

# Finishing well

By Dean Merrill

I got depressed reading a prominent magazine a few months ago as it featured an all-star revue of cover personalities from its past 25 years. While I enjoyed reading about Korean pastor David Yonggi Cho, YWAM founder Loren Cunningham and the musical Winans, I noticed that a full one-fourth of the others had business foul-ups, broken marriages and other indiscretions. One-time heroes had plunged toward the shadows.

The apostle Paul went to special pains to make sure that "after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27, NIV). Whether we preach, teach, sing, manage or counsel, the need for consistency is great, because we are being watched. Even quiet church members who never pick up a microphone are eyed by younger members. Newly married couples get watched by teen-agers, who in turn are role models to grade schoolers.

And here is the bedeviling thing: We cannot assume that just because we start out well in our walk with God, we will finish well. Why is it that

we can do so well for a good stretch and then start to lose our grip?

King Joash in the Old Testament was a dynamic young leader for God. He sparked a fund-raising campaign to restore the Lord's temple and put worship

back on a proper footing. The entire nation was inspired by his godly example.

But then his mentor, Jehoida the priest (also his uncle), passed away — and Joash, now in midlife, began to tinker with other gods. The Lord sent prophets to warn him, ultimately sending Joash's own cousin, whom he totally rebuffed. "By order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's temple. King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoida had shown him but killed his son, who

## Whether we preach, teach, sing, manage or counsel, the need for consistency is great, because we are being watched.

said as he lay dying, 'May the Lord see this and call you to account' " (2 Chronicles 24:21,22). Within a year, Joash himself perished at the hands of a palace coup.

His son who succeeded him, Amaziah, won a battle by following the advice of a godly prophet, brought home great amounts of plunder — and then opted to worship the gods of the people he had just defeated. How dumb is that?

He then went out to fight with another king, who whipped Amaziah's army badly. "From the time that Amaziah turned away from following the Lord," says 2 Chronicles 25:27, "they conspired against him in Jerusalem and he fled to Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him there."

Like father, like son.

When I read these stories, I cry, "O God, I want to finish strong. Don't let me ever start leaning on my own bright ideas and pulling away from Your wisdom. When my funeral comes around, let there be nothing in my biography that requires glossing over."

I worry sometimes about my generation, now in our mid-years, with adequate money and lots of options. It's all too easy to view this as a time to kick back, relax, stop giving — to eat, drink and be merry. In all too many churches, the sentiment is, "Let the younger people do the teaching, the serving — I paid my dues, now I get to rest and just coast."

Idleness is the devil's opportunity. The Bible doesn't even recognize the word *retire*. Like a track runner, it only knows to push strong toward the finish line — fighting the good fight,

finishing the race, keeping the faith.

Do you want to be like Noah, who followed God's directives throughout the entire Flood, only to humiliate himself at the end of his life with a drinking problem?

Do you want to be like Gideon, who won a mighty victory over the Midianites, but wound up shaping an idol of gold that restarted the apostasy he had just conquered?

Do you want to be like Hezekiah, who stood up to the Assyrian invaders, but then in his final years gave away vital information to the curious Babylonian visitors?

What would it take to make you turn back? Getting old? Getting sick? Getting ridiculed by your secular peers? Watching your favorite preacher fall into sin?

Let us resolve in our hearts and minds that, come what may, we will finish strong for God. ■

Dean Merrill is a member of Living Springs Worship Centre (Assemblies of God), Colorado Springs, Colo., and is vice president and publisher of International Bible Society.

