

I used to be a runner, but my running days are long gone thanks to arthritis in my back. Now I have many memories that I cherish, which also includes the discipline and hard work it took to competitively run all those various races (5Ks, 10Ks, one 30K, two half marathons, three full marathons, plus other races of various distances). You cannot take short cuts in your training if you want to compete. You need to discipline yourself and work hard. Sometimes that meant going for a run when I did not feel like it. Sometimes it meant going for a run in the rain or when it was cold. But let me tell you something, those times I went running, seemingly being dragged outside kicking and screaming, never did I regret it in the end. Sounds weird, huh? But it is the truth.

I was once told, *“Pray, even when you do not feel like praying. Actually, those are the moments when you need to pray all the more. But whatever you do, just pray.”* And that makes a lot of sense to me. There have been moments when I did not feel like praying. Sometimes I am in a crabby mood. Sometimes I am upset with someone. Sometimes I feel guilty over a particular sin. Sometimes I am just in a funk that I cannot explain. Whatever it is, if Satan can get you down and give you reasons not to pray, and you take the bait, then he has you right where he wants you. Therefore, you need to go to your prayer closet all the more, “kicking and screaming” if need be, and just pray. Sometimes it will feel lifeless, but God is still listening. Sometimes you may feel distant, but God is right there. Sometimes it will feel useless, but it is anything but that. Actually, you will be beating Satan down as you train your heart for battle.

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. [1 Corinthians 9:24-27]

On Wednesday, February 14, Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Wherever you are in your faith, I encourage you to train your heart. Pick a spiritual discipline (i.e. prayer journal, fasting, meditation, scripture reading, etc) and go at it, and do not listen to the excuses that Satan will whisper in your ear. Just start and keep at it and watch what the Spirit will do in and through you. Discipline your heart and you will never regret it. Discipline your heart and glorify our Lord. Amen.