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Games – World Cup – Football – Sports Events

At the time of writing this session, it is the Women's World Cup 2019 but this talk can be used during any sporting event – we've tried to make it as generic as possible!

The theme for this talk is about your Christian life being like a sporting event. You are the sports person and you are in training for the medal, the cup, the award. The reward we fight for is not temporary, it's our reward in heaven with Jesus and to make Jesus known!

1 Corinthians 9.19-27

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Sports

Many people are huge sports fans. I'm on of them. I'll watch most sports if they're on and if I can! I especially follow and love football (soccer). But I also like climbing, bouldering, cricket, basketball, American football and more. I also like outdoor sports.

To be a successful sports person, you have to be fully committed and learn a lot. You have to have a natural ability, to train hard daily, to rest properly, eat properly, drink the right amount and type of fluids, have the right attitude, mental training, right types of body exercises and workouts and more. People aren't successful if they don't take these essentials into account. You can be a great footballer, but if you're lazy, or drink loads of alcohol or don't turn up to training when you should, you will fail.

When we watch the world's best athletes, footballers and sports people – these are the kinds of things they have done and kept on doing. As a Christian, we need to see our Christian lives in the same kinds of ways. Our 'exercises' are different, but they are just as important.

1 Timothy 4.7-8 says: "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

So we know that looking after our bodies is very important. The Bible describes our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit! I do fitness exercises pretty much every day. But most important is out training to be Godly. The Bible tells us this has huge value – it has value in ALL things, holding great promise for our life on earth and the life to come! If we can get hold of that and live for God in this way, you'll be amazed at what happens!

The purpose of the Training

Paul lets us know the purpose of our training. Have you ever done something and not known why? When I was in Germany with the army, I found myself cleaning my SA80 rifle – taking it apart, cleaning different parts of it, re-assembling and then presenting it for someone to check. Time after time I'd do this and the Sergeant or Corporal would always find something wrong. I didn't question, but kept wondering to myself, 'why am I cleaning this already clean rifle?' !! Looking back I think they were just killing some time by making us clean the rifles.

Paul is very clear – he made himself all things so that he could win as many people to Christ as possible. and "for the sake of the Gospel."

This was Paul's motivation – seeing people come to know Jesus. This consumed him and drove him forward to do everything he did and keep going despite all that happened to him. We need to truly get hold of God's love and purpose for our lives which is the same as Paul's, although it expresses itself in a way completely unique to you. God has a unique and perfect plan for you and will be using the gifts he's put in you and the areas of interest and passion you already have!

But remember that God wants you to be available completely and at all times – you never know how he may use you to reach others. Sometimes it's in ways we don't understand! In some of the football games, players do some strange things. Players score own goals, goalkeepers miss the ball and let it into their nets. Referees make strange and random decisions and managers decide to put players on the pitch with tactics that confuses everyone! In the Christian life, things happen we don't always understand, but we can know that God is in charge and knows what he's doing!!

Romans 8.28 – "And we know that in all things God works for the **good of those who love him**, who have been called according to his purpose."

Run to win

In every sporting competition, the teams have to believe that they can win. When small nations take on footballing giants in football, if the small nation doesn't believe they can win then they probably won't and there's not much point in them being there! Let's read 1 Corinthians 9 again:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

There are lots of Christians who aren't really living fully for God. In fact, most of us aren't operating to the full potential that God has for us. But Paul challenges us to live fully for God and to do whatever it takes to make this happen.

Athletes have to stop eating and do certain things in order to be successful. In just the same way, there are things that aren't good for us that we have to stop doing. Other times there are some good things we need to lay down so that we can do what is the very best for our lives. But every sacrifice that you make for God is always worth it. You may have to stop hanging out with certain mates, stop watching so much TV and read your Bible more, delete your social media account or something else. Ask God what he wants you to do.

Paul talks about athletes in 'strict training.' He didn't mention other sports as they weren't around – and God knew that athletes would still be around even 2000 years later! But what is 'strict training'? It is doing things deliberately in order to effect a specific outcome. For an athlete, the strict training was so they would win the race. For us as Christians, the training leads to winning people for Jesus and getting a reward. Hebrews 12 talks about discipline and God's discipline:

“...the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

So we have to endure discipline as training as we know that the reward of what we're doing is very great! The Bible tells us that we will have a 'crown that will last forever'. An athlete wins a gold medal, a football team wins the World Cup, an ice hockey team wins the Stanley Cup. These are all great but they're temporary. Just like this world, these things will wear out and fade away. But we will have a crown that will last forever in eternity!! One day Jesus will say to 'you did it, welcome home, you did amazingly well, I'm so proud of you, you're a winner in my eyes'. This is a prize above anything!

The great thing about being a Christian is that you are the star in your own life in God's eyes. There isn't 'one' winner, but we are all winners because of Jesus. Our part is to do what we can. Paul tells us that he 'beats his body.' This isn't some crazy beating of himself with whips like some religious nutt! This means that Paul made all his body and whole self obedient to God. He didn't let himself get out of control by getting drunk, speaking bad things about people, get violent or do wrong things with his body sexually or in any other way.

Paul's motivation was so that he couldn't be accused of being a hypocrite and to make sure that he was completely given to God. When Joseph was asked to sin, his reaction was 'no way, I can't sin against God.' If we determine to serve God no matter what and obey him, then we don't get tempted to do so many wrong things and can stand strong when temptations come. Today, decide to live for God fully and win for Jesus!