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HOW TO GO UNDEFEATED 1 Corinthians 6:4-7

After I graduated from college I worked for an organization that ministered on college campuses. In the summers the staff of this organization would all come together for training and encouragement for 2 months. There were 3000 of us there, the bulk of whom were all 20 something in age. They organized a softball league for the time we were together. One particular summer Jerry and I along with a bunch of our friends from California formed a team. We had a couple of guys on that team that were terrific athletes. We had a core of good baseball players, and that team turned out to be really good. We rolled through our regular season without losing a single game, and in the process we mostly obliterated our opponents. We got into the postseason championship tournament and continued to roll right into the championship game. That final game was memorable. Even good teams have off days, bad games where nothing seems to go right. That happened to us that day. We made every mistake you could make. People who never made errors blew easy plays. Every ball we hit hard seemed to go right to one of the opposing team's players. Every call went against us. Murphy was present that day for us because everything that could go wrong did. We ended up losing that game, and the score wasn't close. What made it especially frustrating is that I knew we were the better team. I am certain if we played that other team 5 times we would have won 4 of the games. But we didn't win that one. They beat us fair and square and won the championship.

That was not a big deal. It was not a crushing defeat that stung for years. There was nothing whatsoever of any real significance at stake. Life went on. I suspect had we won that day I would have just gone on with life, and might well have had few memories, if any, of that trivial achievement. But I can tell you to this day that I hated losing that game. My identity, my security and my worth as a person were not threatened at all by it, but it bugged me. I don't like losing, especially when I know I should have won. I'm not extreme about this. In fact, there is someone else in my family who hates losing way more than I do. I learned early in our marriage that playing any game with her in which I might have an advantage and win more than she might not be the best idea. Valuing marital harmony meant being careful about which games we would play. This turned out to be a challenge because she is quite competitive and has been known to turn nearly everything into a competition. I have been surprised to discover that she was unusually proud of winning the

contest of who can get ready for bed first when I didn't even know we were competing. She doesn't like to lose.

Troy Aikman, former All Pro Super Bowl winning quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, was a fierce competitor who could not stand to lose. But he made an interesting comment about it. "I've always known that the lows have been lower for me than the highs have been high." In other words, winning feels good, but losing seems more intense and way worse than winning feels good. The joy of winning doesn't compare with the disappointment and pain of losing. Another athlete once said that winning doesn't feel as good as losing feels bad.

Today I want to talk about losing. Not losing some meaningless game, but losing in several areas of life. I submit to you that we all have a fear of losing. Some perhaps have it more intensely than others, but we all fear it in one way or another. So our subject today as we think about being fearless, is the fear of losing. I want to begin by identifying a few ways we might fear losing, then I want to point out the dangers of this fear. In application we will look for some remedies to this fear.

WHAT DO WE FEAR LOSING?

We Fear Losing The Conflict

The sports metaphor is obvious here. Every game is a conflict. Someone is going to win and someone is going to lose. The point of the game, be it football, baseball, hockey, basketball, tennis, ping pong or pickle ball, is to win the conflict, win the game. Every time we have a conflict with another person the same thing is going on. We think there is going to be a winner and a loser, and we know for a fact it is far better to win than lose.

We hate losing because something is at stake in every conflict. We don't like losing at a game because we fear our reputation might get damaged. We think we gain some value, worth, approval by being the best at whatever the game is, and when we lose, we lose that sense of worth and approval. But most of the time when the conflicts are in relationships it is not just a reputation or our worth that's at stake. There is something we want, and we fear we're not going to get it. Michael and Carissa are putting new floors in their house. They are putting hard floors in the downstairs and carpet upstairs. They were on the same page on the hard flooring, but they disagreed about the carpet. Carissa liked one and Michael liked another. I wondered how they were going to resolve that. When you're going to spend a bunch of money on a carpet that you're going to live with for 10 years, you'd better like it. What do you do when you don't agree? If you lose on that deal

you end up with carpeting that you don't like. I wondered how they were going to work that out. I don't know how they did it, but they didn't go to war with each other and they did put new carpet in.

