The Purpose Driven Life

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

March 22, 2026

Well, it was a joy to be able to open the Word of God with you all this morning. We're going to be in the book of 1 Corinthians, so if you want to turn there now, please do so. But by way of introduction, I want to start just with a little bit of cultural context. We all, as Americans and really as most the citizens of the world, we're familiar with the Olympic Games. Many of you might have even watched a bit of the Winter Olympics last month, but we're going to be in the book of Corinthians this morning and the Corinthian church was also familiar with a similar set of games called the Isthmian Games and these Isthmian Games, they were at times held in Isthmia, which it was just a few miles away from Corinth, but they were also sometimes held at Corinth itself.

Every other year in the springtime, people would come from all over Greece to participate in these Isthmian Games. The Isthmian Games, they were second only to the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia, really only 115 miles West of

Corinth, still very near to Corinth. These ancient games, they had familiar events, events that we would be somewhat familiar with, at least in like kind.

They had the Stadion, which is the oldest and most prestigious event. It was a sprint race covering a distance of approximately 200 meters. Then there was the Diaulos, it was a double stadion race requiring athletes to run one length of the stadion and then turn around and go back the other direction. Then there was the Dolichos. It was a long distance race, varying in length, typically covering either seven, somewhere anywhere between 7 and 24 laps of the stadion. So around anywhere in between a kilometer and five kilometers.

There's also wrestling, which is a bit different than the wrestling we know today. It was a combat sport, in which athletes, they weren't wrestling around on the ground. They were attempting to throw their opponent to the ground, and the first person to throw their opponent to the ground three times was the one who won.

There's boxing. There was another event called the Pankration. It was a combination of wrestling and boxing really, probably what we think of when we think of MMA fighting, mixed martial arts, striking, kicking, choking, headlocks, joint

locks, those were all legal, but it was considered the most demanding and dangerous event there. I read of one instance where someone was disqualified because they put their opponent in an illegal, an illegal lock and move in which he killed his opponent. He was disqualified from the games. Most dangerous event might cost you your life.

Then there was the Pentathlon, a five-event competition consisting of the stadion race, a long jump, a discus throw, a javelin throw, and then wrestling. The winner was determined by his overall performance rather than individual event victories. So athletes who wanted to participate in these games that would happen every other year in Isthmia, they would have to commit to a ten-month training period.

There was a strict philosophy for training these athletes, Greek athletes. They followed a rigorous training regimen which emphasized not just physical discipline but self-control and the pursuit of excellence in all things. There was the concept of *arete* or virtue and it was central to this athletic training, with athletes striving to develop both physical prowess but also moral character. There were coaches called *Pidotrabai* and they played a crucial role in guiding athletes through their physical and mental development. These athletes, they were encouraged to

push themselves to their limits, to embrace the concept of ponos or toil as a means of achieving greatness. Things could, we have similar sayings like no pain, no gain or whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger. They were they adopted this as kind of a a mindset.

Mental preparation was considered equally important to physical training, with athletes learning to control their emotions, maintaining focus under pressure. And then there was the principle of *kalos kagathos*, or the ideal of a well-rounded individual, that emphasized the importance of balancing athletic pursuits with intellectual development and even artistic development.

All of those things trying to develop the person, not just the physical domination, but they're, these training, required training techniques and these included, we're familiar with some of these: weightlifting, rope climbing, resistance training. They would tie sandbags to different limbs and go about life with them, to train, build muscle. They would do cardio running long distances, but they would do it in the full battle armor, that they would go into battle with. They would do polymetric exercises such as bounding and jumping to increase their explosive power and agility. Wrestlers and the pankratists

practice grappling techniques, holds and throws, training people to be more vicious.

They would train with punching bags filled with fig seeds. Boxers honed their striking skills sparring with partners using punching bags as well. They also, and to increase their flexibility and mobility, they participated in exercises and activities like dancing and gymnastics. If you're wondering why men do gymnastics today, it used to be a part of what they did, but that wasn't the point of the competition, just increase their flexibility and mobility.

Athletes also engaged in sport specific drills, practicing their starts to their races, their footwork for long jump, discus, javelin, all the intricate fundamentals of every footstep. They practiced all their footwork for these events and, for instance, there there was greater penalties for them then there are nowadays; for sports nowadays, you get a a red card or a penalty flag, if you have a foul.

Back then if you were racing and you jumped off the blocks to start with, the referee would whip you or hit you with a stick. So a little bit more of a a pain for them. These athletes, they would train at what they called the gymnasium. It would also, this gymnasium, would have lecture halls and

libraries attached to them to encourage their mental development, their education, on top of their physical improvement. They'd have hot and cold baths to promote muscle recovery.

