

CHRISTINE CAINE



UNSTOPPABLE

RUNNING THE RACE
YOU WERE BORN TO WIN

ZONDERVAN

Unstoppable

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CHAPTER 1

THE DIVINE RELAY

I grabbed Nick's hand and, for what must have been the hundredth time, said, "I can't believe we're here at the Olympics! The Olympics, Nick! Isn't it awesome?"

He could barely hear me above the roar of the crowd, but he didn't need to. He could read not only my lips but the glow on my face and could feel the electricity in the air.

"Awesome!" he shouted back, squeezing my hand.

We took in the view together — the massive stadium filled with light and color and motion and 110,000 spectators, the buzz of conversations in who knew how many languages, the red track below surrounding the vibrant green and stunning yellow infield, and the runners taking their positions.

The year was 2000 — Saturday, September 30. The place, Sydney, in my homeland of Australia. I'd celebrated my thirty-fourth birthday a week before, and being here felt like the best birthday gift of my life. I was mesmerized by the sheer size of this state-of-the-art stadium. It made me feel so tiny, a speck in this massive crowd, yet I felt connected, as if being here bonded me to

every Olympic athlete and every spectator since the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece.

Though I'm Australian by birth, Greek blood runs through my veins. I am Greek through and through. The image of the five interlocking Olympic rings fluttering on the Olympic flags above us and plastered all over Sydney — in fact, all over the world — made my heart swell and my chin lift at the thought of the ancient Greek tradition that had inspired all these nations to join together in promoting a peaceful and better world through sportsmanship, friendship, solidarity, and fair play. You got it — I was bedazzled, sold out, and on fire with Olympic spirit!

I love all things sport and always have. I competed as a runner in high school, and running is still my favorite workout. As a spectator, I've always been partial to the 4 x 100-meter relay, and the women's relay in particular. It seemed too good to believe that my husband, Nick, and I were about to watch this very race in person. Eight countries were competing in the final race for gold. I was cheering for the USA team to take the medal.

THE LEGACY

Before the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the USA women's 4 x 100-meter relay team had won the gold medal nine times out of sixteen Olympics. Coming into this race, they were the reigning Olympic champions, having won the gold in 1996. As they prepared to carry on that legacy, I was ready to cheer them on to victory.

Nick and I watched the runners moving onto the track, four per team. The energy of the crowd surged as the teams were announced and cameras zoomed in on the runners' faces, magnifying them on the massive screen that seemed to float in the evening sky. White lines marked the three exchange zones, each 20 meters in length, in every lane. The first runner, the starter, would cover about 100 meters and enter the first exchange zone

to meet the second runner, who would already be running, arm stretched out behind, hand open, ready to receive the baton that had to be handed off within that 20-meter exchange zone. Runner two would carry the baton to the second exchange zone and hand off the baton to runner three, who in turn would run about 100 meters, handing off the baton to the anchor, who would carry it across the finish. The entire race would be only one lap, 400 meters, and take less than one minute.

The runners took their positions — starters at their staggered starting blocks, the second and third runners and the anchors at their places in their respective exchange zones. The raucous noise of thousands of people suddenly quieted. A hush fell over the crowd. The tension was palpable. I held my breath, awaiting the start gun.

The shot rang out and they were off. The first USA handoff was smooth, and my screaming cheers were lost in the roar around me as the US team took the lead. But in the next exchange zone, the second runner struggled to get the baton into the third runner's hand. My heart fell. That muffed handoff had cost precious milliseconds and perhaps the race, but I hoped the third and fourth runners could make up for it.

The seconds flew by — 41.95 seconds to be exact. That's how long it took for Bahama to win the gold. Jamaica was a mere .18 seconds behind, followed by the USA, at 42.20 seconds, trailing the winning team by .25 seconds.¹

"Nick, they should have won!" I cried in disbelief. "How did this happen?" He didn't need to answer. I'd seen it with my own eyes. It had happened in the fraction of a second in the second handoff, when precious time was lost. I watched the screen replay the final seconds at the finish line. Exhilaration on the face of the Bahamian anchor, disbelief on the face of the American. I thought my heart would break for her and her team. All the years of practice, the discipline, the single-minded focus that had led up to this

moment, and the gold was gone. One sloppy exchange and the USA championship was relinquished.

“At least they medaled,” Nick said, trying to comfort me. “They won the bronze.”

I scowled back at him. Those women hadn’t come for the bronze. They’d come for the gold. They were running to *win*. Now they’d need to wait four years to win back the gold.



Four years passed.

In a hotel room somewhere in the US, on August 27, Nick and I sat in front of a television, captivated by scenes of the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece. My Greek pride swelled at the stunning pageantry of the opening ceremonies, and I drank in the history and imagery of every broadcast. My eyes were glued to the screen every available moment, but never was my anticipation higher than when Team USA — LaTasha Colander, Lauryn Williams, Marion Jones, and Angela Williams — took their places for the first round of the qualifying heats of the women’s 4 x 100 relay.

Sixteen teams were competing in the two-heat qualifying round. Eight teams would win their place in the final race. The four American women were considered the four fastest runners on the field. Poor Nick was nearly deaf from my screams of joy when they proved themselves to be the fastest and strongest team in the first heat that day: 41.67 seconds!

“Nick, they were faster than the winning team in 2000. Tomorrow, the gold is theirs for sure, right?”

The next day, nothing could have kept me away from watching the finals, the medal race. The four American women took their positions, muscles swelling, faces alive with focus and concentration. I couldn’t wait to watch them win, poetry in motion, precision and power in every move. When Marion Jones, the second runner, received her baton and accelerated, I knew nothing would

stop this incredible team. She approached Lauryn Williams for the second exchange of the baton. But my heart dropped.

