

Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

Godspeed, Dr. Bannister

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During a recent meeting of Oakbrook's men's group, I mentioned that I had a lot of "God moments" to share from the previous week. A fellow member jokingly chided me to keep it under five minutes. When I was finished he looked at his watch and said, "that was four minutes." I joked about breaking the four-minute God moment and someone brought up Roger Bannister.

If you're not aware, Bannister was a med-student in Britain when he became the first human being to run one mile in under four minutes: 3:59.4, to be exact. Four days after his name came up at men's group, Dr. Roger Bannister passed from this world at the age of 88. Until reading the news, I had no idea he was still alive. In reading of his death, I also learned what inspired his quest to break the four-minute barrier on May 6, 1954. I think that inspiration can be very instructive to Christ-followers. According to USA Today:

"He might not have set the milestone but for the disappointment of finishing without a medal in the 1,500 meters, known as the metric mile, in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. Instead of retiring from the sport, he decided to chase the 4-minute mark."

Christ-followers often suffer what some call "performance anxiety." Once they are saved, they know the behavior they should leave behind; and, in their hearts, they want to leave that behavior behind. And when they stumble, as all Christ-followers do, they sometimes can dwell on the failure and let the enemy use it to sabotage them. They fall prey to the whispers of: "you're worthless, see, you really haven't changed at all." This potentially allows the enemy to fill our hearts with shame and regret.

That's why the Bible reminds us that our salvation comes with an eternal guarantee. *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.* Romans 8:1. Jesus' blood has paid the price for all our sins; past, present and future. Ask forgiveness for your sin and it is forgiven. Perfection is not required. Learning from stumbles brings you closer to God. Roger Bannister used disappointment to achieve greatness. We can use it to strengthen, rather than weaken our relationship with God.

There are two lesser-known elements to Bannister's story. His record was broken just 46 days later, when Australian rival John Landy ran the mile in 3:57.9. That set up a race between the two men in Vancouver, British Columbia on Aug. 9, 1954. Bannister won the race 3:58.8 to Landy's 3:59 even. Bannister didn't let setbacks define him. What does this mean for Christ-followers? Brenda Choo, writing at Relevant Magazine, puts it this way:

And you wonder: Am I going to be a rookie-Christian forever?

The short answer is: Yes. When we recognize Jesus Christ as the only "expert" Christian, we will realize that even the "best" we can offer is not so hot. Nobody has it together. Not Billy Graham, not Charles Spurgeon, not R.C. Sproul, not even Mr. Mere Christianity himself, C.S. Lewis. Only Jesus had it together. No believer will ever "arrive" at the apex of discipleship; only Jesus arrived. On the

spectrum of Christ-likeness, every one of us will (for the rest of our lives) have to settle somewhere in between total success and total failure.

And to do that, we have to accept defeats and failures as gifts from God that help build character and actually bring us closer to Him. *...but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* Romans 5:3-5

I mentioned there is a second element to Bannister's story that is lesser known. Dr. Roger Bannister developed the first test to detect the presence of anabolic steroids in the human body. We can allow defeats and challenges in our faith journey to put distance between God and us or move us closer to Him. The choice is ours. Godspeed, Dr. Bannister.