

1) Me

a) On August 8, the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China will get underway.

i) For 16 days, approximately 10,500 athletes from around the world will gather to compete in 28 different official summer sports.

(1) These are some of the best, most well trained athletes in the world.

(a) And I really enjoy watching them compete.

(i) How many of you enjoy watching the Olympics?

2) We

a) As you watch the Olympics, I invite you to think about 2 things.

i) First, as you watch a race or routine, game or match, I want you to imagine how much that athlete has invested in perfecting their sport.

(1) Olympic athletes submit every aspect of their life to the rigors of athletic training.

(a) It involves mental, physical, emotional, and nutritional discipline to be an Olympic athlete.

(i) Even the clothes they wear and the beverages they drink have been engineered for maximum performance.

1. One race, that gets over in under 10 seconds, represents decades of training by each athlete.
 - a. That's pretty incredible.
 - ii) Second, I want you think of Paul's words to the Corinthians recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:25 and Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:8
 - (1) "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it get a crown that lasts forever." – 1 Corinthians 9:25
 - (2) "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." – 1 Timothy 4:8
 - (a) We may not be in the Olympics, but we, too, are in training.
 - (i) It's a different kind of training,
 1. It doesn't land our picture on a Wheaties box or NIKE commercial, but it is no less valuable.
 - a. In truth, it is much more valuable, having value in both this life and the life to come.
- b) What does our training program look like?

- i) Lets turn to Matthew 14:13 – 36, and look at this through the lens of a follower of Jesus training program.
 - (1) What can we learn from these two miracle stories.
- 3) God
 - a) Feeding of the 5,000
 - i) “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.”
 - (1) Jesus had just learned that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod, and he withdrew to be alone.
 - ii) “Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”
 - (1) Jesus love for people brought him back into the midst of their need to bring healing.
 - iii) “As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”
 - (1) To the disciples, this time of healing had turned into a crisis of sorts.
 - (a) All these people followed Jesus out to a remote place and now it is getting late and they need food, so they need to go.
 - (i) How will Jesus respond?

- iv) “Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”
- (1) So Jesus responds by drawing them personally into the crises as the solution – you give them something to eat.
- v) “We have here only 5 loaves of bread and two fish,” They answered.
- (1) Translation: We can’t!
- vi) “Bring them here to me, he said. And then he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about 5,000 men, besides women and children.”
- (1) Maybe the disciples, on their own, couldn’t possible feed all of those people, but with Jesus they could and they did.
- (a) What an incredible lesson in what it means to be like Jesus.
- (i) It includes solitude as Jesus gets away by himself.
- (ii) It includes mission as Jesus moves in a heals people.

(iii) It includes teaching as Jesus invites the disciples to lay down fear and pick up faith.

(iv) And it includes the disciples actually doing mission with Jesus to feed the crowds.

1. Not to mention the reality that sick people were healed and hungry people ate and were satisfied.

a. Taken as a whole this story is packed with lessons on what it means to be like Jesus.

i. Now, let's look at Matthew 14:22 - 36

b) Matthew 14:22 - 36

i) "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."

(1) This story begins in the same way - Jesus withdraws by himself, this time it says to pray...

(a) This isn't a coincidence, Jesus regularly withdrew to pray, sometimes all night...

ii) "When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night (between 3:00 -

6:00 am) Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, it's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear."

(1) So Jesus walking on water provides another crises among the disciples – now they are crying out in fear...

iii) "But Jesus immediately said to them, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.

(1) It's not Jesus desire to produce fear in the lives of his disciples, so he invites them to set it aside.

(a) Peter speaks...

iv) "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

(1) It's a test.

v) "Come," he said.

vi) Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "Why did you doubt?"

(1) Here Peter got another glimpse of what is possible if he moves in faith and not fear.

vii) "And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were

in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

(1) The end result was faith in the disciples as they learned again that Jesus is the Son of God, the one who heals, the one whose food satisfies, the one that commands the winds and the waves.

viii) "When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed."

(1) This story ends with Jesus in the midst of the people, bringing healing.

c) Summary

i) Did you notice some of the similarities between the two stories.

(1) Jesus spends time alone and in prayer

(2) Jesus teaches his disciples what He is like through miraculous events – so they see him more clearly

(3) Jesus moves missionally into the crowds to heal them and provide for them.

(4) Jesus calls his disciples to set aside fear and move out in faith – joining him in mission.

- (a) And the results are similar...
 - (i) The sick are healed, the hungry are well fed and the disciples grow in faith.
 - 1. They are literally being trained by Jesus to be like Him in the world.
 - a. What can we learn for our faith today?

4) You

- a) To start with, we have the same shortcomings and needs as the first disciples.
 - i) Our lives are full of sin that easily entangles us and keeps us from experiencing life as Jesus intended.
 - (1) We need to be cleansed.
 - ii) Our vision is cloudy and we don't always see Jesus clearly.
 - (1) We need the light of Christ to show us the way to move forward.
 - iii) Our actions and attitudes are inconsistent.
 - (1) We need to spend time with God over the long-haul so that God's values and priorities become our values and priorities.
 - (a) Literally, they become second nature to us.
 - (i) Just like there are essential tasks to becoming a great athlete, there are essential tasks to becoming like Jesus.

1. We need cleansing from sin, ridding our lives of the sin that so easily entangles.
2. We need to be filled with the light of Jesus.
3. We need to live in God's presence so that we see as God sees and love as God loves.

(ii) And just like an athlete continues to work on the essential tasks of their sport, so we continue in these three tasks...they never end.

1. There are always places in our heart, mind, soul and strength that need to be surrendered to God.
2. There is always more we can learn about Jesus which helps us know the way forward.
3. We can always use more time practicing the presence of God, so that we are transformed.

b) Now, what kind of things can WE do to training in these areas?

i) Well, the followers of Jesus that have come before us, and Jesus himself, engaged in spiritual practices that help us grow in these areas.