The running track would be located close by to the gymnasium and these gymnasiums were often affiliated with and sometimes the same location as religious sanctuaries. And this highlighted the sacred nature of athletic training and competition. It was sacred to them. The Isthmian Games were held, in part, in the Temple of Poseidon. That's where many of them would train. But when you entered into this ten-month training period, as many of you probably know, you've trained yourself, you can't just eat whatever you want.

Greek athletes, they followed a carefully regulated diet designed to optimize performance, overall health. These, for these Greek athletes, their traditional diet was based on simple natural foods such as bread, cheese, figs, and meat; protein was emphasized. Athletes consuming large quantities of meat. They didn't have protein shakes like we do. It's just a lot of meat, meat, meat. And some athletes followed specialized diets based on their specific needs and preferences.

There's a legendary wrestler named Milo of Croton who reportedly consumed nine kilograms, that is twenty pounds of meat a day; twenty pounds of meat a day, twenty pounds of bread a day, and 2.25 gallons of wine a day is reportedly what this guy would eat every day. So for ten months they would set aside for training. They would subject themselves to rigorous training for ten months. Why would an individual subject themselves to this kind of rigorous training regiment? Well it was all for the prize!

For them, success in athletic competitions was seen as a reflection of an individual's character. There was a source of great pride for themselves and their entire family, and really the city, state that they came from. Victorious athletes, they were celebrated as heroes. They were welcomed home as heroes. Statues were erected in honor of them, songs composed to commemorate their achievements. The city of Athens would even reward their winners with about a year's worth of wages.

So why'd they do it? They did it for the money, the notoriety, the fame. They wanted to be remembered. They wanted to be somebody. They wanted to stand on the podium and have everyone cheer for them. They wanted to go back home and be welcomed as a hero. They wanted to be somebody that all the kids

in their hometown would idolize, talked about for years to come, maybe even get a bronze statue, of, in the center of the temple in their hometown. They did it to be immortalized in the annals of history. They made these great sacrifices, as we know many people today do in sports. They make these great sacrifices on the slim hopes of being the best in the world, at least for that year. But they made the sacrifice for the prize.

All of this was deeply ingrained in the Corinthian culture. These athletes would be training at the gymnasium in Corinth, right there in their city, nearly all year long, every other year. It was part of life in Corinth. And for the people in the church at Corinth, this formerly had been their life. This formerly had been their religion. They knew it well. And so all of this informs what Paul writes to the Corinthian church in the text that we're going to look at this morning.

So if you're not there already, go to 1 Corinthians Chapter 9 and we're going to read verses 24 through 27. But in the previous chapter, chapter 8, Paul instructed the Corinthian church regarding how to use their Christian freedom, their liberty and then in Chapter 9, he speaks of how he uses his freedom, as really even his rights as an apostle, giving those things up. And in verse 23, we see the purpose that drives all

of this, that drives Paul's life, his thinking in ministry. If you look at verse 23, Paul says, "So I do all things for the sake of the gospel so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

So why did Paul make himself a slave to others working overtime? This is in the context of he reminds the Corinthians that he worked as a tent maker. He didn't take any salary from the church. He supported himself while he was there. Why did he make him a slave to others, work overtime, not take any money for into the Corinthian church? Why did he give up his rights as an apostle? It was for the sake of the gospel, to promote the gospel, to win more to Christ.

Paul then seeks to exhort the Corinthians to join him in this purpose and that's what we're going to study today. Let's read verses 24 to 27, our text for this morning. Paul says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Now everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. Therefore, I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air, but I

discipline my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

So in this passage, Paul is exhorting the Corinthians. He's exhorting us to join him in a purpose driven life of gospel ministry. Just as those Isthmian and Olympic victors lived a purpose driven life of personal glory, Paul wants us to live a life of purpose as well, but for the glory of God and the gospel. So we'll be exhorted to follow Paul in his example in this passage with three points for our outline this morning, the command, the means, and the pattern.

So three points for our outline, the command, the means, and the pattern. We'll start first with the command. And if you want to add a colon at the end of that, the command colon, run to win, run to win. Paul says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win." Paul starts off with this rhetorical question that really nobody would be confused about. They all knew that only one person receives the prize. They weren't confused about that. I think people are confused about that today.

I was just driving by a church yesterday, one of those that's not really a church, it's a false church. But they've got

their signs and they've always got terrible messages on their signs. At least this one wasn't blasphemous, it was just absurd. But it said when everybody is included, everybody wins and that's quite frankly absurd. When everybody's standing on the podium, nobody wins. The Corinthians weren't confused about that. They all knew only one person gets the prize.

