

Are You Running to Win the Race for Jesus?

In some ways, Christianity is like a relay race. We're a team; we're in it to win, and we still have a ways to go. Jesus was our leadoff runner. And man, did He sprint! In 33 short years He radically changed history, and before He ascended to heaven, He carried out His Father's plan by passing the baton to His disciples. They passed it to their generation. And each generation since has handed it off to the next.

The baton represents Jesus' mission. What is that mission? Speaking of Himself, Jesus made this clear: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). When He first called the disciples from their fishing nets and their tax-collecting tables, He didn't say, "Follow Me, and I'm going to make you successful and fulfill your lifelong dreams." He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." He was passionate about saving people.

And now it's our turn. It's time to make the exchange.

Much of the real Jesus way is about watching how He lived, then taking the baton from Him and running our race. Are we securely grasping that mission? Or are we dropping the baton? If we want to carry on what Jesus started, there are three parts of the relay we must get right.

Watch the Rhythm

Before the start of a relay race, each receiving runner makes a mark on the track, usually with tape. When the incoming runner's foot hits that mark, the receiver explodes forward while reaching back with an open hand. The timing must be perfect, and if he's not watching, he won't know when to wrap his fingers around the baton.

What is the receiving runner watching for? He's calculating the other runner's speed, evaluating the rhythm of those churning legs. It's all about rhythm, and the rhythm of Jesus is *seek and and and save*. One leg is *seek*, the other is *save*, and the two never stop. We're watching Him, watching His mission. Jesus is after every man, woman and child who is lost. And that is His rhythm.

Seek and and and save. Jesus is doing this all over the world, and He wants to do it through you. The apostle Paul said it this way: " God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ... We are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'" (2 Cor. 5:18b-20, NLT). Throughout the Gospels Jesus seeks and saves one person after another. The rhythm is clear.

Seek and and save.

As much as the disciples were around Jesus, they still couldn't see His rhythm. They tried to send people away that He wanted to minister to! I think we often miss it too. We get caught up in our own lives, in our activities at church and the world of Christianity, and we miss the heart of the real Jesus. He wants to rescue people.

If we intend to take hold of that baton and run with it, we have to watch Jesus running in His beautiful, rhythmic stride. He is getting closer and closer, about to reach that mark we put down.

Receive the Baton

And then the moment comes! You burst ahead, gaining speed. You're stride for stride now, in sync with Jesus. Your arm is stretched back, your hand is open, and you're ready to receive the baton. There it is! It's time to take hold of it!

The baton represents three things we are receiving from Jesus—His mission, His authority and His Spirit. They are all being passed to us.

We've already discussed His mission, but Jesus is also delegating His authority. One day, Jesus called together His 12 disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and heal all diseases. Then He sent them out to tell everyone about the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. In the same way, Jesus delegates authority to us as believers. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18b, NIV). And later, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus hands us the authority, but we have to receive the baton and run with it. When we get a revelation of the authority that Jesus is placing in our hands, we will begin to do supernatural works.

In addition to receiving Jesus' mission and authority, we receive His Spirit. This is the most important gift we receive from Him.

Jesus said to us, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). As He ascended to heaven, He lifted His hands and blessed His disciples, telling them to go and reach the world. He passed down His Spirit, the Spirit of God. He told His disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised [the Holy Spirit]" (Acts 1:4, NLT). Just as the Holy Spirit fell on those who had gathered after Jesus' ascension, the Spirit falls on believers today and is available to every one of us for empowerment.

You have the baton. It's time to run!

Run!

Like athletes competing in the Olympics, we have a moment in

time to run. Jesus has already run His leg of the race. Other generations have run before us, fighting the good fight and finishing the race. Now it's our turn.

Will we stay on our feet? Will we keep hold of the baton? Will we run with all our might, completing what Jesus started?

Some of us are running casually, as if the race is a jog in the park. Some of us are fiddling with the baton instead of securing it in our hands. Many believers are running with untied shoelaces, and some don't make it to the finish line. The untied laces can be habits we don't shake, too many hobbies, vices we don't deal with. Don't let this be you. Tie your shoelaces. Deal with the things that would distract you, tempt you or take you out of the race.

Others of us wear out. Let's face it. The Christian life is usually less of a sprint and more of a marathon. You may end up running with the baton of Jesus for decades. Passion and enthusiasm are great, but you will also need endurance. I've seen many start like a flash, sprinting with everything they have, only to drop out of the race a few months later. Long-distance running requires a pace that can be sustained for a long time.

To make it all the way to the finish, you must remain energized. Stay rooted in the Word of God and in your relationship with Jesus. And cling to the Holy Spirit. This will give you a fresh wind to finish the race. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you," Jesus said. "For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

The race is on. Cross that finish line, and receive the prize. As the apostle Paul encourages us, "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!" (1 Cor. 9:24). {eoa}

Excerpted from Chapter 11 of The Real Jesus by Jonathan

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