

Small Group Questions

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

TITLE: "LifeShaping"

Sermon Series: Getting Ready for the "Believe" Series #2

Week of August 20th, 2017

THEME/ CONCEPT

THEME/ CONCEPT: This is the second "Pre-series" sermon to prepare for Believe series. I'm calling the second theme LifeShaping, learning to "Act Like Jesus." What should I do as Jesus' follower? This section focuses on the practices of daily life that shape our inner life and outward behavior. Our beliefs need to move from head to heart– the longest distance in the world. We make our faith a way of life by developing "holy habits," consistent practices in thought, speech, deed as individuals and in community. (1 Timothy 4:8-9 also). We are motivated by the prize of living in Christ now and for eternity. These practices bear fruit in spiritual strength, faithful endurance and lives that make a difference. APPLICATION: Let Jesus make a difference in you so that you make a difference in the world. CHARGE: May the difference Jesus makes in us make a difference in our world.

Opening Question

Q: Who doesn't love a good story about the underdog who overcomes? Describe one of your favorite movies with a similar theme- what is it that helps the protagonist achieve his goals?

Scripture References: 2 Corinthians 9:24-27

24 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. **25** 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. **26** Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. **27** No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Understanding the Scripture

1. Verse 24: Paul urges the Corinthians to run in a particular way. How does one run in this way?
2. Verse 25: What "games" are referenced here? What does "strict training" entail? What was the prize awarded to the winning athlete? Conversely, what is the prize that believers are promised?
3. Verse 26: What metaphors does Paul use to describe what believers should *not* do? Why?
4. Verse 27: What does Paul say we should do to our bodies? Why does he say we should do this? What is the consequence of not making our bodies a slave to righteousness?

Applying the Scripture

Small groups are a primary way of *building a community fully alive in Christ*. A small group facilitator can use questions like the following, adapted to the context of the particular small group, to help the group move beyond understanding the passage to allowing *Jesus Christ to fully change our lives* by the passage.

1. Paul relies on the Olympic Games for his biblical metaphors in this passage. Olympic athletes dedicate every aspect of their lives to their sport. For any runners in this group, describe what it takes to begin to establish a habit of running regularly.
2. Let's break this metaphor down even further. In general, what is the diet of those who are physically strong and disciplined? How can you carry this metaphor over into our spiritual diet? What types of things do we regularly "consume," and how can we "detox" from our unhealthier choices? For anyone who has had to quit any substance (this can run the gamut from caffeine, to sugar, to alcohol or drugs), can you describe the physical symptoms that accompanied your attempt to quit?
3. Habits take time. Paul reassures the Corinthians that they are racing for heaven—for an eternal crown that will not fade or perish, though the prizes we race for on earth do not come with us. Many of us have worked hard for earthly prizes—would anyone be willing to share something they worked very hard for? How did the prize fulfill you? Were there any ways that your reward was not what you expected...?
4. The image of someone running aimlessly, or a boxer beating the air, is used for comedic effect. A boxer without an opponent looks ridiculous if he is swinging at nothing—a runner with no goal is effectively wasting his time and resources. Many of us struggle to find direction—what are some concrete ways we can work toward a prize that we cannot physically see?
5. Paul is not literally encouraging self-flagellation, he is using a metaphor about discipline. Forming new habits is hard—it is often painful to become stronger. Paul tells us that if we cannot make our body a slave, we risk being disqualified from the race. Imagine you're an Olympic athlete who spends years working toward the Games—it's the pinnacle of your athletic career, but then you're caught somehow breaking the rules. You're disqualified, your reputation is gone, and you can no longer receive the prize. How would this feel? How can we use this to spur us on as we create holier habits and living?

Missional Strategy: Invite, Connect, Grow and Serve

Use questions like the following, adapted to the context of your particular small group, to work toward the milestone for the year.

Milestone: By this time next year each of us will have taken at least one step to become more like Jesus in our upward connection (connect), inner strength (grow) and outward focus (serve)

- a. Healthy habits cannot continue in isolation. How can you tap into your network of fellow athletes to ask for accountability and help as you attempt to become more like Christ?
- b. Prayer is one of our strongest, most under-utilized weapons as believers. Rate your prayer life, honestly—on a scale from 1=weak, 2=needs improvement, 3=okay, 4=fairly strong, 5=rock solid. Where are you now, and where would you like to be? How can you get there?
- c. Many scholars have referred to the gap between the head and the heart as “the fatal cubit.” (citation needed) Therein lies the problem—many of us already *know* what we need to do, and maybe we even know some concrete steps to achieve holy discipline. Examine your own body, and mentally identify the body parts you wish you could strengthen and tone. Now examine your spiritual life, and identify the areas that need exercise. Without over-analyzing too much, what is your own biggest obstacle that impedes your spiritual growth? How can you conquer those hurdles?

Closing Prayer

If your small group prays together, some of the following concepts might be helpful to invite the Holy Spirit to help each member of the group grow in areas that may have come up during the group's discussion.

Pray....

- For strength as we give up unhealthy habits, and commitment to new ones
- For honesty with our brothers and sisters as we confess our weakness and attempt to stay the course
- That our eyes will see Christ more clearly as we strive to chase closely after Him
- That we would learn to accept and embrace the painfulness of change, and that we would celebrate when our spiritual muscles are “sore” from a new exercise regimen