

Introduction

The Kearney Good Samaritan Hospital 5K starts in a matter of moments and others are questioning my sanity again! I quip to Erich and Tom, “This’ll be a good mental toughness workout.”

Perhaps the 5:30a.m. 6-mile runs and the 120 weekly miles of training contributed to my intense fatigue, but I’m still on the starting line and my legs already burn with fatigue. The gun fires at 8:06; Kearney High runners shoot out quickly. Former UNK (University of Nebraska-Kearney) cross-country runners Tom Magnuson, a three-time All-American, and Erich Whitmore, join me as our bodies transform potential energy to kinetic.

Tom’s experience and strength delay his assumption of the lead until near the quarter-mile mark. Erich and I move into the second and third position after the first half-mile. We pass the mile in 4:45.

“I can hang out at this pace,” I reflect while viewing the split. Erich has other ideas; he quickens the pace. At the halfway mark, my legs begin to wobble and buckle. I struggle to remain upright and moving while Tom holds a commanding lead. My mind, exhausted from the focus and concentration necessary for the demanding mileage and workouts, seeks relief and begs my body to stop. Erich looks back at me, and I call out, “Go ahead.”

Erich yells back, “Come on!!”

Once again I plead, “Go ahead.” This mental toughness workout exceeds my expectations and desire. My legs wobble like a wheel getting ready to fall off a wagon.

Erich bellows a second time, “Come on!!!”

I state consciously but not verbally, *Lord, I need you! I cannot! Christ can! We are. It is not me, rather Christ who is in me.* I repeat this as if playing a continuous loop. Suddenly, my body fills with the strength necessary to continue this hasty and agonizing pace. The intensifying pain resembles lightning bolts piercing my body’s every nerve. Our second mile split is 4:37; an excruciating 4:32 vanishes into history before reaching the three-mile mark. Running on faith, I sprint the final 176 yards and pass Erich to win second place.

A Kearney physician approaches me in the hospital parking lot following the awards ceremony. “Congratulations, Rick. I could never run like you do. I hurt when I run.”

His words leave me speechless! Little did I realize, 10½ years later, I would stand in this same parking lot, speechless again, with excruciating pain zapping my body and mind: *Running on Faith.*

Your Connections

I experienced similar scenarios numerous times while running over 129,000 miles in my lifetime. I discovered a comparable truth while writing this book. I cannot run fast or far under my own strength and power; nor can I write a book or achieve anything worthwhile with my own abilities. Absent Christ, I am nothing. What is your strength connected with?

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Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:1–6)

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4–5)

Success mandates singular focus on Christ's presence and the indwelling Holy Spirit's guidance. I find this is always guiding my speaking, writing, running and actions at all times. The Holy Spirit saturates my heart, mind and soul, consequently I strive to continually study the Bible, pray, worship and fellowship with other Christians. This provides powerful protection against promptings, thoughts, words and actions which oppose God's Word.

Only the Holy Spirit's guidance of my writing and your reading provides any meaningful value to this book. God graciously places those with wisdom in my path precisely when needed to enable me to overcome my numerous shortcomings in running, speaking, writing and everything else in life. Friends and family provide much-needed encouragement. They are the ones calling out, "Come on!" as I near collapse from life's exhaustive and enduring pace.

I'm Calling You

Are you willing to *Run on Faith* the rest of your life? *Running on Faith* is trusting in the presence of the Kingdom of God. This is the power of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, whether it, like the mustard seed, is too small to see ... or whether you see God's power as magnificent as a full-grown mustard tree supporting the birds of the air.

If you are willing to let me help you, I promise that you will fight through challenges and rejoice in celebrations far beyond your wildest imaginations.

Are you *Running on Faith*? Do you exchange encouragement with friends, calling out, "Come on!" like my friends? Biblically, **run** (Gk. *trechō*) indicates to exert yourself, striving hard, and choosing to expend every ounce of energy in serving and obeying God. In ancient Greek writings, running also signified the extreme danger required in the exertion of all your efforts to overcome the challenges leading to victory. Throughout history some Christians have faced grave danger in fully exerting their life for Christ.

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Why then do we *Run on Faith*? We *run* in response to God's love for us, and our responding desire to please God (1 John 4:19). We strive to fully exert ourselves in obediently serving Jesus Christ because we yearn for an eternal relationship with God. Running life's race with near perfect tactics and effort without Jesus will still result in our falling galaxies upon galaxies short of receiving salvation from God. The Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him serves as the only door to an eternal relationship with God (John 10:9).

Are you willing to *Run on Faith*?

