

We Are But Little Children in Training

Feast of Tabernacles

John Pollock

Recorded October 10, 2017

There is a story about three young husbands. Three young husbands are in a hospital waiting room, three young husbands waiting for their wives to give birth. They were sitting around for a couple of hours, talking amongst themselves.

A few minutes later a nurse comes in and says to the first father, "Congratulations! Your wife just gave birth to twins." The father just jumped for joy. He was ecstatic and pleased with the wonderful announcement that he had twins because he worked for the Minnesota Twins.

An hour or two went by. The same nurse came in and told the second father, "Congratulations! Your wife just gave birth to triplets." The second father jumped for joy and he said, "This is an incredible coincidence because I work for Triple A."

But, when the third father heard this, he shouted, "Oh, no!" And, he fainted. The nurse tended to him. And, a few moments later when he awoke, she asked him, "What's wrong?" The third father replied in a foggy state of mind, "I work for 7-Up."

Well, children are a blessing from God, absolutely. Look at the blessing we just experienced with the little ones in the Children's Choir who served us today. Children, indeed, are a blessing, but children are also an awesome responsibility. It's been said that children are a short-term loan granted to us by God. And, that's true, but they are also a long-term investment. As parents, we've been given the responsibility to raise our children and encourage them in their growth and in their relationships with our spiritual Father as well as our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now contrary to what some of you may be thinking, this will not be a message on child rearing, but in today's message, we are going to discuss training children, for each one of us is a child of God. One speaker brought this point out in an earlier sermon that we are children of God. And, as children of God, each of us requires training. Each of us is in training for the kingdom.

Turn, if you would please, to a very familiar scripture, one that each of us have read many times throughout the years. Turn please to Proverbs 22 and here we'll read verse 6. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references today will be from the New King James Version. Here in verse 6 of Proverbs 22, we read:

Proverbs 22:6. *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (NKJV)*

Regarding this specific verse, I want us to consider the following: Are we not all children? We are referred to as such in 1 Corinthians 4:14, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Thessalonians 2:11, and 1 John 3:2¹. Is not each of us a child of God (Romans 8:16²)? And, as children of God, should we not be trained in the way that we should go so that when we are old—in other words, when we are spiritually mature—we will not depart from it?

We're all aware that Jesus Christ, as a child, had a spiritual Father. That holds true for each of us. We are children of God and we, too, have a spiritual Father. As a child, Christ was trained in the scriptures and no one knew the scrolls better than Jesus Christ Himself. We, too, each of us, should be trained in the scriptures.

Turn to the gospel of Luke, please, to chapter 2. We'll begin reading in verse 41. We're all very familiar with this. We're breaking into the context. Everybody knows the story flow.

Luke 2:41. *His parents [Christ's parents] went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.*

42) And when He was twelve years old, ... (NKJV)

I want to stop here and dwell on that for just a moment—*When He [Christ] was twelve years old*. Note the age—twelve years old.

42) And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.

43) When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy ... (NKJV)

Understand at twelve years of age, Christ is still referred to as a *Boy*—not a teenager, not a young man, but a *Boy*, a child if you will.

43) When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it;

44) but supposing Him to have been in the company [the traveling party], they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. (NKJV)

Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus was traveling with the group with the other family members. Verse 45:

¹ **1 Corinthians 4:14.** I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 6:14. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. (NKJV)

1 Thessalonians 2:11. as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, (NKJV)

1 John 3:2. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (NKJV)

² **Romans 8:16.** The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (NKJV)

45) So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. (NKJV)

At a minimum, we see here they experienced one day's journey out, one day's journey return. Verse 46:

46) Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting [among] the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. (NKJV)

So note here, as a twelve-year-old boy, a twelve-year-old child, He was listening and He was asking questions. Listening, being attentive, and asking questions are all very important and vital aspects in training. Verse 47:

47) And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. (NKJV)

I find it interesting here that in verse 46 the *Boy* was *listening ... and asking questions*. Yet, we find here in verse 47 that those who heard him were *astonished at His ... answers*. Consider this: In order for a child to give answers, He must have been asked questions. Dwell on that. Think about that. As a child, a twelve-year-old boy, the teachers of the temple *were astonished at His [knowledge]*. We can assess from this, because of His divinity as the Word prior to His physical birth, we can understand that Christ knew the scrolls. But, we can also assume from this that as a child perhaps somewhere around the age of five, He was schooled, trained in the scrolls. After all, His parents kept the Sabbath. They kept the high days. So, Jesus was very aware of the teachings of the temple and the teachings of the synagogue.

