Are you Fit? Submitted by Eric Brown

After six weeks of "Lockdown" the question above is very relevant! I have become a "couch-potato". This past week our neighbour's daughter celebrated her 18th birthday. A request from mother – on the day would one or both of us play "Happy Birthday" on our French Horns outside the house. I was told it was up to me so decided I ought to get the horn out of its case – have only blown a few notes over the past weeks. I quickly realised that through lack of exercise my "puff" for horn blowing was seriously diminished, hence the description of becoming a "couch-potato".

Did any of you see, on television last weekend, the pole vault competition between the three best vaulters in the world – one from France, one from Sweden and one from the United States? They had training facilities in their back gardens. It was an unusual competition; not who could clear the greatest height but who could clear 5 metres the most times in 30 minutes!

The Olympics are off for a year, athletes are "locked down" but still they are trying to find ways of maintaining fitness; to prepare for their event(s).

The apostle Paul on several occasions in his writings likened the Christian life to running in a race. Very near the end of his life, imprisoned in Rome for the second time – this time held in chains in a cold dungeon and soon to be executed – he writes to Timothy:

> *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

Paul's perseverance is clear in what he writes. It has been a hard fight, a long endurance race. Writing his second letter to the Corinthians he writes of the hardships he has endured.

Paul boasts about his sufferings

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,
²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Paul persevered – he "trained" for what was ahead.

A few years ago, a friend came back to Croydon after attending a summer Bible Camp. He was full of a song, written by Jana Alayra, and used at the camp. We were quickly introduced to it:

> I will fight the fight,
> I will run the race
> I will press on towards the goal   (repeat "verse")
>
> I will take hold of that for which
> God took hold of me.   (repeat "chorus")"

The "verse" and "chorus" are repeated over and over again; the tune is rather monotonous - it wouldn't appear to have much chance of being popular – **but it did work!** It was "gripping", probably because it simply repeated simple but profound scripture. It combines Pauline writing to Timothy and to the Church in Philippi.

We are reminded that the Lord has already taken hold of us – a reassurance in these uncertain times. As Paul writes, there is a goal that we must press towards, a goal to achieve – our taking hold of that for which Christ Jesus has already taken hold of us. (Philippians 3: 12)

Paul goes on to say:

But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

We are in a fight, we are in a race and there is a prize to be won. Like our locked down athletes we need to prepare for it – which takes us back to the title question:

Are you, am I, fit for the fight, the race, that lies ahead?