

Me

World cup monologue.

*All lights out except for spotlight on centre stage for England world cup monologue.*

Its that time again. The ticking I hear in my head. The anxiety I feel in my bones. The hope building up in my heart. Will this be our year. Is football coming home?

My pacing grows quicker. My heart beats faster. The World Cup is once again upon us. The upsets have already started pouring in. Germany, Spain, Argentina, champions challenged, their thrones overturned. The tears of their fans face, the broken hearts around the stadium. A voice inside me asks, "will we be next?" I thought I was watching football but instead it feels like an execution. As team after team, face up to do battle. To be the best. To stand out from all the rest.

Now finally it's our turn, our chance, our opportunity to make our mark. As the lads walk out the tunnel, 3 lions etched on their heart.

Now normally I support united, the greatest manchester has to offer. But today I down my loyaltys to club to support out national charge.

Captain Harry Kane or Hurrikane to the fans. Raheem Sterling, Dele Ali and Pickford between the posts.

This is my team tonight and the game is away. Tunisia looks ready. Who will triumph today?

We score first, a beauty! Did you see how he swung it in?!

But then they go and equalise. With a penalty. A penalty. It wasn't even a penalty. The Injustice, the pain, the anger boiling inside.

And then there's just fear. Is this it? Have we failed again?

The minutes keep in ticking. I can barely watch.

We finally get to half time but no change, no breakthrough.

Second half starts. We go again.

But 60 minutes later. Still nothing

70 minutes later. Still nothing

80 minutes later. Still nothing.

I've already lashed out in anger. The bruise on Sam remains.

I've shouted all I can. Can't they hear my great instructions?

90 minutes up. The score is still locked.

95 minutes up. The games now rounding up.

Surely it's over. That must be it. After 90 minutes of fighting. I think it's time to call it quits.

But no. The boys in red keep fighting. Determination in their eyes.

And finally it happens. The ball is in the sky. From a corner, kicked in by Trippier. And it bounce on Maquire's head. And it fall in front of Captain Kane. And the HurriKane does what he does best!

-Video of celebrations after goal to end monologue and change the mood-

Anyone else share the emotions that I had for England's world cup opener?! After a great start England found themselves locked in a draw that carried right through until the end of the game. It was only in the first minute of injury time that England managed to break the deadlock and wine the game. The world cup is always been filled with great talent, but great talent by itself is not enough for team to win. Talent surely helps but unless you are able to keep fighting throughout the whole game, you are never going to do that well. As I watched England play, I thought there are so many times that that they could have given up. The

frustration at not being ahead, the anger at the bad calls the referee made. But can you imagine if one of the players just decided that enough was enough and they were going to just head home. England won the game because they were willing to keep fighting right until the end.

Now maybe you don't share the same emotion about England's first game with me! But I'm sure that you have been in a place where you have felt like giving up before the end. A situation that gets to a stage where it feel like it's just not worth it.

WE

Sometimes it feels like we live in a society where people are too willing to take the easy way out. To give up before the end. I think part of the reason for this is sometimes we value comfort as one of the most important criteria for a good life. The problem is a comfortable life rarely sets you up for greatness. A comfortable life can very easily mean we lower our target for what we could achieve. But a characteristic that makes people stand out is often a person's ability to persevere and to keep on going right to end.

And I don't just mean 'failed new year resolutions' or 'diets lasting 2 days' situations.

But what about situations like when we have conflict with friends. Whether its a disagreement, offence or a falling out, is our first move to leave that friendship behind and go find new ones?

How about in a relationship whether it's just dating or even in marriage? Are we willing to keep fighting or is it just easier to break up.

What about at work? When challenged are we willing to rise up or are we content to just remain where we are.

When we fail, does that mean it's time to find a different challenge or are we willing to stay put, make it right and find a way to make up for where we missed the mark?

It can happen in Church to. We can be fired up about Church, passionate about the mission, ready to do everything we can, until a few years in when we start the question why we wake up early on a sunday, why we sacrifice our time when we could be at home relaxing in front of the tv, when we tithe but could really use that money for another shopping spree.

How do we respond when things are heating up around us? Are we able to keep on going? To go the distance? When the going gets tough, the tough gets going. But is it going for the exit or is it going to stay strong and fight?

The reality is, the ones that really stand out are the ones that are willing to persevere until the end. The people who stay committed to their cause, to their belief, who choose to follow their path that is before them.

William Wilberforce was one of the key figures that helped force parliament to pass legislation in 1833 that saw the abolishment of slavery and freedom of all slaves within the British Empire.

Wilberforce submitted his first motion in 1791 and fought every single year for 42 years until the motion was passed. Wilberforce received word that he has succeeded only 3 days before he died, yet what he had fought all those years for had finally changed a system.

What he had fought for had given freedom to million of slaves and had changed the outcome for generations

It is people like these that are willing to stay strong in the face of resistance, the ones who don't give up, that really make their mark on this world. These are the people that stand out.

## GOD

Theres also a powerful example of this in the Bible.