Continue here in verse 48.

48) So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." (NKJV)

Anxious? I would think so, having been separated from their child for a minimum of three days. Verse 49:

49) And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must [go] about My Father's business?" (NKJV)

Jesus Christ is emphasizing here as a child of twelve-years- of-age, He's emphasizing the precedence of His Father in His life, the priority of His spiritual Father in His life, to go about His Father's business.

Consider this: The fact that Jesus said "*My Father's business*" denotes that there is business that is not His Father's business. Turn, if you would please, to the epistle of 1 John chapter 3. We're going to read verse 10 here and I'll be reading this from the NIV. Earlier this week, one of the speakers read in his sermon a parallel scripture to this found in 3 John verse 11³. Here in 1 John 3:10 from the NIV, we read:

1 John 3:10. *This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (NIV)*

In other words, one who practices righteousness is a child of God going about his or her Father's business. Yet, those who do not practice righteousness are not children of God for they are about the Devil's business. Ask yourselves these questions: Whose child am I? God's child or the Devil's child? Am I about God's business? Or, am I about Satan's business?

Consider this: Jesus Christ had to prepare to go about His Father's business. And, the physical aspect of that preparation, that training, took part in the synagogue and in the temple, studying the scrolls, interacting with the teachers in the temple. Christ, our Christ, is our example.

We, too, must prepare to be about our Father's business. We, too, you and I, must be trained in His business. Have you ever met an earthly son—if you will—engaged in his father's business? Let me cite an example and this is not meant to embarrass my son-in-law, whom I promise I will not throw under the bus.

Years ago, my son-in-law went about his father's business, his dad's business. As a part of being about his father's business, he engaged in an intensive training program, both at the college level as well as hands-on, working side-by-side with his dad, being trained directly by his father. In turn, my son-in-law was faithful with what his father taught him, applied in his life the teachings of his dad. And, today, due to going about his father's business, he himself is very successful as a businessman still in the same trade that his father taught him. My son-in-law went about his father's business in that he applied in his life what his dad taught him.

That's exactly what Christ wants us to hear, to understand, and to apply as in Luke 2:49, where Christ stated that we *must be about [our] Father's business*. Jesus Christ is our example. He went about His Father's business. And, we, too, must go about our Father's business. Continue here in Luke, picking it up in verse 50.

Luke 2:50. *But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. 51) Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. (NKJV)*

³ **3 John 11** Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (NKJV)

My emphasis here is on the fact that Jesus was subject to Joseph; He was subject to Mary. For you see, He was still a child, twelve years of age. Verse 52:

52) And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God [as well as in favor with man]. (NKJV)

How is it that Jesus increased in wisdom? How is it? He was trained. Mary and Joseph applied what we read earlier in Proverbs 22:6.

We ask the question, moving ahead some twenty years: How is it that Jesus Christ endured what He endured in the final twenty-four hours of His life?

We give the answer: His training, His spiritual education, His knowledge of His purpose as He went about His Father's business.

We're all familiar with Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. We're all familiar with the synoptic gospels and 1 Peter 2:21-24⁴ as they pertain to Christ's trial, His beating, His crucifixion. Toward the final moments of our Savior's life, enduring all that is referenced in the scriptures just noted, after all the ancient prophecies had been fulfilled except one, Jesus asked for something to drink. The soldiers gave Him sour wine. Then He willingly died for you. He died for me. And, he died for all of humanity.

He had accomplished the work that his father had given him to do. Everything was done. And so, He said, *It is finished*. He bowed His head and He gave up His spirit. Jesus Christ went about His Father's business. And, Jesus Christ completed His Father's business.

The point I'm trying to make here is that training is a vital aspect of enduring physical trials, enduring whatever circumstances are thrown at us. This is not meant to be a sermon on endurance, but training plays a vital role in endurance. I don't want to get off on a tangent. It would be very easy to do so. I'll simply state that in your own Bible studies, get out a topical concordance, and look up the word "endurance." Look up the following scriptures. Don't just read them, study them: Matthew 24:13, Galatians 6:9, James 5:11, Revelation 3:10.⁵ And, there are many others like these.

