



LESSONS FROM A FUN RUN (Sermon)

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Purpose: To understand that the Christian walk is a divine race.

Introduction: As the time nears for a new and very different GC Session, it is a reminder of a previous GC Session that took place in San Antonio, Texas, USA, in 2015.

Emails were sent out to delegates, and many were excited about the news. What news? There was going to be a 5k run during the 60th GC session on the 5th of July. Excitedly, many registered for the race and waited for the appointed time. While waiting for the date, communications kept coming, keeping everyone informed of the progress of the race preparations. Sadly, during the waiting period, some participants withdrew for one reason or another. Perhaps it was because they found other engagements that were more important and appealing than that race. Engaging in the race would mean that they miss out on some other activity they deemed more important—so they withdrew.

Our Christian walk is a race. Hebrews 12:1 reads, “Therefore, 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.”

There are several lessons to be drawn from this 5km race.

Lesson 1: Waiting for the return of Christ is like participating in the race.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is going to come for the second time to take us home. John 14:3 reads, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

While many knew about the race and registered, others chose not to. Those of us who know that Christ is coming are waiting for His return. Unfortunately, there are some who know about the coming of Christ but are not willing or prepared to wait. Many people know about the coming of Christ, but because of the cares of this world, they have lost their first love. Many no longer behave like people waiting for the return of Christ. This group of Christ’s followers needs revival and reformation.

On the other hand, there is a group that is not waiting for the coming of Christ at all because they do not know about His coming. This group is waiting for us to tell them about the love of Christ and that He will be coming to take us home. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

We are called to GO! By the grace of God, may your response be “I WILL GO!”

While waiting for the day of the race, the organizers regularly communicated to the participants. While we are waiting for Jesus to take us home, we need to have open communication with Him through prayer and Bible study. This communication will give us a deeper experience with Christ. In fact, our communication with Jesus enhances our ability to witness. In *Steps to Christ*, page 80, Ellen White states, “If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation.”

Lesson 2: Preparing for the race is important.

Before a race, participants should exercise so that they will be fit enough to take part. In like manner, as Christians there are exercises that we need to do so that we are ready to meet Jesus when He comes. We need prayer as we wait for Christ’s return. Romans 12:12 reads, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Reading our Bibles is a great waiting tool as written in 1 Timothy 4:13: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” The command to witness was given by Jesus just before He left, as recorded in Matthew 28, where He commanded us to go and preach the good news to the whole world. These exercises will keep our faith strong and keep us fit to enter the kingdom of God. In addition, these exercises will develop in us a Christlike character.

Lesson 3: The race participants are one, big, family of God.

As participants were preparing on the day of the race, they worked together as a family. One group called themselves the “Awesome Four.” Some took pictures just before the race. As the race began, in less than a minute, those in groups became separated from each other—lost in the crowd of fellow runners. Though participants could not see their group members, it was known that all were there somewhere, running the same race.

In like manner, as families, we will not always be assigned to do the same ministry work in God’s vineyard. We may end up with totally different roles and assignments, but what is important is to know that we are all part of God’s family, preparing for Christ’s soon return. John 1:12 reads, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (ESV).

Indeed, as we move on our Christian journey, the family becomes larger and larger. We soon realize that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we are family, characteristics of the family should rule: love, patience, unity, support, and encouragement. 1 John 4:20 reminds us that “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

Lesson 4: We need to support each other during the race.

As they ran through the first km, runners focused on the goal to finish the race. They may have even reminded themselves not to walk unless really exhausted. When approaching the second km peg, some start feeling tired. One young lady joined with another, and together

they encouraged each other to finish the race. The encouragement is appreciated, and we can draw some important lessons from this. As Christians, we need the spiritual support of fellow believers. We need to encourage each other as we journey on. However, we need to also remember that the actual finishing of this spiritual race is on an individual basis. We cannot ride another's coattails over the finish line.

Lesson 5: What matters is running the race, not knowing about the race.

A lady named Nditsheni was not aware of the race. When she finally heard about it, two days beforehand, she determined to join the race even though registration had been closed. On the day of the race, she woke up early and went to the meeting point. Fortunately, she was able to register and take part in the race. In addition, one of the facilitators brought her a T-shirt.

This too opens our eyes to a truth about Christ's coming. It doesn't matter how long you have known about the coming of Christ, what matters is your ability to live a Christian life from the time you know about His coming. Even in the last moments of time. Having been born Adventist will not get us to heaven. It is living a life that is totally surrendered to God that will get us to heaven. This experience reminds us that "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16).

Lesson 6: Finishing the race is remarkable.

About 100m from the finishing point there was a huge group of people encouraging everyone to finish the race. At that point, runners got a new surge of energy and with a broad, award-winning smile, they finished the race! There was great jubilation from the other runners. As people rejoined their groups and supporters, they were exceedingly joyful. 2 Timothy 2:5 tells us, "Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. Finishing the race is the rule.

Similarly, as we get towards the end of earth's history, we now need to finish the harvest and go home. We need to work harder at winning souls for the kingdom. We all need to finish the work: our neighbors, workmates, colleagues, etc. need to know about the good news. The greatest joy in heaven will be to find your complete family saved!

Lesson 7: Leaving judgement to God.

One participant, Pastor Patience Shumba, was very happy to see her husband and daughter at the finishing point celebrating the achievement. She was also overjoyed and shocked to see her son, Nyasha. Her family and most of her friends were worried that Nyasha wouldn't make it through the race. They never saw Nyasha prepare for the race, even though he told them casually that he was preparing. Pastor Shumba and her family assumed he did not prepare and would not fare well. What lesson can we learn from this? John said it best when he counseled people to "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly," (John 7:24).

In heaven there will be many surprises. We are going to see people we wrote off while on this earth. We are going to miss some people we expected to be in heaven. At that point, our Jesus will tell us that they didn't make it! Dear Fellow Christians, let's not judge each other, let's leave that with the all-knowing God.

Lesson 8: Unknown facts should not discourage you.

As they started the race, many participants didn't have a clue about the route but just ran along with others. Similarly, not knowing the date of Christ's return should not make us live a less Christian life. In Matthew 25:13, the Bible tells us, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

If we know that He is coming, we should continue living a genuine, Christian life—a life totally surrendered to God. There are passages in the Bible that are not clear, and we do not understand them. We should not worry about that. Deuteronomy 29:29 reads: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

Lesson 9: A reward awaits those who finish the race.

Those who registered for the race in San Antonio received nice gifts, including a pedometer, while those who completed the race received medals. The medals are durable and cherished by many. Fellow Christians, there are benefits from living a life surrendered to Christ. Some of the benefits include: good health, peace of mind, joy, and happiness—far more durable than any earthly medal.

The ultimate and final reward will be eternal life as we read it from John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." We will also receive a crown—"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away," (1 Peter 5:4). One day the earthly medals we strive so hard to earn will pass away. But not the eternal life Jesus gives for finishing His race. Can you imagine spending eternity with our Lord and Savior? I want to be there! Let's plan to be there by God's grace.

Conclusion: Our Christian journey is a race. May we remember these nine lessons from the 50th GC Session race. Let's run our race successfully.

**All Bible texts are from NIV unless otherwise stated