

Running the Parenting Race to Victory, No Matter What

Over the last 14 years, my journey of being the mom of a troubled daughter has been like running a race, but this race is not a sprint, it's a marathon. It's a long-distance endurance run. My goal was and still is, to not quit, but to make it to the end (whatever that may be) with my faith intact in spite of her struggles with alcohol, drugs, self-harm, mental illness and suicide attempts.

Some days I feel like I hit a wall, a place where I'm tempted to give up. All I want is for this to be over. I need rest and a victorious resolution. I want the pain to end, don't you?

I've heard when you run a marathon, you need to prepare yourself for a similar place, a breaking point, where you want to quit.

Depleted

An experienced marathoner once told me, "This tends to happen around the 20th mile. Your body tries to convince you you're done. You've got nothing left. All your reserves are depleted. Your confidence is shot. Your strength is gone. There's no more stamina or endurance left in your physical tank. Your chest burns, and your muscles are on fire. Your brain tells you that you couldn't possibly take one more step. Not one. Everything in you screams, 'I can't go any farther!'"

Have you felt this way? I have.

A Breaking Point

In the Boston Marathon, this breaking point is known as Heartbreak Hill. These last six miles are a series of hills that steadily climb higher and higher. The streets are lined with fans and observers who cheer the runners on. They need

all the encouragement they can get. Maybe the end of the race is designed this way to weed out the weak, forcing them to drop out and fall by the wayside, literally. Sounds cruel.

To keep going and finish the race feels impossible. This is where the athlete's advance preparation and training kick in.

An article I read explained that the marathoner can't look too far ahead or back. To do so makes finishing much more difficult. They'll never make it to the finish line if they do that. They must focus all their attention on the next step, and the next, and the next, while voicing positive affirmations to themselves. *You can do this. Don't give up. You're almost there. Just keep going. This will be worth all the effort in the end. Soon you can rest.*

Three Winning Strategies

With similar strategies, we can cross our finish line, too:

1. Stay in the present, on getting through today. Don't look back and regret the past or too far ahead and worry.
2. Focus on Jesus, the author of our faith. Keep our thoughts on who He is and what He's done for us.
3. Fill our minds with positive affirmations from the truth of God's Word. Read and study the Bible. Spend time in prayer. Worship and fellowship with other believers. Educate yourself on your child's issues and find a supportive community who will cheer you on in the hard times.
4. In our parenting marathon, crossing the finish line with our faith intact means we win, even if our prayers are never answered for our children. We can survive and be OK. We can still live our lives, find purpose from our pain and let God use it for good.
5. What about you? Have you reached your Heartbreak Hill? Which one of these strategies will you try?

Encouragement:

Dear, exhausted mom or dad, when you grow weary, please don't give up. When your child's situation looks bleak and you think you can't take one more step, take heart, take one day at a time—sometimes one moment at a time—and put your hope in God. Keep your attention glued on Jesus, the one and only, who conquered his Heartbreak Hill so that you can conquer yours!

This Bible verse helps me keep going and not give up:

“Let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and your hearts give up” (Heb. 12:2-3).

Resources

This devotional book is a good one. It was written to parents of teens, but I find it helpful no matter how old your child is:

Just Keep Going by Sarah Nielsen

Website and blog: Liberty in Christ Ministries, .

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