

# Finish the Race

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*2 Tm 4:7*

## I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Derek Redmond was determined. He had to finish the race. Period.

1. He was a young British runner, one who had sky rocketed to fame by shattering his country's 400-meter record at age 19.
  - a. But then an Achilles tendon injury forced him to withdraw from the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, and he endured five separate surgeries.
  - b. When the Summer Olympics arrived in Barcelona in 1992, Derek Redmond was absolutely aching for a medal.
2. On the day of the 400-meter race, 65,000 fans streamed into the stadium, anxious to witness one of sports' most thrilling events. High in the stands is Derek's father—Jim—a faithful witness to every one of his son's world competitions.
3. The race begins and Derek breaks through the pack to seize the lead.
  - a. "Keep it up, keep it up," his father Jim says to himself.
  - b. Heading down the backstretch, only 175 meters from the finish line, Derek is a shoo-in to win this semifinal heat and qualify for the Olympic finals.
4. But then Derek hears a pop.
  - a. It's his right hamstring. He pulls up lame, looking as if he has been shot.
    - His leg quivering, Derek begins to hop on the other leg, and then he slows down and falls to the track.
    - Medical personnel run toward him as he sprawls on the ground, holding his right hamstring.
  - b. At the very same moment, there is a stir at the top of the stands.
    - Jim Redmond, seeing his son in trouble, begins to race down from the top row. He is pushing toward the track, sidestepping some people and bumping into others.
    - He has no right or credentials or permission to be on the track, but all he can think about is getting to his son, to help him up. He is absolutely single-minded about this, and isn't going to be stopped by anyone.
5. On the track, Derek realizes that his dream of an Olympic medal is gone. He is alone. The other runners streak across the finish line, with Steve Lewis of the United States winning the race. He is orphaned, as it were, a lonely figure on the track, friendless, parentless and alone.
6. Tears pour down Derek's face, and all he can think is: "I don't want to take a DNF."
  - a. A Did-Not-Finish was not even part of his vocabulary.
  - b. When the medical crew arrives with a stretcher, Derek tells them, "No, there's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race."
  - c. And so he lifts himself to his feet, ever so slowly and carefully, and he starts hobbling down the track.
7. Suddenly, the crowd realizes the Derek isn't dropping out of the race.
  - a. He isn't limping off the track in defeat, but is actually continuing on one leg, in a fiercely determined effort to make it to the finish line.
  - b. One painful step at a time, each one a little slower and more agonizing than the one before, Derek limps onward, and the crowd begins to cheer for him. The fans rise to their feet and their cries grow louder and louder, building into a thundering roar.
8. At that moment, Jim Redmond reaches the bottom of the stands, vaults over the railing, dodges a security guard, and runs out to his son—with two security people running after him. "That's my son out there," he yells back at his pursuers, "and I'm going to help him."
9. Jim reaches his son at the final curve, about 120 meters from the finish line, and wraps his arm around his waist. "I'm here, son," Jim says gently, hugging his boy. "We'll finish together."
10. Derek puts his arms around his father's shoulders and sobs.

- a. Together, arm in arm, father and son struggle toward the finish line with 65,000 people cheering, clapping and crying. Just a few steps from the end, with the crowd in an absolute frenzy, Jim releases the grip he has on his son so that Derek can cross the finish line by himself.
  - b. "I'm the proudest father alive," Jim Redmond tells the press afterward, with tears in his eyes. "I'm prouder of him than I would have been if he had won the gold medal. It took a lot of guts for him to do what he did." Together, they kept a promise to finish the race, no matter what.
- B. In tonight's text, Paul will not take a DNF!
1. In fact, the Apostle declares that he has finished the race. He writes to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tm 4:7).
  2. Christianity is often compared to a race:
    - a. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly" (1 Cor 9:24-26).
    - b. "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).
- C. Tonight, we want to examine this race so that we can run our race more effectively.
1. We'll talk about this race by using the acronym GAME.
  2. We will speak of the Groove, the Ambition, the Momentum, & the Enthusiasm.

