

Running The Race

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

MEMORY VERSE

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

As many good prizes (pencils, balloons, or stickers) as the number of contestants you plan to use. Twice as many dud prizes (an old rock, a plastic spoon, and 8-track tape, or a black banana in a plastic bag) as the number of good prizes, lunch bags, and a stapler.

As many balloons as the number of children in your class, a wall mounted target, string, a straw, and tape.

Foil and string.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Let's Make a Deal

You will need as many good prizes (pencils, balloons, or stickers) as the number of contestants you plan to use. And have twice as many dud prizes (an old rock, a plastic spoon, and 8-track tape, or a black banana in a plastic bag) as the number of good prizes, lunch bags and a stapler.

Place each gift in a lunch sized paper bag and staple closed. For each "contestant" you plan to have, prepare one good and two dud gifts and give the "contestant" a gift (good or dud). Ask if he wants to trade the unopened gift for another. Have him ask his classmates what to do. When all trading is done each child may open the gift chosen.

Explain that when we THINK the prize at the end of our race is not very good we will be tempted to trade it for other things. But in the race of faith we should never be willing to trade the prize we will receive for something inferior. The prize He has for us at the end of the race is awesome. We need to run the race of faith to win!

LESSON TIME!

What motivates us to do the things we do? When you think about it, we have a motive (or reason) for everything we do. As an example, why do you do chores around the house? Is it to help your parents out, pitching in to lighten their load or maybe it's to earn money so you can buy an ice cream when you hear that wonderful melody from the ice cream truck?

The apostle Paul said, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel..." (1 Corinthians 9:23). Every motive that Paul had was driven by his desire to do what God wanted, using his gifts for the sake of the gospel so that God may be glorified.

In our lesson today, Paul teaches us about the motivation we should have as we live each day as a Christian; **Run the race of faith to win!** God's reward for us for all of eternity will far exceed any ice cream cone that you could ever imagine.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

The apostle Paul gives us a couple of illustrations to help us see the importance of a disciplined life for the sake of the gospel. In order to win the race that God has us in, we need to "run well." We also need to have self-discipline. The people who lived in 55 AD enjoyed the competition of sports like we do today. They even competed in many sports like athletes do in the Olympics today.

How many of you enjoy watching the Olympics and other sports? Just think, Olympian athletes come to the world's greatest sporting event ready for competition with the world's best, yet they must train many years to reach that level of excellence in their sports. When you stop to think about it, they train all of their lives for that coveted prize of the Gold Medal in the Olympics.

The apostle Paul has given us a great illustration of discipline. Discipline means giving up the good and the better for the best. Unfortunately for us, we live in a nation that is characterized with self-indulgence and immorality. Not having any discipline in our lives is regarded as expressing our freedom. But living without discipline is a far cry from what God desires for us.

God has called us to a higher standard, because He is our standard. We are to run in such a way that we will win. If we want to serve the Lord and win His reward and

approval, we must do what He wants us to. Our motivation in life should be to please God so that He may be glorified. **Run the race of faith to win!**

The Christian does not run the race in order to get to heaven. We are in the race because we have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We must not let sin reign in our mortal body that we should obey its lust but to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11-12). We need to realize that as Christians we have been given a new nature in Christ, sharing in His resurrection life (See Ephesians 2:5-6 and Colossians 2:12-13) so we can run to win.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25

And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Winning a race requires purpose and discipline. Paul used this illustration to explain that the Christian life takes hard work, self-denial, and grueling preparation. As Christians, we are running toward our heavenly reward. With the essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship, we can be equipped to run with strength and stamina.

Why would you want to be a spectator? The disciplines of a Christian result in a blessed life. At times we must give up doing something we want in order to do what God wants, but in the end, He will be glorified and we will be blessed. If our motives are wrong, discipline is nothing but self-punishment, but with the motive of pleasing God, our denial seems like nothing compared to the eternal reward that is ours.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:26

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

Have you ever seen runners run a race without a finish line, or boxers box the air to put their opponent down on the canvas? Could you imagine how funny it would be to see a bunch of runners taking off from the starting line only to wander around the track aimlessly to find the finish line?

Every move that the apostle Paul made in the course of his race was calculated to further his pursuit of the prize (Philippians 3:13-14). **Run the race of faith to win!** We must realize that our life here is only for a moment, and we must press on to the higher calling of God for our lives.

Balloon Ballistics

You will need as many balloons as the number of children in your class, a wall mounted target, string, a straw, and tape.

Give each child a balloon, let him blow it up, but not tie it. Have each child, one at a time, release his balloon aiming for the target. Few, if any, will make it. Then tape one end of a string on the target bull's eye and thread the string through a piece of a drinking straw.

With one piece of tape, attach the blown up balloon to the straw. Be sure the air is blowing out of the balloon away from target. The balloon should travel along the string, striking the bull's eye.

Explain to your class that the balloon is subject to the string just as our bodies should be subject to our wills. If our "straws" are not connected to the "string" we will be like the undisciplined balloon, flying every which way.

Where is your race leading you now? Have you taken the lane that God wants you to run or are you allowing sin to take you down another path? That path will always be easy to run, because it's easy to sin. Pride comes naturally to us. Its so easy to say mean things to others, or become angry over the silliest reasons, or to be just plain disobedient to our parents. But we must remember we have a new life in Christ, and it is Jesus who lives in us because we belong to Him. He will help us to run the race as a champion for His glory.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Someday, we will all come to the end of our race. Some will finish well and others will fall short. Only Christians can run in God's heavenly race for His kingdom and His glory.

In Paul's time only Greek citizens were allowed to participate in the games, and they had to obey the rules both in their training and in their performing. Any contestant found breaking the training rules was automatically disqualified. In order for Paul to run the race for winning souls for God, he had to discipline himself in total surrender to Jesus. If we want to serve the Lord and win His reward and approval, we must pay the price. **Run the race of faith to win!**

Even though the Apostle Paul preached the gospel and encouraged Christians to serve the Lord, he knew that he was not guaranteed a victorious finish. He knew that pride and selfish ambition could creep into his life and he too could be disqualified for the prize, which literally means unapproved.

The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize. A Christian doesn't lose his salvation but only the privilege of hearing those wonderful words of Jesus when He says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Only one runner could win the olive wreath crown in the Greek games, but every believer can win an incorruptible crown when he stands before the Judgment seat of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 9:25 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

This crown is given to those who discipline themselves for the sake of serving Christ and winning lost souls. They keep their bodies under the control of the Holy Spirit and their eyes fixed on the goal.

Foil Coil Crowns

You will need foil and string for each child.

Cut strips of foil about 6"x20". Place a piece of string about 28" long on the foil and roll and crunch up. Place one on each child's head and tie in it in the back.

Explain what it is to have a crown that is incorruptible.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to take the opportunity of today to live for Christ. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.