

November 15, 2020 Pastoral Letter

To my fellow teammate in the great contest:

Encouragement is my thing. Admonishment isn't. I'd rather be with the team, bolstering confidence and rooting them to victory, than in the locker room at halftime, screaming at them to get their act together, pointing out what I'm quite sure they already know that they're doing wrong.

That's why I usually go in for practical pats on the back, and why I shy away from spiritual coaching that turns out sounding like a rebuke or a reprimand. I try to imitate one of my favorite coaches of all time, Paul.

Paul followed pretty much in the coaching footsteps of Jesus. Paul told stories about his amazing recruitment: how he went from being a scout for the wrong team to becoming first-string quarterback for Team Jesus. But occasionally, when some of his fellow teammates started running toward the wrong goalposts, even Paul had to haul out some halftime speeches that singed the old ear hairs.

But you know what? Teams that win have coaches that aren't afraid to coach. And from what I understood, Paul wanted to win—not just the Homecoming game, but the whole championship. That's why he said, "Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win" (1 Corinthians 9:24, MSG).

I'm not completely sure, but it's a fair guess that its Apollos who wrote, **"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to**

**imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised"** (Hebrews 6:10-12, NIV).

Now here's the deal. Listen up. I know you're sucking air, but take a few deep breaths and focus. From watching the first half, it's pretty obvious that you have been up against it. You're up against it emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Join the club, because all of us are a wadded up conglomeration of emotion, intellect and spirit.

That's why I'm passing along to you, my weary teammate, some of the same halftime admonishments passed along to me by Coach Paul, because his coaching has been responsible for many battles won, including a few of my own. And I know you want to win battles ... don't you? Don't you?!!

Need I remind you what stakes we are playing for? Need I remind you that over that goal line of faith lies victory—*forever*—to those who cross it? Need I remind you that we carry the Gospel and we hand it off to others, and we block for them and we bust a gut for them so that they too can cross the line, and so that they too can know Jesus? Need I remind you that part of our game plan includes **"admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ"** (Colossians 1:28, NASB)?

How are we supposed to present every man? (I can't hear you.)

*How* are we supposed to present every man? (I still can't hear you!)

**HOW** are we supposed to present every man? (That's better.)

That's right. *Complete in Christ*. It is for *this* purpose (presenting every man complete in Christ) that we work until our tongues hang out. We're not working just to put points up on the board. We're working, striving, digging in, getting muddy, getting beat up, leaving some blood on the field, because what we do matters!

How can we be complete if we crawl off into the locker room at halftime and lick our wounds? Not by going to the whirlpool while everybody else gets out there and takes the hits. Nope, we're going to get our blood pumping again by fueling up with the Coach's power. I'm not talking about me. I'm not even talking about Coach Paul. I'm not talking about some powder-puff power. I'm talking game-winning *mighty* power! It's that mighty power that works within us, but only if we draw strength from the other weary warriors who are beating their brains out in the same game. You feel me, dawg?!

Would you like to know what the opposing team's coach has cookin' in his playbook? He would love to see our team members, one by one, start crawling off into their own corners of the locker room, where his whisper campaign can kick in: "You're losing," he snarls. "You ain't got what it takes," he sneers. "Might as well pack it in and rub on the Icy Hot, 'cause the game's over for you." Those whispers start sounding pretty loud when you're all alone in a cavernous locker room where the voices bounce off the walls. The best way to silence those voices is to get some other teammates around you to absorb the sound waves from the enemy.

Let me ask you something: Do you honestly think you would EVER see Paul crawlin' away when the goin' got tough? Huh? Paul might have gotten tired *in* the game, but he never, NEVER got tired *OF* the game.

And let me tell you something from my own experience. On those days when I'd just as soon turn in my resignation and get me a *real* job, I'd show up, take a deep breath, start to feel that mighty power well up within me, and by the time we finished with practice, or with the game, I discovered that the rest of the members of the team had given back to me what I didn't even have to give them when I showed up. That mighty power is unleashed *in community*. And that same power is sucked away like a dirt devil when you're all alone.

Listen. If Paul were here, he'd lean in close and tell you, with holy spit on his lips and holy tears in his eyes, that he prays for you. That's the kind of coach he is. He'd say that he prays, not just every now and then, but he prays for you both night and day. That's how earnest he is about his goal of presenting you complete in Christ. He'd say, "I want to help supply you with what is lacking in your game. I want to fill the cracks in your faith" (See 1 Thessalonians 3:10).

One last word before we head back onto the field. You can't build a man up by putting him down. I'm not giving you this speech to tear you down. I'm giving you this halftime speech because I want to build you up. I want you back in the game. I want to challenge you to rise up, not poop out; to stand tall, not shrink back; to move forward, not retreat. I want you to be all you can be, in Christ, *complete in him*. What you do matters. So take a deep breath and get back in the game.

Now let's get back out there and win a championship!

In Christ,

Pastor Lucero