

Did you have any sports heroes as a kid growing up? Growing up in southeast Michigan I had a few. There was Leapin Larry Chene, Dave Debusschere, Bobby Layne, Tedd Lindsey, and Rocky Calavito? You may have heard of those guys, but I also admired Bannister and Ryan, do those two names ring a bell they were not Detroit names? I remember as a young kid hearing stories about a British guy who was the first man to run a mile in under 4 mins. in 1954. Bannister was his name and then when I was in Junior High a high school junior named Jim Ryan became the first to run a sub 4 minute mile. Wow! That blew my mind.

Did you ever try to emulate your heroes? As a little kid I would jump of the back of the couch on Saturdays watching wrestler Leapin Larry Chene, Or bring my base ball bat down over the back of my head and back like Tiger Rocky C. Or practice a hook shot like the original Piston bad boy Debusschere.

I also remember trying to run like the faster boys at school. Almost all of the guys were faster than me. I listened carefully to my track coach who outlined race strategies and read books and watched races on TV. I will get back to that in a bit, but first I want us to visit the Old Testament book of 1 Kings chapter 18 about another race.

The Prophet Elijah was not having the best of years. King Ahab a very bad dude, and his even worse Queen Jezebel were out to kill him because he had brought the message of drought from God because they worshiped out Gods. The land was starving for water, it had been years of no rain.

Ahab and his servant Obadiah went out to scour the land for grass so they would not have to kill the Kings animals. Ahab went one direction and Obadiah another. Obadiah a follower of the One True God bumped in to Elijah. After their greeting Elijah tells Obadiah to tell Ahab that he is waiting to meet him. Obadiah is afraid for his own life just to mention Elijah's name. But does as the prophet asked him to do. Now this sets up the event, a contest of 450 priests of Jezebel against Elijah to see whose God is the most powerful. Who's will burn up their offering first. 450 priests doing everything possible to get one of their Gods to light the bull on their altar. All day chants, skin cutting, dancing, pleading, and nothing, Elijah even has men pour water all over his altar with a moat full of water around it, one prayer and bang it is all incinerated. Elijah then has all of the priests of Bail

killed. A huge triumph in the face of Ahab and Jezebel. Then reading 1Kings 18 verse 41 and following.

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.” ⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’” ⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Elijah ran faster than Ahab’s chariot in the rain storm 17-20 miles. Now that was probably over 10-12 mph for 17-20 miles -unbelievable! The power of the Lord came on Elijah tucking in his cloak into his belt and off he went better than Usain Bolt the fastest man or Eliud Kipchoge best modern day marathoner. All to prove that God is more powerful than what, everything including Ahab.

Now I we are going to reenact one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. It was the spring of 1969 and I a member of the New Lothrop High School Hornet track team, at our first meet of the year, was just assigned by Coach to run the mile. This was my first time to run the mile, always had run 2nd or third legs of relays before in my Freshman and Sophomore years. I approached the coach to let him know I had yet to run a full mile even in practice because I had been battling upper respiratory cough until a week before. He said you are it, we don’t have anyone else. Sooooooooooooo.

Each schools entries lined up at the start. This was the first time I ever started at the starting line, This is cool I thought!. All were loosening up. Ready, bang!, and we were off. I tucked in behind the guy in lane one thru the first turn and was passed by one as we enter the back straight away. Telling myself all the strategies of winning. Then it began to unravel. Passed again by one in the next curve, and then another and by the end of 1/4 mile I was at the end of the pack trying to keep up but..... (now to speed our story up). I was heading for the starting/finish line to begin my fourth and final lap, when all of a sudden, it seemed that everyone was on their feet, people started yelling for me to run faster, my team seemed to be in a frenzied, the crowd was cheering like crazy, I was confused, I was no where near the front of the contestants. Even the race officials who had the finish tape were

yelling at me to run faster . So I gave it all I had and as soon as I went under the finish tape they dropped it down behind me and the winner broke threw it, I then realized I had almost been lapped, I had almost messed up the finish tape people and the race, and now the unbearable—I had a another whole 1/4 mile lap to go by my self– not a victory lap, but the lap of shame. My mind pondered what do I do? My Dad always said son finish what you start. So I kept going and kept the track meet from moving on as everyone waited as I painfully finished my one and only mile race. After I returned to our team area, the coach didn't say anything just shook his head. In fact no one said a word. The next meet I was back in the relay legs.