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence not seen. (Hebr. 11:1)

The Greek word for substance is **hypostasis**, translated as "Title-Deed or Legal Paper" defined as "a legal document to effect a transfer of property and to show the legal right to possess it."^[1] Additionally, pleasing God requires placing your faith, your complete trust, in Him.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebr. 11:6).

This book examines life events involving various levels of trust in God.

Trusting God necessitates trusting Jesus Christ for eternal life, remaining prayerful, grateful and joyful regardless of your circumstances. (1Thess 5:16-18)

Faith consists of the three components:^[2]

1. Information
2. Mental Assent
3. Trust

Faith in Christ begins with information from hearing, reading and studying the Bible.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Ro. 10:17)

The mental assent involves gaining an understanding of the information. You then choose whether to accept or reject the information as true and applicable to your life. Do you trust the information? In order to trust information, you must trust the source of the information. Do you trust the Bible as the word of God? Do you trust God?

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (2 Timothy 3:16)

Faith in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is proportionally logical to our trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. This begins with gaining information about God through Bible study, worship, prayer, fellowship with mature Christians and God revealing himself through nature (Psalm 8:3; Romans 1:20). The order varies for each person. Followed by increasing our understanding of this information enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The greater our

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understanding of Jesus and the holiness, righteousness **and power** of God, the more logical it is to fully trust God regardless of our understanding of His ways. Logic demands knowing that God's perfect will anchored in His perfect character and established before the foundation of the world far exceeds our highest expectations.

Your mind accepts ideas when you trust the credibility of their original source. Once you accept ideas, you then begin internalizing them into your character which guides your thoughts, words and deeds. Internalizing Christian faith and trusting God results in living your trust in eternal life with God through Jesus Christ. This is nicely illustrated in the second chapter of James, a great chapter to read as a supplement to this section. In other words, your character reflects the thoughts that you gain, comprehend and trust. Your faith determines your character. Chuck Swindoll succinctly writes, "Perfect trust is a character-building process."

Running on Faith commands fully exerting yourself beyond the secularly logical, previously known limits perfectly illustrated by the men and women written about in Hebrews 11 who fully trusted in the eternal character and plans of God. We fully exert ourselves because we trust God, the author of life and provider of love, power, mercy and forgiveness. Seek gifts where God wrote your name along with His on the title or deed, despite no physical guarantee of their existence.

Are you willing to push yourself to new, higher physical and emotional limits? Imagine the intimate, penetrating relationship with the Holy Spirit when you assertively explore new frontiers with your absolute trust-filled faith in God as the boundaries of human logic dissipate in your heart and mind's rearview mirror.

God's hand dripping with love, grace and mercy will firmly clasp your hand as a father clasps a child's hand when you accept the challenge of obediently serving Him. You will face challenges while pursuing the necessary wisdom, knowledge and understanding to achieve Christ's will for your life. Will you continue the pursuit when the challenges become unbearable? Remember: wisdom, knowledge and understanding exceed the value of gold, silver and rubies (Prov 3:13-15, 8:8-11,18-19).

I challenged my teammates prior to a 1983 state cross country meet, "If winning were easy, everybody would do it." This is the choice I'm showing you in this book and hope you find it motivating to strive for that heavenly finish line.

If *Running on Faith* were easy, if following Christ were easy, everybody would do it. Consider this a challenge and an invitation. Begin or intensify this challenge of fully committing your heart and soul to Jesus Christ and trusting him with every ounce of energy you possess. Remain on guard, extreme peril lurks in the shadows and aims for your destruction like a highly trained camouflaged sniper in the distant landscape as you traverse along this amazing course (Eph 6:12). Continually study and internalize God's Word throughout your journey, remaining prayerful, grateful and joyful (1Thess 5:16-18).

Chapter 1: Fear Not

Imagine being on a ship in the middle of the frigid ocean, terrified amidst the darkness. The enemy's torpedoes may strike at any moment and sink your ship, your life and your dreams. My Uncle LaVerne and his shipmates experienced this around the Aleutian Islands during WWII. The Japanese lurked in and under the water, seeking to destroy United States Navy ships. My uncle shared that suddenly a distinct voice of no human origin spoke to him and probably others on that ship saying, "Fear Not, for I AM with you Always." Uncle LaVerne received instant, illogical, yet amazing peace. Those sailors lived in the faith of Almighty God just as Abraham and other godly men and women before them.

