



On your marks

The Bible uses the imagery of running a race in a number of places to explore what following Jesus is like. This idea brings together a number of simple warm-up activities and team games that can be used to introduce Bible stories linked to the key stages of running the race of faith.

Get set

Most of the following suggestions need few or no props. They are divided up according to which aspect of 'following Jesus' they best introduce - namely:

- Joining the team
- Keeping on track
- Not giving up
- Supporting each other
- Winning the prize

Go!

General warm-up activities

1. Start with a high-energy warm-up: get your group to mime different events from the original Greek games: running races, the marathon, chariot racing, extreme wrestling (known as *pankration*), throwing the javelin or discus. This could be done to some lively music.
2. Set your group off around the room miming various modern Olympic sports. Call out different sports and then freeze the action to create an Olympic statue park of competitors. Include team events as well so that they have to get into groups to do the mimes.
3. The Christian race is run every day, not just every four years, and every day Christians believe that they hear God saying 'On your marks, get set, go!'. Play a game using these commands where:

On your marks = stay frozen to the spot

Get set = move in slow motion

Go = running at top speed on the spot

Vary the order rapidly for fun!

Christians believe they get 'on their marks' by saying sorry to God; they 'get set' by saying 'yes' to his rules; and they 'go' by following the example of Jesus. This is the way they put God first and the way they believe everyone can be a winner.



1. With larger groups, divide them into five roughly equal groups. Show them the five Olympic rings. Challenge them first to make themselves into the five circles; then to arrange themselves into five interlocking circles; and finally to get the circles rotating in and out of each other. This is a team event!
2. Select some of your group to compete in a few ancient Greek games (see examples below). Also select a judge for each event to make sure the rules are kept.

Javelin throwing: use big straws weighted at the ends with some tissues.

Discus throwing: use paper plates.

Chariot racing: create a chariot and rider with two people in the front as the horses and a rider behind who places one hand on the shoulder of each horse. Can they stay in time and together around a simple course?

Poetry competition: using pen and paper, challenge two teams to come up with as many words as possible rhyming with 'sing' in 30 seconds.

1. *For the whole group together:* Ask if everyone is ready for a game, drama or story. Introduce a Bible box containing the following items:
 - water bottle or team top
 - whistle
 - sweat band
 - relay baton
 - medal
 - Olympic flag

Drape the flag around either yourself or a child and 'celebrate a winner'! Link this to the Olympics, if possible.

Ask what their favourite sports are. Get different groups to stand up and mime one sport. Or get a group to come to the front and mime sports like weight-lifting and so on.

Next, introduce some of the official Olympic values such as Respect, Excellence, Friendship, Courage, Determination, Equality. Select six children and/or adults to represent each of these values as an action - for example: giving a high-five; punching of the air; linking up arms at the elbows; holding fists to chest and looking brave; looking to the winning tape; becoming a human scales balancing equal invisible weights. Link this to the rings on the flag and get everyone to link-up arms. What a combination! What an Inspiration! (Inspiration is another official Olympic value.)

But where do we get inspiration? Christians believe that the Bible is a book full of stories of inspiration from God. I wonder what these stories might say about the Olympic values? What can we learn if we bring the flag and the book together?



Tell a Bible story that inspires Christians today and helps them know 'who comes first'.

1. Welcome everyone. Invite physical responses to the following:

Who can be the tallest... the shortest... the fastest... the cleverest... the sneakiest(!)... the widest... the smiliest(!)...

So much of what we do seems to be about being the best at something... about 'who comes first'. And lots of things are about winners and losers; about who is 1st, 2nd, 3rd... and sporting events like the Olympics put all this in the spotlight!

But who really comes first? That's the big question. Who are the real winners in life? The Olympics might give us some ideas... but the Bible also gives us some ideas. I wonder what we might discover if we put both side by side?

Joining the team

The first Christians, like the Olympians, believed that the most important thing was to be on the team... Jesus' team.

1. Set your group off walking around the room and then get them to freeze. Now give them a number. They must try and get into a team of that number as quickly as possible.
2. In groups of five or six, ask them to work together as a team to form a joined-up statue of people all doing something together, or create a team shape (for example, a star, a cube, a pyramid and so on).

