

A man in an orange t-shirt is seen from behind, standing in a field of tall grass and trees. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow and lens flare. The background shows rolling hills under a clear sky.

RUN TO
WIN

THE LIFELONG PURSUITS *of a* GODLY MAN

TIM CHALLIES

RUN TO WIN

THE LIFELONG PURSUITS OF A GODLY MAN

Tim Challies

CruciformPress

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INTRODUCTION

THE RACE WE RUN

Every four years the Summer Olympics begin again, and the whole world becomes obsessed with activities they haven't thought about since the previous Games. Suddenly we find ourselves waking up early and staying up late to watch athletes pole vault and throw javelins and dive into pools. We can't help but cheer as we watch little-known sports like field hockey and handball and water polo. What is it that compels us to watch these strange events and to cheer for people we don't even know?

We watch the Olympics because we want to see the best of the best. Athletes do not get to the Olympics simply because of natural talent or wishing upon a star. They do not earn the opportunity to represent their countries through parental privilege or dumb luck. They get to the Olympics by hard work, by committing their whole lives to the pursuit of their sport. They have bodies very much like ours—the same 650 muscles, the same 206 bones, the same two feet—yet they

can do things that we can only dream of. We may not know much about high jump, but we do know that we are watching something that required thousands of hours of training. We may not know a tuck from a handspring, but we do know that it took years of painful labor to perform such an acrobatic move. They have become the best in the world because of their total devotion to their sport, because of their grueling training, and because of their rigid self-discipline.

THE RACE

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul uses athletes as a metaphor to describe how believers are to approach the Christian life: “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” (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Of course the Corinthians knew! Their city was the home of the Isthmian Games. Every two years, the best world’s athletes would arrive, their minds set on claiming the prize. In that day, there were no team sports, so each athlete competed alone, and there were no consolation prizes, so each athlete competed to be first. Paul tells these believers to think of the Christian life as a race and to imitate the kind of athlete who runs not just to compete but to be victorious. Striving against the deadly competition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, he urges them, “Run in such a way that you may win” (NASB)!

But how? What must they do to ensure that they win this race? Paul continues: “Every athlete exercises self-control in

all things” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Athletes become successful through self-control. They commit themselves wholeheartedly to their sport and put aside any vices, habits, or activities that might keep them from peak performance. The athletes who competed in the Isthmian Games underwent ten months of dedicated training. During that time, they followed a strict regimen of diet and exercise. They were absolutely single-minded in their pursuit of victory.

Paul is saying that just as self-control is essential to victory in athletics, it is essential to victory in the Christian life. Good intentions will not carry Christians to victory, half-hearted effort will bring no reward, lack of discipline will lead only to disqualification. By self-control athletes get the prize, and by self-control Christians get their reward.

So what was the reward these athletes stood to gain? “They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Corinthians 9:25). In the early days of the Games, athletes were rewarded with a crown woven of dry celery leaves. Later, in Roman times, this was replaced by a wreath of pine. These crowns were organic and perishable, so in ten or twenty years they would fade to dust. Paul draws a comparison: if athletes exercise rigid discipline for the sake of a disintegrating wreath, shouldn’t Christians labor even harder for a reward that will endure forever? Paul doesn’t say what this reward is, but his point is clear: the Christian who wins this race receives a prize of immeasurable value and eternal duration.

Then Paul provides an illustration from his own disciplined life: “So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one

beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:26–27). Paul refuses to be like a half-hearted athlete, content to take a leisurely jog. He will not be like a boxer who shirks his training and ends up futilely flailing his fists in the air. Instead, he will be like a runner who is driven to vanquish the competition and like a fighter who has been trained to deliver brutal blows. He applies self-discipline to every part of his life—his body, mind, and soul. He exercises self-control to avoid sin and to practice godliness, to flee immorality and to pursue holiness. He allows nothing that increases the risk of disqualification. He is as committed to the Christian life as the greatest athlete is to his sport. He is determined to win his race, to receive his reward.

