

# Coffee Break

Promoting effective discipleship training

Issue #1 — "You want me to do...what?"



I'm challenged by this Bible passage:

1 Cor 9:24-27 (TNIV)

*24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*

*25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

*26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.*

*27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

This passage includes an analogy with elite athletes. In particular, Paul—inspired by the Holy Spirit—would have had in mind athletes who participated in the Greek games of his time...the forerunner of our modern Olympics.

The main purpose of an analogy is to help us understand something we may not know so well...by comparing it with something that we do understand well (or better).

So, this passage is encouraging us to consider how elite athletes prepare and perform, so that we can better understand what will be required if we want to maximise our potential as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And, to emphasise how important this is, the point is made that, if elite athletes will undertake "*strict training*"—to ensure that they can perform at their best, in an endeavour to win a "*race*"...and receive a prize that won't last beyond this world—how much more should we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, be prepared to undertake "*strict training*"...to ensure that we "*run*" our "*race*" of life "*in such a way as to get the prize*" ("*a crown that will last forever*")...and don't end up "*disqualified for the prize*".

I can see two broad approaches that are worth considering in evaluating this analogy:

1. What attitudes and disciplines would an elite athlete need to have (or need to develop) in order to "*run in such a way as to get the prize*".
2. What might be the role of coaches, and coaching, in helping an elite athlete reach their potential.

Let's start with the athlete:

1. In those days there was only one prize for an event...for the winner. There were no prizes for coming second or third, so those athletes ran to win...not to get a minor placing.
2. Each athlete would have known which "race" they were to "run" and they would have prepared with that event in mind. The preparation for a discus thrower would have been different to the preparation for a sprinter, or a marathon runner, because each would require different skills and abilities to perform at their best.
3. At the same time, in researching the preparation that athletes in Paul's day would undergo, it was interesting to note that their preparation wasn't limited to what might be directly relevant to their event—each athlete was also trained in areas that went well beyond even the general field of athletics...to embrace other areas of excellence.
4. Each athlete would embrace "*strict training*" in order to prepare, and perform, at their best.

What about us?

1. There is one important difference between athletes and us—God has a "*race marked out for us*" to "run" in life and we aren't in competition with anyone else:

Heb 12:1 (TNIV)

*...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*

Then, who (or what) are we competing against? The short answer is: Everything that could prevent us from fulfilling God's purpose for our life.

2. Do we understand what God has called us to do...what "*the race marked out for us*" looks like?

I have developed some practical study material, under the title "Why Am I Here?", that is designed to help disciples of Jesus recognise and outwork the call of God in their life. These studies can be applied individually and they are also ideal for use in small interactive groups—e-groups or in-person groups—where it's possible to benefit from the insights and encouragement of others who share the same journey. That's a form of coaching...something we'll explore next time.

You can read more about this study series, and download a sample, including a Table of Contents, by clicking on this link: [whyamihere.net.au/resources/studies/why-am-i-here/](http://whyamihere.net.au/resources/studies/why-am-i-here/).

3. Although each of us has a unique race to run in life, each disciple of Jesus is also called to grow in ways that are the same for each of us—for example, to love God and to love people. There are many types of "*training*" we might embrace that could help us do that.
4. What "*strict training*" am I undergoing in order to grow to my potential as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

"You want me to do...what?"

# Reflections

...on effective discipleship training

Issue #1



[ Sid ] I checked out the scriptures that have to do with exerting ourselves in our Christian walk:

1 Cor 9:26,27	The boxing ring	2 Tim 2:2	The relay race
Galatians 5:7	The obstacle race	2 Tim 2:5	The wrestling match
Heb 12:1,2	The marathon	Phil 3:12,14	The last lap
1 Tim 4:7,8	Gymnastics		

[ Sonia ] It's interesting that you look at this analogy of an athlete. I read this last night and was challenged by it. Do I train, like an athlete, for the life Christ has prepared in advance for me?

I have been training with a group of year 11 school girls (actually young women) for a 48km hike in the Gold Coast hinterland. This is the Kokoda challenge. It's a tough event. I did it last year with my first daughter and her friends, and now I am going to be doing it with my second daughter and her friends. Walking 48km up and down hills! It will take us between 12 and 14 hours...we hope. The maximum time to complete is 39 hours. It is done in the spirit of Kokoda — mateship, endurance, courage and sacrifice — and we have been training for about 6 months.