Dad recalls Uncle LaVerne's initial visit to the Meyer farm following WWII. He wore his Navy attire and searched for Otto and Ida's only daughter, Berniel, whom he had recently met at a dance. A nine-year-old carefully observed this United States veteran and responded, "She's not here." Uncle LaVerne remained determined and encouraged. He visited the farm regularly; having found success when he and Berniel married in May of 1948.

They enjoyed life on the farm. They raised cattle, hogs, chickens, alfalfa, corn, wheat, grain and sorghum. Raising their daughter (named LaVerna after her father) and several non-biological children became their most important mission. LaVerne and Berniel lacked any contention for showing up on the Forbes 400 list. I knew them for thirty-nine years and noticed their contentment. They took life in stride but not for granted. A day or two after Uncle LaVerne's passing, the family asked me to speak at his funeral. That was when I talked to family and friends gathering information for a fitting eulogy and I inquired about his service in WWII. It was only then that I learned of his guard duty on that ship and the crew being bitterly cold.

I grew up aware of their emphasis on faith and their 'fear not' approach to daily life. Faith presided for this couple whether the markets went up or down or the weather was dry or wet. When a massive hailstorm knocked out every window in their farm home, they feared not, knowing their Heavenly Father befriended them every step of the way. They trusted our Lord, who promised and delivered for Abraham and who delivered Moses and the Israelites out of Pharaoh's hand. This same Lord blinded the 'torpedo firing enemy' of the United States in the Aleutian Islands in the 1940s. He held their lives in His loving hands every moment.

They worked hard—and prayed and worshipped even harder. They knew their efforts did not produce a profitable crop or livestock herd, just as our efforts do not produce anything worthwhile. Rather, our Lord Jesus Christ worked through their efforts and our efforts.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (NASB95))

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Of course, most readers will never have met LaVerne Anderson; however, you may know a veteran or be a veteran with a similar experience. You may have endured cold, dark, terrifying moments. Every follower of Christ lives as a continual target for Satan and his demons lurking about the Earth. These evil demons fire torpedoes of doubt, envy, greed, lust and all forms of sin, seeking to sink our faith in God Almighty and our Holy Spirit-instilled dreams.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–21 (NASB95))

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 (NASB95))

Uncle LaVerne and his shipmates saved themselves only after turning to God and giving all trust to Him. We must do the same. We, too, can live a life of *fear not*. Our Lord presides with us always, providing blessings as great as the number of stars in the universe.

Why Jesus?

Jesus Christ is the only source of authentic hope and inner peace amidst life's challenges and our physical death.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. **If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.**" (John 14:6-7 (NASB95))

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17 (NASB95))

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23 (NASB95))

God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are one God; three persons, coequal, coeternal. We cannot know the God of Abraham without knowing Jesus as our savior. Jesus is God's spoken Word, including the Word made flesh. God created the heavens and our Earth with the spoken Word.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1–3, NASB95)

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The Bible says all who observe creation are without excuse for failing to recognize and know God. Creation makes God visible or clear to everyone. Jesus later came to earth as a baby in human flesh to die a humiliating and painful death. Through that death, He collected and cancelled every sin ever committed by all humans in the history of the world. Consequently, He descended into hell for three days to suffer the punishment that each person to ever walk the earth deserves. At the end of three days, He conquered death and hell through His resurrection returning to earthly life. His resurrection provides forgiveness for every sin committed in the history of the world. But there is a catch...

Proverbially speaking, the Father requires a signed receipt for entrance into heaven. When you accept Jesus' invitation and acknowledge your dependence on His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins, Jesus effectively signs your heart and soul as a receipt of forgiveness. Your heart and soul, spiritually speaking, network with the book of life. His *signature* simultaneously records your name in the book of life. Succinctly stated, eternal salvation requires the person to believe they have sinned against God and that Jesus Christ is their only source of forgiving those sins.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16–18; NASB95)

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4; NASB95)

Additionally, the aforementioned Holy Spirit resides in you once you know Jesus as your Savior.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20; NASB95)

The Holy Spirit provides freedom from discouragement, resentment, worry, lust and all sins. Sin represents every desire, attribute, thought, word and action opposing God's character. Additionally, the Holy Spirit communicates with our heart and mind, serving as a coach and mentor for each believer. Our willingness to recognize and obey His guidance enables our inner-peace amidst any and all of life's challenges, regardless of the magnitude. Unfortunately, we sometimes ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit, causing us to fail in achieving God's will for us in this moment and to endure the resulting consequences.

The Holy Spirit also convicts our heart, mind and soul of our sins and our eternal death without Christ, while revealing Christ as our Savior. We must acknowledge our complete dependence on Christ and accept his signature on our hearts. The signature is on our hearts as the heart pumps our lifeblood through our bodies.

