

# Sharks & Other Obstacles



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I was watching a nostalgic “Gomer Pyle, USMC” episode recently, about the bootcamp obstacle course. It was not a Gomer-friendly course initially, but he eventually mastered it by practicing after dark. It reminded me of something a friend shared with one of my teams just a few years ago, about the centuries-long love affair the people of Japan have had with fresh seafood—

For decades, even before the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the waters near Japan haven’t given up enough fish. The fishing boats became ships and inevitably got bigger and went farther. The farther they went, the longer it took to bring the fish back...not fresh. Japanese seafood lovers didn’t like that.

The installation of freezers on those ships enabled them to go even farther and stay longer. Still, the Japanese could taste the differences between fresh and frozen. They paid less. Fishing companies then installed large saltwater tanks on their ships and stuffed the fish in, fin-to-fin. They became lethargic and dull. Their fresh taste escaped long before their delivery to the markets in Japan.

Today, the Japanese once again get lots and lots of fresh-tasting fish. How? The large tanks and the fin-to-fin environments continued, but with a brilliant anomaly: The fishing crews started putting at least one small-to-medium-sized shark in those tanks. The constant shark-in-the-water challenge keeps them alert and always on the move. That keeps them strong and fresh. Japanese seafood lovers like that.

God is intimately familiar with the hardwired programming of all of His creatures...including us. He knows that our capabilities grow stronger with resistance and that we become more alert and thence more effective when danger lurks nearby.

We each have an assignment that’s joined-at-the-hip with this life that He has respectively afforded us. Yours is different from mine. There is a presumption that we can justly delegate our personal assignments to professional christians. God has made no provision for that. That popular practice yields only lethargy and spiritual dullness. It sends millions of believers into the bleachers on Sunday mornings, worldwide. It causes them to conclude

that the professionals who demonstrate their skills on the Sunday morning playing fields are their superiors within God's kingdom.

Their assignments are not superior, but *different*. Jesus calls your personal assignment your cross: "And he that taketh not HIS cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." —Matthew 10:38 (See also Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23 and Luke 14:27.)

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The story is told of a man who was awakened by a bright light in the bedroom of his mountainside cabin. The Lord appeared with an interesting assignment: "Push against that huge boulder just outside your door every day for an hour, with all of your strength."

He was initially obedient, but after pushing against the boulder for an hour each day for several weeks, he saw no evidence of progress. "Why should I waste all this time and energy," he thought, "I'll never be able to move it even an inch!" He felt obligated, though, so he pushed every day, half-heartedly, eventually, saving much of his strength and stamina for results-driven projects. Feeling discouraged he prayed, "I've done what you asked me to do, Lord, but the boulder hasn't moved even an inch!"



The Lord responded, "I asked you to push against the boulder every day with all your strength. I didn't say I expected you to move it, but to push. Take a good look at yourself, my son: Your arms and back are exceptionally strong

and muscled. Your hands are calloused and your legs are massive and hard. Your ability far surpasses that which you enjoyed before. You are ready, now, for much greater challenges. Just be obedient, exercising your faith and trust in My wisdom. I'll move that boulder when the time's right; okay?"



Got an unmovable boulder? Got a shark in your tank? Got a cross to bear that's different from someone else's cross?

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