

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 11

Dearest Grandchild,

It occurs to me that I have been writing about technical things that are of interest to me, but may not be of interest to you at this time. I hope today's letter will be more enjoyable.

Many years ago a preacher named Bob Richards became known as the "Pole Vaulting Parson". Even though it was before you were born, he competed with three different Olympic Teams. He won a bronze medal in pole vaulting in 1948, but came back to win gold medals in the Olympic Games of 1952, and 1956. He noted that not all Olympic champions were born with great bodies, and many had suffered from debilitating accidents and disease. The one constant among the champions, however, was their "heart". Consequently he wrote a best selling book titled, *The Heart of a Champion*. Grandpa used to buy these books in quantity and give them away. Unfortunately, the the book is now out of print.

Here are some excerpts from the book that I hope you will find helpful.

- Glenn Cunningham was so badly burned at the age of 5 that the doctors predicted he would be a hopeless cripple. He overcame his handicap and became one of the greatest athletes in American history. He set the world's record for the mile run in 1934.
- Johnny Fulton was run over by a car at the age of 3. His hips were rushed, his ribs were broken, his skull was fractured, and he suffered compound fractures of the leg. At first, he was not expected to live. Not only did he live, he also became a world class athlete who ran the half-mile in 1:49.5.
- Walt Davis was totally paralyzed by polio at the age of 9. He overcame his handicap and became a world champion high jumper in 1952.
- Shelley Mann was also paralyzed by polio at the age of 5, but overcame her handicap to claim 8 different swimming records for America, and even won a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia.
- Howard Connolly won the Olympic hammer throw despite a crippled left arm which been broken 13 times.
- Babe Didrikson Zaharias was so poor that she trained for running the hurdles by jumping shrubbery in the neighbor's back yard. She overcame the handicap of her poverty, however, and won this event in the 1932 Olympics.
- Bob Mathias broke the Olympic decathlon record despite the handicap of a pulled muscle.
- The pistol shooting champion of the 1952 Olympics lost his right arm 6 months after winning his gold medal. He trained for the next 3 ½ years with his left arm and won his second gold medal at the Olympic games in Melbourne.
- Tenley Albright had crippled legs but overcame her handicap to win the World's Figure Skating Championship.
- Ben Hogan won the National Open after struggling back from an automobile accident.

- Roger Bannister was the first man to break the 4 minute mile. He did so on an unlikely day after 5 hours of rain with a sharp cold wind. He had the heart of a champion.
- Bill Nieder broke the world's record for the shot put after being told by his doctors that the many operations on his stiff right leg would keep him from competition.
- Keith Forbes set 4 American swimming records in spite of a crippled hip that prevented him from kicking normally.
- Herb Elliot came back from a broken foot to run the mile in 353:.5.
- Lou Gehrig was once a fat, bungling kid who made so many mistakes that his team mates begging him to quit the team. He didn't quit! He decided instead to "make one less mistake every day" and went on to Baseball's Hall of Fame.
- Rocky Marciano's arms were once so weak that after only two rounds he was helpless. Instead of quitting, he determined to grow strong. He trained by flailing his arms under water thus forcing his muscles to develop under abnormal difficulties. He went on to become the Heavyweight Champion of the World and retired undefeated.

The point of the book is that it is not your body that makes you a champion, it is your heart! While these examples come from a previous generation, the principle is timeless. It is always better to have a "champion's heart" in a crippled body, than a "champion's body" with a crippled heart.

It is also your heart that makes you a great Christian. Note these Bible verses that emphasize the importance of your heart:

- **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. " (Matt 5:8)**
- **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Matt 15:19)**
- **"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart' " (Matt 22:37)**
- **"... if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Rom 10:9-10)**
- **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Prov 4:23)**
- These Scriptures could easily be multiplied. What happens in your heart is very important for it will determine your destiny.

LEARNING LESSONS FROM CORINTH

Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary tour. This city was so filled with wickedness that to "Corinthianize" was a proverbial expression for living a sinful life. Male and female prostitutes devoted themselves to the goddess Aphrodite. From the shameful influence of this "goddess" we get our modern word "aphrodisiac". At any rate, Paul was initially so discouraged at Corinth that God encouraged him in a vision, saying: **"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."** (Acts 18:9-10). Paul was obedient to God. He didn't give up. He overcame

the problems he faced. He stayed in Corinth for a year and a half teaching the Word of God and strengthening believers.

Corinth was also famous for the Isthmian games which were held there every two years. The Isthmus of Corinth was a narrow strip of land six miles wide separating the Ionian Sea from the Aegean Sea. This city of Twin Seas became a major commercial center as ships often transported their wares from one sea to the other by six miles of land, rather than risking the dangers of sailing around the southern tip of Greece.

For the Greeks, these games were a great source of pride. I am told that none but freemen could compete, and then only after ten months of intense training. Other restrictions were placed upon contestants to insure that only the best qualified could compete. When the contest began a proclamation was made honoring each contestant and the country from which they came. The victor was crowned with a garland of pine leaves or ivy. The family of the victors was also honored and all family members were welcomed to their native towns with special ceremonies. The names of victors were often immortalized by poets, and the athletes were given places of honor at future games.

It was against this backdrop that Paul wrote: **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 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 to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor 9:24-27)**

Nobody becomes a champion without hard work. Those who become world champions invest thousands of hours in exercise, self denial, and discipline. They do it to obtain corruptible crowns and temporary honors that will soon be forgotten. How many Olympic champions can you name? There is an old joke about the rich man who died. Someone at his funeral asked: “How much money did he leave?” The answer, of course, was: “He left it all!”. When we die, we will also “leave it all”.

LEARNING LESSONS FROM DR. BEN CARSON

But the heart of a champion manifests itself in every area of life. I’m sure you have heard of the famous neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson. His mother, Sonya, married at 13 to a man 15 years older than she was. When she found that he was a bigamist with another wife and other children, they divorced. Thus she became a single mother with two small boys to raise in the inner city of Detroit. Among other handicaps she faced, she only had a third grade education. Ben was only 8 years old at the time. When he received failing grades in the 5th grade he was taunted by his classmates, not only as the dumbest kid in the 5th grade, but also the dumbest kid in the world.

At this point his mother took matters into her own hands. She convinced her sons that if they would do their best, God would do the rest. She restricted them to only two TV programs per week. She further required that them to read and make written reports on two books each week from the public library.. The boys only found out later that she was functionally illiterate and really couldn't read what they had written. In only a year and a half Ben Carson went from the bottom of his class to the top.

He continued to excel in high school and college, and at 32 became the director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In 1987, he made medical history with an operation to separate a pair of Siamese twins. The Binder twins were born joined at the back of the head. Operations to separate twins joined in this way had always failed, resulting in the death of one or both children. Carson agreed to undertake the operation. A 70-member surgical team, led by Dr. Carson, worked for 22 hours. At the end of the surgery, the twins were successfully separated and could survive independently.

YOUR STORY

Dr. Carson's story can also be your story! There is no limit to what you can do with the help of God! No matter what men on earth may say, if you do your best, God will do the rest.

Please meditate upon this prayer by Paul, for understanding it can provide guidance and direction in your life: **“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”** (Eph 3:14-21)

If you have the courage to do what God leads you to do, you will always be a champion. God wants the very best for you, and so does your Grandpa!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce

P.S. Here is a link to what some believe is the greatest athletic achievement of all time. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJC_2IROS-I&index=7&list=PLHukDN6JVY_Vzk863zfk4Qh1piiSQ53xe