this is true, you will find your greatest strength coming from the willingness to get some help from someone who has worked through the details of setting your pace and can let you know something about what you don't know you don't know. (1 Cor 8:2)
 - **You can be your worst critic or coach...** Have you ever asked someone who really knows you well, "Do you see anything about the way I am living my life that concerns you?" This is a terribly threatening proposition, but well worth the risk of vulnerability. (2 Cor 12:9-10)
 - **The multi-generational net...** Builders (1925-1945) vs. Boomers (1946-1964) vs. Gen X (1965-1980) VS. Millennials (1981-1996) vs. Gen Z (1997-Present). We all have different levels of experience and diverse world views. It's not about whose perspective is right or wrong, but how we can help each other run our own personal race well. Do you believe you can benefit from seeing things through someone else's lens of life? Together, we can form a beautiful "net." (Ps 78:4, Joel 1:3)
- **Leading out of excitement.** If you've never run in a competitive race, you probably think this "excitement" is being a bit overstated. Do you remember the feeling you had the last time you started a new job, a new relationship or a found out there is going to be a new baby in the family? There are times when the race God has set before you has a similar excitement attached to it. (1 Chr 29:9, Acts 21:34)
 - **Adrenaline management...** "Be still and know that I am God." As the Vineyard Church Movement was picking top steam in the early 1980's, we were introduced to a more intimate worship style. The contemporary church (us) was used to a more "happy/slappy/clappy" worship style and we had time letting God love us through worship. Carl Tuttle, one of the original Vineyard worship leaders, would encourage us to "dial down." this really helped us (and really challenge us) to focus our attention, not on what we were used to doing on the outside, but what the Holy Spirit might be eliciting as a feeling on the inside. It was a great time of growth for the church in worship. (
 - **"Don't Trust Your Heart"...** Jon Bloom, the author of a book with this title that I often quote, writes, "My heart tells me that all of reality ought to serve my desires. My heart likes to think the best of me and worst of others, unless those others happen to think well of me—then they are wonderful people. But if they don't think well of me, or even if they just disagree with me, well then, something must be wrong with them. And while my heart is pondering my virtues and others' errors, it can suddenly find some immoral or horribly angry thought very attractive. The "follow your heart" creed certainly isn't found in the Bible. The Bible actually thinks our hearts have a disease: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9)."
 - **Channeling your exuberance...** The "trick" is not to suppress excitement about your race, but to channel it into a pace that will allow you to not just finish your race, but finish it strong, to finish well. As **A.W. Tozer** noted, "The immense tragedy of the contemporary church is that most people worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship".
- **Expending yourself beyond your resources.** Can you run too fast? How do you know if your pace has exceeded your training, talents, or resources? Is it wise to assume that God will simply "fix" all your weak areas to allow you to win your race?
 - **What's in your tank...** When you are trying to set the pace of your race, it might be wise to take a good, long look at what's inside your "spiritual tank."



