

Often the apostle Paul taught spiritual realities through the metaphor of athletics (see [II Timothy 2:5](#)). In II Timothy 4 Paul suggested that the spiritual adventure of following Jesus can be likened to a boxing match or a marathon (v.7). There is a contest for which dedication and endurance are required. It is worth it, because there is an eternal prize (v.8)! Today we are going to consider how we remain “competitive” in this contest. Remember, all believers are in this contest (see [Romans 1:6](#), “you also”).

At the close of January, I shared with our congregation six summary values at Cornerstone, gleaned from your input. Here are three of these values, and examples for you about how they are evident among us.

- **Loving God well** – in a worship service vision huddle a few weeks ago sparked the idea of a **Worship & Prayer Night** which was held this week. It was very meaningful and I see us doing this again. We are going to be bringing in some equipping for worship music ministry.
- **Growing in a deeper understanding of God’s Word** – one of our teens asked at our huddle if Bibles were available in our services. So, we are setting out some brand-new **Pew Bibles** today! Also, please do not forget about our annual Bible reading plan.
- **Opportunities and teamwork for serving** – this is the season when some of our ministries are put on pause. In athletics a “recovery day” is important! So, please respond to the **Congregational Survey**. This will help our leaders assess the equipping and endurance of our volunteers.

Another of the values is “**sharing God’s love and message to those who do not know Him**”. To explore this further, our focus today is “**Good News, Bad News**”. Let’s read [II Timothy 4:1-8](#). When we look at this passage, and think through the lens of an athletic contest, two questions come to mind.

[A] Where do Christians contend?

Currently, BC Place is looking swanky as one of several venues for the 2026 World Cup. Over 50,000 people can be accommodated in the stands. But what is the playing field for the Christian’s contest? In our passage, Paul explained that we are called to contend in the presence of God and Christ Jesus – we must account for how we live and serve (v.1a). Paul’s exhortation to “get in the game” has to do both with the Kingdom of God today and the promise of Christ’s return (v.1b).

An ancient “playing field” was the Roman Coliseum. Our passage today comes from a letter written or dictated by Paul when he was a prisoner in Rome – some call it his “dying letter”. The recipient is Timothy who was a pastor in Ephesus. What stands out in this epistle is the difficulties that surround the sincere attempt to lead people to follow Jesus. The stakes were high as Nero was ruthlessly persecuting Christians. Paul himself was nearing the end of his race. Timothy was in a very tough assignment.

How did Paul and Timothy remain on track in the race to which God had called them. They lived in a time of great polarization in which loyalty to Jesus equaled treason against Rome! Like these ancient servants of God, we need to understand and contend for the Gospel. What is this Gospel? It is “*the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.*” (1:1). There is a fascinating summary of God’s Good News – “*Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*” (2:8). God calls us to contend for this truth in our everyday lives! We especially contend (an athletic term) for the Gospel within the Church.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to **contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people**. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 1:3-4)

[B] What do Christians contend?

For many team sports, the ball or puck needs to go into the basket or the net. In our passage, Paul was reflecting his apostolic assignment as a messenger of the Gospel (vv.6-8). In so doing, he painted a “good news – bad news” picture. This contrasts how people grasp and communicate God’s truth in Christ.

- **Good News: Christ-centered Gospel – vv. 1-2,5**

The true Gospel is good news and inspires confidence. Paul testified to this in 1:12b and 2:9-10. Notice the perseverance despite persecution. The Christ-centered Gospel requires four commitments

[1] Proclamation – “preach the Word”

[2] Preparation – “in season and out of season”

[3] Precision – “correct, rebuke, exhort”

[4] Patience – “with great patience” – see 2:24

- **Bad News: Craftily curated Gospel – vv. 3-4**

Paul warned of a time when people would reject “sound doctrine” (lit. “healthy teaching” v.3). Such people pursue a false Gospel, crafted and curated around their own sinful desires (lit. “lusts”). Because they want their “ears tickled” (or “scratched”) they will turn from the truth (αληθεια) of God and accept myths (μυθους). This is “godless chatter” which spreads like gangrene because it is an untrue, unhealthy Gospel. At minimum, it attacks the truth of man’s need and/or God’s forgiving work in Jesus Christ.

Today we have the opportunity to center our thoughts on Jesus and His selfless sacrifice for our sin. This takes fully into account our sinfulness and inability to rescue ourselves. Communion gives thanks for Christ’s selfless sacrifice to redeem all who come to Him by faith. The celebration of communion is a thanksgiving – **Eucharist** comes directly from the Greek term for thanks!

Welcome & Warning

What connects us? There are many unique ways in which we can feel connected. Last weekend, while kayaking, I had a random encounter with someone I had not seen for almost forty years! But as believers, we are connected by something so much more significant – our common life in Christ! The term the “Lord’s Table” reminds us that it is Jesus who welcomes us. We are also encouraged at communion to examine our hearts and make confession of sin as necessary.

Jesus graciously cautions us to examine our hearts. Are you burdened or ashamed today? Speak to God in prayer today about this. Let’s sing, “Come As You Are” – in this song we are encouraged with the fact that *“Earth has no sorrow that heaven can’t heal”*.

The Bread & Cup

What do athletics have to do with communion? To the Hebrews Paul urged that the running of the Christian race calls for us to diligently and deliberately follow the **pattern** of Jesus. But [Hebrews 12:1-3](#) teaches Jesus is not just the pattern for our lives – He has **purchased** our salvation on the cross.

Today, we’re going to ask you to come forward for communion. Please do not feel rushed. Please take time to listen and reflect on lyrics written by [Charles Wesley](#), the great English preacher of the 18th Century, who wrote over 6500 hymns. Wesley wondered deeply about the love of God. After his conversion in 1738 he expressed this wonder in the hymn, “And Can It Be”. The refrain asks, *“Amazing love! How can it be? That Thou, my God, should die for me?”*

Response – Digging Deeper

What is the response of our lives to Christ’s work on our behalf? We need to keep contending for the faith! In I Corinthians 11:26 we read, *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* How do we do this? We need to be powerfully impacted by the reality of what Jesus has done for us. It cannot be limited to monthly communion but lived out in our lives!