

Sunday July 31st
Run to Win

Philippians 3:13-15 *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.*

A few weeks ago we learned from the message given by my brother, Jake, about how to walk in the light. And in order to help illustrate the lessons he derived from the Word he drew from his experiences competing in a 76 hour adventure race. While I would imagine that for most of you that was far more than you ever thought you would learn or care to learn about this obscure sport, lucky for you, Jake roped me into competing in these tortuous events a few years ago as well. And while at the risk of seeming redundant, there are just too many good spiritual lessons to pull from adventure racing to not utilize my race experiences for this message. After all: **1 Corinthians 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a **race** all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

Repetition as we know is always good as we see in these three scriptures:

Psalms 42:5 *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.*

Psalms 42:11 *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

And

Psalms 43:5 *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

So, as you can see, not only from these 3 verses but throughout all scripture, God's word continually repeats itself. Clearly God knows of mankind's thick headedness and that you cannot hammer a nail in with one blow, but it is by striking it repeatedly that allows that nail to sink in, permanently affixing it.

Isaiah 28:10 *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little."*

So that being said please let me share with you some of my experiences from a particular race back in May, the 24 hour Blue Ridge Adventure Race.

Now this was not my first race and I had been consistently training for the last two years. This training included waking at 4:45 most mornings and on different days consisted of running, biking and weight lifting. Over the past 2 years my body has become more or less accustomed to the early mornings and the strenuous activities and through my training came the confidence to compete in these adventure races. And oh, how easy it is to have confidence when you go out for your one hour daily exercise and then spend the rest of your day sitting in a comfy office chair.

Now I mentioned that this was not my first race. This was however, my first 24 hour race. And while we may be in the woods and up mountain sides, there is no camping during these races. Its 24 hours of non-stop forward motion, not much time for resting and certainly no time for sleeping. It was about six hours into the race the first time that quitting begun tempting me as an option. We were on a mountain bike section, headed down a very steep and what turned out to be a very muddy and slick section of trail. Before I go any further you should be aware that as adventure racing is a team sport, I was racing with my brother Jake, as well as a 15 year old friend of ours named Hunter who weighed no more 120lbs soaking wet. If you're questioning my inclusion of his weight, that will become clear very soon. So as we descended down the trail and as the trail went from hard packed earth to sticky mud, so the tread in my rear tire became filled in, now creating what is equal to a road slick. So when I applied the rear brake, rather than the tread of the tire gripping the ground and slowing me, the tire simply acted more as a ski on top of the mud, allowing my speed to continue to increase and lessening my ability to control my trajectory. Now here is where the weight of our teammate Hunter comes into play as well as a lesson abruptly learned in physics. Hunter was riding ahead of me, taking the trail like a champ as he is a superior mountain cyclist than I. And this is where my lesson in physics was learned and I will present it to you in the form of a word problem:

You roll a pebble down a 45 degree inclining mountain path, 15 seconds later you then roll a boulder down the same path. The pebble is traveling at a steady 8mph. The boulder is travelling at 10mph and increasing its speed at 1mph per second.

At what point in time will the boulder catch up to the pebble and smash it to smithereens?

If you couldn't guess, I was the boulder, Hunter was the pebble and the boulder had no rear brake. So when my collision with the pebble became inevitable, I used my only option, my front brake. And this is where my world literally turned upside down. I tapped the front brake and was consequently flipped directly over my handlebars, flying through the air passed Hunter and landing unceremoniously on my back, removing all the air from lungs.

So six hours into my race I am left with bruised ribs, a bruised ego, and a major reduction in my desire to finish this race. And this pictured for me clearly how it is so easy during our race of faith for a stumbling block to take us from standing on our feet with confidence to lying flat on our face, or in my case, flat on my back, putting us in a place of despair and making us think that what we once thought was possible is maybe just too hard.

1Corinthians 10:12 *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

Let's look at some scripture in Galatians regarding our race of faith.

