

Extraordinary

A 5-day devotional inspired by the
Olympic Games
presented by Living Chronic Faith



Greetings!

It's Olympics season!!!!

I think the Olympics are so exciting because we get to watch an elite group of ordinary people who have worked hard to accomplish extraordinary things. As we watch this year, I pray that we will be reminded that God has placed some extraordinary things inside of us, too.

In all the Olympic Games that I have seen, I have never once witnessed a gymnast diving into the pool or a long jumper attempting martial arts. Each athlete focuses on putting their best effort into what they came to do. That is what God expects us to do as well. There is no pressure on us to do anything except what God has called us to, but He deserves our best effort, and He is always there to provide guidance on how to practice excellence.

I pray that as you journey prayerfully through these devotionals, and then listen for God's voice, that He will be faithful to speak to your heart as you read these thoughts drawn from the Olympic Games. May you always be reminded, no matter how ordinary your circumstances may seem, that with God, you are Extraordinary!

Expect Great Things,

Alli

As always, your feedback is important to us and helps us to create the content you want and need.

We look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions at info@livingchronicfaith.com

Day 1: The Opening Ceremony

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

– 1 Corinthians 15:57

I have watched many Olympic Games and I've always loved the opening ceremony. The extravagant pageantry, the culture of the host nation on display, the synchronicity of the dancers! And seeing the torch making its final approach into the arena after having traveled such a symbolic journey is nothing short of inspiring. But I think the most significant part of the opening ceremony is the entry of the teams. I watch from beginning to end, attentively observing the delegates from nations I've dreamt of visiting and others I couldn't hope to find on a map. I try to identify the flags before they announce the countries they're from, then I look to see how well the athletes' track suits match their flags. I note how many delegates are on each team, marveling at the courage of the nations with fewer than five.

The reason I love watching the opening ceremony, sometimes even more than the competitions themselves, is that at the beginning, before the medal count begins and we learn to identify the national anthems of the leading countries by the first three notes, everyone has the same opportunity to win. And the really cool part is that there are so many events (and three opportunities to medal in each) that the opening exercises are absolutely electric with hope! Each athlete present knows that they have worked hard to get to that point—in fact, they have already won a lot in order to get there. Isn't that cool? They go into the biggest competition of their lives fully confident that they are capable of winning. It is literally a stadium full of winners and on the night of the opening exercises, no one has anything to prove. It is just a celebration of the fact that they have made it this far.

Today, no matter what you are facing, you have already overcome so much to be where you are. You deserve a chance to realize your fullest potential, and the opportunity is here. Whatever "event" God has called you to, give yourself to it fully and trust Him for the rest. If you're a runner, don't worry about what's happening in the pool or on the basketball court. Focus. Stay in your lane. Leave it all on the field. Don't worry about the competition—aim for your personal record every time. Stay disciplined. Trust your training. Keep your head up. Don't look back. Never give up. You've got this.

So, as another history-making season of the Olympic Games begins, I pray that it reminds you of the great opportunities that are before you. Before you suit up, however, take a moment to celebrate how far you have already come. And as you mentally prepare for the challenges ahead of you, remind yourself that you are capable of winning—that's why you're here. God has equipped you with everything you need to succeed, to keep going, and to triumph, so don't you dare quit. I pray that as you take your starting position, you will hear the voice of the Holy Spirit encouraging you, "Focus. Stay disciplined. Trust your training. And never, ever give up. I've got you, and you've got this!"

Father,

Thank you for making us overcomers. Thank you for the fact that, in you, victory is our portion. Remind us that, no matter how things may seem, you have not brought us this far to leave us. As we face the challenges ahead, help us to always remember that you have given us everything we need to succeed, and that every moment is an opportunity to realize another victory.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: Olympic Hopefuls

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” –Romans 15:13

I have heard this term used so many times to describe athletes who have aspired and are on track to compete in the Olympic Games. It takes more, however, than just hoping. There is a lot of work to be done, lots of literal blood, sweat, and tears pave the road to the Olympics. Even so, someone, one day, took it upon him or herself to take what had been an adjective and turn it into a noun.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the adjective “hopeful” as “having qualities which inspire hope”, “full of hope; inclined to hope” and my personal favorite, “pointing toward a happy outcome”. Friends, that’s us! Even if we are never called to be Olympians, we are all called to be “Hopefuls”. Before Jesus, mankind was in trouble. Thanks to the Fall in the Garden of Eden, we were brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). Because of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, however, we were given the opportunity to be born again to a *living hope* (1 Peter 1:3)-- a fresh start that changed our whole trajectory and gave us a future—abundant life on earth and eternity with God! We are, as the definition denotes, “full of hope” and because of our God-ordained future, we can be “inclined to hope”.

