

Weekly Devotionals: Dear Church | November 13, 2022

For our devotionals this week, we're engaging God and the Scriptures with our head, our hearts, and our hands.

Each week you'll have an opportunity to learn (head), to engage how the Scripture passage feels (heart), and be prompted with some action (hands).

Our hope is that this devotional will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

HEAD

Last week, Paul talked in 1 Corinthians 9 about giving up his rights so that he might win people to Jesus. As a recap, take a few moments to re-read **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** and answer the following questions:

- What are the different categories of people that Paul mentions he is trying to serve?
- What reasoning does Paul give for laying his rights down in these verses?
- What do you think becoming "all things to all people, that by all possible means" some might be saved looks like in practice?

Now, read **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** below.

"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, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

- With the context of **1 Corinthians 9** in mind, why do you think Paul suddenly begins talking about athletes and how they train?



- What is the “prize” or the “crown that will last forever” that Paul is after? How might passages like **2 Timothy 4:6-8**, **James 1:12**, and **1 Peter 5:4** shed some light on this?
- According to this passage, what is Paul willing to do in order to obtain his “crown?”

HEART

In the 2000 Olympics, Rulon Gardner defeated a Russian wrestler who was undefeated for thirteen years. Thirteen years without a loss and he had never been scored on. He had won the world title nine times and was going for his fourth gold medal. Can you imagine how excited Rulon Gardner must have felt then when he defeated this perennial world champion? How it must have felt when he watched the flag raised for the presentation of his gold medal? Amazing.

His success, however, was short-lived.

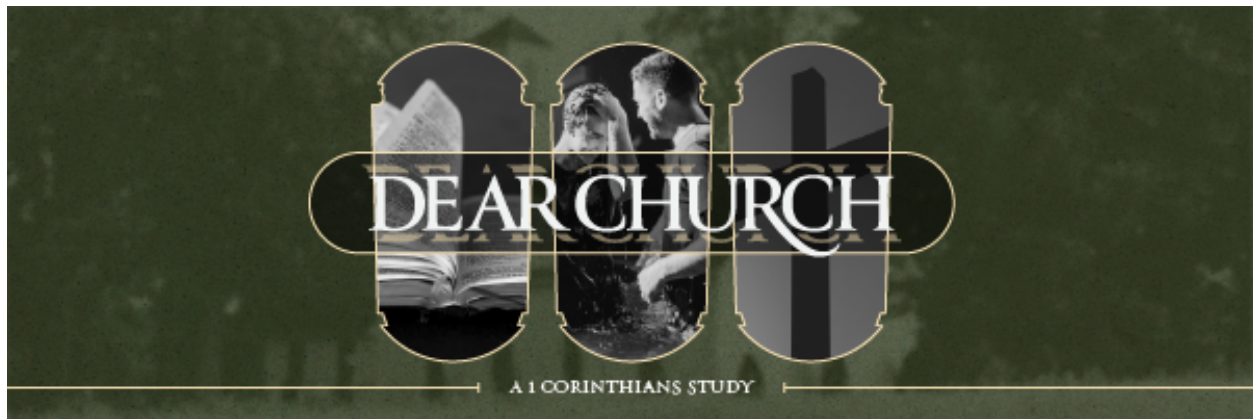
In 2015, Rulon joined a group of contestants on *The Biggest Loser*. He joined the competition in hopes of getting his “life and health back.” Over the course of fifteen years the glory of his amazing win had lost its luster. He’d found himself in need of a change. And the world wondered, “How did he get here from where he was?”

That’s what a lack of discipline can do. One moment you can be winning the gold medal, the next you can find yourself striving to get your “life and health back.”

Re-read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

As you know, Paul uses athletic training as an illustration in this passage. And he does so because athletic training is something that is done voluntarily. We choose to exercise or not and we choose how *seriously* we want to exercise. Paul, here, is focusing on the athlete that is practicing hard, doing everything they can to win!

Which leaves us with a question for our spiritual lives, for the spiritual lives of our families, for the spiritual lives of our neighbors...



