

## Chapter 10

### EXPECT TO WIN!

When the game is on the line and there is time for one more play, what will the coach do? He or she will try to get the ball in the hands of the team's "money" or "go to" players. These are the types of players the coach counts on because they have the ability and confidence to do whatever it takes to win. These types of players expect to win and will settle for nothing less.

University of New Mexico football players a few years ago were often seen wearing t-shirts or sweatshirts with the slogan "Expect to Win" on them. The obvious objective was to instill a positive attitude in the players. Any coach or experienced athlete will tell you your attitude will most likely effect your outcome. A friend of mine played for the University of Oklahoma football team when they won the National Championship (per football polls) two years in a row, which is a very difficult feat. He said the teams may have not been the most talented in the country but they just plain expected to win every time, even when they were behind late in the game. Sure enough something would always happen to pull a victory out of the jaws of defeat – such as a fumble or missed field goal by the opposition. Conversely the other team probably worried about something bad happening to spoil their upset and sure enough it did. Attitude made the difference!

As a Christian you should also expect to win. Win in relationships, win in school, win in your job, and win in your sport. But winning as a Christian is not the same as scoring more points than the other team or beating the competition for a date or job promotion. Winning as a Christian is being joyful, content, satisfied, having an inner peace no matter what the circumstances. It is having a life that is a positive influence on the lives of others. It is being on your way to reaching your God given potential.

What is the answer to having this winning life? What does it take to have peace on the inside no matter what is happening on the outside? How do we remove the fears and frustrations that prevent us from reaching our potential? What do we have to do? Jesus tells us exactly what we have to do in the following scripture;

***John 14:1 - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.***

There is scripture after scripture telling us to trust in God. If we can learn to truly do this we will find it will have a tremendous impact on our life. If we know God's promises and really believe them we would not worry as much as we do, we wouldn't feel down or depressed about anything, and we would look forward to each day no matter what was happening in our lives. We would have much less fear and frustration, which would improve our performance in all that we do. Trusting in God will give us tremendous peace and strength, it will be the key to having the contentment Paul talked about in Philippians 4:12 when he said he had learned the secret to being content in any and every situation.

God made it very clear to my wife after our daughter was arrested that we needed to trust him, and the way he did it has been one of many experiences that has made God very real to us. Our daughter was to go before a judge to determine if we could have custody of our granddaughter Mariah instead of her being placed with a foster parent. Needless to say we had some serious concerns (my wife was very fearful), especially the way Youth and Family Services had treated us. A social worker made it very clear the agency had no intention of placing Mariah with us

because Amy was living in our home when she took off to smoke crack with her daughter in the back seat of her car.

A good friend suggested we take a couple of days off and just get away from everything. We went to my in-laws cabin, a fairly isolated place overlooking a lake, to do some serious praying about Amy's appearance before a judge and just to spend some time with God. Julie opens her bible and Deuteronomy 31:8 just jumped out and caught her attention. This scripture states "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

And did God ever come through. The judge became very upset at the way Youth and Family Services handled the case and he was actually shouting at the case workers representing the agency at the hearing, wanting to know why in the world was our granddaughter taken from us. Since the Agency could not come up with any reasons the judge ruled in our favor. After the hearing Amy's attorney (our daughter wanted us to have custody) said it is very unusual for a judge to overrule Youth and Family Services in a custody hearing. That scripture and the events that followed have had a profound effect on my wife. She had not been handling things well up to that point and since then she has been a pillar of strength. A wood engraving of that scripture now hangs in our home.

A great example of someone who knew how to trust God and whose trust allowed him to accomplish great things in his life was David, who became Israel's greatest King. 1 Samuel 17 describes his confrontation with a nine-foot (some translations claim he was 6' 5" and this was still huge during those times) giant named Goliath. This Philistine giant was taunting and challenging the Israelite army. No one would take up the challenge except the young shepherd David. When asked why he, a mere boy (vs. 33), thought he could defeat this warrior giant he told how when protecting his sheep he had chased and killed a lion and a bear (vs.34,35). He said God had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, events that led to building David's faith, and God will deliver him from the hand of this Philistine (vs.37). David clearly "expected to win" and he did as he went on to kill the giant with his slingshot. This feat of courage was the springboard for David to eventually become Israel's great King.

