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TRAINING GROUND

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I have run competitively for over 10 years. This isn't something many people experience; in fact, I often hear people say, "I could never run," or, "How do you do that?" To be honest, I'm uncertain myself.

Stepping up to a start line, whether it be for a workout or a race, never ceases to unnerve me. Oftentimes, with my toe touching that thin white line, my legs in start position, a voice in my head asks, "Is this real life?" Sometimes, my eyes fixed downward on my front foot, I consider exercising my human right of free will to just stand there when the gun goes off. Yet, something intangible always stops me. And I run.

Warming up before the race is the worst part. I like to call it "pretend time". As I loosen up my muscles with light jogging and drills, I try to subdue the pool of worry in my stomach that so desperately wants to be a geyser. But once the announcer says there's only five minutes until race time, the façade is over.

Suddenly, I have an intense need for the bathroom (or more commonly the porta potty). This near-race phase is fondly known as the PRP to runners everywhere – the pre-race pee.

Next comes prayer. Granted, I usually pray about the race from the moment I wake up the morning of. In fact, I used to wake up in a state of panic on the morning of my races. It usually only lasted about 10 or 15 seconds, but it shows a glimpse of the anxiety and stress running can cause some runners. Thankfully, although it took me many years, I've learned to find peace in God's presence on race day (or a hard workout day).

Finally the gun sounds, and we're off. Even as I take that first step, adrenaline rushes through my body. Senses heighten; my legs tingle and become light; surrounding noise blurs unless within five feet; information rapidly streams into my brain. I am surrounded by the subtle pounding of a hundred pairs of wild feet – all in the first 400 meters.

Competitive running is physically challenging, but moreover, it is an emotional and spiritual battle. Once I've got a race or workout under my belt, another will soon come. Each day of training is an opportunity to give God my best as a sacrifice of praise, learn discipline, and overcome the fear of pain. I like to think of all the pressure and worry as something my teammate told me once – a training ground for boldly trusting in Christ. And it has changed me. I guess that is partly why I continue to do it.