Are you willing to *personally* do what it takes to grow in your relationship with Jesus *and* are you willing to do what it takes to help others know Jesus?

Those are good questions. Consider these additional questions to help you flesh this out a bit more:

- In terms of your own relationship with Jesus, are you more like the Rulon Gardner of the 2000 Olympics or like the Rulon Gardner of 2015? Explain.
- In terms of helping others know Jesus, consider the same question. Are you more like the Rulon Gardner of the 2000 Olympics or like the Rulon Gardner of 2015? Explain.
- What's hindering you from getting "a crown" that will last forever in these areas?

HANDS

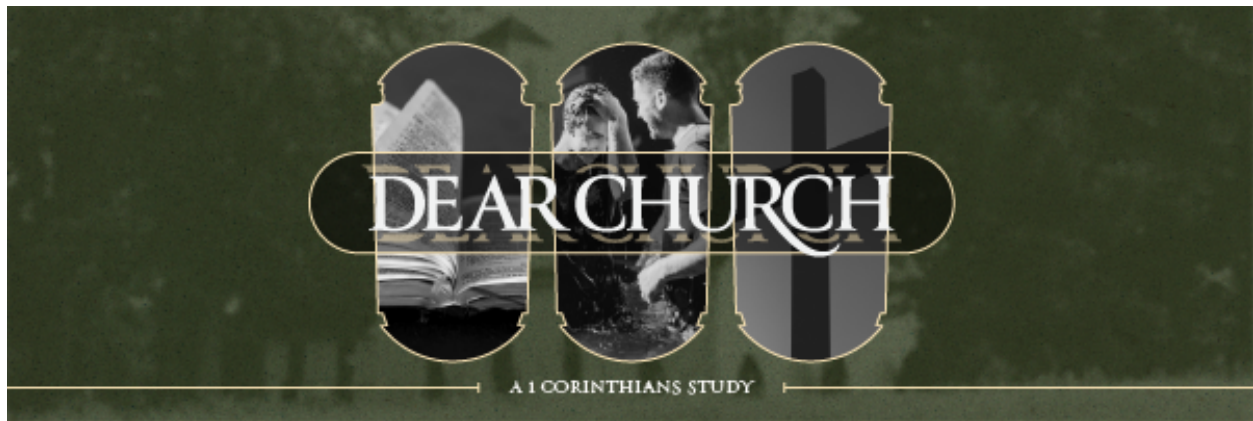
Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Can you believe we're asking you to read it again?

There are so many things that require our hard work. They may be great things (our marriage, our kids, our work, our physical health, our mental health, our house), but *none* of these are as important as our relationship with Jesus.

Many or most of us have allowed one of these things, or an accumulation of some of these, to take the highest priority in our lives. We cannot let the things of this world be more important than our relationship with Jesus. When we do, it looks a lot like idolatry.

And starting way back in the book of Exodus God has warned us about putting this before Him: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." (Exodus 20:4).

In the Gospels Jesus is quoted a few times saying the most important thing is "loving God and loving others (Luke 10:27).



Yet we repeatedly put the comforts of home before going to church on Sunday mornings, we give Netflix and Instagram more of our attention than the Bible, we'll convince ourselves we can't help someone in need while sipping a caramel frappuccino...

Paul tells us that we should work hard at our relationship with Christ. It's our choice, sort of like my choice to go to the gym, but the stakes are much higher!

The choice starts with us - are you willing to invest in your relationship with Jesus? Are you willing to give your life away? Are you willing to believe His desires for your life are better than your own? If you do, it's going to take hard work!

So, for the application this week, let's start small and with just two questions.

**1. What are you willing to do this week that includes intentionality with Jesus?
Consider a few examples.**

- Read your Bible 10 minutes per day.
- Pray every day and then sit in silence to listen to God's response.
- Give something of value away; something that distracts you from God.
- Let a close family member or friend know the steps you're taking to draw closer to Christ. Note: Don't be too hard on yourself when you fail with your new discipline. Instead, recognize how hard you're working at it and start again. Remember: God gives us grace!

2. What are you willing to do this week that includes intentionality with others?