

Why the Bible?
Focus on the Finish Line
2 Corinthians 4:1-18

By Howard Lower
November 17, 2002

We are in the first anniversary of United flight 93. Listen as I read a few paragraphs of Lisa Beamer's book *Let's Roll - Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage*

"Surreal scenes of ash-covered people running through the streets filled the television screen.

Now, like most Americans, I was reeling, attempting to comprehend the reality of what I had seen and the enormity of the destruction and loss of life. Questions I feared to ask aloud raced through my mind. *Are there any survivors? Are there more attacks to come? How many more planes are out there with terrorists aboard?* My heart hurt for the unknown number of victims, and my concern for my own husband mounted. I fretted inwardly. *Where's Todd?*

At first Elaine, my friend who had rushed over, "and I sat on the couch with our eyes and ears riveted to the television set. Though shaken by the attacks on our nation and deeply grieved over the loss of life, I remained relatively calm until the networks showed yet another downed airliner. This one had crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. I knew that Todd's flight would have traveled in that general direction. Cold shivers ran through my body, and a sick sensation clutched at my stomach as I gazed in horror at the crash site. Smoke still hovered in the air, and even from a distance I could see the charred ground. It was obvious the plane had been obliterated. No one could survive that sort of impact.

The newscaster's subdued voice reported that the downed flight was a United Airlines flight that had been bound for Chicago.

Chicago? Whew! Again I felt a rush of compassion for those people aboard the plane and their families, but I breathed a little easier for our family. We were off the hook again. Todd had an afternoon meeting in San Francisco; he wouldn't have had time for a layover. So surely he wouldn't have booked anything other than a direct flight.

I got up nervously and stepped behind the couch, still staring at the television, when the newscaster's voice intoned, "We have an update on the airliner that has

crashed in Pennsylvania. It was not en route to Chicago as previously reported; it was actually a United flight out of Newark that was going to San Francisco."

"No!" I screamed helplessly at the television. Without a shred of hard evidence, I knew intuitively that Todd was on that flight. Suddenly I felt as though my body weighed a million pounds; it seemed my heart might explode. I fell to my hands and knees and gasped again, "No!"

In an instant Elaine joined me on the floor, wrapping her arms around me. "It's probably not his flight, Lisa. He's probably fine. We don't know what's what. Don't worry. Todd's okay."

"No, Elaine ... that's his plane," I managed to say through my tears.

"We don't know that...."

I'd seen enough. In my heart I knew. I couldn't watch any longer. "I'm going to go upstairs now.... Please watch the boys for a while." Elaine assured me that she would. I made my way to my bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed, staring out the window in a near-catatonic state. I didn't move; I didn't speak. It was as though time had come to an abrupt halt, and I no longer existed. In a desperate, futile attempt to make sense of it all, my heart and mind had temporarily shut down. I was numb. I could see and hear, yet I simply continued to stare straight ahead.

Surely this can't be happening, I thought. *It must just be a bad dream. Todd can't be gone! Maybe there's some mistake.*

But the grim reality pinched at any idealism or hope of a miracle that I might have momentarily embraced. *What now? What are we going to do?* I thought of our boys, David and Drew, who loved their daddy so dearly and were now getting to the ages where they could romp and play with him as a trio of Beamer boys. Todd loved playing with our kids. I touched my bulging belly and thought of the new life I carried inside-Todd's and my third child, due in mid-January. *Oh, God, how am I going to do this?* I agonized inwardly. Our life was so good; we had so many plans. I needed Todd. He always made everything okay.

In that dark moment, my soul cried out to God - and he began to give me a sense of peace and a confidence that the children and I were going to be okay. But even that comfort didn't take away the wrenching pain or the awful sense of loss I felt. Nor did it answer the question that continually tugged at my heart: *How can I live without Todd?*

In my braver moments, I dared to ponder what Todd might have experienced aboard that plane before it had gone down. I wondered if he had been injured ... or possibly even killed by the terrorists. I felt strongly that Todd's final thoughts and expressions would have been of his faith in God and his love for his family. And I knew in my heart, if there were any way possible, that he wouldn't have gone down without a fight.”

We had many heroes on flight 93. But I believe that God makes heroes out of people just like you. People, when thrown into a bad situation humbly go forward with God – doing what needs to be done. You are no different than the people of flight 93 as you sit in this sanctuary.

Most of you have made a covenant with Christ. Paul tells us about the Good News and what it should mean to each of us. Are we being trite when we say I believe in God, family and country? When we look around us doesn't it seem that many believe in *me* first? Of course, we are not talking about ourselves – but the other persons. We are all in a race with time. We are running here and there, to and fro in our busy lives. When we are asked to serve God we can truthfully say - I have no more time.

If Paul were here he would set us down and give us a talking to. Hey! Paul is here, along with the Holy Spirit, directing us in this book of life – the Bible.

