

RUN TO WIN

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[Video and Prayer]

1 CORINTHIANS 3:6 *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.*

The verse that Courtney shared gives us a glimpse into something that only God sees fully. God is using diverse people, gifts, and methods to bring people into a relationship with him, and we get to be a part of that!

Another way to imagine and picture this same idea is a relay race. I love competition so that naturally resonates with me. But it's deeply meaningful for another reason. Just over 4 years ago, I stood on this stage, and John Steer handed me this baton. If you started attending Autumn Ridge sometime after that, you may not know who he is. John Steer was the previous pastor who led Autumn Ridge for 30 years!

I keep this on my desk. It's a cherished symbol of the responsibility I've been given. He gave this to me on the first weekend in March 2020. The next weekend was my first official weekend as pastor, which also happened to be the same weekend that every church was closed because of COVID. He timed that just right, don't you think?

Believe it or not, this is a symbol for all of us. Our church is in a kind of relay race. Will you join me in fixating all of our attention for the next few minutes on this, running to win.



I have no doubts that's the kind of church we want to be and are trying to be. We want to run to win.

Last week I met a man who was visiting our church for the first time ever. He and his wife are making the rounds of churches in town, looking for one to call their own. Some of you are here today for the same reason, or maybe you're checking this Jesus thing out. I don't think you

could have picked a better weekend. We're putting our cards on the table and stating clearly today the kind of church we want to be.

So anyway, this gentleman asked me, "What is this church's greatest strength." What do you think it is? I think it's generosity. This church has a long history of putting kindness into action. It's one of our guiding values.

ARC VALUE: Make **GENEROSITY** normal.

- We invest our lives, not just our money.

Last weekend was a stunning example of your generosity, of us running to win.

RUNNING TO WIN:

- 223 Big Boxes (approx. \$100 each to fill)
- Missions Store raised \$6717
- 36 volunteers for Respite Night
- 1100 people volunteered on a team in the past year.

It's a privilege, the thrill of a lifetime, to get to be your pastor. I love being on the same team as you. Who wouldn't want to be a part of a church that is running to win? Did you know, in the past 365 days there have been over 1400 1st time guests? Every time we gather, we get to welcome new people. Every time we gather, we get to share the good news with people who are curious to hear more about Jesus. Last week, I heard about a couple in our church who are eager to get baptized, and they want to use their baptism to invite friends and family to come and see what they've discovered. Isn't that awesome?!

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-27

Would you grab a Bible and find this passage? What we are going to read was written by a man named Paul. He's a fascinating guy. He went from being a hostile, religious bigot whose job it was to arrest Christians to a follower of Jesus and leader of Christians. Jesus changed his life. What we are about to read is dripping with his passion and intensity. Notice that he's running to win, and he's very clear about what the prize is.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-27 *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win **as many as possible**.*

He was eager to give up his freedom, his rights, and his privileges if that's what it took to lead people to follow Jesus. That's important. Put that in your back pocket. We're going to talk seriously about that toward the end.

Right now, let's sit on this. He wasn't happy with just some. He wanted to win as many people as possible. What about us? Are we satisfied? Are we ready to put this thing on cruise control?

120,000

100,000

Do you know what these numbers represent? This [pointing to screen: 120,000] is population of our city. This [pointing to screen: 100,000] is the number of people in our city who are **NOT** connected with any church right now. We are nowhere close to the finish line. Our goal isn't to be a big church. Our goal is to reach as many as possible. Which means we should grow to be much bigger than this. We want to welcome as many people as possible into the family.

So, this is what Paul did.

*To the Jews I became like a Jew, **to win** the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as **to win** those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as **to win** those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, **to win** the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this **for the sake of the gospel**, that I may share in its blessings.*

He wasn't fake. He wasn't manipulative. That's not what this is about. He adapted his approach. He changed his methods to match whatever was in the best interest of the people he wanted to befriend and share the gospel with. Here's an urgent question for us to wrestle down. Do we want to be that way too? What do you think God wants do with a church full of people whose attitudes are this?

I don't need any of my preferences. There's nothing I want more than to lead people to know and follow Jesus.

*"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.**"*

Paul often uses the imagery of a crown to mean people who come to know Jesus. That's the prize. It's not about me. It's not about our agendas. It's not about what makes us comfortable. It's not about what makes us content. It's not about what makes us cozy. It's 100% about whatever it takes to lead people to know and follow Jesus. That's running to win.

"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."

