

Finish the Race

The Christian life is often compared to a race, not because it is easy, but because it requires faith, endurance, focus, and perseverance. Hebrews 12:1 reminds us, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” meaning that we are not running alone. Others have walked by faith before us, and their testimony encourages us to keep going. The same verse tells us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,” because anything that slows our obedience, weakens our faith, or distracts our hearts from God must be surrendered. Then we are told, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Have you ever dedicated time, resources, and energy to a project and felt like giving up? Did you ever experience disappointment toward a goal you had in mind and just felt like quitting? These are common experiences we face in life. Yet God reminds us through His Word that the hardest part is not simply beginning. It is not starting the project or launching the business or even writing the goal down that is the hardest part of accomplishing something. It is finishing, and not just finishing, but finishing strong!

There is a story of a man from Tanzania, Africa. His name is John Stephen Akhwari. He was representing Tanzania at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. While competing in the marathon in Mexico City, Akhwari cramped up due to the city's high altitude. He had not trained at such an altitude back in his country. At the 30-kilometer point of the 42-kilometer race, there was a jockeying for position between some runners, and he was hit. He fell badly, wounding his knee and causing a dislocation. Plus, his shoulder hit hard against the pavement. He, however, continued running the race, finishing last among the 17 competitors who completed it, though 79 had originally started. The winner of the marathon, Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia, finished at 2:20:26. Akhwari finished at 3:25:27, when there were only a few thousand people left in the stadium, and the sun had set. A television crew was sent out from the medal ceremony when word was received that there was one more runner about to finish. As he finally crossed the finish line, a cheer came from the small crowd. When interviewed later and asked why he continued running, he said, “My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race.”

In the same way, believers are called to keep running the race that God has set before us. But the strength to finish does not come from looking at ourselves, our circumstances, or our past failures. Hebrews 12:2 says we are to be “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” He is the One who began the work in us, and He is the One who can complete it. The verse continues, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,” reminding us that Christ finished His course through suffering, sacrifice, and obedience. Now He “has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” interceding for His people and calling us to press on in faith. Friends, Jesus did not die on the cross, arise, and ascend to the right hand of the Father on high to intercede for you and me so we can just start the race. **He did so we could finish the race strong!**

By: Michael Dale