There is one young lady on my team (I'll call her 'M') who is an athlete. She is in training for the national championships and on track for the next Olympics in the event of diving. I am amazed at her athlete's schedule, and training for Kokoda is just a sideline for this schedule. She gets up before 5am six days a week and does 'dry' training in a gym for 1-3 hours before going to school for the day. Then she trains again at night, five nights, a week from 5-8pm. On Saturdays, she trains from noon-4/5pm. Sunday is her day off. On Sundays, she just goes for a 5km run and a 3-5km walk!

When we do Kokoda training, she trains in the gym first, walks 20-30km up and down hills with us, and then heads off to her usual diving training session. She amazes me. She is so disciplined. (The rest of the team has a shower and collapses on their bed for an hour or so after training!)

I am also reminded, though, of the support crew that we will have during the Kokoda event. I remember what a vital role they played last year. They bring along all our food and set up a warm and comfortable couple of breaks for us on route, massage and retape our feet as necessary, apply first aid as necessary and then push us up out of the comfortable chairs to continue walking.

M's family is her support crew in her diving training. She doesn't always 'want' to train, and sometimes there is pain to push through. Her parents always encourage her to keep going.



I see several things in this for our reflection on 1 Corinthians 9.

We need to be clear on what it is we are training for — you alluded to this as you talked about discovering 'Why am I here?' This helps us to focus and not clutter life with everything good we could do, but just with what God has called us to do, specifically and corporately.

The tremendous role of support crew/coaches/ trainers in this race. What role do I play as a coach or support crew for someone else? All of M's coaches are former Olympians! Who do I surround myself with so that I can be encouraged for the race? My greatest encourager is the Holy Spirit. But I need to stay listening for his voice ...and my support crew of friends, home group, family, and church family help keep me on track...but only if I allow them to.

Absolute focus on the goal. Being prepared to do all that it takes, sacrificing some things to prepare ourselves for the call.

Thank you for writing and sharing this 'Coffee Break'. It's been thought provoking. And thank you for being one of the support crew to encourage me to train for the call.

**[ Emma ]** I am so thankful that you chose to send me your coffee break newsletter. The amazing thing was that I hopped up this morning, planning to spend time in prayer, and then my little one woke up early. So I wrapped her in a blanket, got her bottle, headed out to the lounge room, made a coffee, then sat down to see your email.

God's timing never ceases to amaze me. I have been struggling a little lately to try to find some extra time in the morning to spend with Papa God. There always seems to be a reason to sleep in or a blockage of some sort just in the area of prayer in my life at this time.

Your newsletter has reminded me this morning of what is required of me to run this amazing race Father has placed before me. I got a picture of our elite athletes and how much goes into their training. How, at first, it's hard to wake up early...it's hard to train...it's hard to miss out on what others are doing. But, as they start to run, the rewards are beyond measure and to win the race is a prize they carry for a lifetime.

I want to run my race—a race where the rewards are beyond measure and the prize of such worth it is beyond any other. Thank you for sending me this newsletter. I would receive one every morning if I could and would love to continue receiving them.

**[ Elizabeth ]** I have just read the material you sent. It is very good and, this morning, the Holy Spirit gave me a picture of running a race. It was about breakthrough. I had this picture of the winner breaking through the banner at the end of the race...or, in a football team, the leader breaking through a large banner onto the field. Although I'm not a runner, in the spirit I understand there's a tremendous momentum in running that can smash through that next level of endurance. It seems exhilarating to me and I can smell the victory.

I love the rhythm that a runner sets up with their body that carries them forward with the least amount of energy, whether it is a fast race or a long distance one. I know too that strategy is all important in winning ...that we need to run with a plan for our body as well as our spirit. Our body is there to carry us through to the finish and, because our body is the tent in which we dwell in this world, I need to look after, and listen to, my body, without letting it rule over me.

# Coffee Break

Promoting effective discipleship training

Issue #2 — "Send in the coaches"



In "Coffee Break" #1, we considered this Bible passage:

1 Cor 9:24-27 (TNIV)

*24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*

*25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

*26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.*

*27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

In particular, we focused on the need for each participant to undertake "*strict training*" if they want to win the "*race*" they are running...whether as an elite athlete or a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Here is another key perspective on this passage. Every elite athlete—whether in an individual sport or a team sport—has a coach...even multiple coaches...to help them perform at their best.

