



How To Lose In The Race Of Faith

And Samuel said to Saul, *"You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you."* — 1 Samuel 13:13

The moment you turned from your sin to God and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you were enrolled in a spiritual race. And one of the mandates in any competition is that we play by the rules. If we do not, we will be disqualified. Have you watched any Olympic races? How much compliance was required for the contestants? How much more is required for Christians – how much more is at stake ..when we consider the rules connected to the spiritual race of faith? There's no preferential treatment when it comes to the rules. You abide by them or you are disqualified. Yes, that's how it's to be in any race, especially in the spiritual one.

First Samuel gives us the story of King Saul, a religious leader gone bad, a man who did not play by the rules. He began his reign in victory and ended in humiliating defeat. He lost his character, his following, his power, his crown, and in the end, his very life. Based on Saul's life, let's check out some principles on how not to win the spiritual race. Maybe we can learn from his bad example.

To lose the race:

1.) Ignore the little things. Saul's failure was not immediate, but pride gradually turned into envy, and then he flat-out ignored what God had plainly told him to do. Likewise, it is not for us to pick and choose what parts of the Bible we like or don't like. It is not for us to set aside the Spirit's promptings. Anger turned into intense hatred and Saul started believing lies – so much so that he wanted to kill. We are to obey God in the big and even in the smallest matters, because "small" sins unattended to turn into big sins. Sin grows kind of like ugly algae that destroys. It grows and develops until there are huge, negative ramifications. It certainly did for Saul. The Bible says, *"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes"* (S. of S. 2:15 kjv).

2.) Choose the wrong trainer to emulate and be instructed by. It could be a duplicitous person; it could be a religious person. *"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm"* (Prov.

13:20). ***“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul”*** (Prov. 22:24). Show me your close friends and I’ll tell you who you will become. Beware of who you hang with the most – you’ll become like them. Religious Saul buddied-up to, listened to and took his cues from the Father of lies.

3.) Neglect daily practice. Have you gotten flabby spiritually? If we are busy training for holiness, so involved in seeking the Lord, we won’t have time to be sucked into destructive sinful activity. Saul tried to kill his own son Jonathan. He sought to murder David ..daily... thinking he was doing God’s will (1 Sam. 23:7), but Saul did kill the godly priests at Nob. How disillusioned David might have felt, as he watched his leader’s life speed south morally like an overloaded freight train down the icy east side of the Rockies. Saul was unwilling to slay the Amalekites as God commanded him to (1 Sam 15), who were guilty, but he had no problem at all slaying the eighty five priests who were innocent.

4.) Regularly take in the wrong diet. A person preparing for a race doesn’t go eat Big Macs and fries at McDonalds. Do you feast on the word of God to apply it? What do you regularly feed on spiritually? The Lord tore the kingdom of Israel from Saul because he rejected the Word of God (1 Sam. 15:23). His life typified Satan’s persecution of the Church today. Saul was no longer the king, yet he was reigning; David was the king, but he was not yet on the throne. When we see all the evil proliferating around the world, it seems like Satan is the one reigning today, but Christ is King and one day He will take His rightful throne.

5.) Jump the gun. David could have taken matters into his own hands as Saul did, to his own demise, but Dave trusted God. We must wait on the Lord to answer our prayers. We oft grow weary in life's race, we're driven by its hurried pace; but when we wait upon the Lord, His strength becomes our sure reward.

Man, I wish I was more like David here! He patiently waited for God’s deliverance -- for promotion to come and things grew considerably worse before they got better. It took a while but God did deliver Dave over and over again. Don’t run ahead of God. When the child of God is in the will of God, he may expect the help of God (Ps. 34:19). Dave was a great soldier but he needed to suffer in the wilderness for a time in order that he could learn daily dependence upon the Lord and not to put his trust in men. All of us need wilderness testings at times to bring us closer to the Lord and to prepare us to serve.