Laurie and I recently decided we'd had enough of our cable TV provider. Their service has gotten worse and worse while their charges have been skyrocketing. We said, "No mas. We're out." Toby and Anna showed us how we can get television at a third of the prices they were charging. So I called our cable company and told them I was done. I had to be firm and steadfast to get them to let go, but I succeeded. They said we needed to return their equipment, which was a modem and two cable boxes. So we took it all to their headquarters and handed it all in. Their employee then said to us, "You have another piece of equipment that you need to return." It was odd because she didn't identify what this supposed equipment was. I said, "No, this is all we have. There is no more." She insisted, "Our records show that you have something else." I said, "I am sure you're wrong, but what is it?" She said, "I don't know." Um, excuse me. I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "The equipment has a code I don't recognize. I've never seen it before, so I have no idea what this thing is." She called another employee over to look at her computer and she agreed, that code was a complete unknown. She also did not know what the piece of equipment was. At that point I could feel the heat building inside me. I was feeling a big desire to go to war. She said, "You aren't being charged anything for this, but you should call the company to find out what it is and get it cleared up." At that point I was doing everything I could to keep from opening up with both barrels. I wanted to say, "You ARE the company. You tell me what it is. I'm not going to do your job for you by finding out what this mysterious piece of equipment you claim I have is. How can you even care if you get this supposed thing back if you don't even know what it is?" I still don't know what it is. I managed to not go anabolic on her, but as I thought about it I had to ask, why did that irk me so? Why was I so bugged by that? Why did I want to do battle? There is a sense of injustice there. But down at the bottom of that lurked a little bit of fear. I feared if I lost to her I was going to have to pay for equipment X when I have no idea what it is, but am quite sure I don't have it. We fear losing because we fear we're going to get hurt or not get something we want.

We Fear Losing Ourselves

Dr. Margaret Paul, a psychologist, was asked recently by a young woman, "How do I approach a new relationship with the intent of keeping myself fully intact?" This woman had just gotten out of a relationship in which she felt she gave up so much of what she was and she wanted. She said she felt like she lost herself. Dr.

Paul says that she is frequently asked this question. Her answer was that one must “make a solid decision that giving yourself up is no longer an option.”

If you pay attention to any current movies that have a relationship theme you will probably notice that this is a constant theme in them. There is a constant drumbeat that love may be a good thing, but one must maintain one’s sense of identity. That sense of self actually is more important than love in the Hollywood world. You may have heard some of the talk that the romantic comedy genre of movies is pretty much dead these days. It is apparent that Hollywood seems to have lost the ability to make good romantic comedies. That drumbeat message has something to do with that. It’s pretty hard to have a great romance when the focus is on being sure not to give yourself up and to protect your fragile identity.

What does it mean when people talk about not losing themselves in a relationship and maintaining their identity? It pretty much means we want to have things go our way. We want to be able to do what we want. It means pursuing our own interests and not having to give them up. It means being able to watch *The Crown* or *Downton Abbey* instead of the Sunday Night NFL game or vice versa. Inside all of us there is this fear that we will find ourselves in a situation where we are the ones who have to make all the sacrifices. We always end up doing the work, giving up what we want to do. We try to attach our identity to success at some career or even some hobby or interest, and if we have to give that up to some extent then we feel like we are losing a piece of ourselves.