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For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement. (Leviticus 17:11; NASB95)

Consequently, imprints of Christ's character, by the power of the Holy Spirit, disperse through our bodies, reflecting Jesus in our thoughts, words and actions. The accuracy of our reflection of Christ increases with our maturity in and obedience of Him while in our human flesh on Earth.

The Bible identifies blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as the only unforgiveable sin. Anyone who curses the Holy Spirit curses the Holy Spirit's message of believing of Christ as the Savior through His death and resurrection.

The Beginning

I entered this world shortly after 2:00a.m. on Sunday, February 12, 1967 in Smith County, Kansas, the heart of America. Smith County is the center of the continental United States and where Dr. Higley wrote the song, *Home on the Range*. Additionally, one may say that this region is the Bible Heart. Although unverified, it is reported that Smith County, Kansas, led the United States in the percentage of residents regularly attending church.



Figure 1: Delmer, Rick and Judy Meyer. Sunday, March 12, 1967

My parents wrote in my baby book that I had distinct preferences in regard to who held me and who did not. Mom, Dad and my cousins Robert and Bruce sat at the very top. Yes, tiny babies possess the traits of discernment, favorites, acceptance and rejection. Do you have similar stories

about yourself, your children, grandchildren or other kids you know?

I was walking on my own at seven months old. According to my mom, I began running about a month later. Why depend upon others when God provides the ability to do it yourself? God ignited

perseverance in me at a young age. Moreover, God designed each of us to learn and develop at different rates in each area of life. Some may walk later, yet develop another skill at a younger age than most. Regardless of when we begin walking, everyone falls while learning any task. Throughout life we continually fall short in our futile attempts to match God's strides of holiness and righteousness (Romans 3:23). Moreover, God surrounds us with others to teach, support and encourage us along life's racecourse.



Figure 2: Rick on the move at 10 months old

I am immensely grateful for the family, geographical, spiritual, recreational and professional environment encompassing my childhood. Age and wisdom humbly remind me that I did nothing to deserve or earn this childhood. From the beginning I loved spending time exploring outdoors in the trees of the shelterbelt and along the river as well as the buildings, going along with my dad helping around the farm.

Growing Up on the Farm

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:16)

God mercifully continued pouring and forming the foundation of my life when He opened my heart, mind and soul by the power of the Holy Spirit to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as my savior for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life before my first recorded conscious memory. If truth demands memory, how does one explain other non-recallable life events? This formative foundation germinated into a perpetually maturing faith that has molded my life in every aspect, including my running. We know that God can and has communicated with babies in the womb all the way through the oldest men and women. For example, the Bible tells us that John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb when Mary visited her cousin while pregnant with Jesus (Luke 1).



When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27–28)

Figure 3: My nephew Wyatt Isaacson with a baby lamb. Notice the lamb's apparent peace and contentment in the hands of its shepherd.

I remain humble, grateful, joyful and prayerful for this gift. If salvation depended on our intellectual ability to comprehend God's complete plan for salvation what *grade* would be necessary to enter eternal life with God?

Parents

Growing up on the farm allowed me to spend a great amount of time with my parents, especially with my dad. I loved being with him – most of the time. The

work was often long and tedious, and he expected me to listen and respond appropriately. This enhanced our effectiveness and safety. Over the years, we engaged in thousands of deep, meaningful conversations regarding faith, morality and politics; our conversations revolved around Right and Wrong. Dad and others in the community demanded honesty above all else.

Dad's example taught the gray areas in life arise from either our lacking wisdom or combining the pure white of Christ's truth with Satan's black darkness. Dad's honesty, along with all of my extended family's honesty, influenced my view of the Bible, especially parables. Some claim the parables are fictitious events told by Jesus for an appropriate lesson. If Dad and my relatives, who are sinful humans, strive for truth in their teaching of lessons through stories; why would the Spirit of Truth who possesses infinite wisdom and knowledge of every person's thought and action since creation, avoid speaking anything except pure truth? The Bible says it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18); and Satan is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Dad taught the necessity of inquisitiveness to prevent premature assumptions. He also demonstrated listening and humility, although my mind and ego were slow to absorb these attributes.

I became a morning person because being with Dad demanded I get up early to shadow him, later he demanded it for work. I despised going to Bible School for a week every summer, wanting to be with Dad; being inside was against my childhood nature and the crafts required in Bible School

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were boring. Additionally, I despised practicing the Christmas program at church, I am terrible at memorizing Bible verses, acting felt unauthentic; and I wanted to be with Dad.

