

2nd Timothy
Chapter 2:5
“The Fruit of the Athlete”

All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
Matthew W. Thoms, Pastor/Teacher
August 18th, 2019

In **verses 3 through 6 of this chapter**, Paul uses three different vocations to paint a singular picture of Christianity or ... more specifically ... a picture of fruitful Christianity.

Three allegories; the soldier, the athlete and the farmer ... looking at how the positive characteristics of someone successful in each of those vocations can teach us something about our personal Christian fruitfulness.

Last week we saw that the primary characteristic that makes the soldier fruitful is single-mindedness ... as it says in **verse 4** ... **No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.**

This morning Paul adds to that picture with a metaphor of the successful athlete and we'll see that the primary characteristic that makes the athlete fruitful is obedience ... competing according to the rules.

Next week, we'll look at the third metaphor ... the farmer and we'll see that the primary characteristic that makes him fruitful is a willingness to work hard before he partakes of the fruit of his labors.

Verse 5: So, the athlete. But not just any athlete ... Paul says he's talking about the prizewinning athlete. The one who wins the race or the fight or the contest.

And there are many things about the athlete that the Christian can learn from. Paul and others use the metaphor to describe several aspects of the Christian life because Christianity is a contest. Not that it's a game ... but it is a race and a fight and a competition.

Most of us have heard the cliché ... “Too many Christians believe that this world is a playground, while in reality ... it's a battleground.”

1. In this life, we're in a race!

Q. Who will get to that lost soul first ... us ... as representatives of Christ or others in their unwitting representation of Satan?

2. And it's a fight as Paul tells us in ...

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We're engaged in a perpetual struggle against the enemy of God which is why that passage is followed by The Full Armor of God; the armament that God's made available to us with which to resist and overcome Satan.

3. And this life is a perpetual contest ... and we're to be fully engaged in that competition.

But perhaps the one thing we most need to be reminded of here ... is that our God ... our Master ... our Commander has *one and only one* enemy! Just one!

So ... if you have more than one ... or if your opponent is anyone or anything other than Satan himself ... well then, you're wrong and you need to repent for considering them in that light!

So, the apt metaphor of the athlete ...

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. NKJV

So, you have to picture a track in the center of a coliseum. Think of the Olympics. The stands are full of fans there to support you. It's the picture of competition ... which is why it makes such a great picture of genuine Christianity.

Q. So what are the similarities? What can we draw from this allegory that might be helpful to us? (I have nine helpful similarities to share with you)

1. Well for one thing, before one can compete, every athlete has to complete the entry form in its entirety ...

Before you get too far into the competition, It would be a good idea to make sure you're an eligible contestant.

John 3:3 Jesus ... said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." NKJV

So, that's the bottom line ... you must be saved, and you need confirmation of that.

1st John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. NKJV

If you're not certain that you're properly registered for the competition ... if you don't know for sure that you're saved ... then according to The Apostle John ... you're probably not.

If you've not received confirmation of your registration for the contest you must take care of that first. Talk to me or someone else here this morning. Do not leave in an uncertain state because the Bible says that an uncertain state is a lost state.

2. The second thing the Christian life has in common with athletics ... is coaches ...

1st Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia [Eh-Kae`-ah] who believe. NKJV

The Holy Spirit and people who have been through it ... and have had some success themselves. People who are led by the Spirit and can improve the way we compete. They can help us understand all the rules and show us some tricks that will make us more successful.

Athletes need coaches to be successful and so do Christians.

3. The third thing the Christian life has in common with athletics is a common goal

...

In athletics your goal is to put the ball through the hoop or get the ball into the end zone or reach the finish line.

Q. And remember what we read in Hebrews 12?

Hebrews 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... NKJV

We must be goal oriented to be successful.

Q. If you don't know what the goal is ... what will you run toward? –

1st Corinthians 9:26 ... I run in such a way, as not without aim ...

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. NKJV

Q. So what's our goal, as Christians? -- Simple ... to be like Jesus!

I think this is a major, major problem within Christianity ... or at least all that's called Christianity ... too few people actually have goals.

People just sort of lumber along ... waiting. Half the time they don't even know what they're waiting for ... they're just getting through another day. Which is both sad and sinful!

Your goal, if you're a Christian, is become more like Jesus ... today! And tomorrow ... and the next day!

4. Fourth ... just like Christianity, athletic competitions have judges or referees ...

2nd Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day ... NKJV

In a race, it's the judge who determines when you'll start. It's the judge who determines the course you'll run. It's the judge who determines the distance of the race and where it will end. Really ... the only choice the athlete gets to make is whether or not to enter the event in the first place.

Job 40:6 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: 7 "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: 8 "Would you indeed annul My judgment? ... NKJV

So, the Christian race, just like athletics, has a judge and He is the one who decides on the when, where, why and how ... and He's under no obligation to check with us first.

Okay so for you note takers:

- 1.** You must be properly entered.
- 2.** You need good coaches.
- 3.** You must know and focus on the goal and ...
- 4.** You must submit to the judgments of the referees.

But those are really only the basics of the competition ...

Q. The real question though is ... what does it take to win?

5. Well one thing ... as the writer of Hebrews tells ... us ... is a light load ...

Hebrews 12:1 ... let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us ... NKJV

Whether you're a sprinter or a marathoner, you can't win the race with a burden on your back.