How many of you, whenever someone comes up with new idea, you immediately see all the reasons it can work? Let me see your hands. How many of you, whenever someone comes up with a new idea, you immediately see all the reasons it won't work? Who's married to someone who answered differently than you?!

There's something inside of me that's a little too quick to flex my NO muscle. I can see all the reasons something won't work. But I've discovered a question that's helped me find my YES. This is the question.

QUESTION: What would it take...

I've discovered that asking that question turns down the noise and turns up my God-given imagination and creativity. I've been doing this long enough to know that good-hearted, Jesus-loving people sometimes feel anxious when the pastor tries to inspire the church with a message like this one. So together, let's turn down the noise and turn up our God-given imaginations by asking this question.

QUESTION: What would it take for us to run to win?

It's almost time for the Summer Olympics. My favorite event is the 4 x 100 relay. When done right, the teamwork, fluidity, and precision are something to behold. Watch and be inspired by our men's team.

QUESTION: What would it take for us to run to win?

Believe it or not, there's a lot to learn from watching that. That'll make sense as we answer this question. First...

We must know the difference between **RUNNING** and **BUSYNESS**.

The difference between this **[Running]** and this **[Busyness]** is purpose. One represents those activities that keep you in the race. The other represents all the other activities that occupy time, effort, and resources but don't move you forward in the race. The problem isn't that the things that keep us busy are bad—they are often wonderful. The problem is that they don't move us forward toward the prize of leading people to know and follow Jesus.

There's another problem. Sometimes, activities that once counted as running can evolve into nothing more than busyness. Let me give you a real example for our church. Each June we partner with Riverside Elementary School to host ARC 1:8.



The heart of this event was to build relationship with Riverside School and the people in that neighborhood. Many of you invested yourselves in that event. I want to let you know about two things that have developed out of ARC 1:8.

One, because of the trust and relationships that were built through that event, our church has been invited to be a part of Rochesterfest. It is a huge deal to invited into that. There are churches who want in, but can't get in. This is an exciting and humbling privilege. We have an opportunity to build more relationships and more trust with even more people for the sake of the Gospel.

Here's the second thing. The staff of Riverside Elementary love ARC 1:8. But they told us that they are so overwhelmed with other things this summer that they can't host it this year. Hang with me. But because of the relationship and trust we've built, Riverside Elementary wants to be the host for our Upward Soccer League when we bring it back.



If you don't know what that is, it's a soccer league for kids and it's a great way to share the gospel with players and their parents. It has massive gospel potential. If we're able to do that we'd be able to include families from that neighborhood. This means that we have an opportunity to build relationships and trust that vastly exceeds what happens at ARC 1:8.

We must know the difference between **RUNNING** and **BUSYNESS**.

Imagine that we told Riverside, “No thanks. We’ll just find another location to host ARC 1:8.” Do you know what we’d be guilty of? We’d be guilty of giving our allegiance to a program instead of our purpose. We’d no longer be running and would simply be busy instead.

Before you get too excited. I don’t know that we’re going to be able to make Upward Soccer happen. Right now, the missing piece is a leadership team. That requires 8 people who provide the behind-the-scenes structure and support that allow all the coaches and teams to function. If you’re intrigued by that, I want you to email your interest here:

upward@autumnridge.church

I want to inspire you today, but I don’t want to be a hype man. I want us to honestly wrestle with this question.

Are we so committed to running to win that we will pivot away from something we love and transition to something different so that we can win as many people as possible?

The answer seems obvious, but that doesn’t mean it’s easy. Knowing the difference between running and busyness is what allows churches to stop doing things they love in the way they love, so that they can keep running. Knowing the difference between running and busyness is what allows churches to embrace something different, sometimes new—sometimes old, so that they can keep running. Which brings us to the next thing we must know.

We must know the difference between **WINNING** and **PRESERVING**.

The difference between this [**Winning**] and this [**Preserving**] is direction. Churches who run to win are always facing forward. They talk about the future and what could be. Churches who are busy preserving are facing backward. They talk about the past and what was. The longer a church has been in existence the more intentional it has to be to honor the past without dwelling in the past.

I want talk about an elephant in the room. Some of you are blissfully unaware of it. Others of you are painfully aware. I’m talking about the hundreds of people who have left our church over the past several years and are now going to other churches. I know for some of you that feels like a problem to solve. And if I were you, I’d probably be looking around for someone to blame. For some folks, I’m the one blamed. That’s OK.

