“Running to Win for Jesus”
1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Running to win for Jesus requires getting into the race and actively running to win (24)

These verses in 1 Corinthians serve as a transition point, bringing together Paul’s self-defense of his ministry in the early part of 1 Corinthians 9 and preparing the Corinthian believers for Paul’s challenge to their faithfulness and commitment to Jesus above all else in 1 Corinthians 10. In 1 Cor. 9:24-27, Paul uses an illustration from athletics, which the Corinthians would have been very familiar with just like us today. The illustration is of a race that’s being run. In a race, there can be many runners, but there will be only one first place winner. There’s only one first place prize. Paul’s point is simple: Run to take hold of the prize! Paul’s not talking about salvation in these verses, he’s talking about living out our lives in Christ. We are all moving towards our final prize in Jesus Christ! We’ve all won the race through faith in Jesus Christ. What Paul is saying is that in this life you have to make sure that you get into the race and actively run to win the race for Jesus in your life! Paul — in the example of his life — is calling believers to not be spectators to God’s work. He’s calling believers to not be casual, easy going runners in the race. Paul is calling believers to live their lives for Jesus with an active intensity to win the race for Jesus! To do this, we have to get into the race, and we have to run to win.

1. Using Paul’s athlete illustration, where are you in the race? Are you a spectator, just running along, or running to win? Explain why.
2. Can you find any other passages in Paul’s other letters that use a similar athletic analogy? Share these passages, and discuss what they all have in common.
3. What do you think it means for you to get into the race?
4. When it comes to your call in Christ, are you running to win? If not, what do you need to do to get there in your commitment?

Running to win for Jesus requires giving up the things that hold us back from running to win (25)

Paul had just finished talking about how he was willing to forfeit things in his life that he had a right to have in order to accomplish greater things for Jesus Christ. Paul could have received support from the church in Corinth, but he didn’t because in that context he felt it may hinder some from coming to Christ. Paul could have exercised his freedom in Christ to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but he didn’t because he knew that it might cause someone weaker in their faith to stumble and fall. Paul was willing to let go of things in his life — even things that he may have deserved in life — in order to make sure that he wasn’t held back from running to win for Jesus in his life. Just like an athlete goes into training and must exercise self-control in order to avoid food and activities that could damage his/ her ability to compete, Paul reminds the believers that they have to do the same thing in their lives if they want to truly compete to win for Jesus. God’s Word is the same for us today! We have to be willing to give up the things that may hold us back from running to win for Jesus in our lives.
1. Are there things in your life that are holding you back from running to win for Jesus? If so, what?
2. What would it take for you to give up the things in your life that are holding you back?
3. Make a list of all of the things that are identified in your group. Take the list and tear it up, and take time as a group to pray that God would destroy and tear out things from your lives that are holding you back from running to win for Jesus.

Running to win for Jesus requires a purposeful strategy to win the race (26)

Paul makes an incredibly important point in the application in his life of the illustration of the athlete training to win the race, which is that he’s training with purpose rather than without purpose. Paul says that he’s not just running around aimlessly or punching uselessly into the air. Paul is running and punching — training — in a very purposeful and strategic way. He’s not wasting energy on things that don’t prepare him for the race that he’s running. He’s not training haphazardly, hoping that somehow what he’s doing will help him win the race that he wants to win. Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers of the simple fact that effective training requires focused purpose. Paul is stating the obvious in that effective training to win the race requires a strategic training plan that will hopefully develop the skills needed to win. The implication is clear: If we want to run to win for Jesus in our lives, we need a purposeful strategy for training to win the race. Paul focused on the things in his life that would develop the skills he needed to run the race that Christ had called him to. We have to do the same today! We desperately need a purposeful strategy to win the race that Jesus has laid out for each of us.

1. Hopefully, you’ve identified what it means to get into the race set before you. Hopefully, you’ve identified the things that need to get out of the way so that you can run to win. Now, take a minute to identify the things that you need in your life to run to win for Jesus.
2. Allow each person in the group to make their own list of two or three things that they need to run to win. Now take a few minutes to share your lists and to brainstorm as a group on strategies that will help you be purposeful in training to win in these areas in your life.
3. Commit to develop your own purposeful strategy for training to run to win for Jesus in your life.

Running to win for Jesus requires discipline to be faithful to continue in the race (27)

Having a purposeful strategy for training to win the race is important, but more than just the plan is needed. Paul points to this in the final verse in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 when he says that he disciplines his body. Literally, Paul talks about punching himself in the face! Why? So that he won’t be disqualified from the race! Paul realizes that the greatest training plan in the world is only as good as the discipline of the person being trained. If an athlete has a perfect training plan, but he/she fails to stick to it, then what good is the plan? In the end, a training plan won’t have a chance of accomplishing the desired results unless the person being trained sticks to the plan. For Paul, he wasn’t talking about physically beating himself, but he was talking about knocking out anything in his life that would keep him from being disciplined in running to win for Jesus in his life. For Paul, he wasn’t talking about losing his salvation by being disqualified, he was talking about losing his place and his purpose in running to win the race for Jesus in his life. It’s the same for you and for me today! We must be disciplined to be faithful to continue in the race.

1. How would you describe your level of discipline when it comes to commitment in your faith?
2. What are things that tend to distract you or negatively affect discipline in your life?
3. What are things that help you stay disciplined in your life?
4. Have you ever seen a believer say or do something that immediately destroyed their witness? One word or one action is all that it takes. Examine your life this week. Identify and discipline yourself to stay faithful to continue in the race to win for Jesus.