Galatians 5:7 *You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*

We see in Galatians Paul writing to Christians who had been running well, but had since stumbled because of believing something that was not scripturally true. At the point in my adventure race when I went over my handlebars, I became like those Christians. Up to the moment before I lost control of my bike I believed I was in complete control, after all isn't training in the flat terrain of Florida enough preparation for the steep trails of the North Georgia Mountains? I was thinking so, but then God and basic physics proved otherwise. Paul goes on to describe why they had stumbled.

Galatians 5:8-9 *This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

The reference to leaven here naturally refers to the parable of the leaven seen in **Matthew 13:33** *Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."*

The meal is a reference to the ground grain that was used to make bread. And in scripture the bread is a representation of God's word. **Matthew 4:4** But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

The leaven here is being used to symbolize corruption and so without the leaven in the meal, the bread (i.e. the word) is pure. **Exodus 12:19-20** *'For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. 20 'You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.'*

So going back to our scripture in Galatians we see that the Christians being written to by Paul had allowed corruption into their race of faith causing them to stumble.

So what should we do if find that there is leaven in our lives? The scriptures are quite clear. **1Corinthians 5:7-8** *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened (pure). For indeed Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

It should be noted here the contrast between the leaven and unleavened bread. The leavened bread is that of malice and wickedness showing that it is of the flesh. The unleavened bread is of the Spirit as the sincerity is seen in respect of the 'truth', therefore being sincere about responding correctly to scriptures.

So to return to our Galatians scripture, after admonishing the Christians for their disobedience, Paul gives words of encouragement.

Galatians 5:10 *I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind.....*

And to continue in this vein let's look at this encouraging scripture from Hebrews. **Hebrews 10:37-39** *"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

So getting back to our race, we end the first bike section and it is now time for us to begin the 2 hour canoe section down the tranquil Toccoa River. We pick out what seems to be decently lightweight canoe and place it in the water. Hunter sits down first in the middle of the boat and is immediately greeted by the cool river rushing in to soak his rear. There was a leak in our canoe. Lucky for us there was another team with us who very kindly grabbed us a replacement canoe that was sure to keep us high and dry during our journey. Unlucky for us, we would come to find, that they had chosen for us what must have been the oldest and most heavy canoe that was available. Oh, and did I say that the Toccoa was tranquil? Let me rephrase that, the section of the Toccoa we faced was a gauntlet of rapids, rocks and downed trees, and we were paddling what felt like concrete bathtub. I make this reference both to the fact that it was heavy and difficult to steer, but also that the majority of the time spent paddling it, we spent sitting in the water as a multitude of leaks began to appear in the boat as we traversed the river. This is now the second time the temptation to quit tries to overcome me.

So to see this in spiritual terms - if we see the river representing the world and the canoe representing the word of God, to guide us through the world by our obedience to the word, then the canoe given to us by the other team was the equivalent of a fully leavened bread bowl, that as we paddled was corrupted and infiltrated by the world around us.

In our time of need we received help by those that we thought had our best interest in mind. **1John 4:1** *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

This is not to say that the other team had intentionally sabotaged us, they believed that they were helping, and this is often the case with the church at large, they offer up false teachings having been deceived by Satan themselves, and further leavening the word of God as it is preached to those under their care. **Galatians 1:6-12** *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. 11 But I*

make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Although the canoe we were given was corrupted and caused us to sink, we had no choice but to finish the paddle in what we were given. Thankfully this not case if we have received false teachings because of the leaven. God provides us safe passage through this world and the doctrine of demons by the truth of His scripture.

Psalms 119:104-106 *Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. 106 I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments.*

2Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

While the crash on my bike and the leaky canoe were disheartening and worked against me finishing my 24 hour race, the most difficult time came in the night. We started our race at 9AM, the sun had set and I looked at my watch, my heart sank. It was now 9PM and I was only half way through the race. I should be going to bed right now and I still had miles to cover on three more sections, on foot, on the bike and back in the canoe. This is where I really began to doubt myself. The physical aspect of this race is brutal, but I had trained for most of that. What I hadn't trained for was the mental battle I would face counting down the hours to the race finish. It was so daunting knowing what I had already done and seeing what was still to come.

