

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

Moses: Profile of a Finisher  
"When Others Are Not Finishers"  
Numbers 13-14

Take a first look.

I. One of the greatest *stimulants* to making it to the finish line in the Christian life is the community in which we live. One of the greatest *burdens* to making it to the finish line in the Christian life is the community in which we live.

We do not live and serve God in a vacuum.

II. "We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will perish together as fools," said Martin Luther King, Jr. It was not only true of the participants in the Civil Rights Movement. This is a statement of reality about the nation itself. That statement sounds like what Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said to the Continental Congress when the delegates were debating earnestly and not finding common ground. Finally, the *Declaration of Independence* was hammered out and the representatives of the 13 colonies were preparing to sign it. Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." The "together" aspect is a large one in the Christian life. Casey Stengel, who as manager of the New York Yankees from 1949-1960 won 10 championships and 7 World Series, once said, "It's easy to get good players. Gettin' em to play together, that's the hard part."

The even harder part is "gettin' em" to play under the management of God at the same time.

III. When I was in high school, I turned away from my personal faith in Jesus because of the choice to value the acceptance of my peers over the calling of God on my life. I found out many years later that others were doing the same hoping for peer acceptance or at least to blend in and not stand out from everyone else.

IV. We are all impacted for good or bad by those with whom we share this planet. We desperately need to know what to do when we feel that God has called, and no one seems to be listening—or everyone seems to be running in the wrong direction. What do those committed to finishing the race marked out for them do when others around them don't seem to share such a commitment? A pivotal event in the life of Israel and in the life of Moses may help us here. There are three powerful practices that any finisher can adopt. Let's turn to Numbers 13 and 14 in the Old Covenant Scriptures and see what these are.

**Background:** The people of Israel are poised on the edge of the land of promise. They are organized under the direction of the LORD. Now twelve spies sent into the Promised Land have returned with their report.

Take a closer look at Numbers 13:26-32.

**I. WHEN OTHERS ARE NOT FINISHERS, WE MUST LEARN TO SPEAK WITH FAITH.**

1. *This is the example of Caleb and Joshua.* Numbers 13:30. Even though the tide of public opinion was against trusting the Lord, these two brave souls spoke for faith and obedience. They gave the minority report of faith and courage, even though it was outweighed by the influence of the majority.

2. *This is also the example of Moses and Aaron.* Numbers 14:5-9. Though at great personal risk, these men proved to be leaders because they spoke for the LORD when everyone else wanted to go their own way. They stood valiantly against public opinion, not knowing what the outcome might be.

Insight: In a culture that is becoming more and more post-Christian, we need very much to hold out the words of faith and the perspective that is shaped and informed by a Biblical, godly, and Christ-centered understanding of the world and of humanity.

**I—Philip Johnson was something of a solo voice in his realm.** He was a law professor at Berkeley who wrote and spoke clearly in the creation-evolution debate on the side of reason and creation. He wrote such books as *Darwin on Trial* and *Reason in the Balance*. We may not expect to find a Berkeley prof who was outspoken as both a Christian witness and a legal and scientific witness for the greatness of creation and the bankruptcy of evolutionary philosophy. He was swimming upstream. This is the response of faith. It is done by the power of God. And there are many other voices raised in this same realm of conversation.

**I—When our fellow-citizens discuss the pressing moral concerns of our time, we can speak for a godly ethic informed by the Biblical story.** Such topics as abortion, physician-assisted suicide, the nature of marriage and the impact of homosexual political activism in its public definition, the gender movement, and other issues of sexual morality—all need a viewpoint informed by what God has revealed in Scripture and in Christ. **Our example speaks: best-selling author and Sunday school teacher (Southern-Baptist Christian, I am told) John Grisham has written a shelf full of books that have been best-sellers.** Jeannie and I have read together the series for young readers entitled *Theodore Boone: Kid Lawyer* and several of his other books (some we liked and some not as much). The *Theodore Boone* stories are about a 13-year-old son of two lawyers who uses his acquired savvy of all things legal to solve issues in his community. Some years ago, Grisham said, “I have never been tempted to resort to gratuitous sex, profanity, or violence. I couldn’t write a book that I would be embarrassed for my kids to read a few years from now. Plus, my mother would kill me!”<sup>1</sup> I hope that this conviction has carried him forward since then.

**I—We must speak up! Remember the chilling report of Pastor Martin Niemoller from Germany**, one of the friends of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and brothers of the Confessing Church, who survived the Nazi terror. “In Germany they came first for the communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak.”

In our society, described by Pope John Paul II as The Culture of Death, those

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<sup>1</sup> *Leadership*, Summer, 1996.

without the moral anchor of Christ and the Christian Scriptures have come for the unborn. They have come after the aging and infirmed. They are now coming for our children, to confuse them on their basic sexuality as boys and girls. Where will they stop? Who will speak for those who can't speak for themselves?

