

THE *Battle* IS THE *Lord's*

SPIRITUAL STRATEGIES
FOR VICTORY IN YOUR
DAILY STRUGGLES

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CHAPTER 1

NEVER GIVE UP

“Let us run with perseverance” (Hebrews 12:1).

In recent years, marathon races have become very popular. Thousands of runners enter races such as the Boston Marathon or the New York Marathon. So many runners want to compete that the race organizers have to limit the number of participants, and the races are so competitive that at the end of the 26-mile, 385-yard course, often only mere seconds or fractions of a second, separate the leaders.

But at the Vancouver Commonwealth Games in 1954, this was not the case. Jim Peters, a Britisher and the world marathon record holder, came to Canada heavily favored to win the marathon by a wide margin. As the starting gun fired, Peters sprinted to an early lead, which he increased as the race progressed. As he neared the end of the race, he was leading not by seconds, but by twenty minutes over the second place Joe McGhee of Scotland. Peters was—according to some experts—on a pace to set a new world record.

As the marathon was run, the crowd at the finish line in the stadium witnessed history in the making. In the one-mile race run within the stadium, Dr. Roger Bannister had set a new world record. But more than that, he had done something that experts for years had proclaimed as impossible. No human had ever run a mile in less than four minutes, but right before their very eyes, the crowd not only saw Bannister break the four-minute mile—the second-place runner, John Landry, finished in under four minutes as well!

This event would go down in history as the “miracle mile,” and the crowd was still cheering as our marathon runner Peters came into sight.

The announcers proclaimed that he too was on pace to set a new world record, and the crowd was on its feet as he entered the arena. To complete the race, all Jim Peters had to do was circle the track once and come back to the finish line. There he would be crowned the winner and new world record holder for the marathon. But suddenly, he tripped and fell. The crowd gasped, then went silent. What they were to witness in the next few minutes, none would ever forget.

Some accounts say that Peters took nearly fifteen minutes to cover the next 200 yards as he fell numerous times. His trainer ran to his side and shouted words of encouragement: “Get up, you can make it! You will win if you just walk around the track!” It was all the trainer could do as the rules didn’t allow him to touch or aid the runner in any other way.

Finally, when Peters rose from another fall and had turned in the wrong direction toward the infield of the track, it was obvious he wasn’t going to make it. Directed by the team manager, his trainer caught him and six doctors—including Dr. Roger Bannister—rushed to his side. It was clear that he was in serious condition. An ambulance rushed Peters to the hospital where he would stay for seven days. He lived, but he never finished the race. In fact, he never raced again.

Back at the stadium, Joe McGhee eventually entered the arena, crossed the finish line, and was crowned the winner. A second runner crossed the finish line, then another and another—each one a winner. Because even though the first to cross the finish line is the winner of winners, everyone who finishes a marathon is a winner!

But Jim Peters, considered one of the great marathon runners of all time, a man who had broken the world record three times before and was on the brink of doing it again, lost because he didn’t reach the finish line.

Jesus Christ tells us that the Christian life will not always be easy, “But he who *endures to the end* shall be saved” (Mark 13:13). It has been said that 90 percent of success is in showing up! In other words, 90 percent of success is in not quitting or in “enduring to the end.”

The Bible often speaks about the race of life, or the battle of life, and the crown that waits at the finish line. Now not everyone is a sports fan, but the apostle Paul seems to have been one. At least he seems to have been a fan of the Greek Games. He said, “Know ye not that they which

run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24, KJV).

He talks about those things that hold us back in our run through this life:

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.

And then he tells us the way to run the race successfully:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3, NIV).

There is one principle of athletics that holds true regardless of the sport or competition—the game is won on the practice field or in training before it is won on the playing field or track itself. From what I have read about Jim Peters, the experts blame his collapse on his training habits. He didn’t taper his training and preserve his energy and strength in the days before the race. He didn’t pay attention to hydration while he was running the race, taking no water the entire course. One article I read claims that his race that day led to the practice of having water stations along the route of a marathon so that the runners can avoid dehydration.

