

Thought for the week

Several weeks ago, thousands of runners undertook the London Marathon. Many raised money for good causes, some ran in costume and the elite runners, who set off at the front of the field, competed for a prize and a potential course record. For everyone involved it will have been the culmination of a lengthy process of planning, training and monitoring their nutrition, water and rest levels.

A common theme in the stories posted after these events is the pain and difficulty of the run itself balanced against those things that have helped individuals to push through and keep going to the end of the race. Some share of a hardship they have overcome personally, which has led them to pursue the goal of running a marathon. Others talk of the charitable cause that they are raising money for and how the importance of making a difference for those in need helps them to push on and keep going to the end.

Most often, however, runners mention how important it has been to have their family or friends waiting to cheer at specific points on the route and how general members of the crowd offering their support are what spurs the runners on. Often those who line the race route will call out the names or some type of identifier of those running past to encourage them.

This is similar to what we see in many sports where records are usually broken in the context of a race or competition environment. Athletes attest to the ambience of the event – often the crowd cheering and the energy that creates – as the reason why they could push themselves to achieve more than they might have managed in training.

In Peter's letter, he makes clear that he is unsurprised at the struggles his readers are going through and he is not suggesting that they can expect God to end these troubles. Instead, he encourages them to stand firm in their faith and to endure knowing that God is in control and will ultimately prevail and save them. As runners in the race of faith, perhaps we should also consider whether we are looking for encouragement to keep going or for ways to make the difficulties end? And are we aware of the struggles of those running alongside us? We might want to consider how we might be more like the crowd on marathon day, cheering and supporting others to keep going as they face struggles. What might that look like for us in our church and in caring for those in everyday life?