



Call: (Heb2:1-2) Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hymn: STF 545 Be thou my vision <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZBOSfiH8Rk>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Irish, c 8th century translated by Mary E Byrne (1880-1931), versified by Eleanor H Hull (1860-1935) Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 1085607

Prayers: High King of heaven, the star that shines the brightest, the sovereign ruler over all, we come today to declare you are our Lord and Saviour. You are the first in our hearts, the first in our thoughts. You are our strong tower, our soul's shelter. You protect and guide us. You are our Almighty Father and we are privileged to be called your children.

So often we do not hold you first in our thoughts, too often you are not in our thoughts as we follow our own selfish desires. Too often we go in our own strength instead of leaning on you.

Forgive us those times when we forget. Forgive us those times when we ignore. Forgive us those times when we turn away.

You are a graceful and merciful Father, who, without a moment's hesitation welcomes us back when we say sorry and forgives us unconditionally. Thank you God . AMEN

Reading:

[1 Corinthians 9:24-27 \(The Message\)](#)

You've all been to the stadium and seen the athlete's race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.

I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No lazy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself.

Hymn: My hope is built on nothing less <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoPcyr2oYhg&t=2s>

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

His oath, his covenant, his blood
supports me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay.

Chorus

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest in his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
my anchor holds within the veil.
*On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
oh may I then in him be found.
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne.

Chorus

Edward Mote (1797-1874) Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 1085607

Message:

We have recently been bombarded with various sporting activities, the European football championships, Wimbledon tennis championships and now the Olympic games. Something for everyone – if you like sport!

I'm not a particularly sporty person, I don't follow a football team – although my husband does and so I have been watching the "Euros" with interest. I will often watch the tennis finals, and catch up on the athletics.

These are all very different disciplines, but they have the common purpose or goal – to win. Every footballer, tennis player, or athlete has the purpose of winning the match or coming first in the race.

But it's not easy. We can all sit at home and shout at the TV as our team concedes a goal, or our favourite tennis player loses a point, or our national athletes fail to win a medal. We have it easy. Those footballers, tennis players, athletes have trained often for years to get to the point that they can enter competition at this level. They will have followed a gruelling programme of exercise, nutrition, and psychological training.

The people of Corinth would have understood what Paul was writing about when he wrote to them using the imagery of athletics. The Isthmian games were second only to the Olympic games and attracted athletes from all over the Greco-Roman world.

Just as athletes have to work hard, and have to aim for a goal, so we, in our faith need to work hard at it. We cannot run onto a football pitch and expect to be in the Premier League, or pick up a tennis racquet and expect to beat the number 1 seed. When we come to Christ we cannot "sit back on our laurels" and think we have reached our ultimate goal. We have to train hard in our faith.

And that training requires self-discipline – the ability to push ourselves forward, stay motivated and take action, no matter how we feel physically or emotionally. Spiritual self-discipline is what our bible reading today is all about, "no lazy living, no getting caught napping, staying alert and keeping in top condition."

A friend of mine recently took part in the London marathon. She had a personalised fitness programme for months beforehand. Part of that training was looking at what she could do easily and what she found more difficult, examining her strengths and weaknesses.

In our faith it is easy to look at our strengths, but do we always take an honest look at our weaknesses and work hard at them? What do you think your weaknesses are in your faith and what can you do to train successfully?

Remember training requires hard work over an extended period of time, perhaps even a lifetime!

One thing I have learnt over time is that emotional fitness is closely linked to physical fitness. I'm not suggesting that everyone signs up to the nearest exercise class, but looking after our bodies physically, taking time out of busy lives, helps

our emotional fitness. So in our faith if we train “physically” – reading scripture, prayer, worship then our emotional or spiritual fitness will improve.

But what are we training for?

Paul emphasis the point that we need a goal, a purpose, something to aim for. He uses the image of an athlete running aimlessly, or a boxer simply punching the air and achieving nothing, it’s exhausting and serves no purpose. William Barclay quotes a cartoon of two men on Mars looking down at all the people here on earth scurrying here, there, and everywhere, “what are they doing?” says the first man, “they are going,” came the reply, “but where are they going?” “oh they are not going anywhere; they are just going.” To go just anywhere is a certain way of going nowhere.

Let us not be aimless in our spiritual training. Jesus gives us a goal to aim for. He rarely, if ever, based his good news message on penalty or punishment, rather he promised a prize we can all aim for, however physically fit we are, and that prize is one that never withers and dies, but lasts forever, eternal life. That is the goal we are aiming for, the prize we want to win.

What are the goals in your life that you are aiming for?

How disciplined are you in your training for them?

What roles can faith play in that training?

What part does your church play in helping you on your journey of faith?

So whether or not you watched the football or tennis, or whether you will take an interest in the Olympics, remember we can all train for that prize, worth more than any gold medal or trophy, for the eternal life that Jesus offers us.

Prayer: Father God, you made us as we are, be with us as we run the race of faith. Let us learn to run in the footsteps of your Son Jesus Christ who came to offer us the ultimate prize of eternal life. May the Holy Spirit strengthen us when we are faint and feel like giving up, nourish us with living bread and bring us to the living waters so that we may be refreshed and revitalised to run with purpose and not grow weary. AMEN

Hymn: STF 504 May the mind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.

that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self abasing,
this is victory.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928) Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 1085607

Intercessions:

In the power of the Spirit empowering, and in the name of Christ healing, let us pray to the Godhead loving.

We pray for the Church in this town, this Circuit, this country and throughout the world as she so often grows weary of doing good. We pray for leaders who encourage, preach, and guide.

O healing Lord,

grant strength to finish the race, courage to speak, wisdom to be silent and faith to continue to the end.

We pray for Christian leaders called to run ahead of the flock and to beckon others to join them in the race. We pray for our politicians and government, for world leaders and global organisations.

O Lord, who shows us the way,

grant strength to finish the race, courage to speak, wisdom to be silent and faith to continue to the end.

We pray for ourselves in our homes and among our families, friends and colleagues. We pray for our neighbours, those we know by name and those who we greet on passing.

O Lord, who shared a human home and human friends,

grant strength to finish the race, courage to speak, wisdom to be silent and faith to continue to the end.

We pray for those who suffer in mind, body or spirit, especially those who have come to the end of their strength or who find faith difficult.

O Lord who knew in your body the depths of human pain and suffering,

grant strength to finish the race, courage to speak, wisdom to be silent and faith to continue to the end.

We give thanks for those who have died and for all that they meant to us who are left to mourn.

We pray for those who grieve.

O Lord, who knew the depths of human loss,

grant strength to finish the race, courage to speak, wisdom to be silent and faith to continue to the end.

Hymn: STF 345 And can it be <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu2uA6U4Fvg>

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all : the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -
So free, so infinite his grace -
Emptied himself of all but love,

And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 1085607

Blessing: Let us show our faith by our actions, our love by our works, our hope in our perseverance. May God empower us and through his Holy Spirit may we be inspired in all we do. AMEN