This word for prize is only used here and one other place in Scripture, and that's in Philippians 3:14. We're going to look at that in a moment. But outside of Scripture, this word is used really to refer to all the spoils of the victor, which included fixed money prizes, material things, oil, barley, shields as gifts of deity, a crown. Sometimes it was the crown of foliage, sometimes it was gold crowns, money that accompanied them as they went back to their hometown.

They'd often receive special rights and privileges in their hometown. But this word for prize refers to all of that. Only one person gets all that. Only one person gets the statue when they return home. Only one person gets the parade, the acclaim. They know that, Paul knows they know that, and he exhorts them. He, he reminds them of that known reality and he exhorts them and says, So run in order to win that. So run in order that you might win.

Many times in the Scripture, the Christian life is likened to a race. The author of Hebrews does, has a similar passage in Hebrews chapter 12. The race here is the Christian life, and Paul tells them to run. This word, run, is a present imperative and an imperative, when it's in the present, the imperative mood has the force of commanding an action as an ongoing process. So run and keep on running, Paul says, in order that you might actually win. Only one person gets the prize. So run to win.

Paul is trying to motivate the Corinthian church with the prizes that they would have been readily familiar with, and he exhorts them. But he doesn't just say run as hard as you can, don't stop, run, run, run, but he says run to the prize. There's nothing wrong with looking at the prize as a Christian and running after that. So the Corinthians would have been familiar with what the prizes were for these athletes, but what is the prize that Paul has in mind that he wants the Corinthians to focus on winning?

We'll flip over to Philippians chapter 3, that I mentioned just a few moments ago. Philippians chapter 3, Paul talks about in chapter 3, putting no confidence in the flesh. He counts all things as lost because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ, one day obtaining glorification, perfection. We're going

to pick it up in verse 12. It's in verse 14 where this same word prize is used, but we're going to pick it up in verse 12 and we're going to read through verse 21, just for the context.

But Paul says, and speaking of glorification and perfection, he says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not consider myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way; and if anything you think differently, God will reveal also to you.

"However, let us keep walking in step with the same standard to which we have obtained. Brothers, join in following my example, and look for those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk- of whom I often told you, and now tell you even crying- as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their stomach and glory is in their shame, who set their thoughts on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of

our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by His working through which He is able even to subject all things to Himself."

Paul doesn't use the analogy of a race here, but we can see many similar parallel themes. He talks about pressing on towards what is ahead, pressing on towards the goal. He talks about his own example there, like he does in our passage. He talks about how those who give themselves to self-indulgence and fleshly appetites, who chase after the things of the world, they are enemies of the cross. But for those who follow Paul's example, we know, that includes us, that we will also have our bodies transformed in glory through resurrection and obtain perfection that he mentioned previously to this.

So the ultimate goal is eternal life, resurrection from the dead, new bodies, life with Christ. That's, that's our ultimate prize, entering into his eternal blessedness. But I also think Paul has a bit more in mind in Corinthians. And we also see a hint here in Philippians at the beginning of chapter 4, verse 1, he calls the Philippians, my joy and crown, says, "Therefore my beloved brothers, loved and longed for, my joy and crown." The crown was a symbol of the victory, which Paul

mentions in Corinthians 9:25 that we're going to get to. It was a part of the reward. It was a part of the prize.

You can go back to Corinthians now, but Paul, he calls the Philippians his joy and crown. They were a part of his reward, a part of his prize. He preached the gospel to them. They repented and believed. They were a part of his prize as well. We see similar language in 1 Corinthians Chapter 9 here, that Paul has the fruit of gospel ministry in mind as a part of the prize, the fruit of the sacrifice of giving up freedoms, that fruit is a part of the prize and the reward.

If you're there in 1 Corinthians 9, go back up to verse 18. Paul says, "What then is my reward? That, when I proclaim the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my authority in the gospel. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more." That word for win is a, is a literally the word for, gain. He's gaining them into the fellowship of the gospel, which is part of his reward. He's winning them, but he says I, "I do this in order to win more.

"And to the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law, as under the law," through, "though not being myself under the Law, so that I might

win those who are under the Law. To those who are without the law, as without the law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. So I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

Paul gave up his freedoms as an apostle, as a Christian, in order to win more people to the gospel, more Jews, more Gentiles, whoever it was. Paul gives up his freedoms to win and to gain more for the gospel, to increase his own reward. And part of his reward is those who have been won or gained to become fellow partakers with him in Christ in the gospel. So running to win, it's not just about ourselves and our own reward, though it is, but it is in part a reward, as winning others to the gospel to join us in this race that we are running. The joy and the reward of seeing others set free from slavery to sin, renouncing the world and running after Christ with us, that is a great reward in and of itself, is it not? The joy of seeing people set free from sin, pursuing Christ.

