

# At Any Cost

## Week 9 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of November 4, 2018

Day 1

***Anything for the Gospel***

*“Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”*

1 Corinthians 9:12b

God has given me such an excitement and a passion for what we'll study in 1 Corinthians this week. Just as Paul cut to the heart of the Corinthian church's question concerning their "right" to eat food sacrificed to idols in chapter eight, we'll be studying what lies at the heart of Paul's eagerness to give up his rights in chapter nine. I don't have any better way to say this than that I have been completely and utterly overwhelmed by Paul's passion for the Gospel. Even more, I have been convicted to my core that God wants each of us to become enflamed with the need to share it. *God, speak to each of us today and this week. Move your Spirit; light a fire in our hearts; and fan the flames to share your Good News at any cost. Let us more fully*

*understand the privilege to which You call every one of us.*

**Please read 1 Corinthians 9:1-18.**

- List the rights to which Paul says he and others who preach are entitled (vv. 4, 5, 11):
  
- What is his basis for this claim?

The heading given to this section of 1 Corinthians in your Bible is likely something akin to “Paul Gives Up His Rights,” and it’s a good summary of the chapter. Paul talks about the rights of those who spend their lives preaching the Gospel—that they are entitled to earn a living from such; that these rights are founded in scripture; and that he readily gives up his claim to any of it. I was surprised by how much time Paul devotes to emphatically describing the rights to which he (and anyone else who gives his or her life to God’s work) is entitled. Indeed, God’s Word says a lot about supporting those who commit their lives in service to Him; God cares about and provides for their financial needs. For our purposes this week, though, we will spend less time on the rights themselves in order to focus our attention on *why* Paul was so eager to forfeit them and what that means to us.

First, it is important to remember that Corinth was a hub of intellectualism. Itinerant teachers, philosophers, and speakers had an eager audience in this ancient city, and many of them readily accepted payment for their teaching and rhetorical skills. Paul, though he sometimes did accept support from churches, never burdened the people in the church he was currently serving by accepting payment or support from them. He worked a trade to support himself, and if he needed further material support, he accepted it from *other* churches. He did so for two reasons: first, in order to distinguish himself from other false teachers (see 2 Corinthians 11:7-15); second, to make sure that there was absolutely nothing that could stand in the way of him delivering the Good News to anyone who would listen. Paul’s singular concern was to make Christ and His salvation known.

Paul was unique in many ways, but he was still human and therefore was not totally unlike you or me. I think God yearns for all of us to share the apostle’s heart for Christ and His Gospel, and I think we can find instruction and encouragement in scripture to help us get there.

**Please read Acts 9:1-19 and Galatians 1:11-24.**

- In your own words, explain what Paul says God did for him and why, according to Galatians 1:15-16.

- What was Paul's response (v. 16-17)?

**Paul was faithful by taking his calling seriously and responding to it obediently.** In Acts 9:15, God reassures Ananias that Paul's conversion was authentic because He (God) had called Paul to minister to the Gentiles. In Galatians 1:16, Paul reiterates the exact same thing. At some point, God chose to reveal to Paul—either through Christ's initial call or later by some other means—what His purpose was in calling the apostle to follow Jesus. We might be inclined to breeze past Paul's initial response, but it is so important! At any point and for any reason, Paul could have ignored the reality of God's call on his life. He could have responded with doubt and disbelief; he could have considered his past and decided that he was entirely unqualified to serve God by proclaiming Christ. But instead, Paul responded to Christ's call by *believing* what God told him he was called to do and by *doing it*. The amount of faith that takes is remarkable, but if we're told that if we want that kind of faith, all we have to do is ask (Mark 9:24).

In thinking about Paul's demonstrative response to Christ's call, I can't help but consider the slight wordplay in "responsibility." God knew exactly how He designed the apostle Paul and "set [him] apart before [he]

was born" (Gal. 1:15). Surely God gifted Paul with exactly the right talents and abilities with which to carry out his mission. God does the same for each one of us, and our responsibility, quite simply, is to faithfully respond to Him by using our abilities for Him. Response-ability.

**Another thing that set Paul apart was that he knew Christ, and he wanted to know Him even more.** Notice what Paul says he did after his conversion in Galatians 1:16-17: he didn't go discuss what happened with others—not even with those who were already Christ's apostles. Instead, Paul withdrew to Arabia and spent some time alone. But really, Paul wasn't alone. He had an encounter with the risen Christ that changed his life forever. If he withdrew to be alone, we can bet that he spent time getting to know the One who blinded him on the road to Damascus.

