

# 2CH Sunday at 7.30

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Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

## Beijing Olympics

Presented by Richard Quadrio

### Introduction

One of the most amazing things about the teaching of Jesus was his delight in seeing deep truths in the everyday things of life. To teach about the love of God, he told a story about a wayward son. To explain the need to share our faith, he told a story about the plight of four seeds. To encourage people to care, he told an expected tale about a needy man neglected by the religious and cared for by all people a Samaritan. So to look at life and see parallels or parables for our faith has a long tradition.

After enjoying the recent Olympic Games, I thought it would be interesting to consider some of the life lessons that sort presents us with. So, with Bible in one hand and the glory of the Olympics still in our minds, lets consider what we can learn about living life – God’s way.

### Part 1

Like many Sydney-siders, I find it hard to believe that it’s been eight years since we hosted the Olympic Games. In fact it’s nearly fifteen years since we woke to discover we had been awarded the Olympic Games.. Those weeks in September 2000 were very special in the life of people in Sydney. We enjoyed near perfect spring weather. The trains and buses ran with abundance and on time. People were friendly and even talked to each other on public transport. Some of us enjoyed going to various events – the lucky ones attending the opening ceremony, athletics and the pool, while many others enjoyed some of the less popular sports from baseball to equestrian and even wrestling. Though some took the chance to leave town, those who stayed enjoyed a very special time we shall never forget.

And now China’s has had its turn. China deserved their chance to host this special event. As a country they have made huge economic strides in the last twenty years. From a poor, isolated Communist State, China has emerged as an economic force set to rival the super-powers of the twentieth century. When you think about it, China has done more than any other country in the last two decades to alleviate its own poverty, in its own way. The Chinese are hard working, good savers and powerful entrepreneurs. Sport can be a catalyst for change and our hope is that the focus and familiarity that the games have bought to China will aid this nation in developing a free and just society.

The Church in China has asked people around the world to pray for them as their country celebrates a sporting milestone. Those of us who are sport lovers know that love for sport can so easily, in a God-denying age, descend into idolatry. The stars we admire can so easily morph from talented freaks to national deities. As religion wanes, societies have a habit of seeking alternative gods to worship. In a state where for decades God was banned or belittled, sport can provide a very real temptation for false worship. The elevation of sporting stars to god-like status in the end is bad for us and even worse for them.

The Olympics should be a time to celebrate the skills, speed, power and agility of the young from around the world. However we all need to remember that it's just a series of games. Games are fun, games are good, but games should always be games.

“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” 1Timothy 4: 8 (NIV)

## **Part 2**

Some things about the Olympic Games are thoroughly predictable and don't let us down. We expect a blockbuster of colour, costume and creativity in the Opening Ceremony - and China delivered. We expect that every Games will have a slightly more adventurous way of lighting the torch - and China did not disappoint. Even though we thought we knew most of the names of the countries of the world, we discovered there are quite a few we have never heard of - like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Finally we expect that when the athletes come out we will marvel at the wonderful costumes and national dress - and we will be embarrassed at the outfits our national team is wearing.

Sure enough, at Beijing 2008 the various African states wowed us with their flowing robes, the Italians and French looked so stylish and the Americans somewhat aristocratic, while our Australian team looked like they were on the way home from swimming training in their disco-styled track suits. Normally we cringe at the gawky versions of green and gold, but when they were replaced by blue it seemed even sillier. The only saving grace was that the Danes looked worse than us in their jean shorts and red shirts.

Of course the pressure on our athletes to live up to expectations is so much greater. Many did rise to the occasion, they broke world records and were showered in golden Olympic glory. But others sadly woke up on race day with a cold, or maybe made a mistake in competition, or will simply were out foxed, out thought, out muscled or out performed by another elite athlete on the day.

We can't help but be impressed by fellow humans who are faster, stronger, more nimble and more able to endure. God, however, views His creation in an altogether different way. Compared to His standards and measures we have all stumbled at most of the hurdles. Yet He is willing to notice the humblest seeker and honour him or her with glory, honour and celebration. Like the most perfect parent, God treasures us for who we are, not who we can beat.

“Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.” Psalm 147: 7-11 (NIV)

## **Part 3**

What do you do with a boy who is full of energy, won't concentrate, can't seem to apply himself to anything and seems destined for trouble. Well one family in the US was faced with such a dilemma as their son seemed unable to adjust to his first few years of school. You can imagine the sort of reports; “aggressive, quick witted, full of energy, restless, unsettled” and so the list goes on. So as a caring parent you present your son to the medical fraternity and they assess his symptoms and diagnose him as suffering from Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). As a parent it would at this point have been so easy to

despair – you son will never do well at school, will never be able to concentrate, will never amount to anything, will probably have to be on medication for years and will no doubt cause you a lot of pain.

Fortunately this family tried something else as well. On the prodding of an older sister the young 7 year old was taken down to the local pool and encouraged to join the swimming squad. As he grew this decision was to be a very good one indeed. Not only was the young boy full of energy but as his body grew through childhood and into adolescence he developed some amazingly useful attributes as a swimmer – very long arms compared to the rest of his body, huge no.14 size feet in spite of the fact that he only grew to 6 foot 4 inches, wonderful co- ordination and a long body with short legs.

Now the young boy with ADHD is known as the greatest swimmer of all time after securing 8 gold medals at the Beijing Olympics. Michael Phelps, known to his friends as Gomer ( apparently he sounds a lot like that lovable TV character Gomer Pyle – “ Goolly” ) proves one bad report at school is not a life sentence.

It's also a helpful reminder that God did not create humans as a one size fits all model. He made us different for a purpose. One of life's great challenges is simply finding out who we are and learning to live comfortably in our skin. Of course for most of us we may never get the bolt of lightening that reveals our true glory or destiny – instead we muddle along through life doing the best we can given our limited skills and opportunities. But knowing there is a God who designed us and made us helps us to accept and value the person we see in the mirror.

In the world's eyes we are valued by the amount of gold we can secure or win. In God's eyes we are gold. Accepting an appreciating God's love and affirmation goes a long way to living at peace.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

(Psalm . 139:13-14)