All of those things are in mind. It encapsulates the entirety of the prize, eternal, and temporal. So beloved, let us

set our eyes on this prize. Christ is building his church. Let's take hold of our reward by participating in that building, in evangelism, in discipleship. Let's find our joy and reward in the salvation and sanctification of others, ourselves and others, as we proclaim the gospel. And when the fullness of God's chosen people have been reached, he will return to take us home. We will have our glorification. We will enter into eternal blessedness with him, but in the meantime, let us keep our eyes on that prize and run to win.

Run to win more. Do you live your life with that prize in mind? Do you run to win? Maybe some of you are here and you haven't even started the race of the Christian faith. You're still living for your own pleasures, your own glory. That's a totally different race. This is the gospel race. Those who've been saved by the gospel, by faith, who are committed to the gospel. Some of you just need to confess your sins, repent, die to yourself, and get in the race.

Others of us, maybe we need to run like we actually want to win. We're running, but we're not running like we want to win. We're taking our leisurely time, enjoying the view, watching others. Maybe we're comparing ourselves to this guy over here and we're going faster than him, so we're happy with that. Some

of us need to be reminded that we don't just need to be running, we need to run to win. Some, maybe, we're running like we want to win, have to remain as Bill mentioned earlier, watchful that we don't go proud and complacent.

Travis mentioned this last week, but it's not about perfection, but it's about progress. Are you making progress in this race of faith? It's not about comparing ourselves to others. We have our own stewardship of the gifts that God has given us. We don't all have the same capacities. We can't look at someone else and compare ourselves to them. God has given us a stewardship with our own talents, our own giftings.

We can't look at ourselves and we can't look at others, compare ourselves to others. We have to look to Christ. We have to let the Spirit inform our own conscience of whether we're running to win or not. But if you have a season of running hard, there is the temptation to grow complacent, to take it easy. Regardless of where you fall on that spectrum, Paul's exhortation here is to run to win. Keep running, keep your eyes on that prize and keep running. But which kind of runner are you?

Are you pursuing gospel priorities, gospel ministry, gospel opportunities like you're chasing a prize like one of those

athletes would; like if the gun went off in the 200 meter race and you had trained for ten months, are you running towards that prize like that? Are you running to win? We can all use times of self-reflection in our life, to assess where we are and the progress that we are making. And that's actually why I picked this passage to preach through. Not because I thought you all needed it, but because I want to grow in my own faithfulness. I spent time assessing my own life and what is common to me, I know is common to you.

I don't want, as Paul articulated here, to be disqualified. I don't want you to be disqualified. I want us to run like we want to win. So, beloved, are you running to win? We have to stop and acknowledge here that if someone has trained for ten months, gone through that rigorous training process, they really don't need the exhortation to run. MacArthur says in his commentary regarding these athletes who'd give up ten months of their lives to train, he notes. And I quote, "No one would train so hard for so long without intending to win." End Quote. And that really leads us into our next point.

If we want to continue to grow in our faithfulness, if we want to run to win, to intend to run to win, what's the key? So we have the command here from Paul run to win. Now he tells us

the means of achieving, achieving that, point two: the means and if you want to put a colon after that, you can add to that self-control is key. So we have the command run to win and the means of achieving, achieving that. Paul says self-control is key.

I think we can all agree with MacArthur that the one who endures a ten-month rigorous training program and he gets to the starting blocks of the race, no one gets there and thinks to himself, you know what, winning is not everything. I'm going to be happy with last place. No, they intend to win. They intend, at least, to give their all. So the key to running like you want to win is to train for it. If you aren't training for it, you aren't going to want to win.

We all know running is not easy, but if we put a lot of effort into the training then the pain of the race and pressing on in the race is worth it, because we've paid for it in training. We don't want all that work to go to waste. Look again with me at verse 25. “Now everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a corruptible crown. But we an incorruptible.” So how do we run to win? Paul makes the observation that everyone who competes, that's the subject of the sentence; everyone who competes, what do they do? They exercise self-control.

Exercising self-control is one word in the Greek. It means to keep one's emotions, impulses, and desires under control. Let's just take a moment and examine what it looks like to keep our emotions, impulses, and desires under control. We'll begin with the emotions. I think John Bunyan's Pilgrim Progress, Pilgrim's Progress helps illustrate the first of these well, exhibiting self-control in our emotions.

