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Body, Mind and Spirit **Olympic gospel**

By Todd Outcalt

Perhaps, like me, you watched your fair share of the Olympic Games this past summer. After all, living in such a sports-obsessed culture, it is easy to get caught up in the competition. However, if we look beneath the competition, we can often discover some amazing gospel.

Consider one of our United States athletes, Lopez Lomong. I shared Lopez's story with my congregation before the Olympics began, and his is truly a tale of God's grace. Growing up in the Darfur, Sudan, Lopez knew the love of his Christian family. He was only six years old when, one Sunday morning, during worship, armed men entered the church and took Lopez from his parents' arms. He was placed in a militia camp where, for some days, he existed by eating handfuls of sand flavored with sorghum. Weak and starving, Lopez was approached one evening by some older teenage boys who told him that they had discovered a hole in the fence and would try to escape that night. Lopez agreed to go with them.

They did escape, and for days Lopez was carried by the teens toward the border of Kenya. When they arrived, Lopez was given sanctuary by the Kenyan authorities, but the teens were sent back to Sudan. For ten years Lopez lived in a refugee camp, running every day around the perimeter of the fence. Naturally, he became a very good runner.



At the age of 16, Lopez was approached by a missionary who came to the refugee camp and announced that the U.S. government was going to allow 3,500 Sudanese boys to emigrate via adoption to America. Lopez was one of these lost boys of Sudan who found a new life in America.

In high school and college, Lopez continued to run, and as he told many of his coaches, he had already run a long way, had already overcome many obstacles. This past year, Lopez Lomong became the final U.S. runner in the 1,500 meter event.

Lopez explains his inspiration for running - he runs for God. But he also runs, taking every step, in remembering the teenage boys who carried him to safety across the Sudan. Certain that his parents, family and those teenage boys had been killed by Sudanese militia many years ago, Lopez arrived in Beijing eager to honor them, and to thank his adoptive parents, Rob and Barbara Rodgers of New York.

Amazingly enough, when the Olympic team arrived in Beijing, Lopez was elected to carry in the U.S. flag.

Athletes like Lopez are not only an inspiration, but also a living testimony to the grace of God - the creator God who helps us in our weaknesses and fears. There may be many people who, like Lopez, have run a long way and overcome many obstacles. Not a run, exactly, but a life that has been filled with pitfalls, doubts, and difficulties.

Lopez Lomong reminds us that faith can bear us up and carry us to wonderful places. We should be so faithful to follow in his footsteps.

Todd Outcalt serves as senior pastor of Calvary UMC in Brownsburg, Ind. His blog is toddotcalt.blogspot.com and some of his latest writing can be found in digital form on www.Amazon.com.



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