



# **GROW. PRAY. STUDY.**

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

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## **“No Pain, No Gain – The Cost of Winning”**

### **SUNDAY 1.6.19 Lessons from Football for the Game of Life**

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? *Matthew 16:24-26*

Don’t you know that all the runners in the stadium run, but only one gets the prize? So run to win. Everyone who competes practices self-discipline in everything. The runners do this to get a crown of leaves that shrivel up and die, but we do it to receive *a crown that never dies. So now this is how I run—not without a clear goal in sight. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26a*

## **Pursuing the ultimate prize**

### **MONDAY 1.7.19 Philippians 3:10-14**

After every Super Bowl, people ask winning players and coaches, “To what do you attribute your team winning the championship?” The answers usually cite hard work, team effort and the team’s agreement before the first game of the season that the championship was their goal. “Easy” is not the road to special achievements, in football or life. Former Notre Dame coach Lou Holtz said, “For victory in life, we’ve got to keep focused on the goal, and the goal is Heaven.” \* The apostle Paul said his walk of faith was a determined, forward-looking, life-long pursuit of “the prize of God’s upward call.”

- ✚ Paul was writing to the church at Philippi from prison (cf. [Philippians 1:12-14](#)). Directly and forcefully he said his singular goal was “...the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.” Paul focused on being like Jesus. He was confident that goal would lead him to God’s ultimate reward. How has “God’s upward call” motivated you to a disciplined pursuit of your goal of being Christ-like?
- ✚ Playing on a championship team is an awesome experience. (The members of the 1969-70 Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl winning team know this.) Our faith says in Jesus Christ you belong to life’s “championship team.” But in verse 13, Paul shared an essential truth for pursuing ultimate victory: “I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me.” Are you letting anything from your past define you in the present? Ask God to help you focus on the things ahead, not the things (bad or good) in the past.

**Prayer:** O God, Our Father, grant that nothing may hinder me from being what I ought to do and being what I ought to be. Amen.

\* Quote found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/lou\\_holtz](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/lou_holtz).

## “Everyone who competes practices self-discipline”

### TUESDAY 1.8.19 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The apostle Paul (with no football to write about!) used images from the Greek Olympic races and boxing to describe his disciplined approach to Christian life. Hank Stram, the coach of that Chiefs' 1969-70 championship team, said, “You can't be fat and fast, too; so lift, run, diet and work.” He knew being a championship team requires a disciplined, diligent lifestyle. Paul described his disciplined commitment to spiritual life. He had a vision of a “crown that never dies” (greater than any human trophy) waiting for him after the final victory.

- ✚ Football players must follow the coach's instructions. The entire team needs to be “all in” to achieve victory. Christians, too, have coaches and leaders who help to guide us toward a winning life. Who are some of the mentors, pastors and other examples who have guided you in directions that have made you more successful in running to win the heavenly prize?
- ✚ Another element in winning football is the discipline it takes to avoid negative practices that harm the body's physical condition. Paul compared himself to a boxer in a ring, not a person “shadowboxing” against air. Who do you believe was the opponent Paul envisioned himself meeting? Who or what are you fighting in your life? What makes it important to stay in the ring and strive against opposing forces with all your strength?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I pray for strength and consistency to fight and defeat the temptations that come at me daily. Amen.

## Equipment for the game of life

### WEDNESDAY 1.9.19 Ephesians 6:10-17

Ephesians described, not a football uniform, but the garb of a Roman soldier. It said we're up against serious spiritual darkness, not just “human enemies.” We deal with issues that ultimately involve the entire cosmos, or, we might say, the very nature of reality. Super Bowl-winning coach Tony Dungy said, “People look at me and see a calm, cool guy on the sidelines and I want them to know that my Christian faith affects my coaching and everything I do.” \* He knew we need God's “armor” to win this battle, the one that makes the difference.

- ✚ We usually think of everyday issues of money, work, school, houses, cars, even health and illness as “the real world.” Ephesians said the real “real world” is the one in which eternal issues are at stake. How can prayer connect you more fully with God's real world? What other steps help you raise your gaze beyond “this-worldly” worries to focus more of your energy in the “real reality” of God's world?
- ✚ The city of Ephesus held temples of many pagan gods and cults. Paul's list of so many powers of darkness in verse 12 spoke, as scholar Clinton Arnold put it, to “believers [who] came to the Lord from a background in magic, astrology, witchcraft, goddess worship, and various mystery cults.” \*\* What forces in today's world make it hardest for you to hold fast to your commitment to God? Which parts of God's armor have been most important to you in pushing back the darkness in your own life, and in the lives of others?

**Prayer:** O God, remind me today (and every day) to “suit up” for the life you call me to. Empower me to join in your mission to push back the darkness and spread your light. Amen.

\* Quote found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/search\\_results?q=tony+dungy](https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=tony+dungy).

\*\* Clinton Arnold comments on Ephesians in Clinton Arnold, gen. ed. *Romans to Philemon: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume 3*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, p. 336.

