

# Running Partners

## What is a Running Partner?

"Running Partners" are like exercise training partners for spiritual goals. You should look for one or two partners of the same gender who will help you reach Christ-centered goals. The following guidelines are meant to help you challenge and encourage each other, and to help you set a life-giving pace.

## Before you Run:

### Identify Your Running Partners

- **How many?** *Three seems to be the optimum number. It's small enough that each person can share in detail and with a high-level of trust, but gives more than one perspective. If you only have one running partner, consider finding a second together. If you find yourself with four, it is time to multiply so you don't become a running club instead of running partners.*
- **What kind of person should I look for?** *You will naturally look to run with someone you already trust. Especially if both of you are mature, consider inviting a person that has unrealized potential for whom a Running Partner could change their life and leadership. You don't necessarily need someone who is way ahead of you or way behind you. Running Partners are mutual mentors; everyone has something to contribute.*
- **Where do I find them?** *Since you are looking for people you can trust to pace you, push you, and help you persevere, Community Groups are the best place to look first. You have already observed the people in your Community Group and know who they are. Otherwise, look in other spheres of influence (service teams, Bible studies, or peer groups).*

### Map out a Plan

- **When will you meet?** *We have found that you can normally accomplish everything in a 1-hour weekly conversation. Find a 1-hour block of time that all three people can commit to attending more often than not.*
- **What will you read?** *The text for Running Partners is the Bible. The goal is for us to hear God's voice and respond in obedience, not process regurgitated food. Although you might refer to other resources to go alongside your Bible reading (a supplemental list can be found at [www.mckinneychurch.com/runningpartners](http://www.mckinneychurch.com/runningpartners)), for the purposes of Running Partners, don't substitute the Bible for another book.*
- **What pace will you run?** *As a group, pick a book of the Bible where you want to start. A chapter a day is a normal pace for many people. You can choose to do more or less if you find it's necessary to push you or for you to really apply what you are hearing. If you need help choosing what book of the Bible to study, there is a list of books with the topics they address on page 5.*
- **When will we re-evaluate?** *You may run with your running partners for a lifetime, or you may run with them for a season and then multiply to form other Running Partner relationships. Whatever your plan at the outset, commit to a date (usually 6 months or a year from the start) to discuss the best course for you and those around you.*

## When you Run:

### Hydrate by Soaking the time in Prayer

*In addition to praying for your Running Partners throughout the week, consider praying for your time when you pull into the parking lot and before you pull out. Some running partners have found it helpful, rather than limiting prayer to a formal time to open and close the meeting, to pepper the time with brief moments of prayer as you talk; asking God for help, thanking Him for how He worked, or for anything else that comes up. This allows the whole time to be prayer-soaked without sacrificing the time you have for discussion around the Running Partner questions.*

### Warm up before getting started

*From week to week, a different person should serve as the facilitator of the conversation.*

*The first few weeks you should read the following “Rules of Running” before you begin:*

- **Listen carefully.** *Be quick to listen and slow to speak.” (James 1:19) Listen to what the person is saying without giving advice or telling your own story. Only give advice sparingly and with permission.*
- **Ask questions wisely.** *The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out. (Proverbs 20:5) Help the person discern what God is doing and what He wants them to do.*
- **Encourage generously.** *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ...encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25) Speak words of affirmation that God would want this person to hear at this time.*
- **Restore gently.** *If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1) Be gracious and humble when reproof or correction is needed.*
- **Keep confidentiality.** *A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. (Proverbs 11:13) Guard each other's privacy and be sensitive with sensitive information.*

### Start Running

*Your goal is to help each other run the race well (Hebrews 12:1-3). Here are the 5 questions to talk through:*

- **What do I hear God saying?** *As I read Scripture and listened for the Spirit’s prompting in my life, what do I hear God saying?*
- **What is the big thing God has in front of me right now?** *Either a place where He is at work around me, or a circumstance or struggle I am faced with.*
- **What did He ask me to do (or stop doing)?** *Be specific. What step did God call you to take as you listened to Him and followed Him last week?*
- **How did it go?** *Did I take the steps God called me to, or did I fall short this week?*
- **What is my path for next week?**
  - **Scripture I’m going to read?** *Do I need to move on in Scripture or am I still struggling to obey what God invited me to do last week?*
  - **What step will I take?** *Do I already sense God inviting me to a step of obedience or a different pace next week?*
  - **Who will I B.L.E.S.S.?** *(Begin with prayer, Listen to the needs of another person, Eat with a person, Serve through meeting physical needs, Share the Message of Jesus)*

## Resources:

### 1. How to read and study the Bible

#### Starting Point

2 Timothy 3:16 says that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The Bible contains Words that were “breathed” by God. That’s why we call it “God’s Word.” And not only is it God’s Word, the Bible was written in common language to common people – not just to religious professionals! God intended for His Word to be understood by “common” people like us. It is one of the primary ways He talks to us. And if God is talking, we want to be good listeners. Here is a brief guide to help you get started.