⁴ **1 Peter 2:21.** For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (22) "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; (23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (24) who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. (NKJV)

⁵ **Matthew 24:13.** But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (NKJV)

Galatians 6:9. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. (NKJV)

James 5:11. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (NKJV)

Revelation 3:10. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (NKJV)

I want us to consider this. Without training, the Apollo XIII astronauts would never have endured the tragedy of their mission. Without the training and support of the scientists and engineers that worked on in the Apollo XIII project, those three astronauts would have died in space.

Please understand me. I am not trying to compare the trial of what the Apollo XIII astronauts endured to the trial of what our Savior endured. I'm simply trying to draw an analogy of what proper training can do when we're confronted with what seems to be insurmountable tasks.

For instance, without intense training, Canadian researchers Frederick Banting and Charles Best at the University of Toronto would not have isolated insulin. They endured two years of painstaking research and a number of failures before producing a product that would improve the quality of life for millions upon millions of individuals.

Without training, Australian born Howard Florey for his role in developing penicillin into a usable form would not have won the Noble Prize in medicine along with Alexander Fleming, who identified penicillin mold. Although Howard Florey did not discover the penicillin mold, his research systematically transformed penicillin from a simple observation in a Petri dish to a lifesaving medicine, only after enduring decades of research, all in the midst of the early days of World War II.

Let's all of us come to understand this: Without training, without proper education, our chances of enduring and being firstfruits of the resurrection are minimized. Training is vital in our calling just as training played a vital role in the apostle Paul's life, both before his conversion as Saul and after conversion as Paul.

Paul was trained. Paul was educated, highly educated. Paul was bilingual, trained in both Greek, as well as a dialect of Hebrew known as Syro-Caldaic. A man named Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, was brought up, educated and trained in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. From those teachings and trainings, Saul learned to follow Jewish laws and customs very carefully. We also find that Saul was struck blind by an intense light on his way to Damascus and that Jesus of Nazareth spoke directly to Saul. Keep that point in mind, if you would.

Turn over to Galatians chapter 1. Here Paul addresses the Galatians who had itching ears and who were turning to teachings of another gospel—a perverted gospel as scripture states it. Galatians 1, we'll begin in verse 11, from the New Living Translation.

Galatians 1:11. *Dear brothers and sisters, I solemnly assure you that the good news of salvation which I preach is not based on mere human reasoning or logic. (NLT)*

There is an admonition here for each of us. Anytime human reasoning or human logic is used in our belief system in setting doctrine, we're treading on ice—thin ice. We must

without exception at all times, apply John 17:17⁶ as a basis of our beliefs: The Father's word is truth—not any concordance, not any commentary, not any pamphlet, or publication other than the inspired word of God.

Verse 12, Paul states:

12) For my message came by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. No one else taught me. (NLT)

Paul's knowledge of the gospel, His intense education in the gospel message, His training—if you will—came directly from Jesus Christ. Verse 13:

13) You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion— ... (NLT)

Here Paul reflects back on his days prior to conversion.

13) You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted the Christians. I did my best to get rid of them.

14) I was one of the most religious Jews of my age and I tried as hard as possible to follow all the old traditions of my religion. (NLT)

This was all due to his training in the Jewish laws and Jewish customs. Verse 15, Paul states here:

15) But then something happened. For it pleased God in his kindness to choose me and call me ... (NLT)

It is the Father—we all realize—who does the calling,

15b) even before I was born. What undeserved mercy! (NLT)

Think about that phrase *what undeserved mercy*. Apply this to messages we heard earlier in the Feast. Verse 16:

16) Then He [the Father] revealed His Son [Jesus the Christ] to me so that I could proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles.... (NLT)

Now, I want us to pay attention here to these next few verses. Paul goes on to state:

16b) ... When this happened to me, I did not rush out to consult with anyone else.

17) Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. No, I went away to Arabia, and later returned to the city of Damascus.

⁶ **John 17:17.** Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (NKJV)

18) It was not until three years later I finally went up to Jerusalem for a visit with Peter, and stayed with him for fifteen days. (NLT)

There is every indication that Paul was under the direct tutelage of Christ for three years, being trained by Jesus Christ Himself. We understand this from the contents of verses 12, 17, and 18. Paul was trained directly by Jesus Christ. We, too, as children of God are being trained directly by Jesus Christ. We have Christ's own word, and His example before us, every time we open our Bibles.

