

Welcome to our final message in our series on eternal rewards. The word we are emphasizing today is a well-known word in our society. Officially this company began in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports. It was founded by an Oregon track athlete named Phil Knight and his coach, Bill Bowerman. In 1971 they named a soccer shoe by their present name. But it wasn't until 1978 that the company was officially named Nike. The word originates from the title of the Greek goddess for victory. There was a slogan in 1988 that is deemed as one of the top five slogans of the 20th century — Just Do It! A famous athlete in the early 70's was Steve Prefontaine. He held many long-distance running records in the United States. He had a tenacious spirit. One of his most famous appeals was this quote:

“To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the Gift.”

There are over 25 references to this important word in the New Testament. The word means overcomer. The first reading is **Romans 8:35-39**, where the strongest definition of our word is presented. It spells out hyper nike. Even in the intensity of life God's truth is greater and his power is more sustaining. The word means surpass, be stronger, gain victory. With these inspirational words stirring our hearts let's turn to the Book of Revelation where we will see the crux of the issue about overcoming—**Revelation 12:10-12**

* **The Past** — the blood of the Lamb. This refers to none other than Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The Bible is clear that his shed blood was payment for our sin. The meaning of what he did for us is found in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Are you familiar with the term D-day, it literally means Day of Days. It was especially used of WWII and refers to the decisive battle fought so that the outcome of the war was decided. In a similar way, we have experienced D-Day already through Christ and his death and resurrection. However, verse 12 is still real — “The devil has gone down to you. He is filled with fury because his time is short.” Because of what Jesus did we know that V-Day (Victory Day) is certain, but it hasn't arrived yet. The battle wages on.

* **The Present** — the word of their testimony. In today's world we are challenged with hardship, spiritual battles, disappointments, adversity, etc. The courage to face the challenges of life with hope and confidence is what the Bible means by our testimony. Overcoming means living for Christ in a fallen world.

✓ Whose you are - “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:16 & 17)

✓ Who's within - “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

✓ Who's you for - “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” (1 Peter 5:8 & 9)

Your testimony is established by the certainty of who you are, by the power that is within, and by the declaration of who you are living for. If those remain persistent and strong, the Bible refers to you as an overcomer.

* **The Future** — not shrink from death. Death is not something scary to the believer; it is actually the anticipated hope. When Steven Covey coined the phrase, “Begin with the end in mind,” he was challenging us to keep an eye on the end of our life. With the goal of living well today, you can fulfill the purpose God gave you as an overcomer. The Bible calls an overcomer someone who accomplished what God had in mind for him. Let's read what it says in Revelation 2:26: “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.”

Jesus told his disciples that being a servant was the greatest rank in the kingdom. He promised that they would someday rule, even as they gained that right through humble living here on earth. The kingdom belongs to those who are poor in spirit and even points to the fact that those who are persecuted for righteousness will be carried through this life and led to eternity with these words, “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:12)

Conclusion: Living in light of eternity produces courage and strength. It enables us to make choices that affect our lives in small ways and sometimes in dramatic ways. God is aware of every decision you make. A heartfelt decision, in the midst of opposition and suffering, will help you on the path as an overcomer. You may not see your affirmation or honor in this life, but the promise for the overcomer in eternity is one of approval, authority and honor. Stand firm, by brothers and sister.

Reflective Questions:

1. What stands out to you in this series on eternal rewards? What do you understand about eternal rewards and what don't you understand as much?
2. How does the phrase from Steve Prefontaine apply to the Christian life? "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift." I think that is a great definition for an overcomer. What definition would you use for overcomer?
3. Why is the certainty of what Christ did 2,000 years ago so important to overcoming? What does his death and resurrection mean to you today?
4. What is your testimony? Why is your testimony meant to be ongoing? What would be the word of your testimony right now?
5. What do you think of death? How is the definition of death different for someone who knows Christ verses people that are living for themselves?
6. How do you picture standing before Christ one day? How does that motivate you?