Just as it was night time when I had despaired, we also are in a time of spiritual darkness which is often pictured as night time. **1 Thessalonians 5:5** *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

Proverbs 4:19 *The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.*

John 11:9-10 *Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."*

Much like my adventure race our race of faith is not a sprint but instead a marathon. And also much like my adventure race our race of faith can wear us down and become daunting. In relation to the Millennial Kingdom and eternity future our time on this earth is but a drop in the ocean. But in our present experience it can seem never ending. But we must patiently endure.

Hebrews 12:1-2 *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with [patient] endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

If we want to win the prize at the end of the race of the faith we need the Word to guide us through the narrow gate and we need to keep pressing onwards, not falling back.

Hebrews 6:9-12 *But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. 10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Psalms 37:24-28 *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand. 25 I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread. 26 He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed. 27 Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore. 28 For the Lord loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever,*

Up to this point we have covered those things during my race that made me think I couldn't cross the finish line. The bike crash, the sinking canoe, and the sheer

magnitude of the race were all working against me. But now I would like to talk about the aspects of the race that helped me cross that finish line.

Something I hadn't mentioned yet was that at the beginning of the race each team is provided with a map with plotted checkpoints on it that we were to navigate to. Now this is where this a specific skill is involved, for we were not just following a road map that would lead us via streets and alleys to get to the checkpoints. These checkpoints were in the middle of nowhere, some could be reached by trail but many required bushwhacking into thick brush with no landmarks to be seen for guidance. If you would like to know more about navigating these types of scenarios then please go back and listen to Jakes message from 3 weeks ago. All this to say, that without a map, we would be lost and without direction.

Jeremiah 6:16 *Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

So we had the map which was vital, but if you were to hand me that map, while we may have eventually got to the checkpoints, it would take us a lot longer than 24 hours. This is exactly why I was so thankful to have our leader and navigator, my brother Jake. Jake has been racing for years. He has studied maps, he has researched the best way to navigate and he has been taught by other navigators before him. And it was not only Jake's skill with the map that helped me to the finish line. Jake was a constant source of encouragement. He would check on me when I fell behind and he made sure that I was eating and drinking enough to keep up my strength. This is exactly the kind of leader we need in our spiritual lives.

2Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

1Corinthians 4:15-17 *For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*

As I needed Jake to get me through the adventure race, so all of us need a spiritual leader to help us through our race of faith. Someone with the skill to navigate the scriptures, understanding them and teaching them in a way that helps us win our race of faith. We need someone that encourages us to keep going, making sure that we are studying the word daily so that we are sustained through the scriptures.

Ephesians 4:11-15 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ—*

Jake was not the only one I raced with though. We also had our young teammate Hunter. I could say that for a 15 year old, Hunter was good racer, but that would be a lie. Hunter was a good racer compared to anyone of any age that was competing. He was strong, he had drive and he never complained. His attitude and ability, especially at such a young age were a constant encouragement to me. His performance pushed me to challenge myself and kept me from calling it quits.

This is how we should be to one another. We can be such a help to one another by our attitudes but also through our knowledge of scripture. We should challenge and exhort one another to be fed daily by the scriptures, keeping up our strength so we can push toward the finish line.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

Ephesians 4:15-16 *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Hebrews 10:23-25 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir*

up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

As I said before adventure racing is a team sport and I had teammates that were going to get me to the end. Everyone sitting around us right now, those that are seeking God's Kingdom, these are our teammates. They are there to challenge us, to pick us up when we fall and to bail us out when we seem to be sinking.

We ended up winning our division of Blue Ridge Adventure race, and for all of our pain and suffering over those 24 hours all we got was the satisfaction of the win and a silly little trophy. But if we win our race of faith, if we push through the darkness, sacrifice our flesh and diligently seek His Kingdom the prize will be far greater than we can imagine. I'll close with a few scriptures.

1Corinthians 2:9-10 *But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*

Matthew 25:23 *His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*

1Peter 1:3-9 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 ¶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.*

