



July 31, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble."

Psalm 46:1

INFO

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Have You Got Olympics Fever?

Every four years a new crop of sports enthusiasts emerges, inspired by the **Olympic Games**, which are hosted by a different international city each time. The Ancient episodes of the games began in 776 BC and were held in the "town"¹ of Olympia as a friendly competition between nearby Greek city-states who might otherwise be at war with each other. The earliest Olympics had only a single running event, but over the next several cycles other running competitions were added; then wrestling, gymnastics, boxing, long-jumping; then special events for boys, chariot races, etc. The Games had religious overtones, honoring the gods the various city-states respected in common. Amazingly, these games grew in popularity and were held every four years during **the next eleven centuries**, even through the time when the Romans conquered the Greeks and ruled over them. It was the barbarian invasions from the north that ultimately led to the breakup of the Greco-Roman cultural and political domination.

The Games had only been studied as ancient history until they were revived in 1896 in an attempt to keep European civilization from splintering. The **International Olympic Committee** was formed and continues to this day to sponsor and oversee the **Modern Olympic Games**. These have been held in a variety of worldwide host cities every four years since, with the exception of three World War years: 1916, 1940 and 1944. The advent of television in the 1950s radically expanded the viewing audience and enhanced the Olympics' worldwide cultural impact.

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The continuing genius of the Olympic Games always has been and continues to be the **positive human values** at their core. Yes, they are very competitive and, therefore, promote patriotism and claims of superiority of one nation over another. But they are, at the same time, “Games” and not “Wars.” Different population groups can express their pride in ways that don’t demean and destroy other groups. The three top values encouraged in the 2024 Games are **EXCELLENCE**, **RESPECT** and **FRIENDSHIP**.² Expressing these values in competition is recognized by the awarding of medals to both individuals and to national teams.

This spirit could be seen in the high-level achievements of the USA Women’s Gymnastic Team on Tuesday. **Simone Biles**, the star of previous Olympics, has gone through personal struggles, both physical and psychological, that many thought might be career-ending. But she rose above it all to her highest point of triumph.³ But two of her “rivals” for the honor of being the best American gymnast, **Suni Lee** and **Jordan Chiles**, have also suffered recent serious setbacks. In the finals, all three of them overcame the obstacles and outperformed expectations, and together with teammates **Jade Curey** and **Hezley Rivera**, blasted home with a team victory.

There are many life lessons we can learn from experiencing the ups and downs of these Olympic Games. The

Apostle Paul was certainly aware of the Ancient Games; maybe he even attended one. I think he had those competitions in mind when he wrote this:

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air, but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

And toward the end of his life, he wrote:

I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

(2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Pastor George Van Alstine

1 There were no year-round residences in Olympia --- just the arenas and temples to gods. The town became congested only for the Games.

2 In the Olympic Charter these appear as goals of the Games: (1) “encourage effort,” (2) “preserve human dignity,” (3) “develop harmony.”

3 For the three Olympic Games in which she’s competed, Simone has earned a total of eight Olympic medals (and counting), as well as more than 23 World Championships.