There's a point in the Pilgrim's Progress in the book where Christian, he's climbing Difficulty Hill and two other characters, they come running down the hill as he's trying to go up. They come running down the hill and they are screaming and crying out that there's lions up ahead. And they tell Christian that if he doesn't turn around and run with them and flee, then they're going to devour him. They're going to tear him to pieces, if he doesn't turn around and go back with them. And fear begins to grip Christian's heart, but he doesn't turn back.

He exhibits some self-control, and he renews his mind with some truth. He reminds himself of his destination, the Celestial City, that turning back is the way of destruction, and that moving forward is the way of faithfulness that leads to his Lord, to the Celestial City. So he presses through his fears and he keeps walking and even grows more fearful when he approaches

and he sees the lions himself. But he presses on through that emotion of fear and as he gets closer it's revealed that the lions are chained up and if he remains on the narrow path, the lions can't reach him. They're there to test the faith of the would-be travelers, the would-be pilgrims.

False professors turn back at that point and flee back to the city of destruction. To exercise self-control in our emotions means that we control those with truth. We press on past those through some of those fears and we trust God not being driven along by our every emotion, our every fear. For example, give you a real-life example of this, when gospel opportunities come up in your own life and maybe fears arise of how the person is going to react. We've all been there. There's been times in all of our lives, I think, where we've all succumbed to some of those fears and we've kept quiet.

But when gospel opportunities arise, do we like Christian press through those fears or do we turn around and flee? We run to win by not being controlled by our emotions, not being controlled when we feel fearful or we feel like we need a break from running and we feel like the race is too hard, when we feel like we're never going to get to the end, when we feel like we aren't doing good enough, we correct all of those emotions with

truth. We don't give in to them. We don't let them sideline us or distract us or turn us back. We control them. They don't control us.

I just taught the students at YMCA last weekend a whole lesson on this. We control our emotions with the truth of God's Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the help of other believers. But in running to win, we have to control our emotions. If they get the best of us, we're not going to be making progress. So we have to exert self-control in over our emotions. Second, we must exercise self-control when it comes to our impulses.

So I'll distinguish between impulses and desires like this. Impulses come upon you instantaneously. Let me illustrate it this way. I may desire to go to the store and buy a bucket of ice cream, and then when I get that bucket of ice cream, I go to the checkout counter and all of a sudden, I see my favorite candy bar on the rack when I go to check out. So maybe I buy one. Maybe I buy a handful of my favorite candy bar, or I buy one of these and one of these and one of these and one of these.

I planned to go for ice cream, but I ended up impulsively buying a whole bunch of other stuff I didn't need. How does that relate to running to win? Well, we get that if you eat a lot of

ice cream and handfuls of your favorite candy bar, you're probably not going to win any race, right? But let's make the connection to the Christian life. Let's say you get up early in order to make sure that you have time set aside to read your Bible and to pray before you start your day.

But as you sit down with your cup of coffee and you just take a couple sips, you look over and your phone is sitting there. You had gotten up. You had sat down with a desire to read your Bible. But you impulsively pick up your phone and you tell yourself it's only going to be for five minutes. But you end up squandering all that time that you had set aside to spend with the Lord. Those are impulses. Or maybe you impulsively decide to do something that takes time and energy. So then you don't have time and energy to do devotions with your family, to evangelize and disciple your kids and your wife. So we have to exert self-control over our impulses.

We have to tell ourselves no, when those impulses arise. No, I don't need that. That wasn't planned on. There's nothing wrong with candy bars. There's nothing wrong with ice cream. But don't make impulsive decisions. Think about them. Think them through. Keep the goal in mind. Is this thing going to promote gospel faithfulness, be a net neutral effect, or is it going to

hinder my gospel faithfulness? If we're giving in to every impulse, never telling ourself no, our time and our energy and our money is going to be depleted and really affect our ministry negatively.

If we want to run faithfully, we have to control our impulses, not be controlled by them. If we want to run to win, we have to exercise self-control over our emotions, our impulses, and lastly here, our desires. So third, our desires. We have to exert self-control over our desires if we want to run to win, to train ourselves. There's nothing wrong with desiring ice cream and candy bars, going to the store, to buying them. Those are good things that God has given us, that we have the freedom to eat, but we have to exercise self-control in these things.

If, for example, we begin to desire to go to the grocery store to buy a gallon of ice cream every night, or we spend 10% of our budget on candy bars, we might, those desires might be a little bit out of control. Is there something in your life that is a good gift from God for your enjoyment, but it has wrapped its little tentacles around your heart. You have given yourself over to it. Something has gone from that good gift that you enjoy in moderation to an indulgence that you give yourself over

to. It eats up your time, your energy, your money, and it hinders you from running to win. It hinders you from ministry involvement, church participation.

