



## On your marks

This idea was developed in 2012, when London hosted the Olympic Games, but it can be used whenever the Olympics are held. There are so many biblical links with sporting imagery, particularly in the New Testament, that it will be a great opportunity to invite friends along and share the good news of the gospel. Following Jesus means we are involved in something where everyone can take part, everyone can be winners and where there is a prize that lasts forever!

## Get set

The following idea is an outline for a simple, short celebration focused on the Olympic Games. It could be used in an all-age service or as part of a Messy Church celebration; for a Sunday or midweek group; or even, with suitable adaptation, for a collective worship in a school. The outline includes a call to worship, Bible links, a way into the story, a way to tell the story together, a suggestion for a song, a prayer activity, something to go on talking about afterwards and a blessing.

## Go!

### 1 Call to worship

Our theme today is 'running the race' and the Bible has some startling things to say about winners and losers! So as we begin, let's remind ourselves of just who comes first!

Here and now, God welcomes us all saying:

**I, the Lord - with the first of them and with the last - I am he.** (Isaiah 41:4, NIV)

Here and now, Jesus welcomes us all saying:

**... I am the First and the Last.** (Revelation 1:17, NIV)

Here and now, the Spirit welcomes us all and reminds us of the words of Jesus:

**... those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.** (Luke 13:30, NIV)

### 2 Bible links

Jesus chooses his team:

- Matthew 4:18-22
- Mark 1:16-20
- Luke 5:1-11
- John 1:35-51
- There is a retelling of the story in [The Barnabas Family Bible](#)



### 3 A way into the story

Ask everyone to get into the swing of the Games by inviting them to stand and respond with actions to the following roll-call of sports and sounds:

- There'll be running
- There'll be rowing
- There'll be jumping
- There'll be throwing
- There'll be biking
- There'll be sailing
- There'll be shooting
- There'll be boxing
- There'll be cheering
- There'll be gasping
- There'll be losing
- There'll be dancing
- There'll be medals
- There'll be winning
- There'll be records
- There'll be singing

They say that these Games will be the greatest show on earth, with the greatest races and competitions ever. But do you know, there is an even bigger race than an Olympic race? An even greater event than any in the Games? And this race is one in which everyone can take part; everyone can be a winner; everyone can come first (even if they think they've come last); and everyone can get a prize that will last forever!

In our worship today, we're going to explore joining this amazing race - the race of faith; the race that people are on when they follow Jesus.

### 4 A way to tell the story of Jesus choosing his 'Olympic' team

Invite some acted responses to the following questions:

- Who can be the tallest... the shortest... the fastest... the cleverest... the sneakiest... the widest... the smiliest...

So much we do is about being the best at something... about 'who comes first' and the Olympic Games put all this in the spotlight. There have been trials and tournaments, selection committees and much debate, to decide who will represent his or her country. But Jesus chose his 'Olympic' world-winning team differently! He prayed and then... just listen to who he asked to join him. They sound more like a bunch of losers!

But... **With God, the last can come first.**

Teach this chorus and invite everyone to say it after each of the followers of Jesus are introduced - you don't have to use all the people suggested, or you could make up your own descriptions. NB: Some of the women followers are included below although their initial calls are not recorded in the gospels.

- There was hot-headed, loud-mouthed, never-stop-to-think-about-it Peter. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was grumpy-faced, stick-in-the-mud, 'I don't believe it!' Nathaniel. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was easily-distracted, a-bit-of-a-dreamer, far-too-young-looking John. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was never-trusting, always-doubting, 'I'm not sure about this' Thomas. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was temper-losing, tantrum-throwing, 'I'll smash your face in' Simon the Zealot. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was always-busy, easily-upset, 'tell my sister to help me' Martha. She wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was quite-off-her-head, extremely-impulsive, definitely-a-bad-girl Mary from Magdala. She wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was rather-well-to-do, linked-with-royalty, too-close-to-the-enemy Joanna. She wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was no-one's-ever-heard-of-her, what's-she-got-to-offer, just-a-nobody Suzanna. She

wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was very-enthusiastic, bit-pessimistic, over-shadowed-by-his-brother Andrew. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

- There was rather-ambitious, his-mummy-loves-him, thinks-he's-the-best James. He wouldn't be an Olympic first choice. But...

**With God, the last can come first.**

And there's me... and there's you! Jesus invites us to join his team too. You might think that you're too awkward... too unimportant... too much of a failure... too young... or too old but you'd be wrong. You might not make an Olympic team, but Jesus wants you on his team because...

**With God, the last can come first.**

And everyone can win the greatest prize of all - life that never ends!

St Paul, who thought he was the last person on earth who was worthy to join Jesus' team, wrote:

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12 - 14, NIV).*

**5 A suggestion for a song**

- A simple call-and-response song about being on the journey of faith and following God - see, for example, [We're on this Road](#) resource pack.
- Out of the Ark Music has also produced a special [Olympian song](#), although this doesn't have an explicit link to the race of faith.

**6 A prayer activity**

The motto of the Olympic Games is '*citius, altius, fortius*' which is Latin for 'faster, higher, stronger'. Use these three words to inspire your prayers and link each to a simple action:

Faster - *move both hands quickly from right to left in front of your body*

Higher - *reach up high with both hands*

Stronger - *hold up both hands with fists clenched to right and to left*



Each time, after a short one-sentence extempore prayer for the world, the country, the local community, the church and for 'those in need', invite everyone to say the following together with the actions above:

Nothing is faster than prayer.

Nothing is higher than God's greatness.

Nothing is stronger than God's love.

## **7 Something to go on talking about afterwards**

- Do we have to win to be a success in life?
- Is life just a race, with winners and losers?
- Should winning a trophy be the highlight of someone's life?
- What does it mean to be on Jesus' team every day of the week?
- What's the hardest part of running the race of faith?

## **8 Blessing**

May...

God the Father watch over us - *hands reaching up high above the body*

God the Son walk with us - *hands reaching out wide either side of the body*

God the Spirit work through us - *hands crossed over the body*

Until we meet again - *shake hands or high-five each other*

Amen.