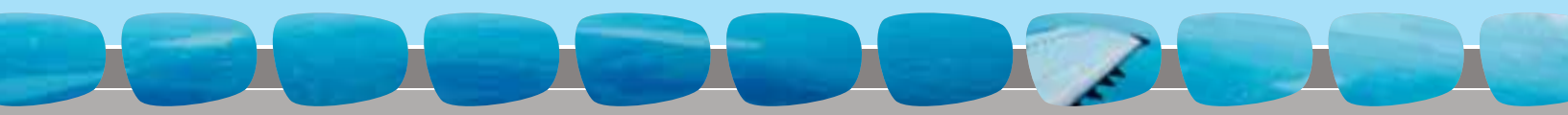
Finishing Well: A Perso

JOY BEST

Beginning At The End Looking down at the ground, it all looked to be black and white. You couldn't see any color from that far up. The earth, the place where I had been so focused and involved pouring out my passion, just seemed to be...boring. My life seemed to be gray as I looked down at the world from that airplane window. God gave me just a small glimpse of my reality that afternoon on an airplane.



My life seemed to be gray

Then something incredible happened. I had an overwhelming sensation that I was somehow between earth and heaven, that my life was over, and that I was on my way to eternity. My hopes rose. For just a few seconds I wondered if I had done well enough; if I had finished well. Then I realized, "Oh well, it's over now," and I prepared myself to meet face to face with Jesus. Tears began to pour down my face, and I must have continued to cry for 20 minutes or so. I was so excited, so grateful, so full of inexpressible joy that I was finished, and now could go on to the best part! I was full of anticipation of the unimaginable things ahead. Face to face - just think of it - I'm coming home! Paul's words in 1 Timothy came to life in that moment:

"As for me, my life has already been poured out as on offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me— the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous judge will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return" (1Tim.4:6-8).

Though I was sure I was going to join the heroes of my faith, God had other plans. As you may have guessed, I did not go home to be with Jesus. This revelatory experience occurred about five years ago – at the exact same time one of our most faithful intercessors was leaving this life and going to meet Jesus. I was left with a lingering question, "Would this be what it would be like when my life was over?"

Learning From Life

Let me take you back in the story even further. When I was 38, nine years before the above encounter, God mercifully showed me a picture of what state I could end my life in, should I choose to carry on in my present patterns. I felt He gave me the option of choosing the path I wanted to follow. My mother was in the last years of her life, and I had the opportunity to see the crop that had grown from the seeds that she had planted (Gal. 6:7). It was not an encouraging picture to me. I saw that I could be in exactly the same place she was in when I got to be her age, if I didn't allow God to change me.

What did her life look like? Outwardly, there was some excellent fruit. Three out of three children followed Jesus; two became pastors' wives and one became a missionary. All seven grandchildren were fully following Jesus. From the outside, everything looked good. On the inside, however, a wall of isolation, shame and marital dysfunction engulfed her. I needed to make some decisions. I realized that I could end up in exactly the same boat. Would I be any different when I reached her age?

At that time, God showed me some guiding principles that I needed to establish in my life:

- **Keep Only Good Secrets**
  I've made a choice to only have good secrets. For example, I might be secretly generous or kind to someone, or secretly pray for a person. As far as I know, there are no bad secrets that I haven't told someone in this world, where they have heard my confession of sin and prayed for both forgiveness and a changed heart within me. I've made some quick and unique new friends this way! Sometimes I've been in a place where I don't know a lot of people, but I've found that confession doesn't require a treasured, deep friendship - any Christian will do! I was even delivered from a spirit of rage through the prayers of my four-year-old. Keep no bad secrets.

- **Don't Isolate Yourself**
  When I'm in situations where I feel insecure, it is most natural for me to pull away and retreat from people. I would love to have the same best friend for a lifetime. God's word says something different. We're in a body where each part is different and necessary, and we're placed as He wants us to be (1 Cor.12:18). I've chosen to embrace being a friend to whomever I'm with. High or low position makes no difference. Because I need friendship, I need to give it away.

- **Be Flexible And Balanced**
  I've always reacted to change very slowly. When our children were growing up, I often felt that by the time I had figured out one stage of their development, they were on to the next! God has made sure that I can't cling to the security of thinking that I "know what I'm doing."

onal Story

When I'm off balance, the only option that I have is to run to Jesus. He holds perfect balance.

Flexibility and balance must also be exercised in the physical. I've worked hard at getting into better physical shape over this last year, and it has made a huge difference in my life. Just being stronger in body helps on all levels. The discipline that I developed physically has helped me stay on track with pressing through obstacles and persevering spiritually.

- **Forgive Everybody**
Because I'm what would be called a hyper-sensitive person, I could easily be hurt 500 times a day! I can't always have the relational "heaven on earth" that I long for, and I can't truly know anyone's heart but my own. Therefore, I must choose a path of constant forgiveness - forgiveness of everything and everybody. There is no one from whom I can afford to withhold forgiveness. For this reason, I've had to get better at worshiping with a bowing heart and a kneeling body. It helps me stay low to the ground, and humble.

Age With Grace

I do want to finish well. I want to encourage everyone who knows me by eventually becoming an old woman who still thinks it's a privilege to serve Jesus, and the ones He loves (including the least of these). So often as we age we become people that allow emotional sludge to build up and clog our arteries. Bitterness, anger and disappointments that make us sour, impatient and inflexible can all collect inside us - and weigh us down. I've seen people become older and not wiser. I don't want to choose that road.

We affect each other so profoundly. When one individual doesn't finish well, but instead gets old and cynical, so many people are influenced negatively. Whatever the cost is, I want to reach the finish line like Paul, having given away everything I have to give, and having taken off the baggage that weighs me down and keeps me back. This means changing sinful habits.

The Lord in his kindness showed me about one such habit through TMJ (Temporomandibular Joints) that were very painful, and only allowed me to open my mouth about one-inch wide. Surgery was recommended, but I had a couple of friends with horror stories who recommended I not take that route. Elders prayed. The Lord gave someone a word for me to be very careful with what came out of my mouth. I asked God to change my heart so that I would not speak with judgment and cynicism. I still don't know exactly when it happened, but one day I just noticed the pain was gone, and I've been able to open my mouth as wide as anyone else ever since!

I want to reach the finish line at the end of my life bringing as many people with me as I can. Whenever I have a chance to give to someone, or tell them about Jesus, I try to stretch myself to take the opportunity. Even if I'm tired, I know that when I meet Jesus I'll rejoice over every time I chose to obey him. I think about that often, as I make daily choices to age with grace.

Follow The Leaders

I've been personally blessed with some fine examples. I have my grandfather's story of finishing well. In spite of being orphaned at two-years old, because of his mother's death and his father's alcoholism, he chose Jesus and raised his family as Christians. My father is finishing well. He chose Jesus as a teenager and raised his family "in the Jesus way." At the age of 91, all of his children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren love his Lord Jesus. It cost my parents so very much not to get bitter when their house burned down, not to lose faith when three of their children died, nor to become bitter when a friend they tried to help swindled their homestead away from them.

I want to run as freely, and as faithfully. I want to be like them - one who finishes well.



Joy Best is a national leader in Vineyard Canada with her husband Gary, and an artist by nature. With a specific call to pray for leaders and the worship community across the Vineyard internationally, her insights in this personal story have powerful significance for creative people in the local church.

He gave me the option of choosing