

40 Days to Better:
Faith, Fitness, Function and Family

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Acknowledgements

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What is interesting to me is that forty days of discernment has essentially led me to the conclusion that everything she has prompted me to consider has really be there for me to discover anyway. Sometimes, it just takes a focused mind to realize such things. And I had never spent the time focusing on this type of leadership and management issue before.

What follows is the story of some time I took to explore in detail and how I was able to figure this out. And how I was able to conceptualize the links across four critical components of my life (faith, fitness, function, and family) and ultimately integrate the lessons and insights across the set.

Now, I just hope that it helps me to continue to improve my life and the lives of those around me. This is the story of September 1 to October 12, 2013.

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40 Days to Better

Today, I took my fourth day in a row off from running. I had not planned to take that many days off in a row. But, after an extra long run last weekend, I got busy at work, and I spent time with the wife and kids that I would not trade for any running accomplishment. Over time, I will continue to work out how to balance everything I want to do, but since Thursday Sherry, sleeping in while camping, the kids, (even the dog who we took camping with us), and work were more important.

But as I looked at my calendar, I also noticed something. After today and before the Baltimore running festival, there are exactly 40 days. 40 days has a lot of symbolism. Of course, it all began with Noah. And I sang along with the Hooters song in high school that mentioned it. Then there is Lent every year. Then there is the worship band that I played with at church for parts of 7 years that was called 40 More Days. The past two Lenten seasons, I have tried to blog for 40 days in a row.

But this 40 Days is a bit more meaningful in a number of ways. First, with the relatively new position and the kids making big choices in the coming year, I have a different focus. I don't have a marathon on the horizon for more than a year--if ever. (Although all my

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close running friends think I will be back.) Without a marathon on the horizon, I didn't run the 20 mile race this Labor Day weekend that I had run the last three. That has me more focused as I have been keeping myself in pretty good shape since the Boston Marathon and keeping my weight pretty well under control, but with the four days of not running, a lot of sweet food while camping, and an important half marathon on the horizon with 40 days between now and then, I started thinking.

What can I do?

No simple answers to that one. But in addition to making sure that I have the best run I can have after 40 days, I also want to make it bigger. I want to have the best run. But I also want to be a better dad. A better husband. A better neighbor. Better at my job. Better at teaching Sunday school. Generally use this time of focus and discernment to make myself a better person.

And what is the most important thing I could do along those lines?

Probably take the lesson I have consistently been able to bring to fruition for running--improve through practice and bring things to closure for the race--and take that to the rest

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Probably take the lesson I have consistently been able to bring to fruition for running--improve through practice and bring things to closure for the race--and take that to the rest

of my life. If I could remember that I've only improved my running in my early 40's by doing it over and over again and take that with me to other things in life, then I could do a lot with that. And if I could take the fact that I also raise the bar on my running and then taper and then execute for the race to other things in my life, that would help as well.

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40 Days to Better: Day 1



There is a phrase that many people still recite in preparing for a wedding: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. I obviously had my own wedding many years

ago. And I don't expect any of my children to be having a wedding for many years from now. But the phrase rang true for me as I thought about what today means in terms of my first day of trying to be "better" over the 40 Days between yesterday and the Baltimore Running Festival Half Marathon. The picture to the right shows something old (my last pair of Brooks Ghost 5 shoes with the tread worn from 649 miles of running including this year's fateful Boston Marathon), my new running shoes (Brooks Ghost 6's--pair #1 with brand new treads), my tattoo (with its many

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borrowed scenes and themes), and something blue (circling back around to the Brooks 5's). I actually think that the folk saying for weddings gives me a lot to think about over the next few days in terms of being better.

For Day 1, let's begin with the easy thing--for the running--I was on the treadmill for two hours this morning--running a constant and flat 8 minute mile. I know that some of my running friends would probably consider this to be a fate worse than death. However, it allowed me to be sure of having access to a bathroom (although I didn't end up needing one), to monitor my water intake (I did drink more than 20 ounces that I could carry on my belt), and to not think too hard.

Now, for Day 1, let's work on some of the more challenging themes. Let's begin with something old.

The shoes are old. Runners tend to get attached to their shoes. I find that I (and at least some of my running friends) get even more attached to their shoes when they are used for a notable race. I've turned most of my old running shoes into walking shoes until they deteriorate. I am trying to think of what else I might do with this pair. I don't have any really good ideas but I am thinking.

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However, it is interesting to think about why we get attached to the shoes. Do the shoes really make a difference in how we run? To paraphrase a book I am reading on personal success called "What Got You Here Won't Get You There," am I successful at running because of the shoes I wear or (as one friend might have me believe) despite the shoes I wear. Should I stick with something because it isn't broken? Or should I try something new because it might be even better? What are the risks of trying something new? Injury? Not running as fast? How soon would I know? How long would it take to figure out? What would be the consequences if I guess wrong? Why is letting go emotionally and intellectually challenging?

And how does this carry over into the rest of my life? Are there work habits that are hard to let go even though trying something new might be better?

Are there parenting habits that kind of-sort of work but that another approach might be better?

Are there things about marriage that I could improve but might be scared to try anything different because what I am doing is at least sort of working?

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Are there things about marriage that I could improve but might be scared to try anything different because what I am doing is at least sort of working?

I could go on with a list of other things. But they all come back to the same question--why is it hard to let go, what is to be lost if I try something new, and how much might there be to gain?

I don't remember what I thought of the tradition of something old when I got married--in terms of the meaning it held. If I were giving advice now, I would say that it has to do with the timelessness of marriage (at least as it is intended, that you can bring something old forward with you) but also a sign of letting go and moving on from things in the past and starting anew. Have the something old, but be willing to leave it--no matter how strongly it pulls--after the wedding so that things can be fresh and new.

My running shoes show one thing--I do appreciate the timelessness of a good run, I still have a hard time letting go of things in the past that might be better left in the past, and I am not one to take many risks with trying new things (at least in some areas of my life). What will help to make me better after these 40 Days is grappling with the questions that arise--how can I carry the timelessness to other parts of my life, how can I learn to let go when necessary, and when is it a good thing to take risks. I certainly have in the past year (like the new job and a

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