David's faith and the resulting obedience caused him to be described as a man after God's own heart in 1 Samuel 13:14, yet David was far from perfect. His personal life was not without sin, in fact he is known for committing a pretty big one when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then sent her husband, one of his most loyal generals, on a suicide mission (see 2 Samuel, chapter 11) in order to get him out of the picture. In spite of his weaknesses David was known for his great love for God and the faith and joy this love produced. He trusted God and David's trust pleased God.

In order to understand David's heart, his love for God and his great faith, you need to read his many Psalms in the book of Psalms, including the well-known Psalm 23 (Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil... - verse 4). This was a man who had great faith and because of this faith had many great victories as a military leader and was responsible for turning Israel into a great nation under his leadership.

Getting back to David and Goliath, there are probably a lot of people who if they were at this battle scene would advise David he had unrealistic expectations taking on the giant because of David's physical limitations. If you recall this topic was discussed in Chapter 9 (Dealing With Failure). Now if David decided to wrestle the giant then unrealistic expectations could have caused

some problems. The giant clearly had the physical advantage. David chose a way to deal with the giant that took advantage of a skill he had. This did not eliminate the great danger to David because a miss and it would be all over for him. He had to trust God his aim would be true.

Then again when God is involved you may never know what is unrealistic because He can perform miracles in your life. This is why we should never stop hoping for what many would think would be unachievable aspirations. We should never let what may seem like insurmountable obstacles, the giants we face, discourage us from achieving our dreams. At the same time we should not be setting ourselves up for major disappointments, heartbreak, or anger if we fail to reach our lofty goals. I believe one of the biggest challenges as a Christian is having a passionate faith in achieving what we want while at the same time not suffering emotional pain if God has a different plan for our lives than what we want. The bottom line is we have to trust God no matter what happens.

Trusting has nothing to do with what we do but it is a matter of our heart. We may think we trust God but our actions often indicate how far we need to go before our lives benefit from a true trust in God. You may have heard the story of the tightrope artist who asked a spectator if he believed he could walk a tightrope over the Niagara Falls with a wheelbarrow. The spectator said he believed he could. The tightrope artist then invited the spectator to get in the wheelbarrow. The spectator declined the invitation. We are like that spectator – when put to the test we may realize how little we trust God. If we really did trust God we would not have the anxiety, fear, and worries we do. A key to letting God be in control is to understand how much of life is out of our control.

Thinking we are in control when we are not is what generates a great deal of stress in our lives. For example, imagine you are an athlete who wants to have a bigger role on the team next season. You control the time you spend training so you double the effort you have been putting into training during the off-season. You become stronger, quicker, and you can see your skills really improved. You totally expect to play a much bigger role because of your efforts. Then you find out the coaches have recruited several bigger, stronger, quicker, and highly skilled athletes. Not only that but your teammates also increased their training. The season starts but you discover in the first few games the flow of the game and the make up of the opposition is counter to your strengths so you're taken out often. You finally get quality time in a game but you have a lousy game, and even the greatest athletes have bad games. You get off to a great start in the next game but you suffer a serious injury ten minutes into the game. How much were you really in control?

We often see many professional athletes publicly give credit to God for their success. I believe the nature of their profession, especially if they are involved in any team sport, makes them realize how much they need to trust God because they understand how much is outside their control. I remember Raymond Berry, a hall of fame wide receiver who played football for the Baltimore Colts, giving his testimony at a FCA banquet. He said he became a Christian because he realized how many things had to happen that were out of his control to have the career he did. He said he then knew God was directing his life and was responsible for him achieving what he did.

