

Your Four Minutes

By Bishop Gary E. Stevenson

Presiding Bishop



The miracle of the Atonement can make up for imperfections in our performance.

The recent Olympic Winter Games enthralled the world as athletes representing 89 countries competed in 98 different events. Remarkably, 10 of these athletes were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3 of whom earned medals recently highlighted in the *Church News*: Christopher Fogt, Noelle Pikus-Pace, and Torah Bright.¹ We offer our congratulations to all of the athletes who competed. Well done!

I speak of these games this morning directing my thoughts to young men, young women, and young single adults—you who are in your critical years which set the course for your life. I feel a great sense of urgency in addressing you.

For you to feel that urgency, I first share the story of Noelle Pikus-Pace, one of those Latter-day Saint athletes. In Noelle's event, the skeleton, athletes build momentum as they sprint and then plunge headfirst on a small sled. With their faces inches above the ground, they race down a winding, icy track at speeds that top 90 miles (145 km) an hour.

Remarkably, years of preparation would be considered either a success or a disappointment based on what happened in the space of four intense 60-second runs.

Noelle's previous 2006 Olympic dreams were dashed when a terrible accident left her with a broken leg. In the 2010 Olympics her dreams fell short again when just over one-tenth of a second kept her from the medal stand.²

Can you imagine the anxiety she felt as she waited to begin her first run in the 2014 Olympics? Years of preparation would culminate in only a sliver of time. Four minutes total. She spent years preparing for those four minutes and would spend a lifetime afterward reflecting on them.

Noelle's final runs were virtually flawless! We will never forget her leap into the stands to embrace her family after crossing the finish line, exclaiming, "We did it!" Years of preparation had paid off. We saw her Young Women medallion around her neck as the silver medal was placed there beside it.³

It may seem unfair that Noelle's entire Olympic dreams hinged on what she did during just four brief minutes. But she knew it, and that is why she prepared so diligently. She sensed the magnitude, the urgency of her four minutes, and what they would mean for the rest of her life.

We also remember Christopher Fogt, a member of the team that won the bronze medal in the four-man bobsled

race. While he could have given up after a devastating crash in the 2010 Olympics, he chose to persevere. After a fantastic, redemptive run, he won the prize he so diligently sought.⁴

Now, consider how your pathway to eternal life is similar to these athletes' "four-minute performance." You are an eternal being. Before you were born, you existed as a spirit. In the presence of a loving Heavenly Father, you trained and prepared to come to earth for a brief moment and, well, perform. This life is your four minutes. While you are here, your actions will determine whether you win the prize of eternal life. The prophet Amulek described, "This life is the time ... to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day ... to perform [your] labors."⁵

In a sense, your four minutes have already begun. The clock is ticking. The words of the Apostle Paul seem so fitting: to run the race, that you may obtain the prize.⁶

In the same way that certain steps are essential in the very brief performance of an Olympic athlete—jumps or maneuvers for ice skaters and snowboarders, negotiating the turns of a bobsled run, or carving through the gates of a downhill slalom course—so it is in our lives, where certain things are absolutely essential—checkpoints which move us through our spiritual performance on earth. These spiritual markers are the essential God-given ordinances of the gospel: baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, priesthood ordinations, temple ordinances, and partaking of the sacrament each week.

"In the[se] ordinances ... , the power of godliness is manifest."⁷

And in the same way that the discipline of training prepares an athlete to perform elements in his or her sport at the highest level, keeping the commandments will qualify you to receive these saving ordinances.

Do you sense the urgency?

My young friends, wherever you are in your "four-minute performance," I urge you to ponder, "What do I need to do next to ensure my medal?" Perhaps during this conference, the Spirit has whispered to you what that may be: to prepare more thoughtfully for an ordinance in your future or to receive an ordinance that you should have received a long time ago. Whatever it may be, do it now. Don't wait. Your four minutes will pass quickly, and you'll have eternity to think about what you did in this life.⁸

Self-discipline is needed. Daily prayer, scripture study, and church attendance must be the foundation of your training. A consistent pattern of obeying the commandments, keeping the covenants you have made, and following the Lord's standard found in *For the Strength of Youth* is required.