For example, in a top football team (of any code), there may be a head coach, an offensive coach, a defensive coach, maybe an endurance coach and a skills coach, as well as specialised input coming from medical, and other, support staff.

This coaching is aimed at helping each player become all that they can possibly become as a player...individually, and in combination with others.

Even people who may not regard themselves as elite athletes may engage a personal trainer, a study tutor, a financial advisor, or someone else who provides them with some form of specialised coaching input, if they are serious about developing in some area of life.

In the Greek games of Paul's day, a similar thing happened. In fact, it is known that athletes preparing for those games not only received coaching directly related to their event but also received specialised input in areas of general personal development. Paul would have had that in mind when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the passage above and compared our development, as disciples of Jesus Christ, with the development of elite athletes.

So, here are two questions I ask myself in relation to growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ:

1. Who coaches me to become all that God has designed me to become?
2. Who do I coach to help them become all that God has designed them to become?

In my experience in church life, training (for the whole church) is usually delivered through weekly preaching/teaching...in a non-interactive setting. In addition, there may be opportunities for small group activities, specialised ministry and some mentoring. And individuals may supplement this, in varying degrees, with their own personal study/ministry.

Traditional, non-interactive preaching/teaching can (and, I'm sure, often does) deliver life-changing information and motivation. But that isn't the same as "coaching"...unless there is an effective follow-on process that aims to ensure that each person:

- (a) has heard, received, and understood, the material delivered to them,
- (b) knows how to apply it,
- (c) applies it, and
- (d) evaluates their application of that material and adjusts, as necessary, to get the best outcome.

Even if sermon material is discussed in a small group setting, that may not generate effective application unless there is some form of individual/group accountability to apply what is taught, evaluate the results and adjust action as required...as you would expect in training as an elite athlete.

If there is no process in place to assess application, then relying on non-interactive sermons to deliver discipleship training, by analogy, would be like a sports coach trying to train an individual, or team, by giving them a weekly address...without any interaction or training drills...without being with them when they apply that...and without a process to find out how they perform or how to help them improve the outcome.

In coaching, the focus shifts from the delivery of information to the application of information.

Effective coaching isn't designed to deliver information and motivation to an audience in the hope that it will be applied—it is designed to activate, check, and develop, personal/group applications to achieve demonstrable development. And, normally, effective coaching won't deliver new training input without checking, first, what has been applied from previous instruction/development sessions.

How much of our discipleship training is effective coaching?

Let's come back to the analogy in our starting passage. It's well known that elite athletes seek out coaches who will help them *"get a crown that will not last"*...and, in many cases, develop further so they, in turn, can coach others...to *"get a crown that will not last"*. As disciples of Jesus, how much more, then, should we seek out coaches who will help us *"get a crown that will last forever"*...and help us develop further so that we, in turn, can coach others...to help them *"get a crown that will last forever"*.

The "Great Commission" is meant to be a relay race, where we make disciples...who will make disciples...who will make disciples...

I don't think we can do that well without effective coaching.



# Reflections

...on effective discipleship training

Issue #2



## Reflections on "Reflections" #1

**[Carling]** I love this...I feel like it creates a sense of community between people we may have never met!

**[Lisa]** I loved reading what other people thought. I was up early sitting on the river bank, on my own fishing, and that was a great opportunity to read "Reflections". It made me smile to think I don't even have my Bible with me but I can still hear from brothers and sisters I haven't even met. It encourages me.

**[Matt]** Thank you for the "Reflections" email this morning; it was great reading some of the responses! I know I was challenged in regards to identifying my unique race and identifying that which would try to prevent me from fulfilling it.

**[Leesa]** I just love the perfect timing of God! He never ceases to amaze me and I thank you for being part of my 'support crew'. This morning I got up at 5am to take my husband to the starting line for the 96km Kokoda Challenge and I'm now home for a short break before joining my 13 year old son and his 48km Kokoda Challenge support team. So, I enjoyed, and related to, reading the reflection that you sent. There really is a great crowd of witnesses cheering us on.

