

THE CURSE OF LAZINESS

Wholehearted hard work in difficult situations is so much of what is required in Christian discipleship and missionary service. All too many people today are physically lazy, mentally lazy and spiritually lazy. We need to stretch our minds and our muscles. Which is why there are so many hikes and mountain climbs involved in our Mission Courses.

"...that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." Hebrews 12:27

CLIMBING MOUNTAINS REQUIRES STAMINA

Mountain climbing is a tremendous analogy for the spiritual perseverance and persistence needed in our spiritual lives and Christian service. Nobody attains to the summit of a mountain by one step, or even leap. It requires thousands of steps, direction finding, consulting the map and compass, following the guide, physical strain and pain, a determination not to give up, or turn back. A focus and resilience to overcome every obstacle. To keep on keeping on. To not give up. To keep on even when you want to give up and turn back. No matter how steep, or narrow, the climb, or how precipitous the pathway may sometimes seem to be, we need to trust the Guide and persevere to the summit. *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them."* 2 Timothy 3:14

INCREASED COST DECREASES NUMBERS

As the cost of discipleship increases, the numbers decrease. This should not surprise us. At the first church picnic, over 5000 people came. But at the first Church sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, there were several hundred. For the Pentecost prayer meeting, when the Lord commanded them to pray day and night, until the power from above came down upon them, there were 120 gathered in The Upper Room. When it came to the first mid-week outreach, the first door to door, street Evangelism, there were 70 who went out, two by two, to evangelise in the highways and the byways. When it came to daily discipleship, there were 12 men and about 4 women who followed the Lord everywhere. Love... *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* 1 Corinthians 13:7

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR CHRIST?

And of those 12 men, one betrayed Him, one denied Him, one doubted Him, and they all forsook Him. Only John went all the way to the Cross and stood with the woman disciples, beneath the Cross, identifying with the sufferings of Christ when He was dying a disgraceful criminals death and there was every chance of John being arrested and crucified as Jesus was. As the cost of discipleship increases, the numbers decrease. *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God."* Acts 20:24

GIVE UP YOUR SMALL AMBITIONS AND FOLLOW CHRIST!

We need to free ourselves from this short-term, self-centred, instant, disposable, materialistic, throw-away culture mentality. God has called us to long-distance mountain marathons. We need spiritual stamina. We need to stretch our minds and muscles, deepen our faith, widen our vision, press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)

"...holding fast the Word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain." Philippians 2:16

