

Racing Through Life ... Backwards

Recently, I unleashed my “inner child” and participated in our Evangelical Free Church’s (Grace Emmanuel’s) AWANA Grand Prix. Essentially a soapbox derby in miniature, each contestant gets a block of wood, axles, wheels and some decals and builds a racecar. AWANA provides rules and specs and, although you must be creative, your “car” must hew to their standards of size and weight. Once built, you turn your creation in and, if it qualifies, they hold it until race day.

I’m a DIY sort of guy and built my own soapbox racers back in my youth, so I thought I’d “give it a spin” and create a car. Keeping it simple, I focused on smooth-rolling wheels, proper height clearance and proper wheel width. I figured, with my technical ability, I’d have a winner and I even boasted a little. Race day came and things worked out far differently than I anticipated.



The track had a long “hill” with 4 starting gates. The racers selected their color (red, blue, green, or yellow) and, with the timers set to zero, the pins retracted and off they went! A long straightaway followed the hill, leading to the finish line, where the timers registered the elapsed times. After that, a “slowdown” ramp kept the cars from going off the end of the track.

Starting with the younger kids and moving up in age, the speeds at which the cars ran impressed me. Some achieved low 3-second times, with a few cracking the 3-second mark into high 2-second runs. Finally, it came time for the adults. Because I got my car in first (don’t know how that happened!), I ran the first heat against one

of the church ladies. Now, I kept the design somewhat blocky, since I didn’t figure aerodynamics would play a part. I tapered the rear, as they did at the dawn of automotive racing, making it look a bit like the “Blitzen Benz,” or Barney Oldfield’s “Golden Submarine.” The pins dropped and the 2 cars sped down the incline onto the long straightaway and, to my utter chagrin, both cars stopped short of the finish line by 2 inches! Oh, no! The car went from a “Golden Submarine” imitation to “The Golden Snail!” Eight-year-olds turned in blazing times and my creation stopped short of completing the race! The timers decided on a second run, so I went from the yellow track to the green one. I held out little hope that things would be different, but my car beat out my opponent by crossing the finish line (hers didn’t). My hopes dashed for any sort of showing, I awaited my “second heat” and that’s when things changed remarkably.

Desperate, I decided to turn the car backwards. *What have I got to lose?* I thought. The pins dropped and, to my amazement, I won, turning in a high, 3-second time! OMG! Who knew? Whoopee! “The Golden Snail” ran two more heats, up against some pretty slick-looking cars (one was a masterpiece!) and edged them both out! I won the division, the whole enchilada, Numero Uno! To say it shocked me would be an understatement. My humble block of wood proved to be a winner!!!



Pondering the reason for the night-and-day change, I reasoned that, because I originally had most of the weight in the front, reversing that placed it in the rear and that made the car run faster. Who knows? Perhaps aerodynamics *did* play a part in the faster times, since the pointy stern had become the pointy nose.



In a different realm, when someone comes to salvation in Jesus, the Christ, he or she believes and repents. Repent is a Greek-derived word that means “to change direction.” Similar to what I did in reversing my car, when we reverse the path we previously followed, we find that our new course after salvation makes our lives better. Oh, we still face opposition and trials, but much of the inner turmoil leaves us and we discover that our “Designer” knows better in which direction to guide us in running our course.

Some people put a lot of weight in the concept of “thinking outside the box” to solve problems. That’s what I did on race day when I turned my car around ... and what I did 56 years ago, when I believed in Jesus, repented of my former course and turned my life around, allowing Him to “do the driving.”

If you want to win in this life, believe in Jesus and change direction.