



February 2012

Dear Friends

I wish you a belated Happy New Year, and for us in the U.K. we pray that it will prove to be an Happy Olympic Year!

This year we will witness and have reported many races and athletic events for which hundreds of Athletes will have trained for not just months but years. This London Olympiad will, for many, be the pinnacle of their athletic career. The climax to the Olympics is surely the marathon which tests the endurance of the individual to the very limit. In 1968, at the Mexico City Olympics, the last runner to finish the marathon represented Tanzania. During the race he stumbled and was badly injured. He was bruised and bloodied but against advice he carried on. When he arrived, the stadium was emptying and there were only a few thousand spectators left in it. The Tanzanian came struggling in, the last person in the marathon race. It was already dark outside. As he entered to run his last lap and finish the race, the crowd rose and gave him a standing ovation. Later he was asked, "Why didn't you quit when you were hurt , bruised, and bloody? Why didn't you give up?" He replied, "My country did not send me 7000 miles around the world to start the race, but to finish it."

The Bible teaches very clearly that the Christian life is like a race. The Apostle Paul wrote and spoke about this. He made it clear that he did not want to miss God's best. In Acts he says "*I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given me.*" At the end of his life Paul wrote a letter to a pastor named Timothy. In the last chapter of the letter Paul wrote, "*I have finished the race.*" Of course he had encountered hurdles along the way, and so do we. Some of them trip us, others slow us down and others seem to try to make us fall flat on our face. There will be times when we become discouraged and perhaps times when we want to give it all up - you may be there right now. Life can be tough for the Christian and non Christian alike.

Those early Olympiad competitors in ancient Greece competed to win a little crown made of either oak leaves or laurel leaves. Those crowns quickly perished. Athletes in London this year will compete for trophies and medals which will also tarnish and, latterly, perish. Paul looks beyond the end-zone in which he stands and he sees a day when the Lord Jesus Christ, the chief official in the race of life, will give him a crown that will never fade away. The Bible tells us that the same reward is there for all who run and complete the race in Christ.

Your friend,

Hugh O'Brien.