

Case Study #2

Is There Anything I Can Do?

The smell of popcorn drifted from the bleachers and the voices of excited runners and coaches echoed off the walls. It was the first indoor track meet of the season and I was warming up behind the bleachers. As I leaned over and touched the toes of my shoes, I heard a familiar voice call out: “Heitger!”

I turned around.

It was Derek Butler. Derek was a senior from Waithorn High, a rival high school across town. I had run against him for the past two years in both track and cross-country. He always pushed me to give it my all. Derek impressed me both on and off the track. Besides being an awesome runner, he was also a great sport; he was always the first person to congratulate the winner of each race.

“Hey Butler!” I yelled back, “How’s it goin’?”

“It’s all good,” he said, “Mind if I stretch with you?”

“Knock yourself out,” I said as I leaned down to touch my toes again. I glanced over at Derek and couldn’t help noticing his feet. He was wearing a tatty old pair of tennis shoes full of holes and topped with broken laces.

He’d had decent shoes last year, I thought. What’s the deal?

A few minutes later, the announcer called our race. Derek and I lined up next to each other, wished each other luck, and then—pow!—the gun fired.

Almost immediately, both our strides and our breathing were in unison. Beads of sweat rolled down my face as Derek and I stayed within spitting distance throughout most of the race. But in the final stretch, I kicked it into high gear, pulled away from the pack, and won the race; Derek came in fourth.

“Nice job, man,” Derek said as we caught our breaths at the finish line.

“Thanks! You, too,” I said.

I grabbed a towel and wiped the sweat from my face and neck.

“You should think of getting yourself some track shoes,” I said, motioning down to his feet. “Those things have seen better days,”

Derek smiled and nodded.

“I know. My coach set me up with a pair last year but I outgrew them.”

“I’ll bet with the right shoes, you could shave 15 seconds off your time.” I said.

“Yeah,” he said with a shrug. “I just don’t have the cash right now.”

1. What is the problem?
2. What are the possible solutions?
3. What does Scripture Teach?

Over the next month, I ran against Derek in several more meets, and each time he showed up in that same old pair of shoes. So one day I approached Derek's coach to ask if he could please buy Derek another pair.

He said the athletic department didn't have the funds for it this year.

"I feel bad," his coach said. "Butler's a good kid. He holds down two jobs to help support his family. In fact, he often misses practice because of his job obligations, but I let it slide because he's working to put food on the table."

I couldn't believe Derek had such a rough situation. I had no idea. "What size shoe does he wear?" I asked.

Coach looked at me funny.

"Eleven," he said. "Why?"

"Just curious," I answered.

I decided that I was going to put my next few paychecks toward something more important than fast food and going on dates—something that I knew, as a runner, I couldn't live without.

A couple of weeks later I showed up at Derek's school with a shoebox in hand.

"Heitger!" Derek said with a surprised look on his face. "What are you doing here?"

I handed him the box.

"I wanted to bring you these," I said. "I think they'll make a big difference in your time."

Derek lifted the lid and his mouth dropped open. "I can't take these shoes," Derek said. "It wouldn't be fair."

"How do you figure that?" I asked. "The way I see it, I've had a unfair advantage this entire season. This just evens the playing field."

"Hey, man, I can't believe you did this! Thanks! But if I wear these, I might beat you!" he said.

"You can try!" I answered. "I want you to bring it!" Derek gave me a sly grin.

"You know I will."

"I'm counting on it," I said.

With that new pair of shoes on his feet, Derek tore up the track. And since we always ran side-by-side, we were both running harder and faster. I definitely had to kick it into a higher gear in order to win the race. But since I thrived on competition, feeling Derek just seconds behind me gave me a huge adrenaline rush.

When the distant meet rolled around, we found ourselves neck-and-neck on the tracks. I'd gain a few feet and he'd inch back to me. Then he'd pull ahead and I'd make up the distance. In the final straight-away, I gave it my all until the final 50 yards when I lost all steam. Derek crossed the finish line three seconds before me.

As soon as the race was over, Derek leaned toward me and said quietly, "I feel kinda guilty about this."

"You shouldn't!" I said, giving him a high-five. "You ran a great race, man!"

"With your help," he said.

This is what I admired about Derek. I never one heard him gripe about losing, and when he won, he was reluctant to even give himself credit. Seeing the smile on Derek's face was well worth the cost of those shoes. And his humble attitude made his win even sweeter.

Who says good guys finish last?

Provoke to Love and Good Works.

Now What?

- What did Les have to gain by giving Derek a new pair of shoes? What did he have to lose?
- Read Philippians 2:3-5. How did both guys demonstrate the Christian principles found in this passage?
- Think about a Derek in your own life. How could you reach out to that person in the same way Les reached out to Derek?
- Memorize Hebrews 10:24: "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works"