

Session Two

Competition and Winning

Who's the Winner?

Here are seven stories about people in the Bible. Some might be called winners; some might be called losers. Read their stories, and match the stories with names as you read the biblical passages (on the next page) about them. Then decide whether each was a winner or not, and jot down some reasons for your decision.

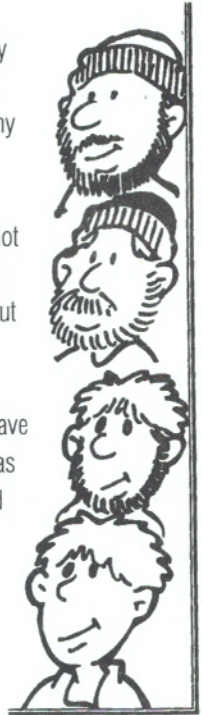
1. Seemed to me I had it all. Plenty of security for my old age and plenty of money and goods for right now. By all the measures I ever knew in this life, I was a great success, a big winner. But a very unusual visit showed me that I'd been wasting my time. All those years!

2. I was really, really afraid. After all, who was I? Just a nobody, a woman with a lot of strikes against her and without anyone to help her stand up to all those learned men seeking justice. Yet he seemed to have a whole different idea from theirs about how things should be . . .

3. You wouldn't think a friend could be as disloyal as I was. A real friend would have had a lot more courage and strength. He'd stand up for someone he loved who was in deep trouble. Well, it's too late. I failed as a friend. I wouldn't be surprised if I'd destroyed every bit of trust and respect that ever existed between us.

4. No doubt some people thought I'd never see what I had been hoping to see for all those years. "Poor old man, he has waited and waited—now he's so old that he'll die soon without having his wish fulfilled," some people probably said. But God didn't make me wait in vain. Now I can die peacefully, with my hope realized.

5. There were times when I truly thought I wouldn't survive. People can really get mad at you when you preach a Gospel that might make them uncomfortable. They can do some terrible things to you. But they did those things to our Lord, too, and no matter what happens to me, I know that in the end I will be where I want to be with him.



6. I remember so well the days when I would always be surrounded by people asking for healing, for baptism with water, and for instruction about the Savior who was coming. When he did come, of course, I had to step aside. I wasn't even worthy to untie his sandal, and now the crowds surrounded him instead of me. Yet he himself came to me and asked me to do something for him, as if I were worthy to do it.

7. We thought we were more clever than they were. After all, who would ever find out if we kept part of the money instead of turning it all over to the community? That's what smart people do; they always keep something for themselves. You can't win in the financial game if you don't. But somehow, for all our cleverness, we had missed something really important . . .

Bible passages: *2 Corinthians 6:3-10. Acts 5:1-11. Luke 2:25-35. Luke 12:16-21. Matthew 26:69-75. John 21:15-19. John 8:1-11. Matthew 3:1-17.*

Match the story with the speaker in the columns below:

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Story 1 | Apostle Paul |
| Story 2 | Sapphira, wife of Ananias |
| Story 3 | A rich fool |
| Story 4 | Simeon |
| Story 5 | Apostle Peter |
| Story 6 | An adulterous woman |
| Story 7 | John the Baptist |



Write your ideas about why you think each of these people was or was not a winner. Are there some who look like winners but perhaps really aren't? Or, the other way around, are there some who definitely do not seem like winners but in God's eyes they are?

Meet Sosi and Sarkis

You may know somebody like Sarkis. Whatever you have, he has the same, only better. Your new computer? His has lots more functions. You saw a good movie last weekend? Too bad you made the wrong pick and didn't go to the fantastic one he saw. The great part-time job you landed, the incredible bargain you found, the really funny joke you heard and want to tell—none of them can hold a candle to what Sarkis has and does. He's a born winner. Just ask him.

Or take Sosi, a ruthless competitor who doesn't let anyone get in her way when she wants something. She doesn't hesitate to give an elbow jab on the basketball court or in the cafeteria line. She spread some really vicious rumors last winter about a girl who was dating the guy she had her eye on. Once she was suspended for cheating on an exam.



Read *Mark 8:35-36*, *Philippians 3:12-14* and *1 Corinthians 9:24-27*. Could these words help you give some loving advice to Sarkis and Sosi? And how about your own attitudes toward competition and winning? Answer these questions for yourself:

1. Is there a difference between healthy and unhealthy competition? Do I keep that difference in mind?
2. Do I value the gifts and talents God gave me, and use them? Do I practice the discipline and preparedness it takes to be a confident winner? Do I really understand that God wishes the best for me—to be my best, to do my best, to be a winner?
3. Am I patient with myself and with life? Do I try to remember that a winner sticks with it, not being put off by some failures and disappointments?

Session Two

Competition and Winning

Key Concepts

1. There is a difference between desiring to win by doing your best and being determined to win at any cost.
2. Christ calls us to do and be our best, but not to "demolish" other people.
3. St. Paul likens the Christian "best" to an athletic race for an eternal prize.