This is absolutely essential to every one of us who wants to know Christ and His calling on our lives. We *must* purposefully set aside time alone with Him in order to seek Him and know Him.

- What does Psalm 37:4 say will happen when we "delight in the Lord?"

When we know Christ and delight in His presence, He'll *give* us the desires of our hearts. Whether He puts His desires on our hearts or grants what we already desire is a moot point. Either way, our desires will be perfectly aligned with His. Paul delighted in knowing Christ more than he delighted in anything else. The result was that Paul passionately desired what Christ desired—the salvation of the lost.

**Because he knew Christ, Paul was *compelled* to fulfill his calling and preach the Gospel.**

- Fill in the blanks:

“Yet preaching the \_\_\_\_\_ is not something I can boast about. I am \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News! If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have \_\_\_\_\_, for God has \_\_\_\_\_ me this sacred trust. What then is my pay? It is the \_\_\_\_\_ to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That’s why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.” (1 Corinthians 9:16-18)

Look at the words you filled in above. What theme do you see developing here? Paul knew Christ so well, loved Him so much, believed Him so thoroughly that he could not help but preach the Good News. He was entrusted with something so precious from the One who was so precious to him that he *had* to share Christ’s message with everyone who would receive it. His reward—his “pay”—was being blessed with the opportunity to share it for free! Church, *we have the same Good News to share!* Do we consider it our privilege? Do we consider ourselves rewarded simply by being given the opportunity to share it? Or do we hide it? Are we embarrassed? Fearful? Tight-lipped? I am so sad to say that I have struggled with every single one of these feelings. But to fear spreading the Gospel is to believe the lie that we have something shameful to share. Our message is one that necessitates being told! It is one of hope, joy, security, redemption, purpose, and unending, unending, truly unconditional love. It begs to be taken to the hurting, the lost, the hopeless, the unloved, and the insufficient. If we don’t take it, who will?

**Because Paul was compelled to preach the Gospel, he was willing to endure anything in order to do so.** When we understand the magnitude of what and Who we proclaim, nothing will stop us from doing so.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.**

- What were some of the ways Paul suffered in order to fulfill his calling?
- What was his attitude concerning such sufferings?

My aim here isn’t to make you nervous about suffering for the Gospel. Rather, I want to draw attention to how “worth it” our message of Christ really is. I also want to reassure you that God sees every struggle you fight against as you serve Him. Paul doesn’t just mention life-threatening events as struggles for the sake of sharing Christ (though he certainly had a number!). He lists hard work and sleepless nights alongside running from his life or needing food, water, and clothing; he draws attention to his burden for all the churches. I don’t want to pretend that we won’t be asked to suffer in ways that might seem insurmountable for the sake of Jesus—but I also don’t want to minimize the daily struggles we face and that these, too, are important and *seen* by God.

**Consider :** How do you feel about sharing the Good News? What are some struggles you face that

threaten your ability to do so? God knows about these exact struggles and is with you in them. How does knowing God's attitude toward your struggles change your perspective?

**Pray:** *God, give me the heart of an evangelist in every circumstance and relationship You bring my way. Let me love the message of Christ so passionately that I can't keep Him to myself. And Lord, please give me Your opportunities and Your words within them. Make Yourself known, and use me as Your instrument, God.*

## Day 2

### Free *from* All, Servant *to* All

*"Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ."*

1 Corinthians 9:19

Yesterday, we saw Paul's heart for the Gospel, and we studied how we can fan that same fire within ourselves. Today, we will study one of the most profound and effective ways we can take Christ's Gospel into the world. We are God's *servants*.

**Glance at the headers for Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52:13-53:12.**

**Then read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Mark 10:43-45.**

- What is the common thread among all of the sections in Isaiah?
- What does Christ say will be characteristic of the leaders among His people?
- What was the purpose of His life on earth (v. 45)?