It is somewhat ironic that this fear of losing oneself comes up when people think about love relationships. If you think of the great love stories in our culture you might well notice that at some level they always involve sacrifice. In fact, real romance requires sacrifice. Romance is when someone throws caution to the wind and goes all out to do something for the one they love that requires true sacrifice. The reality is, if you are focused on making sure you don’t “lose yourself” in a relationship you cannot truly romance the other person. Romance requires losing yourself. You simply cannot truly romance another person while looking out for yourself or even thinking about yourself. Let’s imagine that I really wanted to do something romantic for Laurie for our anniversary. So I take her to my favorite taco shop, El Indio for dinner, then I escort her to a Padre game. As a gift I give her a brand new Padre baseball cap. Laurie loves El Indio so she would like the food for dinner. She enjoys going to Petco Park, so that would be fine. She might even like the baseball cap. All of these things would be fine, but they wouldn’t be

romantic. They would be things that I would like to do, not things that say to her that I am thinking about her and would make her feel loved.

In fact, true love always requires sacrificing yourself. The greatest act of love that will ever occur in human history was Jesus dying on a Roman cross to save us. Let's be clear that he had to lose himself to do that. Philippians 2:6-7 tells us he did not "regard equality with God a thing to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing." Listen to that last phrase. He made himself nothing. That means he totally lost himself. He gave up any evidence of who he really was when he was on that cross. He did it willingly and intentionally, because that's what it means to love!

We Fear Losing Control

This is a big one for many of us. Have you ever thought about why so many people have a hard time with air travel? Well, let's see, you're crammed into a space with so little leg room you have to be careful you don't accidentally bite your knee, but they make up for it by giving you a seat that would have been plenty wide for you when you were 8 years old. Then they don't give you anything to eat for hours on end. Oh, and here's 3 letters for you, TSA. What's not to love?

Yes, it is uncomfortable, but a major factor in this problem with air travel is you are out of control. You can't see where you are going, you have no control over where the plane goes and what it does, and you are 35,000 feet in the air traveling hundreds of miles per hour. You are utterly at the mercy of the airline and you are powerless. I wonder if it would calm people's nerves a little if they would just put a screen on the seat back in front displaying a view from a camera in the cockpit. I know, mostly all you'd see is sky, but maybe it would help a little. Or maybe they could put some simple controls at each seat. They'd have to be like the controls on the old motorboat ride at Disneyland, where you could turn the wheel all you wanted and step on the gas, but the boat went along the underwater track no matter what you did. Maybe it would help.

My point is, we hate losing control of things. A few years back a fitness gym in Portland, Oregon sent out an ad as the new year was approaching. It read, "The new year is right around the corner and you're either going to own the year, or the year is going to own you. It's 100% your choice. It's in your hands. That's the first thing. Simply by taking all of the responsibility and putting it on your shoulders you become empowered. Next, take the feeling of empowerment, of invincibility,

the feeling you can run through a wall, and take action. Take action like you've never taken action before... Let no obstacle stand in your way, no matter what. YOU are in control. YOU!"

There's a message we all want to hear. We are in control. We can own the year. We are invincible. We hate it when we are confronted with the possibility that these things are not true, and in fact, we are not in control of much at all. I have observed some families down through the years where the parents were well meaning, good people who loved their kids and wanted the best for them, but who were near panic in their desire to protect them, and really to have them grow up the way the parents want them to be. I've seen them in this frantic state make an effort to control their children and their circumstances in every way they possibly could. All parents seek to control their kids and those kids' circumstances to some degree. That is just being a good parent. Parenting is truly an art, for it requires exercising the appropriate amount of control to help a child become a pleasant human being, but not so much as to stifle the child.

The parents I referred to missed the mark by trying to exert way too much control. They fear being out of control. Most of the time the results are not pretty. In fact, I've seen a number of instances that are truly heartbreaking. Eventually the child chafes, and often, as an adult, breaks free in rebellious and even self-destructive ways. It is so hard to be a parent, because at some point you realize this child whom you love more than your own life, is totally out of your control.

