

# Our Personal Olympics

**There are many spiritual lessons we can learn from the Olympic Games.**

Did you realise that ancient games in Greece, the forerunner of the Modern Olympics, are mentioned in the Christian Bible?

During the days of the early Christian Church the Olympic Games were an important and famous event every four years, just as they are today.

**The apostle Paul used these Games, with which mostly everyone of his day were familiar, to help him explain vital spiritual principles.**

**These same principles apply, both physically and spiritually, to all humans today.**

## Olympic Origins

The first known Olympic contest took place as long ago as 776 BC.

Thereafter, the games were scheduled at four year intervals for almost 1,200 years, until AD 394, when they were abolished by Roman Emperor Theodosius I after Greece lost its independence.

For the first 13 Olympiads, the only event was a footrace of about 200 yards [180 metres] and the Games only lasted one day. All the contestants were male and all ran naked.

Gradually other events such as chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, the discus and javelin were added, and the duration of the Games extended.

The Games occupied such an important position in Greek life that time was measured by the four-year interval between them, an Olympiad, this custom of counting lasted for 1,200 years.

The greatest honour any Greek could attain was winning the simple crown of wild olive leaves given to the victor in the Games.

Kings competed alongside commoners, even the Roman Emperor Nero sought Olympic honours.

In time, four similar national contests developed in various parts of Greece, the Olympic, Isthmian, Nemean and Pythian Games.

**The Isthmian Games took place every two years in Corinth and would have been familiar to Christians living there in the apostle Paul's time.**

**So the apostle Paul pointed out some striking lessons both physical and spiritual by referring to these Games.**

**When we understand the background, these references take on added light and meaning.**

## Strive For A Prize

**1 Corinthians 9:24** [NIV] *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”*

**Only one** person in each race at the Games received the victor's olive wreath or garland.

Paul compares our life, secular or Christian, to a race and urges us to run earnestly.

**Paul included the comforting knowledge that although in an Olympic race only one person in each race can win, everyone who runs well in the spiritual Christian race can win.**

**1 Corinthians 9:25** [NIV] *“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.”*

**The apostle Paul shows that every successful athlete at the Games had to exercise rigorous self-discipline. So it is at the modern Olympics today.**

All men and women athletes who win at this year’s Olympics will have sacrificed many of the pleasures that other people enjoy, to devote countless hours of exhausting struggle, sweat and toil in training for their events.

It is interesting that the Greek word translated “competes” is “agonizomenos” which literally means “agonizes”, yet these athletes went through all this just to obtain a crown that would **not** last.

**The winner’s crown of olive leaves would begin to wither away as soon as the leaves were plucked.**

**How much more them, ought we as Christians, discipline ourselves spiritually and agonize for our future crown at the end of our physical life?**

**2 Timothy 4:8** [NIV] *“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

The Christian crown is an eternal “crown of righteousness”.

**1 Peter 5:4** [NIV] *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”*

A crown that will never wither away.

**The life of a true Christian is not a simple matter of coasting or cruising along effortless in life.** Merely “believing in Christ” and thinking we are already saved from eternal death and just awaiting the receipt of our eternal reward or crown, is to be deluded.

Rather, living God’s way of life, the way of love towards God and all other humans, is a constant struggle.

**It is a continuing effort to resist sin in this present society that has been blinded by Satan as to the very reason for human existence.** Satan is also influencing humans to rebel against their Creator, in the same way he has rebelled.

**Jude 3** [NIV] *“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”*

**To live a life that leads to receiving the gift of eternal life is something we have to strive for with great zeal and energy.**

We need to drive ourselves forward with every ounce of spiritual strength we receive from God and personal determination, just as an Olympic-class athlete urges and pushes their body onwards to achievement.

**1 Corinthians 9:26** [NIV] *“Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.”*

Paul alludes to the boxing events at the Games and says that he doesn't fight like a shadow boxer, beating the air without purpose.

**We know our purpose in life, we as Christians know it is our goal to receive the gift of eternal life and a place in the Kingdom [created] family of God.**

**Just like an athlete we need to keep our eyes on our goal and never deviate from it.**

Paul knows that his training in this life for his eternal future includes stringent self-discipline.

Once again we see that a carefree and complacent attitude will **not** lead to our entry into the created family of God.

God wants to see that we really mean business in following His way of life.

**God wants to see us straining and striving to really build tough, resilient spiritual character.**

**1 Corinthians 9:27** [NIV] *“No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*

The word translated “*have preached*” refers to the office of a herald at the Ancient Greek Games.

