

Summer Mixtape: Keep Growing - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)

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Big Idea of the Message: Don't be satisfied with your current level of spiritual maturity: keep growing.

Application Point: Christians continue growing closer to Jesus, growing in holiness, work ethic, purity, and integrity.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. - 1 Cor. 9:24-27 ESV

There was this kid in school who was super short and scrawny; people made fun of him because he had a very high voice and wore clothes that were way too big for him (not because it was a cool thing to do). I came across his Facebook profile a little while back and my jaw dropped... he was now a gym rat and totally jacked! I have always said I work out, not to get buff, but just to look normal... All jokes aside, I have been in athletics my whole life and I really resonate when the Bible talks about the parallels of fitness or athletics to spiritual life...

When running the RTO, aside from having the best team name –Running to the Oldies (Richard Simmons was our mascot)--we had to encourage each other throughout this crazy race! “Before you ask me if I am a runner... No, I am not! Sometimes I enjoy a short run, but I am not a runner.”

But, it didn't just start the day of the race. This process took months to get ready.

Struggle: We live in a cultural moment right now where many people are very unhealthy on a holistic level: Despite the insane advancement in medicine, we are more unhealthy physically than ever before due to lack of exercise and over-consumption; we are more emotionally and mentally unstable as a culture due to constant exposure to fatalist mentality induced click-bait and doom scrolling on our devices, lack of attention span due to the infamous YouTube short... Depression and mental unwellness is at its all time high despite being more advanced in thought, scientific discovery and the illusion of “progress.” **Welcome to church today everyone! Haha**

QUALIFIER: I say all this not be a discouragement! If anything, to stoke the fire a bit and maybe give us that jolt of an attentiveness to how serious this is for our lives.

Oftentimes, in our spiritual lives, especially after we have initially made the first decision to follow Jesus and trust him with our lives, we start to see how easy it is to fall into a rut or to allow external circumstances to affect our formation. I don't think, if I were to ask every single person

here today, you would say that you do not want to grow and mature in life—in your relationship with your spouse or family members, in your ability to process failure, in your emotional regulation and mental fortitude to rise above and out of tumultuous situations, even in your physical fitness—nobody wants to be stagnant or unhealthy. Why should it be that way with our faith or our spiritual formation?

In fact, all of these things fall into the category of spiritual formation. And Paul equates this formation to a physical race. He also even refers to boxing. This isn't the first and only passage where Paul references physical activity... I am convinced Paul was not only highly touted religious leader, I bet he was the best player on the Synagogue Softball team!

Let's reread our passage: ²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. - 1 Cor. 9:24-27 ESV

3 Themes for the Christian Life:

1. Life is an endurance race, not a sprint. Do you know where the finish line is? (vv. 24b, 25)
→ 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” - Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

→ In other words, don't miss the forest for the trees... We live in such an instant gratification culture, living only for the moment, sometimes out of self-preservation, but God is calling us to the long game... And yet!

2. The means are equally as important and the ends (v. 26). In other words, God cares about the moments along the way in our journey as much as he cares about where we are going, even the trivial and mundane moments.

→ This is probably the most crucial piece to this whole passage, and what that churches can tend to gloss over or miss entirely. *Talk about the imbalance between salvation and sanctification...* Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) - ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

3. This is a call to train, not just try harder (v. 27). This is not about feeling shame when things don't go the way we intended, or seeking to earn “brownie points” with God because of any good merit. This is about discipleship to Jesus over simply achieving self-improvement.

→ Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV) - ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting

what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

This is where what only God can do (transform, produce that fruit) intersects the invitation and call for us to respond. To be available. Christians should continue to grow closer to Jesus. We can't become satisfied with our current level of spiritual maturity. We can dig deeper to reveal more areas in our hearts that need to grow closer to Jesus, remaining humble and knowing we need a Savior.

Proverbs 3:5–8 (ESV)

5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

6

In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

7

Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

8

It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.

Notice that the proverb does not say the path will be easy, just straight. Nevertheless, we must remember to turn away from evil and fear the Lord. Doing this will provide healing and refreshment down to our core.

Bringing it back to abiding, constantly, in Jesus. But, this does require intentionality on our part, not happenstance, “going with the flow,” accidental spirituality. It is also a call to push through shallowness or superficiality in our faith and relationships. To not fall into the trap of just “playing” church. Especially for us as leaders! That is how Paul ends his passage: ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The key understanding is that Jesus is faithful to meet us when we position ourselves to receive from him... his ministry, his blessing, his very Spirit. So, how does this work? We will finish this series next week, but our series following thereafter, we will be diving into a new series called “With the Grain: 7 Spiritual Habits That Keep us in Rhythm with Jesus,” taking a look at clear pathways that the Bible reveals for us. You don't want to miss it!