**[Cliff]** What has been so striking for me in its simplicity is the practicality of our Christian walk before God. That if we undertake to give Him the time, and remain disciplined in placing ourselves before Him in a receptive posture, both in mind/heart and physical availability, God is faithful to answer. The three contributors to "Reflections" touched on both those factors: availability and discipline.

## Other Reflections

**[J]** I would love to keep getting issues of this please...I am in a dark place at present...it has been a long journey of peaks and troughs, but I am still here and still trying hard for my family! So this certainly has come at a good time! I hope you don't mind, but I did forward the attachments on to a friend who is also going through a difficult time as well (vastly different to my situation). Both of us have recently run a Marathon and half Marathon...and the illustration of running the race was timely for both of us.

**[Anne]** A group of four of us gathered last night and went through the Coffee Break newsletter. We had a great time discussing our race, the strict training, the importance of coaches and the things we can change to help us run toward the prize.

[Warren] One of the things that has been impressed on me about your topic is that, once in the kingdom of God, people develop their spiritual muscles at different rates. Some stay little seeds, or as little children, for much longer than others and need the help of those athletes who have raced ahead. We want to cross the finish line as one people...all having won the prize...and my desire is to be patient with the slow learners so they can run with me eventually.

[Tika] The message that we're getting from "Coffee Break" is so in line with what God has placed in our heart. God's heart beat is always about "people" as His delightful creation. We are designed to have relationship with God and with others. I confidently state that I cannot do my race alone. We need each other in this journey here on earth.

Talking about an athlete, I would like to share my own experience of being a Karate athlete in my early childhood. I joined with a Karate team from when I was 5 years old until I turned 15. I could never forget this experience. Where the majority of children at my age want to be playing, I had to be in training sessions most days after school. I remember all the hard training that I had to put up with prior to a tournament where the best Karate athletes get medals, or simply if we want get to the next level. I was brown/black belt, and a junior coach myself at that time. Every single day, I had to be in training sessions. Sunday was the only day that I could rest my muscles.

I won many medals from Bronze to Gold, and I remember the joy that I shared with my coach, parents, and the team, every time I won. For all the medals that I or my team won, we paid a big price for that. I wasn't doing it alone, I was surrounded with people who also worked hard together with me.

One thing that I remember the most from many hard training sessions is my coach always saying: "FOCUS" on your technique. He often shouted it out very loud, then continued with "Give Me Your Very Best". Oh boy, how could I ever forget those words. Those words truly kept me going even when I didn't feel like coming to the training. But for the sake of the Gold medal, I pushed myself to the very limit. I only missed training if I couldn't get up out of bed. My coach would come to our home to check if I was really sick or not. He was the best coach in town and very strict. His own kids were the best athletes themselves. I wanted the Gold medal so badly, and I was prepared to do any training sessions that my coach prepared for me.

This experience reminds me of our journey with Christ. How much more we have to discipline ourself and put the things of God above all. No matter what happens in our life, to keep FOCUS on Jesus alone and nothing else. I feel that our heavenly Father, and the whole of heaven, are cheering us on in our journey.

"FOCUS on JESUS alone", "GIVE US YOUR VERY BEST" for eternity.

[Chris] Making disciples for the Lord, to follow Him, ought to be the main emphasis of our lives. I have coached and managed soccer teams and found that it is not just about making them elite athletes and winning the game but helping them become winners within themselves.

My greatest challenge, coaching players from the line, was finding you could say one thing to one player, and get the best out of them, and say the same to another and cause them to drop their bundle and retreat. I realised that, as a coach, I needed to know my players (disciples) before I could coach (disciple) them and then I would know what to say to help them be a winner within themselves.

Unfortunately, we can have a fast food mentality with discipling and want to get people to the winning line before they are ready...perhaps that happens when we are more interested in ourselves as coaches than those we are coaching or discipling.

I think an example of a good coach is Wayne Bennett, formally Brisbane Broncos coach and now Knights coach. I don't know him, nor have I met him, but I have heard players under him say that he knows them as a person, helps them as a person and, as a result, gets the very best out of them. That's interesting...because we have our Lord who knows us individually, loves us unconditionally, and we have this confidence in Him that He is with us and we can overcome and be over-comers in all things.