

# A VISION FOR EVERYONE

## **Matthew 17.14-20**

I will never forget my first “big” race. For some reason I decided that it would be fun to run a half-marathon. That’s 13.1 miles for those uninitiated to the grueling placement of one foot in front of the other—mile after mile—which some of us call “fun.” I had never run a half marathon before. I hadn’t ever run more than 8 miles before. However, I was young, in great shape, and naïve enough to think that being young and in-shape was enough, so I didn’t train. I ate whatever I wanted and had the audacity to show up at the starting line anyway. The gun sounded on that bright morning and I tore out leading the pack. I couldn’t believe it. I was in front! I was going to win this thing. Visions of accolades filled my head for the first six miles as I and a handful of others led everyone else. About mile seven, something didn’t feel right. I was getting a little tired. My legs were getting heavy and I hadn’t hit a water station yet. Didn’t these people believe in hydration? By mile 8 I was hurting. My legs were screaming and I had finally hit a water station that had no water. What is that about? Smiles and well wishes were not going to cut it. I wanted to scream but my throat was too parched. However, I still believed I could win this thing. But it was getting harder and harder to put one foot in front of the other. Finally I couldn’t do it anymore. I couldn’t will myself forward. I was done. My last hopes of accolades vanished as the power-walkers faded into the distance and the pregnant moms blew by me like spring hares past an old tortoise. I made it to the finish line that day, about four steps off the pace of a fellow who looked like he and Father Time were twins. The only thing I could think as I crossed the line was that I had failed.

I have spent some time thinking about that race, wondering about what went wrong. If I could sum up the entire experience in a phrase it would be “a failure to train.” I wanted to run the race, but I hadn’t taken any of the steps necessary to prepare me to finish. I hadn’t trained to run, so when it came time to run I couldn’t. In a lot of ways my experience in running that race has been replayed in my faith journey. Time and time again I have set off to do something God has called me to do with Him and for Him, but as I engage in it I find that about mid-way through I fade, and many times I fail. It is enough of a pattern that I have been able to recognize a trend. The times that I fade and fail are almost always the times that I didn’t train. I wasn’t ready because I didn’t take the steps necessary to build my faith so that it would sustain me.

In some ways it’s encouraging to know that I am not the only one to have experienced this. The first disciples failed. They tried to do something that they were called to do, something they had done before and they failed. It wasn’t for lack of trying. According to Jesus, it was all due to a lack of training. They couldn’t serve “on the spot” because they hadn’t trained “off the spot.” The disciples hadn’t made the daily choices to open their lives to God and strengthen their faith, so when they needed it the most, it wasn’t there. I am learning to see the journey of faith as a race, not a sprint but a marathon. Marathons take training, daily choices that prepare you for when you need it most. I am learning to see each day as

an opportunity to open myself to God, learning that I must make the multitude of small choices that increase my faith so that when I need it most it is there.

A fellow traveler,

Blake  
Spiritual Formation Pastor

### **My Next Step**

We encourage you to consider doing the following as a way of handing off faith to your family. . .

- **Off the spot training:** Being about to perform “on the spot” takes “off the spot” training of our faith. Engaging in daily practices as a family that strengthen your faith will prepare you for instances and circumstances where you need it most. Consider beginning one or two simple practices that you can do as a family that will strengthen your family’s faith. You might consider a weekly prayer time where members of your family pray for one another, for issues in the world, and for the blessing of your enemies. You might also consider having a weekly memory verse you learn together. The KPU *God-time cards* are great for this. You could even begin to read RTE 365 as a family and use evening meals to discuss what you are learning. It is in these small steps that we open our life to God and His transforming power in ways that enable us to do great things for His kingdom.

We encourage you to take one of the following next steps on your faith journey. . .

- **Listening to Jesus:** When the disciples asked Jesus what went wrong, he answered and gave them sound practical advice. Jesus wants to speak to us in the same way, if we will ask him. This week consider asking Jesus what he would encourage you to do to strengthen your faith. What steps would he encourage you to take? Find a time that you can be alone with Jesus. Read Matthew 17.14-20. Imagine the scene unfolding before you. Put yourself in it and watch those involved. See if you can imagine their expressions, their words. As you put yourself in the scene, imagine that you are one of the disciples. Ask Jesus what went wrong. This can be a general question focused on an area in which you have faded or failed on your faith journey. Ask what he would have you do. Wait for his response. Often Jesus will speak in a calm voice to us or through scripture that he brings to mind. Journal what he says and commit yourself to acting on it.