#### How to Listen

It is important to remember that there is a difference between *reading* and *listening*. God never intended Scripture to be just a textbook we study or a book that we read. As Eugene Peterson says, “The Christian’s interest in Scripture has always been in hearing God speak, not in analyzing moral memos.” Peterson goes on to say,

*“Listening is an interpersonal act; it involves two or more people in fairly close proximity. Reading involves one person with a book written by someone who can be miles away and centuries dead, or both. The listener is required to be attentive to the speaker and is more or less at the speaker’s mercy. For the reader it is quite different, since the book is at the reader’s mercy. It may be carried around from place to place, opened or shut at a whim, read or not read. When I read a book the book does not know if I am paying attention or not! when I listen to a person the person knows very well whether I am paying attention or not. In listening, another initiates the process; when I read I initiate the process. In reading I open the book and attend to the words. I can read by myself; I cannot listen by myself. In listening the speaker is in charge; in reading the reader is in charge.”*

As we approach Scripture, the goal isn’t just to read or study; it’s to listen to the words of God. Just like in any conversation, understanding can be the key to listening. If we don’t listen to words in their context we may miss the point altogether, no matter how well we listen.

Think of the journey toward understanding the Bible as a trip across a bridge. On one side of the bridge is the particular people a passage of Scripture was written to. The individual letters and books that make up the Bible were written to people, by people who lived at specific points in history with specific application for how they were supposed to respond *then*. On the other side of the bridge is us, people who are trying to understand what the Bible says and how we are supposed to respond *today*.

In order to understand what God wants to say to us *today* through the Bible, we have to cross the bridge from *then* to *today*.

#### Then

To understand what a passage is saying to us, first we have to understand what the passage is *saying*. In order to do that, we have to start “*then*” and do the work of an investigator. To understand the words of

the Bible in their original context, we ask the questions any good investigator would ask: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How? Try to notice:

- **Who** are the players?
- **What** are the circumstances at hand? What kind of literature am I reading?
- **When** was the book written? When were the promises anticipated?
- **Where** was the author? Where was the audience?
- **Why** did the author write what he did? Why should the audience obey?
- **How** will this be accomplished? How should the audience obey?

The goal is to put yourself in the shoes of the very first person to hear the book or letter read. What would *they* have thought? How would *they* have understood the words? How (specifically) should *they* have responded?

### **Always**

It's probably not a surprise that there is a river that separates *today* from *then*. Differences in language, culture, time, situation, customs, traditions create between us and the original audience. Think of it as a river. To understand what God is saying, we need to build a bridge.

The first step in building the bridge from *there* to *today* is figuring out how wide the river is. In some books, the river is wider than others. For example, in the book of Leviticus, God defines laws for His covenant people, the Nation of Israel. We're not Jewish, and we live on the other side of the death and resurrection of Jesus. So we have a fairly wide river to cross between *then* and *today*.

To measure the distance across the river the question to ask is, "*What is different between the original audience and me?*"

Once you know what is different, you're ready to build the bridge from *then* to *today* by asking "*What is the principle in this passage that applies to all people in all places in all times?*"

For example: In Leviticus, although we are not God's covenant people living in the Nation of Israel, we consistently see the principle that God wants people who follow Him to be visibly different from the rest of the world and the gods they serve.

### **Today**

God has not just given us His Word for our *information*; He has given it for our *transformation*. Once you have built the bridge from *then* to *today*, you are ready to cross it by asking "*How should I apply the principle in this passage to my life today?*"

This is where you find out how the passage applies to your own beliefs, behaviors and attitudes. How is this passage "profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16) in your life? Is there...

- a **command** I need to **obey**?
- an **attitude** I need to **change**?
- a **Truth** I need to **believe**?
- a **sin** I need to **avoid**?

Make sure the application is specific, make sure the application comes from the passage, and make sure the application is personal. It's simple to see how everyone around us needs to transform, but difficult to spot specific places in our life where God wants to work.

