

FACE YOURSELF

7 LESSONS

from **7** Marathons

in **7** Days

on **7** Continents

Matthew Barnett



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7 LESSONS

from **7** Marathons

in **7** Days

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by Matthew Barnett
with Robert Hunt

“The two biggest mistakes you can make in life are not starting and not finishing.”

– Craig Groeschel

Prologue

In life, we all have a vision on how things will go. If we work hard, play fair, and execute our plan, we are owed a reward. Everything will naturally fall into place.

But the truth is, life will unfold and not always do what we demand. We're raised to believe that if we "do this" or "take these steps" life must respond accordingly – sometimes and sometimes not. It's a hard lesson to learn.

I've found that the true beauty in life is not always getting what we want or what we thought we deserved. The mystery of life, the real beauty of life, is overcoming those things we never wanted or expected. In the end, it's not as much about those things on the outside that ultimately matter, but what we discover inside ourselves.

Matthew Barnett

I woke up fighting for every breath. With little air in my lungs, fear immediately filled my mind. Disoriented, and continuing to gasp for oxygen, my wife called 911.

The emergency doctor at the hospital found a pulmonary embolism he described as being “like Chris Bosh.” At 38 years old (in 2012), 5 foot 11, and 230 pounds, my affliction was about all I had in common with the former NBA All Star forward.

“You’ll live through this, but you’ll never run a marathon,” my doctor declared. Marathon? I could care less about doing a marathon, the only running I planned on involved a jog to McDonald’s or Jack in the Box.

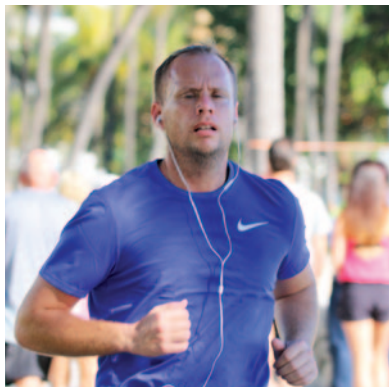
“THE ONLY RUNNING
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JACK IN THE BOX.”

How do you react when someone tells you that you can't do something? The well-meaning physician unknowingly laid down a challenge. I couldn't rest. "I want to do this," I thought, barely believing it had crept into my mind.

But getting from happy thoughts to happy feet running around my block proved to be a big test. Between prayers to not quit and not pass out, I jogged my first mile.

Almost two years of learning to run, a steady regimen of blood thinners, and finally eating right, I decided to attempt the L.A. Marathon, or in my mind 26.2 miles of "What are you thinking?" The extra push I needed was knowing I could raise funds for the Dream Center and its many ministries.

4:29:08 the digital clock flashed. I had run the race, finished the fight, proved the doctor wrong. My first reaction after crossing the finish line? “I’ll never run a marathon again.” But my heartfelt vow would be tested when the Dream Center fundraising team would approach me to run again – three more times in two years to be exact.



The Crazy Challenge

The text I read had to be a mistake. In March of 2016, a friend wrote about the 2017 World Marathon Challenge: Seven Marathons on Seven Continents – in

Seven days! I laughed it off. Who would be so stupid to do that?

Telling my friend and Dream Center donor, Phil Liberatore, about this nutty idea, he immediately shot back, “If you run this as a fundraiser for the Dream Center, I’ll pay your entry fee (\$38,000) and donate \$100,000 to the Center.” What is it about me and crazy challenges? Taking on something way beyond yourself can cause a lot of introspection. It can also drive you down memory lane.

All of 20 years old, I agreed to fill in as our interim pastor for a small struggling church situated next to a liquor store near Sunset Blvd. I never pastored before, but I quickly

**“WHAT IS IT ABOUT
ME AND CRAZY
CHALLENGES?”**

fell in love with the dozen plus elderly members, the last holdouts of a church now surrounded by violence and crime.

I loved my church, but I soon began to realize my congregation extended beyond the windows of stained glass and to the walls of spray-painted gang signs. This church foyer began where the homeless lay and the latch key children play.

So I moved my desk outside onto the sidewalk and began to meet my new congregation. A whole generation of broken lives and shattered dreams soon learned we weren't going away.



Blowin' in the Wind:

Marathon #1

The runway of dirty ice greeted the creaky wheels of an old Russian military transport plane. The Antarctic served as host to our first marathon. It could have been mars with its stark landscape and mountains of ice.

Thankfully, Ryan Hall, good friend and 2008 U.S. Olympic Trials Marathon winner, decided to join me – the least experienced of all the runners. Ryan, out of shape having given up on running, was lured back by the adventure and the hope of raising funds for the Dream Center.

