

I Corinthians 9:24-27

TRAINING FOR THE LASTING PRIZE

- I. The necessary manner
- II. The glorious prize
- III. The disastrous alternative

INTRODUCTION

Cadets, I really like your theme & text for this year.

- the theme: Branded with Christ, & the text: Deut.6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God. Love Him with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your strength.”
- that reminds us that, as Christians, those who believe & love & serve the Lord, we are branded as the ones He saves & loves & owns.
- & then, as those, branded with Christ by faith, we must live that way in all we think & say & do.

Now to believe & live for Christ with our all to be like Him that requires **gumption**, as **C.Swindoll** once wrote,

- he says: “We don't hear much about gumption any more. Too bad, since we need it more than ever these days. I was raised on gumption & to this day I use the word around the house especially when trying to motivate my kids.
- Swindoll then quotes from an article where that writer says: 'I like word “gumption.” A person filled with gumption doesn't sit around stewing about things. He's at the front of the train of his own awareness, watching to see what's up the track & meeting it when comes. Gumption is [what] keeps [you] going. If you have got it & know how to keep it, there's absolutely no way in the whole world [that anything] can keep you from [doing it].’”
- well, Swindoll continues: “It [is] a shame this word has dropped through the cracks, especially since quitting is now more popular than finishing. [For] gumption keeps us at a hard task like practicing the piano or losing weight--& keeping it lost--or reading the Bible all the way through in a year's time.”
- then he goes on & give 5 features about what gumption is & does. “1. Gumption begins with a firm commitment. It is a human tendency to ponder, to rethink, to fiddle around with an idea until it's awash in the slimy swamp of indefiniteness. Want gumption to continue to end? Start strong! 2. Gumption means being disciplined 1 day at a time. Running a marathon? Those 26 plus miles are run 1 step at a time. It will take daily discipline. 3. Gumption includes being alert to subtle temptations. It plans ahead watching out for associations that weaken us, for procrastination that steals from us, & for rationalize-tions that lie to us. People who achieve their goal stay alert. Gumption stabs us awake, keeps us wide-eyed & ready. 4. Gumption requires the encouragement of accountability. People—especially close friends--keep our tanks pumped full of enthusiasm [when] they communicate, ‘You can do it, you can make it.’” 5. Gumption

comes easier when we remember that finishing has its own unique rewards. On more than 1 occasion Paul referred to ‘finishing the course.’ Those who only start projects never know the satisfaction that comes with slapping hands together, wiping away those beads of perspiration, & saying that beautiful 4-letter word, ‘Done!’ Desire accomplished is sweet to the soul. Do you desire to have the character of Christ formed in you? Are you underway? Good for you! [But you need] the gust wind at your back [that comes] from the words [of Gal. 6:9 to fire up gumption in you]: ‘Let us not get tired of doing what is right, for [then] we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't get discouraged & quit.’”

Well, that's what **Bible** is also saying in **ICor.9:24-27** where it calls us to get up & get going with lots of gumption & gusto & passion in living the Christian faith as we TRAIN FOR THE LASTING PRIZE.

- we note 3 truths here about life's training: **1st**, the necessary manner.
- **2nd**, the glorious prize &, **3rd**, the disastrous alternative.

I. THE NECESSARY MANNER

Now we see from what we read that **Paul** must have realize the **Corinthian Christians** were spiritual flabby & lacked real motivation & discipline & gumption in their Christian faith & life.

- it seems they wanted all the rewards without any effort or hard work on their part.
- you see, in the verses before the passage we read, he emphasized the need for self-control & self-denial, even in matters morally indifferent like the use of meat offered to idols.
 - he taught we must refrain from what in itself is innocent so it won't interfere with our Christian faith & life & service for Lord, & others will be won for Him.

Well, in stressing the need for such discipline in our Christian freedom & living, **Paul** points to something the Christians in **Corinth** could readily relate to & understand (& we can too).

- he pictures the Christian life like the Greek games & sporting event.
- you see, Corinth was center of the Isthmian Games which were held every 2 years.
 - it was a great national & religious festival that attracted huge, eager crowds & numerous athletes from all over.
 - it is just like today with the Olympics or our college & high school basketball or football tournaments, or our major league baseball world series, or the Super Bowl.

And, as the **Corinthian Christians** knew, the athletes, who participated in those games of that day, had to be in preliminary training for 10 months.

- but then for 30 days before the game, they came to the city where the athletes filled the streets & hill sides & gymnasium training hard for the up-coming events.
- th'fore it was quite evident, as vs.25 says, “Every athlete exercised self-control in all respects” because such a discipline was crucial to winning the prize.
- & prize won, well, it wasn't a piece of art like the beautiful trophy or plaque the winners get today.
 - it was just a crown of wood & leaves.