The apostle Paul talks about proper training also. He wasn’t afraid of overtraining as Peters seems to have done, but of undertraining, of not being ready.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly, I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to

others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:25-27, NIV).

In this race, battle, or contest, we quickly see the importance of a clear sense of direction and purpose. In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul says,

But this one thing I do: Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (KJV).

Winning is about pressing toward the mark, the goal, the finish line. I remember a hard-fought football game I played in where we were on the verge of winning. At a critical moment, one of the players on our team made a great play. He intercepted the other quarterback's pass! But as he caught it, he was hit hard and spun around. Determined to win, he started running as fast as he could toward the goal line. But he was running the wrong way! No matter how loud we yelled or how fast we ran, we couldn't catch him. When he crossed the goal line (the other team's goal line), he victoriously dropped the ball. One of their players alertly picked it up and scored a touchdown. We lost the game!

The goal line for each of us is to declare that we are once and for all on the side of Jesus. To declare that if it's a race, we are running every step with Him and receiving our strength from Him. We are partaking of the "water of life" and the "bread of life" to sustain us because this is a long endurance race. If it's a battle, we battle, yes, but we are relying on Him for victory. If it's a fight, we have our "elder brother" with us, and when the dust settles, He will be the victor and we will be with Him in victory, just as if we had won.

When people talk about priorities in life, they often debate what "the main thing" is—love, money, happiness, success. Someone said it this way: "The main thing is the main thing," meaning that the top priority may be different for each of us, but whatever it is, it is the most important thing!

If you ask me, my friend, the main thing is Jesus Christ. When you give up or quit in life, you are not giving up on yourself. You should have

given up on yourself long ago. When you give up, you're giving up on Him! You are saying that He is not able to save you! He says that He is able to save you no matter how lost you feel or how bad you've been. Keep trusting in Him and make up your mind that you will not quit on Jesus or on life in general.

In a time of discouragement once, a friend gave me this poem:

The Way to Win

It takes a little courage and a little self control and some grim determination if you want to reach the goal.

It takes a deal of striving with a firm and stern-set chin,
no matter what the battle if you really want to win.

There's no easy path to glory, there's no rosy road to fame
and life however you may view it is no simple parlor game.

But its prizes call for fighting, for endurance and for grit and
a rugged disposition and a don't know when to quit.

You may take a blow or give one, you may risk and you may
lose and expect that in the struggle that you'll suffer from a bruise.

But you mustn't wince or falter if a fight you once begin,
be courageous, face the battle—
It's the only way to win.

Author Unknown

Sometimes life becomes very complicated. We get confused, even desperate, and we look for a way out. Jesus invites us to "look to Him, the author and finisher of our faith." In Revelation 3:11, He gave John, the beloved disciple, a special message for you and me. "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown" (NIV). It's your crown. He has already prepared just for you. All you have to do is hold on, no matter what happens.

I have found that no one has it easy in this life. It's easy to look at others, see the smiles, and think life is easy for them. But you don't know about their struggles. I assure you that no one—rich or poor, man or woman, pastor or layperson, teacher or student, the newest member of the church or our beloved General Conference president and his family—has it easy. Regardless of our sex, race, color, national origin, or station in life, we all have our challenges! Different? Decidedly! Difficult? Definitely!

But Jesus says, “He who endures to the end, shall be saved.”

When we think about “enduring to the end,” the “time of trouble” often seems to be our focus. However, the greatest challenges to our endurance as Christians is the “enemy within” more than an attack from without. This is especially true in North America, where religious freedom is practiced and where few if any of us have suffered religious persecution.

“The enemy within” includes fear, worry, depression, stress, and anxiety—just a few of the “times of trouble” that we face on a daily basis. But these “everyday problems” lead many of us to drop out of the race long before we hit the “final days” of difficulty, the “time of trouble such as the world has never known,” and the finish line. As the Lord said to Jeremiah, “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?” (Jeremiah 12:5).

There is only one way to work through these “enemies within,” these obstacles of life, and that is to have Jesus Christ as your Savior and Guide. Through His Word, our only safe guide, we can find the answers to the challenges of life.

Never give up on Jesus!