

## Running to Win #11

### Running to a Point

By Dr. Greg Wiens

Now that we have discussed pace, it is now time to discuss times when you SHOULD NOT run to pace. In running there are times when you should run to a point ahead of you. It may be a road sign, a building, a street light or even a curve in the road. There are other times when you should run to the person who may be 50 yards ahead of you; to try to catch up or just keep with them. Distance runners know the difference between running to a pace and running to a point or a person. There is a time for each approach; good runners know the difference.

When runners are exhausted during a long race, the pace can become monotonous. It is at these times that runners must have the presence of mind to focus on a point within their line of sight. The end of the race is simply too far away to keep motivation. Your energy level flags and you know you can't keep going for all those miles. That is the time to focus on something much closer like the blue shirt on the person ahead of you. You just try to keep up with them. Or to run to the street light which you can see blinking ahead. That is often attainable, and when you get there you simply set your sights on something that is, again, ahead and attainable. This cycle can take you through the last six to eight miles of a marathon very well, while the finish line is well over 14,000 strides away! Focusing this way, works especially well when you are trying to keep a pace through all those strides.

The Christian walk in general and the ministry in particular can also be too demanding to think of finishing our lives well in forty, fifty or even sixty years. As we go through tough times, just keeping the pace day in and day out can be very monotonous and boring. It becomes very difficult to keep motivated and we begin to worry. In Matthew 6, Jesus deals specifically with this subject. Jesus tells us: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

During economic times like this, it is easy to become exhausted trying to put one foot in front of another. And so, like a runner, it is very easy to simply give in to lesser things like worry. But Jesus tells us to keep our focus on what is directly in front of us (TODAY!), and not worry about tomorrow, and the next day. It is amazing how focusing on what I need to be doing today, in this next minute, hour, or few hours can keep me going.

Maybe we need to follow a person when we are exhausted. By this I mean that mentors, heroes and coaches can keep us focused in times like these. We can ask ourselves: "what would my mentor or coach do in this kind of a moment?" We need to just keep up with them; allow them to set the pace and fall in behind and simply follow them.

To be a great leader often requires a discipline of thinking to keep focused on the immediate goal ahead and not at all on the obstacles that must be overcome. Jesus' admonition is to leave tomorrow to him. When I am leading through tough times and having to make difficult decisions, there is something intrinsically healthy about leaving tomorrow's decisions to God by faith, and simply being God's leader in the moment today. The time for this kind of disciplined focus is when we are "growing weary in doing good." The time to plan and strategize for the future is when you are strong, alert and sharp.

When you come close to the finish line, running to a pace and person fade into oblivion. When you are close enough to the finish line to "almost smell it", research indicates that motivation and

performance rise significantly. A physiological change comes over the body and we actually far exceed the normal physical limits of performance and push ourselves to finish...focusing on the finish line.

Sometimes in ministry we need to run to the finish line as well. However just as with finishing a race, there needs to be a recovery time. Too often we push and push to reach a goal, program or ministry and then ratchet right into the next ministry push. This only produces burnout and loss of long-term effectiveness.

As I said last week, most of the time it is best to run to a pace, however in reality we all need to run to win by running to a point/person at times. That is the good news about experience; you begin to know when to run to a pace and when to run to a point.