Keeping on track

The first Christians, like the Olympians, believed that the next important thing was to follow the rules... God's rules for life: loving God, loving others (our neighbour) as we love ourselves. Link this to the Bible's ten best ways to live - the Ten Commandments.

1. Play a version of 'Simon says' to emphasise the importance of following directions.
2. Play a runaround game: What does the word 'discipline' mean? It comes from the old word 'disciple', which means someone who follows and copies their leader, even when the going gets tough.

Ask your group to imagine they've been asked to join a sports team. If the team coach demanded it, would they be prepared to...? Call out these actions or similar:

- Wear a team shirt all the time.
- Come on a bus to train all day for the next four weekends.
- Give up all your pocket money for a month to pay for new equipment.
- Watch the trainer competing and practise playing just like he/she does.
- Turn up on time to train even when it's raining.

- Play even if the team is not likely to win.
- Come and tidy up the changing rooms for the team instead of watching TV.

Group responses

- ‘Stay on the spot’ version: If they decide they would do what the coach asks, they jump to face the ‘Yes’ wall. If they wouldn’t, they jump to face the ‘No’ wall. If they’re not sure, they face the front.
- ‘Runaround version’: If they decide they would do what the coach asks, they run to the ‘Yes’ end of the room. If they wouldn’t, they run to the ‘No’ end of the room. If they’re not sure, they hover in the middle.

So what marks out a real team member? Open this up for discussion. A real team member supports the team even when it’s hard work, or things aren’t going well. He/she is prepared to learn from the leader and copy them as much as possible.

Not giving up

The first Christians, like the Olympian athletes, believed that they needed to keep going and not give up.

1. Divide your group into pairs, and each pair into person A and person B. Explain that they’re going to take turns at being a sculptor, who has to shape the other person into a particular statue. Try it with statues related to this theme - an exhausted runner, someone encouraging another, someone who has given up, someone straining to keep going.
2. Play an **[‘in and out’ drama game](#)** in which your group create statues of feelings related to this theme - loneliness, fear, anger, frustration, surprise and so on.

Supporting each other

The first Christians, like Olympian athletes, believed that they needed each other’s help to win (coach, trainer, physiotherapist and so on), like St Paul’s image of all the parts of a body being essential (1 Corinthians 12:12 - 31).

1. Set up a challenge for two equally matched children. They must both hold part of the same rubber ring, standing between two plates each with three sweets on. They will have 30 seconds to collect as many sweets as they can. Don’t say it is a competition. Let them assume it. Afterwards, ask why they didn’t take turns to go together from one plate to the other - or if they did, then praise them for thinking first! Explain that the object of this game was not actually to beat the other person but to see how you solved the problem. Life is not necessarily about beating others and being better than others. It could be about finding ways for us to support each other - such as encouraging your team mates.
2. Play one of the following team games to emphasise the importance of encouraging each other as you compete, and the fun of just taking part and enjoying it.



- Game 1: Simple relay race for a number of teams with balls being bounced along a course, brought back to pass to the next player in the team... and so on.
- Game 2: Four teams standing in a cross formation. Each player runs with the ball clockwise around the outside of the circle, returning to pass it to the next player in their team, then going to the back and sitting down. Winning team is the first with all players sitting down.
- Game 3: Divide your group into two teams. One team stands in a circle, with the leader in the middle. The leader has to throw the ball to each member of the team, keeping count of how many throws are made - that's the team's score. The other team meanwhile runs a relay race around the outside edge. When they have all finished and sat down, the inner circle stop throwing the ball and reveal 'their' score of throws. The teams then swap over and repeat the challenge. Which team has the highest number of throws?

Winning the prize

The first Christians, unlike Olympian athletes, believed that everybody is rewarded by God. This is similar to the London Marathon and other competitions where everybody receives a medal.

1. Get your group to pretend to run the London Marathon and all finish in different ways. This could be done to appropriate music.
2. Get your group to create a simple design of five interwoven circles, perhaps using coloured card, tissue paper or ribbon. Use the colours of the five rings to reflect on their feelings linked to the Olympics... the values... and who comes first?

Conclusion

So, 'who comes first' in the Christian race?

- Anybody can, because anybody can be on Jesus' team.
- God comes first... and caring for others, whoever they are.
- Those, who no one else bothers about; those, who get overlooked.
- Those, who know they need other people to help and inspire them.
- Everybody can be winner.