Although in some translations, the word “servant” is missing from the section title of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, all of these passages of scripture are categorized as “Servant Songs” and are ultimately written about and fulfilled in Christ. That the Old Testament refers to Jesus as the Lord’s Servant should impress upon us just how integral servant-hood is to the Person of Christ. His ultimate purposes on earth were to conquer all evil, sin and death, and reveal God’s love, and to ransom us to the Father by sacrificing His life for ours. In His death, He submitted and served like none other, and even His daily life was characterized by perpetual servitude. Jesus—our *God*—left the glory of heaven to serve those He created. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cast out demons from the afflicted, taught when He was tired and hungry, *fed* the tired and hungry, blessed little children, raised the dead, washed feet, and ultimately, He gave up His life to atone for all rebellious human hearts. He served—and He said His people would do the same.

One of the most frequent claims we hear from the Corinthian church is that they are free in Christ. Paul doesn’t deny this truth—and neither should we—but I love that the apostle makes it a priority to remind this church that their freedom from sin makes them “bondservants” of Christ (7:22). Paul goes so far as to say, in 1 Corinthians 9:19, that he considers himself to be a slave to all people. Since we serve the Servant, we should be prepared to serve all others just like He did.

This isn’t news to those of us who have followed Christ for any length of time, but I think we need a reminder of why we serve, Who we serve, and the blessings in serving such a One.

**Please read Luke 17:7-10.**

This parable of the unworthy servants essentially makes the same claim that Paul made in 1 Corinthians 7:22. Jesus wasn’t being cruel or harsh in His regard for servants, but He did lay it out plainly for us: not one of us is worthy to serve alongside God on our own. We are not equal with Him, nor do we deserve reward for doing what the One who created us asks us to do. Instead, our attitude should reflect a sincere humility before God as we seek to serve Him who loves us, served us, and gave Himself as a ransom for us. We serve others because we love Christ, and He asks us to do it. Jesus needs to be at the center of everything.

I am often amazed at how many charities, organizations, and opportunities for giving exist even in this small town of Orchard Park. The school that our kids attend regularly collects supplies for veterans and needy families. We’ve made many friends who sit on boards and organize extravagant fundraising events for medical research or other worthy causes. With Christmas around the corner, all of us at OPWC have the opportunity to serve and give to organizations like Samaritan’s Purse and the City Mission. Everything I mention here is *worthy* of our service, but I also think we can easily feel overwhelmed by how much need exists and confused about where or whom we should serve.

How, then, do we approach serving others in the name of Christ? First, our God is a loving and generous God who gave Christ to bring us everlasting peace. As many needs as we see, we cannot allow ourselves to fall into the pressure and stress of trying to meet every one of them alone. We need to approach serving God with a peace in our hearts, knowing that He has already prepared good works for each of us to do (Eph. 2:10). With our eyes resolutely fixed on God and trusting Him to lead us, we live—and serve—in complete peace:

“You will keep in perfect peace

all who trust in you,

all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)

Next, with eyes and hearts fixed on Christ, we prioritize what He prioritizes.

**Please read Isaiah 58:6-12 and 2 Corinthians 9:10**

A genuine desire for God’s righteousness and justice should mark our service, and anything for which we spend ourselves should ultimately be because we love and value what Christ loves and values.

- What, then, does Isaiah 58:8 and 2 Corinthians 9:10 say God will do?

One of my favorite discoveries in God’s Word came through a Bible study years ago in which the teacher pointed out that the Hebrew word for “protect you from behind” (NLT) or “rear guard” (ESV) in Isaiah 58:8 is *asaph*. It means “to gather, remove,” and the gathering or removal can apply to just about anything—removing and destroying obstacles or gathering up people or a harvest. 2 Corinthians 9:10 similarly asserts that God both provides for the work to be done and produces a harvest of righteousness from it.

So when we choose to “fast” as God wants us to do—by spending ourselves according to His priorities—He causes our godliness to go ahead of us and His glory to protect us from behind and gather up a harvest. He is the One who accomplishes; we are simply serving with attitudes and priorities that please Him.

Do you notice the wide array of needs that God lists in Isaiah 58? With God’s peace in our hearts and the knowledge that He has already prepared good works for us to do, we can read this list of needs and feel encouraged that God recognizes every need as valuable—and every one of our efforts to serve those needs as worthy when serve with a right heart. What are the needs that God mentions?

- “Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;
- Lighten the burden of those who work for you.
- Let the oppressed go free,

- And remove the chains that bind people.
- Share your food with the hungry,
- And give shelter to the homeless.
- Give clothes to those who need them,
- And do not hide from relatives who need your help.”