The warm weather stunned us all as we enthusiastically pulled off layers of arctic-rated clothes. I saw it as a sign for smooth sailing for the seven days. We Americans wanted to run while the weather held, the other majority were determined to sightsee and start in the morning. Big mistake.

50 mile per hour headwinds and negative 35 degree wind chill factor confronted us for the morning start. Even the great Ryan Hall would end up reduced to averaging 10-minute miles. The rest of us barely remained erect. I never felt more proud of a four hour forty-five minute marathon.

**“SOMETIMES YOUR
GREATEST PROGRESS CAN’T
BE MEASURED BY
A STOPWATCH.”**

Sometimes your greatest progress can't be measured by a stopwatch.

I decided that after each marathon I would write whatever lesson I learned from the day. Marathon #1's insight came as clear as the Antarctic sky.

Lesson #1: Progress isn't always about moving fast, it's about gaining ground.

The winds of life can be at your back or blowing in your face. No matter which way the winds are heading, you can still make progress – even if it's slow.



You may not be where you want to be, but good things can happen if you keep choosing to move forward. Setbacks happen to all of us: in our jobs, our families, and even in our church. I can't begin to describe all the trials and tribulations we encountered in starting the Dream Center. We just never gave up, we kept on advancing one step at a time.

Don't get paralyzed by the headwinds of life – run straight into them. Just like our beat up Russian plane needing a good headwind in order to launch, you need one to take you to the place God has for you.

**“DON'T GET
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In the Antarctic, I learned that you can still accomplish great things even when the conditions aren't perfect.

Living in less than an ideal situation? Keep your feet moving. Of course, I wrote this after the first marathon. Would I feel the same after #6 or #7, presuming I got that far?



Carpe Diem in Chile: *Marathon #2*

Researchers say that the body needs approximately 26 days to recover from a marathon, one day for every mile. I would end up sleeping a total of 14 hours in one week.

Upon our arrival in Chile, we all wondered how our bodies would respond, not only to the running, but the travel and lack of sleep.

Chile, a breathtakingly beautiful country, offered us perfect weather. The first three miles felt like we were running in beach sand, but by mile four, my legs began to loosen up. It hit me at that moment that I actually could run back-to-back marathons. In fact, I felt so good, I knew I could run my personal best of 3:49.

**“DO WE EXPECT TO
SUCCEED OR FAIL?”**

But something inside me, that little nagging voice, told me to hold back. So I dialed down my energy and ran a 4:05. It would be my biggest mistake I made while running the Marathon Challenge.

There is something in life about “seizing the moment.” We all have encountered moments when we face the dilemma of charging forward or safely retreating. Many times, our decisions in that hour are influenced by how we feel about ourselves. Do we expect to succeed or fail?

For me, the lesson of Marathon #2 was: Don't be fearful of success. Don't be afraid of achievement. And when the moment presents itself, you must grab the momentum and let it take you to where God is leading. Fear of failure will sideline you every time. Run to win, not to lose. That may read like a cheap motivational poster, but ask any world-class athlete how important mindset is before and during a stressful event.

In the Antarctic, we ran against the wind, fighting it all the way. In Chile, I ran with wind, but instead of

giving it maximum effort, I held back and missed an important goal. We can accomplish great things when we have the wind at our backs. Don't fear if or when the moment is right – go out and get whatever God has for you.

From a tiny, terrorized congregation, God would eventually entrust me to pastor the historic Angelus Temple in downtown Los Angeles. Each Sunday, our church is full of people from every walk of life – from millionaires to homeless, world-class professionals to the down and out. I pray I see them all as God does and how I see myself: a child of God, desperate for his grace and mercy.



Over the years, I've found success not measured in wealth or stature, but founded in the ability of each person to receive and live in that very grace and mercy. I've seen the face transform on the most desperate drug addict the moment they knew they were forgiven; and I've witnessed the look from the rich person who rejects God's great love.

The difference? One seized the moment, the other walked away. No difference in race, education, upbringing, health, wealth, or age ultimately matters. The wise person, the successful individual, goes out and gets all God has for them.

Lesson #2: When the time is right, you have to go for it, because you may never have that window of opportunity again.

During my training for the Challenge, we created the “Face Yourself” campaign at the Dream Center. I used these marathons as a way to challenge each of our residents to look honestly at themselves and confront their fears. Finishing the competition would give me a good story to tell, but the reality is, so many of our Dream Center residents possess a much more powerful story. They have done the hard work of looking inside, making hard choices, and seizing the opportunity to start over.

