

What Race Is Your Family Running?

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

I just want to give you a few minutes to journal about three questions...

I do not want to run a marathon. Have absolutely no desire to run for hours, get crazy blisters, hit “the wall” and all that. No desire to run a marathon and truth be told, I don’t know if I would actually have the mental toughness to keep going and finish. And I ask myself why? Why in the world would I put myself through all that? For what? To say that I did it? Whoop de do. Maybe the only reason I would do it is for the great work out gear and how in shape I would be after it’s all over. But no, even that would not put running a marathon on my bucket list. But what about this “race” we are in? Life. Raising our kids, growing our marriage. Like it or not, we are all running this race.

What race is your family running? Maybe the better question is “what race SHOULD your family be running?” Because that could be two very different things. You could be running the Boston Marathon when instead you are supposed to be doing the Ironman or a triathlon. You could be running hard after success or raising good kids or smart kids or well-rounded kids or being an active family or a serving family or a fun-loving family. All good stuff, all possible goals. But today we want to look at the ultimate goal for your family. The BIG finish line, where we are all supposed to be going as believers. How we all get there will look different because each person and each family is unique, but that’s a topic for another day. Today we want to zoom in on the finish line and where we want to end up so that we can begin with the end in mind.

Have you ever done that? Begin with the end in mind? If you’ve ever tried to lose weight you have. You set a goal of how much you want to lose or what you wanted your body to look like and then you figured out what it would take to get there. How many calories less to eat, how much exercise to put in. And maybe you put up a picture of a pair of jeans or bathing suit that was the end goal. And then you tried each day to do the things that would help you get into that bathing suit and tried not to do the things that would keep you from closing the zipper on those jeans. That is beginning with the end in mind.

What does that look like for your family and why is it important to keep the end in mind?

A. Why is it important to “begin with the end in mind?”

Have you ever gone on the internet/ Pinterest or whatever with the purpose of looking something specific up and then you see this other thing on the side and you click it and then it links you to something else and before you know it you have 14 windows open and lost an hour of time? Or you are walking from your bedroom to the kitchen to get something and stop to turn this off or pick that up and by the time you get to the kitchen you have totally forgotten what you came in there for? We get side-tracked so easily. And not only do we get side-tracked, we can forget the goal we had in mind in the beginning. Or maybe there was no clear goal at all.

Can you imagine if you went to run a race and there was no finish line? The organizers just told you to run, just run until you feel like you're done. How unfulfilling and hopeless would that be? And where would you run? In circles to stay close to the organizers so they can tell you when to stop? How do you decide when to stop? When you are too tired to keep going? When you hit a road block? When you get lost? Aren't you glad on this race of life God gave us a finish line and a clear goal so we can have a purpose and direction, we can know where we are going and if we are moving forward in the race. We can see how far we've come. We need to have a goal or else there is no focus and direction for our lives and we will land up feeling hopeless and directionless and when tough stuff comes we will give up.

Our finish line is the day we meet Jesus face to face in heaven. And the race we are running as followers of Jesus is to bring glory to his name, to advance His Kingdom, to put it simply... **to love God and love others.**

Matthew 22:36-40 (NLT) 36 "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" **37** Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **40** The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

Jesus says that's it. The end, the goal is to love God and love others. KISS principle right? Keep it simple sweetheart! It starts with loving God because He is the source of our perseverance, He is the one that helps us throw off the sin that entangles and He is the one that will show us what our own unique race course is supposed to look like. And then love others. Love your kids, love your spouse, love those around you in your circle of influence. And teach your kids to love God and love others.

Is that the race you are running? Is that what you are running after? Or have you gotten side-tracked by being successful or looking good or your own selfish desires or just surviving? Maybe you're not side-tracked but you've sat down on the sidelines. You got tired, you forgot there is a finish line when you will stand before Jesus to account for the race you ran. Or sin has sidelined you and made you lose sight of the end. Maybe you got injured during your race.

You got hurt by others or you feel hurt by God. Maybe you don't even want to run this race anymore. Where are you at? Let's all look around for a bit. What race are you running? Are you side-tracked or sitting on the sidelines or injured or wanting out of this race?

Before we think about that though, because that's a BIG question...we need to do some warm ups, some stretches. Because we are going to be using our brains, we want to warm up our brains and do some mental stretching. We are going to practice a bit of appreciation to warm up our relational circuits and connect to Jesus so that He can help us get His perspective on this race we are running.

Just a little recap about why we do this. We want to think of something we are grateful for and then write down why we are grateful for that and how it makes us feel. We do that because it helps us use both parts of our brain, the left side and right side. The thinking and feeling side. And then when we connect to Jesus and ask Him what He wants to say to us, we engage the upstairs brain too, the part where our relational circuits are, the part where we think creatively, act compassionately, show empathy, have self control and all those good things. So this simple appreciation exercise warms up all the parts of our brain and helps them to all work together, which is what we want. We want to be able to think and feel and have that upstairs part of our brain in control of our thinking and feeling because then we can act like ourselves and make choices that reflect God's values and character traits.

