

THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture 1 Cor. 9:24-27

Sermon: *Learning How to be a Winner*

I wanted you, in your mind, to join me to sit in a stadium. In the city of Corinth was the second largest games in the entire Mediterranean world. The only other games that were bigger were the games at Athens that has now produced our Olympic games. People from all over the world would come to Corinth, sit in the stadium, and watch the athletes as they would compete. One day, one of the men who was there watching, was Paul. As he saw these men, as they were striving to get to the finish line, to be the best they could be in their field, a thought came to his mind. The thought was why can't people who follow Jesus Christ get the same discipline and have the same desire to be the best as these athletes do. Why can't we, who are striving for that which is far more important than these men who would get a little wreath to put on their head, why can't we strive to really be the best considering what we have the opportunity to gain. In our passage of scripture, as he was sitting there watching these athletes, he began to write these words. "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. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last. We do it to get a crown that will last forever." Then beginning in verse 26, he begins to tell us how you and I can give our best. "Therefore I do not run like a man aimlessly, I do not fight like a man beating the air, 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." The question that came to Paul's mind was why can't you and I be the best? Why can't we be the best Christian that somebody knows? Why can't we be the best, that when somebody says give me an example of what Christ really working in somebody's life is about, that they would mention your name. In all of our minds, there ought to be a desire this morning that I want to be the very best for God that I can be.

If you are a Sunday School teacher you ought to say in your mind today, I want to be the best Sunday School teacher that has ever taught Sunday School. If you are giving your influence at the office, I want to do the best that anybody has ever done. I want to be the best Christian parent that I can be. If I am going to sing in the choir, I am going to be the best choir member they have ever had. What ever responsibilities God gives to me, I want to be the best. Now this church ought to say, we want to be the best church God has ever put together. We want to be the church that upholds the name of Christ, we want to be the best church in reaching people for Christ, we want to be the best church in being generous to others. This ought to be the goal and the desire of our life. Paul said isn't it strange that a person will want to be the best politician, the best athlete, the best musician, the best business person and he comes to church and what he wants to do is just be an also ran. I am hoping that God is going to lay in your heart before we walk out in a moment, that you will say in the responsibilities that I have, I want to the best for God.

What Paul is going to do in these passages of scripture is to tell you how you can do that. The first one is you have to have a goal in mind. I do not run aimlessly. What that simply is, can you imagine a man getting to run the four hundred forty yards and what he does is run all over the field. He runs over the stadium, he says I understand that I have to have a goal in mind and my goal is to get there the quickest that I possibly can. If you are going to be the best, there is going to have to be some goals in your mind that you have set for your own life.

I was interrupted one day by a group of young people who asked me a question. They said if you went out to the airport and there were two lines, one said Atlanta and the other said Charlotte, what line would you get in? I knew it was a trick. The only answer I could come up with was evasion. I don't know. I set myself up real good. They said, "if you don't know where you are going, how do you know what line to get in." Do you know that describes a lot of us in our life. We don't really know where we are going. We don't have any goal in mind to try to get there. We are just waking up every day hoping everything is

going to work out all right, but to have in our mind that this is what I am trying to accomplish, many of us never have that . What you find out is that if you don't have a goal for your life other people do and they will push you around where you need to go. Paul said one of the things that I want to do is, I want to determine in my life that I am trying to get to that point and I am trying to get there the fastest and the best that I can.

I made mention before that when I was in high school and college that I ran on the track team. I couldn't run far but I could run fast. My senior year in high school, I was to run the hundred meters. By all the records that had already been given, in that year, I could run the hundred meters faster than anybody that was in the race. I had trained all that last month to get ready for the big race, but I had a good rival. His name was Sam Miller and Sam was from New Orleans and he went to Jesuit High School. If there was anybody who could beat me, Sam could. The race came and we both started off. I was almost finished and the thought came to my mind, I wonder where Sam is. I decided to look. Do you know where Sam was? When I decided to stop and look, he was about one step ahead of me and he won the race. When I got my eyes off of the goal, my stride broke and he won the race. If you do not have goals in your mind of where you are going and how you are going to get there, what you are going to determine, is that other people are going to win and you are not going to be able to get there.

Let me ask you. Have you ever sat down and wrote a mission statement for your life? If you had to determine who you are and really what you are trying to do, could you write it in one sentence. If you never have, let me encourage you this afternoon and wrestle with yourself and write a mission statement.

It is almost ready to be over. Are you getting closer? Do you have any goals in mind for next year? Let me ask you that maybe you might want to do this. Maybe you want to say what I am going to do is I am going to read the Bible every day. I am going to read the Bible through for the whole year. Maybe what I am going to do next year is.... I am going to go on a mission trip. Maybe what I am going to do is I am going to develop my prayer life and I am going to start journaling and I am going to start writing it down, my relationship with God. Maybe what you want to do is determine I am going to take some place of responsibility. What ever it is, I want to encourage you to understand that you need to set goals in your mind. If you don't know where you are going, how do you know when you get there, where you are? I want to determine in my life that today, this is where I am trying to get and I want to be the very best in trying to get there.

