

Picture this scene. The track coach has gathered his team just before the start of the state track meet. As they gather for his inspiring words, he says to them, "Today is a big day. I want you to go out there and fail, to stumble over the hurdles, to jump the gun, and to forfeit every event you have trained for over the last three months!" Would those words inspire the team? You and I, we are running the Christian race and as our Coach gathers us together, He speaks these inspiring words, "Don't ever, ever give up!"

I. Our God has set us on our life track in order to cross the finish line. A. But, since we are human, we are prone to giving up. 1. We're prone to give up because we get tired. Here's a question for you, "Did the disciples ever get tired? Did Jesus ever take them to a solitary place to rest?" Fast forward 2,000 years from Jesus' day. Do you know anyone who gets tired, anyone who runs out of energy, anyone who gets weary? Of course you do! We all want to claim it's the other guy; not me, but him/her. But I'll let you in on a little secret. I get tired and weary. You get tired and weary. If you don't, you aren't created by God, but created in a robotic science lab.

2. We are also prone to give up because we fail to see results. Let's face it. We want results as quickly as we want our Big Mac and fries from McDonalds! We don't have time to wait. We want results now. Not tomorrow; not next week. We want to pat ourselves on the back now. And when it doesn't happen, we're ready to give up. How many of Jesus' disciples came home every day saying, "What an awesome day. Everybody I touched was instantaneously healed. Everybody I spoke to about Jesus, took the message to heart. This was my best day ever. I can't wait for a repeat tomorrow!" Results - we want them and when they don't occur, giving up looks inviting.

3. We are prone to give up because we forget God is working behind the scenes. Every morning as the disciples walked beside Jesus or were sent out on their own, God was working behind the scenes. Not Peter or John or Bartholomew. It was Jesus at work through them. They were merely His instruments. If we realized how much of what we take for granted is actually God working His incredible plan behind the scenes, God would receive more praise in a single day than He does in an entire month! Giving up rears its ugly head because we think it's all about us. The moment we place the results back into our Father's hands, giving up isn't an option.

B. Although we are prone, what can we do to protect ourselves from giving up?

1. We acknowledge that weariness is normal. How many times did Jesus find a quiet place to rest? Jesus needed rest and so do we because weariness is normal. Why does Paul write, "Let us not grow weary of doing good?" Because Paul knew from personal experience and observation that weariness is normal. If you get weary while doing the Lord's work at your workplace or wherever, you are normal. If you never get weary, the only conclusion we can draw is that you aren't doing anything. If you become weary because of your Christian work, welcome to normal.

2. We protect ourselves by continuing to do good regardless. "Let us not grow weary of doing good." Paul's point? Keep doing good. Keep offering care and

concern. Keep loving one another. Keep building up each other and God's church. Keep noticing the needs of others. Keep offering that helping hand. Keep doing those random acts of kindness. If you want to protect yourself from giving up, choose to do good toward others. When your focus is on doing good for someone else, you gain more than they gain, and, at the end of the day, you will realize that giving up isn't an option, that continuing to do good no matter what is your task today and every day.

3. We protect ourselves by expecting God to bless. In our Gospel, Jesus assembles His disciples. Now these guys weren't the cream of the crop or the most gifted individuals on the planet. They were more like the most likely to go nowhere. Yet those twelve men, those misfits to our way of thinking, ultimately changed the course of history and changed the world. How? Because God blessed their efforts. Remove God from the scene and the story would never have become the talk of the town. Because we are His disciples today, we step out expecting God to bless and when we believe God will bless, giving up doesn't cross our minds.

4. We protect ourselves by praying daily for strength. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest." Those twelve misfit disciples knew the power of prayer and they used that power frequently. "Pray, praise, and give thanks." That's what we say in our Catechism. As we pray for daily strength, we pray and we pray some more. To protect ourselves from giving up when life is tough, our prayers acknowledge that God is amazing, incredible, filled with unlimited power and worthy of more praise and thanksgiving than we can offer. When the power of prayer is imprinted on our hearts, giving up runs for the hills with its tail between its legs.

5. We protect ourselves from giving up by adjusting our pace. Anyone here tired of running faster every year but going nowhere? Anyone wishing they could step out of the rat race and take life at a different pace? You're in good company, but being in good company doesn't solve the problem. Jesus has the answer as He says, "Adjust your pace to fit My pace, not the world's pace. You can slow down; you can make adjustments if and when you decide that finishing is more important than running. Adjust a little here and a little there until your pace coincides with My pace. Then, and only then, will you realize that giving up isn't in your vocabulary."

6. We protect ourselves by remembering who is in charge of the results. In the typical work world, who is responsible for results? Who receives those delightful performance reviews? In that world, we are responsible. Failure is our fault and we are expected to fix it or else. Yet when we recall that the results are in God's hands, that, guided by Him, we will reap a harvest, everything changes. We offer God our best in each area and we leave the rest in God's hands. What the world says ultimately doesn't matter. When we are doing good for the Lord, when what we do in all arenas is for the Lord, He will bless because the outcome is entirely in His hands.

7. Coaches for the track, basketball, football, volleyball, baseball and all the other sports may tell their team to "go out there and win," but our Coach for the Christian race says to you today, "Go! I will bless. I will take care of the rest! Just don't you ever, ever give up!" Amen.