You don't have to be an athlete to understand we have much less control than what we think we do – in our jobs, in relationships, and in school if we are students. It has been over 20 years since I graduated from college and I still remember the tremendous frustrations as a student due to thinking I was in control. There were many times I thought I was well prepared for an exam, only to be convinced I must be in the wrong class when I saw the test. I am sure, if you are a student, you have undergone similar experiences at least a few times in your academic career.

Stress and frustration is made even worse when we make whatever we are focusing on the center of our universe. In other words we make things bigger than what they really are. This is often a huge problem, we forget about all of God's blessings and we become obsessed with our problems, no matter how trivial in reality they may be. This is the opposite of faith! This is why sometimes "getting away from it all" by taking a hike in the woods, mountains, or even a nice park can be helpful because we tend to put things back in proper perspective when we focus on God's beautiful creation.

Being focused by blocking out all distractions is good, but exaggerating the importance of something is not good because we put needless pressure on ourselves. We create this stressful situation when the only thing that matters in life is the task at hand; the test we have to take, the big game, a job interview, a date, or even a conflict with a loved one, coworker, or someone in authority over us. We can't see past the event or conflict, yet this is exactly what we have to do. This is what faith is all about!

We need to understand what may really be important to us may not be important to God because He has something better in store. You may not think He is working or in control of your life when in fact He may be doing His greatest work, even though it may be hard for you to see it at the time. In Isaiah 55:8,9 God makes this point by telling us his thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways are not our ways. He tells us he has a higher purpose that we don't often see or understand. God has a long-term focus while we have a hard time seeing past today.

Understanding God may have another plan for us other than our plans is important because we often second-guess or blame God when things don't go our way. In our examples it may have seemed like the training or studying efforts were being wasted. The reality is that experiences such as these strengthen our work ethic, self discipline, and perseverance which equips us to deal with far greater pressures we will face in our life, along with the many trials we typically face.

***James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

Romans 5:3-5 tells us the same message, to rejoice in our sufferings because our suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope and this hope will not disappoint us because God pours out his love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:28 puts it in much simpler terms by explaining that all things work for the good of those who love God. The challenge for us is to really believe these scriptures.

I believe age is a great asset in developing trust because the older you are the more you have been through and the more you have seen how God works in your life. I remember many times how God has worked for my good even though at the time I couldn't see any good in my situation. I especially remember what one would call "a really bad day". My first job after high school was in a factory. I had no ambition to go to college because I had serious self-confidence problems that led me to believe working in a factory was the best I could do. After about a year I was informed due to cutbacks I no longer had my interesting job as an engine lathe machinist and my new job was basically manual labor. On the way home from work my car broke down and later that evening my girlfriend called to tell me she didn't want to see me anymore. To top it off I had a really bad cold. Looking back I now see that as a great day because that is what it took to get me to make some major changes in my life. I decided to go to college and that has turned out to be one of the best choices I have ever made.

But the dividends of that choice were not paid until many years later because God still had a lot of work to do (and even now He is not even close to being finished with me) in my life. I was

not ready to put the needed effort into school when I first attended college. It took another seemingly horrible event, getting drafted into the military, before I had the maturity to do well in school. Not only did my military experience help me grow up, it provided the training for a decent job while attending school and provided much needed financial aid through VA benefits.

It is the bad experiences in life and not the good times that really help us grow as individuals, especially if we love and trust God. Maybe He will use a really bad game (or season) or a bad grade (or semester) to get you to work a little harder. Maybe He wants you to develop perseverance now so you can work through problems in a future marriage or job. Maybe He is using hard times to get you to change the direction of your life.

The more you begin to see how God works in your life the easier it will be to rejoice (or at least have peace) in your sufferings and others will see there is something very different about you. You will know you are approaching spiritual maturity and contentment in all things when you really start to believe God is working in you during trials in your life and you don't let these trials get to you.

