

## Running to Win #13 Developing a Routine

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

I am a person who enjoys spontaneity. I drive home from the office using different routes simply because I like variety. I love going to places I have never been to, so I can learn new things. However; as much as I like things to be unpredictable, I have learned through years of running that to be able to maintain my discipline, I have to be consistent in a routine. I run in the morning and run the same course. I check my times at the same place. At the YMCA, I use the same equipment and follow a similar workout plan.

Why would I keep such routines in my exercise but enjoy spontaneity in the other areas of my life? I have learned that a routine makes it much easier for me to be disciplined. When I follow a consistent pattern in my training, it allows me to follow a path that I know works and I don't have to work up my will to do it. I just get up in the morning, put on my shoes, shorts and shirt and run. When I come back I shower and then have my time alone with God.

If something messes up that sequence, I then have to make conscious decisions to work out, study the scripture, meditate and pray. If I have to make these decisions I have to display a will and discipline that are not easy for me. I see this demonstrated when I travel or get out of my routine. When I travel and don't know where or when to run, I often don't have the fortitude to be consistent. I tell myself that I will do it later, but seldom do.

When guests stay in our home and I need to be hospitable in the morning, I find that I put off my physical and spiritual disciplines. This is because it gets me out of my normal routine. Obviously, there are times when this is fine, but if it happens too often I do lose my rhythm of discipline and experience negative consequences.

As I have written elsewhere, I am not a naturally disciplined person. I have had to learn strategies that encourage me to be the man God desires me to be. Routines are one of the ways I have learned to be disciplined. I can be very consistent in my discipline if I don't have to make those decisions – I just do it (like Nike says). I do it without thinking, kind of like a habit.

A habit is something you do without having to think about it. By creating habits of discipline I am able to maintain the critical priorities of my life. It is much easier for me to maintain habits if I don't have to think about it. If I had to conjure up my will to decide whether to run or have my devotional time every day, many days I simply wouldn't make the right decision. This is because I enjoy spontaneity and living in the moment. However, this leads to a very poor long-term growth profile. Because I have made this choice an automatic response in my routine, I just get up and do it; it takes very little

discipline or will power. I no longer have to choose, I just do it. The fewer decisions I have to make in the process the better. This is where a routine or a consistent way of doing things becomes a habit.

I hope this makes sense for those of you who lack the natural strengths of discipline. This principle, which I have learned from running, has changed my life. If I need to develop discipline or will power in any area of my life, I attempt to make it simply a matter of routine or habit as part of my lifestyle. This is true in areas like eating well, getting enough sleep, journaling, spending quiet time with God, and going through my email messages.

Now let me clarify that I do change the course I run every so often. It really isn't impossible for me to run a different route. In fact, if Mary Kay is with me on her bike, I am very willing to take a different course. But this is because I am already running so the difficult decision has been made. As I write this article, it is early in the morning and cold and raining. Yet, I know I will run because that is the way I start my day; it is a habit.

Another interesting side note of this is that I usually run by myself. Unlike most runners, I am a solitary soldier when it comes to running. A few weeks ago, I was talking with Joe Palm (one of our pastors in the Orlando area) and he was discussing how he learned to run with others and enjoys running with others much more than running by himself. It is a matter of choice and style, but I believe one of the reasons I enjoy running by myself is because it is a routine for me. I can be more consistent by myself. I don't have to wait or expect another person to show up. I know part of it is that I spend so much time with people that I just need a little space and time for God and me to talk.

This is it until next week, when I will write about the battle for the mind, or is it... the battle *in* the mind? I think it is both...