This hope, however, is not just for us. Our hope should be contagious. Paul wrote these words to the Romans, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). The Holy Spirit did not come into our lives just so that we would be filled with God’s joy and peace. At some point, if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us, the great hope that we have in Christ Jesus should overflow out of our lives and anybody connected to us will be in our spiritual “splash zone”! Whether they are encouraged by witnessing God’s faithfulness in our lives and our unspeakable joy that springs up like a well no matter what, or if we speak life to them directly as the Holy Spirit leads, we will demonstrate, as Merriam, Merriam, and Webster might say, “qualities that inspire hope” in others.

There will be times when we don’t know what to say to encourage someone who is facing a challenge, and difficulties and loss may, at times, cause our own hope to waver. It is then that we must plant our feet even more firmly on God’s Word which promises us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). May we always be faithful to remind ourselves and others of that truth—there is no happier outcome to which we can point.

You may not be an athlete. You might not even aspire to watch the Games on television. But whatever your pursuit, God is reminding you today that when He filled you with His own precious Spirit, He gave you something of more significance than a medal. He placed upon you a calling and then endowed you with the power to become a Hopeful—one who is full of hope, inspires hope, and points to hope.

Jesus,

You are our living Hope. Thank you for your faithfulness and love. Because your character is consistent and your help is ever-present, we know that we can safely place our full confidence in you. You are gracious and your kindness makes us Hopeful. Please help us to live lives that point to your faithfulness and help us to inspire hope in others because of Who you are in our lives.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: In the Zone

“Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.” –Psalm 119:33

Have you ever noticed how Olympians approach their events? They may wave to the audience and smile from ear-to-ear initially, but soon, the smile gives way to an almost automatic laser focus as they take their marks. It is as if they are stepping out of the moment and into a zone all their own. In this zone, there are no cheering fans, no cameras, no competitors and, believe it or not, few, if any nerves. There is only what they have practiced. And practiced. And practiced.

It is that way by design. This is why there are no walk-on Olympians. For years, from the time these athletes discovered their gifts, their entire lives have revolved around being the best they can be at their sport. They eat a specific diet, sleep a pre-determined number of hours, train on certain gym equipment and do exercises that will enhance their performance, wear clothing that is appropriate to their sport, and even avoid activities and interactions that may take away from their ability to compete. Even when everyone else around them seems to be having so much fun, even when it's their birthday, even when they don't feel like it, they remain disciplined. As gifted as they may be, these athletes never take that for granted. There are a lot of gifted people. But what enables them to enter any arena with confidence is their discipline and their commitment to practice.

Some people think that “practice makes perfect”, but that's not necessarily true. It may be more accurate to say that “practice makes permanent” because the way you practice something consistently will be the way you do it when the pressure is on. In practice, an athlete's brain and body “learn” to default to a particular form, a certain way of moving. Over time, they grow accustomed to performing the routine, the race, the shot—the muscles “remember”. This is why there are different levels of workouts—once the body gets used to one, a more difficult level may be required to challenge it, in order to achieve the desired results. If the athletes practice incorrectly, hold their bodies in the wrong position or end with their feet in the wrong place, their bodies will remember that, too, and their performances will always suffer in the same way. Practice hasn't made perfect—just permanently wrong because their bodies “remember” what their brains “snapshot”. Practice only makes perfect when they practice “perfectly”.

This is so important because the time to perfect their performance is not when they are surrounded by fans and cameras and competitors—it's too distracting. But when they have done the work, when they have disciplined themselves and practiced tirelessly, it's as if their brains and bodies are computers that have been programmed. Stepping into the zone is similar to booting up the program that tells their “computers” what to do. This way, no distraction can derail them. They are not discouraged by how another athlete does it. And it doesn't matter what equipment they are performing on—their brains and bodies know how to run the same program on any hardware.

The believer has spiritual disciplines to practice, too. These are meant to enhance our God-given gifts. We cannot afford to engage our opponents using gifts that have not been developed when we have been given the responsibility to build our faith “muscles”. God gave us the tools we need for the job we've been assigned, but part of the assignment is learning how to use those tools, and there is no other way to do that than to practice. Prayer, worship, Bible-reading, meditation, giving, service—these disciplines are all meant to condition us, to ready us for battle, so that when it is time for us to take our positions and face the challenge, we do not have to figure out how to stand—our “muscles” will remember. Even in a crowded room, seconds before impact, or in the throes of great pain, if we have been doing the work, we will be able to “step into the zone” and engage everything we have trained to do. May we always seek the Lord and His Word, practicing His presence constantly, so that our intentionality will lead to consistency and excellence when the time comes to engage our gifts.

