

# *Be A Winner*

## **1 Cor 9:24**

Zeke Flores

*In Athens, long ago, games used to be held in honor of the Grecian gods and heroes. One of these was a torch race--that is, a race of torch bearers--which was run at night in honor of Prometheus. The starting point was a mile and a half out of the city, in the olive grove where Plato had his "Academy," this spot being chosen because Prometheus had a sanctuary there. The winning-post was within the city; and the runner who reached it first with his torch still burning gained the prize. In like manner our Christian life here on earth is "the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1) We shall have run that race well if, when we come at last into God's presence, our lights are still burning. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." (Dan 12:3)*

### **Intro** *There is no thrill like winning.*

- A. Can't help but think of "Wide Wide World of Sports"
    - 1. "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat!"
    - 2. Remember the poor "agony of defeat" skier who flies off the ramp & tumbles down the mountainside? Ouch!
  - B. To focus on winning, we must consider the possibility of defeat.
    - 1. A wise athlete will consider every prospect in his sport so that he'll be ready for anything.
    - 2. Our "game" is more serious than any other - our souls.
    - 3. We yearn for the victory in Jesus but must also recognize the possibility of losing this race.
- I. You can't be a winner if you don't ...**
- A. ... **Enter the race!**
    - 1. Seems amazingly simple, but it's true.
      - a. No one can win any prize unless first he agrees to compete.
    - 2. Too many look at the difficulty of the Christian life and conclude it's not worth the trouble.
      - a. There will certainly be trouble
        - 1) Paul & Barnabas said, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" Acts 14:22
        - 2) No soft-soap, just the facts!
    - 3. But how can you reach glory w/o the effort?
      - a. **Eph 2:4-10**
      - b. The race is on!
  - B. ... **Run according to the rules!**
    - 1. There is a play book for every sport.
      - a. It outlines the do's & don'ts that athletes must obey.
      - b. *At one point during a game, the coach said to one of his young players, "Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?" The little boy nodded in the affirmative. "Do you understand that a team plays by the rules?" The little boy nodded yes. "So," the coach continued, "when a strike is called, or you're out at first, you don't argue or curse or attack the umpire. Do you understand all that?" Again the little boy nodded. "Go on," said the coach. "Now go over there and explain it to your mother"*
    - 2. The point is well made in God's word
      - a. **2 Tim 2:5**
    - 3. The rules permit us to form strategy and make plans
      - a. **1 Cor 9:25-27**
      - b. Not only does the play book set the boundaries, it molds the character of the competitor.
      - c. *Vince Lombardi, the legendary coaching genius who was the only man to ever coach three consecutive world championship football teams, once said, "I've never known a man worth his salt who, in the long run, deep down in his heart, did not appreciate the grind and the discipline. There is something in good men that truly yearns for and needs discipline." Let us discipline our bodies and bring them into subjection to the will of Christ.*
  - 4. God's word, our rule book, is more than a list of do's & don'ts, it's a guide for pleasing Him!

- a. We must realize that our victory is contingent upon our complete and total compliance with the book.
  - b. **John 12:48, Matt 7:21**
  - c. Let's get in the race and run to win!
- C. ... **Complete the course! Don't quit!**
- 1. Sure there are easier ways to find pleasure in this world.
    - a. Thing is, none of them last. Folks move from thrill to thrill seeking some lasting joy, that is until the next big thing comes along!
  - 2. Christians are like anyone else, we can be sidetracked.
    - a. **Gal 5:7-9, 6:8-9**
    - b. A molehill can become a mountain, too difficult for us to climb, if we're not resolute in our mission.
  - 3. A Christian must be disciplined, focused and determined if he is to gain the prize.
  - 4. We look to the perfect example.
    - a. **Heb 12:1-3**
    - b. *The snow covered the ground where three lads were playing. A man came along and said to them, "Would you like to try a race and the winner receive a prize?" The boys agreed, and the man told them that his race was to be different. He said, "I'll go to the other side of the field, and when I give you the signal, you start to run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner." The race commenced and the first boy kept looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy just ran with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the man on the other side of the field. The third lad was the winner, because his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him. - Luke 9:62*
    - c. It won't be easy, but anything worth having rarely is.
    - d. Winston Churchill's simple speech to graduating class at his alma mater: "**Never, never, never quit!**"

**Conc** *Most hope for long life full of success and accomplishments.*

- A. There will be none like the prospect of a well lived life in hopeful expectation of heaven.
  - 1. Be able to say "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*" 2 Tim 4:7-8
- B. Getting in the race: **Hear- Believe- Repent- Confess- Be Baptized- Live Faithfully**
- C. C'mon, let's run!