“No!” I screamed, jumping to my feet. “No way!”

I still don’t know exactly what went wrong. Had Lauryn started too early, too fast? Was Marion too far behind? But no matter which of them was at fault, their timing was off. When that baton finally passed from Marion’s forward thrusting arm to Lauryn’s back-stretched hand, they had run *out* of the exchange zone. The handoff came too late.

I was stunned. But they were the fastest! They were the strongest! They had the lead! They were the best!

It didn’t matter. The 20-meter exchange zone is clearly marked. The passing of the baton must take place within that zone or the team is out of the race. Not only did they miss the gold, they were disqualified. Stopped in their tracks. Not even a *bronze* medal. Disbelieving, I watched them stop running and walk off the track. Once again, they were undone in the exchange zone.

“How could this happen?” I cried.

Nick was a wise enough husband not to offer a response. (Lesson learned four years earlier.)



Fast-forward to Beijing in 2008, the semifinals — Thursday, August 21. This year, Nick and I, again traveling in ministry, watched from a cottage in the town of Ulverston, Cumbria, England. Exchange one — perfect! Exchange two — ideal! Whew! I was on my feet, screaming. Leading the race, Torri Edwards reached forward for that final exchange to Lauryn Williams . . .

Can you feel the tension? I suspect that Nick had the paramedics on hold this time, just in case.

What happened next is still seared in my memory — the image of that baton slipping from Lauryn Williams’s grasp and hitting the track. She dropped the baton! Dropped it! And with it the

hopes and dreams of every fan of Team USA. Disqualified in the semifinals! For the first time in forty-eight years,² Team USA wouldn't even run in the final medal race. My jaw dropped. I was speechless, which, if you ask Nick, was a miracle in itself.

THE GAMES GO ON AND ON AND ON . . .

I confess. By the time of the London 2012 games, twelve years since I'd witnessed that first disappointing loss, I was afraid to watch the women's 4 x 100 relay.

Not that I was going to let that stop me, of course. I assumed it was my love of the games, my love of the sport that kept drawing me back to watch the games, but God had another reason for instilling within me a passion for the relay race. He had something important he wanted me to see.

This time, I was in America with Nick and our girls. We joined the 219.4 million Americans tuning in to the NBC coverage, making the 2012 Olympic Games the most watched event in US TV history. On Friday, August 10, 2012, eight countries — thirty-two runners — once again took their places. Team USA was in lane 7, and my heart, though pounding in trepidation, was right there with them.

I knew that the USA runners were at the top of their game. Tianna Madison, Allyson Felix, Bianca Knight, and Carmelita Jeter had nailed the qualifying round at the stunning speed of 41.64 seconds.³ These runners were brilliant! But this time I knew that did not mean victory was secure. I'd witnessed the best of the best, the fastest of the fast, the most powerful, and the favored lose the race three times before. Sydney in 2000. Athens in 2004. Beijing in 2008. Bitter experience had taught me a few things:

- Having the fastest runner doesn't necessarily win the race.
- Having the fastest team doesn't necessarily win the race.

- Having the most experienced or the most dedicated runners doesn't necessarily win the race.
- Having the reigning champions or the contenders determined to reclaim their championship doesn't necessarily win the race.

None of these things will win the race unless the baton is safely passed in each and every exchange zone and carried first across the finish line. If it isn't, the entire team loses.

In a relay, everything hinges on what happens in the exchange zone.

And that's when it hit me — this lesson from God twelve years in the making.

I wasn't just watching an Olympic race. I was seeing a crystal-clear representation of how the church must work and what happens when it doesn't. As those athletes moved into position in London in 2012, I was seeing the church lined up in lanes all over the globe, batons in hand, running the race that matters most in this world — *the divine relay!*

This divine relay is filled with exchange zones. If the baton of faith passes fluidly from person to person, from generation to generation, we speed unstoppable toward the finish line. But if the exchange is fumbled, the whole team, the whole church, suffers.

By this time in my life, I'd been traveling across the globe for years doing ministry. Nick and I had been serving the local church and leaders through Equip & Empower Ministries and then through The A21 Campaign — an organization we founded in 2008 dedicated to abolishing injustice in the twenty-first century, focused on stopping human trafficking. Through Equip & Empower, as well as The A21 Campaign, I was learning just how important it is to get the “exchange zone” right to ensure that no runners stop running and walk off the field, but that every runner becomes unstoppable in their dedication to carry their baton of faith to the next runner.

I was in one of those lanes myself. I'd been running the race God called me to run. I'd been handed quite a few batons along the way and had released many, some smoothly, some not so well. I had many batons I needed to deliver to the next runners. How could I do it with excellence? What would keep me, or the runners after me, from fumbling or dropping or even stopping the passing of their batons from one to another?

I thought of my A21 team working in dangerous places around the world to fight human trafficking. Was I training them to run well, to receive and hand off so that the whole team could win and the kingdom of God could move forward? I thought of believers I'd met around the world who were running well and others who'd dropped their batons or walked out of the race completely.

The divine relay is tough. The track is treacherous. There are so many ways to mangle the exchange zones, to overshoot, to be knocked off the track, to drop the baton, to stop running. The church needs champion runners who never give up, who persevere no matter what they encounter, who run to win — unstoppable, no matter the cost.

As the camera scanned the passionate crowd that filled the Olympic stadium that day, Hebrews 12:1–2 flew into my mind:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

HEBREWS 12:1–2

The first verse describes a great cloud of witnesses. I considered the millions of people watching the 2012 games all over the globe. Did this compare with “a great cloud of witnesses”?

Not hardly.

