

CHAPTER 1

To Win



Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19

I am a guy who loves sports. I grew up in Texas, where football was king. I played football, watched football, and even dreamed about football. It was the way of life for a kid in the heart of Texas. I dreamed big dreams as I watched the Houston Oilers play in the Astrodome. I would play in the front yard and fantasize that I was Johnnie Unitas or Roger Staubach. I ended every fantasy with time running out and me throwing the winning touchdown as time expired. I won the Superbowl! What a wonderful life that would have been.

I am a very competitive person. I love to win. I love to win debates, athletic endeavors, and just about anything anyone wants to dive into. I love to see competition. I enjoy seeing the underdog win. I like a good thumping. I like to win! I was a very competitive teen and young adult. I wanted to be on top of the world, but only through the eyes of the world. Life has a way of humbling us.

I thought I would be a professional athlete all my life, or a preacher of a church of several thousand people. I wanted to win by the world standards. No matter what my heart said, I wanted to gauge myself by what the world labeled as success.

Years later, I find myself in small-town America as a small-town preacher, and I am not throwing touchdowns. I am not a professional athlete, and I do not have a church of several thousand people. Life takes a lot of twists, but we were made to win this game of life. My fantasies have changed, and so have my passions and desires. When we allow our lives to be led by the Authority of the universe, we start to see victory in a different light. We start to see life in a way the world cannot comprehend. We start to see others as more important than we had thought. We begin to see others as more important than ourselves. Life will take on a completely new meaning when we allow God to actually take the lead.

We were made to excel in life. We were designed for greatness. We have this calling from the pit of our stomachs that there must be more to life than just living and dying. The problem with most of us is that we chase the wrong goals, desires, or even fantasies. How can we expect to excel in life when life tells us that it is okay to quit? It seems so prevalent in our society to just quit when things get tough. We tell our children to quit piano, sports, or even educational endeavors if they are too difficult or no longer enjoyable. We lay a foundation for them to be able to quit other things as they grow older. We quit our jobs when we feel mistreated. We quit our marriages when we cannot find the answers we are looking for. Some of our loved ones have even decided to quit life.

We chase goals that the world has set, that have no true reward. We work hard to get ahead, only to be passed by. We study to pass the test, only to fail. We labor in our marriages, only for our marriage to end in divorce or discontent. We

work so hard in life to achieve and the world keeps knocking us down. How do we become triumphant in a world that is such an overwhelming opponent?

Even when we succeed in the world's view, the reward we receive is only with the values and rewards the world can offer us. If we get the promotion, we receive monetary gain, power, and accolades. We pass a test, only to prepare for another and possibly receive a degree. I think you get the point. These rewards are not bad, but these rewards should not be the main prize of what we are pursuing. These worldly rewards are only temporary and will fade away with time. We will spend the money, get used to the promotion, and find ourselves still lacking in the desire of accomplishment. No matter what the world can give us, we will eventually find ourselves looking for more.

Notice a child with a new toy. The child may have wanted this toy for a long time, but after a while, the child will discard the toy. It may become broken or just simply lose its appeal. Whatever the case, the child will eventually want something new to replace the joy the toy once brought. We are not much different from that child. The main difference is simply the object of our affection. We must break this cycle and change what rewards we are pursuing, or we will never experience true victory upon this earth.

I am here to tell you that you can win in this life if you set your mind to the proper perspective. I am not speaking of the "power of positive thinking." I am not talking about cheating to get ahead. I am talking about truly winning against this thing called life, tasting the wonderful flavor of victory each day. How? you may ask.

Let us look at the lives of some people who won against insurmountable odds to get a proper understanding of winning.

Joseph the “Winner”

Genesis 37:5 says, “Joseph had a dream.”

Joseph of the Bible was a person who had big dreams in life. Joseph dreamed that he would have a very high position and that even his own siblings and parents would be subjective to him and his decisions. Their very life would fall into his hands if so. Now, Joseph had grand dreams of winning in life, but it was not without some severe roadblocks.

At the tender age of seventeen, he was sold into slavery by the very family members he would rule in his dreams. Later, after overcoming great odds, Joseph became a very powerful man in his country, but after a false allegation, he was thrown into jail and stripped of his position. Now, Joseph could have given up while he was in prison, but instead he was given great authority in the prison system. Once released from prison, in about a fifteen-minute period of time, he went from prisoner to second in command of an entire country.

I know this sounds a little unrealistic, but what drove Joseph was not a dream of life, but a true view of living an excellent life. Joseph had set his life apart for honoring God in all circumstances. He chose to live life to its fullest no matter where he lived it. Whether it would be in slavery, jail, or in the command of a country, Joseph did not change his way of living due to his circumstances. We can take so much from his story, for we are a society that changes with the latest fad or idea.