Turn to Revelation chapter 3, if you would please. One speaker yesterday read verses 14-19 and verses 21 and 22. Today we'll read just verse 20, Revelation 3:20.

Revelation 3:20. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (NKJV)*

I like interactive sermons. So, I have an exercise for each one of us right now at this very moment. It's a simple exercise. One speaker this week referred to the book I have before me as a "text." Each of you has a textbook in your laps. I want each of you to pick up that text, your Bible. I don't care if it's leather bound. I don't care if it's hard copy. I don't care if it's a soft copy. I don't care if your textbook is an app on your smart phone or embedded in your tablet. Right now, pick up your textbook. Hold it in your hand.

Look at it this way. The book that we have in our hands is a door. It's a door and Christ is knocking at that door for each one of us. This is God's training manual. Everything we need in order to qualify as firstfruits is found in the book we have in our hands. This is our Father and our Savior speaking to every one of us.

From the book of Genesis through the book of Revelation, both consistently and directly are involved in teaching us—each and every one of us. One message this Feast brought out how precious, how astounding it is that the ones who created this universe are intimately, brethren, intimately involved in our training. They have been, are, and will continue to be involved.

Referring now back to Paul's calling, His training, some may say, "Yeah, but that was Paul. He was an apostle trained directly by Christ." Consider what we find in the second epistle of Timothy. Turn, if you would please, to 2 Timothy 3 where we'll begin in verse 10. Paul, up to this point has given a brief overview of the persecutions he endured. Then, he begins to reinforce Timothy's past training as we pick it up here in verse 10.

2 Timothy 3:10. *But you ... (NKJV)*

Paul is speaking to Timothy; but, by extension, understand he's speaking to each one of us.

2 Timothy 3:10. *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11) persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra — what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12) Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13) But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. (NKJV)*

"*Evil men and impostors*" refers to those mentioned in verses 2 through 5. Now, these following verses are the ones I want to key in on, verses 14 and 15.

14) But you must continue in the things which you have learned and [have] been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15) and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, ... (NKJV)

Paul emphasizes here that Timothy from childhood, as a child, knew the scriptures. That's an admonition for you. That's an admonition for me.

15) and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

I want to emphasize here, brethren, the training that Timothy had as a child. He knew the scriptures as a child. And, each one of us is a child, a child of God. This is an admonition for each one of us. Verse 16:

16) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (NKJV)

No wonder the Bereans searched the scriptures daily. The Bereans were aware of the contents in verse 16, the list of purposes scripture encompasses. Verse 17:

17) that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)

In verses 16 and 17, Paul is emphasizing that we, too, should be trained in the scriptures, because all scriptures, when understood and when followed, *are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. So that each of us—put your name in there if need be—so that each of us *may be complete*. Not partially equipped, but *thoroughly equipped to do every good work*.

This is accomplished by daily prayer, Bible study, fastings, meditations, exercising God's holy spirit and following the lead of that spirit. As one speaker asked this week: Are we thankful? Do we have the gratitude we need to have the ability to pray to the God of this universe? To understand and have the ability to read God's word? To exercise God's spirit?

Turn, if you would please, to Isaiah 28. Now, I don't very often use The Living Bible as a resource. It's not a translation. It's really a paraphrase, but today we will for the emphasis on this message. Isaiah 28, verses 9 and 10 from The Living Bible.

Isaiah 28:9. *"Who does Isaiah think he is," the people say, "to speak to us like this! Are we little children, barely old enough to talk?
10) He tells us everything over and over again, a line at a time and in such simple words!" (TLB)*

Well, as we just read in verse 9, we are children. Are we not? We're the children of God. Verse 10 is where I want to go. Here we find repetition. Words being spoken over and over. The New King James Version of Isaiah 28:10 reads:

Isaiah 28:10. *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." (NKJV)*

The NIV reads:

Isaiah 28:10. *For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there." (NIV)*

We ask the question: Why is this? Why does scripture tend to be so repetitious at times?

We give the answer: Repetition is a form of learning, a key in training.

How do you think these little children in the Children's Choir that we just heard a few moments ago, how do you think they were able to stand before us and sing as they did? Because of practice, countless hours of repetition, going over each verse of the song step by step. It's interesting that [The Guideposts Family Topical Concordance to the Bible](#) under the topic "Education" defines one method of education as "the step by step method." And, training by repetition, step by step, does bring success. We just saw it with these small little children.

