

If Only...

- If only my boss wouldn't be so rude and domineering, I would try harder and be more cooperative at work. "*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.*" (1 Peter 2:18)
- If only my husband weren't so lazy and self-centered, and would treat me like I deserve, I would go back and live with him. "... *wives, be submissive to your husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.*" (1 Peter 3:1-2)
- If only people would quit taking advantage of me, I would maintain a better disposition. "*To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.*" (1 Peter 3:8-9)
- If only the brethren were friendlier and that preacher not so dry, I would go to church more often. "... *let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ...*" (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- If only I had more income and fewer bills, I would give a lot more. "... *in the churches of Macedonia ... in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.*" (2 Corinthians 8:1-2)
- If only my family would be more supportive, I would become a Christian. "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me ...*" (Matthew 10:37)

Do you notice that what God expects of us, He expects regardless of our particular circumstances? Instead of excusing ourselves due to adverse conditions, let us commit ourselves to our Creator and Benefactor.

If only we would be like Jesus, who said, "... I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). He not only said it, He lived it — even to the point of death.

by Frank Himmel

Winning Last Place

We live in a society that is sports crazy. We love football and fishing, racing and wrestling, soccer and softball -- not to mention baseball, basketball and golf. Nearly all of us have had the experience of cheering for our team or favorite player to win, whether the contest was professional, college, high school or just the youth league team that our child or grandchild played on. And many of us have participated in sports ourselves. We've personally experienced "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat."

From a spiritual perspective, sports are not necessarily a bad thing. According to the Bible, sports teach us important lessons about disciplining ourselves when striving for a goal (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), playing by the rules (2 Timothy 2:5), and running with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). Obviously, we can allow sports to become a bad thing if we place too much importance on them or allow them to crowd out spiritual concerns. But sports can also impact us negatively in other ways. They can train us to be too competitive, self-seeking, and ambitious — too concerned with winning at all costs.

In most sports competitions, everyone wants first place. But there are times in the life of every Christian when he should seek last place. In Mark 9:35, Jesus told the twelve apostles, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees because "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:6). He told His disciples, "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place . . ." (Luke 14:10).

The Bible reveals that we should be striving to win last place in our relationships with others! "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (Philippians 2:3). "... Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."" (1 Peter 5:5). "... Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." (Romans 12:16).

Here are some practical suggestions for winning last place. The next time that you disagree

with a brother in an area of judgment or opinion, insist that your brother get his way. The next time that your wife or husband neglects to do a chore that merely benefits you, do it yourself. The next time they are looking for a volunteer at work to do some menial task, volunteer! Win last place!

- by Steve Klein

A Great King

Hezekiah is remembered as one of the great kings in Judah. The nation prospered under his rule and his royal record draws high marks (2 Kings 18:5-6). What was it that made him a great king? And, what might we learn that will help us be effective servants of God?

First, it should be observed that his greatness did not come based upon his family relationships. His father, Ahaz, was a horrible ruler – even offering some of his own children as sacrifice to pagan gods (2 Kings 16:2-4). But Hezekiah overcame the terrible heritage passed down from his father. We, too, can overcome the unfortunate ‘baggage’ of our kinship (Ezekiel 18:20).

Furthermore, Hezekiah was not great because he was ‘older and wiser’ when he came to office. He was only 25 years old when he assumed the throne (2 Kings 18:1-2), yet he was diligent and faithful from day one (2 Chron. 29:1-3). Young folks today need to realize that they have great potential in God’s service – even in their youth.

The defining statement about Hezekiah is in 2 Kings 18:3: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” Notice that it was not what was right in the sight of men, but of the Lord. Men would have likely wanted to continue in the sinful ways of Hezekiah’s father, but this new king was determined to do what God desired. And this was no mere lip service to God, but real action. *“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves.”* He even *“brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses made”* because the people had turned it into an idol (vs. 4). There was no compromising spirit in Hezekiah. *“He clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments”* (vs. 6)

Hezekiah’s example of obedience to God and loyal service stands as a worthy example for us.

- by Greg Gwin