*Lord, Thank you for the blueprint for righteous living that you have made available to us in your word. Please help us to pursue it faithfully and to be doers thereof so that we might please you and change our world—for your Kingdom and for your glory.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Day 4: Sprints and Marathons

“...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” – Hebrews 12:1b-2a

I’ve never run track, but I am familiar with some of the basic differences between sprinters and marathon runners. Their end goal is different—one runs fast and the other runs for a really, really long time. Their training is different— speed vs. endurance. Their shoes are different and their pace on the track is most certainly different. I imagine they are probably even saying something different to themselves. (i.e. “Go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go-go!” vs. “We’re just getting started. Run your own race. Breathe. Eyes up. Keep going. Don’t look at the marker.”)

My goal here isn’t to impress you with my memories from 4th grade phys. ed. I simply want to say exactly what you thought when you read this title. Every race in your life is not going to be the same. One day, you might be the tortoise, and the next, you may be the hare. Some things require quick action, and for others you will need steadiness and precision. It is so important to know the difference—can you imagine running a marathon at full speed or running a 100-meter dash as if you have hours to finish? It’s a bit like trying to force a square peg into a round hole.

As we navigate the challenges in life (in general) and chronic illness (in particular), we must keep in mind that some solutions will come quickly, and others will take more time. If something doesn’t happen the way it did before or the way it did for someone else, it doesn’t mean that we’re doing it wrong or even that God isn’t actively orchestrating the answer we’ve been praying for. It may just be a different kind of race. Maybe you are starting a new style of training. Or maybe you just need to change your shoes. But these are not decisions to make on your own— you need the wisdom of your Coach. The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth (John 16:13) and lead you according to what God wills for your life.

If you find yourself struggling and frustrated with things in your life, take the pressure off of yourself to figure out the changes that need to be made. Re-submit yourself to the plan of God and allow Him to guide you by His Spirit. Let go of the program that has become so familiar and embrace what He desires to do in this moment. Don’t run ahead of Him and don’t lag behind Him. He will empower you to match His pace, and He is faithful to stay beside you through it all, constantly reminding you that you can run on—whether it is a sprint or a marathon.

Father,

Thank you for always being with us. We are grateful because we know that you have a plan for everything you allow. When things in our lives don't make sense or when we feel like we are fighting a losing battle, please remind us to seek your perfect plan for our lives and to embrace the changes you lead us to make. Help us to lean into your sufficient grace at all times.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 5: The National Anthem

*“But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives.
And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.” --Philippians 3:20*

There are few prouder moments for Olympians than when they are standing on the middle podium, holding a bouquet of fresh flowers in one arm, waving to their steadfast supporters with the other, being awarded the gold medal for their event. But if you notice, they usually don't tear up until the orchestra begins to play their national anthem. Why such an emotional response?

In the moment that their nation's anthem plays, they are reminded that they are not just competing for themselves—they are a reflection of their homeland. They represent their entire country, carry their flag, wear its name on their clothing, and every time they win, the commentators mention where they are from. How many times have you heard, "...and that great performance has resulted in another gold medal for Team USA"? What a joy to be the reason that such prestige and honor are associated with your country! Your success is literally a success for everyone you represent. (No pressure at all, right?)

Win or lose, we represent the Kingdom of God in the earth. We are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20)—the light of the world, and when others see our achievements, our lives should point them back to the Father (Matthew 5:14-16). We must also remember that when we fail, it is also a reflection on Him. When people know that you are a Christian, they watch you—some to learn what the faith is all about, and others watch to be the first to judge the slightest mistake. And you may not even know they've been watching until they say something like, "Oh, so that's how Christians talk to people?" or "You took the last donut in the break room—some Christian!" They are less likely to comment when you bring an extra sandwich for a co-worker on a tight budget or you work late so that you can submit a project that is completed with excellence—but even though they may not mention it, they still notice—and it goes down as a W for Team Jesus.

As believers, everything we do has the potential to tell someone something about God. How do our actions reflect on Him? In what ways can we be intentional about making sure that our "good works" cause people to glorify our Father in Heaven? Perhaps it starts with remembering what makes gold medalists tear up when they hear their nation's anthem—a win for us is a win for the Kingdom.

Heavenly Father,

What an honor it is to be part of your family and to represent you in the earth. As we live out the purposes you have ordained for us, help us to look to you for direction at all times and to always remember that our lives are so much bigger than us. Remind us that the world is watching and what they see in us teaches them about you. May everything we do and everything we say bring glory to your great name. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight--Lord, you are our strength and our Redeemer.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you for taking this 5-day devotional journey with us. I pray that it has enriched your life and your faith walk, and that you see yourself more like God sees you--
Extraordinary.

If you watch the Games, or when you hear about them on the news or social media, may you be reminded of the victory that God has ordained for your life.

And even long after the closing ceremonies have ended, I pray that you will continue to carry these biblical truths like the Olympic torch, and that you will pass them on to others until people all over the world see the
Light.



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