

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest Grandchild,

In our last letter we focused on the life of a famous man named Louis Zamperini. As you remember, he was a world class runner who competed in the Olympics. While thoughts about this great runner are fresh in our minds, let us focus on the fact that the Scriptures compare the Christian life to running a race.

Please consider: **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12:1-3)**

You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand this. The Christian life is not a stroll in the park it is a race. I’m sure you have heard of the proverbial race between the tortoise and the hare. The rabbit lost the race because he quit racing. The same thing can happen to us. That’s why we need to fix our eyes on Jesus. He kept His eyes on the goal and didn’t slow down, ease up, or quit until the race was over. Though the race was rugged, He finished His course with joy.

Paul reminds us: **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (1 Cor 9:24-25)**

Do you understand this? The Christian life is a race that requires strict training. Jesus said to “strive”, or “make every effort” to enter through the narrow gate (Lk. 13:24). The Greek word used here is “agonizomai” from which we get our English word “agonize”. As we “fix our eyes on Jesus” we should realize that His race was not easy and neither is ours. He agonized and so should we! Everyone knows the difference between running and walking and God commands us to run.

Many years ago I read a book on “Route 66” and found out that promoting that highway involved a marathon footrace. It was perhaps the longest footrace in history. Great Grandpa H.B. Mouton was bedfast with a stroke at the time I read that book. When I told him about that race he smiled and said: *“A kid from Foyil, Oklahoma named Andy Payne actually won that race”*. He was absolutely right! Forgive me as I share a bit of Oklahoma history. Andy and his family originally lived at Chelsea, where Grandpa and Grandma Myers lived. Then they moved to a farm near Foyil, which is a very small town between Chelsea and Claremore. Andy loved to run. In fact, he ran 5 miles to school and 5 miles back every day. His father borrowed the entrance money and Andy went to California and became one of 275 contestants. The race began in Los Angeles on November 4,

1928, and ended in New York, 3,423.5 miles away. By the third day, half of the runners had quit. The race ended 84 days later and Andy was the first to cross the finish line. He ran the race in 573 hours, 4 minutes, and 34 seconds. His average speed was 6 mph. He used the \$25,000 prize money to pay off the debt on the family farm, and to establish enough savings for him to get married. Though he died many years ago, he remains a local hero and his statue is on display in his home town of Foyil, Oklahoma.

The simple association between Christianity and racing seems to be lost in our present generation. Most “join” the youth group with an unbent back and dry eyes. They select a comfortable seat and try not to get too heavily involved. The idea, of course, that you can hire someone else to do your running for you is a delusion. The thought that being a “church member” is like signed up for a race never occurs to them. Any thought of “agony” and “strict training” is automatically assumed to apply to someone else. Wilbur Rees spoke for many when he wrote: *“I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.”*

Jesus said: “. . . do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:31-33)

Note that the pagans “run” after something to eat, something to drink, or something to wear (Matt. 6:32). Often, unbelievers do get up early and stay up late to beat the competition. On Friday, Nov. 28, 2008, for example, roughly 2,000 eager shoppers gathered outside of a New York Wal Mart in the pre-dawn darkness. When the doors were opened they were so eager to run and get a bargain that they tore the doors from their hinges and trampled to death 34-year-old Jdimytai Damour. Surely some of these 2,000 bargain hunters went to church. Surely some of them claimed to be Christians. One cannot help but wonder if these same “Christians” came early on the Lord’s Day eagerly waiting for the doors to open so that they could enjoy the priceless privilege of worshipping Jesus?

Paul expressed my optimism for you when he wrote: **“ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Heb 6:9-12)**

I love you,
Grandpa Boyce