Trusting God's Word during tough times can do more than just give you peace. In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus explains everyone who hears his words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. He goes on to say, no matter what kind of storms come against this house, the house remains standing because of its strong foundation. He contrasts this with the foolish man who builds his house on a weak foundation that is destroyed when it comes up against a storm. Jesus makes it clear trusting him can make the difference in keeping a relationship together, in handling pressures of your job, school, sport, and whatever else you have trouble dealing with. Believing God's promises and truths can be the difference between success or failure, happiness or sorrow, and survival or destruction.

Trust requires faith. We all have faith in something, but the problem is we place our faith in the wrong things. Because of putting faith in the wrong things we are often let down by others as well as ourselves. This makes it difficult to trust anyone, let alone someone we never see, yet this is what we are called to do.

***Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.***

It is our faith that pleases God, and our faith will be rewarded if we believe God exists and we seek him, as stated in Hebrews 11:6. The more you know God the easier it is to have faith in Him. If you are going to put your trust in anyone your level of trust will depend on your perception of that person's ability and desire to come through for you. In other words you will want to know if they can and want to deliver. The perceived desire may be the most important factor, though ability will also be very important. For example, with the game on the line a coach will rely on players with a strong desire to win. The ability of the players will be very important but their desire will be more important. An athlete with a strong desire and the ability to come through in "crunch time" is usually referred to as a "gamer". God is a "gamer"!

I believe many of us don't question God's ability to come through for us but some do wonder if He really cares enough to get involved in our lives. God cares and He can and wants to deliver when you put your trust in Him. As we learn more about who God is the more we understand his greatness and his love for us. He wants us to know his nature and character while Satan will try to distort our image of God. This is why many cults and world religions paint God as impersonal, imperfect, and with limited power. These cults and religions want you to rely on yourself and/or their religious leaders instead of knowing God personally.

Many cults and religions recognize Jesus as a great teacher and Jesus never questioned (he often quoted) the authority and words of the Old Testament Prophets. So I will use Old Testament scriptures to help you understand God's nature, ability, and desire to deliver. I really debated about directly quoting the amount of scriptures I am about to list. I decided to insert these scriptures because you really need to read them in order to understand the nature of God. I want to encourage you to read these scriptures because you may gain more of an understanding about who I'm asking you to trust in. I want you to read these so you can begin to see why God really wants you to know Him, love Him, and trust Him.

God is unique. There is no one like Him, no one to compare Him to. He always existed and always will. He is sovereign (rules over all) and there is no other.

***1 Samuel 2:2 "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Isaiah 44:6 "This is what the LORD says-- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.***

He has power beyond our understanding.

***Job 37:5 God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding. Job 9:10 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.***

He created the earth with a purpose and we are that purpose.

***Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the LORD says-- he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited-- he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other.***

God is perfect (holy) and does not change with the whims of popular culture which means you can count on His truths and promises from generation to generation.

***Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? 2 Samuel 22:31 "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.***

He teaches us his truths because he wants us to prosper and be content.

***Job 36:22 "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? Job 36:10,11 He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment.***

God can multi-task which means He knows what is going on with all of us and can be involved in an unlimited amounts of lives at the same time.

***Psalms 139:3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Jeremiah 23:23,24 "Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.***

God wants to be involved in our lives, especially IF WE WANT HIM TO BE INVOLVED! If we trust and respect him he can fulfill our desires.

***Job 7:17 "What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, Psalm 145:18,19 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.***

He cares for us and is a refuge. He will rescue and protect us.

***Nahum 1:7 The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, Psalm 91:14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.***

I have underlined key phrases in order for you to clearly understand from what you have just read that our relationship with God will make a difference in God's interaction in our lives. As I have stated before in this book, the key to having a beneficial relationship with God is our love of God that will come from understanding his great love for us. Love is what makes a relationship meaningful and effective.

