

For the Joy Set Before Us

By Jim Davis

In the fall of 1991, Big Earl Campbell was inducted into football's Hall of Fame. That season I attended the Kansas City Chiefs vs. Houston Oilers game in the Astrodome. At halftime there was to be a ceremony of recognition acknowledging Earl Campbell's induction into the Hall of Fame.

During the pre-game and whenever time allowed highlights of Campbell's career were shown on the big screens in the Astrodome. Probably no one has ever compared to his unusual abilities on the football field. First, there would be a clip of him running through a group of 300 pound linemen or over a 300 pound lineman. Then there would be a clip of him outrunning an entire speedy defensive backfield. Then there would be a clip where he first ran over a 300 pound lineman and then outran the speedy defensive backfield.

The screen revealed the proof that Earl Campbell truly belongs in the Hall of Fame. At halftime he made his trek out to the center of the field for the presentation. There he was—dressed in blue jeans, dress shirt, and sports coat and moving at breakneck ...er I mean turtleneck speed. It was the same rate of speed that he always took in the interim between the completion of a play and huddle. The astrodome was full. The crowd rose in a standing ovation, yelling and clapping and making noise.

Earl was receiving deserved recognition for a job well done. The Bible speaks of this as honor or glory. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Each of us is running a race. God has set before us the joy and satisfaction of glory. There is a great cloud of witnesses, a cloud much greater than what Earl Campbell stood before at the Astrodome. And yes, there will be highlights. You see the moment we trust in Christ and receive forgiveness for our sins we are drafted onto the winning team. Every time we make a decision to live by faith according to the truth in the Bible we make the big play.

It is not easy to go helmet to helmet with a 300 pound lineman. It is not easy to face certain situations in life and do the right thing. But there is glory when we hit the opponent hard and fast with unyielding determination. Ultimately, we will have the victory because we already know we are on the winning team.

Here are just a few tips from the verse above that will help us attain the joy set before us. **Lay aside the things that encumber us.** If we are going to Africa we do not pack clothes suited for the Antarctic. The reason is obvious. For where we are going and what we will be doing we do not need the extra clothes because they would encumber us. In the same way if our goal is to become like Christ, then watching six hours of television a day will only encumber us. Excessive amounts of time spent attaining wealth or material things will encumber us. Excessive pursuit of leisure or pleasure will encumber us. We must avoid those things that will distract us from the goal. Remember that the pleasure of temporary things will not compare to the joy that God has set before us.

Lay aside the sin that entangles us. Sin is one step further than the things that encumber us. To be encumbered is to be hindered or slowed in the race. Sin entangles and takes us out of the race. Remember that God's goal for your life is to conform you to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

I leave you with Paul's admonition. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).