In Paul’s mind, self-control brings freedom. Like an athlete, he exercises self-control to free himself to achieve what he most wants to achieve, to live how he truly wants to live. No longer controlled by illicit sexual desires, he can live in purity; no longer controlled by the love of money, he can be content with little; no longer controlled by the opinions of men, he can be satisfied in living for the glory of God. Self-control is the training regimen that will bring him to victory, the program that later allows him to proclaim this benediction upon his life: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day” (2 Timothy. 4:7–8).

RUN TO WIN!

I have written this book primarily for men who are running this race. Women can read it, too, and will benefit from it, I'm sure. (First Corinthians is an epistle that applies to men and women alike!) But I am writing specifically as a brother to my brothers. In this book, I will suggest a number of disciplines meant to help you compete at peak performance and assure you of victory. Each one will be an imperative, a command to consider and obey: Embrace your purpose! Renew your mind! Prioritize your church! Control your sexuality! Treasure your marriage! And many more. As I interact with men near and far, as I talk to the men I pastor, as I look within my own heart, I see far too much apathy and far too little zeal. I see men who are content to slumber instead of train. Men who treat life as if it's a leisurely jog instead of a grueling race. I see men who are unmotivated, who are uninspired by the imperishable reward that awaits across the finish line. I see men who are undisciplined, who regard self-control as a burden instead of a joy. I see men who are indifferent, who seem to care little whether they break the tape in victory or are shamefully disqualified. I want these men to know that the race is on! I want them to long for the prize, and I want them to begin or renew a lifelong regimen of self-control to obtain it.

My friend, you are in the race for the imperishable prize. Are you running to obtain it? You have no hope of victory unless you are determined to prevail and unless you prove your determination with dedication and discipline. Will you follow along as we explore how to run with zeal and self-con-

trol? You've got just one life to live, one race to run. So live it with all your might, and run to win!

STRENGTH FOR THE RACE

You can't run the race and win the prize in your own strength—you need God's help to do it. In the same chapter where Paul talks about disciplining himself like an athlete, he also says, "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting" (1 Corinthians 9:16). He understood what Jesus meant when he said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). As you continue reading this book, pray for strength from the Holy Spirit to practice the disciplines discussed, and look to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ for hope and help when you realize how far you have fallen short. Because he died and rose for us, full forgiveness and abundant new life is available to you at any moment, for this is what the Lord himself says to us:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

PART 1

DISCIPLINES OF FAITH

EMBRACE YOUR PURPOSE

At this very moment, you are running a race. You are running a race even if you are sitting on the bus reading these words on your phone, or even if you are reading this to take a break from the drudgery of your work. Everywhere and at all times you are running the race of all races, the Christian life. The question is not *if* you are running but how. Are you running well or running poorly? Are you out for a leisurely jog, or are you sprinting hard with your eyes on the prize? Through the living Word, the Apostle Paul pleads with you, “Run to win! Run to win the prize!”

In this book, I am calling men away from apathy toward a zealous pursuit of the imperishable prize, away from worthless habits toward godly disciplines, away from aimless wandering toward purposeful living. This chapter will center on one imperative for winning this race. It is fitting that we begin with the matter of purpose, for only when you know your purpose will you be motivated to run this race and to run

it with all the effort required to win it. Only then will you be able to share the joyful conviction of George Whitefield, who declared, “I am never better than when I am on the full stretch for God.” My friend, if you are going to run to win, if you are going to be on the full stretch for God, you must embrace your purpose.

THE PURPOSE OF YOUR SALVATION

Why did God save you? Paul tells you exactly why:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

It would take whole volumes of books to unpack all that Paul says here, but I will make just a few observations.

First, God saves you to sanctify you. God extends his saving mercy to you so he can undo the deep damage caused by your sin. In a moment he redeems you, and over a lifetime he purifies you, teaching you to hate and renounce whatever is ungodly and to love and pursue whatever is worthy. As you walk with Christ, you find a new longing to put to death those

old deeds and the desires that motivated them and to bring to life new deeds born of purer desires (Colossians 3:1–17). This is called *sanctification*, the lifelong process of becoming holy. God saves you to sanctify you, to restore you to the life he intended for you before you gave yourself to sin.

