

Learning to Live Like a Champion

How many of you have been watching the Olympic games?

I look forward every night to turning them on..

I love the diving, the gymnastics, and the equestrian events especially much!

I even got into Beach Volleyball this year which I never had watched before. Anyone else have any favorites??

But isn't it fun to watch people compete at that level...and its inspiring to watch excellence, isn't it? And be amazed at what people can accomplish when they train...

Well the Bible is chock full of references that have to do with athletics and the Olympic Games which, by the way were going strong in Greece, during Jesus' time on earth.

I did a little research on the Olympic Games in Biblical times.

History tells us that the Olympic Games began in the 7th century Before Christ (BC) in Olympia Greece, and that they were held every fourth year, almost continually, for 1,200 years. During that time period, the Greeks even marked their calendars in four-year periods called Olympiads.

Some of the Olympic games they had were running, leaping, spear throwing, boxing, wrestling, chariot racing and racing in armor. Everyone who competed were required to take an oath that

"I trained for at least ten months and I will not resort to unfair tricks."

There were no steroids back then, but as you know, there are many ways to cheat...

And...if you won...these games...or the Corinthian games which were like the Olympic games.....

There were many benefits ... They didn't have boxed cereal back then so you didn't get your name on a Wheaties box.

But your name and hometown were shouted out when you were awarded a wreath. Then you would be given a triumphal parade in your town. You'd get money, and your children would receive a free education for life, you'd be exempt from military duty, and you were released from paying taxes!! Can you imagine? We don't do that anymore...too bad.

Now Paul uses these games as an illustration for the Christian life, using phrases in Greek that people would have recognized as part of the competition at the Olympic games back then. I don't have time to get into all that...but the point is that...

He says run the Christian life to win...run that race so that you do it well. Don't settle for second best, a life of mediocrity...sort of living on the edges of your faith. No way! Give the Christian race your all...its that important!

Excellence in following the Lord, victory in life, doing things well is all through the OT. We read about David this morning. David did what he did very well...it says that the Lord gave him victory. He performed excellently. David was not perfect. He messed up a whole lot. But he always kept at it...working to connect with God with all his heart. And God honored that and blessed it.

And I think there is something about the excellence of these Olympic athletes that can help inform us in our Christian life. What is it that they have, that helps them to compete and win at such a high level?

Well, in all of the interviews with athletes that I heard four things were common for everyone, no matter what country they were from. Number 1 – they all had

1. **DESIRE**...they had a desire to excel...to do the best that they could do and to train to that end. They had passion, deep down inside, to set records, to make a difference in the athletic arena.

You might say, well yeah, but they were born with a certain amount of athletic ability...but you know what?

Probably the most moving thing I saw was a man called Oscar Pistorius, known as South Africa's "Blade Runner," also known as "the fastest man on no legs." Who saw him compete?

He qualified for the 400-meter semifinals a week from last Saturday, making him the first double-amputee sprinter to compete at the Olympics. He runs on prosthetic legs called Flex-Foot Cheetahs. He came in second in his heat.

What kind of desire must he have had to make the seemingly impossible his goal...to make it to the semi-finals in the Olympic games....NOT the local community YMCA race...no, although that would have been impressive in itself. This is the Olympic games...with no legs...and then meet that goal.

No one would have said that he was born with the physique needed to be an Olympian. His legs were amputated when he was 11 mos. old! It was his passion, his desire, his wanting to excel that gave him that ability to compete at the highest level.

What an amazing testimony to what can happen when you are passionate about something and you give your all to attain it.

So let me ask you...what are you passionate about? Rick Warren says that **“A passionless life is a wasted life.”** I like that. If you want to make an impact with your life you must have passion, desire for something and go for it with all you’ve got.

Let’s look at Paul again. **1 Corinthians 9:24** **“You know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. So run to win!”** Run to be victorious in the Christian life. Have the desire to make your life count.

Buddhism says that the goal of life is to eliminate all your desire. When you get rid of it, then you will be content. In Christianity the theology is different. God tells us in Scripture, “I have created you with certain desires. Use them for me...not for evil. Channel those desires for my glory. Channel them to reach out to others, to shine your light in this sorry world, to bring people to Christ.” And do it with all you’ve got!!