I couldn't let them down.

La Familia en Miami: *Marathon #3*

By now, the excitement, the novelty, and the adrenaline all came to a screeching halt on the tarmac of

the Miami Airport. After long immigration lines, we changed our clothes in the airport bathrooms and literally ran to the starting line.

“I NEVER KNEW THE DEPTH OF THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT UNTIL THAT DAY.”

To borrow the title of a C.S. Lewis book, I became “Surprised by Joy.” Joy overwhelmed me, seeing so many friends and family waiting to greet me. I never knew the depth of the power of encouragement until that day. I may have preached on it before then, but nothing can give you strength like a loved one telling you “You can do this!”

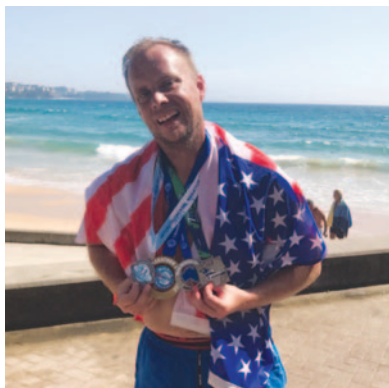
Plus, being in the United States blessed me. I considered it a “home court” advantage. It propelled me forward to a greater level than my own natural ability. It

taught me a powerful lesson, a humbling lesson: We can't win the race on our own.

We live in a society that greatly values the individual. It's part of our American DNA. While we rightly celebrate that lone person who achieves, the truth is, no one succeeds solely on their own.

I love the Bible story of the paralyzed man lowered on his stretcher by four friends through a roof to the feet of Jesus.

"When Jesus saw THEIR (emphasis mine) faith, He said to the man, friend your sins are forgiven." He also healed him. (See Luke 5:20-25.)





All of us will, at sometime in our life, be on the stretcher. It may be due to sickness, depression, or a number of “winds” that blow us down. The first question we must ask ourselves is – Who will lift the stretcher for me and bring me to the presence of God when I’m down? And secondly – Am I willing to hold the stretcher for others?

I’m a blessed man to have many stretcher-bearers in my life. Friends and family flew thousands of miles just to be there for me during this challenge. Do you have at least four friends who care enough about you to do whatever is

necessary to get you off the stretcher? If not, ask yourself if you're investing enough in others' lives.

Lesson #3: You need people to help you win in life.

Maybe as you're reading this, the idea of running a marathon seems impossible. Even the challenge of getting off the stretcher seems improbable. Life is beating you up and you're down for the count. Trust me, someone will be there to lift you up if you're willing to take their hand.

A Hot Mess in Madrid: *Marathon #4*

Our plane to Madrid looked like a war zone and we were the wounded. By now, my feet were swollen to "Shrek-ian" size. Some of the runners learned to sleep

feet up. Because of my history with blood clots, I couldn't take any anti-inflammatory medicine.

The people in Madrid:

wonderful.

The track in Madrid: horrible. No one likes hills in marathons, especially when it's your fourth in

four days. But hills were the least of my worries when I felt a piercing pain in my knee. I've never experienced

"I REALIZED MY RACE WAS OVER."



pain like that before, and it seemed to get worse with every step.

I realized my race was over.

I love the line in Apollo 13. The actor Ed Harris playing the role of flight director Gene Kranz surveying the room of engineers attempting the impossible, to save the crew of the ill-fated flight, declares:

“Failure is not an option.”

But what happens if we fail? Life sends us all kinds of challenges. The death of a loved



one, the bankruptcy of a business, divorce from a spouse...

In my work at the Dream Center, I see daily the devastation of lives crushed and broken. Failure is the beginning spiral down to a final crash and burn. Yet, it often takes that bottoming out before the breakthrough.

My knee brought me to a complete stop and I cried. I'm not one to cry, but tears flowed. I believed God could heal me because He's healed me so many times before. Yet I stood there, crushed, until the Bible verse came to my mind:

"When I am weak, he is strong."

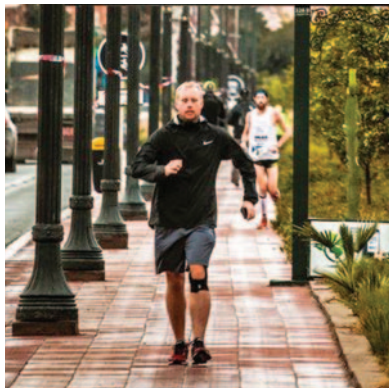
The Lord put a strong impression on my heart,
"You're going to be bent, but you will not break."