6.) Don’t stay in your lane. If you don’t properly stay on track, multiple people can be hurt and stay out of the race. The apostle Paul said, ***“Learn***

from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written' (1 Cor. 4:6 niv). Countless Christian leaders have hurt people in becoming workaholics for God, even trying to make others join them in this folly all the more. They bow down at the altar of "ministry" – not real ministry, just dead church activity. "He [God] does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him" (Ps. 147:10-11). Many Christians today also go beyond the boundaries that God has specifically set for them to run in as Saul did, but the safest place to be is in the center of God's will. You remember how the apostle Paul talked about the importance of not "going beyond" to take on assignments and work not yet designated for him (see 2 Cor. 10:12-16). The Psalmist declared, "I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32).

7.) Push the others to the ground. Egotistical, power-hungry Saul was no longer the topic of songs sung about by the young Jewish girls. He felt very jealous because he was no longer on the cover of Jerusalem magazines, so to speak, so he was determined to do whatever it took to resolve this problem, even if it meant extinguishing the golden boy, Dave.

8.) Never Take Responsibility for Your Own Actions. Come up with religious excuses like Saul did. More than once Saul blamed others for his own bad choices (see 1 Sam. 13:11–12). Saul just wanted to save face and look good before the people. He only cared that the masses still thought well of him. He forgot that no matter what, God sees and really knows what's going on.

9.) Run In The Wrong Direction Away From What Matters Most. Split, Bail, Go AWOL! It's happened in crucial football games – bewildered dudes heading for the wrong goal line. Many people, like Jonah and Saul think they can run from God or hide from Him to their betterment, but they only make matters worse. Once after a great victory, Elijah even ran in the wrong direction, away from a scrawny woman, because he feared what she would do to him. But we must stay the course that the Lord has set for us. If you fear a scary woman, turn to the Lord. We must put first things first.

*You can't run away from trouble.
There ain't no place that far. -- Uncle Remus*

Paul said, "...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 20:22-24).

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary. Isa. 40:31

At a concert, I remember hearing Keith Green sing: “*Well, you can run to the end of the highway and not find what you’re looking for—No, it won’t make your troubles disappear. And you can search to the end of the highway and come back no better than before. To find yourself you’ve got to start right here*” with Jesus.

10.) Say No To Everything You Should Say Yes To. Like “no” to devotional time alone with Jesus, or “no” to fellowship with strong, committed believers.

11.) Say Yes To Everything You Should Say No To. Like time spent with the negative thinkers, peers like the witch at Endor (1 Sam. 28:8). Saul said yes to the wrong counselors, to spears, to pride, to intense hatred, to self-will, to homicide – to SIN. If you say “yes” to an undisciplined life according to what you feel like doing you’ll simply drop off the race track.

Maybe you heard of that man traveling in Canada one springtime when the frost and melting snow made it nearly impossible to drive farther. He saw a sign that read, “*Take care which rut you choose. You will be in it for the next 25 miles.*” That’s a wise warning for us all. Paul learned that the only way to stay the course in the race was to “*discipline [his] body and bring it into subjection*” (1 Cor. 9:27). That implies establishing a consistent pattern of godly behavior. Good health-habits are important, but spiritual disciplines are way more important! Are we choosing to develop consistent habits of prayer, Bible reading, and kindness? Vernon Grounds said, “*A habit is just a rut of routine. But good spiritual discipline can transform our ruts into grooves of grace.*”

Lord, keep me running in Your groove of grace, in the lane You’ve chosen for me; Your will is what I press on to embrace until I reach eternity.

God made me for China. But He also made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure. --Missionary Eric Liddell - Chariots of Fire

*I do not ask for honor, fame while life's short race I run,
but for a will to do Thy will and then Thy glad "Well done." –Meadows*

The world has lost its transient lure—Its evil spell I shun; I've set my course for higher things till earth's brief race is run. —Bosch

12.) Don't Get Mad, Get Even. Like Saul, mull over it time and again. Dwell on how your peeps have lied and let you down. Saul's animosity ultimately destroyed him. He became so envious and resentful when God anointed and began using young David, that zealous shepherd boy. We need to understand God chooses whom He will choose. Even if seriously destructive things are

committed by someone you looked up to, and justice never seems to arrive, don't let bitterness or hatred destroy you. David constantly inquired of the Lord as to what he should do and God gave him specific directions. God might lead you to protect the innocent, but remember that you are not the police to apprehend every sinner. Simply entrust it all into God's hands and do what He says.