In this series we have already looked at Daniel, a Jewish boy torn away from his homeland after it was captured by Babylon. After being taken to the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar's court, Daniel was assimilated into the local culture which meant studying about gods he didn't serve and witchcraft that was against the values that he had been brought up with. Yet despite the cultural clash and the internal conflicts I'm sure he dealt with, he manages to enter the kings service and is described as being 10 times better than all the rest.

Daniel manages to hold King Nebuchadnezzar's confidence and trust right until the the King goes crazy by the hand of God and ends up out in the fields eating grass. Through Daniels time by the Kings side, Nebuchadnezzar even gets to a place where he worships God.

Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar eventually succeeds the throne and once again, faced with a crisis that he can't explain, he summons Daniel and this episode ends with Daniel once again being promoted, this time to third most powerful in the kingdom.

Poor Daniel though, as his new position doesn't last long. Later that very night, Babylon is invaded and Belshazzar is overthrown. Now Darius the Mede comes to power. Yet for some reason, Darius decides to keep Daniel in power even though he was a prominent official under the last 2 kings that were ultimately, Darius' enemies.

Daniels position carries over to Cyrus, the next king. But at every one of these stages, Daniel is of influence and at every stage he manages to turn the kings attention to God. Cyrus is the last king that the book of Daniel accounts but Cyrus was known to the Jews for one very important thing. Cyrus was in fact the king that ended the Jews exile, granted them freedom to return home and authority to rebuild their temple and city.

In Ezra this is accounted

Ezra 1

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

2 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. 4 And in any locality where

survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

This is an incredible change for the Jewish population because now they are free to return home. But Cyrus' proclamation is quite strange because he is giving praise and acknowledgement to God. Cyrus was acknowledging the Jewish God over his own cultural gods and Zoroastrian beliefs. I want to suggest to you that this influence had come from someone that held the king's ear and had retained influence within the empire for many years. Daniel had been the living advert for God throughout his existence in the court and would have been the most obvious source of information about the Jewish God to this heathen King. This influencer, Daniel!

Daniel was faced with death threats, situations that would compromise his morals and multiple dangerous situations through his life. Yet Daniel managed to keep on going throughout, remaining a key advisor to every king and affecting an entire empire. There were multiple opportunities for Daniel to have quit. He could have given up following what he believed in and decided to just sit back and live a comfortable life instead.

And maybe you are not thinking of finding a king of an invading nation to influence but how do we ensure that we are able to become and influence and remain an influence throughout our lives, our careers and amongst our loved ones?

In Hebrews 12 it says

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

As Christians, our lives are the most visible and effective adverts for Christianity. People in your workplaces, or schools, or homes, that do not know Jesus are more likely to be impacted by your life - what you do and don't do, how you choose to live your everyday, - than from what they hear about in Church. In fact many of the people that we do life with will never actually step through those doors and that's why the writer to the Hebrews starts by reminding us that people are watching. Our life is an example. How we live is an advert for Jesus. Which means we need to make sure that our lives are saying the right thing. Brennan Manning said "the greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable. If we are truly to stand out in today's society and go the distance then we need to make sure that our lives are in line with how Jesus taught us they should be.

There is a great word that doesn't really get used much anymore - Fidelity. The Oxford dictionary's definition of fidelity is 'faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support.'

Faithfulness demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support. Fidelity is faithfulness that has already been demonstrated, that has already been shown and played out in the past but at the same time it is a faithfulness that is ongoing. This is a quality that is necessary to stand out!

Prayer

Power of God.

And if we want to know how we can be committed to a cause for so long, then I thought it would be worth hearing from someone who has been there and done that. In marriage and ministry, our pastor, has been a source of influence to the church and society around him.

Invite Ps Tom to stage for YOU

Hebrews 13:7-8 (MSG) Appreciate your pastoral leaders who gave you the Word of God. Take a good look at the way they live, and let their faithfulness instruct you, as well as their truthfulness. There should be a consistency that runs through us all. For Jesus doesn't change—yesterday, today, tomorrow, he's always totally himself.

<INTERVIEW WITH TOM>

eg.

How have you managed to keep going for so long?

What is the most important point to pushing through.

Since you are experienced, capable leader, why have you decided to stay in ministry for so long?

Everyone feels like giving up, yet you somehow keep going. How do you manage that?

In Daniels life, we keep seeing God's favour and his intervention to help Daniel influence his situation. From your experience, have you seen God intervene in your life, situation, marriage, etc.

US

The ones that make a difference are the ones that hang on the longest. The ones that stand out are the ones that stand firm through it all. If we are to really stand out from the rest of the people in our world, we need to be willing to keep fighting, to keep persevering right until the end. When the world looks for a comfortable option, for an easy out, we need to be ready to show that we can push through until we see the result. It is this faithfulness, this commitment, this fidelity to our beliefs, an unwillingness to give up on the ones we love, a decision to keep on fighting right up until the end that will see us hold influence in our spheres. It's a heart to

withstand the situations and challenges over time that will cause the world to stop and take notice. It is this character of dedication that will make us stand out.