Why did I share this sad tail because there is humor in the crazy panic surrounding me and there are lessons to be learned from it.

The Apostle Paul must have been a fan of the games. Because he used illustrations from them. Like these.

1 Cor. 9:24-27

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

The preacher Biblical commentator David Hubbard wrote-

“The phrase “let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus” is the key. The idea is clear. There are lots of distractions as we run. Bypaths beckon us; false goals attract us; competition discourages us; opposition causes us to falter. Jesus, however, a tried and trusted leader who blazed the trail of faith by His own obedience and perseverance and who finished the course in a burst of glory is both our guide and our goal. We look away from everything else– to Him, if we want to run will.”

Now I want us to dig deeper here. I was down after running my mile. It took awhile to rebound. Now you would think Elijah would be on top of the world after these victories. But no He was in the pits!

Elijah ran in God's strength in 1 Kings 18 and ran on his own fumes in chapter 19. And did not do as God directed. When we are exhausted, we need to stop, rest, and wait on God. It's pointless to take matters into our own hands. Faith isn't the opposite of fear, but rather trusting in a greater God when facing our fears.

When Elijah obeyed, God supernaturally equipped and empowered him. But when Elijah disobeyed by not confronting Queen Jezebel and instead ran away from her death threats, he placed himself outside of God's will.

With the amazing miracles God accomplished through Elijah, especially on the heels of Elijah's major victory over the false prophets of Baal and Asherah, (men who led the nation into idolatry and ate at Queen Jezebel's table), it's hard to grasp how this committed man of God could fear Queen Jezebel, sinking into a pit of despair to the point of asking God to take his life.

But if this tough minded prophet with an impressive track record, both literally and spiritually, could be vulnerable to discouragement and depression, then so can we.

What can we learn from Elijah's story?

The Enemy's lie: "You're life is over." There have been mountain top times when I can see God move and feel blessed because I know He is using me. Then the winter season hits when I struggle to hear God's voice. Unsure where He wants me, or what He wants me to do, I give way to frustration and feelings of hopelessness. But it's during these seemingly long, unproductive times that He prunes and teaches me to simply trust, rest, and just enjoy His presence. Because Jesus cleared the way through his atoning sacrifice, I can not only come as I am, a complete mess, before the Father, but He also welcomes me with open arms.

He forgot what God had done. All of us have struggles. But God is faithful. He has seen me through many difficult and good times. I have witnessed His gentle strength, guidance, healing, comfort, and counsel numerous times. While we're admonished to forget the past in regard to sin, we're reminded to remember what God has done.

He listened to the enemy's lies. We have a real Enemy who knows us and seeks to discourage and trip us up. The enemy has used this area before, whispering lies when dealing with difficult personalities in the church. Telling me: "You don't be-

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long here. You don't fit into this church body.”

But just because I am hurt by someone's words or actions, or didn't agree with someone, doesn't mean I should leave and run away. God plants us where He wants us. When we feel pressure, we look for a word from God to bring relief. But sometimes God is quiet and places us in very uncomfortable situations to refine and strengthen us, not to cut us down. But *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world,”* (1 Jn. 4:4).

He isolated himself. Some people withdraw because they don't want to be a burden or obligation to anyone. I tend to withdraw when I'm tired or feel like I have nothing to offer, (which would also be a lie from the Enemy). But these are the times I especially need God's people around me for encouragement and edification.

He began fantasizing about escape. I was thinking of maybe a hole in the ground, Maybe Elijah justified his running away from confronting Jezebel with his strong desire to hear from God. The void he felt within and the hunger to hear a word from God changed his focus from stepping out in obedience to fleeing to Beersheba, then into the desert, and finally to Mount Horeb (Sinai). It was there, like Moses centuries earlier, that he finally talked to God.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Eph. 6: 10-17

Call to repentance and faith in God's will for your life!