Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title] The Apostolic Example
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It takes a tremendous amount of physical and emotional motivation to be an athlete worthy of the Olympics. According to athletic coaches and trainers, Olympic hopefuls spend four to eight years training in a particular sport just to hopefully make an Olympic team. During these years, they plan out their annual training schedules, meet frequently with a nutritionist, exercise psychologist, sports medicine specialist, and coach. At these meetings they discuss their strengths and weaknesses, any tweaking that needs to be done with their diets, and recovery techniques. In addition to all this, they must get 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, and take a 30 to 90 minute nap during the day.

The athletes need to be not only physically tough, but also mentally tough. During these intense years of training, they are often separated from their families while they train and compete at national and international meets. Those athletes who aren’t supported by sponsors also have to juggle side-jobs or careers.1

What motivates an Olympic athlete? What inspires them to spend years on a rigorous training schedule, counting calories, and making sleep a priority in order to compete? What makes them so dedicated that they’re willing to live an abnormal social life? Is it the fame and fortune? Is it the thrill of winning?

According to Dr. Wayne Halliwell, a mental-performance consultant for the Canadian Olympic team: “The motivation that pushes Olympic athletes is not the medals and money they can win. Research in sport psychology shows that Olympic athletes are driven by the intrinsic motivation to see how good they can be and to keep ‘pushing their potential.’ The term used by researchers is ‘mastery motivation’ as these world-class athletes are trying to continually master new technical and tactical parts of their sport and take their performances to higher and higher levels. Passion for their sport is another powerful source of motivation for Olympic athletes as they get to train hard and compete in an activity they truly love to do.”2

Passion was what gave the Apostle Paul motivation to spread the Gospel. But his passion wasn’t to gain numbers or to please people. His passion was to please God in his ministry. His motives were selfless, and God-centered.

Because pleasing God was his goal, Paul was able to maintain his boldness in the face of suffering. His visible wounds were proof that his motives were to serve God, not himself or others. His ministry was honest and upright, and he did not deceive any of his followers or seek personal benefit. Paul cared deeply for his followers, likening himself to a nursing mother. And he went above and beyond his duty, to avoid being a burden to the people.

As we study Paul’s example, we can analyze our own motives in ministry. What motivates us as a church or as individuals? Is it recognition? Is it numbers? Is it “salvation by works?” Or is it, like Paul, a passion to please God?
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