

“The Bislett Effect”

1 Peter 2: 1-10 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. NLT “So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.” NIV 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—5 you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.” 7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

April 18th, 2005, over a thousand members of the media showed up to cover one of the largest single-day sporting events in the world. The list of largest sporting events in the world include the Super Bowl, the Daytona 500, and the Indianapolis 500. But the event that occurred on April 18th 2005 was the Boston Marathon. It ranks right up there with the Olympics. When the starting gun went off on that Monday morning in 2005, 20,000 runners traveled from rural Hopkinton to the city of Boston, over the course of 26.2 miles, and they were cheered on by an estimated 500,000 spectators along the route. Every single runner, from the fastest to the slowest received a tremendous boost from the fans along the way. Last year there were almost 30,000 runners.

Have any of you ever heard of the Bislett effect? Well all the runners in the Boston Marathon experienced the Bislett Effect. It is a phenomenon that has implications for us all, whether we are practicing our running or practicing our religion. The name comes from the Bislett Stadium in Oslo, Norway, a place where over 60 track and field records have been broken over the years. We’re not talking about one or two broken records. We’re not talking about 10, 20, or even 50

records. We are talking 65 broken world records in one stadium. No other track in the world can boast such a record for record-breaking achievements. According to Runners World the British runner Sebastian Coe set several records at Bislett, including a series of stunning miles. Another miler, Steve Cram, who shattered Coe's record for the mile said, "If you can't run well at Bislett, you can't run well bloody anywhere."

So what's the secret of Bislett? In a word, it's the crowd. The track is narrow, with only six lanes, and the grandstand is so steep that the fans are practically on top of you. "The sound of 21,000 screaming maniacs rakes your reflexes," writes Kenny Moore, "forcing you to keep your rhythm, the crowd's rhythm, for one more stretch, one more turn. The frenzied fans keep you going." [NOTE 1]

The fact is, we tend to run faster in front of great crowds because we are inspired by community—we run not only for ourselves but for the team, the family, the congregation, the tribe, the party, the nation. "Our deepest nature," concludes Moore, "is that we are at our most majestic when we do for others." I completely agree. I could always run harder and faster in a relay team than alone.

The apostle Peter knew all about the Bislett Effect although, unlike his colleague, Paul, never used the racetrack, any race running metaphor. Instead, Peter uses a construction metaphor in these words to the Christians who were scattered across the five provinces of Asia Minor: "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (chap.2, verse 5). [NOTE 2]

There is nothing individualistic about the Christian faith, according to Peter—nothing that gives credence to an atomistic, isolated, one on one relationship, even if it is with Jesus Christ. Christianity is about community. We are meant to live, move, and have our being IN COMMUNITY. The Bible knows nothing of a lone ranger Christian. There were a few people in the Old Testament that felt like they alone were following God, but in most of those cases, feeling alone didn't mean they were alone. There are times when one is driven out into the desert to be alone with God but when it comes time to make a difference in the world, time to have an impact, God calls us to work together. Jesus' example was community based. The disciples always went out in pairs at the very least. If you look at the word TEAM as an acronym, it stands for Together Everyone Accomplishes More. That is why Paul gives the definition of the Pastor's job to equip the saints for ministry. The apostle Peter knows that inspiration comes from the crowd and very seldom does anyone grow in their relationship with Jesus without fellowship and accountability. That's why Peter talks about us being "Living Stones built into a spiritual house" and of the Bislett Effect, well not in so many words but in effect.

Community is critical to the health of the ChristBody, as well as to our mission in the world, to see ourselves as a family, a community that empowers and enables one another to set all sorts of records. That is, enabling us to do much more than we had ever dreamed possible. If you would have asked Daisy at this time last year if Doster Church would be able to afford the construction in the front of church, new windows in the parsonage, and a new deck on the parsonage, she would have laughed at you. Not too many weeks ago I talked about attempting and dreaming things for the church too big for us to accomplish on our own, so that God can show us how awesome He is. If you read about the early church in Acts chapter two you will see that they focused a lot on fellowship. They spent time together, they shared meals, they shared Communion, they pooled their money.

[NOTE 3] Every analogy falls short at some point. When I talk about the Bislett Effect and how we apply it to the church, I am NOT talking about a gathering of frenzied fans cheering us on to love and good deeds. There are many drawbacks to the mega church. What I am talking about is thinking of ourselves as “Living Stones” being cemented in to the cornerstone that is “chosen and precious,” according to chapter two and verse 6. Paul’s metaphor is that Jesus Christ is not our cornerstone but the “Prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Our faith is the mortar that connects us to Jesus, and our belief in Him is what keeps us anchored, strong, and secure. Without a good cornerstone in Jesus Christ, we cannot remain standing as a solid spiritual house.

In fact, if we don’t keep our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, we’re going to end up flat on our faces. Peter tells us that for those who do not believe, Jesus becomes a “stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall” (verse 8). That’s an awful position to be in when we’re trying to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). So we need to stay connected to Jesus. It is all about Jesus. **[NOTE 4]**

Yet, the crowd is crucial. We’re living stones in the building, or fans in the stands. And as such, we ourselves are runners, contestants, but in the “stands” we’re cheering on, helping, assisting, empowering, those who are on some particular track, some particular course, who are facing some particular challenge, obstacle, trial or test, and having been on the course, run the track, flown over those hurdles ourselves, we’re in a position to yell and scream and cheer and urge our sisters and brothers onward.

We know what it’s all about. We have to stay close to one another. If we’re going to have any chance of proclaiming the mighty acts of God to a hurting and hope-starved world, then we’re going to have to hang together as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nations, God’s own people” (chapter 2 verse 9). Ben Franklin’s warning is apt: “We must all hang together,” he said, “or assuredly we

shall all hang separately.” We are at our most majestic when we work for the good of the body, and when we do for others instead of ourselves. [NOTE 5]

Take a page out of the life of Senior Writer for Homiletics Magazine, Henry Brinton. It’s October 10, 2004 the day of the Chicago Marathon. The weather is cool and clear, perfect for running. The early morning sun reflects off the Sears Tower and other skyscrapers, and a huge crowd of marathon runners—40,000 in all—converge on the park next to Lake Michigan.

Brinton, middle-aged but fit, wades into the crowd, and waits for the starting gun to go off. His warm-up garment is a T-shirt from an organization called “25:40” which provides assistance to the children of Africa who have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. 25:40 is a reference to the passage in Matthew in which Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

The gun goes off, and Brinton moves slowly forward, breaking into a run at the starting line. The course is lined with frenzied fans, screaming encouragement to everyone in the race, and musical groups appear every few blocks, playing everything from hip-hop to salsa to “The Star Spangled Banner”. The enthusiasm of fans along the route is contagious—it’s a powerful expression of the Bislett Effect.

As the miles drop behind him, Brinton says he thought of the many pledges that church members had made to 25:40 in connection with his run. Their pledges of a dollar mile, \$2 a mile, five dollars a mile all kept him going, because he knew that his steps would be translated into lifesaving assistance for the children of Africa. Sure, he was working hard as he ran across the city, but not nearly as hard as the people who were fighting AIDS in Africa every single day.

By mile 16, he was starting to feel some leg pain and popped a few Tylenol. By mile 20, a real fatigue was setting in, and that was where images of the children in Africa really began to help him. Whenever he felt like giving up, he thought of their perseverance. Whenever he was about to quit, he thought of what they had to endure. In the end, he ran across the finish line at mile 26.2 ...thinking of the children.

No world records were broken by this middle-aged runner. In fact, he can in number 10,581 out of 33,125 finishers. His time of 4 hours and one minute was almost two hours after the top male finisher! Better for him to focus on ministry, than road-racing; on preaching than pacing.

But still, it was a significant effort, what the apostle Peter might consider one of the “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (verse 5). This plodding pastor, supported by his congregation and a Chicago crowd, succeeded in raising \$5,000 to help a struggling group of orphans in Africa. Together, they knew that whenever we help one of the least of our brothers and

sisters, we are really helping Jesus, and they discovered that we are at our most majestic when we work for the good of the body—when we do for others instead of ourselves.

Brinton was a winner that day because of the irresistible power of the Bislett Effect, or the Living Stone syndrome. Nelson Mandela said in one of his speeches to the people of South Africa, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” quoting 1 Peter 2:9. Brinton achieved what he did because he did not run alone—instead, he was a part of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (2:9). And that is the preaching point. Amy and I have been able to care for our new family members because we are part of God’s own people. Your physical help, your financial help, your prayers, have buoyed us up continually. Thank you for listening to God and acting like His family, His people! People of God, we need each other! There is no such thing as an impactful lone ranger Christian. **[NOTE 6]**

And more importantly, we should think about what we can do today to be a source of encouragement to the people around us, especially those who are running tough races. There is an understanding in the marathon world that you only have to run 20 miles in a practice run in order to run 26.2 miles in the marathon itself. While that may come as a surprise to you, the fact of the matter is that the extra 6.2 miles are given to the runner as a gift from the crowd. The cheers and music and support of the spectators are enough to push most marathoners beyond any distance they have ever run before.

And there’s another old adage, a prayer actually. The prayer of the runner: “Lord, You lift them up, and I’ll put them down. The crowd, the church—and Jesus! That is enough to help to get you through any race—however difficult—in record fashion. Listen to the message. Let the fellowship, the love, the support, and the prayers of your church family help you through whatever life throws at you. You will finish well if you do.

Let’s Pray ...AMEN

“Sermon Notes for The Bislett Effect based on 1 Peter 2: 1-10
Given at Doster on August 20, 2023

- I. We are inspired by community as a whole. Many people can perform much better as a part of a team than when alone. Are we inspiring one another as a church to show the love of Jesus in everything we do?
- II. We are to let ourselves be built into a spiritual house. There is nothing individualistic about the Christian faith. Christianity is about community. Together Everyone Accomplishes More – TEAM.
- III. It is critical to the growth of the church that sees ourselves as a community/family that empowers and enables one another to set records. As living stones we are cemented to the cornerstone – Jesus.
- IV. Peter tells us that for those who are not part of the team, “those who do not believe, Jesus becomes a stone that makes them stumble.”
- V. If we’re going to have any chance of proclaiming the mighty acts of God to a hurting and hope-starved world, then we’re going to have to hang together as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (Verse 9).
- VI. What are you going to do about it? Please write down in your “I will ... statement” one thing that you will do this week to be a source of encouragement to the people around you running tough races in their lives.