My friends, this list is comprehensive! What grabs your heart? Who do you know that could use a shoulder to cry on? A lighter workload? Which relative needs your help? The God who designed you gave you your unique combination of temperament, emotions, and talents in order to serve others and glorify Him. He also knew every person who would enter your life. Nothing is haphazard or coincidental with our God. So go forward in peace, confidence, and love, knowing that any effort to serve, when it is done from a heart abiding in and overflowing with Christ, will be multiplied and harvested by our God.

**Consider:** Where are you serving God now? Don't neglect what you might consider to be small acts of service; God doesn't forget those, either. Where do you feel God leading you to serve Him? What talents and abilities do you have that you can spend in service to Christ and others?

**Pray:** Thank God that He already has a plan for you. Even if you don't know what it is yet, He has work for you to do that will produce a great harvest of righteousness and bless His Name. If you're not sure where God is leading you, ask Him! He *wants* you to know and to fulfill His plan for you.

### Day 3

#### In Order to Save Some

*“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”*

1 Corinthians 9:22b ESV

Our devotional today will be more of an overview than a close-up study. Let's get started right away.

Please read 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Matthew 28:16-20, and Luke 15:1-10.

- What does Christ command his disciples to do (Matt. 28:19-20)?
- Why does Paul insist on trying to find “common ground” with everyone (1 Cor. 9:22)?

Although you might not yet be sure of the personalized plan God has for you based on your unique talents and abilities, I can assure you that every single one of us shares one thing in common concerning our calling: every follower of Christ is called to serve Him by taking His Good News of salvation to a world that desperately needs saving. This is the last thing Christ commanded His disciples to do before He ascended to

Heaven; it is the reason why Paul sought to find common ground with everyone; and, according to 2 Timothy 1:14, it is the “precious truth” that has been “entrusted” to each one of us.

On Day 1, we found that we can and should share Paul’s fervent desire to spread the Gospel at any cost. Today, let’s consider a few things that God says about salvation from the scriptures we read. In fact, I am going to re-write our verse for today right here and ask you to fill in the blanks because this verse is so essential to everything that we’ll talk about below. I am using the ESV translation this time:

“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become \_\_\_\_\_ things to \_\_\_\_\_ people, that by \_\_\_\_\_ means I might save \_\_\_\_\_.”

- **Seeking and saving the lost is God’s primary concern.** In the parable of the lost sheep, we see that God’s heart is consumed with love and concern for every one of His “sheep.” He notices when one is missing; He leaves the rest to look for it; and He rejoices when He finds it. (The song, *Reckless Love*, beautifully expresses this. The lyrics are included at the end of this devotional.)
- **God measures success differently than we do.** Just as we learned several weeks ago that God’s wisdom turns ours upside down, so does the way He measures success. In the same parable of the lost sheep, Jesus says that “there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away” (Luke 15:7) And in the parable of the lost coin, we see that even the angels have joy with God over salvation. Multitudes in heaven celebrate every single salvation!

God doesn’t look at the numbers and decide whether or not our efforts spent on the salvation of others were successful based on how many people we affected. He is blessed and overjoyed each time one of His children returns and calls Him Father.

- **God gave everything for our salvation, and He wants us to do the same.** God gave Christ, His “One and

Only,” so that anyone who chooses to call upon His name will be saved. God knows all; He knew that not everyone would choose salvation. But He chose to give what was most precious to Him anyway—so that those who *did* choose Christ would have everlasting life.

Similarly, look at the blanks you filled in for 1 Corinthians 9:22 above. Notice the imbalance of what Paul was willing to give up and become so that just “some” would be saved! God was willing to give everything for something; Paul followed suit. And so should we.

**Consider:** God doesn’t measure us by how many we save for His Kingdom, and neither should we. He does, however, want our hearts and our actions to be fully invested in seeking and saving those He knows belong to Him. How willing are you to invest everything so that “by all means” you might be used by God to save even one and cause heaven to celebrate?

**Pray:** Ask God to show you how He would have you reach out to the lost in your life. Ask Him to reveal ways that you might find common ground to build or solidify relationships; ask Him to show you meaningful ways to serve and meet the needs of even one who needs His Son.

## Day 4

### Sharing in the Blessing

*“I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.”*

1 Corinthians 9:23

We’ve focused a lot this week on the calling we have, the work and service we’re asked to do, and the fervor we should have. Today, let’s spend some time soaking in the blessings we receive when we participate in serving God and taking Jesus out into the world.