## **II. WHEN OTHERS ARE NOT FINISHERS, WE MUST LEARN TO PRAY IN FAITH. Numbers 14:12-19**

1. *The LORD offered a scenario to Moses that was quite heady. He said, in effect, "I've had it with these people. I will start over with you."* Again, that must have been quite the offer. How long did Moses ponder it before he answered? Was it truly enticing? After all, he blamed these rebellious and stubborn people as the cause of his missing out on The Promised Land (see Numbers 20; Deuteronomy 3:23-29, especially v. 26 (NET): "The LORD was angry at me *because of you...*" [my emphasis]). Moses was allowed to see the Promised Land from a distance, but he never set foot there. He was used by God to bring the people out of slavery, but someone else (Joshua, in fact) was used by God to bring them into their new land. At this stage in the narrative, Moses is compelled to consider whether he himself might become the new Father of the nation.

2. *Perhaps this was a test of sorts: Moses resisted and appealed for God's mercy and forgiveness for the people, and it was granted. We must hand it to Moses. He resisted this offer (even if it was only a test). Instead, he prayed for the people with earnestness and selflessness.*

Insight: The greatest service we can do for the people with whom we share life in family, church, or society is to intercede for them before the living God.

**I—The Old Covenant prophet Daniel prayed for his people**, even so far as confessing their sins as though they were his own, and he was powerful with God (cf. Daniel 9:4-6).

*I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,<sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.<sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land (Daniel 9:4-6 NIV).*

**I—Dietrich Bonhoeffer learned about Christian fellowship in an underground seminary during the Nazi terror.** He wrote about it in a little book simply called *Life Together*. One insight there speaks of the primacy of prayer: "A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses."<sup>2</sup>

## **III. WHEN OTHERS ARE NOT FINISHERS, WE MUST LEARN TO WAIT IN FAITH. Numbers 14:26-35**

1. *God made the nation wait 40 years before He brought them into the land of promise.* During that time, all the people who rebelled against the LORD died and were

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<sup>2</sup> from *Proclaim*, AMJ, 1996.

buried in the desert. Even after God delivered this message of judgment to them, they tried to “go up and take the land” on their own, but they failed miserably. That doubtless made their disappointment even worse.

2. *Moses, Caleb, and Joshua had to wait, also.* Though they wished to trust God and move forward, this was not possible, because God wanted to move the entire nation into the land together. So, these men waited, as well.

Insight: Sometimes our sense of vision is right, but the timing is not. God is both in the vision and in the fulfillment of the vision. *Timing is everything.*

**I—Sometimes our visions are timed in the plan of God for the future, and sometimes it takes others around us time to catch sight of what God has shown us.** You might not guess who was cut from his junior high basketball team at the age of 15. Did you guess? It was none other than **Michael Jordan**, the veritable icon of the game. After that humiliating rejection, he went back to practice (on his own) and refined his skills. But he had to wait for another chance to try out for the basketball team.

**I—King David envisioned a great temple for the worship of the God of heaven and earth, the God of Israel.** God said, “Great idea. But I want your son to build it, not you.” David accepted this personal limitation, waited, and prepared for what his son would ultimately do.

**I—“In the film *The Monuments Men*, a woman named Claire Simone (played by Cate Blanchett), lives a very ordinary life in Paris under the oppressive Nazi regime.** She’s an art enthusiast who was forced to facilitate the pillaging of the great works of art of Paris. But despite the seeming hopelessness of her situation, Claire carefully cataloged each piece of art, and marked it with a small colored sticker (a ‘seal’ you could say). She kept this catalog without knowing whether it would ever be useful or just a dusty record of art—or if it would be confiscated and destroyed. She kept meticulous records without any hope that it would come to anything. Not until James Granger (played by Matt Damon) showed up asking about these pieces of art, did an opportunity arise for her risky bookkeeping to pay off.

“But up to that point, during the majority of her record-keeping, she had no idea that the Monuments Men would come along. She had no idea that anyone else cared. She was one woman in a city occupied by one of the most powerful armies on the planet. She was one woman battling against the whole Nazi-engineered system. And for all the time before James Granger arrived, she kept working subversively and systematically, without any assurance that her work would ever be used.

“In a similar way,” says Adam Graber, “Christians live in territory occupied by the Enemy. It’s tempting to give up hope that our work for Christ—our small deeds of compassion and kindness, our faithfulness to our families and jobs and churches—will come to anything. But unlike Claire, Christians have an assurance of hope. Christ’s resurrection guarantees our future. Our service to Christ may feel insignificant, and yet Claire exhibits for Christians an inspiring example of how to live faithfully in Enemy-occupied territory.”<sup>3</sup>

Take it home (applications).

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<sup>3</sup> Submitted by Adam Graber, Wheaton, Illinois, to *PreachingToday.com*.

**Hebrews 12:1-3 (FJV):** <sup>1</sup> Therefore also since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, after laying aside every impediment and the sin which constricts, let us keep on running through patient endurance the race that is set before us <sup>2</sup> while fixing the eyes on Jesus, the Originator and Perfecter of the faith, Who instead of the joy set before Him endured a cross, disregarding shame, and has been seated on the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> For consider how he has endured such hostility against himself by the sinners, in order that you<sup>p</sup> will not be fatigued in your souls, losing heart.

I. Are we in the race?

1. Faith in Jesus Christ
2. Trusting fully in Him alone

II. Are we committed to being finishers?

III. Are we in the race no matter what others around us are doing?

IV. Are we committed to speak and pray with faith, and wait in faith for God to work out His purposes?