

“Have you ever *won* the *wrong* race?”

I was seated on a brightly lit stage before a large audience. The two people with whom I was sitting had been interviewing me, mostly with questions about my book, *Running on Empty*, when one of them posed the question. Then, without time to consider an answer, the one who’d posed the question continued with an answer.

“You can bet I have!” he declared. At the time, I was a scrawny high school sophomore competing in my first track meet. The coach had chosen me to run the 440. ‘Bob, it’s just one time around the track, a sprint. For you, it’s the perfect event.’

As the gun sounded, signaling the start of the race, I shot out of those blocks with a surge of adrenalin launching me forward like a man possessed. Approaching the first turn, I could hardly believe that I was out in front. I kept thinking, ‘Surely they’ll soon pass me’. However, as I approached the final turn I was still in the lead. I’d begun imagining the headlines in the following morning’s news: “**Sophomore Sensation Wins 440 Setting New School Record**”. Then suddenly my brain received an urgent warning sent by a very upset stomach: “The pizza eaten at lunchtime is about to reappear!” The next thing I knew, I’d egressed my lunch and was sprawled out on the track as the other runners charged past me toward the finish line.”

“Where’s he going with this story I wondered?” as he continued. “Obviously, this could’ve become one of my most embarrassing

memories. However, all the years since, I’ve chosen to take the ‘high road’. Rather than remembering the day I failed to finish the 440, I’ve chosen instead to remember the day I won the 330! The only problem is: The race I won was the wrong race and what good is that?”

What a profound question! “What good is in winning the wrong race?” Perhaps now’s a good time to pause and consider the race you’re running and whether it’s the right race. What are the things for which you’re striving? What are you hoping to accomplish? Among the things in your life that you value...what do you value most?

One of my favorite authors, Frederick Beuchner, writes, “One life on this earth is all that we get...whether it’s enough or not enough...therefore, the obvious conclusion would seem to be that at the very least, we’re fools if we don’t live it as *fully* and *bravely* and *beautifully* as we can.”

FULLY...

Thinking of living fully brings a variety of people to my mind. While reflecting on their lives, several principles they seem to share in common, come to my attention, which, when woven together, produce a life of fullness. First, there’s *gratitude* for the abundance of care God has demonstrated toward them. Acknowledging the abundance quenches the longing for more and opens the door to *simplicity* which then yields both internal and external *order*. Their well-ordered life produces *peacefulness* and heightens their *alertness to the presence of God* that surrounds them each day. Thus, their alertness to God’s presence generates a *profound joy*.

Now that, I’d say, is living *fully*!

BRAVELY...

Living bravely brings one of Scotland’s greatest national heroes, Sir William Wallace, to mind. One of my favorite movie scenes is from Braveheart when William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, addresses his army and says, “...all men die but few men really live.” His words echo of a life lived bravely.

BEAUTIFULLY...

There’s nothing more appealing and beautiful to me than a person who, without a trace of pride or contempt, is utterly content to be him or her self. Someone said, “Be who you is, cause if you ain’t who you is, you is who you ain’t.”

The rapid approach of my 55th birthday has me thinking about how I wish to live the remainder of my days. I’ve concluded, my wish is to live them; *fully, bravely, and beautifully*.

Reflecting on this wish and what it may require, I’m reminded of Paul’s letter to the Galatians which translated in The Message read:

“Since this is the life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we’ll not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.”

Winter 2006

A Note From Fil:

My strongest desire is to express the heartfelt gratitude I feel each day for the privilege of living my life. The support and encouragement you, my family and friends, provide is enormous. Daily you offer your gifts to me; through your prayers, spoken and written words of encouragement, financial partnership. None of these gifts are overlooked or unappreciated. Please accept my humble thanks!

As my calendar indicates, I continue enjoying a variety of opportunities to speak to groups and direct retreats. When I'm at home in Greensboro, my energies are focused on meeting with individuals for spiritual direction and writing.

I'd especially appreciate your prayers for the events listed on the calendar and for the other endeavors I've noted below:

We are still in need of additional gifts and pledges. If you are not currently contributing to Journey Resources, would you consider partnering with us? Your gifts would be gratefully appreciated. No level of support is small enough to be considered insignificant. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to those who have given and continue to on a regular basis.

I'm especially excited about the following:

Running on Empty was released this past December in soft-cover. It has a new cover design and is available in book stores or online for \$11.99.

In June 2006, Inter-Varsity Press will release, *The Transformation of a Man's Heart: Reflections of the Masculine Journey*. Each chapter is written by a different author and focuses on a particular theme relevant to men. I was honored by the privilege of writing a chapter, centered on how God has used my vocation to transform my heart.

Fil's 2006 Winter Calendar

January

7 Men's Prayer Breakfast, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC

23 Scott Insurance Co, Annual Retreat, Natural Bridge, VA

27-28 Small Group Leaders Conference, Five Oaks Community Church, Woodbury, MN

February

4 The Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill, NC

5 Christ United Methodist Church, Greensboro, NC

11 Spiritual Directors, International Regional Retreat, Columbia, SC

12 Christ United Methodist Church, Greensboro, NC

16 Gathering of colleagues, Charlotte, NC

20 The Divinity School at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC

25 YL Regional Meeting, Raleigh, NC

March

1 Men of Vision & Excellence, Greensboro, NC

18 Men's Prayer Breakfast, Lawndale Baptist Church, Greensboro, NC

19 Guilford Park Presbyterian Church

22-24 Silent Retreat, Young Life, Windy Gap, NC

24-25 Impact '06, Ocean City, MD

29 UNC student gathering, Chapel Hill, NC

30 UNC Baptist Student Union, Chapel Hill, NC

More about...

The Transformation of a Man's Heart: Reflections of the Masculine Journey...

The following is from the foreword written by Ken Gire, author of such delightful books as, *Moments with the Savior*, *Windows of the Soul*, and *The North Face of God*.

"Imagine sitting around a table with a group of men who have agreed to meet with you to share the stories of their own spiritual journeys. Taking you over the terrain they have traveled. And taking you there with unflinching honesty. Showing you not only the sunshiny vistas but the shadowy valleys. With the sharp rocks underfoot and the steep drop-offs on the side. Telling you where they have stumbled, where they have fallen. And telling you also what brought them to their feet and put them on a path that led to the transformation of themselves as men.

The book is full of stories. Some will make you think. Others will make you cry. Still others will make you kneel. All will make you want to be a better man.

The story of Steve's conversation with his son will open your heart.

The story of Julian Lennon will break your heart.

The story of the man going to his father's gravesite will inspire your heart.

Together, they will transform your heart.

Together, they will transform your heart.

Or at least they will start the process. As the book says, transformation is never finished this side of heaven. Still, it is never too late to start. Or too early. And I can think of no better place to start than with the book you are now holding in your hands."