



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

Keep Your Commitments

In a similar vein, don't say you'll do something you cannot do, and don't make a promise you don't intend to fulfill. Jesus said,

Matthew 5:37 (NASB)

³⁷ "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 (NASB)

²¹ "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you.

²² However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you.

²³ You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised."



A person who doesn't even keep his own commitments is invariably undisciplined in the rest of life.

Tell Yourself No from Time to Time

Gain control of your own appetites by denying yourself pleasures you may be entitled to. Skip dessert. Take a walk instead of taking a nap. Do something for your spouse rather than treating yourself.

That sort of self-denial is precisely what Paul was describing in [1 Corinthians 9:27](#): **"I discipline my body and bring it into subjection."**

[1 Corinthians 9:27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁷ **"But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."**

He used a Greek expression that literally means **"to strike under the eye."** In figurative terms, he was saying he made his own body a punching bag in order to cultivate discipline.

Notice how Paul painted this picture of self-discipline in vivid athletic terms. He wrote, **"Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty" (v. 26).**

[1 Corinthians 9:26 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁶ **"Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air."**

He knew where the goal was. He knew where the boundaries of the track were. So he ran toward the prize with absolute determination. A runner with no goal and no boundaries will run aimlessly and lethargically. The Christian leader must keep the goal in view and run with persistence and with all his energy.

This, by the way, is another integral principle of leadership. It is a perfect partner to the principle of discipline: *A leader is energetic.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #24

A LEADER IS ENERGETIC

I have never known an effective leader who was lazy or idle. Leaders must be industrious and diligent. This goes hand in hand with many of the principles we have highlighted so far. It is a necessary prerequisite to the initiative, the enthusiasm, the decisiveness, and the resilience required in leadership.

The leader, like any good athlete, cannot walk off the track midrace. He presses on toward the goal. In fact, as every athlete knows, we frequently must press on through pain, despite weariness, regardless of injury, against all opposition, and amid all kinds of trials. While it sometimes seems to drain every ounce of energy from the human reservoir, the success of the



effort replenishes the spirit. The good leader, like the good athlete, sometimes has to reach deep within and find a way to persevere when perseverance seems impossible.

Paul knew exactly where he could draw such energy: **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”** ([Philippians 4:13 NASB](#)).

That’s why he could say,

Philippians 4:12 (NASB)

¹²**“I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”**

He had disciplined himself to run, and to persevere through all difficulties, in such a way that he could achieve the prize.

Here Paul added another metaphor mid-verse. He was not only a runner; he was a boxer as well: **“Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air”** ([1 Corinthians 9:26 NASB](#)).

Notice he was not shadowboxing, and he was not sparring. He was in a serious fight. *While* he was running, he was also fighting. He had an opponent he had to keep punching out, because the opponent would otherwise get him off track.

This opponent, remember, was his own flesh—meaning the sinful tendencies that are so often associated with bodily appetites and carnal lusts. Now we know why he treated his own body like a punching bag. Otherwise, his own flesh would cause him to lose the race. He was running to win and boxing to keep from losing. In positive terms, he was cultivating the discipline of mental toughness to keep his eyes on the prize and his feet moving in the right direction. In negative terms, he was cultivating the discipline of self-control in order to keep his own flesh from costing him the race.

Every athlete knows what this struggle is like. Every good athlete must keep his body under control. He can’t be overweight, and he can’t be unhealthy. He nourishes his body, exercises it to stay fit, and works it to build muscle. He stays in control of his body.

Most people, by contrast, are controlled by their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. **“Feed me more. Don’t overwork me. Give me pleasure. Give me rest.”** That is why the sin principle is called **“the flesh”** throughout the Pauline epistles. It is not that the body itself is inherently evil. But evil desires are often associated with the body. So Paul said we need to **“put to death the deeds of the body”** ([Romans 8:13](#)) and **“[crucify] the flesh with its passions and desires”** ([Galatians 5:24](#)).

Romans 8:13 (NASB)

¹³**“For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”**



Galatians 5:24 (NASB)

24 “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The athlete has two things going for him: First, he knows how to subdue the body; and second, he has the mental toughness to keep pursuing his goal. Paul was saying that what makes a great athlete is the same discipline necessary for an effective leader.

But, he said, it is a perpetual discipline. If you slack off or give up before reaching the finish line, everything will be lost. That is why we must press on ([Philippians 3:13–14](#)) and run with endurance ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

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.”

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.”

FINISHING THE RACE

For Paul, the passion to *finish* the race well was never far from the forefront of his thoughts. He told the Ephesian elders,

Acts 20:23-24 (NASB)

23 “Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”

When he wrote to the churches in Galatia, he rebuked them with these words: “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” ([Galatians 5:7 NASB](#)).

He also recounted for them how he had earnestly defended the gospel, “lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain” ([Galatians 2:2](#)).

Galatians 2:2 (NASB)

2 “It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, **for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.**”