

THE WALL: THE PLACE OF DESOLATION



The sound of the starting gun echoes across the multitude of gathered people. Those assembled hear the shot bouncing off of buildings as it dissolves into some unknown crevice of the sky. Before the smoke from the ignited gunpowder even rises from the barrel of the small pistol, the sound of shuffling tennis shoes begins to crescendo into a chorus of rubber soles pounding upon concrete.

At first, the variously clad and gifted runners look indistinct. They are undifferentiated members of a nameless glob thumping its way toward an unseen goal. Absorbed in the mass, the individual runner must marshal all of his concentration simply to avoid tripping over another runner. Initially, the group sets the pace, and he must keep up until he can establish his own position. Finally and above all, he must remain consistent.

As the runners step across the starting line, the crowds of spectators wonder who will be able to complete the race. Who will add drama to the day? Who will lead the pack at the finish line? Whose motivation will carry them to success?

Ultimately, these questions are decided by the individual athlete. Only he can choose to finish the race in spite of adversity or to give in when the pangs of exhaustion shoot through his body. At some point in the

marathon, each runner will hit an invisible but very real wall. "The wall," as all serious runners know, is that place in a race where one's body screams to stop, and the runner cannot help but hear the voice of pain louder than any logical reason to continue. At this moment, the contender's training will be revealed; his passion to win will be tested; his character and moral fiber will be exposed. Now he will decide if he will be among those who overcome and finish the course.

Winning through disability requires nothing less than marathon scale endurance. Everyday, one must consciously decide to stay engaged in the contest. Daily, a disabled person must purpose to contend for independence; he must choose to fight for a healthy family. In these moments of decision, he determines the outcome of the race. In this *Lift Life Group*, we will shine a spotlight on such moments of decision.

The voice of pain is very loud. As the process of choice is explored, listen for the whisper within to determine a course. Watch for motives that direct outcome. Listen for clues from the lives of pace setters within the group. Set your eyes on a prize and don't quit until that medal is around your neck. For those that make it, the trophies of satisfaction and purpose will dispel the chaos of adversity.

THE WALL: THE PLACE OF DESOLATION

Life Principles

9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. 14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.
1 Corinthians 4:9-16

In this passage, the apostle Paul reverses worldly values. The Corinthians were undervaluing his authority and ministry because he did not have the ear marks of success, and instead of defending himself, Paul makes a catalogue of his sufferings—sufferings that would have been shameful and dishonorable in Graeco-Roman eyes. By doing this, he vividly contrasts his humble way of life with the Corinthian self-promoting lifestyle. The essential difference between Paul's and the Corinthian's way of living is that the Corinthians acted according to their human nature and Paul acted according to a transformed nature. People naturally want to curse when cursed, give up when persecuted, slander when slandered, and seek the approval of men and society. However, Christians live by a different nature. Paul claims that his own behavior provides an example of life by this transformed nature, and he encourages the Corinthians to act according to the new nature they also have received as Christians instead of their human nature.

In this study, we will focus specifically on the choices that verses 11-13 imply. According to these verses, Paul faced “the wall” in the form of hunger, thirst, inadequate clothing, brutal treatment, homelessness, manual labor, curses, persecution, slander, and rejection by the world. In these moments, he had to make a choice to continue in the faith—living by his transformed nature and responding accordingly, or to abandon the faith and revert to life governed by his human nature as the Corinthians had. The story of Saint Paul's hardships and most especially his choices when confronted with hardships commend several life principles to us.

Although Paul made the decision to press on in the face of adversity, he did not rely on his natural ability as a human being. Life Principle: As a Christian, you have been given a new nature that empowers you to overcome “the wall.” Even though Paul had the benefit of a new nature, he had to make a decision to live according to the new nature instead of the old one. Life Principle: You must choose which nature to obey. Notice that behavior consistent with the old nature often makes more sense than behavior consistent with the new nature e.g. it seems more natural to curse when cursed or to give up when persecuted.

n Life Principle: The path to victory will, at times, require us to ignore our natural instincts.

SESSION FIVE: THE WALL: THE PLACE OF DESOLATION

Life Affirmation

Every life is marked with memorials of celebration and tombstones of defeat. When one hits “the wall” remembering past victories is vital to the success of the current race. Once the winner’s circle has been experienced, it motivates us to get there again.