This step by step phrase leads us to another question, and you'll see in a moment that the phrase step by step is a play on words. The question is this—and this may sound a bit odd, but stay with me, I promise you it will make sense. The question is: How many here recognize the name Gabriela Andersen? Anyone? Show of hands, Gabriela Andersen. Step by step training became vitally important in Gabriela Andersen's life.

We're going to go back thirty-three years to 1984. In the Summer Olympic Games of 1984, the first Olympics Women's Marathon was held. For those who may not know, a marathon is a grueling, punishing 26 mile, 385 yard race of endurance. For our international family, that's 42.195 kilometers.

In 1984, Gabriela Andersen was representing her native country of Switzerland in the women's marathon. She had trained and trained. She trained vigorously for this event. She had run many long distance races and marathons prior to this one. She trained hard as she knew the grueling road ahead. In 1983, less than a year prior to the '84 Olympics, Gabriela had finished first in the prestigious California International Marathon with a world-class time of 2 hours, 33 minutes, and 25 seconds. And, she had finished first in the Twin City Marathon with a time of 2 hours, 36 minutes, and 22 seconds. Gabriella had trained—and trained hard—for the twenty-third Olympiad.

The race began without mishap. The weather was a little warm, a little too warm for a marathon. It was 90° F, 32.22° C. The following quote comes from Wikipedia.

Fourteen minutes into the 1984 Olympic marathon, Joan Benoit, began to pull away from the rest of the pack. She went on to win in a time of 2 hours, 24 minutes, and 52 seconds. Twenty minutes after Benoit finished, then 39-year-old [Gabriela] Andersen ... entered the stadium. ... the conditions were very warm for running the full marathon.... At the time, the rules stipulated that there could only be five water stations and the contestants could not be given water anywhere else. Unfortunately for Gabriela ... she missed the fifth and [final watering] station and became dehydrated.... The crowd gasped as she staggered onto the track, her torso twisted, her left arm limp, her right leg mostly seized. She waved away medical personnel who rushed to help her, knowing that if they touched her she would be disqualified. While the effects of her heat exhaustion were evident, trackside medics saw that she was perspiring, which meant that her body still had some disposable fluids, and let her continue. The L.A. Coliseum crowd applauded as she limped as she limped around the track in the race's final 400 meters, occasionally stopping and holding her head. Her entrance to the Olympic stadium and the struggle over the last 400m, which took five minutes and forty-four seconds to complete, would make it a memorable finish. She finished 37th out of 44 [contestants], in a time of 2h 48m 42s. Medical personnel tended to her immediately and she was released two hours later. Her time of 2:48:42 would have won the gold medal in the first five [modern men's] marathons.

Now why do I bring up the story of Gabriela Andersen? After all, it doesn't seem to be a story of success, finishing 37 out of 44. And, why am I using an Olympic Games marathon analogy when we're not even in an Olympic year? The answer to both of these questions is simple. Number one, there is success found in Gabriela's story. We'll see that in a moment. And, number two, I bring this to our attention for the simple reason that each of us, you and I, we run a spiritual marathon. And, we run that marathon every day of our lives, every year of our lives. Not just during an Olympic year. We're on that pavement every day.

Now Gabriela's success is this. One aspect of a marathon, which many are not aware of, is that a marathon is never declared over until the last runner crosses the finish line.

Gabriela trained and trained and trained for this event. Remember Isaiah 28:10, which is repeated in verse 13, which states:

Isaiah 28:10. *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, ... (NKJV)*

Do we understand what a precept is? A precept is defined as the following: *a rule intended to regulate behavior or thought.* I'm going to repeat that. Precept is *a rule intended to regulate behavior or thought.*

Gabriela, as a world-class runner put into practice this form of training, this step by step form of training. Yes, in the Twenty-Third Olympics, she may have miscalculated the heat index of that day and she did miss the final watering station. Yet, the success lies in the fact that due to her years of training, her years of repetitious training, the precept upon precept form of training, she did finish the race, a race of endurance, a race full of pain, a race full of anguish, a race full of suffering, but Gabriela did finish the race.

