

For the Imperishable Crown **By Ney Rieber**

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air” (1Cor. 9:24-27, ESV).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2, ESV).

“The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron... and I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2:26-28, ESV).

In acknowledgement of having had the Olympic Games this past year, let us think on how an athlete trains for and practices his sport. His level of motivation must be unparalleled, his goals clear. He must constantly be thoroughly concentrated on it with all his efforts placed in his practice.

So should it be with our spiritual efforts to draw near to God and to reach heaven. If the athlete strives with all his might for a perishable wreath made of leaves and fleeting honor and fame, how much more should we eagerly strive toward eternal rest and peace with God that does not pass away!

Yet also the athlete must pace himself. He must run in a way so that he can win the race, but in order to win, he must finish. He cannot afford to sprint as such a quick pace that he cannot sustain that same pace throughout. Friends and brothers, remember that even God rested on the seventh day after creation of this universe began, when His work was completed (Gen. 2:2-3). If even God took the time to rest, then so should His created beings! Set spiritual goals that will help you grow without wearing you down or burning you out.

Why Daily Encouragement?

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

“We must stay in constant contact with brethren and encourage one another daily. Sin is the agent that hardens man's heart. Sin is deceitful because it promises us pleasures and happiness, but its rewards are misery and death. If not careful, we can begin to believe the lies of Satan and refuse to hear the voice of God, thus our spiritual arteries become hardened” (From Hebrews by Robert Harkrider, p. 21).

Indeed, sin appears fair, but it is vile. It appears pleasant, but it's destructive. It promises much, but it performs nothing. Let us encourage one another daily lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Straight to the Heart

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

“In the early morning darkness of January 8, 1991, an Iraqi Scud missile streaked high over the Saudi Arabian desert, bound for the coalition forces allied against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. But as the Scud raced across the night sky, it was fixed in the invisible spotlight of American radar. Sent rushing up to meet it was a 17-foot-long rocket called the Patriot. Three

miles above the earth, the Patriot destroyed the Scud in an immense orange fireball. American forces also have stealth bombers that can evade enemy radar, and smart bombs that hit their targets with pinpoint accuracy. But for all of our technology, we haven't a single military weapon that can penetrate the human heart or defeat spiritual enemies" (From Bible Illustrator).

2Corinthians 10:4-5 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Six Inch Christians

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Charles Simpson, in Pastoral Renewal, writes: "I met a young man not long ago who dives for exotic fish for aquariums. He said that one of the most popular aquarium fish is the shark. He explained that if you catch a small shark and confine it, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium. Sharks can be six inches long, yet fully matured. But, if you turn them loose in the ocean, they grow to their normal length of eight feet. I don't know about you, but in my lifetime, I've seen some of the cutest little six-inch Christians who swim around in their little puddles. They have never grown to maturity because they have never applied themselves."

The Best Things in Life

An old adage says, "The best things in life are free." There's a lot of truth in that. Some people, however, believe that the best things in life are expensive or perhaps elusive. Recently I saw a sign that made me smile and think. It said, "The best things in life are not things." What a great way to say it! The value of family, friends, and faith points us to the realization that what matters most in life is all wrapped up in people and the Lord.

Solomon was well qualified to speak about material things because he "surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom" (1Kings 10:23). His counsel? "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:4-5). His course of action was, "Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge... For surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off" (vv.12,18).

The best things in life are the eternal riches that come from God's goodness and grace in Jesus Christ. We do not hold them in our hands, but in our hearts. Our greatest riches are the riches we have in Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).