

TRAINING

The athlete knows victory does not begin on race day. Race day merely reveals the conditioning that has already taken place.

We are called to run with endurance, the strength to remain under pressure without abandoning the course when the road grows long and the finish cannot yet be seen. Endurance does not appear the moment we need it. It is forged through training.

Yet we are not our own trainers. We do not design the course, select our lane, determine its length, or choose every hill. We do not set our own pace. Galatians 5:16–25 contrasts walking according to the flesh with walking by the Spirit, concluding with the command: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” The phrase pictures marching in formation, each step following the established cadence of the leader. Military units spend hours learning to move as one, step by step, with no one racing ahead because they feel strong and no one drifting behind through distraction. The Spirit is our pacesetter. We do not determine the rhythm of our conditioning by feelings, ambitions, comparisons, or impatience. Keeping step means neither racing ahead nor falling behind, but remaining attentive, allowing Him to set the cadence, and obeying the next step He places before us. He knows our frame, our weaknesses, and the demands ahead. He does not give every believer the same training plan. Comparison causes us to lose the cadence. The question is not whether we are matching someone else’s pace, but whether we are walking in obedience to the Spirit today.

Once we surrender our pace to the One who knows how to prepare us, we can receive the daily provisions He uses to condition His runners. Every serious athlete must attend to nourishment, hydration, recovery, and discipline. Neglect any of them long enough and strength fails. The same is true spiritually.

THE RUNNER’S DIET

An athlete may possess talent and determination, yet if she fuels her body with what cannot sustain it, her performance will suffer. Appetite cannot dictate everything. The same principle governs the soul. Are we feeding on the spiritual junk food of the world (quick fixes, endless entertainment, immediate gratification, distraction, outrage, and comparison) or sitting daily at the Lord’s table? We live in a culture that overfeeds our appetites while starving our souls. We may consume hours of information and still lack wisdom, fill every quiet moment and remain restless, be overfed by the world and undernourished in the Word.

Israel faced this crisis in the wilderness. Numbers 11 records how God faithfully provided manna every morning. They did not produce or earn it; they simply gathered what He supplied. Day after day it testified that God knew their needs and could sustain them. Yet the people grew dissatisfied, craving the fish, cucumbers, melons, and onions of Egypt while forgetting the bondage. Craving distorted their memory, magnifying desire and minimizing cost.

They complained, “There is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” Their problem was not lack of provision but a desire for something else. That place was named Kibroth-hattaavah, “graves of craving,” because those who yielded to their appetites were buried there. Unchecked craving always leads somewhere.

Deuteronomy 8:1–3 explains God’s purpose: He allowed them to hunger, then fed them with manna, so they would learn that “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” The wilderness was a training ground for dependence. Hunger revealed where they looked for satisfaction. The manna pointed beyond itself. In John 6, Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.” The bread that sustained Israel’s physical life anticipated the One who gives eternal life. This is the diet of the enduring runner, not reading to complete an obligation or collect facts, but gathering daily, humbly, dependently, trusting its nourishment even when the flesh craves something else. Jesus is the true Bread from heaven. We cannot live indefinitely on yesterday’s manna. The Lord invites us to gather again today.

THE RUNNER’S HYDRATION

Without water, even the strongest runner weakens. Dehydration begins quietly; strength fades, thinking clouds. Thirst is a signal, not a weakness. Every soul is thirsty. The question is where we go to satisfy it. Jeremiah 2:13 identifies two evils: forsaking the fountain of living waters and digging broken cisterns that can hold no water. Israel exchanged an endless source for cracked reservoirs of achievement, approval, comfort, control, and pleasure. Every earthly well eventually runs dry.

In John 4, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well. She came for ordinary water but carried a thirst no bucket could quench. He offered living water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life.

Later, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when Israel remembered wilderness provision and prayed for continued supply, Jesus stood and cried, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” The ceremony, the rock, the hope all pointed to Him. He is not merely a source among many; He is the Source. When we feel empty, lonely, or afraid, do we return to broken cisterns of distraction and approval, or come to Christ? The more deeply we drink from Him, the more clearly we see the poverty of every substitute.

THE RUNNER’S REST

Rest is not optional. Even the strongest eventually reach exhaustion. Muscles require recovery; continual training without it weakens the ability to finish. Seasons of exertion and recovery are both necessary. Matthew 11:28–30 records Jesus’ invitation: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He addresses those weary through toil (work, family, ministry, caregiving, grief, uncertainty) and those heavy laden with anxiety, shame, fear, or the belief that everything depends on them. He sees both the weight around us and the weight within us. The rest He offers is not first a change of circumstances but nearness to a Person. He does not say, “Come when everything settles.” He calls us while we are weary. His rest is restorative, not retirement. Like an aid station on a marathon course, it is a provision that helps us finish, not proof of failure. He also says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” The rest is found not in escaping His authority but in surrendering to His gentle leadership. The strongest runners are not those who never need recovery, but those who know where to recover.

THE RUNNER’S DISCIPLINE AND THE SECRET OF ENDURANCE

Nourishment, hydration, and rest are essential, yet an athlete must also submit to disciplined training.

In 1 Timothy 4:7–10, Paul tells Timothy to train himself for godliness. Bodily training has value for this life; godliness holds promise for both the present and the life to come. Agreement is not training. Training requires repeated practice: opening the Word again, praying again, obeying again, confessing again, turning from temptation again. Yet the language of training can slide into self-reliance. The disciplines position us to receive and obey; they are not the source of life.

John 15:4–5 makes the foundation clear: “Abide in me, and I in you... apart from me you can do nothing.” The branch has no independent life. Everything in this training (the manna pointing to the Bread of Life, the fountain pointing to Living Water, the place of rest, the Spirit’s work, the discipline of godliness) finds its source in Christ. He is not one part of the plan; He is the source beneath it. Momentum may carry us for a season, but eventually every runner grows hungry, thirsty, and weary. Disconnected from Christ, what once felt manageable becomes impossible. The answer is not trying harder apart from Him. It is abiding.

THE RESISTANCE TRAINING OF TRIALS

Strength develops through resistance. James 1:2–4 tells us to count it all joy when we meet trials of various kinds, because the testing of faith produces steadfastness. Trials are not interruptions; they are part of the course. Faith that has never been tested has not yet learned to stand under pressure. Testing reveals weak places, exposes what we believe when God’s ways are hard, and stretches us so that steadfastness can have its full effect, producing maturity. God trains us progressively. One act of obedience prepares us for the next; one season of waiting teaches trust for another. No training day is wasted.

The Coach who sets the pace also governs the training ground. He can produce steadfastness, deepen dependence, drive us back to the Fountain, and reconnect us to the Vine.

Return to the track before sunrise. The stadium is still empty. The runner is still there, with no crowd, no applause, only the next lap. Ordinary faithfulness is not insignificant. Every page of Scripture received with humility, every prayer offered in dependence, every temptation resisted, every burden brought to Jesus, every trial endured with faith is training. We are training every day for the victory of that day. There is a finish line ahead. We do not know the distance remaining or every hill, but we know our Coach, the Bread that sustains, the Fountain that satisfies, the Savior who restores, the Vine from whom life flows.

Therefore, keep in step with the Spirit. Gather the daily manna. Feed upon Christ. Drink deeply from the Living Water. When weary, come to Jesus for rest. Train for godliness as a daily practice of depending on Him. When resistance comes, remember that faith is being exercised. If you are hungry, come back to the Bread. If you are thirsty, come to the Living Water. If weary, come to the One who gives rest. If striving without fruit, come back to the Vine. Abide in Him. Strength is forged one training day at a time. Abide in Him and keep running.