I argued with God, “No way, Lord, I can feel my tendon moving.” I appreciated his concern, but I really wanted his healing. Drained of emotion, I reset my strategy. My knee didn’t work, but my other leg did. Failure wasn’t an option.

I learned an unusual lesson from this marathon, a lesson I never would have expected.

Lesson #4: Real strength comes when you show true emotion.

I tried to hide my tears from the other runners and friends in Madrid. I thought it weak to cry. But, there is no shame in admitting you are weak. There are solutions



to our problems when you allow yourself to be broken. I think in that moment I fully understood what many in my church and the Dream Center already knew – real emotion, real tears, real sorrow combined with brutal honesty make a person stronger.

“THERE IS NO SHAME
IN ADMITTING YOU
ARE WEAK.”

And I needed every bit of strength to continue. I finished the race...off to Morocco.

The Lamppost Strategy: *Marathon #5*

I continued to pray for healing. Maybe God would grant me supernatural tenacity. Visions of young Forrest Gump running down that Alabama country road with leg braces falling off comforted me.

I took off boldly in Morocco, running with purpose, at least for the first hundred yards. It wasn't going to happen; my knee, shot, refused to play along. So I limped, looking I suppose like the Frankenstein monster without the electrodes on the neck.

The course in Morocco had multiple lampposts a few hundred yards apart. All I could think to do was limp from one lamppost to another. A surge of adrenaline and I could run two lampposts and walk one. Run one then walk three.

It worked.

Lesson #5: The lesson I learned that day: The power of setting small goals, forgetting how far you've got to go and simply taking the next step to get there.

Lamppost to lamppost – Take on life’s little challenges one lamppost at a time.

How many of us look at the huge challenges ahead and give up? But accomplishing a small goal? It will build your faith. Seems silly? A potential divorce is stopped by taking the first step of saying “I’m sorry.” Or an educational degree is earned by reading that first book. You can regret where you are and where you want to be, or you can take on life’s little challenges and get to a finish line. When you’re limping in life, find a lamppost!

The Gates of Hell: *Marathon #6*

Let’s be honest, there are times in our lives when we are down, depressed, and then there are times when we

just want to quit on life. I am always inspired by those who fight through their personal battles and win. The person most responsible in preparing me to take on this challenge, Jarrett Gautreau, is a winner.

Jarrett arrived to the Dream Center in 2011. Once a promising semi-professional soccer player, an opiate and alcohol addiction landed him in prison. After two years of successful rehabilitation at the Dream Center, we offered him a position managing our site's athletic facility. Today, he's a certified personal trainer, training residents, staff, and community members. After signing up for the Challenge, I asked Jarrett to train me.

In an ESPN interview, he told reporter Anna Katherine Clemmons, "He (referring to me) was overweight, out of shape, having health problems, and at

risk of blood clots. It's been cool to see him go from unhealthy to an elite athlete."

I needed every bit of his training as I limped to the track in the searing heat of Dubai. It would take every ounce of determination to finish within the eight hour limit. The thought of flying home alone short of my goal and letting so many down got me to the starting line.

Thirteen minutes into Marathon #6 and I no longer cared about finishing. I was done. Athletes call it "hitting the wall." I not only hit the wall, it hit back. My mind, emotions, body, and even soul seemed to collapse in on

**"MY MIND, EMOTIONS,
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itself, leaving me a burned out shell.

Then, out of nowhere, a man, dressed to run, came to my rescue. I had never met him before. He lived in Dubai and was following me on social media. That morning, during his devotional Bible meditation, he read:

“ . . . but by love serve one another.” (See Galatians 5:13.)

That verse caused him to question his service to others. It troubled him greatly. Remembering my marathon, he decided to come to the course and serve me.



“Where’s Matthew Barnett at?”

It wasn’t difficult for him to find the marathon runner standing in a pool of self-pity.

A rugby player, he not only ran beside me, occasionally stretching me out, but he also talked about life. Nothing like a good conversation about life to divert one’s attention from pain and scorching heat. But it worked.

Was he an angel? If not, he no doubt came as a gift from God, sent to save me from the “gates of hell.”

“THERE ARE TIMES IN ALL OF OUR LIVES WHEN WE DO OUR BEST, WORK AS HARD AS WE CAN, BUT STILL FALL SHORT.”

Lesson #6: Sometimes we need a supernatural miracle to keep going.

There are times in all of our lives when we do our best, work as hard as we can, but still fall short. But, I truly believe that if we keep on going, keep trying, God himself will see our efforts and send help from heaven.

