Don’t Get Stuck Spectating

Robynn King 17 July 2018



I recently asked a tri-athlete what his training programme looked like, in preparation for his first triathlon. We had been discussing Paul’s admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:5 with a group of friends, where Paul says, ‘An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules’. While of course it’s worthwhile talking about what rules Paul might be referring to, and to understand what that means for us as disciples of Jesus, it struck me that we don’t often deal with what it takes for an athlete to even get to the starting line.
When we look at the book of second Timothy – in the words of DJ Khaled – Paul is giving Timothy some “major keys” with regards to walking out this walk of faith in Christ. He encourages Timothy in his calling and advises him on how to instruct those around him in the ways of the Lord. He also gives him illustrations using the soldier, the athlete and the farmer as characters who model our walk with Jesus.

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My tri-athlete friend said he trained seven days a week for four months before his first race, which amounted to approximately 20 hours per week. Let that sink in. Monday to Sunday, for four months, across three sporting disciplines. Wow! He competed in that first race and is now on a journey to “go pro”, so the daily training sessions have not abated.

I like triathlon. I know a lot about the sport and I like to keep my eye on the tri-events happening

in my town. When friends are competing, I'm that overly-enthusiastic person tracking their progress online, checking if they are making the times they set out to achieve. I even know the rules, but unfortunately, all my knowledge and enthusiasm about triathlons does not make me a triathlete.

Similarly, in the context of church life, we can come to meetings on a Sunday, raise our hands as the music team plays, attend a community group in the middle of the week, and even profess to be a Christian, and yet still not actually be a disciple of Jesus. We could make all the right moves, so to speak, and still not be athletes doing the necessary training, adhering to the required disciplines and running the race of faith.

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV) Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

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If we take Jesus at His word here, we become aware of the consequence of simply being a spectator, or even a "fan" in the body of Christ. As true athletes, running the race with endurance, we must then ensure that we keep to the disciplines of our faith with diligence.

If we don't know where to start, we can take our cue from the early church who were a people who 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42). I would suggest that it was because of this focused way of life that 'awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles' (Acts 2:43).

So then, just like the moments of bliss athletes experience during a competitive race (and even in their training), may we experience the joy that comes from sincerely following Jesus and truly being a member of His body, the church.