

BIBLE STUDY

# Running the Race

By Shari Miller



## “Ready, set, go!”

You might recognize these words if you have ever attended a track meet and watched the runners strive to win the race. Discuss with a partner or your small group what message you think these words convey to each runner.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul uses racing language: *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.* He tells Timothy toward his life’s end:

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7). Our focus will be on the Apostle Paul (Saul) and how God made him ready to serve the Lord, set him on the right path of faith, and blessed that service as he shared the Good News about Jesus as Savior of the entire world — to Jews and Gentiles alike. We will also look at how our loving Lord prepares us for joyful service to Him and blesses us as we go and tell those in our lives about our Savior and all He has done for us.

**Opening Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, You created us and have given us many talents and abilities. Unfortunately, we are sinful and our sin separates us from You. Our Savior Jesus came to live a perfect life, suffer, die for our sins, and rise from the dead. Because of Him, we come to You asking for forgiveness for the times we have failed You. Thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit Who gives us faith in Jesus, readies us for the race, sets our path through Word and Sacraments, and spurs us to go and run the race as witnesses to all that Jesus has done for us. Help us to keep our eyes on the prize of eternal life. In Jesus’ name we boldly pray. Amen.

### Ready.

The Apostle Paul was the first missionary to the Gentiles, preaching and teaching the Good News about salvation in Jesus to those living in the darkness of their sins during three missionary journeys. He wrote many letters of doctrine and encouragement to church plants in such cities as Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae. God made Paul ready for the awesome task of being His missionary. Read the following references to Paul’s background, and identify some of the things that we learn about Paul’s early life, qualifications, and characteristics.

- Acts 22:1–5** \_\_\_\_\_
- Acts 22:27–28** \_\_\_\_\_
- Acts 23:6** \_\_\_\_\_
- Romans 11:1** \_\_\_\_\_
- Galatians 1:14** \_\_\_\_\_
- Philippians 3:5–6** \_\_\_\_\_

How did these qualifications and characteristics of Paul help to prepare him for later service to the Lord? Be specific. \_\_\_\_\_

In **Acts 7:54–8:3**, we read about the stoning of the martyr Stephen, *a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 6:5). Who was present and approved of this stoning? \_\_\_\_\_

What do we learn about Paul/Saul in these passages (see again **Galatians 1:14**)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Faith Talk:** Make a list of at least five characteristics and/or qualifications that God has given to you. How have these characteristics/qualifications helped to get you ready for your service to the Lord? Share with a partner or your small group.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Set.

Saul was zealous in defense of the knowledge and faith he had in his erroneous Pharisaical beliefs. He was confident that he was on the true course as he delivered Christians to prison to be persecuted and killed. Read **Acts 9:1–22**. How did God set Saul on the correct path to becoming His missionary?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Paul was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:9). His path and destination were determined by His Lord and Savior. Read **Acts 9:20–30** for the rest of the story. How long did it take for Paul to begin witnessing about Jesus as Savior? What obstacles did he face? \_\_\_\_\_

Read **Hebrews 12:1–2**. To what is the Christian’s life compared? \_\_\_\_\_

How do Christians *run the race*? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the Christian’s “coach” for the race? \_\_\_\_\_

What encouragement does Jesus give? \_\_\_\_\_

According to **Romans 6:3–4**, when and how is every Christian’s path set by God? \_\_\_\_\_

At our Baptism, we are filled with the Holy Spirit who “calls, gathers, enlightens, and strengthens the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, explanation to the Third Article). How does the Spirit work in the lives of Christ’s people to keep them focused and set with their eyes fixed on Jesus? See **1 Corinthians 1:18, 11:23–26**. \_\_\_\_\_

**Faith Talk:** Share with a partner or the small group how you remain in God’s Word and the path of faith He has given and set for you. Brainstorm together additional ways you can remain in God’s Word. \_\_\_\_\_

**Faith Talk:** When were you baptized? Do you know someone who has yet to be baptized? How could you share the importance of Baptism as you witness your faith in the Savior Jesus? Share with a partner or the small group. \_\_\_\_\_

### Go!

Read a portion of Paul’s own account of his conversion in **Acts 26:15–18**. What did the Lord ask Paul to do? \_\_\_\_\_

Read more of Paul’s story in **Acts 26:19–23**. Describe how Paul did what the Lord asked him to go and do. \_\_\_\_\_

**If time permits:** Imagine being a devout Jew in Paul’s day, hearing his message about proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles. How might this have made you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

The task that God asked of Paul was not always easy to do. List some of the hardships Paul endured for the sake of the Gospel in **2 Corinthians 11:23–28**. \_\_\_\_\_

Read **Romans 5:1–5**. What does God promise His witnessing people even in the midst of trials and suffering? \_\_\_\_\_

See **Mark 5:18–20** and **Acts 1:8**. What does the Lord send these people to go and boldly do by the power of the Spirit? What is the plan for witnessing that Jesus gave His audience? In both cases, what might we learn in our witnessing today? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the master plan for witnessing that Jesus gives us? \_\_\_\_\_

Because of Christ’s perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection and for His sake, what prize awaits the Christian runner at the end of life’s race? See **1 Corinthians 9:24–25**; **Philippians 3:20–21**; and **2 Timothy 4:6–8**. \_\_\_\_\_

### Faith Walk:

1. Thank *God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:57).
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you run the race and keep the faith.
3. Witness your faith in Jesus to family and friends.
4. Do additional study about the Apostle Paul.
5. Praise the Lord daily for the gifts He has given to you, especially His joy as we run the race.

**Closing Prayer:** Speak or sing the words of “Fight the Good Fight” (LSB #664; LW #299; TLH #447).

**Blessing:** (speak **2 Thessalonians 2:16–17** to one another) *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. Amen.*