

*Sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 by Jonathan Shradar January 22, 2017*

All of this rain has me thinking of waterparks this week! I don't go all that often to waterparks but when I do, of all the options of slides, rides and pools to be experienced, I always prefer the "lazy river." To just float, on a raft that does all the work for me, in a current taking me exactly where I need to go... relentlessly flowing in the right direction, in circles! You don't have to worry about other people, except the occasional punk that tries to go against the flow. All around enjoyable.

Truth be don't, this is how I prefer to live my life. On float! Money earning interest out of sight, relationships just that just go with the flow, posting my opinion about those going against the flow but rarely moving off my raft to make an effort for change.

Then when it comes to my faith, my lazy river mentality infiltrates even my expectations of Jesus and the benefits of the gospel, making them all about me and my steady comfort in the same direction. I drive my hardest to avoid bumping into other pilgrims in the gospel current and if I should see someone drowning or slip off of their raft, then I trust the "lifeguard" will get it and I can stay safely on my rear thinking the refreshing water is primarily about my rest.

But then I open the Bible and encounter the waterpark of faith in the New Testament - I see the rides the apostles and the church chose, or were directed toward and I notice something profoundly different from my lazy river experience.

Here in the Word today we are confronted with the call of the Christian life.

**Christians are invited to the fullest life, sharing the belonging found in the gospel.**

**1 Corinthians 9:19-27**

In the flow of the river that is this letter to the Corinthian church we are still interacting with Paul (the author's) answer to a question on how to treat food offered to idols. The question of the outward expression of our faith with the care of others as our compass.

Paul has brought up his apostolic credibility - that he has a right as the leader of the church he has rights to freely eat, even to pay and honor from the church but he sets it down for something more worthwhile, to keep the free gift of the good news of Jesus untainted by entitlement - all that others would hear, see and be changed by it. Here Paul reveals to us that freedom gained in Christ comes with an invitation...

Some say this is the quintessential passage concerning Christian witness in the world.

The whole of 1 Corinthians has been cutting through the tension of being "others" focused over self. Here again Paul makes the outworking or flow of our faith as something with an eye and

effort toward other people. In a world where self is the highest priority and prize, it rubs against current.

And it is what Jesus - the one we say is Lord - director, owner of our lives calls us to it, and frankly little else.

**Matthew 28:16-20** “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the wake of the resurrection, Christian witness is the purpose we come into when we believe in Jesus, all other endeavors by themselves are a waste.

But over and over again life and it abundantly, fully, is about taking this refreshing water of the gospel - of Jesus's life, death and resurrection, to others that they too would share in the acceptance, approval, love, belonging, empowerment and future grace we have in Christ.

In our text today Paul gives a model of this life and he reveals his motive for it while calling us to run too.

### **1) Model**

Though I am free of all - I am not bound to anyone, beholden to none, I made myself a slave to all. All of this talk of freedom, getting out of slavery and Paul says he goes right into a new servitude to other people “to win more of them.” To preach the free-of-charge gospel and see people believe in Christ and experience freedom for themselves.

He goes about it in two ways, first he becomes all things to all people. To the Jew he became like a Jew, to the law abider, as one under the law, to the gentiles as a gentile and to the weak as one of them. He takes on the custom and expression of the people he is witnessing to.

I think this text - since it is such an important one on witness - has been misused to say that to share the gospel is to affirm the lifestyle or perspective of all other people... but Paul wouldn't go there. He is unabashedly honest, direct and clear in the truth of Christ, our brokenness and need for a Savior and the love we are given in Jesus. But what he does is take this truth and love into the context of the unbeliever, into their struggles and experience to bring the cool glass of water to those in the pressure cooker of life.

And this is a poignant issue in our day - how we witness. “You will watch a generation of Christians -- OF CHRISTIANS -- set the Bible aside in an attempt to become more like Jesus.