Students will:

1. Evaluate concepts of "winning" and "competing" that prevail in our culture.
2. Read about the lives of some "winners" and "losers" in the Bible.
3. Define a Christian "winner" as one who follows Christ.

Objectives

Background for Teacher

Winning, for a Christian, means doing one's best through preparation, discipline, using one's talents to the fullest, and making an all-out effort. But it does not mean being a cutthroat competitor, cheating and taking shortcuts in order to win, or belittling an opponent. All these ideas can be found in the Bible, which will be one focus of this session.

Another focus will be the idea that what Christians want to win is the Kingdom of God, and that this is a race, much like an athletic competition. The Bible uses the imagery of athletic training often.

Materials needed

- Bibles
- articles about competitive events (such as academic and sports competitions) in newspapers and magazines
- two signs large enough to be seen across the room, one saying "AGREE" and the other "DISAGREE."

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer. Begin the session with a "continuum" exercise in which students show how much they agree or disagree with statements you will read. Put the "agree" and "disagree" signs on the wall at opposite ends of the room, with a clear space between them, like an imaginary line. As you read the statements below, ask students to stand on the line or continuum at a spot that indicates how much they agree or disagree with the statement being read. If they strongly agree, for instance, they would stand right by the "agree" sign. They would stand somewhere more toward the middle of the line if they agree but not strongly, in the very middle if they are neutral, and so on down to the other end, where they would stand to indicate strong disagreement.

Read each statement slowly twice, saying after each one, "Agree or disagree?", and pointing to the appropriate end of the line for each word. Once students have taken their positions on the line, ask them to stay there a moment so you can make notes on which statements got a lot of similar responses (students bunched together on one spot in the line) and which ones got more variety of response.

The statements:

1. Nice guys finish last.

Procedure

2. A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins.
3. Cutthroat competition isn't Christian.
4. Christians should discipline themselves like athletes competing for a prize.
5. The only way to survive in this world is to beat the other person.
6. Never be satisfied with being #2.
7. It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.
8. Losing dishonors you in most people's eyes.
9. There's nothing wrong with wanting to win.

After the exercise, get students' opinions as to why some statements may have provoked varied responses while others got more uniform responses. It may be that students interpreted the meanings of some statements in different ways and especially for this reason, there are no right or wrong answers. This too could be part of the discussion.

Tell students that as you go through the session, you will be discussing ideas that have to do with some of these statements. (15 mins)

2. Pass out the articles on competitions that you have gathered. Look them over together, and from them make some conclusions about how our society looks at winning. Is it something to be pursued at any cost? (Athletes using steroids; people cheating on tests.) Are some winners more gracious than others? (Teams that refrain from bad-mouthing other teams; winners who don't brag about their superiority.)

Tell students to keep their conclusions in mind as you go through the rest of the session. (10 mins)

3. Have the class do the exercise **Who's the Winner?** in the student text.

Answers: 1. A rich fool (*Luke 12:16-21*). 2. An adulterous woman (*John 8:1-11*). 3. Apostle Peter (*Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19*). 4. Simeon (*Luke 2:25-35*). 5. Apostle Paul (*2 Corinthians 6:3-10*). 6. John the Baptist (*Matthew 3:1-17*). 7. Sapphira, wife of Ananias (*Acts 5:1-11*).

In the discussion you might try to bring out these points:

Procedure

1. The rich fool is the type of person our society might call a winner. But he, like many of us, misses the whole idea of trusting God and putting ourselves into the security of his love instead of trying to build earthly security which can so easily be swept away.

2. The adulterous woman has lost every vestige of acceptance in her society—a real loser. But Christ's willingness to love her brings her back into the world of people. He even shows confidence in her by telling her to "sin no more"—he believes in her ability to do this.

3. Peter, of course, was given great responsibilities by Christ even after betraying the Lord. He felt like a loser, but Christ made him a winner again.

4. Students should understand that Simeon was very old when he encountered Christ in the Temple. Simeon shows us the value of patient waiting. This event is one of the feasts of the Church, called the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple.

5. St. Paul, of course, underwent huge persecution. Nor did he live to see all the churches he had founded doing wonderfully well. They continued to struggle. But they did finally flourish and grow, so Saint Paul was a winner as his work bore fruit.

6. John the Baptist had to "give up the spotlight" for another. This isn't something that would come easily to a lot of us. Yet John knew that the real "prize" could only be gained if people came to know Christ, and he had completed his work to help bring that about.

7. Sapphira and her husband thought only of holding on to some of their money. It seems clever, but as Peter tells them, they have sinned against the Holy Spirit, and it is not Peter who judges them but God. They are an example of those who win the whole world, but lose their souls.

Let students share their ideas about all these Bible characters in terms of seeming to win, and truly winning. (20 mins)

4. Have students do the **Meet Sosi and Sarkis** exercise in their student texts. Their answers may be quite personal, so they need not be shared unless students wish to reveal them. Repeat the "continuum" exercise you did at the beginning of class to see whether students may have changed some of their answers, or whether there might be more unanimous opinion on some of the statements now. Close with a prayer.

(15 mins)