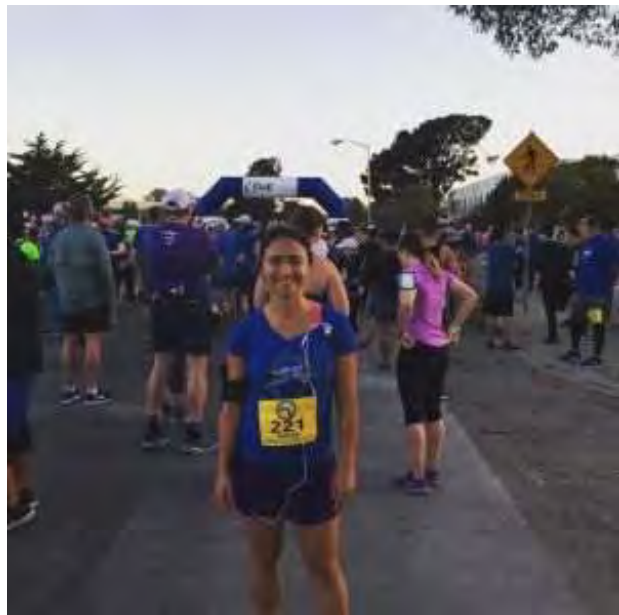


Running Can Be a Conversation with God - Feeling the Burn

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After months of training, the race day finally arrived. I felt a bit queasy, but also excited. I had only slept for bouts of time the night before because my body seemed to be prepared to run hours before the race began. I woke up while it was still dark, grabbed the smoothie I had prepared the night before, and hopped into my car to drive to Alameda. The drive was short, and I arrived and parked my car, breathing deeply before I stepped out to remind myself that I was indeed going to do this.

It was surprising to see so many runners gathered at the location already and to see that they were from all walks of life. There were folks that appeared to be over 50, along with many other younger people. Many people were wearing shirts from previous races. One group of runners had a picture of a family member on their T-shirts.

Others declared on their shirts why they were running: to overcome illness, to support a family member or friend. Some sported tutus while others had their native country's flag emblazoned on their attire. I was humbled to be in the company of so many motivated and determined people, and although they were strangers to me, there was an automatic camaraderie due to the shared excitement and a common purpose.

As a young person who has too many ambitions, running a half marathon was one among many. A few people have expressed a bit of curiosity as to why I would do something like run a half marathon. I think as a young person, and especially as a Unificationist, we long for purpose, and for our lives and daily actions to mean something more. I suppose in that sense, completing a half marathon is a symbolic action. It proves to myself and to God that I am still dedicated to a higher purpose and that I am committed to finding a sense of direction, even when it's easy to get lost in the quagmire of busyness and worrying about the opinions of others.

In so many ways, running can be a conversation with God. In the 1981 movie, *Chariots of Fire*, the protagonist, Eric Liddell, a young Christian missionary, compares the faith journey to running a race. He states, "And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within." I felt this special power when running my half-marathon. By the 11th mile, my legs had turned to jelly, and I realized that the only way that I could make it to the end without shuffling was to rely on those things which are most precious to me: my God, my loved ones, and my friends. They are the ones whose faces I picture when I run. They are the ones I envision getting married and finding true love and joy. God's dream is ultimately what I hope for, even if sometimes it's buried beneath layers of cynicism and the worries and concerns of daily life. The challenge of running has helped me to dig beneath these layers to get to my true essence.

I am not a superhero, and I'm not a perfect church member or wife. After the race, normal life resumed. In so many ways, I'm still figuring out what this life and what this faith is all about. However, completing this half marathon reminded me that I am still dedicated to running the race of faith and finding truth. I like how Eric Liddell summed it up in another statement in *Chariots of Fire*:

"But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It's hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape - especially if you've got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe your dinner's burnt. Maybe you haven't got a job. So who am I to say, "Believe, have faith," in the face of life's realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way."

We each need to find our own way to run this race, so we can feel God's pleasure.