

Christ's Reward Remains Timeless

From July 27 to Aug. 12, the eyes of the world will be on London as aspiring athletes from more than 185 countries compete in the XXX Olympiad.

It will be an extravagant production, fixated on the athletic prowess of men and women who have trained for the last four years to compete for a place on the coveted medal podium.

The path to glory is fleeting, though. Can you remember who won the gold medal at the 180-pound class in freestyle wrestling in 2008? Does the name of the winner in the women's pole vault readily come to mind? Is the men's singles tennis champion on the tip of your tongue? Do you even recall where the XXIX Olympics was held?

The apostle Paul frequently used athletic imagery in his letters to churches and epistles to his young protégés such as Timothy. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote of the transient nature of physical pursuits when compared to the incredible rewards that await the serious, zealous pursuit of Christ Jesus.

"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Corinthians 9:25, ESV).

Like a motivated, disciplined athlete, the follower of Jesus Christ trains his soul and body to "run in such a way that [he] may win" (1 Corinthians 9:24). But unlike the fading prize of a merely physical endeavor, the disciple of Jesus Christ receives—by grace—the unfading, enduring reward of eternal life with the Savior.

That's why we remember men like Scotland's Eric Liddell, who

won the 400 meters in Paris at the 1924 Olympics. His story was compellingly told in the 1981 Oscar-winning movie Chariots of Fire, which is being heavily used in the marketing of this year's Olympics.

However, we don't still talk about him just for his amazing, gold-medal race, but for his staunch commitment to Jesus Christ and a lifetime of missionary service to the King, a service that ended in 1945 at a Japanese prison camp in China.

Eric Liddell ran to win the race of passionate devotion to the Savior. He felt God's pleasure when he competed on the track, but far more important, he delighted in pleasing the Lord with unquestioning obedience.

The Scripture says that we all are to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). There will be many obstacles, temptations, trials and tribulations that the believer in Christ must negotiate along the course that God has appointed for us.

But we run, and finish, and win by constantly "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," (Hebrews 12:2). We bow humbly before Him in prayer, learn of Him through the Word, and worship Him as the Spirit of God reveals the sufficiency, majesty and glory of our Savior and Lord.

The gold medal that Olympic officials hung around Eric Liddell's neck in Paris was "counted as nothing" (Cf. Philippians 3:8) compared to the crown of righteousness bestowed upon him by the Lord. He ran to obtain the "imperishable" wreath.

I trust that our lives will be marked by such devotion, godly character and sacrificial service for the sake of the Gospel. In the end, it will make all the difference, remembering that as we run, in the words often attributed to Eric Liddell: "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ."