

Running to Win # 10

Watch your Pace

By Dr. Greg Wiens

Last month I had the opportunity to spend a few days in San Diego and attended meetings with Ron Duncan and other state pastors. For those who don't know me well, I detest meetings! So one day I decided I would skip a few of them and head out for a run to clear my head. It was about an eleven mile run to the beach, around a small island and back to the hotel. I set out on the run carefully pacing myself for the return leg. It was wonderful and I enjoyed it all until I turned to head back to the hotel. It was considerably up hill (which meant I ran downhill on the way there without knowing it. No wonder it was such a good run!). Also, the very dry Santa Anna winds were blowing off of the dessert and into my face. I was dehydrated and exhausted before long. I tried every trick I could, and finally gave up and started walking. My mouth was parched and it took forever to get back.

Most runners have messed up a bunch of times in this area called pace. Pace is difficult to gauge because it will vary with every run, race and condition. Your pace is clearly one of the critical components that allow you to finish what you start. The goal of ministry according to Paul in *1 Corinthians 9* and *2 Timothy 4* is to finish the race and to finish it well or, in Paul's terms: "run to win."

Most of us in ministry have at one time or another become exhausted. I won't argue over the term burnt out, but it is often simply a matter of degree.

You know when the phone rings and you cringe...or that email pops up and your stomach knots. Not because the requests are ridiculous or even taxing, but because you have so little to give. I have known too many who have come to this state of exhaustion and given up in ministry. The little things just eat away at you and you lack the energy or fortitude it takes to continue. So you check out of ministry and check into something else that doesn't seem to bother you as much.

Others have become exhausted and taken the road of least resistance and have made poor moral choices. They too leave ministry. Great leaders throughout our movement and others have been lost to the Kingdom because they don't understand pace. God, the creator, first models this in the creation. As we all know, he took a Sabbath. He built into creation the rhythm of rest and restoration, not for more work, but for health.

Runners know that a healthy pace not only allows you to finish the race well, it will allow you to run future races well. It promotes long-term health. In the same way, when we pace ourselves in ministry it produces in us a long-term health in ministry. It allows us to win and to help others win. I have found that it is easy to see an unhealthy pace in someone else, but much more difficult to see it in yourself, especially if you are seeing significant results from pushing yourself.

An interesting part of pace is the concept of intervals. I have seen some use pace to justify never pushing themselves, which is an extreme opposite reaction to exhaustion. In most races or training runs, there are times you push yourself very hard beyond your current conditioning and then slow back to your normal pace. You do this to make up some time, run up a hill, or simply move up in the race. Recent research indicates that it is only as you run these intervals, that you will see yourself increase your conditioning, get healthier and faster. The same is true in ministry.

There are times when you simply must work very hard and long hours and that is okay. The problem is when this “interval” becomes a lifestyle. Losing Doug Talley and other staff (and not replacing them for the time being) this past year, have caused a significant hole in FLCOGM. So, for the last three months, the whole FLCOGM team has had to work very hard and long hours. We had to do it to maintain our level of service to the churches with less people. I knew this was an interval and could not continue forever. We talked about it, developed some online systems which you will be hearing about in the next few weeks and put some plans in operation. We now can see the light at the end of the tunnel and are beginning to ratchet back to normal pace.

One of my coaches asked me yesterday if I was cutting back yet, which is a good and fair question. We all go through periods of ministry when we have to push ourselves through our current level of comfort or conditioning. This is okay as long as it is just an “interval” and you are 1) aware of it, 2) have a plan on how to achieve a normal pace again, and 3) have someone holding you accountable to do so. Again, this is where a coach is so helpful. They want you to succeed and make a significant impact for the Kingdom, so they will help you work through intervals without allowing that pace to become a lifestyle.

Pace is learning to use your current resources in a way to produce long-term impact for the Kingdom of God. It doesn't mean you are always on slow or autopilot. It does mean that you adjust your pace depending on the demands and resources available and do not build a style of leading that continues to cause you to run in the deficit.

For me personally, I have to continually monitor my pace. I need others to speak into my life about it. Many of you have done that in the past and I am grateful. Like Paul, I too want to say at the end of my life, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE AND RAN TO WIN.