

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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Winning Last Place

by Steve Klein

We live in a society that is sports crazy. We love football and fishing, racing and wrestling, soccer and softball -- not to mention baseball, basketball and golf. Nearly all of us have had the experience of cheering for our team or favorite player to win, whether the contest was professional, college, high school or just the youth league team that our child or grandchild played on. And many of us have participated in sports ourselves. We've personally experienced "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat."

From a spiritual perspective, sports are not necessarily a bad thing. According to the Bible, sports teach us important lessons about disciplining ourselves when striving for a goal (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**), playing by the rules (**2 Timothy 2:5**), and running with endurance

(**Hebrews 12:1**). Obviously, we can allow sports to become a bad thing if we place too much importance on them or allow them to crowd out spiritual concerns. But sports can also impact us negatively in other ways. They can train us to be too competitive, self-seeking, and ambitious -- too concerned with winning at all costs.

In most sports competitions, everyone wants first place. But there are times in the life of every Christian when he should seek last place. In **Mark 9:35**, Jesus told the twelve apostles, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees because "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues" (**Matthew 23:6**). He told His disciples, "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place . . ." (**Luke 14:10**).

The Bible reveals that we should be striving to win last

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place in our relationships with others!

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (**Philippians 2:3**).

". . . Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (**1 Peter 5:5**).

". . . Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." (**Romans 12:16**).

Here are some practical suggestions for winning last place. The next time that you disagree with a brother in an area of judgment or opinion, insist that your brother get his way. The next time that your wife or husband neglects to do a chore that merely benefits you, do it yourself. The next time they are looking for a volunteer at work to do some menial task, volunteer! Win last place!

Is Is What It Is

by Doy Moyer

A friend of mine, wise and astute beyond his years (so he tells me), has shared his newly discovered motto with me:

"it is what it is." Ok, so I've thought that a few times before, but it is one of those simple statements that forces us back to reality at times when we may feel overcome by our circumstances and disappointments of life. When things aren't exactly as you would desire them, you can become focused on reality by telling yourself, "it is what it is."

Circumstances are what they are. There are some things we can change, and some things we can't (we're getting more profound as we go). Our problem is that we often expend more worry and energy on the things we can't change; and this, in turn, can become a stumbling block to our spiritual growth and joy. "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" (**Matt. 6:27**) Paul's own circumstances were often less than ideal, and beyond his control, yet his attitude remained stable: "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I

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can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (**Phil. 4:11-13**). If I may venture a loose paraphrase: It is what it is, I have learned to deal with "it" through God's help.

"Moses My servant is dead." So spoke the Lord to Joshua (**Josh. 1:2**). Joshua knew this already; they had been mourning for days. But sometimes we need a reminder of the simple truth about reality. Essentially, God was telling Joshua, "Moses is gone, and you can't change that now or have him back. Now it's time to get up and go take the land of promise." In other words, "It is what it is, and you have to work with 'it' the way it is."

The only other option is not to accept reality. People do sometimes go through phases of "denial." They do not feel mentally able to accept what "is." It hurts too much perhaps. But if we will ever "arise and cross the Jordan" in our lives, we must learn to accept the facts and circumstances of life. It takes courage. It takes resolve. But it must be done.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God,

which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (**Phil. 4:6-7**). God gives us the tools to be able to deal with all of our circumstances, including the painful ones. He wants us to cast our cares on Him, pray about them, and then let Him grant us peace in our hearts.

The solution to problems is not denial. We should learn to admit reality, then work with it as it is. When there are matters we can change for the better, let's work to change them. When the circumstances don't meet our concept of ideal, and we can't change them, let's learn to accept them and resolve to move forward with the strength God supplies. In all matters, we must "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (**Matt. 6:33**). Because, as another one of my favorite "profound" questions reminds us, a hundred years from now, what will "it" matter? We worry about things that will pass away into oblivion, and sometimes ignore those matters that have eternal consequences. A hundred years from now, it won't matter that my car has a few scratches, or my water heater went out. What will matter is

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whether or not I've devoted myself to God and His will.

It is what it is.

Thanks, Chris, for that reminder.