

Di122 Essentials of Christianity

Lesson Di122-29 Finish Well: Determination

The Bible often compares living a life of faith in Jesus to running in a footrace. One has to train and prepare to run in a race. You wait with your competitors at the starting line, until the signal is given to "Begin!" You run as fast as you can until you cross the finish line. In earthly races, only one wins the prize. The race to be considered in this lesson is actually the race of life. Every person who believes in Jesus as Savior will finish their race one day and receive the crown of Righteousness, if they have been faithful. The following folk tale about a rabbit and a turtle in a race, illustrates an important truth about finishing the race of life well.

In this fable the hare challenged the tortoise to a race. Of course everyone knows that hares can run much faster than tortoises. The speedy hare was always bragging about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, "Slow and Steady," the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch.

Hare sprinted down the road for a while and then paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and shouted at him, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at such a slow, slow pace?" Hare stretched himself out in the shade alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "I have plenty of time to relax."

Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line. The animals who were watching cheered so loudly for the tortoise, they woke up Hare. Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line. After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"

The apostle Paul was a zealous man. He studied hard, he persecuted the Jewish followers of Christ hard, and he worked hard as an apostle after God called him. To do his best meant that he would stay focused on God's calling in the race of life. He would be the tortoise rather than the hare. Spreading the Good News of Jesus meant that Paul could not get distracted, even in hard times. All the hard work of life only made him more determined to do God's will and be led by the Holy Spirit. He said, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

Ever since the risen Christ had stopped him on the road to Damascus, blinding and then healing him, Jesus was Paul's Lord. Meeting Jesus was only the beginning. It was to be a long hard race. It was an all-out competition with the world, the flesh, and the devil. This race meant eternal life for hundreds of believers. These lives were redeemed because the apostle Paul continued to run and finished the race God had set before him. He testified, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the

country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. . . . But [God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” (2Cor 11:24-27, 12:9).

Paul had begun the race at Damascus and now would continue telling of his Lord to the finish line, his death in Rome. He would refuse to stop or to get detoured, in spite of his suffering. Paul knew how to pray. He learned to be content in all circumstances. Even though Paul encountered prison and life-threatening circumstances, he never quit. He told the elders in Ephesus who wanted to protect him, “Now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace” (Acts 20:22-24).

Near the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy, “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” (2Tim 4:7-8).

This lesson is **important** because it reminds us that we are messengers of the good news of God’s grace. Like Paul, we want to finish the task Christ has given us. His grace will be sufficient for us, no matter where the Holy Spirit may lead. We work for a heavenly reward, not earthly rewards. Our treasure is laid up in heaven.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that just as God sustained Paul in his earthly race, he is able to sustain us in all our weaknesses. It’s not how famous one becomes or how many converts he or she can count, it’s being faithful every day of our lives to what the Holy Spirit leads us to do. Slow and steady wins the prize. A crown of righteousness awaits those who are faithful.

Your **review** questions are:

1. Why did the tortoise win the race with the hare? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “Because the tortoise did not stop plodding, while the overconfident Hare took a nap,” you answered correctly.
2. What was the race the apostle Paul was referring to that he had finished? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “The race Paul was referring to was his life’s work of testifying to the good news of God’s grace,” you are correct.
3. What are some of the sufferings Paul endured on his missionary journeys to reach the lost? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “Paul suffered beatings, stoning, and shipwrecks; danger from rivers, bandits, and fellow Jews; as well as hunger, thirst, cold, and loss of his clothing,” you are right.

Your **assignment** is to listen to the lesson several times until you understand the far-reaching effects of a life lived for Jesus Christ. Pray for the strength of the Spirit in your life, that

he will sustain you in the midst of your trials. Now find someone to whom you can tell the good news of Jesus Christ and how he will forgive and raise them up to new life. If they are suffering, remind them about Paul's suffering and the sufficiency of God's grace for those who call upon him.

Memorize God's words to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9).

Also memorize Paul's words of determination, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Repeat these scripture verses when you are discouraged or feeling weak. God will be faithful to strengthen you.