THE OLYMPIC LIE

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Category: Observations

I love the Olympic Games. For a few weeks, sports which I enjoy watching such as athletics and track cycling (and, joy of joys, rugby sevens) take precedence over the all pervasive football. Of course, the last few Olympics have seen hitherto unknown levels of success for the British, which makes the games even more fun.

However, I am a little concerned about the number of people that I hear telling a huge lieÂ on Olympic broadcasts.

You can hear the lie that I'm talking about in most interviews with gold medal winners; it's the one where they say something like, "my medal shows that if you work hard enough, you can achieve your goal".

This just isn't true. No matter how hard I'd worked in my younger days, I'd never have been able to win a gold medal in gymnastics, cycling or what have you. I'm just not built the right way. Even for those that are blessed with the right physique, hard work is no guarantee of success. For everyone who wins a gold medal there are eight or nine other Olympians who worked just as hard but who have to make do with silver or bronze or, more likely, no medal at all. Then there are all of the people who sweated and trained for four years and didn't even get picked for their national team.

You certainly have to work hard to win an Olympic medal. I am full of admiration for the way that people put in so much effort. You also need to be naturally gifted for the particular event and to be honest, you need a slice of good luck along the way. An injury or virus at the wrong time can ruin years of hard work.

The simple truth is that hard work is no guarantee of success and to pretend otherwise is simply wrong.

So what?

Well, my problem is that this plays into a human narrative that says that we are in control of our lives; the arbiters of our own destiny. On one level this is wrong because it simply ignores (or insults) the millions (billions?) of human beings that live under such grinding poverty and oppression that they have no opportunity to change the way they live. It's all very well for rich Westerners to pontificate about being able to achieve their dreams - not everyone has the same privilege.

More importantly, real success in the world, being reconciled to our creator, can't be achieved through any amount of hard work, but is a free gift, won through the death of Christ on the cross. In fact, the first step in salvation is realising that we can't do itÂ by ourselves. The utopian optimism of being able to achieve anything as long as we work hard enough has to give way to a realistic assessment of ourselves as fallen creatures, who need to be forgiven and restored through the intervention of our loving Father.

Of course, hard work is part of the Christian life. Paul uses the illustration of athletes training for a big

race to encourage us to grow as Christians. But first, we have to recognise our fallenness and our need for a saviour.

I love watching the Olympics. I am in awe of the athletes and I'm staggered at the hard work that they put in. But there is more to life than that.