Not compared to eternity! Not compared to the countless believers who have come before us and who will come after us. This was but a glimpse, a shadow, of how great God's cloud of witnesses really is. I may be passionate about sports, about running, about the Olympic Games, but my passion for those things pales in comparison with the one thing I am most passionate about — the cause of Jesus Christ. The combined passion of all those Olympic witnesses, the passion for this race, these games, was but a passing whisper compared to the passion for us and for our salvation that took Jesus on our behalf to the cross, to the grave, and to the resurrected life. Now that is passion!

It is that passion that calls us to run — unstoppable — the race that God Almighty has marked out for us.



With those thoughts swirling in my mind, I turned my focus back to the London 2012 games unfolding before me. Team USA was in lane 7.

The start was brilliant. It was clear by the end of the first exchange that both Jamaica and the USA teams had the speed to take the race. Coming out of the second exchange, the USA team was firmly in the lead.

And then the magic began.

The USA lead grew. And it grew more. The third exchange was perfect, and the crowd was going wild, sensing that something monumental was happening. The USA team was flying ahead. Eyes flew from the runners to the clock and back again. Barring some catastrophe, the question was no longer *who* would win. The question now was this: Would the USA beat the world record?

Like the crowd in the stadium, Nick and I and the girls were on our feet cheering them on.

And we watched it happen. Team USA sailed across the finish line in a world-record-smashing 40.82 seconds!

The stadium exploded in uproarious celebration. I was jumping so high my daughters thought I would hit the ceiling.

We'd not only seen four amazing individual runners set the world's fastest speed for this race, but we'd also seen a unified team pass the baton with perfect precision and carry it first across the finish line faster than any team in history! And here is a shocking statistic: That unified team of four completed their 400 meters a full 6.78 seconds faster than the individual women's world record for the 400-meter dash. That record is held by Marita Koch of East Germany at 47.60 seconds.⁴ Yes, four champion runners collaborating in the relay are faster than a lone champion runner. That's the power of a team.

Perfect collaboration, each runner doing her personal best, running in sync, reaching, receiving, releasing, and pressing on with every ounce of strength she had to give. And when the anchor runner crossed the finish line, she carried not only the baton — she carried her entire team, her entire nation, to the gold.

I love the quote from Tianna Madison, the USA starter that day. "I knew that the Olympic record was coming down," she said. "I just knew that if we had clean baton passes that we would challenge the world record. Smash it like we did? I had no idea. But I knew it was in us."

Wow. Did you catch her phrase "if we had clean baton passes"? It shows exactly what we've been discussing. Everything hinges on what happens in the exchange zone. There we receive the baton, and there we release what is no longer ours to carry so the next runners can play their part. Miss, drop, or fumble the exchange, and the whole team suffers. But if we receive and release the right baton at the right time, victory at the finish line awaits.

Tianna was confident that if her team got the exchange right, they'd win the race and beat the world record. "I knew it was in us," she declared.

I know it's "in us" to do the same! We too can be unstoppable as we run our part in the divine relay.

Why? Because God is *in* us. God is *for* us. And that is what makes us unstoppable. He tells us so in the book of Romans:

Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

ROMANS 8:30–31

Our great God has not left us on our own to muddle through our spiritual lives — our spiritual exchange zones — untrained. His Word and his story, written into you and me and into the lives of all believers the world over, are filled with the wisdom to train us to successfully master our exchange zones and win the race.

The race marked out for *us*.

The race marked out for *you*.

YOUR RACE

Uh-oh. It just got personal, didn't it?

God works that way.

Maybe you are just like me. I settled in to watch a great Olympic race, and the next thing I knew, *WHAM*. All the lights and cameras and eyeballs seemed to swivel from the track to focus squarely on me — on *my* race, *my* baton, *my* exchange zones. And now, in the pages of this book, they focus on you. *Your* race. *Your* baton. *Your* exchange zones.

If you are tempted to question your role in this race out of fear, a sense of inadequacy, or the impression that you've already put in your time and it's someone else's race now, think again.

Are you not an athlete? It doesn't matter.

Are you still warming up? Get moving! The race has already begun.

God has plucked you out of eternity, positioned you in time, and given you gifts and talents to serve him in *this* generation. Your race is now. This is your time in history. You've been handed the baton of faith and entrusted to carry it forward as you run your part in God's divine relay.

Unlike the Olympic Games, the race we run — this divine relay — isn't limited to only a few finalists with millions of spectators. In the divine relay, *every* believer is called to run, and the only spectators are those already in heaven's grandstand. Our race isn't confined to a 400-meter track; it covers all the earth. It started before we got here and will continue after we are gone, so jump in and grasp your baton and run.

Or perhaps you are already running your race and loving it, like I am. Then you know the joys and the challenges of refining your run, growing stronger, and perfecting the handoff.

Have you run out of steam? Are you winded or limping? Don't give up. Keep moving forward.

Have you dropped your baton? Don't walk off the field! You have not been disqualified. Your race isn't over yet.

Have you stumbled or fallen? Have you hit daunting obstacles? Do not stop! Why? Because the Christian life isn't a one-person race. It's a relay. You are not alone; you're part of a team assembled by our unstoppable God to achieve his eternal purposes.

No matter where you are in the race at this point, God is committed to grow you into a champion. You are never limited to your own strength and power. The strength and power of our everlasting God is ready to be unleashed in you!

Come with me through these pages to discover how you can be unstoppable as you master the exchange zone and win the race you were born to win. For we serve an unstoppable God who empowers every believer — that means *you* — with his Holy Spirit.

There is one thing you are responsible for. Only one thing matters: *Run the race marked out for you.* Run forward toward the

finish line with every ounce of strength in you and with your eyes fixed on Jesus, so that you too can one day say:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7

CHAPTER 2

IMPOSSIBLE IS GOD'S STARTING POINT

The musical tones of Kalli's ringing cell phone startled her awake at 3:00 a.m.

