

8.7.16 **When You're Too Tired to Run - Wait on the Lord** Isaiah 40.28-31

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In early July, Jill and I enjoyed watching the U.S. Olympic trials in Track and Field that took place in Eugene, Oregon. Jill ran cross country and track in high school and we both enjoy watching these great athletes run and compete in the various events. We're always happy for all people who qualify for the Olympic team - it's a dream come true after, in most cases, years of disciplined training, sacrifice, hard work, and intense pressure that often involves moving away from home to train. We also always feel especially badly for the folks who just miss making the team often by as little as .01 of a second! It was amazing to watch 41-year-old Bernard Lagat come from behind with a 52.8-second final lap to win the 5,000 meters. Incredibly, like swimmer Michael Phelps, Lagat is competing in his fifth Olympics in Rio.

At the other end of the age spectrum, is 16-year-old Sydney McLaughlin of Dunellen, New Jersey, who competed in the women's 400-meter hurdles and finished in third place making her the youngest Team USA track athlete to compete in the Games since 1972. In an article written by Karen Rosen on the Team USA website, Sydney was asked after the race if she was thinking about the possibility of making the Olympic team. She said no. *"My mind was on finishing the race and eating a cheeseburger."* She placed third with a time of 54.15 to set a new world junior record.

"I can't believe this is happening right now," said McLaughlin, who added that she wanted to *"just get this out of the way. It's been a very long year, and the trials is stressful. Just hearing the word Olympics was a dream in the back of my mind. I was like, 'Oh yeah I'm going to the trials,' but it's not going to happen. It was never really on my radar, until I ran 54 (seconds). **My season started off really rough with some injuries and some personal issues. It wasn't looking good. But every Olympic athlete has two or three major struggles their Olympic year, and I definitely faced mine.**"*

McLaughlin won both her heat (55.46 seconds) and her semifinal (55.23) at the trials. But inside, **she was roiling with doubt.** *"I think the first day was definitely the*

hardest,” McLaughlin said, *“just the trials, coming up here for the first time and running on this track, in this type of competition. As the rounds went on it definitely got easier to manage the nerves and get used to the field, but **it’s a lot of mental preparation**, and **just keeping the negative thoughts out and trusting** in the ability of what you’ve done so far. **My coach had a lot to do with that**. I had a **mental breakdown** my first day, and without them I wouldn’t have stepped on the line.”*

Although McLaughlin came in as the fifth-fastest performer in the world, she thought she was too young to go hurdle-to-hurdle with the older athletes. *“**It was me doubting everything** I’d done so far this season not understanding that I’ve worked to get where I am and that I deserved to be here. And thinking, ‘I’m 16 and these girls are all professionals.’ I definitely had a moment where **I didn’t think I could do it**, and they told me ‘You’re getting on the line and running this race.’ That put me where I am today. This has to be the icing on the cake. Regardless of what happens in Rio, I made it here and I’m just so thankful for all of that.”*

Besides that cheeseburger, McLaughlin’s incentive to succeed has always revolved around food. *“It was AAU track,”* McLaughlin recalled. *“I was 6 years old, and my dad said that if I won I would get a chocolate bar with almonds. So I won the race and I got a chocolate bar, and ever since I kept running so I could get chocolate bars.”*

In the quotes from McLaughlin we see so many things that would be Olympians face that the rest of us contend with as well: physical and personal issues, major struggles, negative thoughts, doubts, and fears. We also see the need to train hard, to have the support of others around us, to persevere and commit to win, and even the need to rest and recover when the race is over. These are themes we will address in worship in the coming weeks as the nations of the world compete in the Olympic Games in Rio. Hopefully through our times of worship together we will learn the truth God spoke through the prophet Isaiah 40.28-31, (NRSV), *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not **faint** or grow **weary**; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives **power** to the **faint**, and **strengthens** the **powerless**. Even youths will **faint** and be **weary**, and the young will fall **exhausted**;*

*but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their **strength**, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be **weary**, they shall walk and not **faint**.”*

This passage from Isaiah 40 has always been a favorite of mine. It's on the cover of my Bible and on my business card. It communicates so much in just a few words. We're reminded of the greatness of God who is so far beyond and unlike us – God is everlasting – we are mortal. The Lord is the Creator of the ends of the earth – I have trouble keeping my office clean. God never gets tired or weary – we need to spend about one third of every 24 hours and 1/3 of our mortal life sleeping because we get tired on a regular predictable basis. Without sleep, we quickly cease to function well or as we should. God's understanding is beyond our comprehension; there is so little we understand or comprehend in comparison. God is the source of great power. We are described with these words: **faint** (mentioned four times in these verses), **weary** (three), **powerless, exhausted**. While we may not like to admit it out loud to others or even to ourselves, I appreciate these verses that acknowledge there are times in life when we all feel **faint, weary, powerless, and exhausted**. I suspect that some of us here this morning are feeling that way and even more who are home in bed are feeling that way too! Even youths and the young have times when physically, emotionally, spiritually or otherwise they are too tired to run. The question is what do we do, what do you do, **when you're faint, weary, powerless, and exhausted and too tired to run?** Isaiah suggests that's a good time to wait on the Lord; that's a good time to look for power, strength, energy, motivation, and inspiration that comes from outside of ourselves.