Matthew 11: 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." NKJV

Q. So, consider ... what forms do your burdens come in?

a. Q. Is it sin that you've not yet truly repented of?

b. Q. Is it a commandment the Lord's given you, but that you've not yet followed through on?

c. Q. Is it a bag full of worldly concerns?

If we're going to compete successfully, we must "**lay aside every weight and sin**" (Hebrews 12:1)!

6. An athlete and Christian alike, need a good strong heart to win.

This is what you might think of as "off the field work". And it's needed ... because the natural heart leaves a lot to be desired ...

Ezekiel 11:19 "And I shall give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh

That's spiritual birth. Before a person gives themselves to Christ ... they're spiritually dead ... with a non-living heart of stone. When we give our lives to Christ ... that heart of stone is replaced with a living, but still very, imperfect heart of flesh.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked NKJV

It's no longer a dead heart of stone ... now it's a desperately wicked heart of flesh. But as always God comes to our rescue and provides us with the answer ...

Romans 2:29 ... circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter ... NKJV

So, first God saves us for the asking ... replacing our heart of stone with a heart of flesh,

but there's a subsequent and very necessary step. In fact ... it's an ongoing step called spiritual circumcision. That is ... the perpetual cutting away of the old, fleshly, worldly parts that are so displeasing to God.

7. Another thing that both Christians and athletes need to be successful is obedient (coordinated) feet ...

Having a dedicated mind and strong legs is great. Every athlete needs both, but unless they're connected to one another they're worthless. As Christians our feet have to be subject to our renewed and Spirit-led mind. They must be obedient ... otherwise you'll only have disorganized movements and plenty of bruises to show for it.

Now I realize that none of you would know anything about disobedient flesh, but just in case you have a friend who struggles with it ... let me share with you ... God's promise on the subject.

He says to the one with an obedient mind ... or, what we might call, good intentions ...

Proverbs 4:12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble. NKJV

The earnest desire of your mind and heart is something God looks on with approval and is always ready to help fulfill.

God has thoroughly prepared and supplied us for this race called life. But there is one area where the Lord ... largely ... leaves it up to us. And that one area is also the **8th** thing that successful Christians and athletes have in common ...

8. Effort! The greater the effort ... the greater the reward ...

1st Corinthians 9:24 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. NKJV

J. K. Summerhill shares this story and commentary ...

"Watch this," chuckled the coach, as together we watched his team compete in a track meet. "You see my boy there, coming in fourth. Limping! He was favored to win this 200. Chances are he just developed that limp to have an excuse for not doing better. I call it loser's limp."

Sure enough ... he limped over to the coach's side and said, "Coach, I just couldn't do it, something happened in my leg." The coach looked over at me and winked.

I've thought about that a number of times since ... Some of the reasons why men don't reach their goals are no more convincing than the high school boy's

suddenly developed limp as an excuse. Worse yet, the loser's limp attitude can stop a man from even trying When the gun goes off to start the race, with the loser's limp excuse, he's licked before the race begins.

Now this man can be very convincing, "You can see how badly I was outnumbered ... the odds were against me." Or "I was working in a no-win situation ..." Or ... or ... or ... Rarely is it a real handicap.

These are men who have adopted a built-in loser's limp as life's excuse when they come up short.

Q. Know anyone like that? Always has a ready excuse for every poor effort or substandard performance? – Successful athletes and successful Christians have genuine *effort* in common.

But ... while all of those things are true within the context of Paul's metaphor ... none of those things are his main point. Look again ... here in this morning's text ...

2nd Timothy 2:5 ... if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

9. So, the one thing, according to Paul, that supersedes all others ... is competing within the boundaries of the rules. You can do all those other things flawlessly, but ... if you don't compete according to the rules then all of your talent and effort will amount to nothing.

But God's given us a rule book to prevent us from being disqualified and just like in any other competition ... the rule makers don't confer with the athletes just prior to the whistle to make sure they agree with the rules. The athletes are never asked their opinion ... they're simply expected to know the rules and to comply with them.

It doesn't matter how strong or coordinated an athlete is. It doesn't matter how skilled his coaches or how hard he practices ... if he doesn't engage in the competition according to the rules ... he will NEVER win a single contest. Despite superior talent ... he will lose every time!

One pastor advises his congregation to put everything to what he calls, "The Believability Test". And the backbone of that test, as he defines it, is looking at the credibility of the source. He wrote ...

Reputation is what you are said to be ... character is what you are.

Reputation is a picture ... character is your real face.

Reputation is what you have when you move into a new community or start a new job ... character is what you have when you leave.

Reputation goes and can grow like a mushroom ... character is built in a lifetime.

Reputation is what will be said at your funeral ... character is what you will or won't be before the judge of all mankind.

See ... a person can earn a reputation based on talent or coaching or even appearances, but a person's character ... to a large degree ... depends on keeping the rules.

Q. So ... based on those truths ... do people find you believable?

Conclusion:

2nd Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 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. NKJV

FINISH WELL!!! Don't let up! Don't sit down in the middle of the track or wonder off into the infield! God's called you to win and He's given you everything you need to do it. So, there are no excuses.

Three metaphors painting one picture ... the picture of a fruitful Christian ...

- 1.** He's single-minded. Not preoccupied with concerns unrelated to the ministry God's called him to.
- 2.** He does life by the rules so that his testimony and ministry won't appear phony to the world ... so that he'll be believable.
- 3.** And next week ... the farmer ... willing to invest the sweat of his brow before he takes his ease or enjoys the fruits of his labor.