

A FAITHFUL FINISH





By Kari J. Rich

(Based on a true story)

It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. . . . He should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize (Mosiah 4:27).

Don't you just love running?" Olivia asked Ivy as the girls sat tying the laces of their shoes.

Ivy focused on her shoelaces and didn't answer. All the fifth graders were training for the school's mile race that would take place in a few weeks.

"Let's go!" Olivia jumped to her feet and ran to the starting line.

Ivy watched Olivia's athletic body glide across the lawn. Ivy stretched her legs out in front of her and reached to touch her toes, but her fingertips barely passed her knees. She sighed. "Why does running come so easily to everyone but me?" Ivy thought.

Ivy was tall for her age and broader than the other girls. Whenever she complained about her body, her parents would say, "You're strong and healthy, and that's what matters." Still, Ivy always felt awkward when she participated in sports.

"Are you coming, Ivy?" her teacher, Mrs. Barrett, called. Mrs. Barrett was always encouraging.

"Yes, I'm coming." Ivy walked to the starting line.

The race began. Ivy tried to push herself so she wouldn't be the last one to the finish line. But then she had to stop and walk to catch her breath. When she crossed the finish line last again, Mrs. Barrett told her she had done a good job. Ivy didn't think coming in last was a good job.

Breathing heavily, Ivy plopped down on the lawn. She thought about how embarrassing it would be to finish last in front of the whole school. If only she could finish before just one person. But then she realized that even if she beat one person, someone else would feel as bad as she had. Maybe she needed a different goal. Ivy decided that what she really wanted was to run the whole race without stopping to walk. Even if she

finished last, she wanted to finish the race running.

Each day at practice Ivy tried not to think about the kids ahead of her. She focused on finding a pace she could keep up for the whole race. It felt good to work toward a goal

that wasn't measured against anyone else. As the weeks passed, Ivy walked less and less until one day she didn't walk at all. She *ran* across the finish line. She was last, but that didn't matter.

"Good job, Ivy!" Mrs. Barrett said, like always. Then she added, "I saw that you ran the whole way today."

Ivy grinned. "Yes! That was my goal!"

The day of the official race came. Running at her own pace, Ivy crossed the finish line in last place. Afterward, medals were given to the top finishers. Ivy cheered for her classmates, happy for them and satisfied with her own accomplishment.

Then Mrs. Barrett held up a trophy with a star on it. "I have watched Ivy for several weeks during training," Mrs. Barrett said. "She is not a fast runner. But Ivy set a goal for herself and worked consistently to achieve it. I've appreciated her determination as she worked to win a race that was only with herself, and for that I would like to present to her this trophy—the Spirit Award."

Mrs. Barrett handed Ivy the trophy. The audience cheered.

Ivy could hardly believe it. She had been so worried about finishing last in front of everyone, but now they were cheering for her! She realized that by setting a worthy goal and working to achieve it, she could finish last and still win. ♦

"Be strong and of a good courage' (Joshua 1:9) and never, never, never give up!"¹

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