

By now the Super Bowl is behind us, and Steelers fans are reveling in triumph while Cardinals fans lament what might have been (sorry Andy!). If you watched the game, you saw the Cardinals rally from behind in the final minutes and take the lead, only to see victory slip from their grasp. In that final game winning drive, the Steelers proved they have what it takes to be champions. So, exactly what does it take? What are the characteristics of a champion? How do champions approach the challenges in their path? Let's break this down, like the game of football, into quarters.

In the first quarter, you want to remove all distractions from your goal-- anything that slows you down. Anything that doesn't get you closer to accomplishing your goal has to be minimized or eliminated. The writer of Hebrews understood this, saying "Let us strip off anything that slows us down...and run with patience the peculiar race that God has set before us" (Heb. 12:1). As you eliminate those things from your life that sap your strength and weaken your resolve, you will be better able to focus on the goal God has placed before you.

In the second quarter, you should remember the reason and the reward. Why do you persevere in this walk of faith? It may be because you have confidence in the eternal rewards that await those who faithfully do God's work and keep their focus on Him. Paul said, "we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears" (I Cor. 9:25). Just as a football player wants the rewards of being a champion, so you should desire the heavenly treasures that God has in store for those He finds faithful.

Do you need a halftime break? Sorry but we must press on, because we need to go through the third quarter to learn about resisting discouragement. Someone once said that you determine a man's greatness by what it takes to discourage him. What are you allowing to discourage you? Remember that our God is always faithful to fulfill His promises to those who continue to trust Him and persevere. The Lord's words to Habakkuk say it perfectly, "These things I planned for you won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled" (Hab. 2:3).

Many teams grow weary by this point, but the fourth quarter teaches us to remain resilient. Remember the most meaningless score is the halftime score. It comes down to how you finish that determines whether you will be a champion or not. If you can say that "Christ's mighty energy is at work within me..." (Col. 1:29), then you will have the power and resilience to finish the game strong.

Hopefully, you are out there on the playing field, fully engaged in the challenge and opportunity that stands before you. Will you be remembered as a champion, or will you be one of those who missed their chance for greatness and the reward that went with it? How will you finish the game?