

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: October 8, 2023**

**Title: RUNNING WITH PURPOSE**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 9:1-23, ESV**

The end of 1 Corinthians chapter 9 speaks of a race. <sup>24</sup>*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup>Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup>Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup>No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*

Yesterday I had the occasion to attend a race not so far from here. No, it wasn't a foot race, but several things were similar. (Here we watched a short video clip Pastor had taken at the race.) I observed some truths taught by most any race. **1.** Not everyone who entered the race completed the race. In the very beginning of the first race there was a crash. Emergency vehicles flooded the track. They hadn't even completed one lap when they crashed. 5 cars were eliminated. Those 5 did not finish the race, thus they did NOT get the prize. **2.** Some race with excellence, but do not finish with excellence. In another race, a Camaro pretty much dominated the race. It is believed that he got off track, and we never saw him again. Although he raced with excellence in the beginning, he did not finish with excellence. Though he led in most of the race, he ended as a loser. **3.** Some stayed consistent and ended up winning a prize. There was a Toyota that pretty much brought up the rear in much of one race, but because he kept at it, he finished third. **4.** Several cars made a lot of noise but just didn't measure up in their performance. Kind of like, lots of talk and little action. **5.** Some drivers seemed to be along for the ride or just for the fun of it. **6.** OTHERS were serious about the race and were IN IT TO WIN IT! **7.** The external (looks) didn't matter or had little to do with the performance. If I were to pick a winner, I would pick it by its looks. But the winner was determined by what was under the hood – its heart. (“...*Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart*” 1 Samuel 16:7b.) It's what's on the inside that really counts. **8.** In every race only ONE gets the prize. **9.** At best, their prize was temporal.

**9** *“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? <sup>2</sup>If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>This is my defense to those who would examine. <sup>4</sup>Do we not have the right to eat and drink? <sup>5</sup>Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? <sup>6</sup>Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? <sup>7</sup>Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? <sup>8</sup>Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? <sup>9</sup>For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup>Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. <sup>11</sup>If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? <sup>12</sup>If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?*

*Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup>Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? <sup>14</sup>In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*

<sup>15</sup>*But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. <sup>16</sup>For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup>For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.*

<sup>18</sup>*What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

<sup>19</sup>*For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup>To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup>I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”*

As we continue our series in 1 Corinthians, we find ourselves today in chapter 9. Our plan is to look at the first section of chapter 9 today, and the last small section of the chapter next week. Paul just concluded, in chapter 8, a discussion of the proper attitude toward eating meat sacrificed to idols. It was a significant concern in those days and his discussion on the matter was really about the nature of true spirituality. True Spirituality is not only based on how good you are, but it is also based on how good you are to others. This idea of how your actions may affect others carries into Paul’s discussion in chapter nine.

In this chapter he speaks at length about HIS MOTIVES for ministry and the PRINCIPLES that guide him. What he says about his life’s work and his life’s purpose sheds light on how WE should perceive OUR OWN PURPOSE in life and how we should approach our own life’s work. That’s because we all, like the Apostle Paul, have a calling. You or I were not an experiment in God’s creative ability. God made you ON PURPOSE FOR A PURPOSE! It’s not just the missionaries and preachers who are called by God. Every person in the pew has a calling on their life as well. This calling on your life might be your job, as in: you’re a teacher, a policeman, an accountant. Or, it might be an avocation, as in: you work in children’s ministry, you write, you sing, you’re involved in outreach, and so on. Every calling matters! YOUR calling matters. And it must be approached as if it matters for all eternity – because it does.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER – So, let’s look at chapter nine. Paul has just finished saying, in effect: Just because you have the RIGHT to eat any kind of meat you want, doesn’t mean that you should. There are others to consider. There’s a big picture to consider. Paul began making this point back in chapter six, when he said that all things may be permissible, but not all things are profitable (6:12). This same idea is behind his approach to his ministry.

He begins the chapter by reminding the Corinthians of who he is. He is an APOSTLE. He had a PERSONAL encounter with the Risen Lord, AND... The merit of his ministry can be seen among the Corinthians themselves. *“Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord”* (vs. 2). He goes on to talk about how he has the right, like the other apostles, to receive his living from the work of ministry that he is doing. *“In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel”* (vs. 14). He goes on to say that he hasn’t used this right. He has chosen, instead, to support himself in another way. He was a tentmaker – so that he could serve in the ministry without putting an undue financial burden on anyone. Even though it was perfectly acceptable for others to earn a living through their work in the ministry, he had the advantage of being able to take a different route, and it seemed to give him great pleasure to do so.

