

Living like Champions in 2004

Whether you like the New England Patriots or not, at 14 and 2 and AFC champions they are looking pretty good! At the start of our New Year (and the playoffs) I believe there are some spiritual lessons that we can learn here from a team that has had a tremendous 2003 season.

As we all know, the New England Patriots were not always a great team. Coach Bill Belichick, however, has transformed his team over the past few years. So how did he do it? This month, I would like to share one of the principles he has employed.

Living like a champion begins in the heart & mind

Belichick has transformed a team who was conditioned for failure into a team that humbly yet expectantly pursues excellence. Over the past few years they've acquired new players who have signed on to the team philosophy and been coached to distinction. So how does this apply to our spiritual lives?

Choosing to sign on...

Well let me start by asking a question? Have you signed on to the team, to God's way of thinking and living? Romans 12:1-2 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

For many of you, you've got to make this first choice that begins in your heart and mind, *"Whose team am I going to play for in 2004?"* It's decision time. We must each choose, as the apostle Paul urges, to offer ourselves to God and His purposes. We do this in view of *"His great mercy"*—His gift of forgiveness and eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. Through God's great love and mercy he invites you to join his team. The signing bonus is 1) *Forgiveness for your past* 2) *Power and freedom to live a victorious life today and* 3) *An eternally secure future in heaven.* Past, present, and future!

Before you join any team you've got to think it through. That's why I offer our IMPACT personal growth series. "BELONG" is an introduction to the team. Here you learn the basics and have the opportunity to make your decision. The question at the end of these sessions is, *"Will you commit to belong to Christ and will you commit to belong to others through his church?"*

Learning the new plays...

Romans 12:2 says, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* Everyone will say that they want to know the winning game plan but in actuality they often want to call all their own plays. Bill Belichick will tell you, *"That's not how you win football games."* While personal ability is a great tool, the masterful coach holds the secrets to developing a great winning team. He will open his player's minds to new perspectives—a new way of thinking and playing.

This world has a pattern for living already defined for you: the pursuit of pleasure, power, and possessions. These 3 P's are not wrong in and of themselves. God wants us to enjoy life, entrusts us with varying degrees of power, and blesses us with possessions. But if they become the goal of life and replace God at our center, we are living from the pages of a failed playbook that doesn't lead to the endzone. We will miss our purpose and will find our empty pursuits ultimately controlling us.

God's playbook is the Bible and His purpose is to "*conform*" our character not to the world's pattern but to the likeness of Christ. This begins in the mind. Our character is a direct product of our mind or how we think. It is developed by what we think, value, and is revealed by what we choose and ultimately do. That is why the training for the Christian begins in the mind. We may not be running sprints at Foxboro's Gillette stadium but we instead train by filling our mind with the truth of God's Word, which holds the pattern that God prescribes for a great life.

Believing...

It's also a matter of faith. The Bible says in Romans 8:37, "*...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" And 1 Corinthians 15:57, "*...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Do we believe these verses? Can victorious living be ours? Even though we will experience the pressures and difficulties and even sufferings of life, God's promise—His reminder to us—is that we have 'victory' because of what Jesus has done for us. We are 'more than conquerors!' Living like a champion begins in the mind and part of that means that we must begin believing the promises of God for our lives.

Next month I want to talk with you about another championship strategy, "*training.*" For now we'll close on this note. I want to encourage you and help you to strengthen your faith and realize the possibilities that exist for the follower of Jesus Christ! Some of you are held back from all that God has for you. The truth is, the battle begins first in your mind. You must wrestle with these questions. *Will you commit to Christ and will you commit to others through his church? Will you open your mind and heart to God's pattern for living? Will you believe the promises of God for your life?* Answering these questions in the affirmative will set you on the path of a new and exciting journey! The Bible actually speaks of it as a "new life" in Christ!

On Sundays I'll be preaching about the possibilities for our new life in Christ through a series called, "*What God Can Do Through Ordinary You.*" I want to encourage you with the people from God's Hall of Fame in Hebrews chapter 11. These 'Bible Greats' were simply ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary things for God. They were far from perfect. They struggled with signing on, wanted to run their own plays, and questioned God's promises. But they all pressed on in faith and reached their goal. They fulfilled their purpose and for that they were commended. Let's learn together from their experiences and be encouraged to press on in our race that God has set before us—the race of life!

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

Your spiritual coach,

