

INTRODUCTION

The Olympic Games in Beijing are over and we've come to the end of the Go for the Gold Series. This morning, I want to ask you some Olympic trivia questions that all relate to the Beijing games.

1. Which country won the most total medals in Beijing?

- A. China
- B. U.S.A.
- C. Venezuela

The good old U.S.A. ended up with the most medals, 110 in all.

2. Which country won the most gold medals in Beijing?

- A. China
- B. U.S.A.
- C. Latvia

China won the most gold medals with a whopping 51. The U.S. won 36 gold medals (and Latvia did win one).

3. How many nations competing in Beijing did NOT win a medal?

- A. 65
- B. 97
- C. 124

The correct answer is C. There were 205 nations represented and 124 or 61% didn't win a single medal.

4. How many world records were set or met in Beijing?

- A. 39
- B. 52
- C. 112

The correct answer is B. There were 52 world records set and 23 of those were in swimming. Finally,

5. Which Olympian set the most world records in Beijing?

- A. Larissa Latynina
- B. Mark Phelps
- C. Michael Phelps

And if you said, C. you're correct. Michael Phelps set an amazing 7 world records on his way to winning 8 gold medals—also a record. If he wins three more in London, he'll break Larissa Latynina's record of 18 total medals.

During the past month I've had the joy of introducing you to some of the lesser-known Champions in the Bible. Do you remember Benaiah, who faced his fears and chased a lion into a pit on a snowy day? Do you recall our original supermodel of faith, Abigail, the risk-taker? Then we met Puah and Shiphrah, two champions who did the right thing by refusing to obey Pharaoh's order to kill the boy babies. Last week we learned from Micaiah, the prophet with a bloody nose,

that a champion can stand up, stand alone, and stand strong on God’s truth.

Our final champion is a left-handed warrior named Ehud. His is a story of intrigue and violence. There’s a villain and a hero, just like a James Bond movie. The nation of Israel had been led out of Egypt by Moses, and then after Moses died, Joshua led them into the land God had promised to give them. The first stronghold to be conquered was the heavily fortified city of Jericho, which God gave to the Israelites by causing the walls to crumble. The Israelites settled in Canaan, but they were still surrounded by enemies. Fast-forward about 40 years: Joshua was dead and there was no clear leader. The book of Judges tells us the Israelites forgot about God and started disobeying his Word. They split off into their own tribes and lost their unity, so they started losing areas they had captured. In our story, the King of Moab, Eglon, had captured the city of Jericho again. As we’ll learn in our scripture, Eglon was an extremely obese man.

He might not have looked like Jabba the Hut, but he was big and bad like Jabba. But God raised up a southpaw secret agent named Ehud to deal with him. Let’s read about it in Judges 3:14-26:

“The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab, for eighteen years. Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way the men who had carried it. At the idols near Gilgal he himself turned back and said, ‘I have a secret message for you, O king.’ The king said, ‘Quiet!’ And all his attendants left him. Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace and said, ‘I have a message from God for you.’ As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, which came out his back. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, ‘He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the house.’ They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead. While they waited, Ehud got away.”

We’ll stop reading there, but here’s what happened next. Ehud went to a hill and blew a trumpet to assemble the Israelites. He said, “The Lord has delivered the Moabites into our hands, let’s attack!” And he led them into battle and the Israelites conquered Moab, reclaimed Jericho and there was peace in the land for 80 years as Ehud served as a good leader. Ehud was one of God’s Champions. If you want to be a Champion for God there are four things we can learn from this amazing story.

1. CHAMPIONS PLAN CAREFULLY

King Eglon and the Moabites were the enemies of Jehovah, because they kept God’s people in bondage. To Ehud, God’s enemies were his enemies, so he devised a plan to liberate God’s people. First, we read that he made a two-edged sword—that wasn’t easy—or legal. When a King like Eglon conquered a nation, he would often confiscate all their weapons, so the people couldn’t rebel. Making a sword isn’t easy now, can you imagine how much planning and work it took for Ehud to do it in secret with the primitive tools and materials he had 3,500 years ago? Next, he planned the strategy of taking the tribute to the King and then going back in to tell him a secret. Then, he planned his escape route and where he would rally the army of the Israelites.