## II. THE GROOVE.

- A. An exultant Joe Montana commented after the classic Super Bowl XIX how: "We got in sort of a groove. Once you get going like that you gain confidence, and it carries over to the defense, and then back to the offense. It is a snowball kind of thing."
- B. Each of us has our own niche, our own groove.
1. In the Olympics, you don't really expect every runner to run the same way; each athlete has his or her own strengths and weaknesses.
  2. We understand that same principle works in Christianity.
    - a. The kingdom of heaven "will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability" (Mt 25:14-15).
      - The Master did not give all of his servants the same amount of money.
      - He understood that they had different strengths, different abilities, different grooves.
    - b. "As in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Rm 12:4-6). We have gifts/grooves that differ according to the grace given to us.
- C. In order to finish our race effectively, we need to find our groove.
1. In the Parable of the Talents, had the servant who only received one talent found his groove, he could have finished his race.
    - a. Instead of finding his groove, he buried his master's talent in the ground and had only that one talent to give upon his master's return.
    - b. The Master was indignant that his servant hadn't found his groove, and he said to him, "You wicked and slothful servant! Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:26, 30).
  2. There is no doubt but that Paul found his groove, and that groove was key to Paul's finishing his race.
    - a. Paul was quite the evangelist.
      - He went from place to place preaching the gospel.
      - He was uniquely qualified to be an apostle: he had an excellent education, his former life as a persecutor gave him zeal to endure suffering himself; his ability to earn a living independent of the church allowed him to preach in places others might not have otherwise preached.
    - b. Paul was quite the mentor. As you read the epistles to Timothy & Titus, you see how Paul took those two young evangelists under his wing and prepared them for their ministries.
- D. Have we found our groove?

1. Have we carefully examined ourselves to see what abilities God has bestowed upon us?
2. Are we using the abilities God has given us? Are we in the groove?

### III. THE AMBITION.

- A. In the jargon of athletics, ambition refers to desire.
  1. A struggling young surgeon when asked how many operations he could perform in a single day, put it this way: “It depends on how hungry you are.”
  2. There are so many things people hunger after in this life: money, prestige, power.
- B. If you’re running a race, you’re not going to get very far if you don’t have the ambition to finish the race.
  1. If you’re running a marathon and you begin to hurt, begin to get thirsty, begin to get tired, you’ll just quit if you don’t have the ambition to finish.
  2. Derek Redmond wasn’t going to let a pulled hamstring prevent his finishing his race—he had too much desire to finish.
- C. Paul certainly had a desire, an ambition to finish.
  1. To the Ephesian elders, Paul says, “Behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24).
  2. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:8-9).
  2. Paul’s ambition was so great that he didn’t even care about his own life if only he could finish the race.
- D. How is our ambition?
  1. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33).
  2. “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment’” (Mt 22:37-38).
- E. Do we have the proper ambition to finish our race?

### IV. THE MOMENTUM.

- A. In athletics, we all know the necessity of getting momentum on our side.
- B. For a non-athletic example, take Nazi Germany.
  1. Ninety-five percent of Germans opposed the “final solution”—the extermination of the Jews.
  2. Yet, because five percent of the Germans were able to get the momentum going, Hitler was able to do much damage to the Jews.
- C. We need to get momentum going on our side if we are going to finish our race.
  1. It is so easy to lose our momentum:
    - a. To the Ephesian church, Jesus says, “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rv 2:4).
    - b. The Hebrew Christians were in serious, serious danger of losing their momentum:
      - “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather healed” (Heb 12:12-13).
      - “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Heb 10:35-36).
  2. How do we get momentum & how do we keep from losing momentum?
    - a. We find encouragement from one another:
      - “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25).
      - One of the reasons we meet together regularly is to find encouragement from one another to keep up our momentum.
    - b. We remember Jesus:

- “Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God” (Heb 12:1-2).
- Jesus never wavered—when he was persecuted, with he was betrayed by one of his disciples, when he was in agony on the cross.
- If Jesus was able to keep his momentum in such trying times, how can we simply give up?

D. Do we have momentum to finish the race?

## V. ENTHUSIASM.

A. We live in a world that has little enthusiasm for much anymore.

1. Two boys were in a library.
  - a. One remarks to the other about the great “how-to” books he’s finding.
  - b. The other replies with snide cynicism: “I’m looking for the ‘why bother’ books.”
2. “Why bother?” has become the prevailing question of the day.

B. We must be a people of passion.

1. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Eccl 9:10).
2. About the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them” (2 Cor 9:1-2).

C. It’s quite clear that Paul was quite enthusiastic to do the right thing.

1. To the Ephesian elders, Paul says, “Be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears” (Acts 20:31)—That’s an enthusiasm that won’t quit.
2. “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14). Paul says, “I keep pressing on. I keep working.”

D. How is our enthusiasm?

1. Do we seek to serve enthusiastically however we can?
2. Are we serving the Lord God with enthusiasm?

## VI. CONCLUSION.

A. Derek Redmond finished his race; the Apostle Paul finished his race.

B. One day—one way or the other—our race is going to over.

1. Are we going to cross the finish line to hear Jesus say, “Well done good and faithful servant”?
2. Or, will the race be over with a DNF and hear Jesus declare, “Depart from me. I never knew you”?