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## **Running the Race**

By Mark Gorman

How many of you know that running a race is not a team sport? Once the starting gun sounds, you alone have control over how you finish. Sports like baseball or football have teams where individuals share success or failure with their teammates. Yet in a race, only one runner will receive the prize. Though there may be many competitors, there can only be one winner.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul writes, "Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win." Isn't it interesting that Paul compares our Christian life to a race? Is he implying that only one person can achieve heaven? Certainly not. John 3:16 clearly states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". What then is Paul trying to open our eyes to by comparing our spiritual lives to a race?

We can begin to uncover this mystery by understanding the dynamics of a team, and what better team to observe than the first team in the history of the world, Adam and Eve. In Genesis we see that God designed Adam and Eve to be the perfect team. Unfortunately, they chose to turn their backs on the commandments of God. There are some significant elements to this story that I don't want you to miss. Although Adam and Eve both disobeyed God's commands, notice that the choice was made as individuals. In Genesis 3:6, Eve makes the unilateral decision to eat the forbidden fruit based on the serpent's lies. Later in verse 6, we see that Eve then turns and gives the fruit to Adam, who must make his own choice to either rebuke Eve and cling to God, or to willfully disobey as his wife has. He also makes the choice to eat of the fruit and disobey God. They made individual choices to sin. Now look forward to verse 12, and notice how they attempt to justify their actions before God. Adam says, "but it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it." Adam amazingly attempts to blame God for giving him the woman

who caused him to sin. Eve says, "the serpent tricked me." She hopes that ignorance will be a suitable excuse for her sin.

When you're on a team, there is always someone else to blame. That is why Paul compares life to a race. You are responsible for your own outcome. Romans 14:12 forewarns us, "Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God." Some of us have been allowing our circumstances of life to be excuses for why we haven't completely allowed Christ to be Lord of our lives. Others choose to hold on to naivety as Eve did, deceiving herself that God would forgive her disobedience because she had not been diligent enough to recognize the lies of the enemy. Still others argue with God as Adam did. Adam took something that God had given him, twisted it and warped it by his own selfish desires, and then tried to assign fault to God for giving him what had been intended as a beautiful and profitable gift.

Listen to the words of Paul. Everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. Someone reading this needs to "kick" a few players off their team. Maybe you have allowed laziness or immorality to join your team. Perhaps a nasty temper or persistent negative attitude have taken over as team coach. Are you running your race, or are you allowing other people or vices to hinder your progress? The smoke is in the air. The starting gun has fired. It is time to run your race.

### **THE RACE**

Author Unknown

"Quit, Give up! You're beaten!"  
They shout out and plead.  
"There's just too much against you now.  
This time you can't succeed!"

And as I start to hang my head  
In front of failure's face,  
My downward fall is broken by  
The memory of a race.

And hope refills my weakened will  
As I recall that scene;  
For just the thought of that short race  
Rejuvenates my being.

A children's race-young boys, young men;  
How I remember well.  
Excitement, sure, but also fear;  
It wasn't hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope:  
Each thought to win that race.  
Or tie for first, or if not that,

At least take second place.

And fathers watched from off the side,  
Each cheering for his son.  
And each boy hoped to show his dad  
That he would be the one.

The whistle blew and off they went!  
Young hearts and hopes afire.  
To win, to be the hero there  
Was each young boy's desire.

And one boy in particular  
Whose dad was in the crowd,  
Was running near the lead and thought,  
"My dad will be so proud."

But as he speeded down the field  
Across a shallow dip,  
The little boy who thought to win,  
Lost his step and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself  
His hands flew out to brace,  
And mid the laughter of the crowd  
He fell flat on his face.

So down he fell and with him hope  
He couldn't win it now-  
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished  
To disappear somehow.

But as he fell his dad stood up  
And showed his anxious face,  
Which to the boy so clearly said:  
"Get up and win the race!"

He quickly rose, no damage done  
Behind a bit, that's all-  
And ran with all his mind and might  
To make up for his fall.

So anxious to restore himself  
To catch up and to win  
His mind went faster than his legs;  
He slipped and fell again!

He wished that he had quit before  
With only one disgrace.  
"I'm hopeless as a runner now;  
I shouldn't try to race."

But in the laughing crowd he searched  
And found his father's face.  
That steady look which said again:  
"Get up and win the race!"

So he jumped up to try again.  
Ten yards behind the last-  
"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought,  
"I've got to move real fast."  
Exerting everything he had,  
He gained eight or ten,  
But trying so hard to catch the lead  
He slipped and fell again!

Defeat! He lay there silently  
A tear dropped from his eye-  
"There's no sense running anymore:  
Three strikes I'm out, why try?"

The will to rise had disappeared  
All hope had fled away;  
So far behind, so error-prone:  
A loser all the way.

"I've lost, so what's the use," he thought.  
"I'll live with my disgrace."  
But then he thought about his dad  
Who soon he'd have to face.

"Get up," an echo sounded low.  
"Get up and take your place.  
You were not meant for failure here.  
Get up and win the race."

With borrowed will, "Get up," it said,  
"You haven't lost at all,  
For winning is not more than this:  
To rise each time you fall."

So up he rose to win once more,

And with a new commit  
He resolved that win or lose,  
At least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now.  
The most he'd ever been-  
Still he gave it all he had  
And ran as though to win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling:  
Three times he'd rose again.  
Too far behind to hope to win  
He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner  
As he crossed first place,  
Head high and proud and happy;  
No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster  
Crossed the line, last place,  
The crowd gave him the greater cheer  
For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last  
With head bowed low, unproud,  
You would have thought he won the  
Race to listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said,  
"I didn't do so well."  
"To me you won," his father said.  
"You rose each time you fell."

And when things seem dark and hard  
And difficult to face,  
The memory of that little boy  
Helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race.  
With ups and downs and all.  
And all you have to do to win  
Is rise each time you fall.

"Quit! Give up, you're beaten!"  
They still shout in my face.

But another voice within me says:  
"GET UP AND WIN THE RACE!"

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