You probably have heard the statement: To fail to plan is to plan to fail. The Bible supports that statement in Proverbs 15:22, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” The Bible says it’s foolhardy to plan alone. Surround yourself with godly people and brainstorm plans that glorify God.

2. CHAMPIONS TURN ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE

Ehud was left-handed and in many ancient cultures, that was considered a defect—a handicap. In Hebrew it literally says he was “bound with his right hand” meaning he couldn’t use it—either by preference or his hand might have been crippled. In Hebrew culture, the right hand was considered the clean hand and the left was considered unclean. For instance, to this day an Observant Jew will always eat with his right and blow his nose with his left hand. If Ehud ate with his left hand, every bite he took would have been considered ceremonially unclean.

We still have linguistic reminders of how left-handed people were once considered bad. The Latin word for “left” is “sinister.” I asked all the sinister people in our church to email me about what it’s like to be left-handed and I got over 40 emails. They all told me that lefties are the most discriminated group in the world. Their top two frustrations about being left-handed are writing from left to right thereby getting smudges on their hand. One writer told me that all left-handed people have tattoos—the ink marks from years of dragging their hand over what they’d written.

I had many write me that as they were growing up that teachers tried to get them to write with the correct hand—sometimes even punishing them when they reverted to their left hand. One girl wrote me that she attended Catholic school and got slapped by a nun when she crossed herself with her left hand! Lefties had to sit sideways in desks designed for right-handed students, and if there were left-handed desks in the classroom, they were usually not enough and placed in the back of the class. Three-ring notebooks and spiral composition books are designed for right handed people.

The second main frustration is trying to use scissors made for righties. I tried using my left hand to cut some paper and it was impossible. I had to turn them upside down and they still didn’t cut clean. There are some left-handed scissors, but we’ll hold a story about that later.

About 12% of the population is left-handed, and because lefties are forced to use business machines designed for righties and swipe their cards in machines designed for righties, they end up being skilled with both hands—ambidextrous. I’ve often said, “I’d give my right arm if I could be ambidextrous!” As a group, southpaws overcome their disadvantage and many geniuses

were or are left-handed including such as Michelangelo, Albert Einstein, Paul McCartney and Phil Burks. Twenty-five percent of U.S. astronauts have been left-handed.

What many considered a handicap in Ehud's life actually allowed him to sneak a sword into the palace. Since almost all the men were right-handed, they would have to wear their swords in scabbards on their left hip. So when King Eglon's secret service agents checked Ehud, they looked on his left hip and didn't see a sword. They never thought to check on his right thigh where he had hidden the sword under his clothes.

Ehud was left-handed, but he didn't allow his disadvantage to stop him from being God's servant. What's your excuse? David Ring has cerebral palsy, but he has preached to hundreds of thousands of people. You may think your weakness is that you aren't educated enough to teach children, or that you're too shy to stand at a door and greet people. But God is looking for people who turn adversity into advantage. God delights in using people the world thinks are unfit. The Bible says, "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong ... so that no one would boast before him." (1 Corinthians 1:27, 29)

When God uses an NFL star or an Olympic champion to spread the good news, God has to work a little harder because that person might want to boast about their accomplishments. But when God uses someone like Joni Eareckson Tada, who has been a quadriplegic since she was a teenager, she can't boast about anything except the Lord, and He gets all the glory! So whatever you think your disadvantage is, why don't you let God use you to His advantage?