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." James 1:12

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58

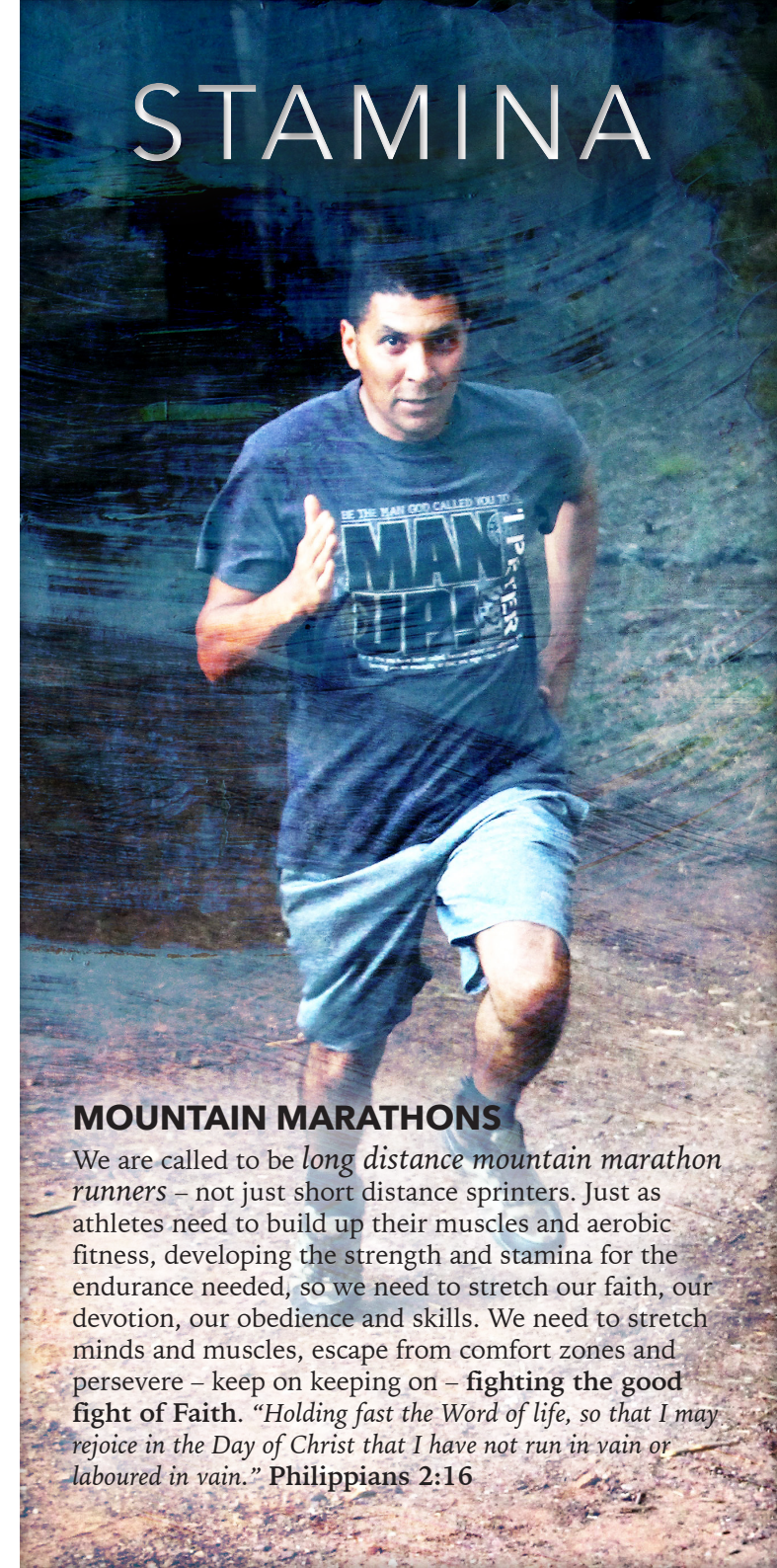
"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Galatians 5:1

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:8



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STAMINA



MOUNTAIN MARATHONS

We are called to be *long distance mountain marathon runners* – not just short distance sprinters. Just as athletes need to build up their muscles and aerobic fitness, developing the strength and stamina for the endurance needed, so we need to stretch our faith, our devotion, our obedience and skills. We need to stretch minds and muscles, escape from comfort zones and persevere – keep on keeping on – **fighting the good fight of Faith.** *"Holding fast the Word of life, so that I may rejoice in the Day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain."* Philippians 2:16

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

A successful athlete needs training. **Discipline. Motivation. Focus. Persistence. Perseverance.** Athletes need stamina. They need to build up their oxygen levels so that they can run and not grow weary, walk and not faint. This requires discipline and diligence. Keeping on when you want to stop. This requires stretches, stair training, repetitions of sprints, push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups and perseverance. *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* 1 Cor 9:24-27

MEASURABLE GOALS AND GRADES TO INCREASE STAMINA

Successful sportsmen focus on measurable goals and incentives – making the team, scoring the goal, winning the game, achieving the grade, accomplishing the standards required. There are medals and trophies to be won. Titles to be awarded. Athletes first need to make the local team, and then the regionals, provincials, nationals and finally worlds. For some this means the Olympics. Think how much time, energy, dedication and years of self-sacrifice must be needed for an athlete to reach a world class level to compete in the Olympics, or any international tournament? *“And also if anyone competes in athletics, he competes according to the rules.”* 2 Timothy 2:5

