

Go for the Gold Series:

***Your Christian Life: Run to Win*
*1 Corinthians 9:24-27***

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Text Introduction: We continue a series today on “Becoming Spiritual Champions.” The Olympic Games are crowning athletic champions, but God has called us to be spiritual champions. So far, we have considered the seriousness of our calling as Christians. We looked at that great text from Hebrews 12 that calls us to run the race that lies before us with endurance keeping our eyes on Jesus. We have also considered our opponent. We said about our opponent, the devil, that He is real, he seeks to devour, but that through Jesus he is destroyed. We consider a very clear call today from another text in the New Testament that uses athletic competition as the analogy to the Christian life. The Word of God exhorts us to “Run in such a way that you may win.”

Text: ²⁴ Don’t you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. ²⁵ Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a crown that will fade away, but we a crown that will never fade away. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Introduction: Paul, like Jesus, had a knack for taking something from everyday life and drawing a spiritual application. Paul’s phrase, “Don’t you know” is the kind of phrase that produces the feeling that everyone was aware of the games. The ancient Olympic games were circulated around a few cities, and games were held right there in Corinth’s backyard. Paul’s analogy is a simple one that we must grasp. We must be careful to see the analogy whole and not in part. In other words, there are parts of this analogy that just do not apply. The obvious example is “but only one receives the prize.” Paul obviously is not saying that only one person can gain the Christian prize. Rather, Paul’s point is in the next phrase “Run in such a way to win the prize.”

Let’s start the discovery of our text by asking, “Why is running to win the only worthy goal?”

Why Running to Win is the only Worthy Goal

- **The Prize Before us**

Please understand that this passage is not suggesting that we have to work our way to the prize, but we ought to run as winners of the prize.

Running the Christian race successfully is
confirmation of your own salvation.

- **The People who Watch us**

In verse 27 we encounter what appears at first to be very strange language—disqualified. What was Paul talking about? Because of clear teaching throughout Scripture regarding what we call the security of the believer, Paul does not have in mind that we could lose our salvation. Rather, Paul wants Christians to acknowledge that we can become disqualified in regards to our witness to others. We cannot lose our salvation, but sin will cause us to lose our influence. In fact, if you notice the above context, the primary goal of this analogy is to think in terms of our witness.

Running the Christian race successfully is
testimony to those who need salvation.

How to Run to Win

Now, we turn to main idea of this analogy. Run in such a way as to win. How do we do that?

1. Serious Dedication

Paul compounds his analogy by adding boxing to running. He used each to make the same point. He doesn't run aimlessly or box aimlessly. The point is that there is real purpose to the way that the competitors compete. The same must be true in our Christian lives.

The Christian ought never to ask, "How little do I have to do to get by?"

Jonathan Edwards while a student wrote down some 70 resolutions by which he would live his life. Here is one of those resolutions.

Jonathan Edwards said, "Resolved: to live with all my might while I do live."

That's the spirit of this text. In the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, a young marathon runner from Tanzania, John Stephen Ahkwari, finished last—90 minutes after the runner before him. Bud Greenspan, famous for his Olympic film documentaries, asked him, "Why did you finish?" Ahkwari's answer is legendary. "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start a race; they sent me to finish."

2. Self Discipline

Though we are saved by God's grace, the heart of this analogy is that in that grace, God calls us to exercise discipline.

Notice the analogy that dominates this passage! If self-control is logical in matters that are temporary how much more so in matters that are eternal.

3. Specific Direction

To me, this passage moves from the general to the specific. What can we do specifically to maintain discipline in our spiritual lives so that we will run in such a way as to win? Let me offer these:

- Regular Public Worship
- Daily Private Worship
- Personal Accountability

Conclusion: And so, God, in Jesus Christ, out of His great love, came out of the stands, so to speak so that we do not have to run alone. You want to run in such a way as to win? Make sure you are running with Jesus.