

During the five years we lived in Russia the then least expensive British Airways flights to Saint Petersburg would fly us through their London hub and that route required a layover so we would sometimes extend our time there, since we had missionary friends living in England. We have enjoyed the London Olympics this year and have thought much about all the sacrifice and pain people invest in those “games.”

In my younger years I spent a lot of time playing organized school sports right up through college, and I was always investing time bouncing, kicking, catching or chasing some kind of ball, or racing against opponents, despite my knowledge of the Apostle Paul's words in I Tim.4:7,8 to, “exercise thyself rather unto godliness, for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

As I have watched these Olympic games in recent days I have kept thinking about Paul's words in Heb.12:1 “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” And his reminder in I Cor. 9:24 “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize. So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptive crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run.” Selva and I want to “not be weary in well doing,” and we are presently embarking on a six week road trip which will include multi day visits to a number of Christian colleges. So please continue praying for our “traveling mercies.”

I ran cross country just one year in high school and absolutely hated it. As you run through wooded areas, you often cannot see your competitors ahead of you or behind you and you cannot be real sure just how you are doing in the race. You just keep putting one foot in front of the other. More than any other race we watched in this Olympics, the marathon reminded us of our needing to be faithful in ministry and not quit like two of our American runners.

In 1964 when Selva graduated from high school the first man to successfully defend his marathon title, Abebe Bikila only wore shoes for his second victory. One courageous S. African man ran with prosthetic feet. That causes me to think of the verse in Rom.10:15 “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.” Pray that our feet will be led this fall to find many who will enter the race of carrying the Gospel to the regions beyond. Fall is our most critical time of year for recruitment especially for the summer program.

World-class marathoner Catherine Ndereba (believer from Kenya) won the silver medal in 2004 and 2008, and whatever their nationality we like to cheer for fellow Christians. We are especially burdened to cheer for the more than 100 million people in more than 60 countries around this world who are literally running and fighting for their lives simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ. According to a 2012 study by the Pew Research Forum on Religion & Public Life, seventy percent of the world's 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion. The persecution and lack of religious freedom often leave believers feeling like they suffer alone in the race of their lives and they feel all alone like cross country runners running through the woods.

It is estimated that nearly 30 million people are enslaved today, and the slavery market seems to be competing with drugs as the most profitable business for organized crime. “Human trafficking generates profits in excess of 32 billion dollars a year for those who, by force and deception, sell human lives into slavery and sexual bondage. Human trafficking is defined as “traffickers using force, fraud, or coercion to exploit people in the commercial sex industry, domestic servitude, manual labor, and in other ways.” Nearly 2 million children are exploited in the commercial sex industry, and it is modern day slavery. (International Justice Mission, 2012)

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympic Games has said, “The important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have won, but to have fought well.” US runner Allyson Felix, 2008 Olympic gold medalist (4x400m), two-time Olympic silver medalist (2004, 2008 in the 200m) three-time 200m World Champion and now the 2012 200m gold medalist says “My faith really plays a part. I'm able to look at the bigger picture and know that God has a plan for my life and this is also part of it. My speed is a gift from God, and I run for His glory.” May we all see the big picture of world evangelism and run the race that is set before us for the glory of the Lord. We are guaranteed to be on the winning side.

Indonesia's 2000 Badminton Olympic silver medalist Hendrawan added: “I believe that career and fame will end and just like an old river my popularity will automatically dry up. Jesus taught that there are more important things in this life, and that there is eternal life. That is what I am looking for rather than fame or popularity as a badminton player. Because I know Jesus Christ, I am certain that I have found eternal life.”

August 7, 2012 Australian hurdler Sally Pearson set a new Olympic record and won the gold medal in the 100m hurdles by 2/100th of a second over American Dawn Harper. She was quoted as saying, "Christians celebrate a gracious Creator with awesome power. As Christians we don't know what will happen next in our race as we struggle against the odds but we can know how it will finish. We have the promise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave His life for us, rose again to take away our sins and will always be with us. As we embrace Jesus we can be guaranteed right now a place on the podium of even greater significance; and unlike the rewards of this world, He has the authority to grant to us the eternal prize that nobody can take away."

Racing is all about staying healthy and Selva and I praise the Lord for the good health with which the Lord has entrusted us, but we sure do wonder how much time we as believers have left to run our race of service. Racing is about timing and peaking at the right time. We wonder how much time we all have left as we see pieces continuing to come together in the Middle East where countries continue to fall to the Muslim Brotherhood, and even our own country is infiltrated in high places by MB sympathizers; and people refuse to acknowledge the dangers of Islam.

Started in 1928 the MB motto is: "The Koran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; jihad is our path; and death in the name of Allah is our goal." Oh, that we Christians were willing to make the same sacrifices they make of laying down their lives. With the support of our government they have taken over Egypt with what they call Caliphates (global Islamic state) and they are in the process of making the main legislative source of Egypt's government the principles of Islamic Law (Sharia).

Christians are suffering terribly with their homes and businesses being destroyed. It is no longer safe for men with our mission to go in there to teach their Bible courses.

A man who was high up in the Iranian government has defected to the US, and he reports that Iran's leaders believe they can facilitate the coming of the last Islamic messiah. They believe the centuries old Hadith predicts this and that the time is close. This thinking pervades the highest levels of Iran's leadership. The Ayatollah Khamenei has now for the first time published in the Iranian papers that he thinks they must get ready for war. He has told close associates that he will be the one to pass the flag of Islam to Imam Mahdi, the Islamic messiah.

Iran's leaders think there are only two triggers left before the return of their messiah. The first one is the death of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. They are excited that he is very ill and has been on his deathbed several times. A film authorized by the highest levels of Iran's leadership titled "The Coming is Upon Us" makes the claim that, "According to the Hadith, upon the death of a ruler named Abdullah, conflict and struggle for power will increase in Saudi Arabia and this will continue until the reappearance of the last messiah, Mahdi. They firmly believe that when Abdullah dies, the reappearance is guaranteed."

The first trigger is a sign that the second trigger needs to take place, and the second trigger is the destruction of Israel. One of the hadiths the Iranians believe has already been fulfilled relates to the rise of a black leader in the West, ruling the largest army on earth. This hadith, relating to Iman Ali, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the most revered figure in Shi'ite Islam, says: "Before the return of Mahdi, a tall black man will rule the West and the largest army on earth. He will carry a clear sign from my son Hussein Ibn Ali (the third Shi'ite imam).

This high ranking defector reports that the Iranians are definitely attempting to arm their missiles with nuclear warheads, and Ukraine, North Korea and China are providing the re-entry vehicle for the missiles. They are working on the bomb, and once Iran has nuclear-tipped missiles and attacks Israel, the Hadith predicts an apocalyptic scenario unfolding in which one-third of the world's population will die, and the world's economy will collapse. May we all continue running hard in the race that is set before us, putting one foot in front of the other and running hard until we hear the trumpet sound. Even so come quickly Lord Jesus.

Your Teammates,

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