Though we *deserve* nothing, as we were reminded on Day 2, God doesn’t ask us to serve Him in misery and without reward. We can joyfully anticipate blessing when we labor for the Gospel with the earnest desire to proclaim Christ and His glory.

**Please read Matthew 20:1-16.**

- What did the workers who were hired early in the morning receive?
- What did the workers who were hired at the very end of the day receive?

We might be inclined to agree with the workers who started working early in the morning and thought that they deserved more than those who stood around for most of the day and only worked the last portion of it. Oh, but as we've seen over and over, God doesn't think or act like we do, does He? Praise Him for that! The workers who started early were not cheated out of anything. They were told a wage before they were hired, and they were paid exactly that. It just so happened that the master of the

house was abundantly generous to the late-starters, and he paid them just as much as those who labored for longer.

This is our God, and I am so thankful for His abundant generosity in rewarding those who serve Him—no matter how late in the day we show up. He never withholds; He always gives more than we deserve.

But just as God's standards of success are often different than our own, so are the blessings He chooses to give. You see, since everything about us pours out from the deepest love of our hearts, what we consider to be a suitable reward for our labor is directly affected to *why* we labor in the first place. In other words, when our hearts are self-seeking, we will desire blessings that benefit or elevate ourselves. When our hearts seek Christ and His glory, we will recognize blessings from God that fill our cup to overflowing.

**Please read Exodus 33:12-17, Psalm 27:4, Philippians 3:8-10, and 1 Thessalonians 2:2-9, 19-20.**

What are the blessings that we will desire—and God will give—when we serve Him in spreading the Good News?

**To know Christ.** I want what Moses and Paul had with the Lord. I want to know Him, to be known by Him, and to have favor enough in His sight that He would reveal Himself and His glory in powerful ways. Paul yearned to know Christ so completely that he was willing to partake of the very sufferings of Christ in order to attain that depth of relationship and to know the power of His resurrection. It is, in part, through our laboring alongside Christ that we can do just that. When we work to share His Gospel, we also share in His sufferings (see the end of Day 1 this week) and gain a depth of knowledge of Jesus that we otherwise could not have. Is there no greater blessing than knowing Christ intimately?

**To dwell in God's presence.** David sought after God's own heart, and his desire for God was so passionate that he wanted just "one thing." David wanted to spend all of the days of his life in God's presence, delighting in Him and meditating on Him. We can anticipate that God will bless us with this exact thing when we seek Him above all else. Not only does it please Him to do so, but Christ repeatedly told His disciples how to do it in John 15. By abiding in Him and obeying His commandments, we will be attached to

and fed from the Vine; we will be able to ask whatever we wish and receive it. And if we're asking for "one thing" like David did, we'll surely have it from the hand of our God.

**Others.** Paul's joy was so full as he wrote to the Thessalonian believers that we can feel it even now, can't we? Being used by God to affect the eternal salvation of others is a blessing for which each of us should earnestly ask Him. Imagine the tears of joy in heaven as spiritual mentors are reunited with those over whom they labored. With the focus removed from ourselves and rightly centered on Christ and what He holds dear, another person's eternal salvation becomes immeasurably valuable to us, too. *People* are our reward and our joy and our crown.

**Consider:** Have you accepted the offer of work from the Master of the House yet? If not, now is the time! Commit yourself whole-heartedly to Christ and what He asks of you. It's not too late. If you have been laboring for what seems like a long time, take heart, because God notices your work, and He is pleased to bless you. Take a moment to consider how He has already rewarded you; what do you yearn for from Him?

**Pray:** Thank God that He is generous. Ask Him to pour out His favor on you and open your eyes to see His glory and power working in your life. Receive His blessings with a thankful heart.

## Day 5

### Running to Win

*"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!"*

1 Corinthians 9:24

We're at the end of the week, and I feel the strain! But it's a good strain and a wonderful race we run, isn't it? We'll find today that it takes training and self-discipline to run well. And periodically, we need to pause to reflect on *why* we're running, *how* we're running, and where our course takes us next.

Before we continue, I want to take a moment to remind us that although we're studying a lot about what we *do* this week, we do not always have to be working. God values rest and gives it to those He loves (Psalm 127:2). He loves when we sit with Him and soak in His goodness, letting Him love us just where we are. His love for us is entirely independent of our work for Him. What matters most to Christ and to our Heavenly Father is a relationship with you; God desires that more than He desires any sort of performance from you. That being said, let's shift our focus back to our study.