"Hello. A21. This is Kalli."

"I have escaped from the house! I ran away!" the frantic voice of a young woman cried into the phone. "I am hiding. Please come and get me!"

The young woman's broken Greek told Kalli that this victim, like most of the trafficked girls Kalli worked with through The A21 Campaign, had been brought to Kalli's town of Thessaloniki, Greece, from another country. From the sound of her accent, Kalli thought the young woman was likely from Eastern Europe.

"We will help you," Kalli assured her in soothing tones. "What is your name? Where are you?"

"Katja. I am Katja. Come get me fast, please. They must know by now that I am gone and if they find me, they will kill me. They will *kill* me!" The panic in Katja's voice had Kalli's heart racing.

What horrors has this girl been through? God, help me help her, Kalli silently prayed as she thought through how to calm the girl.

“I remember you, Katja,” Kalli said, willing her voice to be calm. “We met just two days ago, right? I am so glad you kept my number. I will call my team and get someone to you right away. We will keep you safe. Take a deep breath and tell me where you are.”

Katja described her location. It sounded as if she was well hidden at the moment, and she saw no evidence that the traffickers were nearby.

“Lord, hide Katja in the shelter of your wings until we arrive,” Kalli prayed aloud, hoping the prayer might calm both of them. This wasn’t the first time Kalli had received a panicked call from a young woman whose life was in danger; her emotions always spun wildly at the realization that a human life was at stake — and that she, Kalli, had a part to play in saving it.

“Katja, my team will come right away. But first I must hang up to call them. Can I do that? I will call you back within minutes. Is it okay to call you back at this number? Will you be able to safely answer it?”

There was a pause.

Kalli knew from experience that Katja would fear she was being deceived. Each of the rescued girls found it hard to trust. Who could blame them? Trust had brought most of them to Greece, and that trust had been betrayed. Many of the girls had been promised jobs or education by people they trusted, people they believed to be friends or legitimate recruiters. Most had been told that if they left their homes, paid their money, and traveled with these recruiters to Greece, jobs and other opportunities awaited them. Yet on their arrival, their papers had been taken from them and they’d been brutally beaten and repeatedly raped, threatened with death or the deaths of their families back home, and imprisoned by well-organized traffickers who forced them into prostitution.

“How do I know,” Katja’s now suspicious voice asked the question Kalli anticipated, “that you will come and take me to safety? How do I know you will not sell me?”

“Katja, you can trust me. I am part of A21. This is what we do. We help girls like you. You met me. You must have trusted me enough to call. Trust me now. Let me hang up and send someone to get you, and I will call you back and help bring you to safety. I promise.”

“Yes. But please hurry.” Katja hung up.

Kalli felt the weight of the responsibility she now carried. *Lord, you’ve brought Katja this far. Help us reach her in time!* Kalli prayed, as her trembling fingers dialed the team member who would work with the authorities and make this dangerous drive.

Kalli was running her race, passionately doing her part on the front lines of a brutal war waged by organized crime.

She’d been running it for over three years. This day, God had awakened her at 3:00 a.m. to hand her a new baton — the responsibility to do her part to save Katja’s life. Kalli was on point. She was in the exchange zone, already running, reaching with hand outstretched, when that baton landed in her hand. Now she had to run with it.

Kalli was ready. But she remembered well when she hadn’t felt ready at all. Three years earlier, Kalli thought it was impossible for her to make a difference in the daunting evil of human trafficking. But this day, knowing that helping Katja meant endangering her own life and the lives of her teammates, Kalli was ready to run this leg of the race marked out for her.

ARE YOU READY TO RUN?

Ready is a tricky word when it comes to following Jesus and doing his will. Why? Because there is a huge difference between *feeling* ready and actually *being* ready.

Did Moses feel ready to return to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let his people go? No. It seemed an impossible mission. Did Gideon feel ready to go strike down the Midianites and save Israel? No. Did Jeremiah feel ready to be a prophet to the nations? No. Did young Mary, a virgin teenager, feel ready to carry the Son of God in her womb? No. God's Word records the accounts of their questions, protests, reservations, and pleas demonstrating that they didn't feel ready.⁵

In fact, we can go through the Bible page by page and find person after person who didn't *feel* ready to do what God called them to do. But God didn't ask them whether they *felt* ready. He decided they *were* ready. Then he called them and told them what to do. Those we now call heroes of the faith are the ones who obeyed God's call even when they did not feel ready.

God knew he had prepared them. He knew he would provide whatever they needed. He knew what he was going to accomplish through them even though his plans seemed impossible by human standards. So he called them and sent them. We can be certain of this: when God calls us and sends us, we *are* ready, whether we feel we are or not.

How ready are you to join the race and live in the exchange zone, arm outstretched in anticipation of the next baton God has for you?

Don't misunderstand. I'm not asking whether you're ready to fight human trafficking. That's Kalli's lane and mine. Your lane, your baton, may be entirely different. You may be called to care for an aging parent, or to steer a troubled teen through a tumultuous time, or to lead your family through a financial crisis. You may see the need to organize a local food pantry. Perhaps a neighbor is caught in an abusive relationship and needs your help, or a spouse is suffering from depression, or the local elementary school has appealed for after-school mentors for children who have no one at home to read to them or help them with their homework. Maybe

you've become increasingly aware, during your daily commute, of the homeless on the streets of your city, or you feel an inner nudge to volunteer for the youth ministry at your church. Or maybe you went to visit a loved one in prison and saw the loneliness and hopelessness of those who had no visitors. Perhaps your spouse is being transferred to another city and you face the unwelcome need to relocate your family. Is there a pressing social issue you feel that your company, or your church, should be addressing? Do you sense a growing desire to invest less of your time in the career you've been developing for decades and more of your time in compassionate work with those who don't even have a job, much less a career?

