

Run the Mile You're In is not about winning races and setting running records. It's about always moving forward. Moving outward is an act of courage. The reward is living the lifestyle and embracing the dream.

—**Bart Yasso**, newly retired chief running officer, *Runner's World*

Ryan's journey on and off the course is touching and a meaningful way to live by helping others. This is an uplifting book of joy and finding your sense of purpose.

—**Meh Keflezighi**, Olympic silver medalist; Boston Marathon and NYC Marathon champion

What I love about this book is that we get to know the real Ryan Hall. He talks about why it wasn't just the training that was key to his athletic and life success but also his faith. To succeed in the world's most competitive sport takes so much; Ryan explains it all in this fine new book.

—**Bill Rodgers**, four time Boston Marathon and NYC Marathon champion

Ryan examines and deciphers his well-lived life, and whether or not you share his deep Christian faith, there's much to learn here. He says that he always strove to run free and to run hard. This book contains many lessons to help you follow the same path.

—**Amby Burfoot**, 1968 Boston Marathon winner; writer, *Runner's World*; author, *Run Forever*

I'm inspired by so many of the chapter titles in this book. "Vision," because the "genius is seeing it in the seed." "Sacrifice," because we can accomplish anything if we are willing to accept the sacrifices involved. "Failure," because we fail only if we don't try. And "Faith," because with faith, nothing is impossible. Ryan vividly drives home these and many other nuggets of wisdom.

—**Dave McGillivray**, DMSE Sports; Race Director, Boston Marathon

Ryan knows what it takes to be a champion. No matter what career you're involved in or what your stage of life is, I guarantee you'll be encouraged and equipped as Ryan helps you have the perspective and confidence to fight *from* victory and not *for* victory.

—Lon Williams, pastor, Liberty Church

I have deep admiration for Ryan and his approach to his profession and life. He does a great job of unpacking the big picture and yet being fully engaged in the mile he is in. Get ready to run the race of your life.

—Eric Johnson, author, speaker, pastor,
Bethel Church, Redding, CA

This book will inspire you to chase bigger dreams, challenge you to rethink success, and invite you into a deeper relationship with God. Ryan shares with incredible vulnerability that we can draw nearer to God both on the mountain tops and in the valleys.

—Michael Chitwood, Executive Director of Church
and Ministry Partnerships, World Vision

**RUN THE
MILE
YOU'RE
IN**



RUN THE
MILE
YOU'RE
IN

FINDING GOD IN EVERY STEP

RYAN HALL

 ZONDERVAN®

ZONDERVAN

Run the Mile You're In

Copyright © 2019 by Ryan Hall

ISBN 978-0-310-35444-4 (audio)

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hall, Ryan, 1982- author.

Title: Run the mile you're in : finding God in every step / Ryan Hall.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Zondervan, [2019] |

Identifiers: LCCN 2018052330 (print) | LCCN 2019004481 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780310354390 (ebook) | ISBN 9780310354376 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Hall, Ryan, 1982- | Long-distance runners—United States—Biography. | Running—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC GV1061.15.H35 (ebook) | LCC GV1061.15.H35 A3 2019 (print) | DDC 796.42092 [B] —dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018052330>

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org).

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation. © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Author is represented by the literary agency of The Fedd Agency, Inc., P.O. Box 341973, Austin, Texas 78734.

Interior design: Denise Froehlich

Cover design: Curt Diepenhorst

Cover photo: World Marathon Challenge

Printed in the United States of America

18 19 20 21 22 /LSC/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to my wife, Sara, for always believing in me and supporting me; to my kids, who have added so much joy to my life and will be the greatest legacy I could leave; to my extended family, who was on this journey with me through the ups and downs; to my friends who encouraged me along the way; and to everyone who is on the journey of discovering what God has put inside of them.



Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	11	Mile 13: Celebration . . .	101
Mile 1: Vision	13	Mile 14: Unoffendable . .	109
Mile 2: Purpose	19	Mile 15: Pain	119
Mile 3: Sacrifice	25	Mile 16: Faith	127
Mile 4: Goals	33	Mile 17: Worship	135
Mile 5: Failure	39	Mile 18: Declaration . . .	143
Mile 6: Positive Focus . . .	47	Mile 19: Fearless	147
Mile 7: Humility	55	Mile 20: Love	155
Mile 8: Relationships . . .	63	Mile 21: Partnering	163
Mile 9: Identity	73	Mile 22: Victories	173
Mile 10: Belief	81	Mile 23: Seasons	183
Mile 11: Success	87	Mile 24: Consistency . . .	191
Mile 12: Comparison . . .	95	Mile 25: Closure	203
		Mile 26: Victorious	215



Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge Tom Dean, VP of Marketing at Zondervan, for reaching out to me to consider writing a book to share my story. Without his prompting, this book never would have happened. I'd also like to acknowledge my friend Pastor Matthew Barnett, who pastors the Dream Center in Los Angeles and took me on the craziest weeklong adventure of my life, and connected me with the wonderful people at The Fedd Agency to make this book become a reality. And to the wonderful staff at Zondervan, thanks for helping turn a runner into an author through some serious editing throughout the process. Writing a book is like running a marathon. There may be only one person out there running the race or writing the book, but there is a huge team behind that person, which makes all the difference. Thanks to my team who "ran the race" with me.



MILE 1

Vision

I remember the image vividly—the sparkling bright blue water of Big Bear Lake in the high mountain region of Southern California. Because I'd grown up in these mountains, I'd taken in this image often, but this time it was accompanied by a vision. I was a thirteen-year-old eighth-grade basketball player—one who seemed to be stuck at four foot eleven and ninety-nine pounds—and despite being one of the hardest workers on the team, I wasn't seeing much playing time. But that didn't keep me from enjoying being a part of the team and observing our weekly games from the sidelines. On this particular winter travel trip, the van was full of rambunctious junior high boy energy, the kind that would give most adults a headache, but I found myself tuning out the chaos and gazing at Big Bear Lake. It was as if all the commotion couldn't penetrate my ears; all I could hear was God giving me a desire I'd never had before. I felt like He was giving me the aspiration to run around the lake. The desire wasn't overly obvious; it was more as if I had an itch that could be relieved only by attempting the feat.

Looking back, I realize that my experience in the van was

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

a God-inspired vision, though at the time it seemed like simply an idea that popped into my head. Like many boys, I'd grown up mad about sports and had played the big three American favorites: basketball, football, and—my biggest love—baseball. The son of a former drafted major league baseball player, I dreamed of one day following in my dad's footsteps and getting drafted by a major league team. I spent a considerable amount of time pursuing this dream, tirelessly throwing a baseball into a green tarp with a painted white box that signified the strike zone. Always one to help me fulfill my dreams, my dad had created this pitching practice setup in our back yard.

Yet my vision in the van wasn't about baseball. It wasn't even about football or basketball. It was about *running*. This came as a surprise to me because I'd had zero interest in the sport. I'd been around 5K road races and had watched my dad compete in marathons, but I didn't have any desire to run. Running seemed boring and, well, kind of pointless. Why would you choose a sport, like track, where you run around in circles as fast as you can only to finish in the same spot where you started?

Thankfully, though, I paid attention to the voice urging me to run around Big Bear Lake. But my vision wasn't an easy one to live out. The only running I'd done was short sprints on the basketball court, the football field, or the baseball diamond. And here's the kicker: it's fifteen miles around the lake. Fifteen miles is challenging enough, but the lake is also at seven thousand feet altitude. The thin air at that elevation makes you feel like you're breathing through a straw. Despite those obstacles, something about this crazy vision captured me.

It's easy to dismiss the visions that pop into our minds, especially when they don't seem to fit with the rest of our lives. I'd dreamed of becoming a major league baseball player,

not a runner. And it was just a sudden desire I had—*I want to run around Big Bear Lake*. I hadn't heard an audible voice from God. I hadn't read anything etched in stone. I hadn't received a prophetic word. But I felt a strong pull in my heart, a passion to do something I'd never before imagined, and so it seemed important to act on my vision.

It's crazy how sometimes our smallest decisions turn out to have the most significant consequences. We spend hours and hours writing lists of pros and cons and seeking advice from friends, family members, and colleagues about the big decisions—where to go to college, whether to get married or have kids, which job offer to accept—but we rarely deliberate the small decisions. We tell ourselves that those little things don't matter when actually they can be extremely important.

I'm not saying that the big decisions shouldn't be carefully considered, but I've learned that we also shouldn't dismiss the small ones, because these decisions can subtly change the trajectory of our lives. If I hadn't acted on my God-given vision to run around the lake, I never would have had the opportunity to run at Stanford, meet my wife, compete on two Olympic teams, travel around the globe, and live out all the amazing experiences I've had as a result of running. And all of this came from a God-inspired seedling of a thought, one that I could have easily dismissed. I am so grateful I didn't.

After that road trip with the basketball team, I shared my vision with my dad. I'm surprised he didn't dismiss it right away as being crazy and not a good idea. Now that I'm a dad, I'm not sure I would have reacted the way he did. I would have been more likely to tell any of my four daughters that she should start with a smaller, more attainable goal. But that's not how my dad responded. He simply told me that if I wanted to run the fifteen miles around the lake, he would run it with me.

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

The more I look back on this, the more amazing his response seems. I tend to find myself wanting to give my kids advice and guidance, and there's certainly a place for that in parenting, but sometimes I need to take the dad hat off and partner with my kids' deepest desires. I need to say, "If that's what you want to do, let's do it together." I've learned a lot about God as I've increasingly viewed Him as the ultimate Father. Jesus describes God that way when He talks about how on earth, evil fathers know how to give good gifts to their kids; therefore, how much more does God, who is in heaven, know how to give good gifts to His kids (Matt. 7:11)? As I think about how I want to grow as a good father, I realize that I am interested in what my kids are into, and I do everything I can to support and help them in their dreams and journeys. How much more must God be interested in the desires of our hearts and in our dreams, especially if He is the one who put those dreams there to begin with? I really believe that God is intensely interested in our hearts and all the desires and dreams that reside in them as He leads us to chase after them.

The following Saturday morning, without any preparation, I laced up my high-top basketball shoes—hours later, my bulging blisters showed me that basketball shoes are a little different from running shoes—and headed out the door with my dad for what turned out to be a very long and painful run around Big Bear Lake. Before beginning our journey, my dad and I completed some light stretching on our front porch, then Dad had me pump my hand into a fist and then flat as fast as I could for one minute to show me how strong my heart had to be to pump blood throughout my body my entire life. (If you want to try it, be ready for some serious cramping and pain by the end of the minute.) He had me do this to show me that running was a way for me to make my heart stronger.

We then began the run with a walk, which became my custom throughout my running career, of about 100 meters as a way to warm the body up before beginning a slow jog. As a nonrunner, I understood that I was in for a major physical challenge, but I was not mentally prepared for it. I made it about six miles before we had to stop as we reached the dam and took a little time to watch some fishermen bait-fish in the deep blue waters. I've never enjoyed watching fishing so much in my entire life. I relished every second, hoping to postpone my run as long as possible. Starting back up after that brief break, my quads felt like jello, and I wasn't even halfway there yet! I questioned whether I could make it the last nine miles. Luckily, I had already navigated the hilliest section of the paved, well-traveled road looping the lake. That was the only factor in my favor at that point.

Three miles later, we stopped at a liquor store to grab a cold Sobe to replenish my depleted body of hydration, sugar, and electrolytes. The icy, sugary, orange-carrot drink tasted divine in my fatigued and dehydrated state. Once again, it was challenging to start running again after taking a break. Yet somehow I found a way to keep putting one foot in front of the other, in large part because of my dad's support. An avid runner who could knock off fifteen miles in half the time it was going to take the two of us, he never let on whether he was impatient or bored. My dad just stayed by my side offering encouragement after encouragement and telling me how great I was doing. I definitely didn't feel like I was doing great, but hearing those positive words went a long way in helping me maintain a hopeful, confident belief that I would finish the full run.

Our last stop was with 1.5 miles to go. I was hurting worse than I had ever hurt in my life, and I can imagine that I looked even worse than I felt. My dad decided it would be good for me

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

to take a little break and ice my legs in the frigid lake water, which must have been colder than 50 degrees in the winter. I didn't care how cold the lake was; I had lost feeling in my legs miles ago. After icing our legs for about ten minutes, I shoved my blistered, battered feet into my basketball shoes, laced them up, and set off on the longest 1.5 miles of my life. I felt as heavy as an elephant. With every step, it felt like it took great strength and energy to lift my foot off the ground.

