

## UMC CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### I Corinthians 9:24-27

Who remembers where you were on September 11, 2001? Most of us will never forget. What about September 13, 2001? I usually have two or three who raise their hands. I recall both days with absolute clarity, for very different reasons.

As a college football analyst for ESPN, I was scheduled to participate in the broadcast of a game each week. On this day I was driving from our North Carolina home to Birmingham, Alabama to call the Alabama vs. Southern Mississippi game. ESPN had wisely decided not to put any of its staff on airplanes that week. The NCAA was holding emergency meetings to decide whether or not to hold the games at all.

Needless to say, it was a time of extreme tension, pain, and fear. No one knew what would happen next.

I stopped for gas in Attalla, Alabama, and was greeted by a nice attendant. Since I had coached in his state he recognized me, and could not wait to ask whether or not I thought we would play the games. I told him he might be the first fan in America to find out since we had been told to keep our cellphones handy for a call after the NCAA vote. Sure enough, my phone rang, I answered, and was told to go home, that the games were called off.

I walked back to the nice man and told him what the decision had been-I shall never forget his response. The veins in his neck stood out, he leaned forward into my face, and he said with utter conviction, "Well, let me tell you something Coach. Come Friday night in Attalla, we are going to play football, cause it means a lot to us!"

As I drove home, I could not shake that guy's words or resolve. The mind game became a spiritual exercise. Why football in Attalla? Or Bangor, Me., or College Park, Ga., or Santa Fe, NM, or anywhere? Why did a teenager's game matter so much? It gradually dawned in God's good time-the Huddle...it is the Huddle that is emblematic of all we can be when we try.

In the United States the football huddle is the one place there can be no racism, no sexism, no illogical hatred. Football is the only sport in which every player

needs every teammate on every play just to survive. Children who have been raised in our sick culture to hate each other become brothers in the Huddle. That is supposed to happen in the church, and sometimes it does. *It always happens in the football huddle. After awhile it dawns on us that sweat smells the same on everyone, and that we need each other on every single play.* It even spreads to the stands, where the most unlikely hugs occur when someone's child scores a touchdown.

Could we form a huddle here today? What would Jesus want? What would John Wesley want?

We're going to give it our best shot!

Bill Curry

July 15, 2017