The point is, God's call comes to each of us in every age and stage of life. He calls us to step out of our comfort zone and into the exchange zone, ready to run for him and carry the love of God and the truth of his power into the lives of others. Often, we have no idea what task the Lord will assign us until it is thrust into our hands.

My question is, are you ready and willing to run *your* race in the divine relay? To grasp and run with your baton *whatever* it is and *wherever* it takes you?



God knew Kalli was ready to run her part in the divine relay.

How do I know? Because while I was running *my* race, God placed Kalli in the exchange zone in *my* lane, in A21, and I knew that I was to pass the baton — responsibilities to be carried out at our Thessaloniki safe house — to her.

Of course, Kalli wasn't running alone in this work. Was she the driver who would pick Katja up? No. Was she the police officer who would arrest Katja's traffickers? No. Was she the lawyer who would put Katja on the stand to convict those traffickers, thereby protecting other girls from being stolen, beaten, raped, imprisoned, and enslaved? No. All of those people were further

down the track, positioned in their own exchange zones, where God had placed them. Kalli's part in the divine relay was to carry the baton to them.

But before she stepped into the exchange zone at the age of forty-one, Kalli, a homemaker and mother of two children, assumed it was impossible for God to use her to save lives. "I'd been a Christian for about eighteen years, attending church, growing in my faith," Kalli said. "I'd been invited by a friend to attend a Christian women's conference. There I heard Christine tell how God had recently called her into the fight against human trafficking, leading her and her husband, Nick, to start A21. The numbers she revealed were staggering."

They still are. Billions of dollars exchange hands every year in this barbaric business, largely controlled by organized crime around the globe.⁶ About 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year, and 99 percent of those people never escape.⁷

Kalli said she knew she couldn't just ignore those needs. *But I'm only one woman, she thought, a mom with two kids of my own. What can I do about this massive global problem?*

"But there was Christine Caine, this petite little bundle of passionate energy, and she told us that God had called her to help abolish human slavery in the twenty-first century, and that she needed help to do it.

"That seemed impossible. Her goal was so audacious it was almost laughable. I couldn't imagine how I could make a difference, but I sensed God telling me, 'Kalli, you have a part to play in A21.' I knew I couldn't walk away. So, without a clue as to how I could help, I asked God to use me in whatever way he could, and I signed up as a volunteer."

Kalli joined A21 as one of the first volunteers when it began in 2008. She's been unstoppable ever since.

"I had been running in the A21 'volunteer's lane' for a while

when another baton was passed to me: to come on staff as the shelter manager,” Kalli recalled.

Kalli reached out and grasped that baton as well. Because of that, Kalli had met Katya a few days before that 3:00 a.m. phone call and offered her phone number. And when Katya called, Kalli was there to answer.

Impossible for Kalli, a mom and homemaker, to make a difference? Tell that to Katja. When her life hung in the balance, it was Kalli she called. Then a driver came and took her to safety. A home was provided where Katja learned to heal. An officer arrested her traffickers. A lawyer won their convictions. Do you see? Today, Katya is a free woman back in her home country, attending university — not only because Kalli stood ready in the exchange zone and grasped and ran with her baton, but also because an entire team stood ready, hands outstretched, positioned at the right time and the right place to run their parts in the race.

Each of these individuals had at one time believed it was impossible for them to make a difference in a global problem. But they’ve discovered that together, with each of them carrying their own unique batons, they are unstoppable in carrying out God’s plan.

That sounds far too complex to be real, doesn’t it?

It sounds impossible.

Fantastic! *Impossible is God’s starting point.*

WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK?

Because our God is God of the impossible, the seemingly impossible can’t hold us back from achieving God’s purposes for us. But other things can. Failure to enter the race or an unwillingness to take our position in the exchange zone will keep us from the thrill of playing our part in God’s relay.

So allow me to ask a personal question: What holds you back?

Anything?

Are you 100 percent satisfied that you are engaged in the relay, in the right lane, grasping your baton, running full-out, holding nothing back?

Here is why I ask. I travel the globe talking with Christians in every walk of life and every phase of Christian maturity, and I've discovered that our churches are filled with brothers and sisters who, for a host of reasons, feel dissatisfied with their spiritual condition.

- Some are new believers just beginning to understand the nature, character, and purposes of God. They are eager to run but not sure how to get started.
- Others attend church but are weary or burned out from living a busy or self-focused Christian life without seeing the life change or the world change they long for.
- Some have lost interest in attending church and feel the established church has lost its relevance, but they themselves long to be relevant in the world, to make a difference.
- Most long for a taste of God's power and presence unlike anything they've ever known.
- Many believe they are not qualified or gifted enough to be used by God in big ways.

Did you find yourself in this list? If I missed your description, but you too feel that something is missing in your spiritual life, take a few minutes to articulate the problem. Do it now. Write it in! Because until you can identify your current condition, how can you move forward?

Now that you've identified your current spiritual condition, here's the good news: God has an eternal purpose for the whole body of Christ and a divinely chosen part for every single believer. He has uniquely designed and selected each and every believer to fulfill his or her purpose. I'm going to repeat that, because it's that important.

God has an eternal purpose for the whole body of Christ and a divinely chosen part for every single believer. He has uniquely designed and selected each and every believer to fulfill his or her purpose.

That includes you, my friend. If you seek God's will, if you offer yourself to run his race, he will equip you to join or return to the race, no matter how impossible that may seem. Not only will he equip you as an individual runner for personal spiritual enrichment, but he will also train you as part of an unstoppable team, the church of Jesus Christ. We have been entrusted with the mission of advancing the kingdom of God on the earth. Never underestimate how huge, how mighty, how world-changing and eternity-altering this divine relay really is.