So assess your own life. Are you exercising control over your emotions, or do they get the best of you and you turn back from doing things you know you should? Are you exercising self-control over your impulses or you waste time regularly on things that you impulsively do? Are you exercising self-control over your desires, keeping all of those things in proper order, because you love God and love his people, because you want to grow in faithfulness, because you want to win others to the gospel.

We exhibit self-control in all these things, in order to devote ourselves with greater and greater freedom and zeal. Calvin says, And I quote, "To all the duties of piety." End Quote. All the duties of the Christian life, seeking righteousness in every area, seeking the blessed life as we exert self-control in all these things there, we're just going to have a greater freedom and zeal to obtain them. Do you want to be free to zealously serve God and the gospel? I think the answer for all of us is yes. Do you want to be free to run, to win? Yes.

Paul says exercise self-control over your emotions, your impulses, your desires and as you tell yourself no, as you grow, as you train, then all of those times you told yourself no, are going to encourage you and exhort you and press you on to run for the prize, because you didn't give all those things up for nothing. But then Paul gives an argument from the lesser to the greater.

Look at the end of verse 25, he says, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things," but he says, "They do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." The argument is, if those ancient athletes were willing to sacrifice so many of their freedoms, to deny themselves, to control their impulses and desires, if they were able to do it for a perishable crown made of leaves, which would wilt and decay and wither away in a matter of days, they're willing to do it for that; how much more so should we be willing to deny ourselves our freedoms for an eternal reward, for an incorruptible reward?

Peter describes it this way in 1 Peter 1:3 through 5. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from

the dead, to obtain an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, having been kept in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Paul's comparison is a crown made of greenery. We know that this wasn't the extent of the prize, but Paul brings this up just, just to make his argument. It symbolized the fame and the glory and all the other rewards, but it also symbolized how quickly it dried up and withered away. Even if that athlete was remembered for generations. We don't know who they are. Do you know any famous Olympians or Isthmian Gamians? No.

We give up our rights, we sacrifice in this life, we tell ourselves, no; not for some temporary benefit, but an eternal one. And if men could deny themselves for a quickly fading away award, how much more ought we, be freely willing, to give up our freedoms and our desires to train ourselves to win, to obtain that prize? So we run to win, by yes keeping our eyes on the prize, but by training ourselves by means of self-control.

When we say no to things, we have time and energy and money to say yes to a lot of Christian duties of piety. And Paul, he's not asking us to do anything that he himself is unwilling to do. Which brings us to our final point, the pattern. So we've talked

about the command, run to win, the means, self-control is key, and finally, the pattern here and if you want to put a colon at the end of that, you can put Paul's determination.

Paul's determination; he saved some of his most harsh and strict language to describe his own pattern of life, his own thinking about how to run the race. But look at verses 26 and 27 again with me, Paul says, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

So Paul, he's not giving us an eleventh commandment, so to speak, to beat ourselves into submission. He's giving. He's providing his own example from his life. He commanded them run to win; keep your eyes focused on the prize. But he leaves it to each and every conscience to decide what that looks like. He doesn't burden anyone's conscience with this command: Beat your body. But he gives a pattern of his own life, that we might look to him and learn from him, emulate him.

But he leaves it to the spirit and the conscience to follow his pattern of life to the appropriate degree and as we look at Paul's pattern of life, we, we see three important factors to encourage us to, run to win. So we have three sub-points for

this section: The goal, the method, and the purpose. The goal, the method and the purpose. So the goal, you might add to this a question, what are you aiming at? What are you aiming at?

Verse 26, Paul says, "I run in such a way, as not without aim;" and "I box in such a way, as not beating the air." Imagine with me for a moment that you're watching the Olympics and you are watching a race. Let's just say the 200 meter dash, they're on the blocks, they're ready to go. The gun sounds and all the racers take off towards the goal, the finish line, except one. And there's one poor soul who's lost his mind and he takes off the blocks and he starts meandering around, turning this way, turning that way, turning around the wrong, totally opposite direction. He's totally lost. He has no idea where he's going, but he keeps running really, really hard. That's Paul's idea here of running aimlessly.

Gordon Fee, in his commentary, he notes that, "people who enter races," he says, "of course, do not do such things. Hence the absurdity of the metaphor makes its own point. Paul's actions, which are defended in the preceding paragraphs, are not those of an aimless runner. Everything is focused. It's for the sake of the gospel that he too might share in its blessings." End Quote. So what is your aim? Do you have a goal? Paul says, I

run not aimlessly. I've got a goal. Do you have a goal or do you run really, really, really hard without a goal? Like that guy I just described, running around aimlessly. I mean, we would all laugh at the TV if we saw that.

