

A 52-Week Running Devotional

WALK  
RUN  
SOAR



Dorina Gilmore Young  
with Shawn Young

FOREWORD BY RYAN HALL

# WALK, RUN, SOAR



**A 52-Week Running Devotional**

**Dorina Gilmore Young**  
with Shawn Young



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INITIATIVE

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## FOREWORD

When I look back at my career, it wasn't the two Olympic Games I had the honor of competing in, or the American record I set in the half marathon, or even running 2:04 at the 2011 Boston Marathon that I treasure the most. Rather, it is a still, quiet moment when I was thirteen years old, before any running ever began, when I was looking out the window at the sparkling blue waters in Big Bear Lake, California, that I cherish most. This was the moment when I encountered God for the first time in a still, small, quiet inner voice challenging me to run around the lake. It would have been easy for me to dismiss this feeling as a passing random urge to do something that I always hated to do (run), but there was something about it that captured me. It captured me in a way that made it impossible to let it go. This small encounter with God changed the trajectory of my life forever.

The following Saturday I laced up my running shoes with my dad and embarked on what had to be the world's longest, slowest, most painful run in history (at least that's how it felt to me). When I finally stumbled through the door and collapsed on the couch, I felt like I heard God speak to me again that one day I would run with the best guys in the world, and that I had been given that gift to help and love other people. I would spend the next twenty years

of my running career pursuing this vision, beginning a wonderful journey full of exhilarating highs, gut-wrenching lows, and everything in between, experiencing God at deeper levels with each passing stride.

In the same way that I experienced God so deeply throughout my running career, I believe He wants you to experience Him in new and deeper ways through your running. Something that has always bothered me about sports is that usually there is only one winner. Only one person gets to stand on top of the podium and say “I did it!” while everyone else is left with the emptiness of not achieving that top step. But this isn’t the case with God. Knowing and experiencing Him truly is sweeter than anything anyone could ever achieve—more than any gold medal, world record, or goal reached. He is sweeter. He is true satisfaction. And the good news is that we can all have Him, all at the same time, and have as much of Him as we want. Which leads to the next question that is probably running through your mind: How?

We all need guides in life. Guides come in many different forms: family members, friends, pastors, teammates, messages, and books to name a few. The book you are holding in your hand is one such powerful guide to help you experience God every step of your journey. It will turn your attention away from the lesser goals and toward the greatest goal: experiencing God on the run. My prayer for you is that you will have an experience similar to my own: one that was full of amazing experiences, people, and performances, but most important, encounters with God that mark you for the rest of your days.

—Ryan Hall, Olympian, author, coach, speaker

# INTRODUCTION

Hey, friend! If you are a walker or a runner who has a hunch that running and faith are intricately connected, you're in the right place.

If you're a runner who wants to accomplish your physical goals, but also longs for a more personal connection with God, then we need to chat.

If you're a runner who deep down wants your training to engage the body, mind, soul, and spirit, this book is for you.

If you have ever felt out of breath or stuck in life, I am here to help you find new strength to press on. I can certainly relate. After my husband, Ericlee, died from cancer in 2014, I wasn't sure if I could ever run again. He had been my coach, my running partner, and my biggest cheerleader for almost a dozen years. He trained me for my first half marathon and then my first marathon. He logged hundreds of miles with me, pushing our daughters in the jogging stroller and pushing me to personal records.

I still remember that first week after my husband's death when I ventured out to the track for a workout. I wasn't sure I could run without him. I laced up my running shoes and took a deep breath. I ran once around the oval and then began to hear it. Ericlee's coaching voice boomed from heaven. He was telling me to lift my

knees, to steady my breathing, to square my shoulders, and run. My eyes, body, and heart were lifted from grief to hope.

The prophet Isaiah says, “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31). These words remind us that we are called to place our hope in Him. We cannot trust in our own sense of control and purpose. He is the One who can help us begin to walk and run again after crippling life circumstances.

Different versions of the Bible use different words like *wait* (ESV), *trust* (NLT), and *wait upon* (MSG) in place of *hope*. These words help deepen our understanding of this passage. When we have that hope and wait upon God, He leads us in surprising ways to fly like eagles.