***Psalm 86:5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. Psalm 25:10 All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. Isaiah 54:10 "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord who has compassion on you.***

Isaiah 40:26-30 does a beautiful job of summing up what God wants us to know about him. He tells us to look to him for our strength. He explains even though he has such great power, creating the heavens and the earth, we as individuals are what matter to him. He knows each one of us. God knows we become weary, we stumble, and we get discouraged, but wants us to know he doesn't. If we look to God and trust Him with all our heart and soul, even though we may not understand his ways, He will make a tremendous difference in our lives. He will give us strength when we feel like quitting, He will give us hope when there does not seem to be any, he will give us power in our weaknesses.

***Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.***

God is not some passive spirit who created us and then forgot about us. What we typically do not understand is if God seems distant to us it is because we have failed to make much of an attempt to really know God. We often go through the motions – go to church or bible classes, yet we make little extra effort to study scriptures, go to God in prayer, or seek the wisdom and companionship of those who have a strong spiritual relationship. All too often we know of God but we don't have the personal relationship with him that is needed to build our faith.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us without faith it is impossible to please God and that God rewards those who earnestly (key word) seek Him. The following scriptures specifically tell us our faith will make a difference. Our faith will give our prayers power.

***Mark 11:22-24 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."***

As far as I know history has not recorded anyone throwing a mountain into the sea. Obviously Jesus is not saying you will get anything you ask for, especially if your request is out of line with the will of God. There are factors that can hinder the power of prayer and these are discussed in Chapter 11 (The Game Plan). The power comes when your heart is right and your request is in line with God's will. Then God will use you to carry out His purpose and if His purpose required you to throw a mountain into the sea that is exactly what would happen! Reaching our potential as a person is part of God's purpose for us.

***1 John 5:14,15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.***

Faith according to God's will is important to understand because you may run across teachings that claim you will get anything you ask for if your faith is strong enough. This name it and claim it (or blab it and grab it) doctrine can cause a lot of problems for Christians because when you don't get what you want it will cause disbelief in God's promises. If anyone would have perfect faith it would be Jesus. In Luke 22:41,42 Jesus prays that if it is God's will, not his own, to spare him of his pending fate. Did he get what he asked when he asked God to spare him from being put to death on the cross? Because of the intense suffering he knew he had to go through, Jesus at that moment of prayer was hoping for another way for man to be reconciled to God, but God had a plan that had to be carried out, so his request was denied.

It is not the size of faith that matters but it is having the right type of faith – faith that God will use you and equip you to do His will in your life. Jesus makes this point in Luke 17:5, telling the apostles when they asked Jesus to increase their faith, if they had faith as small as a mustard seed they could tell a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, and the tree would obey them. Having the right type of faith is a very important concept to understand. Every time we don't get what we ask for, especially if we think we have great faith, we can allow doubt and even anger to enter our minds because we think God is not listening to us.

OK, we know we should desire and pray for whatever is in God's will for our lives and those we pray for. Do we know what this really means? Just how do we know what God's will is anyway? For example, if you just finish high school and you pray for direction in your life do you know if God's will is for you to be a doctor, lawyer, nurse, teacher, or a professional athlete? Do you know what university he wants you to attend? Do you know if God wants you to marry or date this person or that person?

These are exactly the type of life impacting choices we should go to God for help. So after we pray do we then go to our bibles and open them up and read – attend the University of Oklahoma, major in biology, and date the person who will sit behind you in chemistry class? Doing God's will is not that simple, yet it is not that complicated.

From what you have read and from your spiritual growth you should understand we were created to have a relationship with God. In order to have the relationship God wants we need to know him, believe him and in his son Jesus, and obey him. This is God's obvious will for us. It is very important we also understand our lives should help and motivate others to want to have that same relationship.

So if our underlining motivation is to take a direction that will bring us closer to God, if what we pray for will somehow get others to notice that God does make a difference, we can have total confidence we are paying for God's will to be done. We should know, have total faith, God will steer us in the right direction and he will influence our paths even though we may not have a



clue how he will do it or what his time frame will be. We just have to trust he will open the right doors, close others, and do whatever it takes, even if it is painful, to get us back on track when we wander off.

