

Run!

"I will run in the way of Your commandments..." (Psalm 119:32)

By the Rev. Derek Elphick

Introduction

In order to prepare for today's message, I invite you to think back to the last time you ran...

- ...what were the circumstances?
- ...was it in a team sport or were you just running for pleasure?
- ...were you running to catch a bus or train or plane?
- ...were you running *away* from some kind of danger?
- ...or were you running *toward* a happy, exciting event?
- ...maybe you were playing a game with your children or grandchildren

Even if we don't run anymore, or haven't done so in a long time, we can still tap into our own memories of running...

- that sense of freedom (getting out of the house or office) - running in the great outdoors, with the fresh air blowing on our face
- that sense of accomplishment (overcoming obstacles, setting a goal)
- that sense of keeping our body healthy & strong

And since most of us have the memory and experience of running at some point in our lives, we can quite easily switch to thinking of "running" as a metaphor...

- ...of "running away" from a difficult or painful situation
- ...of our mind "running around in circles"
- ...of "running" or "rushing" to judgment or criticism
- ...of "running" toward a goal

1. Examples from Scripture

The Scriptures are full of examples of people running (for different reasons)

In some cases, the individuals run because the prospect is exciting and hopeful

- like Abraham's servant running to meet Rebekah at the well
- and she, in turn, running to tell her mother the joyful news of her betrothal to Isaac

- or, after years of being estranged from each other, Esau runs to meet his brother Jacob
 - and there is a tearful, heart-felt reunion.

- during the Lord's life on earth, there were multitudes of people who ran to meet the Lord, to see what He was doing.

In other cases, we learn of individuals running from danger

- like Elijah running into the wilderness to escape King Ahab and Queen Jezebel

- or the Woman Clothed with the Sun running into the wilderness to escape the fury of the dragon

And in other cases, we learn of individuals running when the outcome is uncertain

- like Peter and John running to the tomb on Easter morning.

2. The Correspondence of Running

All of the movements of the body carry a correspondence...

- walking, sitting, kneeling, lying down

We were reminded of this in our recitation from Deuteronomy this morning -
"You shall teach these [commandments] to your children and talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:4-9).

Each movement of the body corresponds to a particular mental activity like reflection, or seeking to understand, or willing.

So, what about running? Running carries with it the idea of urgency...

of doing something from set-purpose.

Unlike other movements of the body such as

lying down
 or sitting
 or walking

Running only happens when we are seriously intent on doing something!

In other words, it's hard to run half-heartedly
 - either we do it or we don't.

Now, we may not all be runners.

It's (obviously) not a pre-requisite for understanding or appreciating the correspondence of running...

[NOTE] **As to our spirit, we're all runners!**

We "run" to communicate our intent, our desire

This is the correspondence of running - "*wanting to make something known*" (AC 3804).

- running has an *intentionality* behind it

So, as to our spirit, what are we running toward or from?

This is where it starts to get interesting (and a bit scary).

You might be familiar with the teaching that says if we, the human race, were left to our own devices, we would "rush headlong" into every kind of evil and falsity (AC 929).

- we would "rush headlong" into hell (AC 868).
- Isaiah speaks to our fallen condition when he says, "*their feet run toward evil...*" (Isaiah 59:7)

Now, the operative word here is "if"

- *if* the Lord were to leave us on our own
- *if* the Lord and His angels were to abandon us

Fortunately, the Lord doesn't do this.

Instead, the Lord protects us in countless different ways.

He sets up "guard-rails" to keep us from falling off the edge. He does this by giving us things like...

- ...a conscience (formed by means of knowledge from the Word)
- ...and moral and civil laws (rules, regulations, right & wrong)

Which means most civilized societies won't rush "headlong" into a life of crime

- there's a moral pressure to follow the rules
- people want to protect their honor/reputation, get along w/each other

But this teaching reveals an important lesson about where our spirit *would* run if it were left to itself - it would run in a very bad direction!

