

You Won't Grow in Christ Without This Inner Motivation

When I was a trainer at Gold's Gym, I would often have new clients come in for our first session with pictures of the bodies they wanted me to help them create. I would respectfully accept these as their legitimate wants or desires and candidly describe to them roughly what it was going to take to achieve that particular body or something similar. Well, as you can probably imagine, very few of these earnest individuals even seriously pretended they were willing to put forth the level of effort or discipline they now recognized necessary. In one pretense or another, their principal response was, "Wow, I'm not really willing to...", or "Really—I can't do all that" or something reasonably similar. So, not wanting to discourage them in any way, I would say something to the effect of, "Well let's talk a little about what you are willing and able to do, and then get started and we'll see what we can accomplish."

What people want and their corresponding willingness is very often strikingly different. It was obvious in the gym and it has been likewise in the church as I regularly coach/mentor churchgoing men. Now, I do not want to disrespect my fellow male Christ-followers, as I fall short as well in resembling the man I need to be, but as I get older, I believe I recognize a little more clearly the enduring war which is all around us, as well as some essential strategies for success. It's these strategies, which I have, for the most part, learned in the trenches that I attempt to pass on to my fellow warriors. I like the classification "warrior" in this analogy because of the connotations in which this term is used in sports, such as in the NFL (National Football League) and the analogous "spiritual world" battles we face in our Christian journey.

When someone is characterized as a “warrior” in the NFL, the term refers to someone who is seen as relentless, passionate, almost neurotic in the intensity at which they approach their specific “combat zone.” One person who comes to mind is often characterized in this manner is Marshawn Lynch, or “Beast Mode,” as he is often referred to. For those of you who are avid viewers of professional football, you likely know of this former all-pro running back of the Oakland (soon to be Las Vegas) Raiders. If Marshawn had come into Gold’s Gym back in the day, I am confident he would have been willing to do whatever I or anyone else suggested to obtain the level of physicality he wanted/desired; he would have done whatever it took.

I love coaching Christ-following men with the spiritual fortitude of Marshawn Lunch. Because the level to which this mentality is available in these men is often in direct proportion to the level to which they will approach the Christ-likeness accessible to each of us. Yes, “Christ-likeness” is the reasonable and definitive goal of our heavenly Father as well as each of us who characterize ourselves as Christians as we participate in this specific journey to one degree or another. However, for too many of us, it probably feels to the Father somewhat like my Gold’s Gym experience felt to me: Intentions or wants are often present, but “willing” is so often disappointingly deficient. The discipline, effort and attitude in those striving for a championship, gold medal or trophy is often exceptionally impressive. And all of this for a reward that will tarnish, fade\ and essentially be forgotten. Look with me at a great paraphrase of such a scenario:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that all those who run in a race run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain it. Everyone who strives for the prize exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we

an incorruptible one. So, therefore, I run, not with uncertainty. So I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I bring and keep my body under subjection, lest when preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

I believe that most of us have experienced varying degrees of success in aspects of life because our motivation was such that it provided adequate discipline, and the corresponding results proved proficient. However, that motivation is by and large lacking in so many of our spiritual quests. So how can we make the necessary adjustments so that our heavenly trainer is more able to administer the Christ-like adjustments to our spiritual bodies that will match any picture we may come across? Like any serious pursuit, it ultimately has to come from somewhere within each person individually. Oh, we can be inspired by someone or something for a short period of time, but we need to find that place, somewhere inside of us that will provide the necessary motivation to take the appropriate steps necessary. And it unquestionably is a step-by-step process for every one of us. Billy Graham did not spiritually look in his '20s as he did in his '70s; it was a process for him as well as for any perceived "spiritual giant" you may look to.

Those people, those spiritual giants are the Marshawn Lynches of the spiritual realm. And in the spiritual, unlike the physical, it has nothing to do with natural abilities or potential; it is completely about disciplining ourselves and intentionally doing what is necessary, one step at a time—which we can all do. For example, if Woody Allen had ever gone to a gym with that extreme warrior mentality, his potential would be a good deal less than a Marshawn Lynch's; regardless of the intensity of his pursuits. It is highly improbable he would have ever been capable of being an All-Pro running back. However, every one of us can be a spiritual Marshawn Lynch, an all-pro follower of Christ. Every one of us. There are no physical limitations or hindrances in this

most important quest of our lives. As it says in the 1 Corinthians passage above: "Everyone who strives for the prize exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one. So, therefore, I run, not with uncertainty. So I fight, not as one who beats the air" (1 Cor. 9:25-26).

My fellow followers of Christ, we can successfully pursue the Christ-like process by intentionally doing those things we *can* do right now, and stepping our way forward until those things we feel we cannot do at this moment, become possible. Every one of us can—right now, at least, start with the following:

Find 15-30 minutes in our day to "hang out" with the Lord, whether that be;

- Reading a good Christian book and listen for His voice in the midst;
- Spending time talking with Him in a dialogue format (talking and listening);
- Listening to Christian music and paying attention for His heart/voice in the midst;
- Intentionally inviting Him to participate in whatever you are doing and conduct that activity in such a way that you do your best to retain that awareness;
- Reading your bible and listening for His voice as you read;

Now, of course when I say listen or pay attention for His voice, I am not talking literally. Not to say that's impossible, but generally the promptings we sense during times spent with Him are the voice, the communication, I am speaking about.

The Marshawn Lynches of you may take this as a restrictive guideline and perhaps find appreciably more time in your day to exercise the potential for somewhat sooner All-Pro Christ-likeness. Either way, regardless your level of intensity,

Christ-likeness is an extraordinary pursuit and will provide incredible dividends lasting for time and eternity: Your level of willingness in direct proportion to your specific want.
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