

Finishing the race

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

As the racers lined up at the starting block a hush settled over the crowd; a final stretch, a deep breath, and a last swig of water with closed eyes. Each athlete seemed to occupy his own silent world while tuning out all of the many surrounding distractions. A quick glance at the others then eyes to the ground. As he positioned his foot onto the block, he carefully tested it to ensure a good solid grip. Then forcing his eyes forward as to mentally transmit himself farther down the track, the runner waited for his cue.

Suddenly: “Bang!” More impulse than decision making, he flew from his place with a blur. Each step was sure, every motion timed, like beautiful music he flowed. But then something happened. A flash of red color from the crowd caught the corner of his eye. Without a pause he looked up, turning his gaze from the track ahead to the stands. And before he even knew what was happening, his eyes turned his head, his head slightly adjusted his neck, then shoulders. His entire torso was, for just a flashing moment, ever so minutely twisted. His perfectly aligned sleekness transitioned into a wobble, then bam. He was down with hand and knee on the ground. The crowds stood up aghast. All time and space stood still for this runner and a million years passed if it was a second. Instantly he felt hot and tired and evil curses ran through his mind ‘Give up, get off the field, you blew it, you’ve lost”.

My short story is intended to be a metaphor describing where many people find themselves in life and in their pursuit of God. It is a story of someone who starts the race well but has unexpected events occur that seemingly threaten to ruin the whole thing. Also, many people have started their pursuit of God well. They have acknowledged their need and called out to the Savior, repented from their former ways and set their sights on pursuing a grand calling. They had received the Holy Spirit of God living inside and therefore have been given what was needed to run the race. They have even acquired training in the form of church attendance and Bible studies, worship and prayer. But now they are in the race. They are living the life that God has given them and now they are expected to win. For many, there wasn’t any pressure when no one expected them to win. But then there wasn’t any hope either.

Things are different now. Winning the race is a real possibility - In truth, a certainty, if only we would stay focused. This is a race where there are many winners, all who finish

well. And therein rests the key: “to finish well”.

You may be wondering how my story ends. Well like some of the newer movies that have “alternate endings”, so does my story. Will the runner believe the lies of the mind and commit himself as cursed and lost and walk off the field in defeat? Will you? Or will this runner regain his focus, shake off the lies and rejoin the race to win. What will you do? The message here is that the most important thing is to finish the race well. You may have started well but there is no good story to tell until you finish the race well. Don’t stop halfway. Don’t give up. If you got distracted and found yourself on the ground and out of the race, get up and start running. Refocus. You are meant to win!

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race this is set before us. (Hebrews 12:10)

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 649-1515
www.calvaryojai.org

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195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
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