

TOGETHER: Yearn for the sea, vault for the gold_82304

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Paul Hamm pressed on, refusing to let an embarrassing fall mark the way he would remember the 2004 Olympics.

In the fourth of six events which make up the men's all-around gymnastics championship, Hamm vaulted. When he landed on his seat rather than his feet, the air seemed to go out of the hopes the Americans had for their first gold medal in that event. All his hard work and dreams suddenly evaporated. The announcer warned no one could get an Olympic gold after such a glaring fault.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in the Greek town of Philippi: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, ... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

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Hamm was sure his dream for a medal of any kind was toast. But he gathered himself for the last two events-parallel bars and the horizontal bar. Putting his failure behind him, he soared to new heights, scoring more in each of those two events than in any of the four preceding ones. He outscored the courageous Koreans by only 0.012-and captured the gold!

“Don't ever quit.” That was the advice the Hamm twins, Morgan and Paul, received from their mother. It paid off on that night, as his coach observed: “I thought he was done. But he never, ever gave up.”

In our lives, we experience mistakes, failures and falls. It feels almost spiritual to blame ourselves harshly and surrender to guilt and weak yearnings. But we have been given another way to live. We have a passport for citizenship in another state of being. Those who follow Jesus have been called to live lives of obedience which leads to joy and victory-the life abundant, Jesus called it.

Jesus said, “I am the Way.” Because we journey heavenward with him, we do not dwell on triumphs or failures. We stretch forward to what lies ahead, confident that the goal he has set before us will bring blessing and joy to us and to others.

Churches can learn from this truth. Over the past five years, 54 percent of our Texas churches have declined, 12 percent have plateaued and 34 percent have grown. While demographic changes, leadership issues and

spiritual health matters always can be considered, it is time for all of us to look at the need around us, forget failures and address with all our strength and determination our opportunities. Jesus calls us to the harvest and prays for laborers to join him there.

Milfred Minatrea, director of the Missional Church Center for the BGCT, has just written "Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches." It is profoundly helpful. He writes: "At its core, it is not the number of activities a church is involved in that defines success, but whether those activities result in accomplishing God's mission for his church. True success can only result when the activities of God's body reflect what is in his heart."

His prescription for helping a church to be missional? He quotes Antoine de Saint-Exupery: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

Let us yearn for the sea, for the gold, for the "Well done!"

We are loved.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.