2. The second thing that all of the athletes in the Olympics seem to have in common is **DIRECTION**

They were focused on a goal.

1 Corinthians 9:26 **“I run straight to the goal with purpose in very step. I fight to win. I’m not just shadowboxing or playing around.”** (Living)

Those Olympic athletes were not just playing around were they?

They had a target. They had a goal. They had an objective. It was something specific they wanted to attain...not something vague and general.

It’s like if you went to a restaurant and the waitress or waiter came up and said, “May I take your order.”

And you said...”I’d like some food please.”

He or she would say, "What kind of food?"

Be specific in what you want, and then go for it....

The Olympic athletes didn't just dabble in this, and dabble in that. I'm into this this week, I'm into that the next... I think I'll try this over here now...

No, not all. They had direction....They were whole hearted, completely committed to a certain cause, goal, target, as I said.

They weren't just coasting.

Someone once said "**When you are coasting, you are always going downhill.**"

No one ever coasted and climbed a mountain, did they?

So be prayerful, and consult with those who know you well and folks that you trust, AND THEN out of that prayer, consultation, and self reflection...get to know your direction and your desire...and go for that...

David's excellence, that we read about earlier, might be summed up in his phrase in the psalms where he says, "**One thing have I desired, and that I have sought after...etc..**

Do you see the focus?

David was all out committed to the target of knowing and experiencing God's love in his life. He did everything to attain it. One thing he desired...very specific...

I am all out committed to that goal, that target, that objective...to grow in my knowledge and love of Jesus Christ...

So here's the question if you want to make your life count and succeed in what matters most ask yourself, "**What is the focus of my life?**"

Whatever you focus on you are going to move toward. If you say "I am not going to be like my dad" what are you

focusing on? Dad! So instead of deciding what you are not going to do, try focusing on what you want to do, want to become. In other words say “I want to do this!” Focus on your goal.

The third thing that all of these athletes shared was

3. Discipline

Doesn't the word discipline just fill you with joy! I'd just really like to skip over this one, just like I would really like to not go to the gym and do my little work out three times a week. I know of a poster that says “**New Discovery: Prayers that help you burn away fat.**” This definitely sounds easier than the treadmill for sure.

And yet the training that these athletes went through to get to the Olympic games required a lot of discipline, right? Doing what sometimes they simply did not feel like doing. Working out early in the morning, preparing when no one was watching, pushing themselves beyond what other people were doing. Going beyond the norm...

Even just traveling with my son Jonathan to Georgia a week ago to see him play tournament baseball, I was amazed at the discipline that the coaches inflicted – but I realized it was necessary to keep the team in shape; when the team was on the field they played excellently. But, behind the scenes, there was a lot of grueling effort expended, a lot of ongoing exercise, some tough conversations, work outs, sprints, often in terrible heat, just to prepare the team for the game itself.

But its doing that kind of extra work, spending the extra hour studying, going the extra mile, doing the extra phone call,

making the extra effort that turns our desire and direction into a win.

Now how does this translate into the spiritual life. If you want to grow in your faith you need to discipline yourself to engage in certain habits...

It is critical for your growth as a Christian.

In a nutshell those habits are **studying the scripture, serving others, and spending time in prayer.**

Now granted, you may not always feel like doing these things.

It may not always be convenient, or something that fills you with delight.

Sometimes you might enjoy it, sometimes you won't

But this is the discipline necessary to stay the course as a Christian when the going gets rough, and to learn to live victoriously... even when circumstances are not going your way

So...let me ask you...

Are you involved somewhere where you can learn the Bible and make it central to your life?

If you are not, be sure to get involved in our Philippians study after church on Sundays beginning in September. And we aren't doing this study just to do one more thing. We are doing this so you can grow in your faith. Philippians is a great book to learn about wherever you are in your faith walk...beginner, intermediate or long-time Christian.

Are you serving somewhere? If not, on August 26...JUMP IN SUNDAY...is happening for that purpose. To give you an opportunity to see what is going on here at WVPC and sign up to serve according to your gifts, desires, and the direction God is calling you in. There are amazing ministries here that you can get involved in.