The world has capitalized on our fads. When something becomes “in style,” the advertisers find many ways to market it. These companies will make us believe that we have to conform to be accepted. We are willing to change our beliefs and stances and do what is popular in this world.

The story of Joseph is so refreshing in a society that wants to tell us that we have to keep up with the Joneses. We have been convinced that if we do not meet the world’s standards, we are a lesser cog in the wheel of society. We

are told that we must look a certain way, drive a certain car, and live a particular lifestyle to be seen as a success in the eyes of others. Wouldn't it be nice to live in a place where you are viewed by your character and not your looks? There is a way!

To truly win in life, we need to have a solid foundation upon which to build an excellent life. Joseph knew what his foundation was built upon and where. Joseph knew that he was being directed by God and that his circumstances were being led by God. He trusted God enough to know that He was still the same wonderful God whether Joseph was in the pit or ruling a government. You are the same, in God's eyes, no matter your circumstance. You are a beautiful creation of God, and you are the same masterpiece no matter what your life circumstance.

You have heard stories of someone buying a painting at a garage sale and later finding the five-dollar painting to be worth thousands. The painting never changed from what it was; the only thing that changed was its value. You will find that God has made you very valuable, and you just need to let Him place you where He will, and, just like Joseph, you will be valuable to whomever and wherever He places you.

Paul: “Counted All as Joy”

Romans 4:8 says, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Another figure in the Bible was the apostle Paul. Paul was a man who “counted it as pure joy” no matter what circumstance he was in. In 2 Corinthians 11, we read about Paul's resume of afflictions.

What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they

servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Did you notice that Paul states that “I do not feel weak” and “I do not inwardly burn”? Paul is saying here that no matter what life has thrown him, this world cannot defeat him and that he will not hold a grudge against it. I mean beatings, shipwrecks, jail, labor, and many other things, and Paul is still winning in the game of life.

What a man he must have been. This same Paul had a different heart before he laid his life in the hands of Jesus. Paul was a man who set out on the very road he met Jesus on to persecute and kill those who followed Christ. He was a respected man by his constituents. He was a powerful man for their cause. He was an angry man toward those who followed Christ. He was lacking in character until he met the true Christ and chose to become all he could be. You too can

become a changed person who sees life in a different view than the world sees life.

You can rest assured that life is not going to slow down, back off, or allow you a free pass. Life is going to come at you hard. It is going to attack, slam, and try to alter everything about your life. The question then comes down to why, how, and what are we to do about it?

As we explore the win factor over the next few chapters, I want to bring you to a common point. Life was never promised to be easy. No matter your economic or sociological background, life has its own twists and turns. We can allow those twists and turns to either lead our life in a direction of fulfillment or lead our life to a very destructive end.

The Edge

John 19:11 says, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

To win in this life, we have to define the word “win.” Winning in life cannot be measured by any of the world’s standards. The measuring stick must be defined by our attitudes, attempts, perseverance, and cause. In the next chapter, we will begin to look at the “why” of winning and start to define this picture. This will be the edge for winning in this life.

None of us want to lose in this game of life. All of us want to leave a legacy to encourage others and be remembered well. This does not happen by itself. No, this takes intentional living, striving to live the best life we can live. We do not live this life for us; we live this life for Him. Jesus. We must have a goal and direction in life, and most people simply go through life-changing directions with every new philosophy.

A life that truly wins is a life that pursues excellence directly. A life that truly wins does not falter because of location, circumstance, or challenges.

My sister was diagnosed with lymphomas many years ago. The doctors gave her six months to live. My sister is

a wonderful Christian woman whom I respect very much. At the time of her diagnosis, she had three wonderful little children.

My sister made a decision, which has impacted my life tremendously: to win over this life and the standards this world sets for us. With God's guidance, she is still with us to this day and has raised those three wonderful children. She lost her youngest to a cyst on the brain when my niece was only seventeen. The courage, love, and perseverance my sister has shown has made her an all-time hero in my life. She understands how life can be cruel, but she has the edge that continues to raise her above what this world will throw at her. When I get the opportunity to get together with her, I always leave her presence feeling better than when I arrived. She chose to win, and that attitude is contagious.

Let me leave you in this chapter with a few simple questions.

- Are you ready to live life to the fullest?
- Will you be willing to accept a better rewards system?
- Can you accept that the world has been telling you a lie?

If so, please continue this journey with me. If not, please stop, pray, and ask God to open your eyes to the possibilities He may have for you and then be willing to listen to Him as He leads.