



the race of life

by Katie Kyle



SHOCK AND AMUSEMENT seemed to be the overriding emotions when I announced to my family that I was taking up running. I spent the first 38 years of my life refusing to run (unless I'd spied a traffic warden or one of our children escaping) but now I had itchy feet and a yearning to shape up and run away from my chores and responsibilities, even just for twenty minutes.

As I prepared for my maiden run, I encountered my first problem: I had nothing to wear. Dressed in some old leggings, Jack's oversized t-shirt and my biggest pair of sunglasses (so no one would recognise me), Jack declared I looked like Jackie Styllone minus the celebrity kit. So I lost the shades. Being a multi-tasking mum, I decided to take our dog, only I forgot the poo bags. The first half of the run therefore involved me trying to dispose of dog poo with sticks and leaves.

Finally, it was time to exercise. After a few strides, my laces mysteriously tangled and I tripped. Having sorted them out, like a small child in its first lace-ups, I resumed my jog but a few moments later a fly flew into my eye. As I leaked mascara everywhere, I realised why runners don't wear make-up. I removed the fly and ran on. Then my hair clip fell out. As I tried to reattach it, a fly flew into my other eye. I couldn't be bothered to stop again so I ran along, one eyed, like a mummy Cyclops.

As I struggled on, I thought of John Lennon's words. "Life is what happens whilst you're busy making other plans".

Prior to my run, I'd planned to enjoy some 'me-time' and get fit but my dog, my trainers, nature even, had other plans. This mess of a run is a good reflection of how my life often plays out, as I make one set of plans whilst a whole heap of other things actually fills my time. As a military spouse, this can be particularly true!

The apostle Paul likened the Christian life to a run at least 5 times. As I try, and often fail, with my running training, I've started to reflect on how I'm faring on my spiritual run. I have a distant memory of Paula Radcliffe, with no time to stop, being caught short during a marathon and completing the run in her own mess. I wonder how many of us do that spiritually. We're so keen to keep running in our own strength, desperate to make progress, that we don't stop. We don't stop to pray, read our bible or go to church because other things seem more pressing. Martin Luther King Jr once said, "I have so much to do that I will spend the first three hours in prayer." God is lucky if he gets a few minutes of prayer from me when I'm not busy! Bible reading is another thing I struggle to prioritise and it's amazing how I'm tired almost every Wednesday night, when our mid-week group meets...

Jack showed me a beautiful image of a runner on YouTube recently. Derek Redmond was hoping to win the 400 metres at the 1992 Olympics but, part-way through his race, he tore his hamstring. Rather than give up, he decided to fight on. His father rushed to his side and helped him across the finish

line. What a perfect picture that provides for the Christian life - the runner, unable to keep going in his own strength, who allows his father to help him finish his race.

Interestingly, Derek Redmond said afterwards that he'd have preferred to win the medal than be remembered, arguably more enduringly and inspirationally, for finishing with the help of his dad. Most of us want credit and success, to be the authors of our own significance and value. The good news is that we don't have to choose between the medal and our Father's help. We can have both. God wants to help us on our run and He has a medal for each one of us because we're all precious to him, however messy our race might be.

Derek Redmond's plans were rudely interrupted by a torn hamstring. That wasn't his plan but it turned out to be a significant part of his life. A challenge we face as Christians is to embrace the detours our race takes us on. I'm starting to realise that some of the more significant parts of my life are the bits that weren't my idea - helping a friend when I wanted to do something else or running crèche at church when I'd rather have heard the talk. Often, it seems, the life God wants for us is what happens whilst we're making other plans...

Katie Kyle is married to Jack, a Chinook helicopter pilot and they have three children.