



PART 3

AN APPROVED WORKMAN: LEADERSHIP HELD TO A BIBLICAL STANDARD

Chapter Ten

HOW NOT TO BE DISQUALIFIED

And thus Paul highlighted for us another critical, indispensable, and supremely important quality every leader must maintain: *A leader is disciplined.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #23

A LEADER IS DISCIPLINED

Samson's strength was overcome because of his own lack of self-control. Solomon's wisdom was compromised by his lust. And if David, a man after God's own heart, could succumb to the lust of the eyes and commit adultery and murder, no leader ever ought to feel immune from personal failure. Paul certainly did not.

As a matter of fact, that was Paul's one great concern about his own role as a leader. He did not want to disqualify himself from the race. Therefore, he disciplined himself, restrained his fleshly desires, and brought his own body into subjection, so that the time would never come, after having preached to others, when he himself would be disqualified. He kept his eye on the prize ([Philippians 3:13-14](#)).

Philippians 3:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."



He exercised himself unto godliness ([1 Timothy 4:7](#)).

1 Timothy 4:7 (NASB)

⁷“But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

And he ran the race with endurance ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

Hebrews 12:1 (NASB)

¹“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

COMPETING FOR THE PRIZE

Why run a race at all, unless you're running to win? No true competitor wants to finish second.

These days we have lots of “fun runs” and marathons that attract thousands of amateur runners whose only goal is to finish the race. The prize they are seeking to attain is the satisfaction of completing the race (sometimes whether they finish *well* or not). There's nothing wrong with that in a race for pure recreation. But in a real athletic competition, the goal is to win. And Paul portrayed all of life and ministry as a real competition, not a fun run. He took the contest seriously, and he lived accordingly.

The Corinthians understood athletic competition as well as any modern ESPN junkie. Since the time of Alexander the Great, athletics had dominated Greek society. The two most important athletic events were the Olympic Games held every fourth year in Athens, and the Isthmian games held every other year (in the spring of the second and fourth years of the Olympiad) in Corinth. The Isthmian games were among the most famous attractions of the city. Everyone in Corinth knew something about athletics.

And one thing everyone knew was that in order to get the prize, you had to win the race. In the Isthmian games, the prize was a wreath made of pine leaves. But along with that came fame and high honor. Winners were venerated above all others in society, exactly as our society does with sports heroes today. Every young man in Corinth dreamed of winning the prize.

I was an athlete in high school. I was on the football, baseball, and track teams. I *always* competed to win. That was my whole life in those days. And I was able to achieve a moderate degree of athletic success. When I think of the sacrifices I was willing to make to run on a football field with a piece of pig under my arm, it seems almost inconceivable to me today.



Notice what Paul said about earthly athletes:

1 Corinthians 9:25 (NASB)

²⁵ “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. **They then do it to receive a perishable wreath** [crown], but we an imperishable.”

A pine wreath. Something that was not even comfortable hanging around the winner’s neck. These days, the most prestigious prize for a runner is an Olympic gold medal. I’m told the material from which they are made is worth about \$110. These are perishable prizes. They have little intrinsic value. Even the intangible rewards are short-lived. And yet athletes make amazing sacrifices to win them.

Earthly accolades are fleeting and transitory. And yet athletes are willing to make amazing, long-term, hard-core sacrifices in order to achieve the prize.

Paul said if the worldly athlete is willing to discipline himself to win a pine wreath, what price would you pay to attain “**an imperishable crown**” (**v. 25**)—one that is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away” (1 Peter 1:4)?

1 Corinthians 9:25 (NASB)

²⁵ “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. **They then do it to receive a perishable wreath** [crown], but we an imperishable.”

1 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

⁴ “**To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away**, reserved in heaven for you.”

Paul described his own quest for that prize in **Philippians 3:13–14**:

Philippians 3:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The race was not over. He had not yet achieved that which he strived for. He was determined not to stop short of the goal. To look back or look around would only slow him down unnecessarily. He therefore kept his objective in view and pressed on toward the prize. That is what every runner must do.

I’ve observed over the years that all gifted leaders seem to have an innate drive to win. Those who lack the winning instinct don’t make very effective leaders.

But if we are going to win *this* race, it will come at a price, or we will be disqualified.



TRAINING FOR THE CONTEST

The price of victory is discipline. That means **self-control, sacrifice, and hard work**. Athletes in Paul's day trained hard just to be able to compete in the competition. In order to enter the Isthmian games, athletes had to give proof of ten months' full-time training. For thirty days before the event, the athletes trained together daily, in public view. They followed a staggering regimen of exercise and discipline that eliminated all but the most devoted. Then, as now, it was a serious commitment to be a world-class athlete.

That was precisely how Paul portrayed the discipline he followed as a leader of God's people. This was no mere game to him. He was more serious than any track-and-field athlete. He wanted to win a race that had far more significance than any arena sport. Therefore, it required even more diligence and discipline.

"Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [moderate, self-restrained, not given to excess] in all things," he said in [1 Corinthians 9:25](#).

1 Corinthians 9:25 (NASB)

²⁵ **"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control [temperate [moderate, self-restrained, not given to excess] in all things. They then *do it to* receive a perishable wreath [crown], but we an imperishable."**

You can't break the training regimen and win. That is true not only in athletics. It is true in everything. It is *especially* true in leadership.

Genuine success always comes at a high price. Every athlete knows this. That is why athletes regulate their sleep, what they eat, and how they exercise. It's not a part-time effort. For those who want to excel, it is a constant, nonstop responsibility.

Discipline has to become a passion. It isn't merely a question of doing whatever is mandatory and avoiding whatever is prohibited. It involves voluntary self-denial. An athlete has every right to eat a full eight-course dinner just before he runs the 100-yard dash. That's his privilege. But it's not smart. And if he doesn't sacrifice that right, he's not going to win.