

## It's Not How You Start, It's How You Finish

### **HOW THE RACE IS *WON*:**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Am I playing **to win**, or playing **not to lose**?

Playing to win takes:

**Focus**

**Discipline**

**Sacrifice**

### **HOW THE RACE IS *LOST*:**

1 Corinthians 10:1-11

- ▶ Assume that **"blessings"** equal God's **favor**.
- ▶ Focus on your **desires**, not God's.
- ▶ Pursue the **temporary**, not the **eternal**.

### **TWO RULES OF THE RACE:**

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

1. The way out of temptation is always **obedience**.
2. The way back into the race is always **obedience**.

### **TWO QUESTIONS TO TAKE HOME:**

Matthew 7:21-27

1. Am I **foolishly** content with just a **good** start?
2. How am I being **strategic** about running the race?

# Growth Group Homework

For the week of October 25, 2009

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## QUICK REVIEW

This weekend Chris reminded us that “It’s not how you start, it’s how you finish.” Looking back at your notes from this week’s teaching, what did you find most interesting, challenging or thought provoking?

## MY STORY

1. If someone could silently observe you 24 hours a day for 7 days how do you think they would describe the focus of your life? What would they say you desire or pursue most?

Have you ever felt like your focus or pursuit in life and God’s plan seemed to be heading in different directions? How did you become aware of this?

2. God has promised us a way of escape when we are faced with temptation and it will always start with obedience. Can you think of any situations where people feel like they are trapped and there is no way to escape?

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. This weekend Chris dug into 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and helped us see how Paul’s description of training for a race relates to our own lives. Read a few more of Paul’s racing analogies and find as many of his “training tips” as you can.

### Philippians 3:13-14

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. <sup>[NIV]</sup>*

### 2 Timothy 2:5

*Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>[NIV]</sup>*

### **Hebrews 12:1-3**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. [2] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>[NIV]</sup>*

Growth Group is one place where we can talk about our race strategy. In addition to prayer, list a few specific ways that we can help each other apply Paul's advice.

How can our past successes and failures either help us run or slow us down?

2. Competitive athletes are strategic about their racing; they “play to win” instead of “playing not to lose.” Jesus told a story about some guys who illustrated both of these strategies. Read Matthew 25:14-30 and imagine what each servant must have been thinking. What words would you use to describe someone who is “playing to win” compared to another who is “playing not to lose”?

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

*"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. [15] To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. [16] The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. [17] So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. [18] But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.*

*[19] "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. [20] The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'*

*[21] "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

*[22] "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'*

*[23] "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

*[24] "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. [25] So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'*

*[26] "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? [27] Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

*[28] " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. [29] For everyone*

*who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. [30] And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* <sup>[NIV]</sup>

God has also given each one of us specific “talents” (gifts, abilities, or resources). What are some of the “talents” you believe God has given you and how do you think you could invest or grow them?

Are there any “talents” you need to be careful not to bury?

3. In addition to using what God has given us to win the race, we also need to know how temptations threaten to take us out of the race. When we find ourselves giving in to temptation, it's often the last step in a series of bad choices. Read Genesis 3:1-13 and identify both the strategy of the serpent and the steps that led to Adam and Eve's sin.

### **Genesis 3:1-13**

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

*[2] The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, [3] but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "*

*[4] "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. [5] "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

*[6] When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*[8] Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. [9] But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

*[10] He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

*[11] And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

*[12] The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

*[13] Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"*

*The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." <sup>[NIV]</sup>*

What lessons can we learn from their experience about how temptation works in our own lives and how we can respond to God when we have blown it?

What are a few reasons people don't take the obedient way out of temptation?

## **TAKING IT HOME**

How would you answer the questions that Chris asked at the end of this week's message?

Am I foolishly content with just a good start? (What do I need to focus on to finish well?)

How am I being strategic about running the race?

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**Prayer Requests:**