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## Barefoot runner bares soul in new book

By **Rob Roberts**, [rroberts@lsjournal.com](mailto:rroberts@lsjournal.com)

Rick Roeber, a Lee's Summit resident who has run 19,500 miles barefoot since October 2003, bares his soul in a new book of devotional writings, many of them inspired during his daily barefoot runs. According to Roeber, whose book can be purchased via his website, [www.barefootrunner.org](http://www.barefootrunner.org), he has been blogging for about five years and recently decided to publish some of his favorite posts from [www.thebaresoul.blogspot.com](http://www.thebaresoul.blogspot.com) in book form.

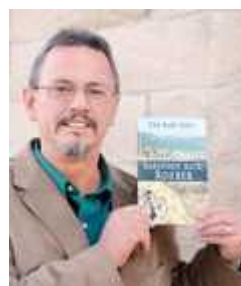
The result, "The Bare Soul: Reflections, Ruminations and Recollections of God's Holy Word, Volume I," represents an expansion of a personal ministry that benefits from Roeber's feats. When someone runs through snow or completes a Boston Marathon barefoot, it tends to attract attention, he said. And for Roeber, that attention has included interview requests from national media outlets including the Wall Street Journal, the Associated Press, Fox News, CNN and ESPN.

Roeber, who made a "SportsCenter Top 10" along with LaBron James on the latter network three years ago, said he especially likes to be featured on live television broadcasts. "They can't edit live TV," he explained, "so I get to talk about Jesus Christ."

A former problem drinker who "put the plug in the jug" in 1992, Roeber says, via his website, that "barefoot running is my statement of faith and humility before the Lord God Almighty and His Son, Jesus Christ. ..." "Through the faith He bestows, He does remarkable things through a penitent sinner saved by grace. As such, I am privileged and humbled to be a barefoot runner for His glory."

When Roeber first began running barefoot back in 2003, however, he had no idea the practice would grow into a ministry that he says has helped countless souls, including addicts, alcoholics and homeless, he said. Roeber, who routinely speaks to groups ranging from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to maximum-security prisoners, said running barefoot immediately made him feel more connected to God and the holy earth he created. But the impetus that originally drove him to kick off his shoes before hitting the road was a medical one, he said.

Roeber, who ran 18 marathons and thousands of miles before kicking the shoe habit, said shoes cause



Rob Roberts/The Journal

Rick Roeber is pictured with his new book of devotional writings, many of them inspired during his daily barefoot runs. Roeber has run more than 19,500 miles barefoot since 2003.

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runners to step from the heel to the ball of the foot, which can cause knee injuries. "I knew I had to do something," Roeber recalled. "My knees were killing me, and I thought I was going to have to get scoped."

Then, he read about how barefoot running forces proper technique and began to mix it in with his traditional running regimen.

In addition to causing him to stop "running goofy" and to feel more connected with the earth, Roeber said, barefoot running gave him a feeling of liberation. "It's that inner-child thing, where you're able to run free like when we were kids," he said.

Since running the Boston Marathon barefoot in April 2004, Roeber has run barefoot exclusively, completing dozens of marathons and one 40-mile run. And since July 27, 2007, he has run barefoot every day, setting what he calls "the self-proclaimed world record for the longest barefoot running streak."

One of the modern-day pioneers of barefoot running, Roeber has inspired disciples such as Daniel Howell, who wrote "The Barefoot Book: 50 Great Reasons to Kick Off Your Shoes" plus an endorsement of Roeber's new book. According to Roeber, he doesn't try to sell barefoot running as a panacea. But just about everyone could benefit from a little running or walking without shoes, he said.

Roeber has encouraged coaches at Lee's Summit High School to incorporate two or three hours of barefoot running in weekly workout regimens to strengthen the muscles that are allowed to atrophy with shoes on. "I think we have a tendency to take our feet for granted because they're always encased in foot coffins," he said. "Barefoot running and walking stretches your arches and makes your feet healthier." Except for when you step on a nail or some glass? People ask him that all the time, said Roeber, who has a ready answer:

"God also gave us a good set of eyeballs," he said. "I watch out for the big stuff, and don't worry about the small stuff, which is kind of a metaphor for life."

At the least, barefoot running "makes you much more aware of your surroundings," Roeber said.

For Roeber, the barefoot path has led to a unique ministry and a stronger faith in Jesus, he said. Jesus, however, was probably not a barefoot running or walking enthusiast himself, he added.

"Jesus probably wore sandals," Roeber said.

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