



Frisco First Baptist Church

Distracted • Stolen Focus • 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 • Jan 12, 2025

MAIN POINT

We began the sermon series on January 5th during Family Worship, today is the first day of the actual LIFEGroup lessons. Also, make sure mark your calendars for January 26th. After the second service we will have LIFEGroup Leader Training. The topic is: How to know if you are winning.

Today's Lesson: **Stolen focus. The Tyranny of Technology** [1 Cor. 9:24-27; 6:12, Phil 4:8] – Paul challenges us to be intentional in how we live our lives, which includes how we use technology. Using the metaphor of technology, Paul challenges us to not run aimlessly. The addictive pull of wasting time on our phones robs our focus, our time, and consequently our lives. To experience spiritual sanity, we might require a digital detox. If you don't discipline yourself to control technology, be assured that it is controlling you.

INTRODUCTION

Adults spend an average of 7 hours daily on screens, with about 2.5 hours dedicated to social media. This excessive screen time, including doomscrolling, is linked to anxiety, reduced attention spans, and poor mental health. Social media habits exacerbate reduced attention spans and feelings of stress.

- 1. Do you spend more or less time in front of screens than the average person? Do you feel better or worse after your time online?**
- 2. What activity or sport have you enjoyed participating in, and how does that experience resonate with the idea of striving for mastery and discipline?**
- 3. If you could learn any new skill or sport right now, what would it be and why?**
- 4. As you consider what people say when you are not around (think obituary or eulogy even), what would they say dominates your life?**

UNDERSTANDING

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

- 5. To what extent did Paul go to save people? (9:20–23)**

- 6. What are some of your rights and freedoms as a Christian?**
- 7. Under what circumstances should we take advantage of our rights, and when should we willingly waive them?**
- 8. How can we show our love to unbelievers while refusing to participate in activity that is sinful?**
- 9. Why is it helpful to adjust our actions for the people around us?**
- 10. How does insisting on our rights hinder the gospel of Christ?**
- 11. What right have you given up because it may have caused others to stumble?**

9:19 Paul put himself at the service of others in order that God may use him to bring people to Jesus (compare Phil 2:5–8; Gal 4:4–5). He does not regard himself as a “savior,” but as an instrument through which someone might hear the gospel and be saved (compare 1 Cor 7:16). He adapts to his audience (but not by compromising the gospel or his message) to remove any obstacles to their acceptance of the gospel messageⁱ

9:22. In his references to Jews and Gentiles in the preceding verses, Paul explained his voluntary restraint of freedom in order to reach unbelievers with the gospel. Some suggest that the weak in this verse refers to Jews and Gentiles together in a state of unbelief and so was intended to summarize Paul’s previously stated convictions (cf. Rom. 5:6 where “the weak” are also called “the ungodly”). It is more likely, however, that Paul was referring explicitly to the weak Corinthians described in 1 Corinthians 8:9–11 (cf. Jew, Greeks, and the church of God in 10:32). His concern to win them was not in the preliminary sense of justification as in the case of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles (9:20–21) but to win the Corinthians in terms of sanctification and maturity in Christ (cf. Matt. 18:15)—and so to save them for God’s ongoing work in their lives (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 8:11). Paul’s condescension to the scruples and customs of all men (cf. “everyone” in 9:19) found application on a momentary case-by-case basis since it would be impossible to satisfy simultaneously the penchants of both Jews and Gentiles alike. 9:23. Paul voluntarily did this in order to gain the widest possible hearing for the gospel and so to share in its blessings as God’s fellow worker (3:9), reaping the joyful harvest of many won to Christ (cf. John 4:36).ⁱⁱ

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

- 12. Why is it necessary to live with purpose and discipline? (9:25–27)**
- 13. Why did Paul lead a disciplined life? (9:27)**
- 14. In what ways do you need to be in “strict training” and making your body your slave (see 9:25, 27) in order to win the imperishable prize?**
- 15. How can Paul act differently toward different groups and not be considered a hypocrite?**
- 16. In verses 24–27 the athletic metaphor is emphasized. How does this metaphor apply to our Christian lives?**

17. What does it mean to be “all things to all people”?

9:24 The Corinthians were familiar with athletic contests. The Isthmian Games took place in a nearby town every two or three years. They were second only to the Olympic Games in importance in all of Greece. The Greek word translated race is stadion, the word used to describe the standard 600-foot Greek footrace. Paul’s emphasis in this verse was on the last statement in it. We should run our race in such a way that we will receive a reward from the Judge. In the Christian race we do not compete with one another for the prize. We compete with ourselves. The emphasis is on self-discipline, not competition. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward (cf. Matt. 6:19–21; 2 Tim. 2:5).

