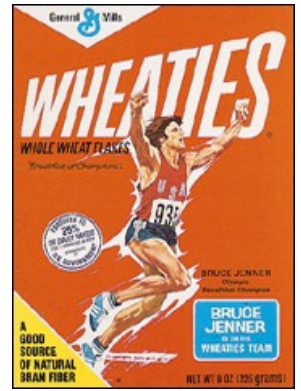


# Cereal Box Christians

## Doug Hamilton

### Defining the Series

- In the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, Canada, there was a competitor named Bruce Jenner. He was the American Decathlon athlete that set a new world record in that event. It brought great joy to our country. Not only was our country celebrating the Bicentennial, but we now had the best athlete of the Olympics and in the world. Do you remember the victory lap that he ran around the track with the American flag waving in his hand? It was a time of great national pride for the USA.
- Not long after that moment, Bruce Jenner appeared on a box of *Wheaties* cereal, for that was the standard that true champions from my generation had grown to expect. I remember sitting down at the table as an eleven year old boy, eating my *Wheaties* and staring at that box. With every bite I thought to myself, “This is the breakfast of champions! Each morsel brings me one step closer to being on my own box of *Wheaties* someday!” I was promptly brought back to reality when becoming sick on Wheaties while quickly jogging around the block for initial training following breakfast.
- What were the makers of *Wheaties* attempting to do with the cereal box covers? They were putting those champions on the cover of the cereal boxes for us to share in their glory. If we would somehow connect those athletes on the boxes with ourselves, then perhaps we would believe that cereal would also make us champions. It was all about being able to envision ourselves on that box someday and have the strength to be make it past that finish line in the future.
- Just think of all the champion athletes of the century that were once young boys and girls sitting at the breakfast table, imagining themselves on that box of cereal in the future. Think about all the times they stared at the box while crunching the cereal through their teeth. They were a champion in their heart before they became a champion in real life.
- Once again we have Winter Olympic Games upon us. Athletes from all over the world are coming in to be that champion they have trained for a great part of their lives. They want their shot on the cereal box. In reality for us normal people, the closest we will come to a cereal box is for breakfast in the morning. That leads to the title of this series, “Cereal Box Christians.” If there was breakfast cereal in heaven, what would it take to be on God’s cereal box? That is the aim of these lessons, knowing that we are Cereal Box Christians.



### The Foundation of the Outline

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- It is here that we find the outline for the next three lessons about being Cereal Box Christians that god would have us to be. The world of the first-century loved their Ancient

## Cereal Box Christians

Doug Hamilton

Olympic Games and it showed in their archeology. Ancient records show that there was a great following for not only the Olympics, but also the regional games for each Roman province. There were many different sporting events such as javelin, mixed-martial arts (pankration), discus, boxing, wrestling, the four and ten-horse chariot races and the long jump. The biggest events were usually those that focused on running, for they were the most ancient of sports. There were the sprints, intermediate and marathon running events, with each one calling for a particular discipline.

With an ancient running event in mind, let us return to the text of Hebrews 12:1-2.

- “...let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us...”  
When the ancient runners would practice their event, they would strap heavy weights around their waist to make them more resistant to gravity while training. They figured that weight resistance would make them stronger and more apt to run faster when the encumbrance was removed. This phrase dealt with PRACTICING.
- “...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”  
When it came time for the actual day of the race, the athlete would lay aside the weights and head to the starting line. They were ready to compete with all their might for this is what they trained for. They would not settle for second best, for that is not what they came there for. They came to compete! This phrase of the text dealt with COMPETING.
- “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...”  
There was a great reward for those who practiced and competed well. When the Olympian won the race, the joy was tremendous and life-changing. Everywhere and everyone they came into contact with would gladly rejoice with them because of their great feat. This phrase dealt with CELEBRATION.

That is the outline for the three lessons:

1. We are to PRACTICE like Cereal Box Christians.
2. We are to COMPETE like Cereal Box Christians.
3. We are to CELEBRATE like Cereal Box Christians.

We are to Practice like Cereal Box Christians.

- They say that practice makes perfect and to a large extent that is true. Even greater is the concept that the greatest competitors in the world practice the greatest. When we turn on the television and watch an Olympic athlete compete, we are witnessing the results of many months and years of hard training. It is always refreshing when the media does a biography on the athlete prior to the competition. It is always amazing to hear about all the hours of training, heartache, blood, sweat and tears that the athlete goes through. They are Cereal Box athletes because they PRACTICE like they want to be on a Cereal Box!

# Cereal Box Christians

## Doug Hamilton

### God's Cereal Box

- Christians are no different when it comes to making sure that we are on God's Cereal Box. We need to be putting in long hours of practice for good service and healthy spiritual living for the Master. It is time to put on the Christian running shoes and run a few miles around the track. How you practice will determine your spiritual conditioning.

1 John 3:7-9 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;<sup>8</sup> the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.<sup>9</sup> No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

- John was reminding the Christians of his day to not be deceived. There are two types of “practices” that people choose to enter into, righteousness and sin. Depending on how we choose will be the primary indicator with how we will end up on the Day of Judgment. If we practice righteousness, then we can expect to be in heaven. On the otherhand concerning evil, as Paul would say in Romans 1:32 “...*that those who practice such things are worthy of death...*”
- John clarified that the Christian, the one that died to his sins through Jesus, does not have the option to PRACTICE sin, because he is in Jesus' gymnasium. The rules there are simple...DO NOT PRACTICE SIN! It is in JESUS FITNESS that we are working out toward maturity for the kingdom. As Paul would confirm in *Philippians 4:9* *The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* When we fail to do so it is to our detriment.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.<sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- The Hebrew writer was reminding those Christians that they should be mature teachers by now, but have failed to grow in their knowledge and walk. Like a newborn babe, these Christians cannot eat a steak, but are relegated to mother's milk of dependence. It is through PRACTICE that the Christians become mature and able to tell right from wrong.
- We as Christians must make sure that we are practicing righteousness by living a godly life for Jesus Christ. What does a Jesus workout look like? It looks like Him.

### Practice is Hard!

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:25 (NIV) “*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training...*” An athlete that was to compete in the games of the first century had to literally take an

## Cereal Box Christians

Doug Hamilton

oath that they were going to practice at least ten months leading into the games. It was only fair to the respected fans and Caesar to train so as to bring the best out of them.

In like manner, we must strive hard in practice to be fair to the loyal saints and our Caesar which is God. Our training for Christianity is also difficult but even more rewarding in the end. As Paul would say concerning athletic training in 1 Timothy 4:8-9 (KJV) *For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* <sup>9</sup> *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.*

2 Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

How have you been practicing lately? Do you have a big upcoming competition in the world? Start your training for your destination on God's cereal box by practicing hard today. Make sure you are on God's cereal box.

### Suggestions: A Good Spiritual Workout

Training Day 1: One Day of Fasting

Training Day 2: One Letter of Encouragement

Training Day 3: One Hour of Personal Bible Study

Training Day 4: One hour of Christian Fellowship

Training Day 5: One Hour of Outreach

Training Day 6: One Hour of Prayer

Training Day 7: One Hour of Worship