Reading Schedule for January 25 - 31, 2010

We are entering our last week of January already and we will be completing the Book of Genesis. Obviously we didn't read every chapter of Genesis, but you received a clear picture on God's work among his people, beginning with creation, meeting a man named Abraham, and now ending with the life of Joseph. Joseph is an amazing character and he exemplifies the life of an overcomer. We will not be reading Genesis 50:20, but I wanted to include it as a marvelous, timeless truth: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." You can trust God, because as Joseph learned, God can overrule people's evil intentions to bring about his intended results. I know you will enjoy the reading this week as we highlight a man named Joseph.

January 25: **Genesis 41:37-57** – This is the transition of Joseph's life where the favor of God is definitely making something great happen out of what had been very difficult. "Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt." (verse 46) Joseph was still a young man, but at age 17 he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. He spent 13 years as an Egyptian slave and most of those were in prison. God can turn around a situation "overnight," as the saying goes. God can intervene in a moment's time. Most often he works slowly but surely for your good and his glory. But don't forget the marvelous, surprising miracles of God that are seen clearly in Joseph's life. What does Joseph's promotion mean to you? How did Joseph trust God? What do you learn from this miracle?

January 26: **Genesis 42:1-38** – "Reuben replied, 'Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.' They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter." (vv. 22 & 23) This is such a fascinating statement from Reuben. He is admitting guilt for how they treated Joseph. Guilt is hard to overcome. Selling Joseph into slavery amounted to death in their minds. They made a choice that they would continue to live with. Is there anything in your life that continues to surface guilt? Why is guilt something that can keep us bound up? What has Jesus done for our guilt?

January 27: **Genesis 43:1-34** – We are reading the whole story of Joseph at this point. The main point of the story during these chapters is about Joseph's interaction with his brothers. Joseph is wisely approaching his brothers in a way that would bring out some deeper issues in their lives. "And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." (verse 14) What secrets are a part of this story? Why do secrets tend to own us? How is God using Joseph to unveil these secrets? Why is it so important that the brothers feel their guilt and pain? What is the next step for their healing?

January 28: **Genesis 44:1-34** – "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." (vv. 33 & 34) Judah is the main character of this chapter. He steps forward with courage, willing to do whatever it takes to protect his brother. Joseph no doubt saw some positive changes in Judah's life through how he responds. How is God using this interaction in the life of Joseph's brothers? What changes do you notice? Why are these changes important?

January 29: **Genesis 45:1-28** – "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." (verse 8) This principle is clearly expressed in Genesis 50:20 as I already have mentioned. God used their evil actions to fulfill his ultimate plan. He sent Joseph ahead to preserve their lives, save Egypt and prepare the way for the beginning of the nation Israel. God is sovereign. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." How does this story fit this principle from 8:28? How does this story help you?

January 30: **Genesis 49:1-33** – Jacob blesses his sons in this chapter. It portrays the importance of passing on the blessing to one's children. I have mentioned this previously with Isaac blessing Jacob. Now Jacob blesses his sons and predicts a hopeful future. "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." (vv. 22-24) Jacob celebrates God's plans in Joseph's life and trusts that God will do the same into the future. Joseph was a man of great faith. He is our main character this week and this blessing fits his life journey. What do you take away from our reading this week about Joseph? How can his life help you?

January 31: **Exodus 1:8-2:10** – This is transition time as we begin a new book for the first time in 2010. We will study the life of Moses next month. "When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'" (2:10) The name Moses is one for the ages. The life of Moses was saved by the hand of God. In turn, God would use Moses to save thousands of lives. The uplifting part of this story is that Moses' mother actually has the opportunity to nurture and nurse her son. God used Moses' mother's courageous act of saving and hiding her baby to begin his plan to rescue his people from Egypt. This is another clear illustration of how God takes care of the future, even when the present seems paralyzing. What do you like about the beginning of our story on Moses? What kind of world was he born into? How does that fit our world today? Why?