“Church is very important, you need to go!” Was uttered on numerous occasions. His adamancy of being active in the body of Christ epitomized his core. When Dad and I traveled to the southwest corner of our farm to prepare the sandbar for a Sunday afternoon picnic with friends or family, he whistled or sang *Shall we Gather at the River*. When I complained of the memorization required for Sunday School, Dad assured its significance. When I complained of the required music class, Dad said, “Learning music is very important for church.”

Mom possessed the same qualities. Their faith was verbally soft, while screaming in action. The hot Kansas sun in the summer of 1981 elevated the mercury thermometer beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit. I was cleaning a hog barn with a shovel and pitch fork in mid-afternoon. Suddenly I was interrupted by Mom delivering a huge green plastic cup filled with homemade chocolate malt. The taste and satisfaction of this malt hit squarely on the bullseye of my thirst and taste buds.

Dad **eagerly** invited traveling salesmen who stopped around noon into our home for dinner. Mom joyfully added another plate and assured an adequate supply of food. We struggled financially, yet they and others in the area welcomed known and unknown visitors to dine. Mom always had enough extra when friends or family visited during meal time.

Mom sat on the floor with my sister, Dee, and I playing and singing songs such as *Jesus Loves Me*. I viewed this as normal, assuming all children and parents engaged in similar activities of praising our Lord. My grandparents frequently played gospel hymns on their record players. Mom drove Dee and I to non-Sunday church activities **and** she drove me to baseball practice. When her parents visited once a month she made a cherry pie for Grandpa. Mom continues making my favorites when I visit. To this day, her quiet radiant faith brightens daily.

Farm

What do you first remember? **How old were you?** Emotion initiates and strengthens conscious memory. **What do you believe sparked the emotions to engrain this moment in your memory?** My first conscious memory occurs at the age of fifteen months **in May 1968**, the day we moved a half mile down the road from Martha’s where my dad was raised. Martha was a recent widow, who, along with her husband Bill Dannenberg, raised their family in that house. My parents rented the farm and house from Martha after marrying. Since Bill and Martha’s sons didn’t return to the farm, Bill offered Dad the opportunity to join him in a farming partnership. Bill died before they formed the partnership.

You shall not move your neighbor’s boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess. (Deuteronomy 19:14; NASB95)

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On the day of our move, I stood on the porch on the east of the house. Dad centered the back of the olive green 1951 Ford F-100 pickup between two red brick pillars with white cement tops standing approximately three feet high. The north and south ends contained the same brick features with hand-crafted wood extending to the roof covering the porch. Someone opened both the screen and wood doors connecting into the dining room.

I simply observed as Dad, Mom, Uncle Doug, Aunt Betty and probably others carried household items from the back of the pickup into our new home. Dad and his siblings grew up in this home less than 150 yards from the river. At fifteen months, I lacked the size or strength to assist the adults. Dee and our cousins joined me in the dining room. This was a very emotional day for my young self, filled with the excitement of moving and the company of extended family.

God blessed my sister and me with loving parents and a relationship with Him while we grew up on that Kansas farm along the North Fork of the Solomon River. I loved growing up on this farm. However, I did nothing to earn this privilege of knowing Jesus Christ or living here; rather, God ordained this arrangement just as He does for each of us. My heart, mind and soul cherished life on that farm along the river with an abundance of hunting and fishing opportunities. Each clear night offered an opportunity to gaze into the star-filled heavens, recognizing the glory of God and the work of His hand (Psalm 19:1), providing evidence of God for everyone (Romans 1:20). Knowing God and receiving the fruit of His Spirit which consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, gratitude, forgiveness and prayer (Galatians 5:22-23) carries us through life's heart shattering, breath seizing moments.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalm 19:1)

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Unfortunately, our human nature frequently encourages us to question, debate and sometimes argue about God's goodness and methods. Ultimately, this originates from our judging His wisdom, which is us judging God. The more we mature in our relationship with God the greater we recognize God's holy, perfect and righteous character. This also leads to us knowing the absurdity of anyone judging God's actions.

So we moved that half mile down the road to the farm that my grandfather, Otto James Frederick Meyer, purchased in 1918. He and Grandma, Ida Sophie Zabel, married on May 31, 1923 and raised six children on this farm a mile east and two south of Gaylord, Kansas. After fifty years of farming the land and raising livestock along the banks of the North Fork of the Solomon River, Grandpa and Grandma chose to retire and moved a few miles north to Smith Center. They sold the farm to their second youngest child.