A.W. Tozer

- **Time.** All of us only have 24-hours a day to work with. What are you doing with your time? Pause for a moment, open up your phone and look at your “**screen time**” (Go to “Settings” and scroll down to “Screen Time”), and it will show you your Daily Average of time on your phone. Surprised?
 - **Energy.** Everyone is familiar with all-out energy drain — that exhausted day or night when no matter how enticing the movie you want to watch, or the Black Friday deal you want to take advantage of, or how devoted you are to **read a chapter in your Bible** (Sorry, I couldn’t help it!), you just can’t psych yourself up enough to pull it off. If this sounds familiar, take heart. Energy zappers are all around us, some obvious, some hidden. How much energy do you have to give to your race? You may want to consider reading a chapter of the book of Proverbs each day and letting your energy level be managed a bit more by what the Word of God says than the inner voice that hungers and thirsts for distractions and entertainment.
 - **Money.** Let me be blunt. If you are serious about finishing well, you are shooting yourself in the foot if tithing is not a spiritual discipline in your life. God doesn’t need your money, but you don’t need all of it either. In fact, if it’s true that everything we have comes from God’s provision for our lives, why do we think it would be wise to not give him a portion of that 100% back, if nothing more than to say “Thank You” for all he has done and will do to provide for us? If you don’t have the faith to give 10% back to God, start with something. Give him something. Finishing well depends upon what you do with the financial resources God has given you.
- **Disciplining yourself...** If you are preparing to run (and finish) a marathon, most of your success will come from the level of preparation you are disciplined to engage in before the race even starts. Here’s my advice. Carve out a couple hours and Google “Spiritual Disciplines” and “Rule of Life.” You will thank me for it. Here are a list of the four Spiritual Values Evangel embraces as a congregation:
- **Worship.** Not just singing along with songs being led by a worship band on Sundays, but crafting a lifestyle of worship, where the Father is glorified, relationship with Jesus is pursued and the power of the Holy Spirit is employed, every hour, every day. (2 Tim 3:16-17, Josh 1:8, Heb 4:12)
 - **Prayer.** God still wants to talk to his people. He still wants to talk with you. The spiritual discipline of prayer is essential to the race you find yourself in. Can you run without it? Sure you can. As **E.W. Kenyon** says in his classic, *In His Presence*, “If you live with the Lord in secret, you will be able to pray with great freedom in public.” Will not establishing the practice of prayer in your life influence your ability to finish well? Without a doubt it will! (Phil 4:6, Acts 2:42, 1 Thes 5:17)
 - **Giving.** God wants access to your time, energy and money. He will use that access to help you develop your race pace. Let’s say he is about to send you to Poland next year as a missionary. Can he really do that without access to these three key elements of our life? Maybe that’s too radical a move. Let’s say he wants you to lead a small group at Evangel and help disciple people who need to grow in their relationship with Jesus. Just how important is the access you give him to your time, energy and money now? (2 Cor 9:7, Prov 18:16)
 - **Growing.** There is no such thing as spiritual stagnancy. Either you are growing or fading. The tricky part about spiritual growth is that if you are not intentional about growing, before you know it, it’s been a couple months since you last heard the voice of God, gave yourself to serving others, or learning something new about the character of God. (1 Pet 2:1-3, 1 Cor 3:1-3)



E.W. Kenyon

- SETTING A HUMBLE PACE

- **Honesty.** It’s really hard to be humble when you’re not being honest, especially honest with yourself. If you truly want to set the best pace for **you** to run **your** race, you’re going to have to be honest with yourself. Serious runners have figured out how to find the most efficient pace for **their** race. Here are some of the ways they do that:

- **“Functional Threshold Pace”** (FTP) - The fastest you can run with an all-out effort for 30 minutes. You only really count the last 20 minutes because it typically takes you 10 minutes to get your heart rate up and settle into a consistent pace. Your “threshold” is the point at which our body stops being able to eliminate lactic acid.
- **“Rate of Perceived Effort”** (RPE) - How you feel and how much you feel you can do on your run. Can you breathe easy? (The “Nose Breathing Test”) Can you talk while you run? (The “Talk Test”)
- **“Negative Splits”** (NST) - Training your body to run the second half of the race, when you’re actually getting tired, at a faster pace than the first.
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- **Humility.** Your race is your race, but not only your race. The race God has “set before us” is not just for us. **Jon Bloom**, in an article entitled, **“Embrace the Race God Gives You,”** has these remarkable insights about “your race”...

“You have a race to run. It’s a race you’ve been given, not one you’ve chosen. It’s possible you wouldn’t have chosen your race at all, had the choice been yours. Or perhaps you wouldn’t have chosen this particular route. Or perhaps you wouldn’t have chosen your pace. Or perhaps you would have chosen different racing environments, teammates, or coaches. Or perhaps you would have chosen different capacities, strengths, and resources, ones you believe would help you run more effectively. Or perhaps you would have chosen a different distance. But here you are: in this race, on this route, at this pace, on this terrain, in this climate, with these people, and your strengths, and your limitations, for this distance. **Like it or not, this is your race.**”



Jon Bloom

- A **“humble pace”** would be a pace that makes room for others, not as competitors, but as fellow travelers. The other runners each have their own races and we should not only want to finish well in ours, but have a sincere desire to see them finish well, as well!
 - Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Phil. 2:4 NLT-SE)
 - ¹⁰ For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. ¹¹ Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. (Heb. 6:10–11 NLT-SE)
- **Courage.** It takes real courage to embrace your race and “run with endurance the race set before you.” We’re not talking the kind of courage that comes from inner fortitude either. This kind of courage comes from three realities:
 - The **Father’s** Love (John 3:16, 1 John 3:1, Matt 18:12-14)
 - The Sacrifice of **Jesus** (Rom 5:8, Heb 9:12, 1 Tim 2:5)
 - The Power of the **Holy Spirit** (Gen 1:2, Rom 8:11, 1 Cor 2:4)
 - **Embrace your race.** Study the great faith-runners, run as light as possible, push your current endurance limits, and get your eyes on the Great Prize. Run freer, run faster, and run for joy.” ~ Jon Bloom