

## The Making of a Champion

*"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain"* (I Corinthians 9:24).

These words reverberate in my soul after just having met and had dinner with a man by the name of Joe DeLoach. He and I are speaking together at Ft. Bluff Youth Camp on Dayton Mountain in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee. Through the years God has been good to me in bringing fascinating Christians that inspire God's children to do more for our Lord. I pray in the next few moments you, too, will become inspired to reach higher and do more for your Lord. In 1988 in Seoul, Korea, Joe ran the 200-meter in the Olympics and came home with the gold medal. Joe was reared in a Christian home. What a blessing to hear him tell how he did not have a choice about going to church because of the dedication of his parents and an even greater blessing to hear how as a young man of twelve he came down the aisle to receive Christ on his own. It was rather humorous to hear him say he had one brother and eleven sisters and because of the meanness of the sisters and their enthusiasm to bring him under their rule, he began to run and that's where he received his first Olympic training.

It was fascinating to hear how it was broadcasted that he was the man to beat in the 1992 Olympics. And this man who still holds the collegiate time record for the 200-meter, had to forget about a lifetime dream because of injuries received that incapacitated him from competing. In tears, Joe said the Lord impressed upon his heart, "Joe, I want you to love me and be as dedicated to me as you were to winning the gold in the Olympics." Although Joe operates a Running Center, training other young men for their future championships, he is pre-occupied with getting the youth of America that he ministers to into complete dedication to the Lord.

After hearing his burden and hearing him tell of how he trained to be a champion, I was impressed with three things that made for Joe's winning attitude and for that matter, what it would take for anyone to become a winner:

### I. He had a coach.

In high school there was a coach that recognized potential in Joe and encouraged him to "go for the gold." He alerted Joe to his potential and doing so, set up a belief system in him to take the dare and reach for the stars!

I love the Bible verse that says, *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). This great verse tells us that Jesus is the author of our faith. It is one thing for me to say, "I believe in you," but so much more is said, when we understand that Jesus believes in you! Do you have a dream to do something great for God? It did not come out of the clear blue sky; it came from the heart of God, directly to you. He authored your faith! Thank God He is the finisher, too. We see this affirmed by Psalm 37:23 and 24 which says, *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."* Philippians 1:6 says, *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."* You have a Coach! He is on your side as you walk in His steps. *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

### II. He did what Carl did.

Joe's coach said, "There is a man out there in track and field that is the best there is at what you need to be doing. His name is Carl Lewis (believed by many to be the best Olympic competitor of all time). "Joe," his coach said, "Watch him and do what he does." That is some great advice. Joe met and shortly began training with the great Carl Lewis. He observed his demeanor, his relaxation exercises, his take-off

out of the blocks, his stride and his confidence.

Let us observe and follow others who follow Christ. My dad used to tell me, "Follow me as I follow Christ, but no farther." When a man follows Christ, it is good to emulate and to a degree imitate what he or she does, but do not follow them if they take one step away from God. Paul said, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you"* (Philippians 4:8,9).

Remember at all times keep Jesus the primary goal in your life; learn of Him! Better even than doing what Carl does or Dad does, do what Jesus would have you do! *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matthew 11:29).

### III. He trained with total dedication.

One of the most moving things Joe DeLoach said today was, "I trained for four years, many hours every day for a run that lasted less than twenty seconds." He said he had his one moment in time to prove himself and to test the ability God had physically given to him when maximized by steady, incessant training. The Apostle said it like this: *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..."* (I Corinthians 9:27). In other words, I do not let my body pull me around; I bring my body under control.

Carl Lewis used Joe DeLoach as a training partner. It was hard to believe as a young man still attending The University of Houston, he was now in world competition with his mentor. In 1988 Carl took home nine gold medals and one silver which was in that 200-meter race. The gun sounded, the runners took off and in the few remaining strides, Joe came up beside Carl Lewis. Carl finished the race at 19.79 and Joe finished at 19.75. The gold medal was determined by four one hundredths of a second. Joe said, "I trained for four years for that four one hundredths of a second."

I say to our youth, we don't know what race God has set before us, but let us now *"..therefore so run, not as uncertainly..."* (I Corinthians 9:26). Keep these two Bible verses in your memory: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"* (I Corinthians 9:24, 25).

- Pastor Pope -

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