Let's just take a moment here to pray and ask Jesus for His peace. And we're going to take a few moments to relax our bodies and breathe deeply. Just slow down for a minute.

Now, think of a time when you did something physical that made you feel really good. Maybe it was exercise of some sort, maybe it was dancing or floating in a pool, or working really hard outside, or going for a walk with a friend. Briefly write down that memory. Focus on the memory until you feel gratitude for what was happening. Jot down a few words about how it made you feel. Your emotions and how your body feels. Now let's connect to Jesus..."Jesus, where are you in this memory? Is there anything you want us to know right now?" Write down whatever he reveals to you. Finally, take some time to thank Jesus for His faithfulness in meeting with you.

(10:20) -prayer sheet and discuss.... (10 minutes for exercise and prayer sheet...but let table leader begin discussion when they are all ready)

B. What does it look like to "begin with the end in mind?" (10:55?)

If you want to begin with the end in mind you have to keep your eyes on the finish line. You have to focus on where you want to go in order to actually get there. Sport is full of that. In golf you are supposed to visualize your shot, where you want the ball to go. In baseball you want to throw with your arm extended toward your target. When you teach your kids to ride a bike you tell them to look at where they want to go otherwise they land up turning their handlebars this way and then that way and fall off.

So we have to keep our minds and our hearts, our words and our actions focused on the end goal. We want everyone in our family to love God and to love others. How do we accomplish that goal?

Spend time with Jesus every day.

Parenting and marriage definitely have their moments. Sometimes when I run, I get on the treadmill and start going and I feel like I could just keep running. I feel good, my legs feel strong, my breathing is easy and I feel like the time flies by. Then, there are the other days. The days when you get on and right from the get go, you know every minute is going to be hard. You are panting and sweating and aching and watching that clock all the time and it seems endless. Parenting and marriage can sometimes feel like either one of those two. But it's especially in the tough slug, when you are counting the seconds and just enduring that we need to be with Jesus. We need to tell Him how hard it is, what's working and what's not. We need to get alone with Him and remember how big He is and how much He loves us and how He is the one that gives us strength for each and every second. And when we spend time with Him we are reminded of the big picture, the finish line, eternity. And that helps us not get so bogged down in the day to day.

Get Jesus' perspective on the little things

All the little miles add up, they are all part of the race too. We are not just trying to get through the baby stage, or make it through adolescence. When things are overwhelming or frustrating we need to remember our goal and not just look at the circumstance. That's what Peter did when he walked on water. He asked Jesus if he could come walking to him and Jesus said "come". So Peter, by faith, stepped out of the boat and starting walking. Amazing! Then he started looking at the waves and maybe looking down at his feet in the water and started to sink. He took his eyes off the goal, which was Jesus. And we need to take our eyes off our circumstances too and see our kids, our life, our marriage, our husbands through Jesus' eyes.

-Let him show you what matters and what doesn't. A few years ago one of my boys was not invited to a birthday party. I was devastated, my son seemed not to care. But I brewed and festered over this hurt. Finally I took it to Jesus and he reminded me that elementary school isn't when the deepest friendships are formed, and that God knows which friends my son needs and will bring them

into his life and that really at his age, I need to be praying for mentors and loving teachers that will impact him. God reminded me of what matters and what doesn't and that brought me so much peace.

-Let Jesus remind you that little things add up to big things.

Sometimes we get tired and let things slide or we don't think about the long term implications of what we are doing or allowing. Things like letting your kids have bad attitudes or lip off to you which if left unchecked lead to adults who are rude. Or giving your kids whatever they want which leads to adults who think they get whatever they want. Or doing all the chores for our kids instead of taking the time to teach them to work which leads to kids who don't know how to work and expect others to do things for them.

-Finally, we need to **let Jesus show you that sometimes what looks really bad will actually turn out for good.** "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them." (Romans 8:28) That tough kid in their class that bothers your child, that behaviour or fear you wish were gone, that work situation that has your husband stressed. All these things we need to bring to Jesus and find out how He sees them and what He is doing in them. Because God is real and He is always at work and we can trust Him to work things together for our good when we love Him and obey Him.

So now it's your turn to get Jesus' perspective on something in your life

Take home:

1. Talk to your husband about what you learnt today.
2. Write down 5 "end in mind" ideas and think about what it will take to get there.
 - I want my kids to be hard workers. (then I need to teach them to work and not just do it myself because that is easier)
 - I want my kids to be polite and respectful to others. (I need to be very careful of the tone I use with them. I need to teach them what it looks like to be polite and respectful (look people in the eyes when talking to them, respond back

to their questions, don't interrupt) When they aren't polite or respectful I need to have strategies for teaching/disciplining them.

-I want my kids to sit nicely at the table and try new foods politely so we can have people over and go to other people's homes and fellowship with them and not turn them off with our bad table manners. (I need to try new food at home on them, I need to explain what I expect at the table, we need to practice good table manners at home before people come over, I need to have plans for what to do when they say "yuck" or burp and use potty talk at the table)