My dad, Delmer, visited the bank for a loan. Norm, the banker, reviewed the history of interest rate fluctuations because no caps for variable rate interest existed in the 1960s. He then assured

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Dad that variable interest rate loans remained historically stable, while also sharing that risks of increase remained possible. Unfortunately, the initial 6% interest rate later soared up to 20% in the 1970s. The additional interest expense created the difference between living comfortably and breaking even or even losing money. The early to mid1970s were a very hard time for many American farmers.

I became a morning person as a small child because I wanted to be with my dad. This demanded waking up early. Additionally, as a four or five year old, I once slept until 11:40a.m. I do not recall the reason for my extreme fatigue. However, Mom refused to cook breakfast for me since it was almost dinner time. She did let me eat two chocolate chip cookies. I was devastated to miss breakfast for the first time in my life. Do you crave spending time with God enough to get up early each morning? When we miss opportunities for Bible study and prayer, we miss our spiritual breakfast.

I learned from that early lesson; unless I was sick, I never slept in and missed my breakfast again. This once again stresses the fact that a spiritual life demands we take action on our beliefs; not just study. **When studying anything, define principles and apply them** in your life to reflect those lessons.

Initially, the farm turned a profit as indicated by Table 1.

Table 1

Irrigated Corn Yields	
Year	Bushel / Acre
1969	125
1970	130
1971	135
3-Yr Avg	130

Yields proved successful in these years, 1969 being the first full year my parents had complete control of the farm work; and thereby complete responsibility. My dad worked around the clock when necessary, taking fifteen to twenty minute catnaps every three to four hours on the tractor in the field. Yes, he stopped the tractor before snoozing! Sundays consisted of feeding the cattle and hogs, changing the irrigation water when applicable and worshipping God the remainder of the morning. He enjoyed the afternoons and evenings spending time with his family and friends. Afternoon activities varied from visiting with others, viewing crops, hunting, fishing or relaxing

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on the river following a bonfire cookout in the summers – held on that sandbar we cleared just for these gatherings.

In 1972, our corn yields diminished to about 65 bushels per acre—half of the previous three-year average. There was a disease causing the corn to die, with the plant's death descending from the top down in July. To put the timing in perspective, healthy corn stalks typically mature in September or October as the plant's base turns yellow first, then ascending to the top of the plant. So the early death from the top **caused** the sickly corn plant to **develop very few harvestable kernels** which is used to feed cattle. Although unable to assess an accurate diagnosis, plant pathologists studied our challenge. We later learned that our farm became one of the first infected with the disease called Corn Lethal Necrosis (CLN).

The combination of two viruses caused this disease. Before accurately identifying CLN, scientists named it Blue Death because the corn's color turns a blue hue. Dad joked that Blue Death referred to the farmer turning blue because of the financial loss. Plant pathologists later hypothesized that at least one of the viruses necessary for this detrimental disease originated outside of the United States and was transported to north central Kansas by those picking marijuana in our area. Yes, sinful activities have, do and will carry devastating effects on all of society, well beyond those participating in the deeds of the flesh.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

CLN continued spreading across portions of Kansas and Nebraska even into the 1990s. Fortunately, leading seed corn companies developed resistant hybrids. Dr. Ben Doupnik of the University of Nebraska spoke about CLN at a meeting I attended as a crop consultant. A fellow agronomist inquired about the severity of Corn Lethal Necrosis. Dr. Doupnik responded, "The geographical area of CLN is relatively small, but when this disease hits your farm, it is very serious." Would you agree that this is a common truth in life? A situation may not cover a wide area, but significant challenges become very serious when they affect you directly.

Despite these economic setbacks, my parents modeled their internalized faith in Christ. I have frequently quipped, "If I were perfect, I wouldn't need Christ as my Savior for the forgiveness of my sins." One's internalized Christian faith fails to make anyone perfect; humans will never be without fault. Faith transforms our hearts to love God and His people—our neighbors.

Grandpa Meyer

After my grandparents moved off the farm, Grandpa continued helping Dad. As a small child, I eagerly anticipated his daily arrival. He greeted Dee and me at the west kitchen door as we grabbed the pant portion of his overalls before he swung us one at a time between his legs. Our celebration

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contained extra exuberance if he brought knipp. Grandma made knipp, a German meat combination that delighted our taste buds.

