

“Called to Run”

Philippians 2:14-16 says, “¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I **did not run in vain** nor toil in vain.”

As I’ve been preparing to teach on Philippians, the word “run” became an item of interest to me. Paul seems to love this athletic imagery. **Galatians 2:2** has some similarity to our text, in that it says, “It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for **fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.**”

Paul also encourages Christians to run the race for Christ. He says, “Do you not know that **those who run in a race all run, but *only one receives the prize?* Run in such a way that you may win.** ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore **I run in such a way, as not without aim**; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (**1 Cor 9:24-27**).

And sadly, Paul talks about Christians who were once running, but apparently took a walk down a side path. For he tells the Galatians that “**You were running well**; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (**Gal 5:7**). Notice that running is tied to obedience, as it also is in Philippians 2:12-16 (with Christ as our ultimate example in Phil 2:8).

And if you’re of the opinion that Paul wrote Hebrews, well the following is some fuel for the fire. **Hebrews 12:1** says, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also **lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race** that is set before us.”

The Gospels also have “running references.” First, we have the Parable of the Prodigal Son. **Luke 15:20** says that while the prodigal was still a long way off, “his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and **ran** and embraced him and kissed him.” Second, **Mark 9:15** mentions a crowd who sees Jesus and begin “**running** up to greet Him.” Third, we have the accounts surrounding the empty tomb. **Matthew 28:8** says, “they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and **ran** to report it to His disciples” (also see John 20:2). And **Luke 24:12** speaks of Peter **running** to the tomb.” The Gospel references have one thing in common – joy causes one to run.

As I scanned the near 100 references of running in the Bible, some interesting OT passages popped off the pages. There are references of running to the battle (1 Sam 17:17), running to Bethlehem to make sacrifice (1 Sam 20:6), running to bring good news (2 Sam 18:19), running in the strength of the Lord (2 Sam 22:30; Psalm 18:29), running into the strong tower of the Lord (Prov 18:10), and running in the path of God’s commandments (Psalm 119:32).

In summary, the “running references” that I pulled out address the following:

- Running in a way that builds up others in Christ
- Training to run and to work vigorously with a goal as you serve Christ
- Obedience drives our running activity
- Running with endurance
- Joy causes us to run
- God motivates us to run with Him (into battle, to repent, to share good news, to gather His strength, towards His ways, and into His strong tower).

Ultimately, as I kept thinking about all of this running around, I could not escape “To live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). It’s such a powerful statement, that’s it’s difficult to study Philippians without it seeping deep into one’s thoughts. “To live is Christ.” In other words, true life is found only in Christ. Without trying to exhaustively explain all of the reasons, it’s probably sufficient to just say that as Jesus redeems every ounce of our being, we find ourselves in a new state of existence. “We are given new life” (Rom 6:4) and now “Christ lives in us” (Gal 2:20). Indeed, “Christ is our life” (Col 3:4).

“To live is Christ” --- this statement informs why Paul ran, why joyful Christians run, why obedient Christians run, and yes, why we are all called to the training, the race, and the battle. We must run, and we must run with vigor as we serve our Lord!