

For the last few weeks I've committed myself to running every day... I know.

It's a long-needed effort to shock my body into fitness again. For a while I've been blaming my two toddlers for my recent lack of athleticism but I'm beginning to wonder whether it might have more to do with the inordinate amount of cake I've been consuming. I guess we'll never know.

It has NOT been easy. The first day I started with a quick local run that just about floored me. Sadly, because I had made such a song and dance of "being a runner now" to my husband (Ash), I continued to run out of spite. Gradually, I've been getting much better. No stitches and no stopping. It's seeping into everything else I do. I organise my day so that I definitely get out to run. I'm listening to podcasts that teach me better breathing techniques. Ash audibly gasped when I suggested eating a salad for dinner. Aching muscles, growing laundry piles, boring nutritious food; it would seem that I have caught the bug.

But why? I love sitting and eating cake, why bother changing that? Well it's because the benefits far outweigh the hardships. For every run that I've dreaded and crawled my way around, I feel stronger and healthier for and still get the 'runner's high'.

I mention all of this because it feels like a fitting comparison to my faith. For those of you who know me, you'll know I've been running the Christian race a long time now but talking about it can still feel clunky, critical, and irrelevant to those who don't share my beliefs. I struggle to talk about this thing that defines me for fear of not striking the right balance. In the same way that avid runners can end up unintentionally sounding like extreme fat-shamers when they talk passionately about their hobby, as a Christian I often fear that I sound like the equivalent- a judgemental fundamentalist. Sometimes that's been decided of me before I've even opened my mouth on a matter and sometimes that's because I do myself no favours.

However, where I reckon a lot of Christians go wrong or are misrepresented is that we don't talk enough about why we do all this. We do talk a lot about the traditions and culture around our faith. But where I think we go wrong is that we struggle to talk about the reasons we love the faith we have in a way that is meaningful to those outside of Christian circles.

What if we talked more about the joy of knowing God? Without motive or agenda, what if we celebrate one of the purest and most basic elements of our faith because it is the only appropriate response to the gift that it is?

It seems to me that Christians in media, or rather those who make the news, are often mouthy and known for what they are standing against. As far as I know, there are very few who are featuring in headlines because this joy continues to change them from the inside out. This same joy is deeper than mere happiness and more steadfast than stable circumstances. For me, it has been my fuel through both the elation and heaviness that can come with motherhood. It is with joy that I've known the Jesus spoken about in the gospels through heartbreak and lostness. Though in many ways it would be much easier for me to ditch my faith altogether- to have my cake and eat it (if we're continuing analogies)- it's the joyful, no-matter-what, closeness of God that brings me back every time.

If I could allow the people in my life who aren't Christians to understand one thing about my faith it would always be joy. I'd want them to know that this faith- that can look like an endless list of restrictions and far too costly to bother with- has given me more basic and sustaining joy than I ever thought was possible and has *always* been worth the price. It stems from a love that is unconditional and inspiring. It comforts in times that are so dark and confusing and partners with enough hope to continue the race.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that the joy I have from knowing God is like my inexplicable 'runner's high'. No, much more than that:

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

And to those wary of even a run around the block, I say "press on".