3. CHAMPIONS HAVE THE COURAGE TO CHARGE INTO A CHALLENGE

Ehud planned carefully, and he didn't let being left-handed stop him, but then he had to have the courage to follow through. I can just picture him as approached King Eglon and said, "By the way, King, I have a secret message for you." The King cleared the room and he probably felt safe because his secret service agents were right outside and this little Hebrew couldn't even use his right hand. Ehud came close, because he wanted to make sure Eglon got the point. As Eglon leaned forward, Ehud reached under his robe with his left hand and pulled out his two edged sword. In one swift motion, he plunged it into Eglon's belly. He thrust it so deep the handle was lost in the rolls of fat. The last thing Eglon saw before he died was a handicapped champion of Jehovah who had delivered God's judgment.

To be a Champion for God, you've got to plan well, overcome your weaknesses, but then you've got to just charge into your challenge. Sometimes we talk so much about our faith, but we never really get around to DOING anything. James wrote about the relationship of faith and works and he concluded by writing, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." (James 2:26) Sometimes we get so analytical in our faith that we fail to launch. We suffer from the paralysis of analysis.

Do you know how most adults get into a swimming pool? First, we stick a toe in the water to check the temperature. If it's okay, then we either walk down the steps, or climb down the ladder. We don't make a splash. Do you know how kids jump into a pool? They run as fast as

they can and do a cannonball—the more water they splash, the better! And even though it may be cold, they come up for air yelling, "Come on in, the water's great!" But they're smiling. When it comes to serving God I don't believe God wants us to tiptoe into ministry. I think he wants us to charge into a challenge and jump in and make a splash for the glory of God!

Are you someone standing on the side of the ministry pool dipping your toe in? Are you thinking about how you *ought* to work with children, or teenagers, or volunteer for a ministry, but you just haven't gotten around to it yet? Are you waiting for a call from God? Here it is: SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS! Is that loud enough? We need you. We can't do what God has called us to do without your help, so stop standing there—jump in the water's great—because it's the Living Water!

4. SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS CONTINUALLY SLAY THE SINFUL NATURE

Have you ever wondered why we have these rather upsetting stories in the Old Testament of bloody wars and gross murders like Ehud killing Eglon? Sometimes I'm asked, "What's the value of stories like that?" The New Testament teaches plainly that these stories in the Old Testament are actually there to teach us how to live the victorious Christian life. The key that unlocks the meaning of the Old Testament stories is found in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things happened to them [Old Testament characters] as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." For instance, if you read between the lines, you will find spiritual truth in Benaiah chasing a lion or in Abigail offering to intercede for her husband, or in Puah and Shiphrah refusing to kill the babies. And there is a spiritual lesson hidden between the lines of the story of Ehud stabbing fat King Eglon.

The Bible teaches us there is a spiritual war raging within us—just like war raged between Israel and Moab. It is the war of the two natures we have. One is the nature of the flesh, the sinful nature, and we can let fat old King Eglon represent that. Like Eglon, our sinful nature is a wicked, lazy, indulgent old man and when we allow it to rule over us, we are in bondage to it. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have another nature dwelling alongside King Eglon. The other nature is the nature of the Spirit, which we can let Ehud represent. This inner battle between Eglon and Ehud occurs everyday in the life of a Christian. There is a part of us wanting to do wrong (sinful nature) and a part of us wanting to do right (Spiritual nature).

The key to living a life in the Spirit is to continually slay the old sinful nature, just like Ehud stabbed Eglon. There are multitudes of scriptures that teach this. Here are two: "If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live ... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature, with its passions and desires." (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:24)

It would be wonderful if once you became a Christian that your old sinful nature would be dead and gone, but it's still there. Satan uses your flesh to attack you—like an inside job at a bank. He tempts you in ways that appeal to your sinful desires.

The best weapon we have for killing the old King Eglon who lives in us is the same weapon Ehud used against Eglon—a two edged sword. Your Bible is like a two-edged sword. God says,

“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit; joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) In other words, if you allow the Word of God to saturate your soul, it’s easier to keep the flesh, the old sinful nature dead. The Bible is a great sword to cut sin out of your life. The Psalmist declared, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11). I have a sign in the front of my Bible that says, “This book will keep me from sin; or sin will keep me from this book.”

