

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Perhaps you noticed that on July 24, 2020 President Trump presented 73 year old Jim Ryun with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Because Ryun is a Christian, reflecting on his life will perhaps provide guidance and inspiration. While information about Ryun is easily available, most of the following information has been condensed from an interview he had with *Risen Magazine*.

Jim's athletic career began with a series of disappointing failures. First, of all things, he was cut from the church baseball team. Then he was also cut from the Jr. High basketball team. Jim was completely discouraged. He went home and prayed: "*Dear God, if you have a plan for my life, I'd really appreciate it if You'd show up and tell me what it is. And by the way, I'd also appreciate it if it was something in sports because that's where I'd like to have my future*".

After this prayer Jim went out for track and field, and again he failed. First he failed as a hurdler, then he failed as a sprinter, then he failed as a pole vaulter. He worked hard for three years but never made the team in any event. In 1962, at the age of 15, he tried out for cross country. At the end of the try outs Jim was totally exhausted. The next morning he was so sore that he could hardly walk. In fact, he had to go up the stairs by walking backward. His mother urged him to quit but Jim said that God intervened. Several class mates apparently believed in him and encouraged him to come to practice that afternoon. Jim took this as a sign from God. Even though he was sore and miserable he dutifully went to the practice and kept plodding on. Finally he made the team, albeit as the last man on the C squad. Remarkably, with the help of God and much hard work, he came from the last on the C squad to # 1 on the Varsity Team in only 6 weeks. That year he ran in the state meet and finished sixth. Coming back on the bus he sat by Coach Bob Timmons who said to him: "*I think you could be the first high school boy to run a mile in under four minutes*". In less than two years that prediction came true!

Ryun remembers his desperate prayer as a turning point in his life. He believes God answered that prayer. He was the first high schooler to break the four minute mile. (He ran five sub-four minutes miles while in high school). He competed in three Olympics, held both American and world records at distances varying from 880 meters to two miles. In spite of technological advances one of those records stood for 36 years. ESPN selected him as the High School Athlete of the Century. He was honored as *Sports Illustrated* "Sportsman of the Year". He was given the Sullivan Award as the nation's top amateur athlete. He was also honored as Athlete of the Year by both ABC's Wide Word of Sports and *Track and Field News*. These are just some of the MANY honors he received in sports.

Jim competed in an era when runners received no endorsements. Consequently, in addition to his rigorous training schedule, he had to work two jobs to pay his bills. Jim had been raised in a religious family and he believed that God was answering his prayers. He was very immature in his faith, however, and saw religion only as a duty. Sadly he didn't enjoy a personal relationship with Christ. That problem was solved on May 18, 1972. On that memorable day he and his wife Anne, asked Jesus to come into their hearts. Jim said: "*That night, I had this overwhelming peace I'd never experienced before. It was like God saying to me, 'You never have to strive again. My love is given to you freely'. It was a brand new experience, a tremendous healing, because I realized a tenth of a second in the race doesn't mean anything to Him. He loves me unconditionally. After that night it was a whole new lifestyle*".

Forgiveness was also an important part of Ryun's new relationship with Christ. He was bitter about an Olympic official. In a qualifying heat in the 1,500 meter race he was spiked by another runner, fell and hit his head on the railing. Jim was unconscious for several seconds and thus failed to qualify for the race he was favored to win. The whole incident was captured on film, but the German official refused to accept it. Today a runner victimized by such a foul would automatically be advanced to the next round, but on that occasion the Olympic official coldly told Ryun to come back in four years and try again. With the love of Christ in his heart, Ryun's major concern now is not winning an Olympic Medal, as much as winning officials like that to Christ.

In 1981 Jim and his family moved back to Lawrence, Kansas and became involved in the pro-life movement. He and Anne started a chapter of Kansans for Life. When Congressman Todd Tiahrt suggested that he run for congress Jim prayed about it and sought advice from family and friends. His mother's response was typical: *"If that's what God is calling you to do, then you have to do it."* Jim answered that call and campaigned on a platform of: "pro-life, pro-family, fiscal responsibility, lower taxes, smaller government, strong military, and pro-Israel". He was elected and served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for five terms from 1996 to 2007.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor. Presidents traditionally honor Americans who have made outstanding contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. When presenting him with the medal President Trump said: *"Jim, thank you for your unfailing devotion to our country, and congratulations on a lifetime of incredible success, not only athletically — that was obviously a big deal — but what you've done in life and even with you family has been just incredible. So I'd like to congratulate you very much."* The words of our president, while very appropriate and very much appreciated, will pale into insignificance when the Judge of the Universe says **"Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness"** (Matt. 25:23).

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce