



Run

YOUR OWN RACE *by Kate Wicker*

MEB KEFLEZIGHI may not be a household name like LeBron James or Tiger Woods, but he should be. On April 21, 2014, the Olympic medalist was the first American man to win the Boston Marathon in 31 years. His victory was not only momentous in the world of sports, it also offered hope and healing to a city and a country that one year earlier was struggling to recover from the Boston Marathon bombings.

As a runner, a Catholic, and an American, I cannot think of a better person to win this historic race. Meb is short for Mebrahtom, which means “let there be light,” and the elite distance runner’s Twitter bio and webpage

quotes Philippians 4:13—“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!”

Carrie Hilley, 26, is not an elite athlete, but she is a runner who is well aware that covering miles is a way of glorifying God. “The ability to run is a sweet gift the Lord allows me to enjoy. On a leisurely run or during a race, there’s this deep dependence on the Lord to pull me through. Every run is an adventure that strengthens my relationship with him,” says Hilley, a physical therapist who works regularly with runners. “One of many verses in Scripture that references running is Hebrews 12:1-2: ‘Let us run with endurance the race that is set before

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us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.’ Running has helped me see that daily life is much like a race. We face challenges that build perseverance and endurance. Facing those challenges—whether on a race or in any given moment—is only possible with the help of the Lord.”

You can run.

Q OF COURSE, running is not only good for your soul; it does a body good as well. What’s more, almost anyone can run. You just have to point your two feet forward and start moving.

“Running is easy and accessible to all. The only equipment needed is a pair of shoes and an open space,” says Jimbo Wood, a physical therapist and owner of Horizon Physical Therapy who regularly works with runners and is a runner himself.

Steve Raccuglia, a father of six, who is 57 years old and still running marathons (that’s 26.2 miles, in case anyone is wondering), agrees. “I’m always amazed by the huge diversity of people I see running marathons—old and young, robust and thin, short and tall. It just reinforces the idea that it’s a sport all kinds of people can enjoy.”

Now, you may be thinking to yourself: *Enjoy running? Then how come I feel like I am going to die when I run for more than one consecutive minute?* Well, here’s a little secret: A lot of people hate running when they first begin. I did (I started running when I was 15 because some of my friends did). Now I hate it when I *can’t* run. Louis Zamperini, the elite runner and WWII prisoner of war

Steve Raccuglia waving while running a marathon



survivor who inspired the book *Unbroken*, hated running when he first started, too. But if you are patient with yourself and your body, embrace a sensible training plan, get fitted for a good pair of running shoes, and believe in yourself, you just might discover a new passion.

“If you can run a block, you can call yourself a runner,” Raccuglia says. “And if you can run a block today, then in a few short weeks you’ll be running a mile.”

Maybe you’ve never run unless you’ve been chased. Maybe you ran ages ago but think you’re too old to lace up those running shoes again. Or perhaps you already jog but are ready to unleash your inner Meb and challenge yourself to compete in a new event. Wherever you’re at, we’ve got some tips and inspiration to get your feet moving.

Age isn’t as important as knowing your body.

YOUR RUNNING GOALS will obviously depend upon your current fitness level, and natural ability, but far too many people allow age alone to limit them. Age isn’t as much of a limiting factor as what your body can endure. There are youngsters who are remarkable runners (see the Letters page), and there are people who are still running marathons well into their golden years. “My best advice is to listen to your body,” says Wood. “Everyone has a ‘magic distance’ they are made for. Normally, when runners surpass their ‘magical distance,’ they get injured, feel chronic fatigue, or chronic heaviness in their legs. Some runners are in their 70s and still successfully running marathons; others experience breakdown symptoms at

six miles. Allow your body to tell you when it’s ready to make the move to a longer distance or to decrease to a shorter distance.”

Running doesn’t cause injuries, but running improperly might.

QUONCE YOU START RUNNING, there are bound to be naysayers who begin worrying about your poor joints. And if you’re an injured runner like I am right now, there are going to be people who think you should never run again. But I didn’t get injured because I was running. I became injured because I was running the wrong way—namely, too many miles on not enough sleep with a pelvis that was out of whack from a past horseback riding injury and giving birth to four kids.

“Running causes much less deaths per year than sitting on your couch eating hamburgers,” says Wood. “Running doesn’t cause injury, but running with improper mechanics, improper footwear, improper nutrition, or an improper training protocol does lead to injury. Before initiating a running program, it’s important to seek the advice of a running specialist to assist with proper footwear, form, training, and nutrition. Your local running shoe store is probably a good place to start.”

There are also ample online resources and websites that offer training programs for beginner runners (and intermediate and advanced folks, as well), such as *JeffGalloway.com* and *RunnersWorld.com/Training-Plans*.

Find a greater purpose.

WHILE RACCUGLIA says he’s enjoyed every race he’s ever completed, there’s one race that

sticks out. “A few years ago my daughter Regina and I ran a half-marathon together. I was so proud of her as we jointly showed support for her little brother Thomas, who had been, at that point, fighting cancer for more than a year [Thomas is thankfully in remission now],” he says. “We raised our hands high together in victory as we crossed the finish line in solidarity for Thomas, and somehow it felt like we’d just won the Boston Marathon.”

There are many charitable organizations that offer coaching, training plans, nutrition tips, and more in exchange for fund-raising. LIFE Runners is a great organization for Catholic runners (or aspiring Catholic runners) because funds raised support pro-life causes. Visit LIFERunners.org to learn more.


Whatever your reasons and goals for running are, or whether you actually ever run in an official event or not, run your own race. Competing can be fun, but it’s not about your pace or if you end up with a medal; it’s about the run itself and the fact that you were courageous enough to start.

“Just getting to the finish line is a great accomplishment,” says Raccuglia. “Being an average runner, there’s no pressure to win—just to do my best.”

“My running career has become far more rewarding as I’ve started to use the gift of running to honor the Giver instead of honoring myself or my trophy case,” echoes Wood. “One of my favorite all-time quotes is from the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Olympian Eric Liddel says, ‘I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast...and when I run, I run for his pleasure.’ Running is an awesome expression of our gratitude to the Lord.”



Steve and Regina Raccuglia finishing their half-marathon together in honor of Thomas

You may be slow at first (or forever), but take it from the tortoise: There’s nothing wrong with slow and steady. You may not “look” like a runner, but if you run, then guess what? You’re a runner. Maybe you think you’re too old to lace up those running shoes again (ah, remember those fancy schmancy track shorts you used to proudly sport?) or for the first time. Rubbish, I say. Meb was 38 when he ran 26.2 miles in two hours and eight minutes. You can run one mile in 12 minutes. Maybe not right away, but eventually your body and the road (or perhaps the treadmill) will take you there. Remember, you and Meb both can all do all things in Christ who strengthens you—and that just might be running around your block without passing out. 

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