

EDITORIAL Stewardship encompasses all of life

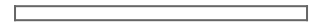
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EDITORIAL: Stewardship encompasses all of life

Soon and very soon, people from all over the globe will settle down in front of our TV sets for two solid weeks, mesmerized by the XX Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy. We'll cheer for athletes we've never heard of competing in sports we only think about once every four years. And don't say you won't, because you know you will. "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" are the best drama on TV (with the slight exception of any episode of *Lost*).

One of the most attractive aspects of the Olympics always has been the uniquely individual nature of the competition. Of course, I love baseball and football, respect basketball and have developed a growing appreciation for hockey. Team sports are thrilling and larger than life. But individual sports, such as the majority featured in the Olympics, are so compelling because they highlight a solitary competitor striving against nature, time, gravity, human limitations and/or other individuals with the same dreams and aspirations. When you watch many of these solo competitions, you witness the world in microcosm.





Many factors determine which athletes climb up on the medal stand and which ones pack up and head for home. They include everything from climate to equipment to talent to genetics to funding to, sometimes, sheer good fortune. But the No. 1 factor inevitably is this: Stewardship of individual resources. Sure, raw ability plays a part. (Remember Eddie the Eagle, the British ski-jumper? Everyone knew his physical skills wouldn't fly him to a medal.) Every other factor, however, is impacted by stewardship of resources—how well the athletes use everything at their disposal. The medal stands are populated by athletes who commit themselves to gaining quality experience, training extremely hard and well, understanding the dynamics of both the sport and the specific competition, eliminating distractions, resting body and soul, and focusing intensely on the one thing that matters at the moment: The competition. We call them champions.

The Apostle Paul apparently loved the ancient Olympics. He enlivens his letters with athletic metaphors. The most famous one states: “But 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 3:13-14). Paul understood the similarities between athletic prowess and successful Christian living: Forget what is behind. Strain toward what is ahead. Press on. Keep the goal in mind. In other words, steward all that you have—time, talent, energy, passion, funds, focus—toward being and doing what God has called you to be and to do.

This issue of the *Baptist Standard* includes a focus on stewardship. Most of the time—as is the case with this package of articles—when we say “stewardship,” we mean “money.” That is entirely appropriate. One of the stellar teachings of the Bible is the importance of financial generosity and of contributing a tithe and more of our financial income to support the Lord's work. We can't begin to imagine how many more people would come to faith in Christ and how much pain and suffering would be alleviated if God's people would tithe to their churches and provide generous offerings for other Christian causes.

But we miss the mark if we narrow our understanding of stewardship to finances. The gospel is holistic; it encompasses all that we are. When Jesus saves us, he doesn't simply claim our wallets, because he needs our money. He claims our wristwatches, because he is Lord of our time. He claims our shoes, because he wants to guide where we go. He claims our gloves or equipment or baking pans or toolboxes, because he wants to direct us as we work. He claims our books and TVs and computers and musical devices and conversations, because what we think and how we shape the thinking of others matters to him. He cares about our diet and exercise and sleep, because our bodies belong to him, not us.

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus preaches about a master who went on a trip and allocated portions of his estate to his servants, “each according to his ability.” When the master returned, he held each servant accountable for the portion entrusted to him. The master rewarded the servants who used their resources wisely (someday, we'll discuss the spiritual virtue of risk-taking), but he not only condemned but also took away from the servant who did not exercise wise stewardship of what he had received.

God expects the same from each of us. We're accountable, not only for money, but for every second of our lives.

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