What is the moral of the story for us? For starters, turn if you would please to 1 Corinthians 9. We'll begin reading with verse 24. I'll be reading this from the New Living Translation. Paul, in his first letter to the church at Corinth (and, by extension, a letter to us today) writes:

1 Corinthians 9:24. *Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win.*
25) *All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.*
26) *So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. (NLT)*

Paul states here in verse 27:

27) *I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should do.... (NLT)*

Paul understood what a precept is: once again, *a rule intended to regulate behavior or thought.* Verse 27:

27b) *... Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (NLT)*

The apostle Paul was inspired by the athletes of the ancient games. Paul had the same dedication and discipline that we just read of in the story of Gabriela Andersen, but with one exception. Paul was motivated spiritually, motivated for a priceless everlasting reward. And, Paul knew that a spiritual marathon is run each day of each week of each month of each year over the course of one's lifetime. Paul knew that to be the best apostle he could be required sacrifice, courage, and confidence in the face of

challenges, in the face of adversity such as Gabriella Anderson, who showed courage in the face of adversity, facing total dehydration. Yet, she had a goal and she had reached that goal.

The goal of a marathon, in reality, is not gold, silver, or bronze metal, although I guess these are nice to place on a mantel or hang on a wall. The real goal of a marathon is the challenge of finishing. That's exactly what Ms. Andersen did. Her story is a story of success, but not because she finished thirty-seventh out of forty-four. Her success is the fact that she finished the race.

What kept Gabriela going? It's a great question. In an interview later, she stated she remembered entering the coliseum and thinking that she didn't want to quit, that she had to finish. But why? Why finish? After all, she was nearly in last place. Why finish? The answer lies in the fact that a marathon is not a race against another athlete. A marathon is a race against time. It's nice, like I mentioned earlier, to win the goal, but, in reality, a marathon is a race against time.

A moment ago, I asked the question: What kept Gabriela going? And, I stated that it was a great question. I have another great question, a question for each of us. What keeps us going? Spiritually speaking, what keeps us running our marathon? What keeps us going? That brings us to the title of today's message.

We Are But Little Children In Training

We can list a number of items in answer to the question of what keeps us going. Items such as, prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, fellowshiping, service to one another and the list goes on and on. Do you know what keeps us going? Training. Training.

In the opening message of this Feast, the speaker referred to our spiritual conditioning. Another speaker referenced "doing." Both conditioning and doing are aspects of training, as the doing aspect is action and the other is results; we become conditioned, the conditioning aspect. The same kept Gabriela going because of her training regime, the doing, she was conditioned to finish the race.

No matter what the challenges may be for us, no matter what the adversities are, no matter if we miss the watering stations or not, we must keep on training—training for the goal that has been set before us, the goal that God Almighty, the Father that called us has set before us.

Turn, once again, to the gospel of Luke chapter 14. Prior to baptism, we were asked to count the cost. Luke 14, we'll begin here in verse 28.

Luke 14:28. *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it —*

29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

30) saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' (NKJV)

The drive, the desire, motivation to continue is wrapped up in one word—training. Things such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, fellowshiping, service to one another, these are all vital to our success. Why? Because these are the foundation of any good spiritual training program. And, as children, don't ever lose sight of that fact. As children of God, our spiritual Father has given us a step-by-step training program. The question is: Will we adhere to it?

For our last set of scriptures, turn please to 2 Timothy 4. Here we find some departing words of Paul, his final words of training to Timothy and Paul's final words regarding the race that he had run. 2 Timothy 4, we'll pick it up in verse 6 and I'll be reading from The Amplified Bible.

2 Timothy 4:6. *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [from this world] is at hand and I will soon go free.*

7) I have fought the good and worthy and noble fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith [firmly guarding the gospel against error]. (AMP)

Note here Paul's summary of his life when he states to Timothy,

7) I have fought the good and worthy and noble fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith [firmly guarding the gospel against error]. (AMP)

We have a record of what the apostle Paul endured. Paul had finished the race. Consider what He had endured during his race: three times beaten by rods, five times whipped with thirty-nine lashes each, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, and at least once spending twenty-four hours in the deep. In addition to those, hours of sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness. Yet, through it all Paul endured. Paul finished the race.