A collection of *good* memories establishes a foundation for future success. You have to deliberately choose to search for the positive and refuse to focus on the negative. One can easily locate and dwell upon failures, but the discovery of triumph takes an intentional act of the soul, a willful application of energy, and a disciplined imagination. This is why each *Lift Life Group* Session starts with a celebration. We are in training to win the marathon, not just to take a casual stroll in the park. Eventually, finding the laughter in a moment will become as natural as weeping is today.

n Recall a funny experience that is directly related to your disability journey. Was it an embarrassing, awkward, or slapstick moment? Did it involve others? When you think of it, does it still bring a smile to your face? Would you consider sharing it with your group?

n Why do you think that the event you remembered was important to you?

n Did it provide a stress reliever?

n Did it distract you momentarily? Does it still?

n What trophies inspire you to keep trying?

Think about how your positive memories relate to the life principles mentioned earlier.

n Have you ever made it through a wall of adversity only by relying on the power of God? If so, would you be willing to share the experience with the group?

n Have you ever made a decision and been fully aware that at that moment you were making a choice to live by the new nature instead of the old? If so, consider sharing the experience with the group.

n Have you ever made a choice because it was right even though you had to fight your own will every step of the way? If so, could you describe that experience to the group?

Joy is a choice!

“Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. We cannot avoid pain, but we can avoid joy.”

Holy Sweat by Tim Hansel, pg. 55

SESSION FIVE: THE WALL: THE PLACE OF DESOLATION

Real Life

It has been said that we are the sum total of the choices we make. In his book *Holy Sweat*, Tim Hansel quotes Paul Tournier who says, “*Perhaps the most powerful and unused gift from God is choice.*”

Your choices will determine whether your confinements will *stop* you or give you a place to *start*. They will make you *bitter* or *better*. They will *sour* or *sweeten* you. They will either *sap* your strength or *sharpen* your skills. Though the events of our lives influence us, they do not deterministically define us. Rather, we participate in our own self-definition by choosing in what way we will respond to those events. Namely, we may respond according to our old nature or according to our new nature.

The walls of life are inevitable, and those walls require hard decisions to be made. Here are some walls that you may have faced or may be currently facing.

Four Great Walls in Life's Marathon

Abandonment	Self-pity
Forgotten by family	Why me?
Forgotten by friends	It's not fair!
Forgotten by society	I'm a victim!
Forgotten by God	I can't do this!

Faithlessness
I have no help
I can't trust anyone
The system has failed
God has dropped the ball

Resentment
Wounded pride
Humiliation
Betrayal
Retaliation

- n Consider the four walls above. Which one do you identify with the most? Which of these walls have you confronted unsuccessfully?
- n What choices have you made that have left you with regrets?
- n Do you feel trapped by your circumstances or decisions?
- n What nature do you tend to follow when you make decisions?
- n When you confront a wall what do your natural instincts tell you to do?
- n Do you feel empowered by a new nature when you face decisions, or does that aspect of Christianity seem like a pipe dream to you?

“Adversity introduces a man to himself”

Author Unknown

Chicken Soup for the Soul – Book 3

SESSION FIVE: THE WALL: THE PLACE OF DESOLATION

Better Life

Winning your life's marathon requires you to make good choices along the path, and good choices begin in your thought life. When ideas fully mature, they naturally precipitate decisions. If we believe we have a chance to succeed, we will persevere; however, if we lose hope, we will give up and fail. Thinking and acting both come down to a choice, namely, the choice of which nature we will think by and eventually act by (life principle 2). However, the new nature itself empowers us to make the right choices even though such decisions often contradict our innate human instincts (life principles 1 and 3).

Practical steps towards better life:

In your personal devotions, reflect on the new nature that Christians have and how it empowers them.

Pay special attention to the following passages of Scripture: Romans 8:1-18; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 5:13-26. As you realize that God has given you the power to make good decisions, you will find it easier and easier to overcome walls when they block your path.

The writer of Proverbs says, "Where *there is* no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18a KJV)." The same can be said for our lives. The Olympian strives for the gold medal, the marathoner a personal record time, the baseball pitcher a no-hitter! What drives you when the going gets tough? Discuss what motivates you to overcome walls with the group. Have you found any new motivators through this small group experience? What can you do to keep these motivations before your eyes?

In the group, discuss ways that you can encourage one another to make decisions based on the new nature instead of the old. Perhaps the accountability partners from week one can help in this area.

Take a few moments to write down the things that are most important to you. What do you want to be by next week? Next month? Next year? What do you want to be five years from now? Who do you want with you? What goal is powerful enough to pull you through your wall? Either discuss these questions in the group or write about them in your journals.

Champions are *created*