The driving force behind all of this could be found in three key motivational factors – three principles of purpose – that kept Paul moving forward throughout his entire life, even in spite of all the opposition that came his way. These three purpose-filled principles can keep you moving forward as well. It doesn’t matter where you are on your journey, how long you’ve been a believer, or how many candles there are on your birthday cake, these three principles will guide you with certainty to the finish line. So, whether you’re on your first lap around the track or approaching your final lap, today I will challenge you to adopt these three principles into your life’s calling – to pray for them and to pursue them with your whole heart.

**1. Seek a Calling that Compels You.** A supposed relationship expert was known to say that a fulfilling marriage is not just to find someone you can get along WITH, but to find someone you can't get along WITHOUT. I won't go so far as to say that it works in all marriages, but I do know that's how it works in your life's calling. The objective is to find something that you CAN'T NOT DO. I remember one of my college professors saying that if you can do anything besides ministry, you should probably do it. In other words, ministry shouldn't be one of your many options. Purpose to do it with passion. That's exactly what Paul said about his life's work. *"For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"* (vs. 16). Perhaps the greatest gift you could ever receive would be a calling in which you can say, "Woe to me if I do not pursue this calling." "Woe to me if I'm not the best parent in the history of parents." "Woe to me if my garden doesn't overflow with produce so I can bless others." "Woe to me if I don't write." "Woe to me if I'm not involved in music." "Woe to me if I don't take these gifts and use them to the glory of God." When you have a calling that compels you, rewards and remuneration tend to take a back seat. It's ALL about the work. The WORK ITSELF is its own reward. Stephen King clearly doesn't write stories for the money. Jerry Seinfeld clearly doesn't tell jokes for the money. Bruce Springsteen clearly doesn't perform music for the money. These individuals, who each have more money than they can possibly spend, have continued to pursue their life's work well past the age of traditional retirement – because it's THEIR WORK THAT MATTERS to them more than anything else, AND... It's significant to note that as successful as they are, their work amounts to what Paul refers later in the chapter to a *"PERISHABLE WREATH."* It's only temporary. Someday it will be all but forgotten. OUR work, on the other hand, matters for ALL ETERNITY – because OUR work is built on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and is focused on serving others in Jesus' name. When your work contributes in some way – directly or indirectly – to someone finding their way to Christ or to someone becoming stronger in the Christian life, then you've done work that will be measured by all eternity. Seek that good work which you are compelled to do, as in: Woe is me if I don't. Here's the second purpose-filled principle.

**2. Look for Ways to Adapt to Others (Every Individual).** I'm thinking this quote came from something I heard this week, but I'm not remembering where I heard it. "The STRONGEST tree is the one that bends. It is the tree that doesn't bend that usually breaks." Paul says... *"Though I am free and belong to no one, I HAVE MADE MYSELF A SLAVE TO EVERYONE, to win as many as possible"* (vs. 19). What's Paul's purpose? To WIN AS MANY AS POSSIBLE. He goes on to say that to the Jews, he becomes like a Jew, observing the law. To the Gentiles, who do not follow the Jewish rituals, he becomes like a Gentile. And... Even to those who are weak, he accommodates their weakness. Then he says... *"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I MIGHT SAVE SOME"* (vs. 22). He's not talking about compromising the message of the gospel itself – that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins and was raised from the dead and if you put your faith in Him, He will deliver you from your past life and give to you a new life in Him. Paul never lost sight of this message, but he is saying, in effect, "If there is any flexibility I can bring to these peripheral, non-fundamental matters, I will make that move." Back in the sixties (Jesus Revolution) several courageous, ground-breaking churches began to modify their approach to ministry in order to reach a new generation. They relaxed their dress code standards. They opened the door to new styles of music. They even adapted their vocabulary to rephrase ancient truth in a way that the modern mind – the unchurched – could comprehend. The result was that in the coming decade millions turned to Christ or RETURNED to Christ and began to live their lives for Him. Rick Warren started Saddleback Valley Community Church in the eighties. His approach was to design services that would appeal to a category of people he identified as seekers – those who were interested in spiritual things but had not yet fully committed to Christ. As a result of this seeker-friendly approach, he was criticized throughout his denomination and other denominations ... at least, at first, he was. Until people began to see the fruits of his labor, and then his methods became a model for many to follow. Rick used to say, "It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people." He didn't expect every church to be a carbon copy of his. He never claimed that Saddleback was the perfect church, but his attitude was this: If we can be flexible in these non-essential areas WHILE REMAINING FAITHFUL TO THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL, then let's do what we

