

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

1. What did God speak to you about – most specifically and most powerfully – in this lesson?

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2. Tell us a highlight in your ministry wherein you experienced, as Paul did, great joy in seeing the person you ministered to believe in Christ and is growing in Him.

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3. God's ultimate goal for us is to make us like Christ (Philippians 3:12–14). As we become more and more like him, we discover our true selves, the persons we were created to be. How can we be conformed to his likeness?

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**PRAYER**

On the space provided below, record prayer requests and answers to prayers.

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**Prize**

**WARM-UP**

Tell us the most memorable awards, achievements, or recognitions you have received in the past or maybe even when you were growing up.

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**WORD**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:1–2

*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

1 Corinthians 9:25

Running in a race needs a lot of discipline, preparation, and perseverance. As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. We press on toward that goal. We don't merely observe from the grandstand; don't just turn out to jog a couple of laps each morning. We train diligently to get the prize.

There's nothing wrong with being motivated to win in life. Apostle Paul used Olympic analogies to highlight this truth. What's the prize? The Bible mentions what this prize represents. It represents the "crowns". There are at least four of these that we can see.

### **The CROWN of JOY**

This is a direct result of faithful witnessing.

*For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?*

1 Thessalonians 2:19

The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was not money, prestige, or fame, but new believers whose lives had been changed by God through the preaching of the gospel. Likewise, our reward and joy are those people we minister to, who come to believe in Jesus and are growing in Him.

### **The CROWN of RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Our incentive for faithfulness and holiness is the promise of the Lord's appearing.

*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

2 Timothy 4:8

Do you share Paul's confident expectation of meeting Christ? The Good News is that the heavenly reward is not just for giants of the faith, like Paul, but for all who are eagerly looking forward to Jesus' second coming. Paul gave these words to encourage Timothy, and us, to keep fighting—no matter how difficult the fight seems. When we are with Jesus Christ, we will discover that it was all worth it.

### **The CROWN of GLORY**

As we faithfully minister and care for God's people, He has promised us this crown.

*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

1 Peter 5:4

Most businesses, organizations, and institutions measure greatness by high personal achievement. In God's kingdom, however, service is the way to get ahead. The desire to be

on top will hinder, not help. Rather than seeking to have your needs met, look for ways you can minister to the needs of others. Are you caring for God's flock? Are you leading out of eagerness to serve, not out of obligation? Are you concerned for what you can give and not for what you can get? Are you leading by example, not by force?

### **The CROWN of LIFE**

As we remain faithful in the midst of pain and hardships, even as the men of old, our heritage, stayed loyal to God, we shall do the same thing.

*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

James 1:12

On the cross, Jesus endured all including the crown of thorns to give us the crown of life – the reward of eternal life, living with God forever.

How shall we handle such awesome crowns? Shall we glory in it? We are called to finish the race marked out for us. Running in the Olympics, there is but one gold. Only one winner to claim the gold even if hundreds participated. But in the Christian life, a finisher is a winner.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

2 Timothy 4:6

Therefore each one who could finish is a 'gold' medalist in God's eyes. And when you do, God gets the glory.

*...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*

*<sup>11</sup>"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

Revelation 4:10-11

### **God Gets the Glory When We Go For the Gold**