Now our **text** is saying, if such a strict training & disciplined exercise & self-control & self-denial was needed & done to win a wooden prize that perishes,--

- then surely how much more shouldn't we Christians run the race of our Christian faith & life in obedience to God with gumption & passion, with total dedication & devotion, with perseverance & persistence to win the prize that is imperishable & worth a lot more-- eternal life with God.
- that's why Paul says in vs.26 he isn't running or boxing aimlessly.
 - but he is disciplining & exerting himself fully in being Christ-like or His servant.
 - all so that he wouldn't be disqualified & lose for eternity.

So then here **Bible** describes **THE NECESSARY MANNER** needed for training & performing to get the eternal prize.

- it says we must be like an athlete running a race or boxing in a ring or being in any other sporting event.
- we too must eagerly & with gumption live for Lord with every spiritual muscle strained & stretched to reach the finish line & gain the prize.

Well, to do that we must then train & practice hard like any good athlete does.

- you see, that word “compete” in vs.25 is from the Greek word meaning “to struggle”.
 - & from that word comes our word “agony”.
- th'fore the Bible is saying to win the prize, as any athlete worth his salt knows, you've got to agonize & struggle through a severe, strenuous training program.
 - a program of constant practice & exercise, of discipline & total self-control & self-denial, of self-sacrifice & abstinence, of concentration & gumption & passion & the like.
 - we must to get our body & mind & whole self in proper shape—fit & trim—so that we can perform well, going all out physically & mentally, & gain the victory.

But now, to attain the prize of eternal glory with God, that also requires, **ITim.4** says, that we strive with gumption to be & to live godly, Christ-centered, Christ-controlled lives

- & so that means we must regularly & rigorously work out to be spiritually fit & trim.
- we must do that as carefully & as hard as any runner or basketball player does, or even more so.
- we must then exercise & exert ourselves to the utmost, with gumption—with all the effort & energy we have—to build ourselves up spiritually so we are strong, able to actively live the Christian faith & be Christ-like in our total being & behavior.
 - & able to reach goal of being godly & win the prize of being with God forever.

And, when **ITim.4** says we must train ourselves “to be godly”, it is referring to a gymnasium in **Greece** which was, & still is today, the place where athlete's train & practice & is used for physical exercise.

- & in the gym Greek youths stripped & went through various vigorous & severe courses of physical training to promote vigor & vitality, strength & fitness for their bodies.

Th'fore **ITim.4** says our spiritual training for godliness must be like those who strip themselves of every physical burden & hindrance so they could train & perform without any limitations.

- we too then, must get rid of everything that impedes & interferes with our spiritual progress in living for Lord--any sin, any evil habit, & even legitimate things that get in our way.
- &, like those who train & exercise & run a race with eyes fixed on the goal of being the best or the winner, we too must be working out spiritually with our eyes focused on God.
 - & focused on attaining complete devotion & dedication to Him & eternal glory with Him.
 - or, as Paul puts it in Phil.3, we must press on to the goal of knowing & trusting, of loving & living Christ better & deeper, & of being with Him in eternity.

And notice too: **vs.25 in ICor.9** says we must exercise & train & live the Christian faith “in such a way” or “in all respects.”

- that means, like any athlete knows, to be & do good, we have to have long, strict, severe training times, strenuous drills, proper diet, sufficient rest & the like.
- th'fore to train for the eternal prize means a lot of hard work & gumption, with sweat & tears to make Christ a true & total, vital & vigorous part of our total lives.
 - we must strenuously apply with all the strength & action of our hearts & bodies & souls, Deut.6 says, to love God & to live out our faith in Him in every crook & cranny of our lives.
 - all so that we will grow & progress spiritually strong for Him.

And so to train to experience & exercise a greater life for God involves **CONCENTRATION**.

- like Paul says, we mustn't be like a boxer throwing punches aimlessly in the air.
 - or in today's language like a player shooting an air ball from the 3 point or foul line.
- instead we must be like a good athlete who is focused & concentrates so that his blows land, or the ball goes in the hoop.

That all means in all of life, at our daily work, in leisure times, we must have 1 unswerving aim & goal.

- we must be determined & focused to take Lord seriously in everything as our sole Savior & the only Ruler of entire selves.
- we must be totally persistence & absorbed in working hard to take Him into our complete lives.
 - & to more & more consciously make Him the only motive & purpose for all we think & say & do.

Then too, to train for to the lasting prize by living fully for Jesus involves **SELF-CONSTRAIN OR ABSTANANCE.**

- you see, that's what Paul means in vs.27 about treating & enslaving the body.
- it is just like some of you, Young People know: that when you are in training & practicing & playing basketball or soccer, there are certain things you must give up.
 - & there are other things you must make & discipline yourselves to do.
 - you must refrain from certain foods, be at every practice, keep up your grades, & even give up some social functions & entertainment.
 - & in that way you keep your bodies & minds in check, free from flab & weakness.

Well, that's the way it is in being a Christian, branded with Christ, who completely trusts & obeys Lord.