Second, God saves and sanctifies you so you can do good to others. Your sanctification has a purpose: to make you “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Good works are deeds that are done not primarily for your own good but for the good of others. You are called to put aside the natural selfishness that once controlled you and to put on the Christ-like selflessness that compels you to bless to others. You are to live as a good-works extremist, a man who will stop at nothing to be a blessing to others. “We are [God’s] workmanship,” says Paul, “created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Third, God does all things for his glory. God does not save you so he can make much of you, but so you can make much of him. The good deeds you do are not meant to make yourself look great but to make God look great. They stand as proof of the great change he has worked within you, for only by his grace can you turn your desires away from your own comfort, your own enrichment, your own fame. “Let your light shine before others,” says Jesus, “so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Men, this is your purpose: to bring glory to God by doing good for others. This means your life is not first about you.

You are not the point of your existence or the hero of your salvation. You were created by God and for God. You were saved to bring glory to God by doing good to others. This is your purpose.

However, I suspect you already know most of this. The problem is that you still struggle to find enough motivation to bring to your life the focused self-control that will enable you to run to win. So let's turn back to Paul to see where he found the motivation to embrace this God-glorifying purpose.

EXTRAORDINARY FERVOR

An athlete runs to receive a reward and to enjoy the fame and acclaim that come with it. All the training, the exertion, and the self-control are judged to be worth it when the wreath is placed upon his head and when the crowd stands to pay tribute. His self-control is driven by the greatness of the prize. So what prize could be sufficient to motivate Paul to live this life of extraordinary fervor and intense zeal? Only one thing: Jesus Christ. Paul, once the self-proclaimed chief of sinners, had been suddenly and dramatically saved by Jesus. In a moment he had been plucked off the highway to hell and set upon the pathway to heaven. He was forever transformed. And with this new life, he had a new purpose. He now lived to be a faithful representative of Jesus Christ, to be absolutely devoted to growing in Christlikeness and making Jesus known to those around him. When Paul embraced Jesus Christ—or rather, when Jesus embraced Paul—Paul also embraced a new purpose.

Men, have you been transformed by Jesus Christ? Have you been given new life? With new life comes a new purpose! Let go of the ridiculous notion that your life is about you. Let go of all the selfish purposes you once held on to. Let go of the cultural wave of apathy and self-indulgence that is plaguing so many. And once you have let go of all that might hinder you, grab on to a lifelong pursuit of Jesus! Embrace your purpose and align every area of your life with it: you are here to glorify God by abounding in good works.

This is your challenge and mine. Your church needs you to be holy, to see a believer who has been set free from sin and who is committed to their good. Your neighborhood needs you to be holy, to see a man who has been utterly transformed by Jesus and who now puts aside anything that might hinder the gospel of Jesus. If you have a family, they need you to be holy, to see a husband and father who models what it means to be a mature Christian man. Your world needs you to be holy, to see evidence that Jesus Christ continues to save his people and continues to transform them into his image. In the inestimable prize of Jesus Christ, you have all the motivation you need to embrace a new purpose and fix your eyes on the glory of God.

DO IT NOW

Here are some practical ways that you can increase your motivation to live for the purpose of bringing glory to God:

- ***Lay up treasure in heaven.*** Jesus said,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19)

The more time and energy you spend on spiritual endeavors (if done through the power of the Holy Spirit), the more your heart will become motivated to love and serve Christ. We place a high value on material possessions when we pay a lot of money for them or put a lot of time into them, and that “treasure principle” applies to our relationship with God as well.

- ***Lift up the Lord in worship.*** In Psalm 73 David describes how he was envying the prosperity of the wicked and thinking that his own pursuit of purity was in vain. But then he “went into the sanctuary of God” and was reminded that he would be much better off in the end (vv. 16–20). His God-centered, Word-centered worship caused him to value the Lord so much that he ended up saying, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (v. 25).
- ***Lead others to Christ.*** In Luke 16 Jesus told a parable about an unjust steward who used his earthly treasure to build relationships with people who could help him

in the future. Drawing a spiritual parallel, the Lord said, “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings” (v. 9). The idea is that if you use your treasure, time, and talents for the sake of the kingdom in this life, you will be blessed with true friendships both now and in eternity. And this will make you more able to, in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

RUN TO WIN!

You are a few minutes farther into your race than you were when you began reading. You’ve taken a few more steps. And I hope you have come to see that if you are going to succeed in this race, you need to know the reason God saved and sanctifies you. Only then will you be motivated to put aside the selfishness of apathy and put on the selflessness of holiness. Embrace your purpose, then run to win!

