**THE LONGEST RACE**

The marathon is the longest race in the Olympic games and is part of athletics. Athletics is considered the Olympic sport by excellence, it is the king of sports. The fastest men on the planet and the most resistant, capable of running long distances, participate in it. At the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games, the first to finish the marathon competition was Eliud Kipchoge, an athlete born in Kenya, Africa who holds the world record for the marathon by doing it in an official time of 2 hours 1 minute and 39 seconds. How did he accomplish this achievement? He himself gave the answer: "Discipline and effort." When he was a child, every day, he had to run to and from school, 5 miles. When he arrived to his house, Eliud used to ride his bicycle for over 12 miles working to earn some money and help his mother. At the age of 16, having an experienced coach, and with hard discipline and effort, for the first time, he won a world championship. Today he is considered one of the greatest athletes of modern times.

**The school of discipline and effort**

When we listen to stories about athletes and their achievements, we should remember that in life it is necessary to have clear goals, strive, believe and to be disciplined. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.”(1 Corinthians 9: 24-25 NKJV).

We have to run in such a way that we reach the goal. In summary, you have to give your best. We have to understand that he who fights, is temperate in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25). In simpler words, he who fights, is submitted to training. When God spoke to Joshua, He gave him an instruction: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God *is* with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1: 9 NKJV). For Joshua, it was not an option, it was a command. In the same way, for you my child. Being strong and brave and trusting in God is an order, a divine mandate. God promises to be with you. Remember: “The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm.” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 509.1)

**An incorruptible crown**

In every race, athletes seek to achieve a goal, they fight for a crown. They fight for an earthly and passing glory. But we fight for an incorruptible crown. What God has for his children is eternal (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Have you ever imagined what God has for you if you seek Him with all your heart? As it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”(1 Corinthians 2: 9 NKJV).

**A story of effort, discipline and faith**

One of the most beautiful stories of effort and struggle is without any doubt, the story of David. God commanded the prophet Samuel to anoint him as a king (1 Samuel 16:13). What a beautiful moment for David! But after that, he was not immediately crowned.

1. He continued to be a shepherd as before;
2. His first job in the palace was to play the harp for King Saul when he was going mad (1 Samuel 16:19);
3. He had to endure the envy of his brothers (1 Samuel 17:28);
4. He killed Goliath at the risk of his own life (1 Samuel 17:40);
5. He served as a captain in the army of Israel (1 Samuel 18: 5);
6. He was a fugitive, living in the desert, in the caves, among the dangerous enemies of Israel because of the envy of King Saul (1 Samuel 21:10);
7. Bitter men, indebted, and fugitives join him (1 Samuel 22: 2);
8. He was humiliated by Nabal (1 Samuel 25:10);
9. He knew what it is like to lose his wife, his children and everything he had in a single day (1 Samuel 30: 3,4).

We wonder, why did God allow David to go through all this suffering? God was preparing David for his mission. David learned to trust the Lord, to love him with all his heart and God trained him to be the best king that ever lived in Israel. A man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

David even wrote this beautiful psalm: “The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.” (Psalm 23 NKJV).

**A special invitation**

God wants to bless the life of each one of His children. In the same way He did with Joshua, God calls you to be strong and courageous. The advice of the Apostle Paul is also for you. For you to prosper. God invites you to seek him with all your heart and to put Him in the first place. God has the power to transform your life as He did with David. He transformed a simple shepherd into a prince of Israel. (2 Samuel 7; 8). God wants to prepare your life to be a blessing here on earth, but above all, He wants that you have eternal life in Christ Jesus. To do this, you have to fight with faith, you have to accept the Lord's training. I share the words of a father to his son. “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:1 NKJV). Remember this promise of the Lord: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)