

A Gold Medal Evangelism Team Leader, Part One

What does it take to be a gold medalist in the Olympics? It takes passion, practice, skill, devotion; in a word, “discipline.” In America, we have all seen the TV coverage of the Olympics. One of the most fascinating aspects of that coverage is the “behind the scenes” interviews with the athletes. Filming crews follow the athletes through a typical day, which always includes intense training. We get a firsthand view of the discipline that the athletes have to subject themselves to in order to compete at that level. In order to win the coveted gold medal at that level, it takes even more work.

Stop for just a minute and think about that. People will spend almost their entire lives, their life savings, and subject themselves to what some people might consider cruel and unusual punishment simply to win a gold medal! I was recently surprised to discover that the average Olympic gold medal is only worth \$120 in terms of its intrinsic value. \$120! But the prestige of the Olympic gold medal cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

But even *that* prestige is a fading flower. It fades proportionately at the same rate that the athlete’s flesh fades away. One day the athlete will go the way of all flesh and die. In 1,000 years, that gold medal will be nothing more than a distant memory lived in an existence that will seem like a nearly forgotten dream. In the light of eternity, it simply will not matter.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, the Apostle Paul reminds us of the discipline that is required for ministry. He reminds us that it is not easy to serve the Lord in an evangelistic ministry, that it requires Olympic level discipline. Paul makes the point that there are similarities between the two. However, we all know that there is one huge difference; the prize. Our prize in ministry is not measured in prestige or finance. It is measured by the degree to which we seek the glory of God and by souls. Keep that in mind as we examine the goals we should keep in focus as leaders.

1. Our first goal is to win the prize.

Paul outlines this goal for us in verses 24 and 25 and gives us three ways to obtain the prize. First, look at verse 24:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

The first way we can win the prize is by BEING MOTIVATED. Paul is speaking of the motivation of the athletes. In essence he is saying, “Everyone who enters a race participates in running, but they all do it for the sake of winning the prize. YOU run the Christian life with the same drive as Olympians do.”

One thing I have heard Darrel Rundus say is that in business, when someone is not performing well that it comes down to MAT. MAT is an acronym that stands for “**M**otivation, **A**ttitude and **T**raining.” Usually, the reason for the poor performance can be identified in one of these three areas. Once the problem is identified, it can be dealt with head on and an improvement can be made.

What does it take to motivate you? Are you motivated? For some people, a gentle nudge in the right direction is all they need and for others a nuclear explosion in their ear wouldn't rouse them from a deep sleep. We see the whole spectrum on our evangelism teams and in our churches. And we can see the whole spectrum in our own lives.

So, if you struggle with motivation, here's some motivation for you.

150,000 people die every day on this planet. Pay day will come some day and it could be today. Death is as much a possibility for you as it is for the average sinner on the street. While we take it easy this week, our towns and cities filled with millions of people will either go to Heaven or Hell. While we excuse our lack of faithfulness now because of previous battles fought and won, thousands march into Hell.

Leonard Ravenhill wrote:

*“How do you take it easy
When His fire burns within?
How do you take it easy
In a world that's crushed by sin?
How do you take it easy
With a thousand tribes to tell?
How do you take it easy
In a world that speeds to Hell?
How do you take it easy
While the Church sleeps in its lees?
How do you take it easy—
Will someone tell me please?”*

Additionally, we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses; saints who have gone before us. People like Daniel, Job, Elijah, Paul, Ruth, Deborah, Priscilla. What do you think they are thinking from the stands? Are they cheering us on while we sprint down the final straightaway, or are they on the verge of booing us out of the stadium because we have decided to take a break...we'll catch up a little later?

And above all, the eyes of the Lord Himself are upon us. He is in the box seats. The same eyes which beheld the earth when it was without form and void while darkness was on the face of the waters, those same eyes which shed tears for Jerusalem before she crucified Him, the same eyes which are like flames of fire in The Revelation, those eyes that are purer than to behold evil, THOSE eyes watch us and our labor for Him.

Are we running like Olympic athletes or are we out for just a little stroll around the block?

However, the only question related to motivation is not, “Are we motivated?” but “What motivates us?” In fact, “What motivates us?” is a far more important question in the light of eternity.

