

Get in the Game

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Turn to **1 Corinthians 9:24**. I'm going to read from the New Living Translation. "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!" **Verse 25**: "All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize."

Verse 26: "So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing." **Verse 27**: "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."

Get in the game and give it everything you have; and I'm not talking about going out and getting in a football game, because many of our bodies couldn't handle that. I'm talking about getting in the game (the race) that we run with Jesus Christ. I'm talking about how we live our lives serving the Lord.

We had 22 people go through our membership class yesterday morning, and I told them that, by doing this, they were taking their first step of getting in the game of running with the Lord at the Maranatha Fellowship Church. When you get in the game, don't just go through the motions. Don't just shadowbox and beat the air but have **purpose** in everything you do.

Verse 24 says that "everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. So run to win!" If you are going to get in the game, **play to win!** What is the purpose of just being in the game? So you can wear a uniform and look important to somebody sitting in the stands? If you are going to be in the game, **play to win**; and don't let other people win.

When you play games with your kids, some of you let them win. I don't believe in that. I'm competitive. If I'm going to play a game, I'm going to play to win. When my daughter was little, she had a game called Candy Land, and I hated that game. I hated it because I could never win! She always beat me. People thought I let her beat me, but I didn't. She always beat me fair and square.

I learned a valuable lesson playing that game with my daughter. How many know kids can teach you something if you just allow them to? She taught me that, if you're going to get in a game, **play to win!**

My oldest son taught me a valuable lesson as well. At about 17-18, he asked me one day if I wanted to box. Well, he has always been big for his age, so I said yeah, I'll box. We put our gloves on, and before we started, I said, "Are we going full speed, or are we going half speed?" He said that it probably would be smart if we only went half speed. How many know he was only setting me up?

So we start dancing around a little bit. I gave him a couple jabs, and before I could bring another jab around, he came up with a right hook to my jaw, snapped my head back, and I thought I was going out! It was only by the grace of God that I didn't go out, because everything went black for a minute.

What that taught me was that, if you're going to play, don't go at half speed. When you get in the game, give it everything you have. Go full tilt. Give it all you've got. **Play to win!**

So, why is it that we get in the game? **Verse 25** says because there is an "eternal prize," and that "eternal prize" is being able to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus Christ! That is why we run the race. It's all about Jesus! It has nothing to do with us. It isn't about who we are. It's all about Jesus! That is why we are in this game.

Verse 26 tells us that we are to "run with purpose in every step and not just shadowbox." If you are going to get in the game, have **purpose**. Don't just do it for the sake of doing it, but have **purpose** when you're running the race, when you're in the game, when you're serving the Lord. **Do it with purpose!**

There are areas all across this ministry where you are needed. We need crosswalk guards. We need ushers and greeters. We need volunteers in the children's ministry. We need people to get off the sidelines and get in the game here at the Maranatha Fellowship campus. So have **purpose** in everything you do!

I want to talk about four (4) things that let us know when someone is in the game. **(1) You know someone is truly in the game because they have been at practice.** They didn't just show up at game time. If you have ever played sports, you know that if you just show up at game time, you don't play! If you don't show up for practice, you don't get to play in the game.

It's not about who we think we are or who our parents or grandparents are. They may already be in the game, but YOU have to decide to come to practice so YOU can get in the game. No one can do that for you. YOU have to **purpose** to get in this race and **run it to win!**

(2) You know someone is truly in the game by who they are listening to. I've noticed that little kids will be participating in a game, but instead of listening to the coach, they are looking in the stands trying to find mom, dad, grandma, and grandpa. They're out there, but they really aren't in the game. They are in the game more for show rather than doing what they are supposed to do. They are there to please the ones in the crowd. So, are YOU listening to the Coach, or are you listening to the crowd?

You had better be cautious who you give an ear to. Be careful who you are listening to. Are you listening to the Coach or the crowd? You had better be listening to the Coach, because He is the One who calls the plays. The Coach is the One that positions the players where He knows they will work best.

Sometimes the Coach (God) is hard on us, because He can see the talent and the ability that is on the inside of us that the ones in the crowd can't see. So, sometimes the Coach needs to be hard on us, but we don't like that. We just want to be easy and greasy walking with the Lord, but sometimes God corrects His children. AMEN?

Sometimes when we're called off the battlefield, God will correct us for doing something He told us not to do. Then sometimes God will call us off the battlefield, because He sees something inside us the crowd can't see. **Be careful who you give your ear to.** Listen to the Coach (God) and not the crowd!

So many times, when we are corrected, we become offended and leave. Did the Coach tell you to leave? Be careful who you listen to. We are in this game to please Him. We're not in this race to please the crowd. **Our purpose is to please God** and not the people around us. So, who are you listening to? Get in that secret place, allow the Coach to give you your instructions, and stop trying to please the crowd!

(3) You know someone is truly in the game by what they are saying. What are you saying about the team? Are you a team player? It's not all about you. It's not about one person being the superstar. It's about Jesus Christ being the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and it's about us being the instruments He has called us to be! It has nothing to do with us, but it has everything to do with how we are speaking and what we are saying.

It's about **encouraging each other.** It's about **lifting each other up.** It's about being the **team members** God has called us to be, because this is YOUR team; and you had better protect the team, take care of the team, and pray for the team!

Colossians 2:2 says, "That their hearts may be *encouraged*, being knit together in love." We're to **encourage one another!** **Hebrews 10:25** [NLT] says, "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do; but *encourage* one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near."

Everywhere I look across the ministry of Maranatha, I see great people. I see gifted people and called people. I see anointed people throughout this ministry. God has called phenomenal people to the ministries at Ripley and Mishawaka, just the same as He has called YOU to this campus in St. Albans. We are all in this together. It's a **team concept**, and what you put into it is what you will get out of it!