Note: My book *Do More Better* is a practical guide to a life of productivity, with productivity defined as: “Effectively stewarding my gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God.” If this is an area of struggle for you, consider reading the book. (See bit.ly/domorebetter)

STRENGTH FOR THE RACE

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 Paul explains where he got his strength to run the race for God's glory: "The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." Jesus loved Paul even though he had been the foremost among sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) and Jesus died for us "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). Knowing this keeps us from despair over our failures and gives us hope that through repentance and forgiveness we can bring glory to God in our lives regardless of how messed up they might be.

RENEW YOUR MIND

There are many places in the Bible where God presents a stark contrast between two options, then urges the reader to make a choice. He gave his law to ancient Israel, then said, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasted wide and narrow gates and pleaded, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13–14).

Another of these contrasts is found at a key point in the book of Romans. For eleven chapters Paul has expounded on the gospel, describing what Christ has accomplished for Jews and Gentiles alike. Then he confronts his readers with a contrast and implies they must make a choice: “Do not be conformed to this world,” he says, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (12:2). There are only two options:

conformity or transformation. You can be conformed to this world or you can be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The choice lies before you every day.

Many of today's men have made a poor choice. They've chosen to conform, to feed their lust with the pornographic images of the world, to speak as the world speaks, to take on a sinful lifestyle marked by pride, apathy, and self-indulgence. If you are a Christian man, you are called to something different, something better, something far more challenging and far more satisfying. You are called to godliness. You are called to renounce anything that would hinder you in your race and to embrace a lifelong pursuit of knowing Jesus.

In this chapter we will consider how God calls men like you to live with the same discipline, dedication, and self-control that an Olympic athlete brings to the pursuit of the gold. Such commitment demands self-control that extends even to the mind. More accurately, it demands self-control that begins in the mind. To run to win, you must renew your mind.

A DARKENED MIND

At one point in your life, you were confronted with the choice of entering the wide gate or the narrow gate. If you are a Christian, that means you chose to enter the narrow gate and follow the way that leads to life. In that moment of decision, that moment of salvation, you experienced a kind of awakening. Your mind was suddenly able to understand that you are a sinner, that you had defied a holy God, and that Jesus Christ was offering rec-

conciliation by grace through faith. The reason you had never before accepted this truth or embraced this Savior is that your mind had not been able to understand it. This truth was hidden from you because of your spiritual blindness.

Paul talks about this in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. (Ephesians 4:17–19)

You were born in a state of sinfulness in which your futile mind could not understand the truth of the gospel.

The alarming fact is that sin not only made you *walk* in the darkness, it also darkened your understanding. Not only were you unable to do things that are pleasing to God, but you were also unable to even know what is pleasing to God (Romans 8:8, 1 Corinthians 2:14). But when you turned to Christ in repentance and faith, suddenly your mind was illumined by God so you could understand. You could understand who God is, who you are, and why the gospel is such good news. In a moment, your mind was given access to true and saving knowledge. In a moment you understood just how blind you had been for all those years. This is what Wesley celebrated in “And Can it Be,” one of his greatest hymns: “Long my impris-

oned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

You entered the Christian life with a mind that had just been pierced by that quickening ray of God's truth. But while your mind had been awakened, it was still far from perfected. Through the rest of life you are faced with the constant challenge, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). This choice is set before you each day: will you allow the world to conform your mind, or will you invite God to transform your mind? To not choose is to make a choice—the world is so immersive, so powerful, and so present that unless you actively resist it, you will inevitably be conformed to it and consumed by it.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED

When the Bible speaks of *the world*, it refers to any value system or way of life opposed to God and foreign to his Word. The world promotes “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” (1 John 2:16). As a Christian man, God calls you to live on this earth surrounded by human society, yet to display a very different system of values and to exhibit a very different way of life. Even though you are a Christian, it is easy to be conformed to the world so that you begin to desire what the world desires, to think how the world thinks, and to behave like the world behaves.