Perhaps you're aware of things in your life that are threatening to slow or stop your spiritual progress. If so, follow this scriptural counsel: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."⁹

It is not yet too late to repent. But it soon may be, because no one really knows when your four minutes will be over.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "I already blew it. My four minutes are already a disaster. I may as well give up." If so, stop thinking that, and never think it again. The miracle of the Atonement can make up for imperfections in our performance. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught:

“To those of you ... who may still be hanging back, ... I testify of the renewing power of God’s love and the miracle of His grace. ...

“... It is *never* too late so long as the Master ... says there is time. ... Don’t delay.”¹⁰

Remember, you are not alone. The Savior has promised that He will not leave you comfortless.¹¹ You also have family, friends, and leaders who are cheering you on.

Although my remarks have been directed to the youth of the Church, for parents and grandparents, I offer the following:

Recently, Elder David A. Bednar described a simple way to conduct a family assessment to mark progress on the covenant path by essential ordinances. All that is needed is a piece of paper with two columns: “name” and “plan for next or needful ordinance.” I did this recently, listing each family member. Among them, I noted an infant grandson, soon to be blessed; a six-year-old grandson, whose preparation for baptism was essential; and a son turning 18, whose preparation for the priesthood and temple endowment was imminent. Everyone on the list needed the sacrament ordinance. This simple exercise assisted Lesa and me in fulfilling our role to help each member of our family along the covenant path, with an action plan for each of them. Perhaps this is an idea for you which will lead to family discussions, family home evening lessons, preparation, and even invitations for essential ordinances in your family.¹²

As a skier and a snowboarder myself, I was deeply impressed with the “four-minute” silver medal-winning performance of Australian LDS athlete and snowboarder Torah Bright in the half-pipe competition. She dazzled the world as she finished a virtually flawless run culminating in a backside rodeo 720. However, even more impressive and surprising to the world was the way she reached out and demonstrated Christlike love to her competitors. She noticed that American snowboarder Kelly Clark, who had a bad first run in her final round, appeared to be nervous about her second run. “She gave me a hug,” Clark recalls. “She just held me until I actually calmed down enough and I slowed my breathing. It was good to have a hug from a friend.” Kelly Clark would later join Torah on the winners’ podium as a bronze medalist.

When asked about this unusual act of kindness toward her opponent, which could have put her own silver medal at risk, Torah simply said, “I am a competitor—I want to do my best—but I want my fellow competitors to do their best, too.”¹³

With that in mind, is there someone who needs your encouragement? a family member? a friend? a classmate or fellow quorum member? How can you help them with their four minutes?

Dear friends, you are in the midst of an exhilarating journey. In some ways, you are racing down the half-pipe or sled track, and it can be challenging to perform each element or navigate each turn along the way. But remember, you’ve prepared for this for millennia. This is your moment to perform. This is your four minutes! The time is now!

I express my utmost confidence in your abilities. You have the Savior of the world on your side. If you seek His help and follow His directions, how can you fail?

I conclude with my testimony of the blessing we have in a living prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, and of Jesus Christ and His role as our Savior and Redeemer, in His holy name, Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Christine Rappleye, “Mormons in the Olympics: 3 Medals for LDS Athletes at the Winter Games,” deseretnews.com/article/865597546/Mormons-in-the-Olympics-3-medals-for-LDS-athletes-at-the-Winter-Games.html.
2. See Christine Rappleye, “Mormons in the Olympics.”
3. See Sarah Petersen, “Noelle Pikus-Pace Wears LDS Young Women Necklace throughout Olympics,” deseretnews.com/article/865596771/Noelle-Pikus-Pace-wears-LDS-Young-Women-necklace-throughout-Olympics.html.
4. See Amy Donaldson, “Army, Faith Helped Push Mormon Bobsledder Chris Focht to Olympic Success,” deseretnews.com/article/865597390/Army-faith-helped-push-Mormon-bobsledder-Chris-Focht-to-Olympic-success.html.
5. Alma 34:32.
6. See 1 Corinthians 9:24.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20.
8. See Alma 34:31–33.
9. Hebrews 12:1.
10. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2012, 33.
11. See John 14:18.

12. David A. Bednar, conversation with the author.

13. Vidya Rao, "Snowboarder Kelly Clark: Hug from Competitor Helped Me Win Bronze," today.com/sochi/snowboarder-kelly-clark-hug-competitor-helped-me-win-bronze-2D12108132.

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