

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

### # 24

Dearest Grandchild,

In the last couple of letters we talked about being “born again”. Today we will give an example of the “transformation” that takes place when this happens. While there are literally millions of examples to choose from, I have selected the story of Louis Zamperini as a movie about his life has just been released. The movie is called “Unbroken”.

Louis Zamperini was the son of Italian immigrants, was born Jan. 26, 1917. His first years in school were difficult as he did not speak English. This led him to get into trouble and he was constantly involved in anti-social behavior. Under the influence of his brother, he channeled his energy into athletics and in 1934 set a world interscholastic record of 4:21.2 for the mile run. Later he would set a national collegiate mile record of 4:08. In 1936, at the age of only 19, he ran the 5,000 meter race at the Olympic Games in Berlin. He was the youngest American at the time to ever qualify for that event. He sprinted the last lap in only 56 seconds and Adolf Hitler was so impressed that he asked to meet him.

He achieved even more fame during W.W. II by surviving 47 days adrift in the South Pacific and over two years of torture in Japanese prison camps.

After his return to the states he became addicted to alcohol, cigarettes, and hatred. He constantly dreamed of revenge against the Japanese who tortured him. In particular, he hated Matsuhiro Watanabe who was “The Bird” by the prisoners. This sadistic officer would actively seek out and torture Zamperini in an effort to break him. Zamperini never gave him that honor.

Franklin Graham commented that the movie, released in 2014, missed the most important part of Zamperini’s amazing life. In 1949 Louis Zamperini surrendered to Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade. After throwing away his cigarettes and pouring his liquor down the drain, God miraculously gave him the ability to forgive. His nightmares disappeared and in 1950, when he visited the Sugamo Prison in Japan, the Holy Spirit prompted him to embrace his former enemies and tell them about the love of Christ.

Among other Christian endeavors, he launched the Victory Boys Camp to help troubled teens. His 28 year old grandson has recently decided to revive and continue this noble mission.

Zamperini’s earthly honors are too numerous to mention them all. Races, stadiums, and plazas have been named in his honor. The Torrance Airport was renamed Zamperini Field. He was honored as a torch bearer for several Olympic Games. In 2008 he received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. The same year he was inducted into the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame. In 2011 he received an honorary doctorate from Azusa Pacific University, a Distinguished Character Award and another doctorate from Bryant University. He threw out the ceremonial pitch at Fenway

Park in Boston. He also received the Kappa Sigma Golden Heart Award and will be honored posthumously as the Grand Marshall of the 2015 Rose Parade before the playoff game in his home state of California.

Louis Zamperini died of pneumonia July 2, 2014. He was 97 years old. Ironically, the big celebration for him in heaven did not take place at the time of his death, but rather at the time of his conversion. The angels rejoice when we repent, not when we gain another earthly crown. Jesus said it like this: **“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” (Luke 15:7)**

All of Zamperini’s earthly achievements will ultimately be thrown down like trash before the throne of God. Louis will join with all the others saying “You are worthy”. He will correctly give to God all glory for ever and ever. John, the Apostle, described it like this: **“They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’ ” (Rev 4:10-11)**

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce