

FINISH THE RACE

Scripture Reading: Read Acts chapter 20

Each year, close to 4,000 women and girls race five kilometers (3.1 miles) during the Freihofer's Run for Women in Albany, NY. The race starts in front of the New York State Museum and travels up Madison Avenue to Washington Park and then loops around and returns to where it starts. This year's event featured a number of world-class runners. The winner, a woman from Ethiopia by the name of Mamitu Daska, won again for the second year in a row in an impressive time of 15:19. As exciting as that finish was to watch, I was more impressed with another young lady's efforts. Our 5th grade daughter ran and finished her first Friehofer's Run. I was certainly a proud papa!

In today's chapter reading, Paul mentions a race that he was hoping to finish as well. Oh, it obviously wasn't the Friehofer's Run for Women or any other road or track race. No, he was referring to the Christian life and the call of God upon his life (Acts 20:24). Paul shared this desire in a farewell address he gave to the Ephesian elders in chapter 20 as he was finishing up his third missionary journey and planning to head back to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor saints there. Paul knew in the Spirit that difficult times awaited him in the future and he wanted to prepare the leadership in the Ephesus church for the fact that he didn't think he would be seeing them again. He wanted to encourage them to remain faithful to the task God had given them as overseers and shepherds of God's flock. Paul also wanted to warn them about the impending dangers that would befall the church after he left so they would be on their guard and watch over the flock.

Paul's desire to finish his race and to run it well shows up again and again in his writings. He wanted the Philippians to live godly lives so that he *"did not run or labor for nothing."* When he presented his gospel to the Jerusalem church leaders, he did so privately *"for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain."* He told the Corinthians that, *"I do not run like a man running aimlessly."* At the end of his life, Paul testified, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

The crown awaits us. Therefore, we are challenged to *"run in such a way as to get the prize."* To do so requires us to *"run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* To run with perseverance indicates that the Christian life is not a sprint. It's more like a long-distance race. The good news is that Jesus, as the Author and Finisher of our faith, has already run his race and if we keep our eyes on him we can finish our race too. I hear the cloud of witnesses cheering. Let's go running!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: How are you doing with your training? The writer of Hebrews tells us to get throw off every thing that hinders us and every sin that entangles us in this race of life. Pray for the Lord to coach you for this race so that you may finish well for His glory through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Take-a-way: *The Christian life is a marathon we run not a 100 meter dash we sprint.*