As we begin to conclude this message, I'm going to read a piece from www.christianglobe.com. It's about a childhood race, yet, it's an illustration of our spiritual journey in life. I think as we listen to this that we'll grasp the spiritual significance of this physical event because each of us is but a child in training. Or, as Paul states in 2 Timothy 4:2:

2 Timothy 4:2b. *... those who are growing towards spiritual maturity. (AMP).*

And, brethren, what is it that children do? They grow. Don't they? They grow. As children, our spiritual journey and our spiritual growth are not yet over. Our physical journey may be short. That's a given, but the spiritual aspect of that journey is a long battle, a long road. Our spiritual race is not over until our physical race is complete. The apostle Paul was very aware of that.

Now, as I read this piece titled "The Race", listen to these words and dwell on the spiritual significance found here.

"The Race"

"Quit! Give up! You're beaten!" They shout and they plead.
There's just too much against you, now, this time you can't succeed.
And as I start to hang my head in front of failures face
My downward fall is broken by the memory of the race.
And hope refills my weakened will as I recall that scene
For just the thought of that short race rejuvenates my being.
A children's race, young boys, young men. How, I remember well.
Excitement, sure, but also fear, it wasn't hard to tell.
They all lined up so full of hope, each thought to win the race
Or tie for first or if not that at least take second place.
And fathers watched from off the side, each cheering for his son,
And each boy hoped to show his Dad that he would be the one.

The whistle blew and off they went, young hearts and hopes afire
To win, to be the hero there was each young boy's desire.
And one boy in particular, his Dad was in the crowd,
Was running in the lead and thought, "My Dad will be so proud."
But as he speeded down the field, across a shallow dip
That little boy, who thought to win, lost his step and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself, his hands flew out to brace
And mid the laughter of the crowd, he fell flat on his face.
So down he fell and with him hope, he couldn't win it now,
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished to disappear somehow.
But, as he fell his Dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race."

He quickly rose, no damage done behind a bit, that's all
And ran with all his mind and might to make up for that fall.
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win
His mind went faster than his legs, he slipped and fell, again.
He wished that he had quit before with just one disgrace,
"I'm hopeless as a runner, now, I shouldn't try to race."

But in the laughing crowd, he searched. He found his father's face
That steady look that said again, "Get up and win that race."
So, he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the last.
"If I'm going to gain those yards," he thought, "I've have to run it fast.
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight or ten
But trying so hard to catch the lead, he slipped. He fell, again.

Defeat! He lay there silently, a teardrop in his eye.
"There's no sense in running now, three strikes, I'm out --- why try?
The will to rise had disappeared. All hope had fled away.
So far behind, so error prone, a loser all the way.
"I've lost so what's the use?" he thought. "I'll live with my disgrace."
But then he thought about his Dad, who soon he'd have to face.

"Get up!" An echo sounded low, "Get up, and take your place."
"You were not meant for failure, here. Get up and win that race."
With borrowed will, "Get up!" it said, "you haven't lost at all."
"For winning is no more than this, to rise each time you fall."
So up he rose to run, once more. And with a new commit
He resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others, now, the most he'd ever been,
Still he gave it all he had and ran as though to win.
Three times, he'd fallen, stumbled; three times he rose again.
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran and ran 'til the end.
They cheered the winning runner as he crossed into first place
Head high and proud and happy – no falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster crossed the line in last place
The crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race.
And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he'd won the race to listen to that crowd.
And to his Dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."
"To me you won" his father said, "you rose each time you fell."

And now, when things seem dark and hard and difficult to face
The memory of that little boy helps me to run my own race.
For all of life is like that race with ups and downs and all
And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.
"Quit! Give up! You're beaten!" They still shout into my face.
But, another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race."
.....AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Brethren, success indeed is reaching a goal, but true success is the journey on the way to that goal. With its stumbles, with its shallow dips and trips, with our embarrassing falls into the muddy quagmire of life, its bumbles, its unfairness, true success is accepting whatever the journey has in store for us and having the endurance, having the knowledge to look to our Father to find the encouragement to cross that finish line. It's a journey that each of us must take.

As Christians, members of the spiritual body of Christ, those who have God's spirit residing in our lives, we must come to understand that we must put first things first. As little children, we must make the spiritual goal of the Kingdom of God the number one

priority in our lives. We must have the drive. We must have the desire. We must be motivated to get back up each time we fall and stumble.

It's true we are not the apostle Paul. It's true we are not the evangelist Timothy, but, like them, each of us are in a race for we are but little children in training.