And stunningly it will sound completely plausible. This will be perhaps the cleverest of all the devil's schemes in your generation. Sacrifice TRUTH for LOVE's sake. And you will rise or fall based upon whether you will sacrifice one for the other. Will you have the courage to live in the tension of both TRUTH and LOVE?" -Beth Moore

The model here is living in the tension, not changing the message but entering into the lives of others. Going to them, moving into the neighborhood and caring for those that live there. Purposeful engagement, empathy for those around you. Understanding what they live for, what their hopes and fear are - and not a media given perspective of them but a face-to-face education. Taking us out of the cloister of our clubs and churches to meet the "all people" of our city and world. Relational Intentionality. The same intentionality you'd use to raise your kid and get the next promotion.

And then in this entering into the lives of others, Paul goes about it with discipline, like an athlete.

Corinth at this time is the home of Isthmian games (second only to the Olympics) so they were familiar with athletic performance and effort made to win. He doesn't run aimlessly but on purpose, training, striving, sweating to cross the line. He doesn't throw wild punches, he hits his target.

We are familiar with personal discipline of our bodies, of attempts at self-control (as we come off the resolution season) for Paul this is the lifestyle of a believer - active, vigorous and driven... all for others though. "His point was that discipline is absolutely essential not to our progress in the Christian life, but to our witness in the world."

An engaged, empathetic, active and disciplined life of witness - evangelism, unrelenting, always on.

We can understand the model and get excited about it, revved up by it... but we can never live it if we miss the motivation for it.

## **2) Motive**

All of his rights set aside, all of his effort made in this direction - to win people to Jesus.

This is Paul's purpose clause, his life verse, the reason he becomes all things to all people and disciplines his body for the cause:

**1 Corinthians 9:23** "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." (ESV)

Paul is motivated for the sake of the gospel, to extend its reach to people in need, that the Jew, the one under the law, the gentile, the weak, would share in the blessings, of the good news of Jesus with him. That he would be surrounded by other worshipers adding to their number with each intentional relationship.

Matt Chandler conversion; 'we are going to talk about Jesus, you can decide when, but it is going to happen.' As believers, here is the truth, we don't have relationships for our own sake, to be surrounded by friends, we have friends that we would share in the blessings of the gospel with them.

What are the blessings? Paul is not referring to its content as such, but to the proclaimed gospel as God's saving power at work in the world. **Romans 1:16-17** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (ESV)

"What is the nature of the gospel? The gospel foundationally is about a witness who came to us by becoming one of us - an insider who felt our deepest hopes and aspirations, who learned the questions we were asking and the things that troubled us. It's about a witness who immersed himself deeply in our fallen world, speaking and giving, living and loving in ways we could understand - sharing everything with us, but even more, giving his life away for us and our sin, becoming weak, losing it all - because he had a goal that kept him going. That goal was you. It was me...

"And when we see him doing all of that for sinners like us, it gives us a goal of our own - not only to share his gospel with others, but to share in its very nature as we do that. Why do we listen and why do we learn the hopes and questions of our neighbors and to speak in ways people can understand? Why do we keep going when the rigor of intellectual and cultural training and loving our neighbors gets hard? We keep going in order to share not only what God has done for us but how he did it for us too. The goal that keeps us going isn't winning souls or arguments. It's not about amassing converts, rewards, or all the knowledge in the world. It's about standing side by side with our neighbors and sharing in the nature of this gospel that has saved us, even as we learn to show it more and more to one another through our words and through our love. "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in it."

To add to and extend the worship of Jesus in our world. This is the motivation. The gospel is so good it must be shared, at all costs, to all people.

Paul does it for the prize!

**1 Corinthians 9:25-27** "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one

beating the air. [27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (ESV)

Verse 27 can be tricky and as we read it, “disqualified,” we get nervous because does he mean he loses his salvation? We can’t rob this verse from its context and being disqualified here “disqualified from receiving rewards.” The imperishable wreath or crown.

Now when we come to rewards in Scripture we are so inclined toward ourselves that sometime we miss their meaning. Paul is not striving for a prize merely of gold, or even more glory, his bigger mansion in heaven - the prize is the people.

He disciplines his living and preaching so that he won’t lose out on the winning of other people to Christ.