Second thing.....goal principle. He said I do not fight the air. [athletic metaphor] An athlete in the boxing ring. All the months he has been practicing, gotten his foot work down, gotten the right jab, left cross, already to go. He had practiced and worked but one thing he forgot to do. He forgot to show up for the match. He spent all of his life shadow boxing, but never made it into the ring. Do you know there are a lot of people who think that the Christian life is all intellectual. They just can't wait to get some new fact to put in their head. Particularly, if you can tell them something about some mysterious riddle in the Bible, they can hardly wait to get the answer. Some people think the Christian life is all meditation and contemplation of God.

There was a famous man in history. His name is Simon Stylis. He determined he was going to dedicate his whole life to God. He built a tower and climbed up to the top. He stayed up there for sixty-four years. His family put food up and brought human waste down for sixty-four years. He was dedicating himself to God, not one person did he help, not one person did he give any encouragement to, not one person did he touch. Sixty-four years and finally when he died, they brought him down. There are lots and lots of folk who spend their life on the side lines, looking at people in the race but never get in it themselves. I am going to ask you a question. When Christmas is over, is there going to be somebody that will say, I am better because of what you did. I am helped because of what you did. Will there be some missionary around the world who will say I will be able to carry on my work because of the money you gave?. Let me ask you. I am not asking you how you feel, I am asking you, what did you do? So many of us get to the point where we just are Monday morning quarterbacks. We can tell you every way it ought to be done, but we are not in there ourselves, getting the job tasks down. Paul said if you are ever going to be a champion, you are going to have to practice, but he said you are going to have to get in the race yourself. I hope that today you will determine to go home and find something specific that you can get involved in for Him.

The third one... He said if you are going to win the race, if you are going to be the best, you are going to have to be willing to discipline yourself. When I lived in Memphis, the world football league began . It didn't last very long but it was a wonderful experience to watch, at that time, the best running backs in American to come to Memphis and to play for the Memphis team. They practiced all summer. Practiced down in the northern part of Mississippi. Larry Czonka was there and I went down one day to watch them practice. I sat in the hot Mississippi sun in August. I saw these fellows come by with all their pads, all their helmet's and I went over to Larry Czonka and got his autograph. I saw them run up and down that field for two hours and then walk away completely exhausted but they had spent the time to be the best. Paul said just as a person disciplines himself to be the best athlete, you are going to have to discipline yourself to be able to be the best Christian you can be. How many of you said, "One day, I am going to wake up every morning and pray." How many of you lived up to it? I am going to read my Bible every day but after about thirty days, you found out you didn't. I am going to get a hold of this really in my life and you found out you couldn't. Then you began to understand that the most important problem that you had in your life is that you make resolutions, but you can't live up to them. The slightest little trick that Satan has is to say to you, well go ahead and do it, but you don't have to do it right now. Do you realize that between your head and your feet there is this vast gulf and the only way you can ever live up to what you want to, it takes discipline in your life to be able to do it.

Many of you have had the opportunity to read some of the writings of perhaps the best known business consultant in America, Steven Covey. In one of his writings, he mentions a play called "A Man for all Seasons." It tells the story of Thomas Moore. Thomas Moore was the archbishop of Canterbury that finally was killed for his faith. There came a man to him one day whose name was Richard Rich. Richard was his friend and he came to the archbishop. He said "Archbishop, hire me." Thomas Moore shook his head and said, "I can't do it." He said "Tell me, why can't you give me a job?" Listen to what is in the play. "I can't give you a job Richard, because you can't answer for yourself." If somebody comes along and wants you to do something else, you will go do that. You cannot answer for yourself. That night in the play, a person came with money and bribed Richard Rich and Richard betrayed Archbishop Moore. It is not what you say, it is, do you have the moral integrity to keep it done? The only way you can do that is to wake up everyday and say Lord, what ever it is going to take, I want to put in the practice time to make sure that I live up to my commitments.

Listen to how it ends. I want to do what it said because I have a fear. This is the fear. When I share with others, I myself, will loose the prize. Let me tell you the word picture. The word picture is a beautiful vase. In the beautiful vase you keep perfume. One day you dust the vase and you hit it too hard and it puts a crack in it. It is no good any more for perfume. It is too valuable to throw away. You just put in on a shelf and keep it dusted. Paul says my fear is I will because I don't discipline myself, I can say something to somebody else, but then I get a crack. Then all I am good for to God is to be on a shelf that occasionally He dusts. The fear of his life was that he couldn't be useable for God. Now we are back to the stadium.

You know that after every race there is a reward ceremony. I want you to imagine that all of the people who have run are there. You remember the little stage, a fellow stands here and then it goes up. The fellow who wins goes there. Number one, number two and number three. Do you remember the flag comes down, the national anthem is played and the three are all there. The also RAN's are not there. Everybody is listening to the national anthem and then when it is over the, official comes over and gives them the medal. This isn't fanciful because the Bible says that when you get to heaven, there is going to be an award ceremony.

Now the national anthem of heaven is the Hallelujah chorus. The flag comes down, the stand comes out and the people who have been the servants of God walk forward and you are there. One day you will be. My question is will you be on the bottom, on the top, or will you be in the also ran's because you have never had the motivation to be the best. I am going to tell you what I want. I want to be on that stand and my Lord come to me and say , "You are a good and faithful servant and here is the prize." Can you walk out of this building and say, "Lord, of all that you have done for me, I don't have the motivation or the discipline to be the best."