Men are most often conformed to the world by carelessness, by neglecting to consider the allure of the world and by failing to guard against its encroachment. Just think of the countless seductive website advertisements that appeal to men who are ready to plunge into sinful desire. Think of the character traits displayed by men in popular sitcoms: ignorance, laziness, immaturity. Watch out for the unexpected gateways of conformity. It may be entertainment, when you fail to be cautious about what you watch, hear, and read, and when you fail to limit the time spent on entertainment. Sometimes the gateway is education, when you are influenced by people who are opposed to God. It may be friendships, when you maintain your most formative relationships with unbelievers. Or the main gateway of conformity may simply be neglect, when you fail to walk closely with God and instead allow the natural worldliness within your own heart to gain influence.

Worldliness is like gravity, always around you, always exerting its pressure. You must resist it because your spiritual life and health depend on it. You can resist it because you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who delights in transforming you by the renewing of your mind.

BE TRANSFORMED

For God to save you, he first had to open your mind to understand the truth of the gospel. But instead of immediately perfecting your mind, he assigned you the lifelong responsibility of renewing it. Just as a caterpillar undergoes the slow metamorphosis that transforms it into a butterfly, your mind is

meant to undergo a steady, purposeful change as it is saturated and controlled by the Word of God. The Holy Spirit illumines the words of the Bible to your mind so you can understand and obey it. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). There are no shortcuts and no alternative paths. The one and only way your mind can be renewed is by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God.

Christian man, you must renew your mind. Which direction is your mind changing: toward conformity to the world or toward transformation into God’s image? Which has more of an influence over your mind: the Sports page of the newspaper or the Word of God? Where do you find yourself more often: sitting on the couch watching television or bowing on your knees in prayer over the Word? Over a lifetime of commitment to God’s Word, you gain new wisdom to replace old foolishness, and you gain godly desires to replace satanic longings. The sins that once fueled your imagination and motivated your actions begin to lose their power and are displaced by virtues that motivate good to others and bring glory to God. Your eyes stop their lusting because your mind is now filled with love; your mouth stops its cursing because your mind is now filled with joy; your hands stop their stealing because you are convinced you can be as content with little as with much. Such transformed lives begin with transformed minds, for your body always obeys your brain.

DO IT NOW

Here are some practical ways to help renew your mind:

- ***Eliminate all temptations.*** What causes your mind to think about the wrong things? Is it what you look at or listen to, places you go, or people you spend time with? When you know something is a stumbling block to you, take Jesus' advice in Matthew 5:29–30: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” This “principle of amputation” means that you should eliminate anything from your life that is preventing your mind from being renewed.
- ***Replace the old with the new.*** Ephesians 4:21–24 says you “were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” It’s not enough to just “put off” the bad influences on your mind—you also have to “put on” or *replace* them with things that point you to Christ. Paul gives some practical examples in the verses following that passage, like replacing lying with speaking the truth and hurtful words with those that build up others. Make a list of sinful thoughts that you struggle with, and next to each write some true, biblical thoughts that you can “put on” instead.

RUN TO WIN!

Now the choice lies before you. Will you be conformed to this world or will you be transformed by the renewing of your mind? There is no mystery to either one. To be conformed to this world, you simply need to immerse yourself in it, to allow yourself to be influenced by it. It takes no effort and brings no true reward. To be transformed by the renewing of your mind, you need to immerse yourself in the Word of God, to allow yourself to be influenced by it. It takes great effort and brings great reward.

The Olympic runner longs to hear the crowd screaming his name and longs to feel the weight of the gold medal as it hangs around his neck. He determines in his mind that he must win and then instills habits that will force him to live with discipline, to train with persistence, and to put aside anything that might threaten his success. If he does all this for the adoration of mere men and the reward of a few ounces of metal, how much more should you, Christian, resolve to “lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and... run with endurance the race set before [you]” (Hebrews 12:1)? You run to hear your heavenly Father proclaim, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21) and to bestow on you a reward that can never fade and never be lost. If you are going to keep your legs moving toward the prize of Christ, you must keep your mind renewing toward the mind of Christ. Christian man, renew your mind!