Ask yourself what type of life will get others to look toward God. A life of constant turmoil, as opposed to trials that we all go through, I don't think so. How about a life of underachievement, everyone really wants that, right? How about a life of peace and contentment, even during your toughest circumstances? Do you think others would take notice if you have a life where you are on your way to achieving your potential, fulfilling your dreams, making a difference in the lives of others? Does anyone ever notice a person filled with joy, love and strength? You bet they do so do you think this might be the type of life God wants for you, in other words, is it God's will for your life? When we pray we should not have any doubt, have faith, God will help us have a life that will draw those we know to him, not away from him, and this will be a life we will enjoy and that will give us peace, strength, and fulfillment.

Our biggest problem is we cannot see into our future and God can. We should know God wants us to do our best, but we don't know how God plans on getting us there. We need to use our talents and abilities to have a positive impact on the lives of others instead of using them for our own indulgences. So it goes back to doing God's will, the right type of faith, and God just may want you to be the star of the team, the top of your class, or to achieve whatever your dreams are, if achieving these dreams strengthen your relationship with God and cause others to want to have the same type of relationship.

Sometimes we don't get what we want simply because we don't ask. Maybe we think what we want is not important to God or maybe we don't go to God in prayer because we are afraid His answer may not be the answer we are looking for. If something is important to us then it is important to God, and we just have to have faith that whatever answer he gives us, our life (or those we pray for) is going to be better off because of asking God to be involved.

We need to think of our life as a book that God is writing. We have to truly believe, have faith, that our book will be a great book because we know God loves us and He knows how to "script" an exciting, fulfilling, abundant life for the characters. After all, the creator of the universe is the author. We have to understand God wants our book to be valuable to those who read it and our book should point to the author. We need to view our disappointments, failures, and hardships as just a chapter, or maybe even a paragraph, sentence, or just a word in this book. We also need to know these trials are there to develop our character. We have to know the "plot" may be different than one we might want to develop because He has a different purpose, a better purpose, for our life, just like a good novel has unpredictable twists in the story.

Once we understand there is a purpose for this book, a point to be made, and that purpose is to show the readers, those who observe our story, what a spiritual relationship with God can do for us, that this relationship gives us peace and contentment, helps us reach our potential, and prepares us to make a difference in this world we will begin to have the type of faith Jesus is talking about.

Jesus makes it clear how very powerful the right type of faith can be and this faith can lead to fulfilling our desires. God tells us if we "delight" in knowing him, and if we do good, there are rewards.

***Psalms 37:3,4 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.***

You should now understand this does not mean He will give you the desires of your heart every time because there may be times our desires may be contrary to God's will. This is a promise that if we put our hope in God, if we desire a relationship with him, if we do "good", He will grant us desires that will lead toward and not hinder his purpose for our lives. In our example you needed to trust God for the desire of your heart, playing time, while preparing yourself to earn that playing time. You also need to understand God may have a different timetable for you to get that PT, or he had something else planned for you or he may be preparing you for even tougher challenges ahead. God's idea of success or His timing for your success might just be a little different than your plan.

For example Kurt Warner, one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL, had dreams and desires to play in the NFL right out of college. So what happens – many years later when his opportunities seemed to be long gone he finally gets an unlikely opportunity to play in the NFL and ends up one of the most amazing rags to riches success stories in the history of professional sports, leading his team to winning the Super bowl. He is a believer, he even wrote a book titled "All Things Possible" and his life is a great example of this verse;

***Mark 9:23 "If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."***

We need to internalize this verse and other verses on the power of faith. You will be amazed at what can happen in your life when you really trust God! You will have less stress and anxiety because you will know a loving God is in control of your life. You may not always get what you ask for from God but you will take comfort in knowing God has something better planned for you. If you persevere and truly trust God you will start accomplishing things you never thought you could do. Life will begin to be an exciting adventure.