Practically speaking, let me give you some examples on how this works. Whenever you’re tempted to lust after someone of the opposite sex, take the double-edged sword of the Spirit and plunge it all the way in to that fat old desire. Say to yourself, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God!” When you see something lying around that isn’t yours, and fat old King Eglon whispers, “You can take that and nobody will ever know.” Take the sword of the Spirit and say, “You shall not steal!” When you’re afraid and wicked old King Eglon whispers that you should be scared because bad things are going to happen, just take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God and plunge it straight in to that fear and say, “I will fear no evil for You are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me!”

CONCLUSION

God’s champions are those people who can turn adversity into advantage. During this month, we’ve met several Olympic champions. One of the greatest Olympic champions in American history was Wilma Rudolph. In 1960, when women’s track and field events were just starting to be held, she arrived in Rome as an unknown athlete. By the times the games were over, she had won three gold medals—the first woman to ever do so at a single Olympic. She was declared the fastest woman in the world by winning the 100 and 200 meter races. She also won gold in the women’s 4X100 relay.

But in order to appreciate Wilma Rudolph you have to understand the adversity she faced early in life. When she was young, it was thought that she might not ever walk—much less run a race. Wilma was number 20 of 22 children near Clarksville, Tennessee. She was born prematurely, weighting in at barely four pounds. As an infant she suffered from scarlet fever and double pneumonia; to make matters worse, when she as four she contracted polio and one of her legs became useless. At age six she was forced to wear metal braces on her legs to even stand. But she had a mother who loved her enough to take her 100 miles twice a week for two years to see the only black doctor in the area. In addition, every night Wilma’s mother would massage her legs and tell her she believed that she would walk and run someday. At age 12, Wilma took off her braces and started walking. She entered races in school and for three years she came in last place in every race. But she didn’t stop running and one day in Rome she ran into the history books. She refused to allow her handicap to slow her down and she went on to become a track and basketball star at Tennessee State University. After winning her three gold medals she returned to America and became a teacher and coach. She was a committed Christian and was one of the first celebrities to share her testimony at a Billy Graham Crusade. When she died in 1994 she was one of the most respected women in America.

Remember I talked about how some people seeing being left-handed as a disability? David

Davault wrote me about something that happened to him as a child. He had finished vacuuming his room and he was afraid to grab the vacuum plug to unplug it from the wall socket. I’ll let him finish his story:

“I looked around the room, and there on my desk laid a pair of scissors. So, I grabbed them, and without thinking jammed them between the prongs of the plug in the wall. BAM!!! A huge spark flew out, the lights in the room flickered, a big puff of smoke began filling the room. I screamed, jumped back—with scissors still in hand, and immediately started crying. My Mom came running to see what was the matter. She saw the scissors in my hand, the blackened wall plug, the seared electrical cord. My hair was standing on end from fright! The scissors were still in my hand, and they were now fused together, but I was stunned but unharmed.

What saved me from being shocked terribly—and possibly worse—was being left-handed. Back then, children’s scissors were entirely made of steel—a great conductor of electricity. However, to differentiate between the “normal” scissors and those made for lefties; the lefty scissors had green rubber encasing the handles. That green rubber probably saved my life.

Even as a kid, I could just envision God planning out my life, and seeing that one day I would do such a foolish thing as to stick steel scissors into a power outlet. I can envision Jesus telling the Father ‘better make that one a lefty’ with a chuckle on His face. I kept those scissors for several years after that. They were, of course, uselessly fused together, but were a vivid reminder of the all-knowing God who loves me.”

That’s the attitude of a champion! Turning what some see as adversity into an advantage. God is looking for people like Ehud and Wilma Rudolph. You don’t have to be perfect; in fact, you might be struggling with some weakness or disability. Congratulations! You are exactly the kind of person God delights to use!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes