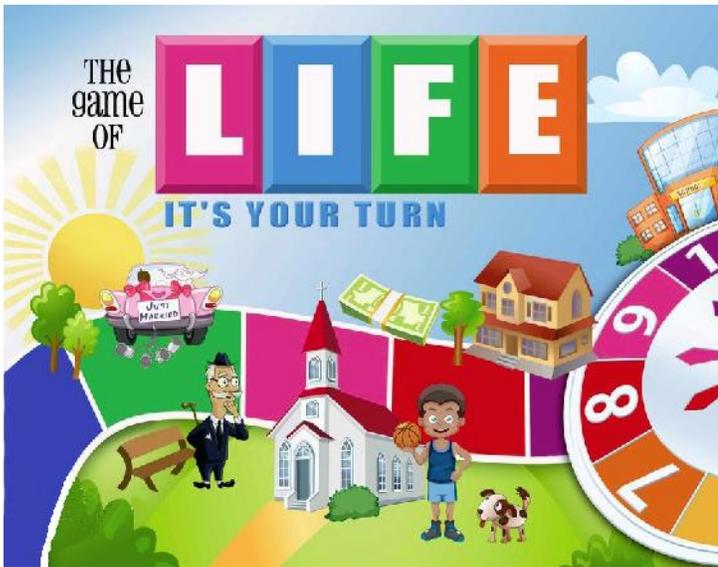


# Winning at the game of life

Message for Sunday, October 16, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser



**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Children's Message:** I heard an interesting story. A fellow by the name of Harvey Moore was telling about his career as a baseball player. In the beginning, he wasn't very good. The pitcher would throw the ball, he'd swing the bat, and the ball always ended up in the catcher's mitt. You know the feeling? Here's his story:

What I did was find someone who was a great batter, and watched how that person did it. He got a good firm grip on the bat. I watched how he stood in the batter's box. Sometimes he moved up, and sometimes he moved back. I copied the way he spread his feet, and the way he flexed his knees. I watched him and I copied everything he did.

And you know what happened? I hit the ball! In fact, I hit it so far, I couldn't believe it! I stood there and watched it go and go and go. I felt so good I turned to the catcher and said, "Did you see that?" Boy, I felt good!

But do you know what happened? I spent so much time feeling good about my great hit that I didn't think about running the bases. By the time I came to my senses, it was too late; they got me out at first base.

I learned something very important: starting is important, but it's finishing that really counts.

That's right! When we start on a new project, we might get all excited. We talk about it and make wonderful plans. And then the work begins, and it takes a long time, and we lose interest, and...

Have you ever done that? I sure have. We need to ask God to help us to stay committed.

**Message:** "Winning at the game of life"

Let's start off with a test. Who won the Grey Cup last year? (Answer: Edmonton Eskimos).

Who won the Stanley Cup earlier this year? (Answer: Pittsburgh Penguins).

Who won the Commissioner's Trophy for the World Series of baseball a year ago? (Answer: Kansas City Royals).

Who won the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy for basketball earlier this year? (Answer: Cleveland Cavaliers).

Some of you really know your sports! Here's something to think about, though: if I asked the same questions about who won those trophies thirty years ago, very few of you would know the answers. The winning teams were big news at the time, but they are quickly forgotten.

Well, in the game of life, there may not be all the cheering you heard at yesterday's Blue Jays game, but the results of the game of life are far more important and longer lasting than who wins the World Series.

Let's open the Bible and find out more.

**1 Corinthians 9:24, New Living Translation:**

**Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win.**

Paul in the Bible compares life to a race. I doubt that any of us want to get to the end of our life and find out that we lost. I don't know about you, but I don't want to get to the end of my life and find out that I blew it, that I wasted my life.

What I want to do today is to give you a strategy for winning. And by the way: the game of life as a follower of Jesus has a special quality: we can *all* win! It's not like a race where only one wins; we can help each other.

Do you think the Blue Jays go into a playoff game without a plan? Do they just flip coins to see who pitches and who bats next? Of course not! They have a play book with their strategy. If you don't have a strategy for life, then you'll likely just aim at

survival. That's how a lot of people live: if I can just make it until the end of the month. If I can survive until retirement. That's not much of a life, is it?

No, I want to win; I want to succeed. I want my life to matter, to make a difference. That brings up a question, though: what is success? What is the goal of life? Starting today and over the next several weeks, we're going to look at that. We'll use Monopoly, poker, baseball and some other games as metaphors for how we play with money, with relationships, with priorities, and so on.

We'll use the Bible as our guide, because the Bible is God's play book for our lives.

## 1) "L": Live with an eternal perspective

**1 Corinthians 9:25, New Living Translation:**  
All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

This echoes what I said earlier. Winning a trophy for being the best golfer in the world is nice... while it lasts. But that's the thing: the thrill fades away.

No, the game of life we're playing is one that has eternal consequences. There's a big difference between trying to survive until Friday, and living for eternity.

