



by Caleb Miller

The Olympic runner Eric Liddell, of *Chariots of Fire* fame, would say that “[he felt God’s pleasure](#)” when he ran.

I have no idea what he is talking about.

I’ve always hated running. I’m not bad at it - that doesn’t mean I like it.

One of the things I hate about running is that it never seems to get easier. Sure, getting to a certain pace or time or distance can be done. But the experience of running - fast, hard, past the ability to hold a conversation (or shout a cadence!), often early in the morning in unfavorable weather conditions - has never been the least bit enjoyable for me.

My entire Army career, at least from one perspective, can be summed up as an attempt to force myself to like running. The last Olympics in Tokyo (delayed until 2021, if you remember), I committed to watching coverage of [the entire marathon](#), all 3 hours and 20 minutes of it, to see if I could find some inspiration.

I found some, but not in the way I expected.

Eliud Kipchoge - the Kenyan long-distance runner and other “fastest man alive” besides Usain Bolt - was on the cusp of running a sub-two hour marathon in the Olympic games. Needless to say, he won the race in masterful fashion. He dared other competitors to keep up with his absolutely blistering pace, which was that much more punishing in the heat of summer in Tokyo.

Watching him and the other competitors inspired, if anything, feelings of inadequacy. He was chewing through over 26 miles at a faster rate than I would hope to get through two for a fitness test.

But there was another runner, just outside the top ten. Daniel Do Nascimento - a Brazilian long-stance runner and up-and-coming star from the Americas - had clearly pushed himself too far. [About an hour and a half into the race](#), he collapsed for a moment on the side of the road. His chest was rising and falling. He was blinking, twitching. The commentators weren't sure if he tripped or was reacting to the heat. He got back up and kept running.

I could relate to this man. Anyone who has ever fallen out of an ability group run knows the sensation. I do not know what it feels like to come close to a two hour marathon, but I know what it feels like to get swept up in a stronger runner's pace.

If someone without context were given just that brief clip and asked “Is Do Nascimento proficient at running?” - what would they say? When they found out that [something similar](#) just happened to him at the NYC Marathon, what then?

Sporting events, romantic comedies, action films, even pop songs - think about how struggle and determination and grit is portrayed in these mediums. We see the winners prominently displayed. We are accustomed to happy endings. We are conditioned every day to believe that even in the midst of a challenge people are graceful, speech comes naturally, fighting is choreographed, and ability is innate. It doesn't take practice. It doesn't require doing anything that feels unnatural or painful. It just kind of ... happens. We begin to believe we are one montage away from mastery.

What these portrayals often leave out is the awkwardness, the misunderstandings, the injuries, the hours of time on task that don't seem to add up to anything. This applies to more than just acquiring skills. There are people who are bouncing between the stages of grief after losing a loved one. There are people who are scraping by with alternating minimum payments on credit cards and utilities to heat the house and feed their kids. There are people spending far more time in the office than they should, trying to deliver on a report for a superior officer and becoming paralyzed with the thought, “am I doing any of

this right?”

Most of us progress like Do Nascimento, not Kipchoge.

Resiliency in real time often feels like *failure*. It feels like *doubt*. It feels like imposter syndrome. It feels like these things because it is these things, for a season. Like Theodore Roosevelt’s “man in the arena,” who reminds us that “[there is no effort without error and shortcoming](#),” Do Nascimento’s example reminds us it can happen on the most public of stages.

We talk of “bouncing back” like a tennis ball rather than an egg. But think about how that feels from the tennis ball’s perspective.

To conclude, I still hate running. But maybe that’s the point. In the meantime, I will be following and cheering for Do Nascimento. Due to his diligence, I am now a bit more grateful for the lessons running can provide.

If you are in the midst of a struggle or failure or doubt - whether in the context of physical fitness or another of life’s many circumstances - take heart. You are probably making far more progress than you can currently see: keep going, keep showing up, keep building good habits, keep looking for good mentors and accountability. If, along the way, you are tempted to look down on someone else for their clumsiness, doubt, or failure, realize there might be more to their story than you know. You don’t know what kind of race they have already run, before that point where you watched them, if only for a moment, collapse.

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