Paul tells us of the God given ministry given to each of us. We should never give up on our ministry. We should do our ministry honestly, never distorting the word of God.

Each of us has God given talents. Many of you have heard of William Wilberforce who just about single handedly ended the British slave trade. He had to reevaluate his partying life style to become a Christian. He had to reevaluate what he was going to do with the rest of his life. He was perplexed, and yes, angry with himself for wasting so much of life. He was told by some to retire from public life. Others urged him to stay in politics. It all came down to the scriptures and taking a cue from the Good Samaritan. He said “It is evident that we are to consider our peculiar situations, and in these to do all the good we can.” Given his particular gifts, Wilberforce concluded that it was God's will that he stay in public life. He then searched for God's plan – and listened. He knew he was up against strong political and business interests thriving on slavery. It took him tens of years to see the abolishment of the slave trade. Being a Christian, Wilberforce new he had to start at the grass roots, with people like us, to force the politics to change. He knew he could never give up until he was at the finish line – abolishment of slavery. Without Wilberforce using his God-given gift of politics, slave trading may have gone on for many, many more generations.

Grandma Oakes lived in the Stewartville area for most of her life. She was busy baking, making small flowers by tatting and gluing them on stationary, crocheting then giving it away to friends. One day she was taking some cookies to her friends at the bowling alley. She hit the wrong pedal slamming the car into the building. Bricks fell on the car and dropped around her. She crawled out of the car distressed – not about the damaged car or the damaged building – but that her cookies, her gifts, might be broken. Without people like Grandma Oakes the world would also be a darker place. She reached out to many in servitude, teaching as she went.

Today you are here to praise God in the Good News and have time for coveting with your brothers and sisters. Look at the Ministry Covenant handout with opportunities for you to minister. There are many things you could do with your God given talents. You need not fear any challenge as Jesus is your personal trainer and with you 24/7. You are in a win, win situation when you serve God. He is using each of us to make a difference in people's lives.

We are reminded there are those who refuse to believe the Good News. Know that Satan is “the god of this evil world.” Satan's work is to deceive people who don't believe in Christ. The allure of money, power, and pleasure blind people to the glory of Christ's Good News. Therefore, those who prefer their own pursuits have unknowingly made Satan their god by rejecting Christ. We are to witness about Christ – not to be false teachers who witness or preach about ourselves.

As soon as we are born we are old. We are in a weak and perishable body with death just a heartbeat away. God has chosen our aging and limited body as the container of his glorious light and power that comes from God. God has entrusted the timeless message of salvation in Jesus Christ in each of us. God in his wisdom is using us even though we are frail and fallible human beings to spread the Good News. No matter our age we are to continue to work for God knowing the power is his, not ours. The power of the Holy Spirit keeps us from pride and motivates us to keep in daily contact with God. We are to let other people see God through us. We are each called to serve. We need to listen to His direction for us.

Each of us is pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed or broken. We get perplexed, but we don't give up. We are challenged but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and again and keep going. We may be at the end of our rope, but we are never at the end of hope. Our perishable bodies are weak; we live in the face of death as part of our life. The Good News, at the finish line, is eternal life for each of us.

It is easy to lose heart and quit. We all face problems in our relationships, or our work, which have caused us to think about giving up. What Paul wants for us is to taste the mighty inner strength that comes from the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). Don't let fatigue, pain or criticism force you off the job. Renew your commitment to serving Christ. Don't forsake your eternal reward because of the intensity of today's pain; finish the race at the right finish line. Your very weaknesses allow the resurrection power of Christ to strengthen you moment by moment.

We are told in 2 Cor 4:16-17 "That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed each day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurable great glory that will last forever!"

We are all to think like a world-class athlete no matter our age, or physical strength, our starting position in our walk with Christ. When we think like a world-class athlete we focus on the finish line. We ignore our pain and discomforts. Isaiah 35:10, No matter what happens in this life, we have the assurance of eternal life, when all suffering will end and all sorrow will flee away.

Lisa Beamer says in the dedication in her book "To Todd, my husband, my everyday hero. Thank you for loving God, loving us, and always playing hard. Thanks you for teaching me patience and mercy. I love you and promise to finish our journey well. See you later..."

Thank you Lord for your great gifts of servitude. You showed us how. Let us go forth with courage yet with humbleness bring people to faith and freedom in you, Lord. Let your guiding grace lead us in our opportunities to serve you in our everyday lives. Change us, as you will. We will see you later...

And the people say Praise God, Praise Jesus, Praise the Holy Spirit, Amen, Amen, Amen

Go; run the good race focused on the Good News at the finish line. Know he is there to carry you if you should falter. Know he is with you always. Amen

Credits:

New Living Testament Life Application Study Bible (Tyndale House 1996)

Lisa Beamer with Ken Abraham, *Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage* (Tyndale House 2002)

Kevin Belmonte, *Hero for Humanity: A Biography of William Wilberforce* (NavPress, 2002).