When we finally made it home, I was beyond exhausted. I remember stumbling through the front door and being faced with the runner's debate: couch or refrigerator? I couldn't decide whether I was more tired or hungry, but I ended up opting for the couch. In my exhausted state, I suddenly found it was a lot easier to connect with God. I didn't have to go into my prayer closet and put earplugs in and beg God to let me hear His voice. It was more as if my immense fatigue had quieted my mind and all of the distractions around me and the only thing left was His voice. Until this point, I knew who God was. I occasionally spent a little time reading the Bible and praying, but I wouldn't say I was conversational with God. But I discovered that when I am exhausted, I can more easily pray and—more important—hear His voice. Depleted from my journey, I felt God speak to the depths of my heart for the first time in my life. And what He told me was nothing short of amazing. God unleashed His purpose for the next season of my life. God spoke to me that I would one day run with the best runners in the world and that I would also be given the gift of helping others through my running. Now, I knew what running with the best runners in the world looked like: the Olympics. But helping people through running? It took ten years before I discovered how powerful my running could be as a way to love others.

Purpose

It was acting on my vision to run around the lake that led to God's revealing His purpose for my next season of life. If I had not had the vision before the purpose, I wouldn't have believed the purpose was accurate or possible. Something activated within me on that run around the lake. Somehow, despite the pain and my dread toward running, I became intrigued with it. I began to see potential in myself I hadn't seen before. There began an inkling of curiosity to see why God had given me the vision and desire to run around the lake. After that moment with God on the couch, everything changed. I no longer saw my purpose as one day playing professional baseball. My purpose, on my way to running with the best guys in the world and loving others through running, was to run and nurture the talent God had put inside of me. Not only did what I do change but also who I was changed. I went from a typical middle school boy dabbling in this and that, trying to be cool and just get by in school, to a driven, disciplined, and focused athlete. I never lived my life the same way again. My goals changed. My desires changed. My friends changed. How I went about my life and how I spent my time changed.

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

That day I began an adventure with God that lasted twenty years before it evolved into a new season of life.

People often ask me if I was surprised to make Olympic teams and set American records, and my answer is always no because God told me where I was going from the very beginning. That day, God gave me a belief that I was designed for a mission. One of my favorite movies is *I, Robot* for the reason that at the climax of the movie (spoiler alert), the main character, a robot named Sonny, realizes that his creator (a scientist) designed him to help save the world. Once Sonny realizes his purpose, he is able to carry out his mission because he realizes that his designer gave him everything he needed to fulfill it when he created him. In the same way, I believe that we each have a mission to accomplish and that we have been designed in such a way that we are not lacking anything to accomplish it. Everything we need is already inside of us. We just have to find it and figure out how to cultivate it.

Having purpose is important because the road is hard. My purpose sustained me through years and years of gut-wrenching lows, disappointments, and heartache. My purpose gave me the courage to get back up every time I stumbled, because I knew I hadn't yet lived out the mission I was designed to carry out. It's as if my purpose was calling me forward, like a magnet pulling me toward accomplishing what I needed to when my strength was weak.

I believe that God has given all of us a purpose, a calling, a mission—whatever terminology you prefer. He has given each of us our own promised land to enter the same way He created the Promised Land for Israel to enter. He might not have communicated our purpose through an audible voice, a flash of lightning, or a vivid vision, but because God is the ultimate Father, I believe that He wants to show us what we

were created for more than we want to find it, so He is going to reveal to us that purpose. Our job is simply to watch for it and act on it.

Sometimes God ignites a dead desire within us. At other times, he gives us a set of skills and abilities that allows us to do something only we could do, as was the case for Sonny in *I, Robot*. I know Sonny is just a character in a movie, but I have felt the same sensation. When I found what I was created to do, suddenly my life made sense and what seemed impossible became possible. God created us to go after the seemingly impossible because He designed us with a purpose in mind! Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Maybe you already know what you were created to do. Maybe you haven't yet discovered your purpose. Or maybe your purpose in one season of your life is shifting to a different purpose in a new season. It may take some dialogue with God—and with people in your life—to figure out what He has created you to do. I am now in a season of figuring out what's in the next season after retiring from professional running a little more than three years ago. I'm not sure what my next mission is, but I know that the end of one mission signifies the beginning of another. I know that God has something else for me to go after, something He probably had been preparing me for in my last season of life as a professional runner. I'm beginning to see that coaching others to achieve their goals in running brings life to me in much the same way that competing did, and I can see that perhaps all throughout my professional running career, God was preparing me to coach. As a result, I have begun to coach a few athletes, beginning with my wife and also helping to coach my daughter. I'm not

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

sure where the road will take me, but I believe God always asks me to do my best with what is right in front of me, and so I'm continuing to love and help others through running. I am carrying on the purpose of the last season in a new way.