Eagles are beautiful, majestic birds created by God to soar. They have long, large wings. Their bodies are very light with bones that are hollow. Their skeletons weigh only about half a pound, but their wings are very strong. When eagles fly, they flap their wings for only a short time to gain altitude. Then they stretch their wings horizontally and use wind thermals to soar or glide through the air, conserving energy.

A wind thermal is a big gust of wind that rises up from the atmosphere. Eagles wait and perch (sometimes for days) before they catch a good, strong wind thermal to carry them to where they want to go. Like the eagle, we also must “wait with hope,” listening for the Holy Spirit to whisper, nudge, or direct us where to run next.

While we wait, Isaiah 40 says He “renews our strength.” An eagle molts, which is the natural way God replenishes its wings. Similarly, God can give us a dose of renewed strength, power, and ability while we are waiting or putting in the miles training for a race. We can’t simply rely on our own human strength because it is too-often misguided and will eventually run out. Like the eagle, we need to conserve energy and soar on the wind the Holy Spirit provides.

My heart is to run alongside you this year and help coach you to connect with God, develop muscle memory, and catch a second wind to soar to the finish line. Whether you are a walker or a seasoned runner, this book was designed with you in mind.

In this 52-week experience, I encourage you to read one devotional at the start of each week, and then spend time journaling and taking the faith steps throughout your week. You don't have to start at the beginning of the year. Whether it's January, June, or November, just jump in today!

If you're a runner or walker, my husband, Shawn, has included coaching tips to help you improve your training and your form. You might couple these weekly tips with some of the workout plans for 5K, 10K, or half-marathon distances included in the appendix. We also have included space at the end of each chapter for writing your reflections and recording details about your workouts.

This book lends itself well to meeting with other runners and walkers. You might connect with a friend for accountability or form a running group or team to share these weekly reflections together. Discuss the questions, memorize the Scriptures, and cheer each other on to your personal finish lines.

Friend, when you reach the final page of this devotional journal, my hope and prayer is that you will *walk*, *run*, and *soar* knowing that Jesus is with you every step of the way.

# 1

## CULTIVATING COURAGE

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

### FAITH FUEL

I still remember the night before I ran my first half marathon. Butterflies danced in my stomach. Even though I had trained hard and followed the plan my coach put together for me, I was still nervous. *Would all those practice runs really pay off? Did I drink enough water? Would my knees hold up? Would I make it to the finish line?* All these questions crowded my mind.

I also vividly remember the night before running my first full marathon, which was in San Diego. Again, I put in the time and persevered through the long runs and strength workouts, but I had to battle the fears floating through my heart. The 26.2 miles felt daunting. I woke up several times that night, wondering if I was

really ready for the race. With trembling legs, I prayed for courage for the next morning to get on that starting line.

In the book of Joshua, God encourages Joshua to “be strong and courageous.” Joshua served Moses during Israel’s forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Joshua was a faithful servant and proved a worthy leader whom God intended to use to lead the Israelites into the promised land after Moses’ death. First, God prepares Joshua’s heart and urges him to prepare the people.

As He is calling Joshua up to leadership, God imparts courage to him. He commands him three times in Joshua 1:5–9 to “be strong and courageous.” That repetition is like a holy highlighter emphasizing the importance of courage to Joshua. That word *courage* is used throughout the Old Testament, meaning to “be brave,” “keep hold of,” “make firm,” “grow strong,” and “be swift-footed.” Courage also means “breath” in Hebrew. Reciprocally, when we are discouraged, we are short of breath.

God follows up His command to Joshua with these words of assurance: “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). God isn’t asking Joshua to muster up a bunch of courage on his own. He’s not asking him to pull up his proverbial bootstraps and prove himself a courageous warrior. He’s simply reminding Joshua that courage comes in knowing God will be with Him. He gifts Joshua with His presence.

Sometimes in life, courage is standing at the intersection of fear and faith, and choosing faith. Sometimes courage is humbly admitting our weaknesses and moving forward. Sometimes courage means venturing out to run a distance we have never run before. And sometimes courage means getting back up after a horrible race and training again.

Friend, let God breathe courage into you today. If He can get me to the finish line of that first half marathon and marathon, He will surely go with you as you run, walk, and maybe even soar through your race. “Above all, be strong and very courageous” (Joshua 1:7 HCSB).

