

## ***Being On the Winning Team***

1 Corinthians 9:25-27

Let's face it; most everyone loves sports of some kind. Whether it's cheering on your favorite Iowa gymnast, participating in a little Sunday afternoon church softball, or proudly displaying the colors of your favorite local or state football team, or root on your favorite pro football team, we love sports here in Iowa.

How about a quick quiz to see how well you know your Iowa teams:

What year did the Iowa Hawkeyes last win the Rose Bowl: 1958

The Iowa State Cyclones play home games in what stadium: Jack Trice Stadium

After the UNI football team makes a touchdown tradition has the fans do what? Shake keys

The Central College football team are known as what: The Dutch

Drake University hosts what famous athletic event every year? Drake Relays

What are the third and fourth lines of the Southeast Polk Rams school fight song?

"We've got to fight with all our might. We've got to work and really fight."

When we watch sports teams, we are looking at great athletes. What is it that makes these athletes so great? What is the focus that pushes teams to have winning seasons despite the tough opponents they face? Well, I think a big part of it is training. Training includes a strict nutritional program, grueling workouts, and countless hours of practice. Every time a person or a team wins a trophy we're looking at a person who spent a huge amount of time and energy training to win.

The Apostle Paul wrote this "**Everyone who competes in the game goes into strict training**". **1 Corinthians 9:25** That's a statement right from the Bible that refers to the world of sports. It was part of a letter that Paul wrote to some people in the city of Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul **writes** "**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 forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 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**".

Church, God has called us to a purpose. I was thinking about winning football teams this week and just what it was about them that gave them the drive to win. I've come up with four things that I think are found in winning teams that moves them toward victory.

These four things are also important spiritual truths for us to embrace in order to move us toward being all that we can be as a church and individuals who have made a commitment to follow Christ.

So, here they are ***4 things that make a winning team.***

**1. We need to train.** Athletes train. They train hard. They have training camps where they have practice two and three times a day. It's what helps make them a winning team. We need to exercise Christian discipline. Training is hard work. It takes sweat. It takes effort. It takes determination to do what you know it will take to get you to your goal.

When an athlete goes into training they take on new healthy disciplines in order to break old wrong habits that prevent them from living healthy lives. A part of training is *self-denial*. An athlete has to give up anything that interferes with reaching his goals.

This kind of self-denial is important in the spiritual life. Our culture has become so enslaved to sinful habits; alcohol addiction, drugs or pornography or gambling, and many more. When we follow Jesus Christ, we need to let go of sins and vices. When you're training for godliness, you need to say farewell to ungodliness.

Notice that in verse 27 Paul says "I beat my body and make it my slave..." There's no easy answer to the problems of being tempted to live for self. It takes completely rethinking how you will live your life.

**Romans 12:2 tells us "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"**

This is an important part of the training process. We must exercise our mind as we think on spiritual things just as an athlete exercises his or her body to be able to handle the pressures of the game. Our minds must be able to handle the pressures of our culture which is opposed to the ways of God. As an athlete reaches for weights, let us reach for the Bible. As an athlete gets onto a tread mill, let us get on our knees to pray. As an athlete sits down at the training table to eat only those things which are good for him, let's sit down to the table prepared by the Holy Spirit and fill ourselves with the fruit of the spirit which will give us spiritual strength.

**2. We need to work as a team.** A football team has more players on it than just the quarterback, or a running back, or just a receiver. All of the players understand their part and work together as a team in order to win the game. The same is true spiritually, we all need to do our part to help the entire body.

***“As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” Ephesians 4:16b (NLT)***

We have been called by God to be closely involved in each others lives. Iron sharpens iron is what the Bible tells us. None of us are immune to temptation. Given the right situation, you and I are all capable of weakness. God knows this, so he’s brought us together into a team called the Church.

And together as a team we are called to be Christ’s spiritual body, the church. We are to work together to carry God’s love and the story of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation to the rest of the world. And we do that together as a team.

We all have a common goal: to love God, love others and serve the world. Let’s come together shoulder to shoulder and work side by side as team players embracing the vision. We can make far more of a difference together as a team than we can individually.

### **3. We need to be participators not spectators.**

I know that this is pretty basic, but to be on a winning team, you have to be on the team. Being a spectator doesn’t make you an athlete. Can you imagine at team where if the coach called on you, you said; *“I’m not here to play, I’m just here to sit on the bench and be close to the team”*. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Being a fan of Christians doesn’t make you a Christian. You need to get into the action yourself. You need to respond personally to the challenge of living for Jesus and seeking to be godly. Otherwise, you’re not an athlete; you’re a spiritual couch potato.

A winning team is built on people busy serving. Each person doing their part for the advancement of the team. Friends, to do that we all have to be active on the team roster. We all need to participate in the advancement of this church. (I’ve known players who hold out on training camp, that doesn’t help the team)

We can’t have just a few members doing all of the work while the rest of the church sits by and cheers them on.

***“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.” Corinthians 12:12***

Children’s ministry will never reach its full potential of caring for the children of this church until you get out of your chair and say, I want to be a part of the team; I want to serve.

It's time to get out of the stands and into the game! Some have been sitting there watching the game for far too long. Come on get into the game! There's nothing that can stop our church from being all that God has called us to be if we all decide to answer God's call to serve. We're the only ones standing in our way.

#### **4. We need to understand that we win.**

A winning football team is focused. They see themselves playing in the Rose Bowl or in the Super Bowl. They know what their goal is, and press toward it with all their might. They don't see themselves as a bunch of losers; they'll never win the prize if that's their attitude.

The same is true for us. One of the best parts of being on the winning team is just that; we can't lose. We win. I've read the end of the book, and we win. Two thousand years ago, God sent his Son Jesus Christ, to break the hold of sin on our lives and bring us back into relationship with our creator God.

It is faith in Christ's work on the cross that assures us a winning life. Paul wrote; ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Romans 8:35

Paul wrote that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Jesus said I'm going to go and prepare a place for you...so that you can be with me. Satan may try as hard as he can to bring temptation and hurt and pain our way. **But, our enemy Satan won't defeat us; he can't win unless we surrender to him.**

You see, I used to be on his team, the kingdom of darkness; but one day I received Jesus Christ as my savior and I was transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. I'm not on the losing team any more.

Paul saw the Christian life as a race to finish, and a fight to win. If you're not already training to be a winner, Jesus calls you to begin today. Trust him as your Savior. You can join the rest of us as we train for that heavenly prize that awaits us one day. **Get on the winning team!**