

## LIFE and the Bible

Love.Inspiration.Faith.Eternity



Pastor Jonathan Watson

### Jesse Owens – 1936 Olympics

Striving to achieve Christ-like character is an important part of being a Christian. Most of us need to work very hard at accomplishing that goal and to others it seems to come almost naturally. Perhaps that is the way it was for Luz Long, an Olympic athlete during the 1930's.

Jesse Owens seemed sure to win the long jump at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. He was the record holder for the running broad jump with at 26 feet 8 ¼ inches, a jump that most experts thought seemed certain to capture the Gold Medal. But as he walked to the long jump pit Owens saw a German taking practice jumps in the 26-foot range. He was aware of the racial tension created by his presence at the Olympics and also realized the Nazi's desire to prove their racial superiority by winning more medals than America.

Because of the pressure Owens inadvertently leaped from several inches beyond the takeoff board on his first two jumps. Consequently, he was only one foul away from being eliminated. As Owens was about to position himself for his third and final jump the tall German approached him and introduced himself as Luz Long. Since the qualifying distance was only 23 feet 5 ½ inches, Long suggested making a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jumping from there just to play it safe.

Amazing! This model of Germany's strength was providing technical assistance and words of encouragement to a foe during a competition when winning meant more to him and his country than any other. Owens qualified easily, in fact during the finals; he set an Olympic record and earned the second of the four gold medals he won during the 1936 Olympics. Owens later wrote, "*You could melt down all the medals and cups I have won and they wouldn't be plating on the 24-karat friendship I felt for Luz Long.*" Luz Long demonstrated the power of an encouraging word and reflected an admirable character trait!

It is all too seldom that we see encouragement and loyalty like that of Luz Long demonstrated as part of a life experience, but we can find many examples in the Bible. The book of Ruth is a story worth reading as an inspiration of encouragement and loyalty. She was a young virtuous Moabite woman of devout faith who became the great-grandmother of Israel's King David.

Naomi, who was Ruth's mother-in-law, had lost her husband and both of her sons, was experiencing great adversity and thought the Lord had forsaken her. She was headed for Bethlehem to seek help but did not want to burden Ruth by having her leave her homeland where she would have a better opportunity for remarriage. Ruth's famous response was, "*Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.*"

Both Ruth and Luz Long are examples of Christ-like character that demonstrates how we can show the love for each other that God calls us to. God will help you if you just let Him. God bless you and have a great day.