9:25 The word competes is a translation of agonizomai, from which we get the English word agonizes. To receive the prize of our Lord’s “Well done” we need to give all our effort. We also need to exercise self-control. Competitors in the Isthmian Games had to train for 10 months. An athlete in training denies himself or herself many legitimate pleasures in order to gain an extra edge of superiority. Likewise, as spiritual athletes, we may need to limit our liberty and exercise self-control for a higher goal. ... Winners in the Isthmian Games received a perishable wreath of parsley, wild celery, or pine. In the Olympian Games, the prize was a wild olive wreath. In contrast, the victorious Christian’s reward is imperishable (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8) and it lies in the future. ⁱⁱⁱ

APPLICATION

- 18. Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.**
- 19. How much effort do you put into being a Christian? Do you work as hard for the gospel as Olympic athletes train to win a medal?**
- 20. Would the writer of your obituary be able to say that ‘the gospel dominated his or her whole life’?**

PRAYER

Father God,

We come before You today with hearts full of gratitude for the grace You've shown us through Jesus Christ. Thank You for the opportunity to belong to Your family, to become more like Jesus together, and to benefit others through our love for you. Help us to live with purpose and discipline, as Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 9, so that in all things we may point others toward You.

Lord, we ask that You would give us the strength to remain focused on what truly matters—our relationship with You and with each other. In a world full of distractions, may we keep our eyes fixed on the eternal prize, remembering that everything we do is for the sake of the gospel and for Your glory. Empower us to serve others, even when it's difficult, and to make the most of every opportunity to share Your love and truth.

As we go out this week, may we invite people into relationships with you and us. Use us to guide others toward You and help us to grow in faith and love together. May our lives be a testimony to Your goodness and grace.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

COMMENTARY

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27, discusses his voluntary restraint of personal freedoms and rights for the sake of the gospel. He describes himself as free in Christ but chooses to become a "slave to all" in order to win more people to Christ (9:19). This approach includes adapting to the customs and cultural norms of different groups, whether Jews, Gentiles, or the weak, in order to remove barriers to the gospel message. While Paul had the freedom to live in any manner, he willingly chose to adjust his behavior to avoid causing offense and to share the gospel effectively.

Paul's example demonstrates that he never compromised the core message of the gospel—salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He was committed to reaching both Jews and Gentiles, showing his deep desire for all to be saved, even if it meant sacrificing personal comforts or freedoms. For Paul, the goal was always to share the good news of Christ and build relationships that would lead others to faith (9:20-22).

Paul uses the metaphor of an athlete in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, comparing the discipline needed to win a race to the self-discipline required to live a life that honors God. Just as athletes train rigorously for an imperishable crown, Paul disciplined himself in his ministry for the imperishable crown of eternal life. His commitment to winning souls required him to deny his own desires and submit to the authority of God, striving to live in a way that would keep him faithful and focused until the end of his race (9:25-27).

Ultimately, Paul's life was a constant balancing act of freedom and sacrifice. He was willing to adjust his life for the sake of others but never compromised the integrity of the gospel. His discipline was not just for personal growth, but for the sake of those he hoped to win for Christ, illustrating how the gospel should take priority over personal rights and preferences in the pursuit of God's kingdom. His example calls believers to intentionally

focus on the goal of eternal life, putting aside distractions, and dedicating themselves to disciplined, purposeful living for the sake of the gospel.

This passage challenges Christians today to evaluate their own lives, asking how they might sacrifice personal freedoms for the sake of others and how they can discipline themselves in their pursuit of holiness and service to God.^{iv}

ⁱ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Co 9:19). Lexham Press.2-3

ⁱⁱ Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 524–525). Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (1 Co 9:24–27). Galaxie Software.

^{iv} Adapted from Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 524–525). Victor Books.