Faith has made a huge difference in my life. It has caused me to not worry nearly as much as I used to (I confess I do worry at times) and it has helped my confidence grow immensely. My confidence is not in what I can do but what God can do and what He has already done in my life. Yes, this means I believe in myself, but not in the way many use this term. I believe in spite of my many weaknesses, God is with me and can use me to accomplish so much more than I could ever do on my own. In fact, at times I have been amazed at how God has worked in my life and answered my prayers. Answered prayers are what have made God very real to me!

I am not the type of person to make something out of nothing. In other words I am not going to say God answered my prayers when I probably would have gotten what I asked for anyway (but I will still acknowledge God may still may have had His hand in it). I am talking about answered prayers that cannot be explained by coincidences. When this happens time and time again you really start to see God's power in your life. You know you are not wasting your time when you pray for others as well as yourself because you know God wants to work in the lives of those you love as well as in your own life.

Answered prayer is what gave me the strength and peace to deal with the crises we had with my daughter and granddaughter that I talked about in the introduction of this book. The days before my daughters arrest I had been intensely praying for her because it was becoming apparent her drug problem was worse than what we thought and my wife and myself reached the point where we agreed drastic measures had to be taken. Three days before her arrest I was to go on an unplanned weekend trip with someone that I had a very difficult time feeling comfortable with. I prayed intently about this the night before the trip because I was so worried about it. God made it so obvious that he answered my prayers because of how great my trip turned out. Because of

answering this prayer and a several others before my daughters arrest I knew God was setting me up to trust Him for far more serious issues that were ahead.

And did God ever come through! Because of my daughters arrest and the publicity that followed, she was able to get into a four-month rehabilitation program that we would have had a very difficult time getting her into under normal circumstances. This program allowed Amy's daughter to be with her so in addition to drug counseling my daughter was also taught much needed parental skills. The publicity exposed Amy's problem to our entire community, a problem that our family and especially Amy would rather not have anyone know about. This provided an additional incentive for Amy to change because she is the type of person who loves being around people, loves to be loved, so she had to show others she is really a person who is joy to be around.

Amy has changed because of our prayers and so many others who have been praying for her, and the events God used to get her attention. Anyone who knows my daughter knows she is now a much different person. She has a strong desire to know God and she knows only God will deliver her from her addiction. Our relationship has changed from one that was gut wrenching and heartbreaking to a relationship that is now pure joy. She is constantly sharing with my wife and myself what God is revealing to her through her growth and she is genuinely excited about her new found spiritual relationship.

It has become so obvious all that has happened and what will continue to happen has and will turn out for good. Relapse is always a possibility but we now have the strength to deal with it and we know God will always be involved. God has been made very real to us through our many life experiences and especially through our experiences with our daughter.

After going through what we have with Amy and seeing God's intervention I felt a read sadness when someone put a sticker on my car that read, "God is pretend". Instead of anger I just felt pity because there is someone out there, like so many others, that do not have a clue about the power and divine help they have available and to tap into this power all they have to do is believe and have faith in God. They and we need to understand it is a strong spiritual relationship with God which builds our faith, a faith that makes a difference, this is why we are told in James 4:8 "draw near to God and he will draw near to you....".

Knowing God is always near makes me look forward to everyday, no matter what is going on in my life. I take great comfort knowing God is still working on my "book". Because of finally understanding many of God's truths I feel confident the best chapters haven't been written yet. How many more great chapters are to be written in your life? Most of you who are reading this are so much younger than I am and my hope is you realize much sooner than what I did what it will take to have a winning life. My hope is your book is exciting from beginning to end instead of going through a lot of difficult chapters that will be needed to develop the "character" God wants you to become.

This "winning" faith does not occur overnight. You need to cultivate your heart and taking steps toward increasing your spiritual growth will be what makes the difference in developing the faith God wants you to have – faith that will equip you to "win" at whatever you do.

***There can be miracles when you believe, though hope is frail it's hard to kill. Who knows what miracles you can achieve. When you believe somehow you will, you will when you believe – lyrics from "When You Believe", sung by Whitney Houston and Mariah Carry (Prince of Egypt soundtrack)***