If you've ever been engaged in an exercise program (or any other kind of disciplined pursuit like learning to play a musical instrument, to paint or carve, or a trade) you likely have had moments in which you lost your motivation, focus, or energy and you felt too tired to do what you wanted and needed to do. What do you do when that happens to you? Often times one of the most helpful things we can do in those moments is **remind ourselves of our motivation or purpose for engaging in that activity or pursuit**. BBC's Paul Goodhue who rode 278.65 miles, 16 hours and 58 minutes of pedaling this weekend as part of the Pan Mass Challenge is motivated by the memory of his late wife Peg and many other friends and dear people he has come

to know. Thinking of them helps him to keep going when he may get tired on his training rides. When you find your motivation dropping, remind yourself of why you're doing what you're doing and what it will help you to achieve or accomplish.

I was so struck by the honesty and vulnerability of 16-year-old USA runner Sydney McLaughlin who is young and in as good a shape as anyone yet she openly shared her struggle with personal issues, negative thoughts, doubts, and fears. Even a young Olympian can feel weary and exhausted. If we find ourselves feeling that way more often than we'd like it can be helpful to see if we can identify any kind of pattern to when you find yourself "too tired to run?" Are there any common pieces, clues or elements that we can identify? It's important for us not to keep falling into the same rut or unhelpful patterns.

Where do we turn, what do we do when we face those moments in our life? Isaiah encourages us to turn to the Lord, to turn to the one who is so far beyond us in wisdom, creativity, power, and strength and yet who cares for us and comes along side us to help renew our strength and to keep going. Watching certain events at the Olympics like some of the shorter running races, the competitors get in starting blocks and then are in a position of readiness, their bodies poised and set for the sound of the starting gun to release them. They are waiting with full attentiveness for the signal to begin. Waiting on the Lord is similar in that we're attentive, alert, and listening for the Lord and we're ready to respond.

Isaiah 40:28-31 tell us about the strong and caring nature of the God we worship and of the Lord's care and concern for us. It is similar to Psalm 103 which tells us as a father has compassion for his children so the Lord has compassion on us.

One of the best examples I recall of how even the youngest and strongest among us can become tired, weary, faint, or hurt too much to go on came in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain when Derek Redmond of Great Britain was competing in the 400 meters. Watch what happened: **Note**: In worship we watched a video from the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona when Derek Redmond tore his hamstring during the 400

meters and his father comes out of the stands to help him finish the race. **You can watch the video here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2G8KVzTwfw>.

It's so powerful to see Derek Redmond's dad come out of the stands, wave everyone else away, put his arm around his son, and help him reach the finish line. That's what the Lord does for us. As Sydney McLaughlin noted, ***“Every Olympic athlete has two or three major struggles their Olympic year, and I definitely faced mine.”*** How heartbreaking it is when that struggle comes in the biggest race or moment of all as it did for Derek Redmond. We all face struggles and times when we're too tired to run. Could regularly “waiting on the Lord” make a difference for you? Maybe it's something to consider. Last week when I spoke about Training for Reigning I heard afterwards a few people were confused. When I shared about Training for Reigning, I was talking about as a king of queen reigns, not the drops of water that fall from the sky. Part of training for reigning in God's realm is waiting on the Lord so the Lord can strengthen, renew, inspire, and help us when we're struggling.

If we wait on the Lord, then like Derek Redmond's father, God will come to us, put an arm around us, to comfort and encourages us, to push us and helps us to finish the race. When we're too tired to run, may we learn to wait on the Lord and may God enable us to run our race of faith with perseverance and the determination.

Prayer:

Almighty, true and incomparable God, You are present in all things,
yet in no way limited by them.

You remain unaffected by place, untouched by time, unperturbed by years,
and undeceived by words.

You are beyond all corruption and above all change.

You live in unapproachable light and are invisible,
yet You are known to all those who seek You with faith and love.

You are the God of the universe and of all who hope in Christ,

Renew our faith and our strength so that we may run the race of our life and not be weary, that we may walk and not faint. Amen.

Blessing: “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.”

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever been engaged in an exercise program (or any other kind of disciplined pursuit) in which you lost your motivation, focus, or energy and you felt too tired to do what you wanted and needed to? What do you do when that happens to you?
2. What do you do when you find yourself struggling with personal issues, negative thoughts, doubts, and fears? Where do you turn, what do you do when you face those moments in your life?
3. Have you ever been able to discern any kind of pattern to when you find yourself “too tired to run?” Are there any common clues or elements that you can identify?
4. What do you envision when you hear or read the phrase, “wait on the Lord?” How passive or active do imagine that to be?
5. What does Isaiah 40:28-31 tell us about the character of God and the Lord’s care and concern for us?
6. What would regularly “waiting on the Lord” look like for you?