The herald had the job of proclaiming the rules of the Games and calling the competitors together and exhorting them to obey the rules.

The word translated “*disqualified*” was used to refer to a person whom the judges would reject as **not** having deserved a prize.

**Galatians 2:2** [NIV] *“I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.”*

**Again the apostle Paul refers to the work he was doing for Jesus Christ, his Master, as a race that he could lose.**

**Philippians 2:12-13** [NIV] *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

The Greek translated “*work out*” has the idea of bringing to perfect accomplishment.

**Note this end goal will only be accomplished when working with our Creator God, that is the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us.**

**Every successful athlete has a trainer to encourage and guide them.**

**Revelation 3:11** [NIV] *“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no-one will take your crown.”*

Even the members of the Church in Philadelphia, who had been faithful to Jesus Christ [**verse 8**] were warned to remain dedicated to what they were doing so they would **not** lose their crowning reward to another person.

## **Consider Past Champions**

These verses portray another aspect of the Ancient Greek Games that can bring to us further vivid spiritual lessons.

Olympic athletes receive added motivation from the awareness that they are surrounded by stadiums full of spectators, spurring them on to success.

Particularly in ancient times, when success at the Games was even more highly prized than today, all the principal leaders of the nation, as well as past heroes and champions, would be at the arena, supporting the competitors.

Those in the audience would seem like a vast cloud because of the athletes' blurred vision when running as fast as they could past them.

**In our Christian effort, we can also look to outstanding examples set by men and women of faith, the heroes and champions who have preceded us, such as those who are listed in Hebrews 11:4-40.**

**Meditating on the lives of these people, as recorded in the Christian Bible, should spur us on in our race in life.**

## **Cast Off The Weight Of Our Sins**

An Olympic athlete can **not** afford to carry any unnecessary weight such as heavy clothing which is a slowing and hindering burden.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to “*throw off*” sin that could easily entangle us during our race of life.

**Proverbs 5:22** [NIV] *“The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.”*

**Sin of any sort must be discovered and cast aside as we speed forward in our race towards the Kingdom of God.**

**A well-trained athlete will never look back in a race but constantly fix their eyes on the finishing tape or the goal they had set before them.**

Jesus Christ was there for us at the beginning of our individual Christian life and He will be there at the end of life's race, to award the prizes to all who have overcome all obstacles in their race.

**Jesus Christ is also the Hero and Champion we look to as an example to follow.**

**Hebrews 12:3-4** [NIV] *“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”*

**We may not have literally shed our life blood as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did on the cross for all humanity, in a perfect loving sacrifice.**

**Romans 12:1-2** [NIV] *“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. 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.”*

**But we are to set aside our own pleasures and dedicate our lives totally to the race we are on in our life. This will involve a total change of how we view life in our re-educated minds.**

**Philippians 3:11-14** [King James] *“if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Pressing Toward the Goal. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching*

*forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul reminds all Christians of the goal we are aiming for, the resurrection from our graves to eternal life. **At no point in our race towards this goal are we to consider we have attained it and slow down.**

For a running athlete to slow down at any point is fatal as far as receiving a reward at the end of their race.

**1 Timothy 4:7-8** [NIV] *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

Again the apostle Paul is referring to training for Olympic Games. Just as physical exercise helps us to stay healthy, so spiritual exercise will help us to remain healthy in our spiritual race in life.

**Study and meditation on God’s Word, the Christian Bible, along with prayer are the exercises we need to have daily to keep spiritually healthy.**

**1 Timothy 6:12** [NIV] *“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

Again Paul is referring to boxing at the Olympic Games. This fight includes the confession of our faith in Jesus Christ before people we meet on a daily basis.

**2 Timothy 2:5** [NIV] *“Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.”*

No-one will receive a crown of eternal life unless they are obeying the “*laws of love*,” that Jesus Christ introduced as part of the New Covenant [agreement]. We read this in **Matthew 22:35-40**.

**2 Timothy 4:6-8** [NIV] *“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

Paul was able to look back on his life, that was about to end, with satisfaction and assurance of reward from Jesus Christ. “*On that day*” refers to the day of Jesus Christ’s return and the first resurrection of all who have lived faithful lives for Him.

**Are we able to look at our spiritual lives with this same confidence?**

**Have we been making our spiritual condition first and foremost in our life?**

Have we put forward all the energy we should in our training to assure we will gain the “*crown of righteousness*” from Jesus Christ?

**Only you can answer these questions.**

Please run to win, in your personal spiritual Olympic Games!