The lesson is to trust the Lord to provide, to send you “manna” from heaven whether it be in the form of provision or people – he wants you to keep moving. He



wants you and I to always look to him as a father who loves us and will take care of our every need.

Jesus once said:

“How much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?” Matthew 7:11

I finished the race in 7 hours 37 minutes with only 23 minutes to spare. The gates of hell would not prevail.

Down Under and Out: *Marathon #7*

The longest flight was saved for last – 14 hours to Australia, our final continent.

The most miserable I’ve ever been. Filthy, having had no time to shower, and completely exhausted, all I could

hope for, some sleep. My swollen, blistered, bare feet raised above my body slumped in the tight airplane seat.

An hour later, awakened with cold chills coursing through my body, I could feel my heart flutter while I fought for every breath. I had known this feeling before. I understood the risks. Blood clots – running with swollen feet coupled with long airplane flights are a recipe for disaster.

**“YOU’RE GOING
TO DIE.”**

Being disoriented only added to a raging fear. The blood clot experience that started this entire journey seemed tame in comparison to what now had me in its grip.

With each pale breath and skip of the heart, the thought screamed, “You’re going to die.” We were over

sea, nearly four hours till landing. It took everything inside me to confess to a fellow runner, “Please tell my wife and kids I love them, because I’m not going to make it.”

There are human emotions that defy language. We use words like fear, panic, and worry. Nothing I can write comes close to describing how I felt.

I don’t want to be overly dramatic, only to relay the overwhelming sense of imminent death that captured my mind for two hours.

The emergency physician in the Australia hospital, after scanning my entire body, proclaimed, “Good news,



no blood clots.” That was a huge relief as any clots, big or small, would mean the end of my running. Then he proceeded to give me hope that I could continue. Having attended to many other ultra runners, he had heard of them waking up and experiencing a panic attack.

“The stress of all you’ve gone through literally woke you up producing this anxiety and the physical response.” He looked me in the eye with a twinkle in his own, “What do we need to do to get you back on course?” Then my doctor turned motivator, “We’re going to get you out to finish this race!”



With one hour of sleep in the last 27 hours, I began the last of seven marathons. Once again, friends came out to support me, including a pastor from Hillsong Australia who had never run a marathon before. He finished. We both did.

In the span of a few hours, I went from thinking I would die to the ultimate in exhilaration.

Lesson #7: God can take you from your lowest low to your highest high.

Don't quit, because God can turn it around.

We serve a God of the sudden breakthrough.

The seventh marathon will always remind me of how dark life can become and how suddenly it can change ... by the grace of God.

After each marathon, my wife and kids sent a card to encourage me. The last one read like words from an Old Testament prophet to my heart:

“Life is so much easier to dream of the future you want than to make it happen. But you stayed focused, treating each step as a little lamppost win on the way to the one big success that you set as your goal.”

The Apostle Paul wrote near the end of his life,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)



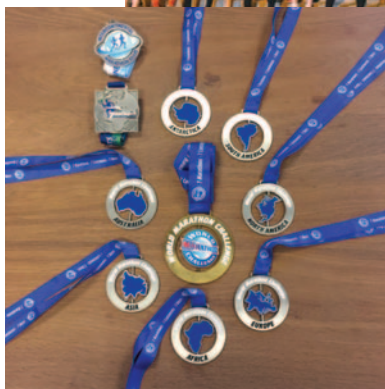
I believe that God not only wants us to finish the race called Life, he wants to awaken us to something great. You may feel dead inside, but he will resurrect you. You may be limping along, the stride of life taken from you; yet there's something beautiful about winning wounded. You may be running a personal best, seize the day and expect even greater things from God. Wherever you are in the race of life, never give up, press on, and trust him.

If you have never experienced the mercy and grace of God that I mentioned in this booklet, I'd like to invite you to know Jesus. The greatest and only perfect person to live on earth, Jesus was and is God's only son. He lived and died, never sinning, so that he could take your sin upon himself when he died on the cross. His resurrection after three days in the grave made it possible for everyone who will ask to receive eternal life. His

promise to us is also for abundant life here on earth.

If you want to begin a relationship with Jesus, begin by praying this prayer. Simply talk to him because he is listening.

“Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross that I might be saved. I repent of my sin and I give you my life. Thank you for dying for me, now I’ll live for you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”



For a free four-booklet set called *The Journey*, by Dr. Daniel Brown, that will assist you in your new walk of faith, contact Foursquare Missions Press at **fmp@foursquare.org**.

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Have you, or someone you love, ever faced a challenge that seemed impossible to overcome?

Matthew Barnett's powerful lessons from his incredible journey will give you the courage to win.



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