

Winning from Behind

Running to Victory:

1 Kings 18:41-46

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I'm holding some running shoes because the Bible likens our journey on earth to running *a distance race*. Over the past two months, we've considered the Scriptures that compare our lives to a race. We've considered what it means to *win this race*. We've pondered the need to win the head game, the need to deal with thinking affected by fear, opposition and expectations. We've discussed how the Holy Spirit is active in your life, grooming you as a child of God to be a champion on earth. *The intent of your heavenly Father is twofold: 1) intimacy with you as Jesus had with him, and 2) impact through you as Jesus had on humanity and creation.* Your Father wants to love the world through you... even as he did through Jesus. He calls your body a temple for the Holy Spirit. He calls you with other believers the body of Christ. He wants the world to know what is possible because of what he does through your faith.

God lifts us up and grooms us as champions in his family. As family we build one another up to maturity, which is *the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. Let's say that together: **the whole measure of the fullness of Christ**. We're to become wise like Christ, loving like Christ, generous like Christ, and effective like Christ. The whole measure of Christ is to speak, act, heal and move on earth through us.

God calls all kinds of people, with all kinds of problems, to actually reach this stature, and win this distance race of redemption. Most people don't think they have a shot at Christ-like intimacy with God or Christ-like impact on their world. They think they are starting from

behind, too far back in the pack. Most churches think they have little chance of growing and impacting their communities because of past conflicts, their size, their gifts, their personality and so on.

Our problem is faith. We don't realize that we are a work of God. When young David defeated the Philistine giant Goliath, only one thing set him apart from his fearful countrymen. He didn't just believe, as they did, in what God did in the past. He also believed in what God was doing with them right now. Being little, being the underdog, being disadvantaged, being inexperienced, being weaker, being less skilled all meant nothing if God loved him and worked through him; and he believed that. Listen to the promise we read in our stewardship presentation:

Being confident of this... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:4-6, NIV)

God began a good work in you when you believed, and he has promised to complete it.

Are you confident of this? Hear the call of your heavenly Father:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2, NIV)

Jesus has given you what to believe and why. He has stirred your faith. He is the *author* of your faith. He is also the *perfecter*, for he is restoring you to intimacy with God. You are being taught and disciplined as God's child. With Jesus you are running the race of redemption for all humanity and all creation. Please join me in reading this:

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10, NIV)

You are being groomed. You are being created in Christ Jesus. You are being crafted as the workmanship of God for impact – to do good works which God prepared in advance for you.

Do you see yourself as God’s workmanship? Do you think of how God has groomed you to make a difference in the situations you face and the world in which you live? Do you believe God has planned to make an impact through you today? Do you think you are too broken, too flawed, too sick, too disadvantaged?

The Prophet Elijah had this horrendous, conflicted, life-draining encounter with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. God sent fire from heaven to consume a water-drenched sacrifice. Then Elijah initiated the execution of these false prophets. Elijah sent King Ahab off to eat while Elijah prayed for rain that would end the three year drought and famine. After his seventh prayer session, Elijah’s servant reported a tiny cloud rising above the Mediterranean. Elijah sent his servant with an urgent message. Ahab needed to hitch up his chariot and race to Jezreel or he would be stopped by the heavy rain. Elijah had no such advantage. This is what the Scriptures report:

The sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:45-46, NIV)

Starting from behind, Elijah won a 20 mile footrace with the king’s horse and chariot. No way should he have won. Elijah was human, just like you and me. It was the power of the Lord. Jesus said, ***“Everything is possible for him who believes”*** (Mark 9:23, NIV). The Apostle Paul wrote:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms... Eph 1:18-20, NIV)

God has given us incomparably great power, death-destroying, life-changing, world-directing power. This power is accessed and exercised by faith. It is for those who believe!

Have you been watching baseball's World Series? This year the Tampa Bay Devil Rays are in the World Series seeking to go from worst to first. In 2007 they had the worst record in major league baseball; and in 2006 they claimed the worst record with 101 losses. A hundred losses in major league baseball is a special sign of futility. Teams that near or reach that mark are considered noncompetitive. Yet, here they are. They've won their division, their league, and now they're competing for a world championship. Winning from behind isn't impossible. It just is not easy. However, winning from behind reveals something special. Listen.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29, NIV)

Winning from behind reveals the most important truth. What do we sing? *Praise God from whom all blessings flow!* It reveals the greatness of God, for in Christ we have wisdom. In Christ we are made righteous. In Christ we become mega-conquerors. **Starting from behind is an opportunity, not a problem!**

Now, listen church. God did not create an aristocratic class of human beings to govern the earth. He created you. God did not create an aristocratic education system to prepare people for governing. He gave you his Spirit and his spirit-guided family. You are hindered by nothing in your past, except your unbelief. With faith, every hurt, setback, betrayal in your past (and achievements also) are schooling. Bethany Church today is hindered by nothing in our past, only our present unbelief. God does lead us through some hard schooling. Do you think we are too

small, too conflicted, too frail, too burdened with baggage and debt to win? There are tests, trials, conflicts, losses and painful disappointments. They are useful when we turn our eyes to the wisdom and favor of our Heavenly Father. We need not worry that we are at a competitive disadvantage to anyone. Truthfully, we are positioned for the glory of God.

Brothers and sisters, will you put on your running shoes and run to win? Will you expect God to show us the way forward, and believe what he shows us? Will you welcome God's grooming of you as a champion? Will you attack our challenges with faith and refuse to speak discouragement to your brothers? Will you refuse to live as if your world is God-forsaken and respond to your divine coaching with faith? God is grooming you for intimacy and impact! Believe the good news, for victory will come according to your faith.