



"Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones."

—Phillips Brooks

25-Apr-08

On Your Marks . . . Get Set . . .

Ever jump the gun? When I officiated at junior high and high school track meets years ago, I saw runners do it now and then. An overzealous boy would leap from the starting blocks prematurely, before the gun sounded, before the clock started. Often, his precipitate action was contagious, influencing other boys to rise from the blocks too soon. It was a false start; the race had to be restarted.

Ever go offside? I occasionally did when I played football as a teenager. Overanxious to gain the competitive edge on the boy facing me, I would cross the line of scrimmage before the center snapped the ball, starting the play. When the referee caught me, the entire team had to pay the penalty of lost yardage.

Jumping the gun and going offside are sure signs that one lacks self-control. They indicate a person who cannot subjugate his or her zeal to the "rules of the game." A person guilty of these infractions misdirects effort, wasting valuable resources of time and energy.

In our Christian walk, jumping the gun and going offside both translate into the same thing: doing the *wrong* work! Instead of directing our energies into the work [God](#) has ordained for us, we seek to do another work. Perhaps it is a work that God has already finished. Perhaps it is a work that God does not want started yet. Whatever the case, we end up doing *our* work rather than God's work. We squander our energies and time.

Ultimately, we are sure to pay a penalty.

Find an Israelite—and there were probably many—who tried to cross the Red Sea before God parted it, and you will find someone who jumped the gun. Yes, crossing the sea was a work God wanted the children of Israel to perform, but on His schedule! The overanxious Israelite at least got wet. Even worse, he may have drowned!

Far from idle, the runner crouching in the starting blocks has a work to do. So does the football player tensing at the line of scrimmage. That work, however, is not to *perform* the main event but to *prepare* for it. The wise runner best uses his time at the blocks to clear his mind of distracting thoughts, to remind himself of the stride he must assume, to rehearse what his coach advised about pacing himself advantageously. Likewise, the wise football player uses the moments before the snap to review the planned play, or if on defense, to study the configuration of the other team to try to determine their strategy. Never, never should this preparatory activity include thoughts of past victories, past glories. Wise preparation is always forward-looking.

Recently, Olympic trainers have become aware of the vital role mental preparation plays in an athlete's performance. Successful gymnasts and divers learn to pause before the event to rehearse mentally the moves they have so often physically practiced. Mental preparation allows the contestant to focus, without distractions, on what he or she must do to win.

[King David](#), a "man after God's own heart," steadfastly refused to jump the gun, opting instead to prepare for a great work God would later carry out. David came to realize that he dwelt "in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under tent curtains" ([I Chronicles 17:1](#)). David was undoubtedly well-intentioned in his desire to build a Temple for God. God appreciated his concern, but told him He had ordained his son Solomon to build the Temple ([II Chronicles 6:8-9](#)). God rejected David as its builder because he had been a man of war and had shed blood ([I Chronicles 28:3](#)).

God appointed Solomon to carry out His work for that time: constructing the Temple. David obediently deferred to God's judgment. Building the Temple would wait an entire generation.

However, God gave David an important role to play in the building of the Temple: He was to *prepare* for its construction. So, he conscripted foreigners to serve as stonemasons; amassed nails in quantity; gathered bronze "in abundance beyond measure"; and stored cedar trees, probably for curing. More importantly, he prepared Solomon for the task that lay ahead, charging him to build a house "exceedingly magnificent, famous

and glorious throughout all countries" ([I Chronicles 22:2-6](#)).

David's work was to prepare—and so he did! Not thinking it below his station to get ready for a work God would perform in a later generation, he gathered, amassed, and stored. Undoubtedly, the Temple was a better building because David so conscientiously fulfilled his responsibilities.

Of course, our responsibility today is not just mental preparation, as in the case of a diligent athlete, nor is it physical preparation, as in David's case. Even so, our responsibility is much like David's in that we are *gatherers*. Our duty is to gather [faith](#), patience, and wisdom.

We also need to gather God's [Holy Spirit](#). How much do we need? [Christ](#) tells us that a "night is coming when no one can work" ([John 9:4](#)). In His [Parable of the Ten Virgins](#), He says that the Bridegroom came at midnight ([Matthew 25:6](#)), an hour well into the night. The wise virgins were those who had enough oil—representing God's Spirit—to last the night. Indeed, we ought to gather God's Spirit like David gathered bronze, "in abundance beyond measure."

Our work today is to prepare ourselves for a future "main event" far more glorious, magnificent, and challenging than the work of building the Temple. Our "main event" is to rule with Christ forever, to labor with Him in restoring God's government on this planet, and to . . . well . . . only God knows what work lies ahead of us in the eons of eternity. Our task now is to gather character—God's character—so that we can participate in the great events soon to take place.

One last stop at the football analogy: God is our quarterback. He calls the plays; He determines on what number the ball will be snapped. We do not know when the events at the end will commence. It is our duty to be diligent players, waiting, ready, prepared to jump into action when He puts the ball into play.

ON YOUR MARKS! God called us to the starting line years ago and has kept us from drifting away.

GET SET! Today, God commands that we prepare ourselves for what is to come.

GO! It will not be long before God fires the starting gun—blows the trumpet initiating a glorious main event.

Will we be ready? Let us be about our Father's business by preparing ourselves today for an eternity of service to our great God tomorrow.

- Charles Whitaker

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Preparing to Be a Priest](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh focuses upon our future responsibilities as a priest in God's Kingdom, asking us if we are really preparing for this role. If we are not practicing being a priest right now, we will not be prepared. During the Millennium, the priest will be required to make a large number of mediating sacrifices on behalf of the people, mediating, reconciling, teaching, judging, and saving the remnant of Israel. The primary function of a priest is to assist people in accessing God- so that there can be unity with God. A priest is a bridge-builder between man and God. The sacrifice that God demands is a total sacrifice of time, energy, and service (in short, ones whole life) to that end. Nothing will prepare us to become a priest more than to commit our entire lives as a total living sacrifice.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[How You Can Glorify God!](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The Bible commands us to glorify God in all we do, but sometimes we are not sure just how we can do that as sinful human beings. Martin Collins shows that the key is righteous character.

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