When you step forward, willing to join the race and run, you, like Kalli, will see that the seemingly impossible — you making a difference in this world — isn't impossible at all. God has empowered you with his very own Holy Spirit to run to win.

Just the other day Kalli wrote, "For me, A21 is not a job — it is my passion! It is my life! I love every moment of it, even the most challenging parts. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that I would play a part in saving lives. I am so honored to be where I am today."

I'm with Kalli! When Nick and I started The A21 Campaign, I had no idea where it would take me. I did not realize how many legs to this relay there were. I keep handing off more and more batons with every new office that opens and every gathering I address; and now, so many others are running that more batons are in the relay

than ever. The surprise of this divine relay is that just when you think you've finished your leg of the race, you discover that the best part is still ahead, that God had so much more in mind for you than you ever imagined. The ride is so wild and thrilling that the more I run, the more my passion grows to run even more.

If you don't have a spiritual passion burning inside you today, challenging you, leaving you wowed and honored to be doing your work for the Lord, you're missing the thrill of running your part in the race. If that's the case, then please work through this book with a seeking, open heart and an outstretched, open hand.

Don't even wait for the end of the book. Pray now!

Oh Lord, sign me up for my part in the divine relay. Start with my "impossible." Place me in my lane, in my position, in my exchange zone. Lord, I reach out, palm open, to receive the baton you have for me. Fuel me with your passion, Lord, and I will run!

Amen?

Amen!

DECISION TIME

If you just prayed that prayer with me and are awaiting your first baton — or if you've been running for a while and have a baton in hand or are waiting for the next one — here are a few questions to help you become unstoppable while living in the exchange zone.

- Why do I hold back from running my race with 100 percent commitment?
- Why do I sometimes fail to receive the baton that God holds out to me?
- What do I do with my reluctance to release the baton — given that, when I depend on others, they sometimes let me down or fail me?

- What makes me fumble the exchange or drop the baton? And if I do, what then?
- What happens if I run off course, and how can I find my way back?
- What is it that tempts me to quit the race altogether?
- The race is sometimes long and hard. Why does my passion sometimes wither away, and what can I do to refuel it?
- What can I do to run better, smarter, and stronger?

We will explore the answers to these questions in the chapters to come, so that when we hit such questions, challenges, and obstacles, they won't stop us in our tracks. We'll be prepared and equipped, unstoppable in our commitment to run the race marked out for us.

Here is a news flash: We don't have to look any further than our own neighborhoods or even our own homes to find the glaring needs of our broken world. There are people who need to know they are loved, children in need of hope and help, teens suffering from loneliness and depression, coworkers who don't know the truth and freedom of the gospel, friends caught in destructive life choices, elderly who need to know they are valued and honored. The list is endless.

Yet somehow, far too many of us reason this way: I don't know where my calling is. I don't feel led. Not yet.

I confess, I get a little over-the-top passionate in my answer to that, but here it is:

WAKE UP, CHRISTIAN!

God's Word calls you. Let God's Word lead you.

This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

Do you want to find your place? Do you want to know your part in bringing light and hope and healing into this fractured world?

Do something.

Do anything.

But don't just stand there.

Run!

Pray. Fast. Find a need that needs filling and fill it. Find others who are running and run with them. Ask God to move your heart and open your eyes to those other runners who might hand off batons to you. Just find one thing to do and get started.

God Almighty, who calls you by name, wants to make you a partner in his eternal work. He invites us to be world-changers by sharing the good news of eternal life and caring for the needs of a broken, hurting world. That's what running the race marked out for you is all about.

You've heard Kalli's passion and mine. Doing God's work leaves us wanting to do more. As we see lives changing through our efforts, as we see God start with the impossible and go on to change the world with the baton we are carrying, our passion to play our part in his divine relay grows even stronger.

Today, when Kalli looks at Katja and sees a young woman who has learned that God loves her and who has experienced deep healing, Kalli sees how God is using her to change the world. When she sees that Katja has forgiven the traffickers who deceived, brutalized, and enslaved her, Kalli stands amazed. Because of Kalli's willingness to run her race, something seemingly impossible is now unfolding in Katja's heart.

The same will be true for you. When you run your race, you will see the impossible melt away as God's power is unleashed in

you and through you to a broken world. God's plans for your eternal impact on this world are beyond your wildest imagination.

Sound impossible? Of course it is!

But impossible is God's starting point.

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

MATTHEW 19:26

CHAPTER 3

FULLY QUALIFIED FOR YOUR RACE

The impossible was God's starting point for Kalli's work to save trafficked women.

But her work with A21 was not the beginning of her *race*, just the beginning of her A21 *leg* in the race. You want to hear about impossible? Listen to the story of how God's ongoing divine relay through the ages brought Kalli into her race and how seemingly unqualified she and her forerunners were for the parts they were about to play in the grand race.

Kalli grew up in South Africa. Rejected by her mother as a child, Kalli was sexually and physically abused for many years, which eventually led, at the age of eighteen, to her accepting a job in her city of Cape Town, South Africa, as an escort for her company's clients, understanding full well that providing sex was part of her job. And guess what her father did for a living? He was part of the Mafia in South Africa — a drug dealer, a nightclub owner, and a trafficker of humans. Haunted by childhood traumas and a

broken family, starving for affection, and feeling used and worthless, Kalli sought to escape her pain through drug abuse.

This is the woman who, in chapter 2, answered the desperate call from Katja. Do you believe this? I couldn't make this stuff up!

Something changed that drastically altered the course of Kalli's life. Her father — a drug-dealing human trafficker — accepted Christ. He had a total God encounter, and with it came a dramatic life change. God's call to Kalli's father, and his acceptance of that call, led him to carry the baton of faith into Kalli's life, where it multiplied. After witnessing the radical change in her father's life, Kalli surrendered her own life to Jesus and became a Christian at the age of twenty-three.