How long do you think you'll live? 60? 70? 80? Some of you are already there. 90? 100? Like Alice Heasman, going for 108? No matter how long you live, you are going to live far more time on the other side of eternity than you do on this side.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11, New Living Translation:**  
God has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

That verse tells us that there is something inside each of us that understands there's more to life than what we see around us.

That's why Paul writes this in Colossians:

**Colossians 3:2, New International Version:**  
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

## 2) "I": Invest in my integrity

Do you see how, when you look at things from the perspective of eternity, you see the big picture? You think about the things that are really important.

One thing that really matters in this life—how you live, and the legacy you leave for others—and that will also matter in the life to come, is your character, your integrity.

**1 Corinthians 9:27, New Living Translation:**  
I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that... I myself might be disqualified.

Can you think of someone who has been disqualified in life because of a lack of integrity? Did I say *someone*? There are dozens of people who have done that! Whether it's sports or politics or business—and yes, even church leaders—there are plenty of examples.

At the same time, though, you probably know someone who lived their life with integrity. Maybe it was a parent or another relative. Maybe someone you looked up to, or someone you read about, who inspired you. Jesus is the greatest example of integrity.

There are certain places where we all tend to stumble, where our integrity is tested. Money is a big one. Or how we treat other people. We're going to look at some of these areas in the next few weeks.

It's so easy for us to cut corners on integrity, to play close to the line. We think, "It's not technically cheating, so it's OK." That reminds me of the millionaire who was looking to hire a chauffeur for his limousine. He lived in the mountains, where driving could be dangerous. He was talking with three applicants for the job. He asked the first one, "How close can you get to the edge of the cliff without going over?" The driver said, "I am the most experienced guy in this whole group here. I can safely drive within one foot of the edge." So the millionaire goes to the second driver and says, "Well, how about you? How close to the cliff can you safely drive?" This driver answers, "I may not have the years of experience, but I can get within six inches of the edge without going over." The

millionaire says, “That’s pretty good. And how about you?”, he asked the third driver. That driver answered, “I stay as far away from the edge as possible. If you want to look over the cliff, you can get out and walk over there.” The millionaire said, “You’re hired.”

What if we lived our lives that way? No, I don’t mean pushing the boundaries, tempting ourselves without actually sinning. I mean staying away from the edge, and living a life of integrity.

That doesn’t mean never taking risks. We’ll see that when we look at the game of poker. Jesus calls us to take a chance on him. It means being faithful to Jesus and to the people around us, being a person who is trustworthy, a person of integrity.

Do you remember back in school when you learned the secret of compounding interest? You invest \$1,000 at 5% interest. After one year, it’s gained \$50. Well, whoopdee doo. But that interest keeps multiplying, and in fifteen years you’ve doubled your money. Integrity is like that. It’s the result of years of making small decisions, day by day, to do the right thing, even if it’s inconvenient or unpleasant or requires sacrifice. It becomes part of your nature.

The Bible has some strong words about someone who doesn’t pay attention in this area.

**Proverbs 11:20, New Living Translation:**  
The Lord hates people with twisted hearts, but he delights in those who have integrity.

I’d rather delight God, than for God to hate me.

### 3) “F”: Follow my purpose

In the sports world, there’s a saying for someone who’s not playing all out. This person is just going through the motions, or maybe not even that. Their heart is not in the game. The saying describes this kind of player: they “phoned it in.”

Listen to how Paul describes his mission:

**1 Corinthians 9:26, New Living Translation:**  
So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches.

“Run straight to the goal” and “purpose in every step.” That doesn’t sound like someone who’s just punching the clock. He was ambitious for the job God had given him. He was excited about life!

What are you aiming for in the game of life? That’s what this item is all about. What are you passionate about? How can you use that passion to fulfill God’s purposes? One person put it this way: “You should find in life what makes your heart sing.” That sounds exciting!

### 4) “E”: Engage God’s plan for my life

Jesus said in John 10:10, “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.” No, that’s not what he said! Let’s read it together:

**John 10:10, New Living Translation:**  
“My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.”

Playing the game of life with Jesus is exciting! When we live with Jesus, three things happen:

- our past is forgiven;
- our present has purpose;
- our future has promise, the promise of eternal life with Jesus.

You want a model for a successful life? You want a plan for winning in life? It’s found in following Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus makes all the difference in life, in death, in life beyond death.

Here’s a summary of what life with Jesus is like:

**Ephesians 2:10, New Living Translation:**  
For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Turn to someone near you and say, “You are God’s masterpiece!” Do that right now. And let them say it to you.

### Next Steps:

- Make or renew my commitment to live for Jesus. I may make great promises about integrity, or about how I will do God’s will, but those are empty words if I’m empty on the inside. The first thing is always to have the fullness of Jesus in my life.
- Then follow through on the things mentioned today. Is there one item that caught your attention, your eyes lit up? God may be calling you to work on that area.