

Why get all excited about a race? Philippians 3:4 - 14

The men's 100 meter sprint has been called the marquee event of the Olympic Games. It is estimated that during the 2008 games this famous contest will attract around 100 million viewers world-wide. So why does a race that lasts less than 10 seconds draw such a great crowd? Perhaps it's because we view it as something more than a group of competitors running from one line to another. Races symbolise the human pursuit of our life goals.

The apostle Paul was fond of using athletic imagery to describe his Christian walk (or run). Paul's race began the moment he had a blinding encounter with God's Son. From that time he left behind his old earthly ambitions, tossed all his former trophies onto the rubbish heap and began surging forward to take hold of an eternal prize found only in Jesus Christ.

1. Read Philippians 3:4b - 6. When Paul talks about putting confidence in the flesh, he is speaking about his former humanistic goals and rewards. List some of the things in which Paul had once placed his hope (see also Galatians 1:13 - 14). How do Paul's old pursuits compare with worldly and humanistic pursuits today?
2. Read Philippians 3:7 - 9. What does Paul mean, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ"?
3. Based on what you know of Paul's life, what sacrifices did his new pursuit require him to make? (e.g. 2 Corinthians 11:21 - 33)
4. Read Philippians 3:8 - 11. What is the ultimate goal toward which Paul and all believers in Christ are striving?
5. Read Philippians 3:12 - 14. What does it mean to forget what is behind us and press on toward our heavenly goal in Christ Jesus? What is this goal? What must we leave behind to attain it?

Reflect on the following verse:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:8 - 10 NIV)