Kalli joined a church, and, thanks to the influence of church leaders and teachers who were doing their part in the divine relay, she began to run her race. This brought her to the point of stepping into the spiritual exchange zone of wanting to be used by God to help others. One exchange zone led to the next, one baton to the next, and so she was running in the exchange zone when, at the age of forty-one, she reached out and grasped the A21 baton.

Now let's step back and consider the one who brought the gospel to Kalli's father. We don't know his name, but God does. And of course there was someone who carried the gospel to that person, and the person before. While we don't know their stories, their qualifications, their sins, their flaws and obstacles and struggles, we do know that one after another, they each stepped into their own exchange zone, received the baton of faith, and passed it forward until it landed in Kalli's outstretched hand. Do you see how the divine relay stretches back?

And now Katja — a once broken and abused sex slave — having received the baton from Kalli, is running her own race, carrying on the baton. To whom will she carry it? We can only imagine, but God knows. Katja is one of many girls who've been

helped through Kalli's work at A21. They have all moved forward, many of them coming to faith and carrying their batons as well. Some are carrying their batons in Greece. Others are in Bulgaria, Nigeria, the US, Australia, South Africa, the UK, Norway, the Ukraine, and Asia.

Do you see how the divine relay stretches forward? Are you beginning to get the picture of how big, how huge, how interconnected and unstoppable it is? Each runner's efforts are multiplied many times over. Each handoff opens limitless possibilities for future handoffs that spin off in multiple directions, carrying God's work across the globe in ways we could never imagine. God's Word describes the unstoppable, ongoing nature of the divine relay, touching generation after generation with these words:

One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. . . . All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

PSALM 145:4, 10–13

Wow! What a privilege God gives to you and me to play our part in this ageless saga.

THE MULTIPLICATION FACTOR

When we move into the exchange zone, ready to accept the baton God has in store for us, God multiplies our efforts. This divine multiplication factor is critically important for us to understand. Why? Because all too often, rather than seeing ourselves as qualified by God to play a great part in his race, we look at our lives — our limitations, our meager resources, our brokenness,

our apparent insignificance in this huge world — and rather than moving boldly into the exchange zone, we feel unqualified to be used mightily by God, and so we slink to the sidelines.

But the race isn't run from the sidelines! The Christian life is no spectator sport. It is heartbreaking for me to meet Christians who love the Lord and desire to serve him, but who shy away from playing their part because they don't understand God's divine multiplication factor. How tempting to look at our broken world and messy lives and falsely believe we are too broken, the pain is too much, the evil of this world is too entrenched, for us to make a difference. Countless believers are stopped dead in their tracks before they even make it to their first exchange zone. "After all," they reason, "I'm just one person. My involvement isn't going to make a dent in what's wrong in this world. I'm not qualified enough for God to use me in important ways."

That kind of thinking would have stopped the man in South Africa from witnessing to the Mafia, drug-dealing human-trafficker who was Kalli's father. That kind of thinking would have kept that radically changed father from sharing his faith with his wounded daughter, Kalli. That kind of thinking would have stopped his daughter, the former drug-addicted prostitute, from volunteering for A21 and eventually coming on staff as the shelter manager. So who would have befriended Katja and given her a number to call? Who would have answered the phone at 3:00 a.m.? Would her trafficker still be in business, stealing other young lives, rather than behind bars like he is today? Do you see the potential ripple effects when just one person walks away from his or her exchange zone? This is what happens when, believing we are unqualified to make a difference, we choose not to live in the exchange zone.

Of course we are small, but God is huge.

Of course we have limitations, but God is limitless.

Of course we are weak, but God is strong.

Of course we are finite, but God is infinite.

Of course we are imperfect, but God is perfect.

Of course we fail, but God never fails.

Of course we can choose to stop, but God is unstoppable. And if we choose to carry the batons he brings our way, we will witness how he gladly multiplies our efforts and makes us and our impact on this world unstoppable.

God calls you to step into the exchange zone not because *you* are mighty and strong. He calls you to take your place in the race because *he* is mighty and strong, and he plans to accomplish his work in you and through you!

HOW NOT ENOUGH BECOMES MORE THAN ENOUGH

Some two thousand years ago, on a hillside swarming with thousands of hungry people, the disciples found themselves confronted with a problem that looked too big to overcome. Watch what unfolded as God multiplied what was offered to him. And look for how God speaks to you about running your race.

Jesus had been teaching and healing a large crowd all day.⁸ His words were so life-giving, so earth-shattering, that the people stayed hour after hour after hour to hear more. Late in the day, the disciples came to Jesus, saying he should send the people away so they could go to surrounding villages and buy themselves something to eat.

So Jesus asks, “How many loaves do you have?”

Andrew, one of the disciples, comes back with, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Notice that Andrew didn’t just say it was five barley loaves and two fish. He called them *small* loaves and *small* fish, as if he wanted to emphasize that such a small amount was insignificant in light of the huge need.

Notice that Jesus asks them how much there is to go around.

He makes sure that the disciples recognize the limitations they are facing. Often it is when we come face-to-face with our limitations that we give up, thinking all is lost. But when we recognize our limitations, then we also recognize when God demonstrates his limitless power. Until we hit our limit, we often assume we can provide, we can deliver, and we can produce.