## 2. Books of the Bible Summary:

Green: Easy

Blue: Moderate

Black: Advanced

G	Genesis	Beginnings, God keeps His promises, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
G	Exodus	Passover, Deliverance, Redemption, Sovereignty of God, Moses
	Leviticus	Priesthood, Sacrifice, Personal and Corporate Holiness
	Numbers	Wandering in wilderness, God's care for disobedient people
G	Joshua	Strength and courage, Fulfillment of God's promises
B	Judges	Cycle of sin and disobedience, justice and repentance and blessing
G	Ruth	Unconditional love and loyalty, God's sovereignty
G	1 Samuel	Transition of generations, appearances vs. heart, Saul, Samuel
G	2 Samuel	God's promise to David, Trials to triumphs, God's covenant with David
G	1 Kings	The reign of Solomon, division of kingdom, unwise leadership
G	2 Kings	Unwise leadership, Elijah, Elisha, God's sovereignty over other gods
	1 Chronicles	Genealogy of David, Law, Priesthood, Temple, God's faithfulness
	2 Chronicles	David's spiritual legacy, faithful kings in a divided kingdom
B	Ezra	The return from exile, importance of corporate worship
G	Nehemiah	Leadership, rebuilding of a destroyed city, repentance of Israel
G	Esther	Brave leadership, God's providential care and sovereignty
	Job	Suffering well when God is silent, How God's goodness allows suffering
G	Proverbs	Wisdom, fathers and sons, practical living.
B	Ecclesiastes	The pursuit of happiness, finding satisfaction in the wrong places
B	Song of Solomon	The pursuit of sex and lasting relationships between men and women
B	Isaiah	Salvation and redemption by a coming Messiah

	Jeremiah	Backsliding and unfaithfulness, judgment of sin on Israel
	Lamentations	Consequences of sin, mercy and judgment, God's faithfulness
	Ezekiel	Coming judgment, apostasy, God's faithful but will discipline and judge
B	Daniel	God's sovereignty over everything. Daniel's conviction and character
B	Hosea	Spiritual adultery and idolatry, God's faithfulness
	Joel	Sovereignty and judgment, the Day of the Lord
	Amos	God is righteous Judge, hunger for God's word, loving the poor and needy
B	Obadiah	God's ability to see when our enemies attack, coming judgment on earth
G	Jonah	Compassion, complacency, laziness. The idol of comfort
	Micah	God's people on trial for neglecting the poor and needy around them.
	Nahum	God will judge enemies so we don't have to.
	Habakkuk	Faithfulness in a culture that isn't faithful; in a world that is hard.
	Zephaniah	Complacency of God's people, laziness and spiritual malaise
	Haggai	God's encouragement for spiritual renewal of His people
B	Zechariah	Spiritual restoration of Israel, promise of Messiah
B	Malachi	Preparing for God to do justice.
	<b>The New Testament</b>	
B	Matthew	Portrays Jesus as the Jewish Messiah-King
G	Mark	Jesus' Leadership Training manual
G	Luke	A detailed account of Jesus' life
G	John	Best starting place – the Good News about Jesus
G	Acts (of the Apostles)	The Beginning and spread of the Church
B	Romans	The bad news about us and the good news about Jesus
B	1 Corinthians	Message to hypocritical church people
B	2 Corinthians	Encouragement to a repentant church; protection from false teachers
B	Galatians	Legalism and license. Pursuing grace instead of just following rules

G	Ephesians	The message and implications of the Gospel
G	Philippians	Joy, humility, attempting to look like Jesus, eternal perspective
G	Colossians	The identity of Jesus, how to look more like Jesus in our everyday life
B	1 Thessalonians	Encouragement for faithful believers. How to live in expectation of Jesus' return
B	2 Thessalonians	Standing firm in life and faith as you wait for Jesus' return
G	1 Timothy	Leadership manual for a young church leader.
G	2 Timothy	Final words of Paul, importance of Scripture
G	Titus	Practical advice on how to lead a young church
B	Philemon	Redemption and forgiveness
	Hebrews	The supremacy of Jesus, danger of apostasy, godly discipline
B	James	Avoiding hypocrisy, living a life in which the "walk" matches the "talk."
B	1 Peter	Suffering well, living with persecution.
B	2 Peter	Dealing with false teachers and problems inside the church
B	1 John	Walking in love. Avoiding hypocrisy and half-hearted worship.
B	2 John	Avoiding false teachers, living a life of love, staying true to doctrine
B	3 John	Being hospitable to good teachers, avoiding false teachers
	Jude	The coming judgment of false teachers and ungodly people
	Revelation	The culmination of God's story.