**Please read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philipians 3:12-14, and Hebrews 12:1-17.**

- In what ways do you think the Christian life resembles a race?

The Corinthian church would have been very familiar with races and athletic competition. Every two years—in the spring of the second and fourth years of an Olympiad—Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games. These were similar in nature and popularity to the Olympic Games, but the Isthmian Games were held in honor of the Greek god, Poseidon. One of the main events in the games was the chariot race, and footraces were also part of the competition. The winner of the competition received a crown made of celery (later replaced with a crown made of pine). So when Paul describes the Christian life as akin to running a race, he's speaking to the right audience!

Before we consider how we can finish our race as victors, let's note that the opposite is also possible. Even if we have accepted salvation in Christ, we can choose to feebly run our race, unfocused and without purpose, and we can be disqualified from reward at the finish line. As we learned in 1 Corinthians 4, when Christ returns, He will come to judge the hearts and actions of believers. He will reward those whose works prove valuable and withstand the test of fire; those whose works disappear in the flames will receive nothing.

We certainly don't want to run aimlessly. How, then, do we run to *win* this race?

- **We need to know and want what lies ahead at the finish line.** Our focus, once again, needs to be squarely set upon the beautiful Person of Christ. He is both our prize and our example of how to run.

- According to Hebrews 12:2, how did Christ endure the cross?

- Where is He now?

Everything Jesus did—including enduring the pain and shame of the cross—was for the joy set before Him. It was for us. He knew the plan, trusted His Father, and desperately wanted to save those He loved. So he continued, and He conquered. Now, He is our prize, seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When we finish our race, our eternity will be spent in His glorious presence. We will be made perfect; we will share in His inheritance; and we will forever enjoy Him and His everlasting love.

- **We need to abide by the rules of the race so that we're not disqualified from the reward.** Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 9:27, that he disciplines himself so that, after preaching to others, he won't end up disqualified from the prize. We all need this reminder because each one of us is called to preach the gospel. What Paul is saying is that our actions need to match what we preach! We cannot proclaim the

Good News of Christ and live unholy lives that would displease Him. We are called to holiness and righteousness and freedom from sin. Let's make sure we continue to seek God in His Word so that He can teach us how to live according to His standards.

- **We need to train and discipline ourselves, and we need to gratefully accept God's discipline.** We already referenced Paul's statement that he disciplines his body. But the original Greek for this phrase is quite a bit more descriptive. Essentially, Paul says, "I pummel my body and make it a slave." Paul is not saying that he physically punishes himself in order to earn a reward from Christ. Rather, as suggested in an ESV Study Bible footnote, he could mean that he endures uncomfortable physical hardships because of the work that he does as an apostle. I think it is also possible that this "pummeling" is not a physical beating of oneself but that it rather represents the very real battle we have against our own fleshly desires. We know that these desires wage war on us, and unless we decisively win each battle through training ourselves to surrender to the power of God's Spirit, we'll lose our reward to a lifestyle steeped in sin and self-gratification.

In addition to self-discipline, we need to gratefully accept God's discipline. Hebrews 12:10-11 says that "God's discipline is always good for us" and that "afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Can we accept God's discipline as helpful to us? Oh, it is hard sometimes. But if we trust and embrace His discipline, He will grow us into the likeness of His Son—and our reward will be great.

**Consider:** How are you currently running this race? Christ died so that you could live and conquer; He *wants* to see you win.

**Pray:** Thank God for the example and the prize of Christ. Ask God to help you stay focused on Jesus as you run.

### Reckless Love

Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me  
You have been so, so good to me  
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me  
You have been so, so kind to me

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God  
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine  
I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away  
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, yeah

When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me  
You have been so, so good to me  
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me  
You have been so, so kind to me

There's no shadow You won't light up  
Mountain You won't climb up  
Coming after me  
There's no wall You won't kick down  
Lie You won't tear down  
Coming after me  
There's no shadow You won't light up  
Mountain You won't climb up  
Coming after me  
There's no wall You won't kick down  
Lie You won't tear down  
Coming after me  
There's no shadow You won't light up  
Mountain You won't climb up  
Coming after me  
There's no wall You won't kick down  
Lie You won't tear down  
Coming after me

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God  
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine  
I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away  
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, yeah

Songwriters: Caleb Culver / Cory Asbury / Ran Jackson

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*Devotional by Jennifer Skinner*