But I think many Christians, that's how they live their Christian life and we don't want to be those people. We want to run with purpose. Paul then uses, I'll return to this in just a moment, Paul uses the analogy of a boxer. He says, "I don't box as one beating the air." Fee again, in his commentary he says and I quote, "To get in the ring with an opponent and only beat air is as useless and absurd as the runner who has no eye for the finish line." End Quote. You don't see boxers doing that, and when they do it's laughable.

The word beat, in verse 26 there, according to one commentator, refers to hitting someone so hard that it flays the skin off of them. It really literally breaks their head open. This is referring to a knockout punch. So for a boxer to swing extremely hard, to throw a haymaker punch, but to whiff and miss the target all together is embarrassing. Paul's point with both of these is he doesn't run, run, run really, really hard. He doesn't throw really hard punches without knowing what his target is and landing them, without knowing what the goal is.

Are we following his example? What is your aim? Do you have a sure goal? So we have to, yes, run to win, but we can't just run really, really hard aimlessly. Is it eternal gospel things that you are chasing? Or are you aiming at temporal, fading, fleeting things? Maybe you're running, running; you're running really, really hard, but not towards the right goal. You're running without aim. What are you aiming at? What's your goal? Let me give you just a few examples of what we can aim at as Christians. Things that Paul certainly would have had in mind as he was talking to the Corinthians. Gospel minded goals.

Let me just give you a few. Do you have a goal to read through the Bible in a year or read through the New Testament in a year? The Old Testament in a year? But reading through the Bible is a pretty standard Christian goal. We've got all kinds of Bible reading plans to get through the Bible in a year. Do you have a basic goal like that? Do you have a basic goal to pray for a certain amount of time each day? Again, we don't want to set laws for ourself, but we do want to set goals. Do you have a goal to reach certain friends or family with the gospel? I know we've all got them, but do we actually have the goal of doing it, or is it just this nebulous, yeah, I'd like to get to it someday.

Do you have a goal to, beyond Bible reading, read other certain books to increase your joy in learning about God, to increase your joy in learning about different aspects of the Christian life. Do you have the goal of finding someone to disciple you, to the goal to find someone else to disciple, you have the goal to mortify a certain sin in your life, work out repentance in this life. We all still sin every day or do we actually have the goal of, yep, I've identified that thing and I want to put it to death. Is that a goal in your life? Do you have the goal to steward a certain amount of your time and money for gospel purposes?

So this is just a sampling of basic Christian goals. If you don't have any kind of goal like this, then you are that guy running around aimlessly throwing punches at the air, as far as the Christian race goes. Don't be that guy. You don't need to do all of these, but follow Paul's pattern of life. Aim yourself at something. Set a goal, run faithfully, seek to make progress in it. Run to win, run to win. We have to have a goal.

Sub-point B, the method, and you might put next to that the question, how are we getting there? And this is kind of the positively framed side of self-control. Look at the beginning of verse 27. "But I discipline my body." So self-control is saying

no and discipline is saying this is what I'm going to do. Paul knows the enemy of reaching that goal that you have set is his own flesh, his own fallen body, within which that sin principle still remains.

This is very severe language that Paul uses here. The word discipline means literally to blacken someone's eye or to put under strict discipline. It could even be translated as, to treat roughly, to punish, even to torment. So Paul's very careful in his usage of language here. He tells them how he thinks and how he treats his own body. He doesn't tell them, just you go do this, you still start beating yourself into submission. He knows that there would be those who would take his words literally if he made that a command. So he's very careful.

He says, this is my pattern of life. Follow me. The implication is if we want to run to win, we have to follow Paul's example rather than just commanding them, setting a law for them. His command is, here's your prize, run after your prize. Follow my pattern in doing this, but we should follow Paul's example and pattern, Calvin says of this passage. He quotes the Bible elsewhere when he says, "bodily exercise profiteth little. Let us, however, treat the body so as to make

a slave of it, that it may not by its wantonness keep us back from the duties of piety, and farther, that we may not indulge it, so as to occasion injury or offense to others."

We don't need to self-flatulate or beat ourselves like monks tried to beat back their wanton desires. No, with the gospel we are to subdue our bodies, we are to rule over them. We are to rule over our desires in the power of the spirit, but not be ruled by them. When we would rather do this thing, we do what the goal we have set. When we would rather do this thing over here, instead of pursuing our goal, we take charge of our own body and we tell it what to do. We don't let it tell us what to do. That means if you're tired, if you're a man and you come home from work tired, but you have the goal of doing family devotions, you push through all that and you pursue your goal.