I recall when Toby was a couple of years out of college and trying to find his way in life there came a moment when I ran into my lack of control. He loved football and wanted to be a football coach. So after he graduated from college he coached high school football for two years. He loved it and was passionate about it, but he realized he couldn't make a living doing that. He gave up on that dream. But now what would he do? He hated the idea of having an office job. So after some consideration he announced to us that he had decided that he wanted to become a fire fighter. That is a noble calling and a good job. But I knew it was wrong for Toby. Oh, he could do it, but that job would not capitalize on some of his greatest strengths, and I knew it. I wanted to say, "No way, Toby. That's not for you. You must find something else that's a better fit." But as the parent of an adult, I had exactly zero control. Anything I tried to do to exert control would cause a reaction that was the opposite of what I wanted. That was a hard place to be. All I could do was pray. He started down that road and traveled it for a year and a half until he changed directions to one that to my great relief is a perfect fit for him.

WHAT EFFECTS DOES THE FEAR OF LOSING HAVE?

We know our efforts to win, to protect ourselves and our identity, and to exercise control create a huge amount of stress for us, and tend to destroy relationships. There is a graphic example of this in the Bible. There is a person who feared losing so much that it dominated and ultimately ruined his life. His name was Saul.

In 1 Samuel 13 a big battle with the Philistines was about to happen. The Philistines had a huge army that outnumbered the Israelis. Saul gathered his troops at a place called Gilgal. According to verse 7 “all the troops with him were quaking with fear.” Saul was waiting for Samuel, the prophet, who would bring God’s direction and blessing. Verses 8-9 tell us what happened. “He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter.” Saul is losing control, and he fears losing the battle. “So he said, ‘Bring me the burnt offerings and the fellowship offerings.’ And Saul offered up the burnt offering.” Uh oh. He wasn’t supposed to do that. That was a job reserved for Samuel. Saul was supposed to wait until Samuel came, however long it took. But instead he feared losing, so he took over and did it his own way. In verses 13-14 Samuel said, “You have done a foolish thing. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. If you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure.” Saul lost big time because he feared losing.

In chapter 18, after David had led the troops in yet another victory over the Philistines, as they were coming into town after the battle verse 7 says the women danced and sang, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” Verse 8 says, “Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. ‘They have credited David with tens of thousands,’ he thought, ‘but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?’” Verse 12 says Saul was afraid of David. In 19:10 we find that he finally snapped, grabbed a spear and hurled it at David, hoping to run him through and kill him. He feared losing himself, losing his position as king, so much so that he became irrationally afraid of David, who loved him and supported him with all his heart. He was so irrational that he tried to kill him. In fact, he eventually became obsessed with that to the point that was insane. He destroyed his friendship with David, fouled up his own administration and ruined his own reputation.

In 1 Samuel 28, in direct disobedience to a command from God, Saul, now desperate because he knows he has been cut off from God, goes to see a psychic as a way of trying to hear something from God. He has completely gone off the rails. So let's sum up what Saul's fear of losing resulted in for him. It led him to disobey God and totally destroyed his relationship with the Lord. It made him insecure and obsessed to the point of insanity. It destroyed his relationships with his own son, his daughter and with his most loyal supporter and military leader. It cost him his position that he was so fearful of losing.

When we fear losing it will have similar effects in our lives. It will ruin our relationship with God and cause us to disobey him, it will make us insecure and stressed, almost to the point of insanity, it will destroy our relationships with those we love, and it will result in the very thing we fear. It will cause us to lose big time.

APPLICATION

So how can we let go of this fear and not be afraid of losing?

TRUST THAT YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS SOVEREIGN

God is the one who is in control of what happens in this world. He is always in control. Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases him." Nothing can stop him. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and will help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Proverbs 16:4 says, "The Lord works out everything to its proper end, even the wicked for a day of disaster." That tells us that everything has a proper end. There is a plan for everything, including the wicked. In other words, even people who live in total rebellion against God, will only end up being brought to the end God has designed for them. They will try to do what God doesn't want and will end up right where he wants them. Proverbs 16:9 says, "In their hearts humans plan their steps, but the Lord establishes their steps." We can make all the plans we want, but God decides what actually happens.