need to do to win people to Christ – to win MORE PEOPLE to Christ. Here’s how this approach applies to our own life’s purpose. For us to have influence in the lives of those around us, we need to be ready to adapt our efforts. ILLUSTRATION: (I confess I’m not much of a fisherman.) Fishing. Being flexible is generally a characteristic that makes for a good fisherman. The time of day, the location, the bait, and the weather conditions can all have bearing on your success as a fisherman. If I caught a fish in a certain hole some 10 years ago and declared that I’m not moving, I’ll probably not see too much success as a fisherman. Let me say it another way: We must be willing to throw ourselves into the interests of others, and to connect with them on their wavelength. In William Barclay’s commentary on this passage, he wrote... “The man who can never see anything but his own point of view and who never makes any attempt to understand the mind and heart of others, will never make a pastor or an evangelist or even a friend.” The question we need to be asking ourselves at every turn is: “How can I be more accommodating to the people God has placed in my life, so that they will be more receptive to the message of Christ?” It’s our job to bend for others. We may be free and independent and our very own boss in every way, but we must be willing to bend, and to accommodate, and to give ourselves in service to others. Here’s the third purpose-filled principle.

**3. Run Your Race with the Intent to Win.** Verses 24-27 of this chapter have so much to say that I’m thinking next week the entire message might focus on these three verses. In this final point of today’s message, we’ll take a sneak peek at the first part of this passage. *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? RUN IN SUCH A WAY TO GET THE PRIZE”* (vs. 24). Here is the second analogy for how Paul thinks about his life. The FIRST was “a SLAVE to the gospel.” The SECOND is a “Professional Athlete.” A professional athlete gets rid of EVERYTHING that would keep him from winning. A professional swimmer, for example, takes off literally everything that would slow him down. The professional swimmer would wear a speedo (as little cotton as possible), shave their legs and chest, and wear a rubber cappy. I suppose I have the right to wear jeans and a tank top, but that’s not a right I would exercise IF I wanted to win. Paul says, “I have the right to do a lot of things in the Christian life that I lay aside to help me win people to Jesus.” Paul is talking about pursuing excellence in everything – in the way we strive for holiness, in the way we reach out to others, in the way we live for Jesus. His words echo the words of Solomon... *“Whatever your hand finds to do, DO IT WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT”* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). EXAMPLE: Michael Phelps. I think Michael is the most decorated Olympian athlete of all time. He won a total of 28 medals, which means by himself he won more medals than 70% of the countries that compete in the Olympics have won in their history. To win those medals came at a high cost. During his peak training seasons, he would swim about 12 miles per day. EVERY day. I read that he did that every day for 1800 consecutive days, without missing a single day. He ate 12,000 calories a day. He’d eat a pound of pasta for lunch, AND... A pound of pasta for dinner. (Who says you can’t out-exercise a bad diet? You swim 12 miles a day, and you can eat whatever you want.) And to think that he did all that for a bunch of medals that will end up in a dusty museum somewhere. Someday our grandkids – maybe our kids – will hear the name Michael Phelps and ask us “Who is that dad?” Paul says if athletes train like they do for crowns that perish and names on jerseys in rafters that fade into oblivion, how much more should we be willing to discipline our lives for the souls of people that last forever? Every now and then, leaders need to take a mediocrity check: Is there an area of responsibility that we are approaching only half-heartedly? Is there something we could be doing better? Am I giving my all? Howard Hendricks said, “I have never met a Christian who sat down and planned to live a mediocre life. But if you keep going in the direction in which you are moving, you may land there.” Former NFL coach George Allen had a sign on his desk to serve as a daily reminder to stay focused. The sign said, “Is what I’m doing right now taking me closer to my ultimate goal of winning?” This is a question we need to ask ourselves every day: “Am I moving in the direction I want my life to go, and am I doing so with a sense of urgency?” Next week we’ll talk more about living a disciplined, focused life. In today’s message we see that it begins with a commitment to live our lives in pursuit of excellence in the calling we have received in Jesus Christ.

**CONCLUSION.** Paul’s life could have been quite different than it was. It could have been so much easier than it was. He could have stayed home, and traveled less, but he would rather take the gospel into new territory. He

could have traveled with a wife, so he chose to remain single so that he would be less distracted in his work. He could have earned an income for his efforts, but he chose to work in the ministry for free, making tents on the side, so as not to burden any church. And he said... *"I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings"* (vs. 23). What blessings is he talking about? Observing firsthand the miracle of changes lives. Seeing up close what God can do in the lives of others. That was the reward for his work. None of us are called to be the Apostle Paul but we are all certainly called, and we can live our lives according to the same principles that filled his life with purpose. **We can seek to be compelled.** We can each ask God to make His calling so clear, and so dear to our hearts, that we can't not do it. **We can learn to adapt our lives for the good of others.** We can learn to be all things to all people, to be willing to say, "If I can change my approach in such a way that it will benefit the lives of others, I will change my approach." **We can choose to run our race with excellence.** We can choose to take this calling we have received and do it to the very best of our ability – whether it's teaching or parenting or gardening or singing or taking care of someone else – we can choose to pursue our calling with excellence. This is what it looks like to live your life on purpose.