This is why the Lord wants us to be *intentional* in our running...

He wants us to, in the words of our text, "run in the way of His commandments..."

Not simply "walk" in His commandments (a frequent reference in Scripture) but RUN!

[NOTE] He wants us to pay attention to the direction in which our spirit is running...

**What are we running toward?
What are we running away from?**

3. Run Away!

Spiritually speaking, love is what drives our spirit (Life 1).

Love

- propels us forward
- points us in a direction

Swedenborg, as a revelator of things heard and seen in the spiritual world...

...describes seeing people running there
 ...running to meet each other, share in each other's joy
 ...running to deliver happy news
 ...seeing crowds running to meeting houses and outdoor gatherings to discuss important topics (see CL 316).

(**reminiscent of the multitudes running to greet Jesus - Mark 9)

This brings us to an important spiritual **law of order**...

In heaven, everyone runs toward that which is good and true (while in hell everyone runs toward that which is evil and false)

The spiritual principle here is that good and evil run in **opposite** directions because they cannot "dwell" in the same space...

...they "run away" from each other, good from evil, evil from good
(AC 6724).

The Latin verb, *fugere*, means to shun or flee.

[NOTE] To the degree we run *from* evil we run *toward* goodness (Life 21).

Try this exercise...(picture a negative attitude or behavior you've been struggling with recently)

Your spirit will automatically turn toward wholesome, uplifting ideas...

...the moment you *run* from that evil, that negative attitude or behavior

"The church takes hold in us...when we abstain from things that are evil and sinful and run away from them as we would if we saw hordes of hellish spirits pursuing us with flaming torches" (TC 510).

This gets to the *intentionality* of "running"

- just as we can't get our body to run if our heart isn't really in it
- neither can we get our spirit to run away from evil if we aren't horrified by the destructive tendencies we see in ourselves
 - horrified by how it is hurting us and the people we love

4. Gaining Spiritual Stamina

Let us run "in the way" of the Lord's commandments by not harboring negative thoughts and feelings.

Let us be *intentional* in our running

Let us flee from...

- ...that grudge we've been holding onto for years
- ...that unforgiving attitude that's dragging us down

...that stubborn refusal to say "sorry" to our loved one or friend
 ...that deep-rooted reluctance to "come clean," to be 100% truthful

This is what gives us the spiritual strength and stamina to run freely in the way of the Lord.

On the surface, shunning evil (running away from it) seems depressing.

How could there be any joy in it?

Swedenborg says,

"My friend, make your **escape** [from evil]" (see BE 59).
 - and you will learn the true meaning of peace and happiness

Why?

Because running from evil *"is the Christian religion itself"* (DP 239).

It's the most charitable thing we can do, which is why it's called

"...the first of charity" (TC 535)

Running from evil...

...is the one thing that will **"open our spiritual mind"** (AE 798:6)

"When we run from (shun - fugere) evils as sins, we daily learn what is a good work, and the affection for doing good works grows in us..."
 (AE 979:2).

...enables the Lord to "teach and lead us" (AE 979:2)

Conclusion

As to our spirit, we are all runners.

Not the whole time (that would be exhausting)

Our spirit, like our body, also needs rest, walk, sit down...
But there are times when we need to run.

Just as physical running gives us...

- a sense of *freedom* (getting out of the house or office) - running in the great outdoors, with the fresh air blowing on our face
- a sense of *accomplishment* (overcoming obstacles, setting goals)
- keeps our body *healthy & strong*

Our spirit need the same opportunity...

- it needs to be free to run in the way of the Lord's commandments
- it needs to be challenged, overcome the status quo (set new goals)
- it needs the exercise to stay strong and healthy

We run to communicate our intent, our desire.

We *run away* from anything that holds us back from loving the Lord and our neighbor, *toward* everything that promises to fill our lives with purpose and meaning.

"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary..." (Isaiah 40:31).

AMEN.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 119:32; Mark 9:14-27; True Christianity 510