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MONDAY MANNA
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RACING FOR THE GOLD – BUT IS IT THE RIGHT RACE? **By Sergio Fortes**

Were you among the millions of people around the world who viewed the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo – held in 2021? Along with the Winter Olympics, this globally televised event exhibits the highs and lows of competition as men and women seek honor for themselves and their respective nations.

More than 11,000 athletes from 204 countries competed in the “2020 Summer Games,” delayed until this year because of restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the one-year interruption, all with one goal: These athletes endured exhausting training and rigorous diets, abstaining from any distractions that would keep them from the gold. The bronze medal, or even silver, were not enough.

In their assessment, any sacrifice is worth it. One high-performance athlete, whose expectation was to finish the Olympics with at least six medals, suffered a sudden emotional crisis. The athlete would later say, “Life is not just about gymnastics. We are not just athletes. We are people, and sometimes it is necessary to take a step back.” Most of us can hardly imagine the demands of the Olympic “gold rush.”

Many of us, however, have encountered something similar in other life pursuits. In today’s highly competitive marketplace environment, as well as everyday life on its many fronts, the rush for “gold” remains constant and unbridled. A common but harsh expression describes this reality: “the rat race.”

Young entrepreneurs dedicate themselves to earning money, becoming wealthy, even millionaires if possible. Mature executives and expert professionals are on the same footing. They don’t settle for little. They want the most they can possibly acquire and achieve – and quickly. They endure many kinds of stress and pressures, making everything else secondary: family; health; social relationships, even leisure activities. Only the gold – and a lot of it – counts.

We find a very different perspective in the Bible, addressing the futility of striving to gain what ultimately will be lost. King Solomon of ancient Israel, purported to be the richest man of all time, commented: “When I saw all that my hands had done, and the work I had worked so hard to accomplish, I understood that it was all illusion! It was like running after the wind!” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Jesus Christ, telling the story of a diligent and eager agribusinessman celebrating a record harvest, gave this warning: “Fool, this night they will requisition your soul, and whose shall these things be that you have prepared?” (Luke 12:20).

I have been encouraged to see many entrepreneurs and professionals resisting a lifestyle that values only material, financial, and socioeconomic success. Having observed

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generations that preceded them, especially the so-called "Baby Boomers," the newer generations have other measures for success.

How much are a harmonious family, healthy family and social relationships, peace of mind, and having a good reputation beyond reproach worth? As Jesus told His followers, "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing" (Luke 12:23).

What kind of "gold" is ruining your sleep today, taking you away from your family, occupying so many hours of the day that you don't even have time for a healthy meal, or an appointment to attend to your physical health? Jesus issued this serious warning: "What advantage is there in someone gaining the whole world and losing his soul? What can compare with the value of his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Jesus told anyone who would listen what the "true gold" is: "But seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things will be added to you" (Luke 12:31).

Sergio Fortes is a mentor and consultant in logistics and corporate strategic business. As a member of CBMC in Sao Paulo, Brazil, he has coordinated the translation of Monday Manna into Portuguese for more than 20 years. He is committed to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ – to make disciples.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Did you watch any of the recent Summer Olympics? If you did, what were your impressions? What were your thoughts about the stories of hard work and sacrifices the athletes made to prepare for the highest levels of global competition?
2. In each of these competitions, winning the gold is the total focus. Everyone dreams of draping the gold medal around their necks and standing proudly on the podium? What kind of "gold" are you pursuing in your career, or even in a typical workday?
3. The ancient king Solomon said, after indulging himself in every form of pleasure and project imaginable, that it was like "running after the wind." In other places in the book of Ecclesiastes, he declares that the pursuit of temporary things is "vanity" or "meaningless." How do you respond to such an assessment? Do you think he was overly cynical and pessimistic?
4. Jesus Christ encouraged His followers to "seek first the kingdom of God," declaring that even if someone were to gain the entire world, would it be worth losing their eternal soul. Do you agree? How would you evaluate your life, in light of these statements?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 11:14,28, 18:11, 15:16, 30:8-9; Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

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