Grandpa arrived every morning driving his 1966 cherry red Ford F-100 four speed, a short box pickup with a Windsor V8 engine. Grandpa putted along on Kansas Avenue, turning south onto Main Street or Highway 281; once outside the city limits he most likely quickly shifted up to fourth gear to assure staying on the top side of the 75 MPH speed limit. He claimed to do this to be sure he removed all the cobwebs from the engine while avoiding being a nuisance on the road by traveling too slow. Grandpa, like many Kansans, lived with joyful urgency.

Grandpa lived a life nearly absent sickness. My father recalls my grandfather's first illness as the stroke he suffered at the age of 71. Dad shares that through Otto's 65th birthday, "I nearly had to run to keep up with his walk." I must have inherited at least a portion of my fast walk and running abilities from Grandpa.

Grandpa's smile appeared as practically a permanent part of him. However, one morning while his two-year-old grandson was helping with chores he (yours truly) locked him in the barn's feed room with no alternate exit...Grandpa's smile vanished. His cheerful voice quickly dissipated. I was unable to unhook that latch attached to the barn door from the staple driven into the side of the barn. Though my grandparents raised six children on this farm, I was the first to lock Grandpa in the barn. His beaming smile returned as my father opened the door, releasing him from bondage and back to the great outdoors.

Grandpa frequently whistled while he worked. We could catch him whistling or singing on the tractor, tapping his toe on the accelerator to the beat of his favorite church hymns. Delmer says the tractor engine's fluctuating response to Grandpa's toe tapping "could be heard a half-mile away."

How true it is when we feel good, we feel good. I frequently invite audiences on cerebral explorations which include the question, "Is it possible to smile and maintain negative emotions?" Smiling and anger oppose one another. Smiling opens our neuron receptors to the chemicals of joy, blocking the anger chemicals. This produces a chain reaction throughout our body. Relaxed muscles are normally healthy muscles.

Our crushed spirit generates negative chain reactions in chemicals in our bodies, resulting in ill effects on our mood and health. Pessimists seldom escape illness.

Though I simplify these explanations, the principles remain true.

What causes cheerfulness in our hearts? The presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being

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fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19–22)

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17)

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Romans 8:9)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another (Galatians 5:16–18, 22–26, NASB95).

Additionally, God expects us to continually pray, live with gratitude, and joy.

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

Focusing on the desires of Christ while walking with the Holy Spirit creates immense joy. This real cheerfulness prevails through life's challenges, it is a deep feeling that remains even in difficult times. You may have a child or grandchild lock you in a room. That is a small event. Christ sweated blood-like drops as He pondered the crucifixion (**Luke 22:44**). Christ kept his eyes on the Father's will and love for us. We, too, should focus on the Father's will and our love for others.

Grandpa Meyer suffered paralysis from that stroke in August of 1971. His ill-health continued on for four years. Pictures reveal him still smiling, his cheerful heart remained. His smile lessened during the last few weeks of 1975. As I viewed Otto James Frederick Meyer in the casket, his smile beamed ear to ear. His beaming smile returned as our Heavenly Father opened the door to heaven, releasing him from life's bondage.

Sam Showed Me the Door

Once I began walking, I loved the outdoors and exploring the farm when I wasn't *helping* Dad or Grandpa. Having a dog at my side escalated the joy of my adventures around the farm. My buddy

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Sam, a brown retriever, fulfilled this role. I began engaging in physical workouts at an early age. During one of these adventures at age three, I became disoriented in the shelterbelt north of our house. Grandpa Meyer planted this shelterbelt consisting of thousands of trees planted in five parallel rows extending a quarter of a mile in length in 1947.

The benefits of reducing the effects of the cold, erosive winds blowing from the north towards our house included reducing soil erosion and snowdrifts. The shelterbelt also protected the house, other buildings, those working outside and the livestock from destructive and chill-piercing winds. This is nearly a quarter of a mile long and roughly twenty-yards wide. Dad shared stories about he and his siblings carrying buckets of water two hundred to four hundred yards up from the river to aid the trees' early growth and development.

It seemed so dark amidst these trees and I couldn't find a way out. Sam led me to the old outhouse used during my dad's childhood. This revealed a path through the trees because a well-worn path existed between the house and the two-seater outhouse. Old Sears and Roebuck catalogs, whose pages once substituted for Charmin, remained in the outhouse.

Dad told a story about his youngest brother Richard seeing a bull snake stick its head through one seat of this outhouse while sitting on the other seat during their childhood. Richard quickly finished and headed for home. By leading me to that old outhouse, Sam saved me from being lost in the shelterbelt. I later told my parents, "Sam showed me the door."

As a youngster, I crawled on Sam's brown back, grab his ears and rode him like a horse around the farmyard. I considered Sam as both dog and motorcycle. Ever the good sport, Sam seemed to encourage the use of my imagination. My slight frame was a light load for Sam. So I am sure he never looked on those romps as a burden.

In 1970, Sam collided with a forage wagon pulled by a pickup on the county road by our farm, though Sam knew the road was off limits for him. We rushed Sam to the veterinarian who examined him, then returned to the front desk where Mom and I waited. "We have to put Sam to sleep." We entered the room where Sam lay on a table. I petted him saying, "Goodbye Sam." I accepted his death as a way of farm life.



The following months I missed having a dog accompany me on my voyages around the farm. In February of 1971, Dad arrived home from town dressed in olive green coveralls, cowboy boots and red winter cap, entering through the west door into our large kitchen. He carried a puppy into the kitchen, kneeling down and saying of the animal, "I just happened to find it..." The timing was more than suspicious. I was elated about my birthday present!

Unfortunately, shortly after receiving the dog, workers constructing the Harvest

Store silos accidentally hit and killed my puppy with their pickup in the farmyard. I was concurrently sad about the puppy's death and understanding of the circumstances.

Livestock births and deaths naturally occur as a part of life on a farm. I believe my parents and those whose vehicles hit the dogs, suffered more from the dogs' deaths than I did. Because I heard the word of God at home and while attending church and Sunday school since I was only a few weeks old, I developed a child-like faith very early on.

Faith in Christ enables us to understand that while life is to be revered, death should not be feared. One of my great-grandmothers passed away about the same time as Sam. After her death, I stood in the farmhouse kitchen imagining what would happen if my sister, parents or I died. Would Jesus physically descend thru the roof, the attic and the ten foot ceiling into the kitchen? Would He pick up the deceased in his arms and carry them to heaven? Through deaths of animals and loved ones, I learned about living on the faith of Christ's salvation. I never seemed to have a fear of dying.

My Race against a Calf

I certainly ran early and often during my adventures around the farm. This resulted from my curiosity, sense of adventure, trying to keep up with my dad, and Dad demanding I urgently respond to his commands. Whatever Dad instructed me when performing a task, whether chores, retrieving a tool or getting a vehicle or tractor parked away from our location, he nearly always

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completed his command with “Run!” Obedient sons and daughters immediately and urgently responded to their parents back in those times. Since it touched an area of joy in my young life, you can imagine how swiftly I complied and ran with intensity.

Decades later, Dr. Stanley Toussaint, one of my favorite professors at Dallas Theological Seminary, illustrated while teaching on Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy about them responding to Paul’s vision in the middle of the night at Troas in Acts 16:9-10, “True obedience acts immediately.”



Figure 4: Dr. Stanley and Mrs. Toussaint. A class picture after Dr. Toussaint's final class of full time teaching at Dallas Theological Seminary. He began teaching in 1960. Rick is in the maroon shirt.

A memorable example of Dad commanding me to run occurred because of a calf. My running gear that day consisted of cowboy boots, Lee stretch denim jeans and a snap-button western shirt. That gear greatly contrasts the type worn by competitive runners today.

This calf’s speed and endurance provided a life-long lesson for future races. The cows and calves grazed on the corn and sorghum stalks during the winter. Though we had erected an electric fence to contain them, a calf crawled underneath into the alfalfa field. This calf refused to cooperate and return to the fenced area as we pursued it in the 1966 cherry-red pickup. Finally, Dad stopped and instructed me to climb out to pursue the calf on foot, running to cut it off before it entered the timber along the river. Dad drove on the opposite side of the calf. I ran after that calf for over a half mile, while my legs and arms experienced a sulfurous burn. Even as my lungs burned and lactic acid in the muscles tormented me causing pain in my nerves, I knew I had to keep up the intense pace. I had to succeed! Finally, the calf returned to the fenced area. The chase ended. I bent over

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huffing and puffing. My legs and lungs continued burning while I rejoined Dad in the pickup to continue our chores. For my young life, that was the most pain I had experienced, but I also felt so grown up and proud of myself for a job well done.

When maximizing our running performances, we must push beyond previously known limits. Just like a seed wanting to germinate, we must figuratively die to ourselves; die to our neurological sensors screaming of the pain. Beyond this sensory death lie the great victories of life. Beyond this intense, tortuous pain resides the great exhilaration of contentment, knowing you challenged yourself more than you ever thought possible. Success in every endeavor requires this extent of personal challenge—only the balance between physical and mental exertion varies.