What are you facing today that brings you face-to-face with your limitations, leaving you questioning how qualified you are to make a difference in this broken world? Is it a broken past? A dream that has died? A lack of time, money, education, leadership skills, influence, or confidence? We must never assess a difficulty in light of our own resources but in light of God's resources. You can step boldly into the exchange zone not because you have no limits (we all have plenty!) but because *God's resources are limitless*. Jesus accepted the five loaves and two fishes, small though they were. One packed lunch. A meager amount of food. It was all the boy had, but he offered it all. If the boy had kept his little lunch, it would have remained little. If you keep your little, it will remain little as well. But if you step into the exchange zone ready to offer what little you have to be used by God in moving the baton forward, your little will be multiplied as you run.

When the boy gave his little to Jesus, Jesus blessed it, and it became much in his hands. It is never about how little we have. It is about what our little has the potential to become in the hands of a miracle-working God. Don't focus on what you don't have, what you can't do, what isn't enough. Just offer your "not enough" to God, and he will multiply it into *more* than enough. That's what happens when you are living in the exchange zone, offering yourself to be used by God.

I love this next part! Do you know the first thing Jesus did with that meager offering? He looked up to heaven and gave thanks to God for the little he was given by the boy. I wonder what it was like for that boy to see his meager meal held up to the heavens by

the hands of a grateful Jesus. Jesus, of course, knew it wasn't going to remain little, that it was about to be multiplied into great abundance. But let's not miss this moment. The Son of God, holding our offering up to Almighty God and blessing it with his thanks! Remember Kalli, unable to imagine what she could possibly do to help but volunteering anyway? We need to be like her. We don't need to know *how* God is going to use our meager offering. We only need to know that he *wants* to use it. Always remember that *God celebrates our gifts to him and blesses them.*

Next, Jesus broke the bread and the fish. When he blessed it, there were five and two. But when he broke it, we lose count. The more Jesus broke the bread and fish, the more there was to feed and nourish. The disciples started distributing the food, and soon what was broken was feeding thousands. *The miracle is in the breaking.* It is in the breaking that God multiplies not enough into more than enough.

Are there broken places in your life so painful that you fear the breaking will destroy you? Do you come from a broken home? Did you have a broken marriage? Did you have a broken past? Have you experienced brokenness in your body? Have your finances been broken? You may think your brokenness has disqualified you from being able to run in the divine relay, but as with my own life and Kalli's, when we give God our brokenness, it qualifies us to be used by God to carry a baton of hope, restoration, and grace to others on the sidelines who are broken. What should have disqualified Kalli from the race was the very thing that qualified her for it.

Put your broken pieces into God's hands and watch him use them to work his wonders. Some of the most life-giving people I have met have gone through something that broke them and allowed them to see God use for his glory that which the enemy meant for evil. *When our broken pieces are offered to God, he multiplies them for his purposes.*

Not only was there enough for everyone to have their fill, there

were leftovers! Listen to what Jesus said when everyone had been filled and satisfied:

He said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

JOHN 6:12

Did you hear Jesus' words? "Let nothing be wasted." So precious to the Lord are our offerings, our broken pieces, that even when he's multiplied them into an overabundance, he puts every bit of it to good use. The next time you are tempted to withhold your contribution to the kingdom, believing it to be too small or too broken to make a difference, don't forget that not only will God celebrate, bless, and multiply your contribution, he will also value every little bit of it. *God never wastes what we offer to him.*

All four of the disciples who wrote the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — record this miraculous hillside feeding, and all report the number of people fed as five thousand men, which did not include the women and children. Matthew 14:21 makes that very clear: "The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children."

Have you ever noticed that part of the verse? I used to think, *Why didn't they count everybody? Why only the men?* Until a powerful realization occurred to me.

Whose lunch was it that Jesus multiplied? It was a child who gave his meager lunch — an *uncounted* boy! The disciples did not count the very one whom God had moved into position to release his miracle.

Isn't that just like God to use people whom other people do not count?

You may think you are too insignificant to count when it comes to God handing off batons. But God counts you. He more than counts you. God counts *on* you. *The uncounted count.* You matter.

As a mom, I like to think about that boy's mama who packed his lunch that day. There she was, doing her mom thing, packing ordinary foods. She didn't know she was packing the ingredients for a miracle, did she? I wonder if she was in the crowd that day. Did she see what God did with those ordinary ingredients? Or did she hear about it from her wide-eyed son and neighbors later that night? Either way, she must have been amazed that it was her common food that was miraculously multiplied.

Are you holding back from stepping boldly into the exchange zone because you have nothing extraordinary to offer? God is not waiting for you, hoping you'll eventually bring him extraordinary talents, abilities, accomplishments, and gifts. The time is now to give him what you have, no matter how ordinary or insignificant it seems. In the divine relay, *God uses ordinary to do the extraordinary.*

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

There's no reason to hold back, lingering on the sidelines rather than expectantly taking your position in the exchange zone. Be confident that God will take your little and make it much.

Are your resources too limited to change the world? Great. His resources are limitless. Do you not have enough to offer him? No problem. God multiplies your not enough into more than enough.

Do you doubt the value of your contribution, wondering what you could possibly do to help in God's kingdom work? Offer yourself joyfully, knowing that God celebrates your gifts to him and blesses them, no matter how meager.

Are you broken, thinking you are too wounded to be qualified to serve? The miracle is in the breaking. What has been broken, God is able to multiply for his purposes.

Do you feel so used up and worn down that all you have left to offer are your leftovers? Marvelous. God values your leftovers and never wastes one morsel of what you have to offer.

Do you believe you are too insignificant to count in carrying batons that will change this world and have an eternal impact? The uncounted count. God counts on you doing your part.

Are you so ordinary that you have no remarkable gifts or talents for God to use? How wonderful! God uses the ordinary to do his extraordinary.

Congratulations! You've passed the test. Your "not enough" becomes more than enough when you take your place in the exchange zone, arm outstretched, ready to receive the next baton God will place in your open palm. You've qualified to take your place in the exchange zone.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 PETER 4:10–11