

Randall trained hard and competed well in high school track. 1974 was his last year at West Bend West High School, and he knew he had a chance for the high school record in the 2 mile run. In the last meet of the year, he was doing so well, he even had a chance for the conference record. During the race, others were boxing him in and he had to wait for a chance to get around. As he was moving, one runner cut him off, and in order to keep from running into people, he had to step quickly onto the grass, and then back onto the track. He regained his place, ran around those ahead and won the race anyway. He did it in school record time. But he felt if he hadn't been cut off, he could have done it faster and set a conference record. The coach of the kid who had cut him off complained that he should be disqualified because he stepped off the track. The school decided that he should get the school record anyway, but placed an asterisk next to his name, for the fact that he had stepped out. He was convinced it was unfair.

An Asterisk. That's an ugly word to say. See it fast three times. It is a little star that refers you to a note somewhere. In a sports record it means there are special circumstances about this one. Maybe steroids. It takes away the glory of the record because there is something unusual about it. It's an ugly thing.

Randall set high standards for himself all through his life. He had many successes, editing and writing and organizing Christian seminars. And he had some other disappointments and rejections. When he got cancer, and found his life shortened, he had a bucket list of things he wanted to do. Some of them were trying to undo past pains. In June 2004, 30 years later, he and I and Dad went to West Bend. He looked up the old news article about that race. He took a copy and went to the High School. His name was still up on the sign of school records in the gym, with an asterisk next to his name. He showed the article and requested the school's track coach to reopen the case to get the ruling changed and that asterisk deleted. The coach said there was no way to do that.

Last week we heard Dean VanderPlas speak at the Men's club basketball honors breakfast. Mr. VanderPlas coaches the Ripon High School boys basketball team. He spoke of setting high standards and the character it builds when one works for those high goals. He says he doesn't set goals that depend on circumstances beyond the team's control. He sets goals about improvement, personal achievement, but not win/loss goals. We've got to do our best, but also live with forces beyond our control.

Hurts come from disappointments, from failures, from rejections. Some of them are due to something we did, and some are due to events beyond our control. Athletes plan for pro careers, which are stopped by injury or family tragedy or war. Business people count on a number of customers that dries up in a recession. City managers count on

the taxes of industries which go bankrupt. Fianceses break off engagements. Disappointments, failures, rejections. Even our successes have an asterisk.

What is yours?

What is the asterisk in the records you carry? Where is the burden in the baggage you carry?

Where is the pain of rejection? Where is the anger because of loss? Where is your failure? Where is the asterisk?

Have you tried to undo that past event? Have you tried to do it over? You've found it doesn't work. Bernie Madoff could never pay back all the people he took money from. Your stocks might never again be worth what you paid for them. You can't undo the past, by yourself.

But there is something you could do. If that past event is controlling you, and you want to be done with it, there is something you could do.

Go to the event with Jesus. Watch it happen. Talk to Jesus about what and who and why. Now you've got hindsight you didn't have then. What do you wish they had done or said differently? What do you wish you had done or said differently? It may not be possible for you to go to the other person to give or ask forgiveness. But it is possible for Jesus to do it. He can go where you cannot go.

What if you did succeed at proving those hurtful people wrong? What if you won vindication and proved to everyone you were right. What if you could undo all the mistakes and make victories out of all those failures? What if you could prove that person wrong, who turned down your marriage proposal? Would you be happier? Would you be enjoying God more? Would you feel better about yourself?

My brother wanted to get that asterisk removed. He wanted to be vindicated, he wanted proof that he was right and others were wrong. He wanted to be made right, to have equal status with the other record holders on that sign.

How many times in these college bball tournament games does a player shoot a bad shot, or miss a chance to stop a drive to the basket, and the announcer says "He'd like to have that one back". Sometimes it is a game deciding play. The player feels like a failure because of that one play. The commercials are showing us historical game changing plays that still hurt, years later.

My fellow disciples, your life is not about one play. It is not determined by one success or failure.

Life is not about having a clean record. It is about love. There will still be chances to love, whether or not you get your record cleaned up. Randall received a crown of righteousness, even though there is an asterisk by his name on the sign in the West Bend gym. That life with God forever has nothing to do with his successes and failures. It has nothing to do with his acceptances and rejections. It has nothing to do with

anything he did or didn't do. Randall is loved. He is with God, not because of what he did, but because of what God did.

A great theme of many of us Americans says "Work hard, keep your nose clean and you'll be a success". It is my definition of the American Dream. We try. Often it works, but not always. It is a probability, not a guarantee. It's not a formula that always is true. Sometimes you work hard, and you do it right, but because of other forces, the project fails. You are rejected.

Judas couldn't forgive himself so he hung himself. He didn't give himself a chance to hear the forgiveness of Jesus.

We have heard it. We are forgiven.

When we became Christians we started new. The old is passed away. God becomes our father, our debts are cancelled. We have a new name, an new inheritance and new brothers and sisters. We can honor our earthly parents, but we please God. One of the Chapters of the book Emotionally Healthy Spirituality tells how we don't have to be stuck in the patterns of the family we grew up in. When Jesus has a better way, we follow Jesus. We are servants of Christ, the scripture said. We honor our parents, we love them, even when we don't do things they way they taught us, when Jesus has a healthier way. The old is passed away.

We don't need the vindication of others to feel right.

Paul says he preaches what he does, "not to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant." Gal 1: 10

We all know how much God loves us. I'm loved by God, so why be concerned whether I get the approval of others.

What happened to the man Jesus told about who said to his father "I have sinned against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son?" What happened, his father was so glad he was back he threw a party. We are in God's family, no matter whether we did right or not.

Do you think all your deeds must be done right in order for God's will to be done? God used the misdeeds of many of the Bible's people to turn out good as well as he used the good deeds of those Bible people. He can even use yours. Even the one with an asterisk.

Arthur Miller the playwright, is quoted "All one can do is end up with the right regrets." We can end up with the pain of them washed away, by the blood of Jesus Christ.