God has given you, like Saul, potential. He has given you certain talents and gifts – spiritual assets. And it is up to each one of us to use what God has given us for His glory, not our own. It's up to us to run the race to the best of our ability and play by God's rule-Book. Don't be disqualified. Don't be given to the wrong type of competition and then be sidelined in the race of life! Don't be shipwrecked spiritually. Don't become distracted by circumstances or by others and compare yourself with them. Don't steam, fume or become prideful. Don't play the fool by hanging too close with fools. Don't let small men who constantly swallow camels influence you downward into gnat-straining (see Matt. 23:24). Don't crash and burn like Saul did. That would be such a waste! If you fall down, don't stay down. Get up! People that sweep their dirt under the carpet to hide it and refuse to repent will not win.

13.) Wear Heavy Religious Attire To Run In. “My iniquities... like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps 38:4). Saul believed a runner should wear a coat of heavy mail (1 Sam. 17:38), but Dave wore a different track uniform to run in – a robe of righteousness. How light and cool!

Paul the apostle said, "*All things are lawful for me.*" But then, Paul didn't stop there. Though we have total freedom and there is no condemnation in Christ, Paul went on to say, "*all things are not expedient.*" "Expedient" means to help along the way. The idea is that, as a Christian, I'm running in an IMPORTANT race where not all will finish or be rewarded. Paul said, "**Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, and only one receives the prize.**" (1 Cor. 9:24). There are many things that can impede my progress, which can slow me down in this race. They can keep me from winning the race. We are told to lay aside every weight and sin which so easily besets us, that we might run with patience the race that is set before us. Face it; some activities can become weights rather than wings.

This weight may be an excessive desire for possessions or for a position. It might be a captivating love of money or for power. It could be an endless pursuit of pleasure or mere slavery to sinful passions. Maybe it's that burdensome legalism...to get others flying right! Our watchword must be: Off with the weight!

I don't know about you, but I want to make sure that I win the Prize in the race of faith! God has used men and women – people of great faith, single-mindedly and submissively committed to the glory of God and committed to

His worldwide plan of redemption – to move the Church forward throughout its history. So why can't He use you or me? Why can't He overcome the limitations we struggle with? They knew God intimately, believed God fully, prayed like they meant it and took God at His Word. They accepted the challenge. They ran with patience. They rejoiced when they suffered wrongfully for their faith ...from so called spiritual leaders and sinners, knowing that it was the very testing of their faith that produced the patience to run better. Where they perfect? They were being perfected.

Listen, if you are going to finish the race as did many who have gone before you, you'll need to make some tough decisions. Will you lay aside every weight and forsake the sin of unbelief? Will you run your race with patience as David did? Will you ditch all your idols? Will you run in such a way as to get the Prize? Christ is my prize! Will you fix your eyes on Jesus, setting your mind on things above instead of on things of this world? If you answer "Yes!" in thought, word, and deed ...to each of these challenges, then you will become a race-finisher! You'll become a man or woman of great faith who glorifies the Lord. You will be prepared by God to move the Church forward at this crucial time in history.

Run the straight race thru God's good grace, lift up thine eyes and seek His face; life with its way before us lies, Christ is the path and Christ the prize.

—Monsell

14. Lie down on your sword before you reach the finish line, rather than using it properly to fight the real enemy. Jesus was faithful to the end – He still is. *The goal was reached, the price was paid to ransom all of Adam's race; our guilt and sin on Christ were laid, and now He saves us by His grace.* Paul said, ***"I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"*** (2 Tim. 4:7). Will you? Hebrews 12:1–2 says, ***"Let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish."*** King Saul wasted a lot of time running after and fighting the wrong person (Dave). In the end he purposely fell on his sword. He didn't reach the finish-tape. Don't be like him.

God wants you to win right so keep your eye on the prize.

Have Kurt's fishing devos blessed you? Click on the "Contact" button and let him know!

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