Elsewhere we see him call the church his crown. **Philippians 4:1** “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”

If only we could be freed from our selfishness we might see the beauty that the point is not to float along or even gain some crowns for behavior or perfect knowledge. To see the reward as other worshiper, adding to the chorus of praise to the giver of the gospel - our true and forever king!

This is what drives Paul. This is what reshapes his personality; what stirs him to face the harshest of treatment, the grimmest of circumstances, to be eligible for the prize, to win others.

Now what? We see the model and the motive, where do we fit in. The call to the Corinthians is the same to us.

### **3) So, Run!**

**1 Corinthians 9:24** “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.” (ESV)

This is the invitation **to the fullest life, sharing the belonging found in the gospel.**

For us this is living from the gospel for others. From our benefits, our being made right with God and being transformed by his Spirit, living to see others experience the same thing.

If our gospel doesn’t reorient us toward other people in need of it, it is probably no gospel at all.

Think of ways you can engage in your neighborhood. With people different from you, maybe those of different faiths, ethnicity, education. And being intentional with people just like you - hobbies, work, interests, kid’s sports teams.

Blow out the categories of gifting or roles in the church. As Jesus gave the church the great commission he did not say “go therefore and make disciples if evangelism is your gift....” No, it is a call to each and every believer - that as we go, as we live, as we journey, make disciples.

And there isn't a lot of training that you need. Discipling is all about learning and teach what Jesus commanded, reading the Bible with people, letting them see how the good news of Christ is working in your life, giving you hope, transforming you, freeing you from sin.

Maybe it is a concern for time that keeps us - our plates are too full, kids schedules, work-life balance, if only I could get more rest.

“Do you realize that most of the wonderful things being done in the world are being done by tired people? Tired parents raising kids, tired soldiers defending our nation, tired scholars writing books, tired pastors preaching sermons. What are we expecting? This life is hard, it isn't going to be easy. Let's just accept it, we are going to work hard, keel over dead, then go to heaven - great! Why do we think there's a day where we won't be tired? We're not looking for the easy way out. We have Christ in us, the hope of glory. What a life! Let's work hard in the strength the Lord supplies till the day we die, then enter into the presence of God with an unwasted life. How glorious!” - Ray Ortlund

The way to run - is to live beyond yourself.

Screwtape 14 “... the virtue of humility. By this virtue, as by all others, our Enemy wants to turn the man's attention away from self to Him, and to the man's neighbors. All the abjection and self-hatred are designed, in the long run, solely for this end; unless they attain this end they do us little harm; and they may even do us good if they keep the man concerned with himself...”

If we would live low, not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less, we will be geared for this sharing. For inviting others to belonging, to acceptance, forgiveness and purpose in Jesus.

“The greater difficulty for all who would so preach Christ is our inherent resistance, due to the Fall, to the imitation of Christ expressed in v. 19, that freedom leads to making oneself the servant of all in order to win them.” Fee

This difficulty, the exhaustion, the worries over gifting, can all be overcome because Jesus did it.

He entered into our lives, taking on our fears, our temptations, our experience. He disciplined himself for the race. And his motive was the same, to see you saved... to see others saved.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the

**joy** that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (ESV)

He is still doing it. Entering in. Empowering. Calling. Inviting us to share him, to live the life of purpose and power, serving the gospel to all people.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul is not saying “look at me” just watch and be entertained by how I live! He is saying, look and live, do this, be used this way. Be free this way for your good and the glory of Christ.

**Christians are invited to the fullest life, sharing the belonging found in the gospel.**

I fully believe the Lord is stirring something in me, and maybe in you, in this church. That we will move from the lazy river of merely having right theology and checking the weekly box of singing some songs and hearing the Word preached, to the raging rapids ride of being doers of the Word. Of living for others to share in the blessings of the gospel.

That we would experience the fullest life. With all the sweat, danger, hard situations, and rewards.

We don't script the story of how life will unfold, but as we live it and look back it is worth it, where we are headed is worth it. His love, his mission, being a witness is worth the risk - because the reward is so much greater.

“God didn't say loving our neighbors would be easy; He just said it would work.” Bob Goff

It is actually a glorious good - that we get to share with those around us, as we go, as we live for his glory. May it be so with us.