

Getting Off the Ropes

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Sometimes it seems like life comes at you going seven hundred miles per hour. It's hard to keep up, it's hard to keep balanced and it's hard to keep going. That's exactly the way that Satan would have things. If life were a boxing match, Satan would want us on the ropes struggling to keep our footing. Like a prize fighter, he would keep throwing punches, looking for weaknesses in our defense and waiting for our guard to falter. He would push us to the precipice of failure and keep pushing till we were ready to give up. That's exactly where he wants us, on the ropes.

Just like boxing, if we never get off the ropes, we don't have a hope in the world of victory. When's the last time you heard of someone winning a fight by backing up the whole time? If we are to defeat the devil, we must find our footing in life by grabbing onto the things that are really important and letting go of things that aren't.

That's part of Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 9.24-27. If we are going to run the race, then we are going to have to give some things up. In the Corinthian games, athletes went through strenuous ten month training programs where every aspect of their lives was monitored. They were not allowed to eat certain foods, go certain places or partake in a number of every day events. Why? Because they were preparing themselves to compete, and even the preparation for these games had rules.

Someone once said that this life is preparation for eternity in heaven with God. We have entered into a strenuous training program, so we should expect to give some things up, too. If we are going to live a life that glorifies God through Christ, then we must focus on and grab onto spiritual things while letting physical things go. I'm not talking about giving up things that we all know are wrong; I'm talking about "regular stuff" like the athletes in Corinth were expected to give up. If we are ever going to get off the ropes in our battle with Satan and sin, then we are going to have to slow down our lives.

For instance, how many activities should we allow our children to participate in? One? Two? Three? That doesn't seem like too much until you consider practice three times a week. Then there's recitals and games and pictures. Then there's extra competitions and exhibitions. Now multiply that by three activities and then again by the number of children you have. That's why there's never enough time in the day. How many hours a week do our children spend in extra activities? Compare that to how many hours we spend studying the Bible with them. Which is greater? Which ought to be greater? Which is "extra" and which is "necessary"?

What about our own lives? We can never be the spiritual leaders and guides we need to be for our families if we don't make time to first grow spiritually ourselves. We must make prayer and meditation an important part of our daily lives if we want to be godly people who raise up godly children. Spiritual families aren't an accident; they are meticulously sought after, they are diligently planned.

How many hours a day do we spend watching television? How many hours a day do we spend on the Internet? Compare that to how many hours we spend speaking about the commandments of the Lord to our children when they rise up, when they walk along the way, when they sit down, and when they lie down to rest. Which is greater? Which is extra? Which can be gotten rid of?

There is nothing inherently wrong with children's activities, watching TV or surfing the web (Some of my greatest childhood memories revolve around little league baseball). However, we have to consider what we spend most of our time doing. Are we training for this life or are we training for eternity?

We cannot be the kind of people that God wants us to be if we are not willing to give up things that are unimportant. When we allow ourselves to get caught up in every day events, we are like an athlete running aimlessly across a track, we are like a boxer furiously beating the air. Eventually, we will find ourselves against the ropes being pummeled and beaten by Satan. We have two choices: we can put away those things which are unimportant and focus on being spiritual people who raise up godly children or we can box the air, run aimlessly and go down for the count.