There is a great line in the old classic movie *Rudy*. The movie is based on the life of Daniel Ruettiger, or Rudy, whose dream was to go to Notre Dame University and play football there. Unfortunately he was a small guy with little athletic ability, and he was dyslexic so his high school grades were nowhere near good enough to get into that school. But what he had was huge determination. He pursued his dream and worked hard to get in. But he was repeatedly denied. It came down to his last chance to apply. He was desperate. He met with Father Cavanaugh, who had been helping him. He asked the priest what more he could do, did he need to

pray more. He pleaded, asking if there was something more the priest could do to get him in. Father Cavanaugh said, "In 35 years of religious studies I've come up with only two hard, incontrovertible facts. There is a God, and I'm not him."

We need to let God be God. In an article in *Psychology Today*, psychologist Elliott Cohen wrote, "To have the sense that I should be able to control what happens and fear losing that control is blasphemy, because you are a mere mortal feigning godliness." In other words, you are pretending to be God. We are not omniscient, nor are we omnipotent. We are not sovereign in creation. Those things are only true of God. We need to stop and let him be God.

The difficulty we have is that we insist on the world going the way we want. Recently Laurie and I took care of our granddaughters. Little 2 year old Ella was having a grand time. But Anna arrived to take the kids home. Ella didn't want to go yet because she was having fun. The day before Anna had a discussion with her about who was the boss. When she said she didn't want to leave Anna said, "Ella, who's the boss?" Ella said, "Mama is boss." But then she saw the implication of that. She would have to leave. So she quickly revised her answer. She said, "Nana is boss," thinking that surely Nana would want her to stay. In other words, whoever will allow her to do what she wants is boss. Will we say "God is boss"? Or will we insist it has to be our way?

REMEMBER THE POWER YOU HAVE

We don't control the weather. We don't control the choices other people make. We don't control the opinions other people have. We don't control how things turn out most of the time. But we do have some tremendous power. We have the power to exercise our own choices.

We are not victims. Oh, sure, at times we might be victims of unfair treatment, maybe even abuse or persecution from other people, but even in those times we still have the power to choose. We can choose how we respond. We can choose what kind of people we will be. We are ALWAYS in control of our own choices and behaviors. No one can ever take that away from us.

Last week Laurie and I visited Chuck Badger a few days before he went home to the Lord. He was weak, he was in some pain, he was unable to get out of bed and move around whenever and wherever he chose. He was dying, and he knew it. He had circumstances that had befallen him that he did not desire and did not choose. His options had been severely taken away and narrowed down. But he still had the

power to choose. He chose how he would respond and what kind of person he would be. As we visited with him for that short time he exhibited a sense of humor, a positive spirit, and rock solid faith in God. He took the opportunity to speak words of encouragement to Laurie and me and to express his trust in God. He had power and he used it. He had the power to choose.

FOCUS ON THE REAL GOAL

There is a passage in the book of 1 Corinthians that I have quoted on several occasions to brothers and sisters in Christ, and in every instance where I have done so because it applied directly to their situation, they have totally ignored it. That passage is in chapter 6, and it tells us a profound and revolutionary truth.

The Corinthians were a badly divided group. They fought over anything and everything. Unfortunately some of them had business dealings with others in the church. I've come to the place where I hate to hear that. You can almost count on it that at some point they are going to have a falling out and it will be over money. That happened in Corinth. And, as is usually the case now, somebody ended up taking somebody else to court. In verse 5 Paul said, "Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?" Yeah, there probably was, but they didn't want to do that because they feared they wouldn't get what they wanted. They feared losing. In verse 6 Paul went on, "But instead, one brother takes another to court, and this in front of unbelievers. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?"

