

RALF SANTIAGO | Stories of HOPE

Fight the Good Fight of Faith

The apostle Paul coached young Timothy that he was here for a greater purpose than to just mind the things of this world. His life was a state of warfare as he took on the role of a spiritual fighter, and was not to entangle himself with the things of this life (2 Timothy 2:4) but to occupy himself with a godly vision and worthy mission. It was referred to as fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).

In 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, Paul said, “So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” The apostle understood the importance of faith, focus, training, and spiritual disciplines in the daily life of a Christ follower.

From Queens, New York, Ralf Santiago was introduced to boxing at 9-years old when his father wanted to protect him from being a target of gangs and other pitfalls for local youths. In 2003, Ralf met martial arts legend, Shidoshi Nathan Ingram, who trained and mentored him and eventually hired him as an assistant trainer. After graduating from Nyack College in New York, he worked with the New York Board of Education and one of his boxing mentors to start the DAS Boxing Center in downtown Manhattan. Later, connections with Lee University led him to Cleveland, Tennessee, where he opened Five Point Boxing.

Ralf’s passion is to give back to a diverse community combining his two loves of helping troubled children and teaching authentic boxing. He trains youngsters, teenagers—even adults—who have never boxed, and introduces them to challenging authentic boxing training. In this “Stories of HOPE” episode, coach Ralf shares his personal testimony of “fighting the good fight of faith.”

Discussion Questions

1. Ralf used the word “war” to describe his upbringing? In what ways can you relate to his story?
2. Ralf was exposed to drugs, street life, and criminal activity early on in his childhood, but spoke affectionately about how his mother constantly “fought” to influence him with the Gospel. Have you had anyone like that in your life?
3. In what ways has the Gospel proven to be more powerful than the negative things you grew up around?
4. Like Ralf, perhaps you have tried to prove yourself to others in different ways. For him, that process led to fear. What has trying to prove yourself to

others produced in you at times?

5. After getting involved with illegal drug activity, which nearly cost him his life, Ralf had an epiphany about the value of his life. “Am I just worth \$350?” What comes to mind when you think about the value of your life? How do you measure the worth of your life?
6. Have you ever prayed a prayer like Ralf prayed? “If you save me from this, I will stop living like this and I’ll try to do better.” Did that yield anything fruitful in your life?
7. Ralf’s journey from street life to new life in Christ and serving in ministry leadership was a step-by-step process that he described as an orchestrated “mystery.” In what ways has God mysteriously worked in your life through simple steps of faith that you have taken?
8. Speaking about the grace of God, Ralf said, “I didn’t deserve it. I didn’t do anything good to impress God to save me, but He did.” He described it as God taking a bunch of messy “ingredients” and working His “Chef magic” in it all. How would you describe God’s grace in your life?
9. Seeing the “fruit of God’s goodness” is something Ralf has experienced through family, being a husband, a father, a coach, a business owner, and a part of God’s family—the church. Are there fingerprints of God’s goodness in your life that you haven’t necessarily taken time to pause and reflect on?
10. He confessed that he “used to think that anyone dealing with depression was selfish themselves,” but now speaks of depression as a real fight for people with real faith. The way he chooses to fight that battle is by being in community with other believers. Why do you think that is important?
11. “God continues to love me and continues to bring me closer to him even though sometimes I feel so far,” he said. Are you able to have trust in God’s faithfulness even when happy feelings are not present? Explain.
12. Coach Ralf shared that our society has embraced the idea of quitting and starting over, because dealing with the old isn’t worth it. But a life lesson he has learned through the sport of boxing is that if you quit you can’t be a champion. “As a fighter there comes the time when you can get hurt. You feel like you’re tired and you can’t continue anymore,” he said. In what ways has God sustained you in moments of weakness, discouragement, or exhaustion with life?