When was the last time you encouraged somebody? If you want to change somebody's course of direction, tell them that you are proud of them. Tell them that you believe in them. We have to learn how to encourage each other, because one day all of us will need that encouragement.

We reap what we sow! How you block for somebody will determine how somebody else blocks for you! I won't allow you to get tackled. I will block with everything I have. I will push with all I've got. I'll pray. I'll fast. I'll do whatever it takes to make sure this ministry is advanced for the Kingdom of God, and I expect YOU to do the same thing!

Some of us are here to clear the way. There is a game in Green Bay, Wisconsin, today, and I think they just got a foot of snow. Do you know what some intelligent individual in Green Bay said? Let's call some of the fans and see if they will come and clear the snow for us. We will pay them \$10 an hour, and we need 450 people to clear this stadium. Over 700 people showed up to clear snow!

One lady drove from Canada to Wisconsin just to shovel snow. Think about that! Over 700 people showed up just to shovel snow; but one person said, "They are paying us \$10 an hour, but I would do it for free just for my team!"

Listen, that was just for some NFL football team. The greatest thing they will ever accomplish is winning the Super Bowl, but let me tell you something. I'm not part of a team from the NFL. I'm part of a team that is anointed by the Holy One. I'm on a team that has greater purpose than any NFL team will ever have!

We need to stop asking, how much are you going to pay me? What are you going to do for me, but say, "God this is for You! Do with it what YOU want to do with it!" Be like Isaiah. Say, "Lord, here am I; send me!"

(4) You know someone is truly in the game by their tenacity to stay in the game. Meaning, you don't give up quickly! I had someone come in my office the other day and say, "Don't give up!" Those words are not in my vocabulary. I don't give up. Sometimes I might get quiet, but when I get quiet that means I'm just pressing in to find out where God is guiding me. That is what being quiet means to me.

Being quiet doesn't mean I'm discouraged. It doesn't mean I'm contemplating giving up. It doesn't mean I'm questioning the decisions I've made. It means I'm pressing in to find out what my next step is! I don't give up, and you don't need to give up either. You don't need to back up. You don't need to shut up. You just need to keep pressing in the direction God has called you to!

You need to have the tenacity (the courage) of a bull dog. When you bite down on something, don't let go of it! Quit is a four-letter word. I don't quit!

In **2 Corinthians 4:8** [NLT], it says, "We are pressed on every side by troubles." Have you ever felt that way? It seems like 2012 started out that way. It seems like everywhere we look there are conflicts, issues, and circumstances that we didn't create.

I had someone tell me the other day that he feels the reason 2012 started out this way is because the enemy has caught a glimpse of what God is going to do, and he is trying to abort it now. If we will just stay in this game and don't quit, by the end of 2012 we will see just how vital this season is that we are in right now! AMEN?

We have to have tenacity! We have to have tenacity to stay in the Word, to continue to pray and fast. That is what **1 Corinthians 9:27** is saying. "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should." When you are fasting, you are disciplining your body. That is hard to do because the flesh wants control.

That is why it is so vital we get in the Word, pray, and fast. We cannot allow our flesh to get the upper hand. We must be disciplined. We must do this in order to get our spirit to the place where it is sensitive to the Holy Spirit; so that, when He says something, we can hear it and respond, so we can see miracles take place.

We have seen miracles in the past, but I don't believe the Lord is finished with miracles yet. I still believe there is a greater outpouring, a greater fullness to be experienced than what we have seen; but to obtain that, I believe we have to walk in realms most people aren't willing to walk in.

We have to become hungrier for what God has for us. That is why we live the life we live. We have to have tenacity, and the key is to **stay in the game!**

Sometimes when you are in the game, it seems like nothing is happening. Nothing, but **stay in the game**; because you never know when the Lord is going to hand the ball off to you. You never know when the Lord is going to hand your calling to you, and you have to run with it with everything you have.

You never know when God is going to give you a dream or a vision. You never know when God is going to trust you with an area of ministry; and when that happens, you have to be ready to run with everything you have.

You never know when God is going to hand the ball off to you; and when He does, you have to be ready to focus on what He has entrusted you with. So, how do we get in the game? **Stay close to the Coach!** Who is the Coach? Jesus!

I was blessed in high school to letter all four years in football, and the only way I lettered my freshman year was because I stayed close to the coach. When somebody got hurt, and coach turned around to see who he could put in, he saw my face. When somebody messed up and made a mistake, and coach needed to correct them and call them to the sidelines, I made sure that when he turned around, he always saw my face.

This is what I want you to understand. Maybe you haven't gotten in the game yet, but the Coach is just about to turn around, He is about to see your face and say, "Hey, get in the game!"

That is why practice is so important. That's why you have to know the plays even though you might not be in the game right now. That is why you have to be studied up, prayed up, praised up, and fasted up; so, when God calls your name, you will know what to do once you get in there!

Stay close to the Coach! The Bible says if we will draw near to God, He will draw near to us. **Stay close to the Coach**, because the Coach is the only One who can put you in the game. Man can't put you in the game. He can try, but God is the final Authority. You are either in or you're out. **Stay close to the Coach**, because your name is just about to be called!

Some of you need a game-changing moment in your life. You need God to come on the scene and change your situation around. That is what happens when someone accepts the Lord. Old things pass away, and all things become new; and when someone accepts the Lord, their game just changed for all eternity.

When God calls your name, you have just received a game-changing moment; and God never stops handing those game-changing moments out! Whether or not you receive your game-changing moment will be proven by your pursuit.

Get in God's presence and leave your situations and circumstances before Him! Ask Him for a game-changing moment, and then do whatever it takes. Get in the game and stay in the game!