**FAITH STEP:** Sometimes it helps when we are running or walking to repeat a phrase to ourselves. Make “be strong and courageous” your mantra for this week. Run and feel the strength and rhythm of these words in your heart.

**INSPIRATION:** “Being brave, for me, means not giving up on the things that make me feel alive.”

—GABE GRUNEWALD, 2014 USA indoor track-and-field 3,000m champion; battled cancer from 2009–2019

**NOTES FROM COACH SHAWN:** In a race, spend some time mentally chanting a positive phrase or song lyric that will help keep you focused, relaxed, and running on a good rhythm. One suggestion is to use “Walk, run, soar.”

*Use the space below to jot down some notes about your daily workouts or goals.*

SUNDAY	MILES _____
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MONDAY	MILES _____
--------	-------------

TUESDAY	MILES _____
---------	-------------

WEDNESDAY	MILES _____
-----------	-------------

THURSDAY	MILES _____
----------	-------------

FRIDAY	MILES _____
--------	-------------

SATURDAY	MILES _____
----------	-------------

TOTAL MILES \_\_\_\_\_

# 2

## BEAUTY FROM ASHES

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me . . . to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Isaiah 61:1, 2–3

### FAITH FUEL

My friends and I rolled out of camp bunk beds early. The air was brisk but the sun greeted us with a promise of warmth. I joined my running buddies at the starting line for another attempt at the Shadow of the Giants trail race.

“Three, two, one, go!” the race director bellowed, his voice echoing through the forest. And we were off.

My lungs burned as we headed uphill through the grove of Sequoia trees at 5,000-foot elevation. Inhale. Lift. Exhale. Lift. Inhale. Lift. I tried to find the rhythm of my breath and feet to

make it up that first long hill. I had confidence, knowing I had completed this race before, but five miles of hills is still five miles of hills. I knew what to expect, but I still had to put in the work.

This time, as I ran the Shadow of the Giants race, I couldn't help but notice the landscape. The trail through the Nelder Grove—near Yosemite National Park—looked strikingly different from the year before when I ran the same race. Fallen trees and blackened trunks provided a striking stark contrast against the backdrop of the bright blue sky.

A wildfire earlier in the year blazed its way through 12,407 acres of this forest. The cause of the fire was unknown, but it threatened communities, historic buildings, resorts, and the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad.

When a fire rages through dry underbrush, it clears thick growth so nourishing sunlight can reach the forest floor. This encourages the growth of native species. Where forest fires destroy, new life always springs up. A resilient tree that survives the fire can even experience a growth spurt.

As I ran, I noticed evidence of new growth. Green grass and leaves sprouted in all directions. Wildflowers dotted the trail. As I rounded the corner after the steepest part of the race, angled light beamed through the blackened tree trunks. Beauty rose from the ashes.

Out of my family's grief, a fierce sense of hope has risen in my life these last several years. I still bear the scars of loss, but God uses these to open doors so I can encourage others. My three daughters have resilient spirits, which I believe spring from the fire they have walked through. Sometimes life is about breathing and lifting, moving forward one step at a time. Our hearts were singed, but we have found unexpected joy in the journey.

Do you feel like you are running uphill through the dark? Do you feel the sear of the fire at your heels? It's taken more than a few runs to learn that the challenge is in how I respond. Will we let life's fires destroy us or refine us? Will we sit in the ashes or will we wear a crown of beauty?

**FAITH STEP:** What is a difficult circumstance you are facing? Write out a prayer responding with hope.

**INSPIRATION:** “Sometimes you have to go through the tragedy before you can experience the jubilation of the triumph, and so I was super proud with the way that he was able to find that gear.”

—COACH ED EYESTONE on his athlete winning the men’s NCAA 10,000m championship in 2019

**NOTES FROM COACH SHAWN:** If you begin to struggle during a long run or race, try consuming fifty to a hundred calories either from food (gels, chews, etc.) or from a running beverage. The sustenance may perk you up and give you a second wind.

*Use the space below to jot down some notes about your daily workouts or goals.*

SUNDAY	MILES _____
MONDAY	MILES _____
TUESDAY	MILES _____
WEDNESDAY	MILES _____
THURSDAY	MILES _____

FRIDAY	MILES _____
--------	-------------

SATURDAY	MILES _____
----------	-------------

TOTAL MILES \_\_\_\_\_