

Confessions (and Lessons) from an Olympic Game Junkie

As a former Catholic, I went to the confessional booth on a regular basis. The basic prayer was, "Father, forgive me, for I have sinned..." Today, I'm here to confess that in the last few weeks, I've been lured in spending more time in front of the TV than I have in months. The reason...the Olympic Games.

I grew up in Vermont where outdoor winter sports are king! This year there are seven Vermonters on the Olympic squad. The Olympics are a perfect fix for a Vermont winter sports junkie. I enjoy every part of the Olympics...oops, I lied...I can do without curling! I've watched hockey, speed skating, skiing, snowboarding, and figure skating. But what has kept my interest almost as much as the events are the personal stories of athletes who overcame injuries and hardship on their way to this world stage.

Skier Lindsey Vonn, who earned two medals, overcame a shin injury that undercut her prep time. Speed skater J.R. Celski, who also earned a medal, suffered a serious injury in September when he fell and his skate cut a 1/2 inch gash in the quadriceps muscle, missing the femoral artery by only an inch. Then there is the story of Da and Hao Zhang, figure skaters from China, who struggled back from what could have been a career-ending fall but went back home empty handed. I could go on with other examples. Some made it to the medal platform, many did not; but each one represents a story of persistence and faithfulness to the task.

I'm reminded that God's call to us is one of faithfulness: "Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2 NIV). We're all called to be faithful, regardless of the size of our ministry. I believe success in ministry is not measured by "nickels and noses" but by faithfulness. For me, faithfulness has two key components: knowing and doing God's Word and giving my all to the task.

Knowing God's Word begins with reading and studying the Word on a daily basis – not reading and studying for the next sermon but for daily living. It was Spurgeon who said, "A Bible which is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not." But knowing God's Word isn't enough...it must be faithfully obeyed.

Some of us compartmentalize our lives, believing that because we are faithfully obeying God's Word in one area means that we're obeying it in all areas. Or sometimes we rationalize God's Word by questioning the interpretation of Scripture for today. That's especially convenient when we don't like what it says. But success is faithfulness to studying and obeying God's Word, applying it to every area of our life.

And then there's the "giving it my all" factor. The term "lazy-faithful servant" is an oxymoron. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the story of the Talents. The servant who was given five talents multiplied them as did the servant who was given two. And each received the same commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23 NIV). But to the servant who did nothing with the talent, the master said, "You wicked lazy servant!" (Matthew 25:26 NIV).

Like many world class athletes, all of us in ministry ride the same emotional roller-coaster – times of great joy matched by times of criticism, doubt, and even sorrow. When these come...get into God's Word...as a matter of fact – soak in it! Read it and reread it; meditate on it, and let it get into your heart. Then, as it speaks to you, faithfully obey it with all your heart and keep on keeping on, doing what God has commanded you to do.

Every time I'd walk out of the confession booth, I was warned to prepare for the next level of temptation ahead. May I not be tempted into spending too much time watching all the basketball games of March Madness!