STRENGTH FOR THE RACE

The command in Romans 12:2 to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” is one of the ways “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship,” as it says in the previous verse. And in that verse Paul highlights both our motivation and empowerment when he adds the phrase “by the mercies of God”—referring to all the blessings of God’s grace that are discussed in the previous eleven chapters of Romans. That’s why we should commit ourselves to renewing our minds, and how we can do it even though it runs counter to our sinful nature: God has graciously intervened to save us from the horrible consequences of sin (Romans 1–3); he has freely forgiven and justified us in Christ (Romans 4–5); he has given us the ability to live a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6–7); and he is working all things for good in our lives by his sovereign power and plan (Romans 8–11).

KNOW YOUR DOCTRINE

“Doctrine divides,” the young man explained. “Of course it’s important, but God cares far more for our deeds than our creeds. Doctrine divides, but love unites.” Could he be right? Is doctrine a force for division, meant to bow before the primacy of love?

“I find doctrine boring,” the husband confessed. “I don’t have any interest in hearing about theology. Just tell me what God wants me to do, and I’ll do it. I’m a doer, not a learner.” Could he have it right? Is doctrine a drab discipline fit only for the halls of academia?

As it happens, the Bible has much to say about doctrine and only ever commends it as something that is of great importance to every Christian. In fact, we cannot rightly consider ourselves faithful followers of Jesus Christ unless we thoroughly know our doctrine, staunchly cling to it, and faithfully defend it. Though the Christian faith is far more than knowing doctrine, it is never less. And yet many who profess

to be Christians have only the most rudimentary knowledge of Christian doctrine.

Many who claim to love the Bible have only the barest knowledge of the doctrines it contains. Many who have received the sacred deposit of the gospel are unequipped to guard it. And for men, who are called to lead their homes in devotion to God, the pursuit of doctrine often takes a back seat to easier, more comfortable pursuits. With the spare time before and after work, relaxing with television sounds far more appealing than laboring over the doctrine found in Scripture. But there is great cost to neglecting the study of doctrine, just as there is inestimable gain in a deep knowledge of it. To rightly pursue God for a lifetime, we must know who he is and how he calls us to live. If you are going to run to win, you must train yourself to know your doctrine.

DOCTRINE

The word *doctrine* simply refers to what the Bible teaches about a given subject. As you carefully study the Bible and recognize its themes, you come to understand what it communicates about an endless variety of subjects—the doctrine of Scripture, for example, which explains what the Bible says about itself; the doctrine of God, which describes what the Bible tells us about the nature, character, and works of God; and the doctrine of salvation, which tells us how God saves people from their sin.

The Bible divides doctrine into two broad categories:

sound and false. Sound doctrine originates in the mind of God, is consistent with the Word of God, and proves profitable to the people of God. You are responsible to know such doctrine so you can live by it and faithfully protect it. False doctrine originates outside the mind of God, is inconsistent with the Word of God, and is unprofitable to the people of God. You are responsible to reject such doctrine and to distance yourself from people who proclaim it.

While pastors are specially charged to know, promote, and defend sound doctrine, all Christians are expected to be well-versed in it. Why? Because faithfully living for God is inseparable from rightly knowing God. Those who know him best are equipped to serve him best. Those with the deepest knowledge have opportunity to express the greatest obedience.

MORE THAN FACTS

Doctrine involves facts, to be sure. But these are not cold facts accumulated in scornful minds to later be used as a kind of theological trump card. Rather, these facts are vital truths that motivate faithful lives. Married men, think of your relationship with your wife: when you were first dating her and learned about difficult events from her childhood, you gained facts that allowed you to better know and appreciate her. When you learned that your wife loves mint chocolate truffles, this is not a fact you simply filed away but one you used to express love to her. In the context of an intimate relationship, facts are not accumulated so that you can merely recite information about a

person or create a page for them on Wikipedia. Facts are accumulated so that you can diligently pursue that person in love.

Similarly, when you learn facts of the Christian faith, you are gaining knowledge that allows you to better understand God so you can better pursue God. Suppose you read in Scripture of the extent of God's love for you: "In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:4-5). Through this verse, you come to understand that God's love for you pre-dated the creation of the world and that ultimately your salvation was the result of his determined purpose. Now you better understand the character of God (He is good! He is loving! He is powerful!), and you better understand the actions of God (He initiated! He loved! He acted!). You are growing in doctrine! Having believed these facts, you begin to live with greater confidence, knowing that your salvation is not dependent upon your will but upon God's. You begin to love God more deeply and pursue him more joyfully as a recipient of his sovereign grace. Your love for him overflows in greater patience and love for others as you long to display the same kind of love God extended to you. Those facts have now deepened your relationship and changed your life. Doctrine does not merely inform your mind but also warms your heart and reforms your behavior.

