

Living like Champions in 2004 – (Part 3)

Well our own New England Patriots proved their metal in Superbowl XXXVIII showing us what champions are made of! Bill Belichick's coaching delivered. Let's look again at how the strategies employed by a successful sports franchise hold some parallels to our spiritual lives as well.

We first discussed that **living like a Champion begins in the heart and mind**. We must **choose** to sign on to God's team (*choose to be part of His family*), **decide** that we will learn His plays for abundant living (*inviting the transformation of our preconditioned hearts & minds to a new way of thinking and living*), and **resolve** to step out in faith (*trusting that God's promises for our New Life in Christ are true*). These movements all begin in the heart and mind.

Last month we discussed that **living like a champion also requires training like a champion** (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). While God promises to conform us to the image of Christ, to make us more like Jesus, we must cooperate with His leading (Gal. 5:16-26). While our salvation is totally dependent on God's grace through faith alone, our spiritual maturity does require personal discipline and effort. There is no road to "instant" spiritual maturity or a special diet called, "7 days to Christlikeness."

Training leads us toward maturity but it is still only preparation for the real game. You never see Bill Belichick gushing over a practice that went well during the week. While he may feel that his team is well prepared, he also knows of the challenges that they will face in the "real" game. He staunchly sets his face against these challenges and seeks to coach his team to perform in the face of adversity. So we also learn that...

Living like a champion necessitates performing like a champion under pressure

No one needs reminding that "living" the Christian life is different than "learning" about it. In real life a variety of pressures and temptations challenge our training. You might execute a play perfectly in practice but in the pressures of the game it might be more difficult. When a champion blows a play, however, he doesn't give up and hit the showers. He gets back into the huddle and goes out for another play, pressing toward the goal! He learns "in the thick of things" his own strengths and weaknesses and uses that knowledge to hone his game.

At the very beginning of the football season the Patriots were demoralized by the loss of one of their star players, Lawyer Milloy to the Buffalo Bills. They were subsequently crushed by the Bills in a 31-0 loss. As true champions, however, they recovered: studying their mistakes, honing their skills, and preparing for their next game. They didn't give up, pressed on, and claimed the victory!


As champions in Christ we are called to grow in our training through God's Word and then to execute our "plays" through a lifestyle of Christlikeness. An article I read by Raymond Causey said,

"We must ***mimic God's character as it is revealed in his Word:*** 'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma' (Ephesians 5:1-2). We mimic the character of God when we internalize His Word and begin imitating the pattern of behavior and attitude displayed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no greater honor or accomplishment on this earth than to become more and more like Jesus. Jesus Christ was the perfect model and example of godliness. He demonstrated what it means to have a mind that is constantly in tune with the goals and objectives of heaven. Unlike many of us, Christ did not allow the wickedness of the world, the fascination with the flesh, or the deception of the devil to influence his thinking. Instead, Christ kept his mind sanctified [*set apart, holy*], pure and focused on the will of God. "¹

Reader, its decision time! Get on board! Begin your personal journey of discovering what it means to live like a Champion! Christ's promise to you is that his way is the path to abundant and eternal life beginning today! In Class 101 you will be introduced to the life changing message of Jesus Christ in detail. You will be called to begin the journey, to commit your life to Christ and to become a part of his family. In Class 201 you will be given the tools you need for a lifetime of spiritual growth. In Class 301 we will build on our personal commitment to Christ by pledging to a life of action. That action is ministry- mimicking God's character as seen in Christ through serving others with love. The question at the end of this class is, "*will you, like Jesus, commit to a lifestyle of service in using your God-given shape in ministry?*"

As you follow the pathway to Christian maturity you will find that the Christian life is far from self-focused. It is an "others" oriented lifestyle. Through ministering in Christ's name to others you will find the peace and joy that you are longing for, even when your personal circumstances may be far less than perfect! Take a step in faith toward what others have discovered: a new life of victory and freedom in Christ! Embrace your calling to live like a Champion!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PASTOR SCOTT". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

¹ Changing for Good by Raymond Causey. (c)2002 by Raymond Causey.