- we must abstain from those damaging, deadly dainties the sinful world offers in its music & movies & magazines & other manners of lifestyles.
 - we must make every effort to keep away from those places & persons & activities that hinder us from being & living like Christ to the fullest & will harm us eternally.
- in other words, we must keep ourselves physically & spiritually under control of H Spirit so that we refrain from following & being enslaved to our sinful natures.

We must then do what **Rom.6** says: we must constantly realize we were crucified with Christ so that the body of sin is done away with & we are no longer slaves to sin.

- we must not let sin reign in us so that we obey its evil desires.
- we must not offer bodies to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer ourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.
 - we must offer bodies to Him as instruments of righteousness.

Now, to train for the everlasting prize with a greater love & loyalty for Lord also involves a **PROPER DIET.**

- we must constantly feed on His Word through a regular reading & study of Scriptures.
- & we must keep its truths central in our minds & hearts & lives as the only authority for our faith & life.

But also, just as those in training & competing in sports must exercise with calisthenics & have proper rest to receive the necessary strength & endurance,--

- & as IITim.2 says an athlete must train & play by the rules if she going perform right & win the prize,--
- so it is the same for our spiritual lives & in being & living with gumption godly for Jesus.
 - we must do spiritual calisthenics, such as knee bends of continual praying because it will give us the power able to keep us in contact with God, the only source of real life & strength & wisdom to go on.
- we also need the spiritual rest & re-creation of Sunday.

- its set times of worship to be refreshed & renewed to be able to train harder & to live better for Lord to receive the lasting prize.
- & we must live only by God's rules that require us to be reverent, obedient, compassionate, consecrated, trust-worthy, pure, grateful, loyal, industrious, cheerful. (your Cadet Code)

But to train & live for greater godliness so we will obtain the eternal prize also involves we always keep that goal & prize clearly in view.

- that we realize, as Paul says in Phil.3, we have not yet reached the goal & gotten the prize because we aren't yet perfect.
- when we realize that , we will be motivated & stimulated, spurred on, pushed & pulled by the finish line ahead or by the clock ticking down to the final buzzer,.
 - with all the gumption & passion we got to go forward & strain harder to achieve the goal, win the victory, & get the prize of perfect, eternal life with Lord.

II. THE GLORIOUS PRIZE

And indeed, as **Paul** says in **IITim.4**, when we keep faith , fight the good fight against evil & error; run the race of the Christian faith life well, with all we are & have, then we will win the prize.

- & our text says that will be “an imperishable crown”.
 - 1 that lasts forever symbolizing eternal life with God, a life that never ends.
- IITim.4 says it will be “a crown of righteousness”.
 - that refers to the fact that our final reward will be living right with Jesus in eternity where there will be no more sin, but only perfection & purity.
- Jas.2 calls it “a crown of life”.
 - that means the life we now have in Christ will be even richer & fuller with perfect peace & joy & no more sorrow & death in eternity with Him
- & IPt.5 says it will be “a crown of glory” symbolizing we will live with Lord forever in the wonderful glory of honor & complete victory.

Indeed, the lasting prize we are training & living for is everlasting & authentic, abundant satisfaction.

- & one of eternal, triumphant rest & festive enjoyment that awaits all those who faithfully love & serve Lord & others here on earth.
- to sure, shouldn't that make us try even harder with all kinds of gumption & passion to live for Jesus?

III. THE DISASTROUS ALTERNATIVE

It surely should & must, because our **text** also tells us that **THE ALTERNATIVE IS DISASTROUS.**

- you see, vs.27 is telling us we can make all correct moves, have all kinds of faith & knowledge.

- but if they aren't of our hearts & lives so we aren't living them,--
- if, in our spiritual lives, we aren't straining properly, exercising right & regularly,--
- we aren't constantly feeding on God's Word, strengthening ourselves with faithful praying,--
- we aren't throwing off everything that impedes & sin that entangles us so we can't make progress in living for Jesus,--
- if we aren't keeping ourselves from sinful desires & practices & places,--
- aren't playing & living only by Lord's rules,--
- aren't keeping our eyes fixed on Him & are determined to do His will solely,--
- & we aren't always focused on the eternal prize God will give all who faithfully train & live in genuine godliness for Him,--
- then Bible says, like in any game we play, we will be disqualified in the game of life,; we will be given thumbs down, & thrown out to live eternally separate from God.

CONCLUSION

Th'fore let us with all gumption & gusto, motivation & determination, desire & delight continue to train hard & to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

- & let us exercise & play the game of the Christian faith & life with all our minds & might, with all our heart & soul & strength, with all our hearts & lives devoted to Lord in complete obedience to His will.
- let us not then, as an old hymn says, “be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize & sailed through bloody seas.”

And then, when we reach the finish line, the last buzzer sounds & life ends,--

- then we will hear our Lord & Savior say: “Well done. Enter into the eternal rest that has been prepared for all who love & live for Me with gumption everywhere & in everything.”

AMEN