

Running the Race

"Please, God, don't let anything bad happen to me or anybody I love... ever." Most of us have prayed it, even knowing God is unlikely to grant our request. In this fallen world, sin, decay and death surround us. Evil abounds. Bad things occur every day, some profoundly affecting us and those we love.

I remember a much-publicized prediction 15-20 years ago for the date the world would supposedly end. Although no one can know that (Mark 13:32), I almost wished at the time that it were true. I had lived a pretty full life, and everybody in my family was healthy and happy. But since I knew it couldn't remain so forever, I liked the idea of skipping over whatever suffering inevitably lay ahead, all of us being carried up to heaven together at Jesus' immediate return.

The world did not end that day, of course. Instead, life has continued, the years that followed holding some wonderful things as well as some that were painfully difficult. God has seen us through it all by his steadfast grace and mercy. Although it is right to pray for the health and safety of those we love, it is *not* right to live in perpetual fear of what may happen. Fear for the future is a sign that we don't completely trust God, his plan, and his provision.

As always, Jesus is our example. He didn't have to *wonder* about the future; he knew what suffering awaited him at the cross. Saying, "Thy will be done," he obediently went forward anyway, trusting his father to see him all the way through to death and out the other side. The Bible exhorts us to do the same.

... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

God has set the joys of heaven and the example of his son before us so that we might not lose heart in the dark times, that we might run with perseverance the race he has marked out for each of us, counting as insignificant by contrast whatever suffering and obstacles we have to face along the way. We can trust to God's perfect plan for when and how each of our races will finish. Then we will hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21)

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