There is nothing that can disqualify you more quickly from leadership than doing it for the wrong reasons. We receive many requests for information about becoming leaders in GNN every day. One of the questions on our Local Leader application is, “Why do you want to be a Local Leader?”. What would some of the answers be if we answered that question honestly when we are in the flesh? “Because I want to build a kingdom to me on this earth.” “Because I want to be known as someone who gets to hang around the cool people.” “So I can get a web page to let everyone know how great my accomplishments are.” Sometimes we are tempted with the same temptation that Lucifer himself succumbed to and we want to rewrite the doxology to read, “Praise ME from whom all blessings flow. Praise ME all creatures here below. Praise ME all ye heavenly hosts. Praise ME Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” If you think that this is just another classic overstatement, listen to the voice of your own self-talk when you are drifting away from close intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus and still pursuing ministry. What do you hear? How do I know? A writer can only write what he knows and this writer has fallen prey to the danger of self worship and self deception more than once. It’s the classic deception of the ages, one that preceded even Adam’s fall.

Let’s be honest about it and admit that our motivations are not always pure. But we also need to recognize the character of this self worship and self deception and call it what it is: idolatry. We have engraved an image to worship and that image stares at us from the mirror. We must destroy the high places in our heart as soundly saved believers so that we won’t be left with a pile of ashes on the Day of Judgment.

What was Paul’s motivation? Why did he run the race like an Olympic athlete? Paul lived for two things: the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:15-23). These motivations are exactly parallel to the two greatest commandments: to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31)! If we love God with ALL of our being, we would not dare to dream of robbing Him of His glory to heap it up at the altar of our self-worship. If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will not withhold the living water from them. When these two priorities are what drive us, we will have no time to fall for the delusion of self worship which has so permeated modern Churchianity.

Now look at verse 25:

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.”

The second way we can win the prize is by exercising SELF CONTROL.

The word “temperate” means self controlled or the ability to abstain from something. The only other time this Greek word is used in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul says that it is better for the unmarried who cannot exercise self control to marry than to burn in their lust. Here it does not refer solely to sexual temptation, but to “...all things.”

This term is borrowed from the Greek athletic world and describes the training of ancient athletes, which lasted about ten months (Lenski [The Interpretation Of St. Paul’s First And Second Epistles To The Corinthians](#) 383)! During that time, athletes carefully regulated everything they ate, how long they slept, how long they practiced, and what other activities they engaged in so that everything they did would benefit their bodies and help them win the competition. It was common knowledge that the athletes of Paul’s day exercised self control in everything.

Paul goes on to point out that they did all of this simply to win a crown, a *stephanos*, that will do nothing but decay. In those days, the decay happened very quickly in comparison to our gold medals of today. The *stephanos* was simply a wreath made of laurel or pine branches and had no intrinsic value to speak of. Not even worth \$120! The value of the *stephanos* was not commercial endorsements, it was fame. The glory of man himself. What foolishness! Man is described in Scripture as being of the same nature as the wreath! In Romans 1:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:54 we discover that man is of the same perishable nature! Only sinful pride would motivate us to exalt man who lives only a little longer than a laurel wreath.

There are crowns mentioned in the Word for faithful believers that we apparently will receive from the Lord in judgment (2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4). So the question is, “What crown are we living for?”

Do you streamline your life so that everything you do is solely for the glory of God and the Gospel? Are you so disciplined in all that you do that anything that hinders your effectiveness as a God glorifying evangelist is immediately demoted to its proper place? Ministry is filled with hard choices. We should not sacrifice what is best for the sake of what is good. That is exactly what an Olympic athlete would do for a counterfeit glory that fades. How much more disciplined should we be, knowing that the rewards we receive from the Master have an eternal prize!

Are you a disciplined person? Are you characterized by self-control? Ultimately, it is a work of the Holy Spirit, part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). We must be absolutely surrendered to Him, completely yielded to Him as a tool in His hand.

Do you train for evangelism like an athlete would train for a race? Do you force yourself into the Word and prayer? Do you sharpen your skills by studying the resources that the Lord has blessed us with through Living Waters, Way Of The Master and GNN? These are ways that we can “train” to run the race that is set before us.

“Self control is absolutely vital to lasting success in any endeavor of life. Many people do attain a degree of prominence on the strength of sheer natural talent alone. But the real, influential leaders are the ones who devote themselves to personal discipline and make the most of their gifts. Those who utterly lack self-control will invariably fail, and they forfeit the example of integrity so essential to the best kind of leadership.”

(MacArthur The Book On Leadership 146).

To be continued...