If you really want to discover the purpose for your season of life, I believe that one of the best ways to find it is to talk to others who know you well. Sometimes it's easier to see someone else's giftedness than your own. If you are searching for your next God-given mission, I encourage you to surround yourself with close friends who will tell you what gifts God has given you and what those gifts may be equipping you to do. My dad—who obviously knows me well—did an amazing job of telling me the potential he saw inside me without bending my arm to act on that potential. He knew it had to be my choice, that I needed to act on my own desire. Even before I began running, Dad used to tell me that I could be a great runner if I wanted to be. Yet he always followed that comment with, “But you have to be the one who wants to run.” I'm so glad he didn't push me into running, because if he had, I would have been doing it for him and likely would have quit after my first significant setback. Passion that comes from our own drive is so much more powerful than passion derived from another person's dreams.

A few years ago, I coached high school cross-country at my oldest daughter's school, University Preparatory School in Redding, California. Coaching has made me realize how different my life would have been had I not received the purpose I was created for when I was thirteen years old. I imagine my desire to fit in and be cool would have led to some poor choices that would have had negative consequences on what colleges I could have attended, who I would have surrounded myself with, and ultimately, what I would do with my life.

Purpose

Because of that, as a coach, my primary goal is to help my athletes find purpose for their lives—whether it be running or something different. I am learning to do this by using the same approach my dad used with me. I “call out the gold” in them. I let my athletes know what could be possible for them, but ultimately, I allow them to decide whether they want to pursue their potential. For example, when I watch certain athletes run, I can tell by their stride, footspeed, and how they respond to training that they have an exceptional level of running talent, so I try to make sure they know what I am seeing rather than just keeping my belief in them hidden. It seems obvious that I should tell my athletes about the talent I see in them, but I’ve found that it takes intentionality for me to “call out the gold,” because often my thoughts stay captive in my mind. Another way for me to help my athletes find their purpose is to take an interest in them as persons. I don’t want just to talk running with them. I like to get to know their likes and dislikes, what they wake up in the morning excited about, what makes them tick, what motivates them, what they fear, and I just try to learn about them. Doing so, I learn a lot about how God created them and possibly what gifts He has given them to use, which allows me to help them find their purpose. There is no greater feeling for me as a coach than to help someone find their purpose, because I know firsthand how empowering it is to live a life of purpose. Once an athlete finds their purpose, they can focus their entire being on cultivating it.

When I think about Jesus and how He cultivated the purpose for which He came, I recall the passage in Matthew 16 where Peter rebukes Jesus for saying He would be delivered to the elders, chief priests, and scribes and then killed before being raised from the dead three days later. Jesus’ response

RUN THE MILE YOU'RE IN

reveals His passion for fulfilling His purpose: “But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s’” (Matt. 16:23).

It’s hard not to laugh at the harshness of Jesus’ response. Who calls their friend Satan? Seems kind of intense, right? But Jesus was so intent on doing what He had been put on earth to accomplish that He rightfully saw anything that challenged His mission as being from the devil. That’s how focused I want to be on accomplishing what God created me to do, because I realize that today, more than ever, so many distractions pull me away from my mission. During my career as a professional runner, I didn’t feel like just a runner on the starting line trying to run fast. I felt a clear and deep sense of purpose coupled with a strong vision of where I was going to end up. I really believe that it was this sense of vision that propelled me to greater heights than I otherwise could have attained, and I believe it is a key for all of us to fulfill our purpose.

Sacrifice

After my run around Big Bear Lake, I asked my dad to write me a training program for my running. Even though the sport Dad knew best was baseball, he had already coached some very good runners (one of whom ran 9:05 for two miles as a senior in high school) during his time as a teacher in both Australia and Seattle. He'd also read dozens of books about running and had developed into a good runner himself, running close to a sub-three-hour marathon, so he was well equipped to help me on my journey. He handwrote my training plan for a month at a time, and I followed it religiously. My first forty-mile week, when I was a freshman in high school, felt like such a huge accomplishment, which is pretty funny to reflect on now, considering that years later I would put in more than forty miles per week when I was tapering (resting) for a race.

That's what progressive training is all about, though—increasing your normal. When you are accustomed to running twenty or thirty miles a week, a forty-mile week feels like a huge jump. Pretty soon, though, your body adapts and gets stronger to the point where what was once a challenge has now