TRAINING FOR VICTORY

In the Army we were continually reminded: *Winners never quit!* Quitters never win! Never give up. Never give in. Strive for victory. The Army disciplined us, forced us to do without, to endure hardship, to persevere in spite of all obstacles and discouragement, even when deprived of sleep and food, and pushed to the limit, to never give up and make excuses. Selection in the Army, and in sports teams, is aimed at weeding out those too weak – physically, emotionally or mentally. In the Military they would deliberately discourage and tempt candidates to give up – so as to see who has what it takes to endure, adapt, persevere and overcome. *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* 2 Timothy 2:3

THE ROOTS OF FAILURE

Why do so many give up? Lack of discipline. Neglect of training. Failure to heed counsel and instruction from the coach. Self-indulgence. Comfort weakens us. Hardship strengthens us. Those who are easily distracted, double-minded and half-hearted will fail. There are so many quitters, losers, excuse makers and failures. They are too tired or too weak. Wimps, wets, weeds, spineless jellyfish, cowards and compromisers will fail and give up. *“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Philippians 3:14

DEFINING THE WORDS

Websters Dictionary defines endurance as: “Continuance... lasting... a bearing or suffering, a continuing under pain or distress... without sinking or yielding to the pressure.”

Endure – “To last, to continue, to remain; to abide... without breaking... to sustain.”

Steadfast – “Fixed, firm...constant; resolute; not fickle or wavering.”

Steadfastness – “Firmness of mind or purpose; fixedness in principle; constancy; resolution; as the steadfastness of Faith. He adhered to his opinions with steadfastness. Undeviating.”

ENDURE TO THE END

The Bible teaches us: *“...He who endures to the end will be saved.”* Matthew 10:22

We are commanded to: *“Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...”* John 6:27

What endures forever? *“But the Word of the Lord endures forever...”* 1 Peter 1:25

Winners study the Word of God.

Winners submit to the God of the Word.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

As Christians we are called to persevere, in spite of sicknesses, disappointments, opposition, danger and difficulty. In the face of criticism, we must keep on keeping on, persevering with all endurance and steadfastness. *“...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* Ephesians 4:14-16

FAILURES NEVER TO FORGET

In the Scriptures we read of failures who deserted the Faith: Esau, Judas, Demas... *“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”* Hebrews 10:39. *“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”* James 5:11. *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”* Hebrews 6:11-12

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

We have a great cloud of witnesses, examples of excellence, in the Scripture and in Church history. Overcomers who persevered and pressed on to victory: **Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David and Daniel, Peter, Paul, Polycarp, Perpetua, Martin Luther, William Carey, Robert Moffatt, David Livingstone, Mary Slessor, C.T. Studd,**

and many more. *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* Hebrews 12:1

A JOSHUA GENERATION

We must not be like that faithless generation who were condemned to wander in the wilderness, but we need to be like the Joshua generation who went in and possessed the land, conquering, overcoming, in faith and obedience. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the Faith.”* 2 Timothy 4:7

UNDER AUTHORITY

If you are not under authority, then you have no authority. *“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* Acts 2:42. We need commitment, community, accountability in the fellowship to which God has called us. *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”* Hebrews 13:17

FOCUS ON JESUS

We need to keep our eyes fixed on our Lord Jesus Christ, *“the Author and Finisher of our Faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God.”* Hebrews 12:2. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Our highest priority is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. To seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, making disciples of all nations, teaching obedience to all things that the Lord has commanded.

LONG DISTANCE MOUNTAIN MARATHON

Christianity is not so much a short distance sprint as a long distance marathon. A mountain marathon. *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”* Galatians 6:9

DEEPER, WIDER, FURTHER

We can endure far more than we think we can. We can accomplish far more than we have ever imagined. We need our minds and muscles to be stretched. We need our faith to be strengthened. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. We need our understanding of the Scripture to be deepened and our vision to be widened. Look at the fields. We need to keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ on Whom our Faith depends from beginning to end. That is why we need to emphasise physical endurance, mental focus, emotional intensity, along with academic assignments and practical challenges – with spiritual energy. *“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the Faith of the Gospel.”* Philippians 1:27