Wow. That is startling. He's saying, "Why not lose?" Why not lose the conflict? Why not lose control? Why not lose yourself?" Why would anyone choose to lose like that? It is because there was something else much bigger, much more important to them at stake. Do you get what Paul was saying? Why did Jesus choose to allow people to ridicule him, mock him, spit on him, beat him, torture him and execute him? He didn't have to do that. He had the power to stop it. At times when I read the story of Jesus' death I kind of wish he had. I wish suddenly 60,000 heavenly armed, awesome, frightening angels had shown up at his call and Jesus could have said to his opponents, "In your face!" He didn't do that because something bigger was at stake. He was accomplishing something so much more important. He was saving us and fulfilling his Father's rescue plan.

Laurie helped me learn this lesson when we had our very first argument as a husband and wife. She was hurt by the way I spoke to her. But I was right in most of what I said. She even admits that, mostly, to this day. I won the argument. But in winning I sacrificed something much more precious and infinitely more important. I sacrificed her heart and damaged our love and unity. Talk about a pyrrhic victory, that was it big time. Why not rather be wronged? Do you want to win, or do you want to love your wife and make her feel safe and cherished?

You and I have been saved by God's grace for a reason, a purpose. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." We are God's special possession, and our purpose is to declare his praise, to honor him and bring him glory with every word we speak and everything we do. Why not lose if winning means sacrificing that hugely important goal? What do you really want in life? If you choose to always honor God, to live for his praise, you can do that. No one can stop you. You will always have the power to exercise that choice, no matter what your situation.

BELIEVE GOD GIVES WHAT YOU NEED

Philippians 4:19 says, "My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." God will give you everything you need. By what standard. According to the riches of his glory. That is a standard that is beyond human calculation.

Do you believe this? Think about what would have happened to Saul if he had believed that. He wouldn't have jumped the gun and offered those sacrifices when he absolutely wasn't supposed to. He would have said, "My God will give me the troops I need to win this battle. Gideon defeated an army of many thousands with 300 men. God can do the same for me if he chooses." He would not have lost his kingdom. He would have trusted David, knowing that God would give him what he needed. He would have believed that if the kingdom were, in fact, taken from him, then God knew that's what he needed. Instead of being violent and insane and destroying people who loved him, he would have been at peace. He would have been calm and been a successful king.

Understand what this means. If this is true that God will meet all your needs, then ***you can't lose!*** You will never lose, no matter what happens, because God will

give you what you need, he will bring good out of everything that happens, and most important of all, you will be focused on pursuing the most crucial goal, declaring the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his light. What if someone takes something I think I need from me unfairly? What if they cheat me? That's all right, because if I need it, God will give it right back. What if our cable company tries to make us pay for something we shouldn't have to pay for because we have never had it? That's all right, because God will provide whatever we need.

In Philippians 1:21 Paul said, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." If we live with that perspective, we can never lose. No matter what others do to us, we can glorify Christ. The only way they can stop us is to take our lives, in which case, we gain! We have a different scoreboard than the world. Our scoreboard is all about Christ, not about us.

Recently we visited Toby, Anna and their girls up in San Clemente. Laurie and I were in their backyard with Cara and Ella. I found a piece of sidewalk chalk, so I drew a picture on their patio. It depicted Mickey and Minnie Mouse. Now, my drawing ability is hilariously bad. Atrocious doesn't even come close to describing the depths of its pathetic ness. But in this case, for some reason I was inspired. It was magnificent, my piece de resistance, my magnum opus. It wasn't quite in the class of the Sistine Chapel, but it was getting close. Ella loved it. And then she got it into her head to improve it. What she did was to deface it! She damaged this great work of art. But she didn't stop there. She actually wiped it away. My work of art! Now no one will come to visit their house to see this great treasure. I was devastated. I was upset. Do you believe that? I hope not. I couldn't have cared less. That little chalk drawing didn't mean anything to me. It was less than nothing. I cheered her on as she wiped it out. That drawing was of no value to me, so the loss of it was of zero significance. When we take Paul's perspective, that to live is Christ, then if someone takes something from us, if someone takes advantage of us, if someone denigrates us, disregards us, if someone cheats us, it will have zero significance, for to us to live is Christ.