We don't give in to every little whim of our body, every little appetite that takes our time and energy from basic, basic acts of piety. Paul's method for reaching the goal is to be the slave master of his own body, not to be a slave to it. But beloved, this is only achievable by the power of the Spirit, by seeking the Lord in prayer, by asking him to strengthen our willpower, by giving us the grace and the power we need to strive to win. But the method for attaining the goal is to make

sure all of our gospel informed thinking, that's in control of our bodies and we are disciplining our bodies to do what we have set out to do.

Finally, in order to follow Paul's pattern, not only we need to discipline our bodies and be the slave master to our bodies, but we have to have a similar purpose, sub-point C: The purpose, Why are you doing it? Why are you doing it? Look at the end of verse 17 or verse, I'm sorry, let's read verse 27 again. Paul says, "But I discipline my body and make it my slave," so that there's the purpose, the why. "After I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

Paul as a minister of the gospel, he did not want anything in his life to disqualify him from being a gospel minister, from going out and preaching the gospel, to win more people to Christ, that would diminish his reward. He doesn't want to bring reproach on the name of Christ. He doesn't want to diminish his reward. He doesn't want to be disqualified as a minister. For the Christian, there's, there's no being disqualified from the Christian life. You can apostatize and be revealed to be not a Christian at all, but we can't lose what we have.

Some people say this is really losing, not losing salvation, but having it recognized that you're not a Christian.

I don't think Paul had any question about his salvation. He doesn't want to be disqualified as a minister and the average Christian can't be disqualified from Christian service, but we can diminish the name of Christ. We can profane the name of Christ and diminish our ministry effectiveness.

Our purpose, why we do this, cannot be a love for other people, can't even be a love for our spouse; it can't be a love for our kids or for our neighbor, for personal glory, looking good in front of other people, position of honor, that can't be why we do any of this. We have to have a similar purpose to Paul, and that's a negative statement of it. But if we go back to verse 23, that's the positive statement. "I do all things for the sake of the gospel," so that's his purpose statement, before that, "I may become a fellow partaker of it."

Paul's purpose and motivation is his love for God and the gospel and other people being brought into that fellowship. Paul's purpose and reason for sacrificing is because he loves God and the gospel and he doesn't want to be found disqualified from continuing to proclaim it. He doesn't want to be overcome by some fleshly desire and be disqualified from gospel ministry. He doesn't want to do anything that hinders his testimony in the

name of Christ. He wants to please God and preach the gospel, so he does all of this, motivated by a love for God and the gospel.

This is the only true purpose that will motivate you, beloved, to exercise this kind of self-control, to discipline yourself, to do what you know you need to do; it takes this kind of love. Only love of God will motivate you sufficiently to keep running to win. But beloved, we also have to remember that Christ has already won on our behalf. He has already defeated death. He has already lived the perfect life that we could not. He's already won and secured our prize positionally in heaven before God.

We are freed from any fear of condemnation. We're freed from any fear of losing, of failing and so let us have those weights taken off of us. Let's run freely for the prize of gaining others, to this reward that Christ has secured for us. Let us examine our own lives. Are we running to win? Are we controlling our emotions? Are we controlling our impulses, our desires? Are we following Paul's pattern here to run to win, motivated with a love of God in our hearts for the gospel, to achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves?

With this exhortation from Paul, let us run to win, beloved. Let us take control, make our bodies a slave to us, to

the gospel with the power of the Spirit, set our sights on that goal and run after it with all of our might as if we've trained for it and we want it more than anything else. Let's do all of this out of a love for God and his gospel. Amen. I'm trying to pursue this pattern of life in my ministry, as Paul was pursuing Christ. Will you join me in pursuit of the same thing? Let's run to win. Let's pray.

Father, there are so many opportunities we have in life, so many things that we can pursue. I pray that we would all go out from here today examining our own lives, setting goals for ourselves, good pious goals for the Christian life, not done out of a sense of duty, but out of a love for God and the gospel. We want to, we want to see souls saved. I'm reminded of what, what something that Travis taught many, many years ago when he first came here, teaching that there's only one thing that we will not be able to do in heaven, that we can do here, and that is evangelize.

We want to see the gospel go forth. We want to be men and women who are faithful to all that you have called us to. We want our lives to be a gospel witness and we want to see people come to know you. This is all because we love you Lord, and I pray that by the power of your Spirit that you would clarify

these things to each and every individual conscience, how you would have them apply these things, that they might steward their life well, that they might stand before you and receive a full reward, not one that is burned up in fire, but one that endures the fire that endures and is a testimony to your faithfulness to us throughout eternity. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.