## God's reward for the "tried and true"

### THURSDAY 1.10.19 James 1:2-5, 9-12

Legendary Dallas coach Tom Landry said, "People striving, being knocked down and coming back...this is what builds character in a man." \* In a similar vein to Coach Landry, James said that God's reward for those who faithfully persist through life's trials and struggles is even greater than a *stephanos* (the wreath of leaves a Greek Olympic champion won). "They will receive the life God has promised to those who love him," he said. Our reward now and eternally, our "crown," is the quality of life God gives us.

- ✚ Verse 2 ("think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy") might sound like idealistic, "ivory tower" thinking. But James led the early Christian church in Jerusalem. He saw some of his fellow believers killed and many others driven away by persecution (cf. [Acts 7:54-8:2](#)). He knew first-hand about tests and trials. In what ways have you found God's deep joy even in trials? How, if you stay connected with God, can your hardest times help you develop inner strength and endurance?
- ✚ Scholar William Barclay said, "What is the crown? It is the *crown of life*; and that phrase means that it is *the crown which consists of life*. The crown of the Christian is a new kind of living which is life indeed....The struggle is the way to glory, and the very struggle itself is a glory." \*\* In what ways have you found "a new kind of living which is life indeed" in following Jesus? How have struggles and trials helped shape your new kind of living?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you lived encircled by enemies and misunderstood by friends. Please teach me to see my trials as you saw yours, as a door to "a new kind of living which is life indeed." Amen.

\* Quote found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/search\\_results?q=Tom+Landry](https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=Tom+Landry).

\*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter (Revised Edition)*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, page 49.

## "Practice these things"

### FRIDAY 1.11.19 1 Timothy 4:8-16

Don Shula coached the only unbeaten Super Bowl champions, the 1972 Miami Dolphins. He once said, "You take on what's right in front of you. You want to do the best you can with the opportunities that you have." \* His comment captured well the essence of what Paul told his young friend and protégé Timothy about life. Be confident; do what's right in front of you. You cannot be a "winning" Christian without continued learning, growth and experience.

- ✚ Scholar N. T. Wright said, "For genuine godliness...you need to go into training just as much as an athlete does....We expect and want to be told that 'spirituality' is simply the sense I have of being in God's presence, surrounded with his love, sensing a transcendent dimension in the affairs of everyday life. It comes as a shock to be told that it's something you have to work at—and something, moreover, which will take the same kind of hard work as going into training for athletics." \*\* Are you "in shape" or "out of shape" spiritually?
- ✚ You do not exercise to win your doctor's approval, but because you want to be healthy. And you don't train spiritually to win God's love (you always have that), but to build inner strength for a growing Christian life. Not sure how to "train" spiritually? [Click here](#) \*\*\* for a list of spiritual practices many Christians in the Methodist tradition (as well as most others) have found helpful.

**Prayer:** Lord, whatever my physical circumstances and condition, help me spiritually to be more of a "gym rat" than a "couch potato." Give me an inner hunger and thirst for your righteousness. Amen.

\* Quote found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/don\\_shula](https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/don_shula).

\*\* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 47.

\*\*\* <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>

## “Make every effort”

### SATURDAY 1.12.19 2 Peter 1:4-8

Roger Staubach, a great quarterback for Navy and the Dallas Cowboys, knew one key to being a standout football player and person. “There are no traffic jams along the extra mile,” he said. Focused on an even greater cause, Peter urged Christian believers to go that extra mile, to give 100% dedication to growing spiritually.

- ✚ Peter said we must “make every effort” to build these positive traits into our life. Scholar William Barclay wrote, “We do not earn salvation, but we have to bend every energy towards the Christian objective of a lovely life.... Life is at its noblest and best when our effort cooperates with God’s grace to produce the necessary loveliness.” \*\* What daily choices are you making to allow God’s power to build a beautiful character in you? As you review Peter’s list of qualities which make up a “winning” character for eternity, which of the qualities do you see most present in your life today? Reflect on how those qualities got there—have you always had them? In what ways have you cooperated with God to cultivate them? What light does that cast on how you can work with God to add the remaining traits to your character?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I’m willing to make every effort to become the person you call me to be—or at least I’m willing to be willing. Please add your power to my effort. Amen.

\* Quote found at [https://www.brainyquote.com/search\\_results?q=Staubach](https://www.brainyquote.com/search_results?q=Staubach).

\*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter (Revised Edition)*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, page 300.

**Family Activity:** As a family, discuss how you prepare for events or activities. Do you save money for a vacation, study for a test, practicing batting for baseball or walk often to build stronger muscles? Typically when we prepare, we are able to handle the event or activity in a more healthy and helpful way. Since life will bring about times of struggle and challenge, we can prepare now by growing stronger in our faith. Talk about how you might do this as a family (consider learning Scripture, being in prayer, serving others, being in worship and sharing in Christian community). As a family, choose one or two ways you can build your “faith muscles” for not just one season, but for all of life! Commit to following through and ask for God’s help as you grow!