DOCTRINE AND LIFE

Few Christian men will become professional theologians and teach doctrine in classrooms and seminaries. But every

Christian man, including you, ought to aspire to be an amateur theologian, to study and to know the facts of the faith. This doctrine will equip you to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Only the husband who has deep knowledge of the ways and works of Jesus Christ is well-equipped to love his wife, “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). How can he love like Christ if he does not know how Christ loved? Only the father who has studied doctrine can “bring [his children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). How can he teach what he himself has not yet learned? Only the church member who knows his facts can serve his church as an elder, for an elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Do you feel inadequate to take on leadership in your church because you don’t know the doctrine necessary to lead people in the faith? Only the believer who knows the content of the faith is able to skillfully “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). How can you defend your faith in the workplace, how can you protect your family against Satan’s attacks, how can you be a promoter of truth if you cannot distinguish sound doctrine from false?

DO IT NOW

Are you uncertain of where to begin in studying doctrine? Here are a few suggestions of basic introductions to theology:

- *Basic Christianity* by John Stott
- *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
- *Core Christianity* by Michael Horton.

For more advanced reading, perhaps try:

- *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem
- *Biblical Doctrine* by John MacArthur.

For video instruction, consider a subscription to Ligonier's Connect platform which offers a host of excellent courses on a wide variety of subjects.

RUN TO WIN!

Do you know your doctrine? Do you know at least the basic facts of the Christian faith? You have no excuse for ignorance. Of all generations, ours is most blessed in our exposure to the facts of the Christian faith. We have pastors who faithfully preach the Word and take seriously God's instruction to "be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). We have countless systematic theologies written not only for theologians but for laypersons. We have a host of online courses just waiting for us. We have every opportunity and every reason to fill our minds with the knowledge of God.

To know doctrine is to know the content of the Christian faith and what is necessary to properly live it out. You cannot run well if you do not know where you are going. Your faithfulness to God depends upon your knowledge of God. Christian man, to run to win you must know your doctrine.

STRENGTH FOR THE RACE

Second Timothy 2:15 says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” To be a good student of biblical doctrine requires some hard work—in fact, the NASB translates the beginning of that verse, “*Be diligent* to present yourself approved.” Can any of us, even those who are paid to study the Bible, honestly say that we are as diligent as we could be in this pursuit? The answer is no, so we might be tempted to give up on it because we are never learning as much as we should. But Paul’s command to study is bookended with words like these: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (v. 13) and “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: the Lord knows those who are his” (v. 19). So when you feel inadequate in your knowledge of the Bible, cling to the rock of God’s faithful, unfailing love for you in Christ, and let that provide the motivation you need to learn more about him from his Word.



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Shortly after its release, *Do More Better* had received 173 reviews on Amazon, with an average rating of 4.8 out of 5 stars. The book sold more than 10,000 copies in its first two months. Here are Tim's thoughts about this book:

I am no productivity guru. I am a writer, a church leader, a husband, and a father—a Christian with a lot of responsibilities and with new tasks coming at me all the time. I wrote this short, fast-paced, practical guide to productivity to share what I have learned about getting things done in today's digital world. It will help you learn to structure your life to do the most good to the glory of God.

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- *Common obstacles to productivity*
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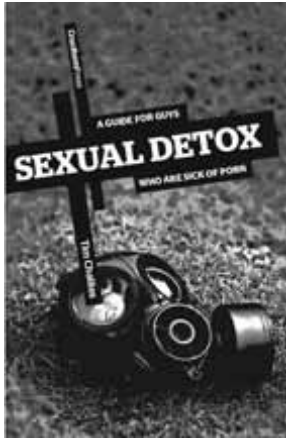
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“Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness.”

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Kristie Anyabwile, holds a history degree from NC State University, and is married to Thabiti, currently a church planter in Washington, DC., and a Council Member for The Gospel Coalition.

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