(1) They can be organized under three categories.

(a) Contemplative practices

(b) Communal practices, and...

- (c) Missional practices...
 - (i) Contemplative practices are more or less practiced in solitude.
 - 1. This general list, which comes from Brian McLaren, includes...
 - a. Solitude, Sabbath and rest
 - i. Resting in the presence of God, without work or speech, so one becomes more aware of the companionship, grace and love of God.
 - b. Spiritual reading and study
 - i. Exercising the mind to love God through the reading and study of scripture and other spiritual literature.
 - c. Fixed-Hour prayer
 - i. Getting away at specific times during the day to be in contact with God through common prayers.
 - ii. Take our moments and our days.
 - d. Prayer Journaling
 - i. Writing prayers and recording answers to create a record of God's faithfulness.
 - e. Contemplative prayer
 - i. Prayer that focuses more on listening and receiving rather than speaking and asking.

- f. Service, secrecy and generosity
 - i. Serving and giving anonymously to bless others without recognition.
- g. Simplicity and slowness
 - i. Resisting the pull of complexity, acquisition, consumption and hurry by choosing a simple and slow life
- h. Fasting and self-denial
 - i. Reducing consumption of food or other pleasures as a way of strengthening spiritual health and resolve.
- i. Feasting and celebration
 - i. Just the opposite
- j. Holy days and seasons
 - i. Observing special days and seasons that interrupt the normal rhythms of life to call attention to God's work in and through history.
- k. Gratitude
 - i. Counting one's blessings
- l. Meditation and memorization
 - i. Holding a truth in the mind and memory so it can savored and deeply rooted and accessible in the stress and struggle of everyday life.

- (ii) Communal practices are things that we do with other believers to strengthen our faith and faithfulness.
 - 1. Again, borrowing from McLaren, he mentions
 - a. Inconvenience
 - i. Going to a place you didn't choose at a time you didn't choose for a purpose you do choose – Going to church when you don't feel like it...
 - b. Self-preparation
 - i. Getting yourself ready to join with others believers for a common purpose.
 - c. Hospitality
 - i. Welcoming others, no matter who they are, as fellow followers of Jesus, making them feel a part of community
 - d. Stillness
 - i. Quieting one's inner chatter so that you can listen and be present and awak
 - e. Invocation
 - i. It's a way for us to say – together – that we are awake to God's presence.
 - f. Singing
 - i. Joining our voices across, race, gender, and class dividing lines

in one common voice to praise God.

g. Attentiveness

- i. Preparing and listening to sermons is a communal practice of attentiveness.
- ii. What is God saying as we consider our lives, our world and God's word?

h. Interpretation and discernment

- i. How do you understand what is being said?
- ii. What is useful in building up faith and faithfulness?

i. Confession and assurance of pardon

- i. A group of people who are committed to following Jesus admitting how they don't and then rehearsing the assurance that God is present and forgiving.

j. The Eucharist or Lord's Supper

- i. A communal celebration of the life and death of Jesus and the grace we receive through Him.

k. Prayer and sharing time

- i. Sharing our joys and struggles and bringing them to God together.

l. Giving

- i. Joining our gifts of time, talent and treasure with others to accomplish more together than we could apart.
 - m. Even the announcements are a communal practice as we talk about important events in the life of the community beyond Sunday morning worship...
 - (iii) The contemplative and communal practices, as good as they are, don't exist in and for themselves...they exist to prepare us for mission.
 - 1. Remember, this whole thing is not about me – it's about God's healing and hope flowing to as many people as possible.
 - a. God wants to heal the world, which requires healthy individuals...
 - b. And God wants to heal individuals which leads to a better world.
 - i. So the missional practices are those actions that have a healing impact on the world around us.
 - 2. Borrow from McLaren one last time...
 - a. Things like...

- i. Forgiving those who wrong us
- ii. Showing hospitality to strangers
- iii. Praying for the sick
- iv. Not judging others, but showing mercy and compassion
- v. Confronting evil with good
- vi. Serving
- vii. Listening
- viii. Associating with the lowly
- ix. “eating with sinners”
- x. Speaking the truth in love
- xi. Practicing neighborliness, even with enemies
- xii. Preferring the poor instead of showing favoritism to the rich.
- xiii. Speaking and working for justice
- xiv. Proclaiming good news in word and deed
- xv. Giving to the poor
- xvi. Throwing parties for the poor and forgotten
- xvii. Walking to the other side of the street to serve those in need
- xviii. Showing empathy.

3. Missional practices are the things that bring us to the front lines of

the Kingdom of God as it presses and expands and pushes against the world – proving one small act at a time that another world is possible because of Jesus.

5) Conclusion

a) I know you won't remember all of those things – I will post the lists on-line so that you don't have to remember them...

i) Just know, that there are many different ways to train as a follower of Jesus.

(1) What's especially important is that you know that these are NOT ways that you make yourself better by your own strength.

(a) They are ways that you make yourself open to being shaped and molded by the Holy Spirit.

(i) In athletics, you train for one reason – to put yourself in a position to win...

1. That is the role of spiritual practices, to put yourself in a position to be faithful.

b) Our goal is to be rid of the fear that keeps us from following Jesus, to be filled with the light of Christ so we know where to go, and to be so transformed by being in God's presence that God's values and priorities become ours...

- i) In that way, when Jesus says feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, invite someone to follow me, heal the sick, comfort those in need, stand up for justice, speak for the voiceless, or anything else Jesus calls us to...
 - (1) We won't say...
 - (a) We can't, we're afraid, we don't know how...
 - (i) We are the body of Christ – his hands and feet – we need to practice so that when He calls, we go...