Do you have a group or even one person with whom you can pray? We all need community. Our small group Bible studies offer this, and I wish everyone of you was in a small group. You learn how to pray when you are with people who pray. If you are interested in joining up, let me know!

The fourth thing that all the Olympians had in common was..

4. Determination

There's a sign on a church here in Cupertino that says "**Never Give Up**" I love that! I believe that's what God tells us again and again in scripture ...

Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination.

They won't give up!

Jesus was big on determination – never giving up. He even told a story about a woman who wouldn't give up in prayer. You can read about it in Luke.....Basically the story is about a persistent widow who keeps bothering a judge about an issue. This judge is not a reputable character. He is not someone who cares about anyone. He has no regard or empathy for the widow's plight. But the widow just won't leave this judge alone. She keeps coming to him...bugging him...insisting...and never gives up...asking for him to grant her, her request. And finally this very disreputable judge does it...just so that the widow will leave him alone.

How much more Jesus says will God who cares deeply for you, grant you your desires. Keep at it in prayer! Jesus says. Don't give up...

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, "Let us run the race that is before us and never give up! We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that holds us back. Let us look only to Jesus."

(TODD – HERE ADD SLIDE)

When we do this, scripture says in Rom 8:37 that every Christian is more than a "conqueror", or "winner" through Him who loved us. **The Greek word translated "conquerers" in Rom 8:37 is "NIKE"**, the Greek word that one of our most popular modern athletic shoe companies borrowed for a corporate name! Amazing.

Some of you might have come here today ready to give up on something.

Maybe it's a marriage or a friendship or some relationship you've worked on for a really long time. You just can't take it any more and you are ready to throw in the towel.

Maybe it's your faith. You just aren't able to connect with God in a meaningful way right now. You don't want to stay the course...it is just too hard

Maybe it's a journey you are on for some kind of healing. You've got to work through some issues from your past and its really painful...or a recovery process from some sort of an addiction that you have suffered from... and you've been on the right path...but today its really hard and you are being tempted to go back to the old ways.

Or maybe it's a dream you've had, and you've tried to work towards it and it just isn't happening. So many things are getting in the way of that dream...

And God says to your today don't give up.

I am with you.

I am your God.

You aren't alone. I'm the best coach, advocate, friend and support... you'll ever have...I'm telling you to...

Hang in there. Keep at it.

Don't give up, even if you are discouraged.

We'll finish this together.

David Redman was a guy who ran in the Barcelona Olympics. As he was running the 400 meters he pulled a hamstring and fell, while everyone else passed him by. With a hundred meters to go it looked like David Redman wouldn't finish the race. But then, his father came out of the stands to help him the rest of the way. David said, "When he came over and put his arms around me, I started to shake him off...but then Dad said, "David..., *we started together, let's finish together.*" And David said "I realized this was exactly what I needed – my Dad was the only one who knew exactly how I felt. And they went the rest of the way...and crossed the finish line together!

Life isn't easy...its tough.

The race that God's called you to is challenging.

We will stumble, and we will fall.

But when we do, we have a father who will come and pick us up...put his arm around us and call us by name.

And in the moment of our failure he will say "I've been with you from the beginning. We started this together. We're going to finish it together. Lean on me and we'll make it to the finish line."

Psalm 60:12 says, "**We can win. We can win with God's help.**"

Lean on the Lord and he will give you the desire, the direction, the discipline and the determination. And he will help you make it to the finish line...and be a NIKE...more

than a conquerer. Never give up...we can win with God's help.

Let's pray: Lord you have made us for a purpose. You have a race for each of us to run. It is our desire to be what You intended us to be in this life. We don't want to waste one minute of this life you've given to us wallowing in mediocrity or simply dabbling in our faith. Give us clear direction. Lord, we may not understand it all but we want you to guide us in exactly what you are calling us to do, both as a church and as individuals. Help us to be disciplined and allow us to let go of things that are hindering our progress – and do those that will help us grow in our faith and service to you. Help us to give all we've got. And we praise you Lord that we don't run this race alone. That when we stumble, and get discouraged you are there to put your arm around us and keep us going, encouraging us to never give up because You are there to bring us to the finish line. In Jesus' Name Amen...