But what if the departure of folks is simply normal? What if it’s not a problem with them or a problem with us? What if all of it is a highly predictable pattern of human behavior? This is just how people respond to change. When a church goes through a lead pastor change, especially when it has had the same lead pastor for a long time, it’s normal for 25% of people to leave the church. We didn’t just go through a lead pastor transition; we changed during a global

pandemic that required and led to making all kinds of other changes, too. It's exhausted some of us—me included!

A pastor of one of the largest and healthiest churches in America reports that 50% of their congregation left during the last few years and were replaced with all new attendees and members. Pastor Caleb and I talked to a pastor in the cities who's been at his church for 15 years. During the past few years, there has been a 60% turnover in attendance. Lots of people left, and just as many new folks started to come. I could fill the rest of your day with stories like that from churches all over the country. Our church's story is very similar.

God placed a friend in my life who has this uncanny ability to get me to stop focusing on myself and onto the bigger picture. Can we try that? What if God is using this Great American Church Shake Up to get us all ready to run the next leg of the race? I'm asking us to see that major transitions often mark entering the next leg of the race for a church.



This is where we can learn from Olympic relay teams.

In each leg of the race the runners are running for the same thing. They aren't running in the same way. Each leg of the race requires different strengths, techniques, and skills. What was required to get the baton to one runner is a little different than what is required to get the baton to the next runner.

If we took the USA men's relay team, and switched around who ran what leg, they would no longer be a winning team. They'd run, but they wouldn't win because they have finely tuned their training to the needs their leg only. Do you think it's different with churches? It really isn't. It's no different with us.

Here's the deal. I don't know which leg of the relay we are running. Our church is older than the state of Minnesota. So I know we aren't the first leg. Unless Jesus comes back while we're still getting after it, we're not the last leg. We're probably one of the middle legs of the race. So this is what we get to do. This part of what it means for us to run to win.

- We *appreciate* those who ran before us.
- We *accept* the baton.

It's our time and our responsibility to steward this well.

- We *advance*.

We're in the same race as the people who came before, but we're running a different leg. So, we're going to run a little differently than them. And one day, we are going to hand this off. And when we do, they're going to run the same race, but they'll run a different leg than us. This means the people that we hand this off to one day are going to run and do things differently than us.

And God is going to use all of it. So, right now, in the time that we have, with the opportunities we have, and with the influence we have, let's run to win. There's one more thing we need to know.

We have to know the difference between **SACRIFICE** and **COMPROMISE**.

The difference between this [**Sacrifice**] and this [**Compromise**] is value.

- **Sacrifice:** giving up something of value for something else of *greater* value
- **Compromise:** giving up something of value for something else of *lesser* value

The older we get the more we come to see how easy it is to confuse the two. Not just people, but churches too are vulnerable to confusing sacrifice and compromise.

If you take the time to read all of 1 Corinthians 9, and I hope you do, you'll read about Paul making a sacrifice. He had the right to be paid by the Corinthian church when he was there for the work he did with them. And yet, he recognized that turning that down allowed him to have even greater influence and effectiveness in leading people to follow Jesus.

Paul sacrificed his rights. He gave up what he deserved. He voluntarily sacrificed a need. Why?! Because it got in the way of winning the prize. It got in the way of leading people to Jesus. It is a necessary precondition to have trust with those whom you want to lead. So he gave up his right so that he could build trust and leverage his influence to lead people to follow Jesus.

We get to decide if we are going to be the kind of people who happily give up our rights, things we deserve, and even things we need, for the purpose of leading people to Jesus. That's the kind of church that is running to win.

As we wrap up, I want to be honest about two challenges our church has right now. I feel a little insecure in moments like this because I don't want to manipulate anyone. A friend of mine says, I don't want to manipulate, but I will communicate. That's what I want to do now.

HURDLES:

- Kids Ministry volunteers
- Giving

The kids who are coming are outpacing the volunteer recruitment. As we head into the summer, where people scatter, I'm asking you to join the team a couple of times during the summer to help us keep running forward. Over the next month there are a couple of times that I'm not preaching. On those Sundays, you won't see me in here. I'll be volunteering on the Kids Team. Come and join me.

The second one is giving. We're behind. We want to be transparent. Every week our budget and giving to date are printed on the sermon notes. I want to be honest with you about where we're at. I can cut spending. The staff of this church has done a remarkable job of cutting spending without losing momentum. I'm proud of them. I think you should be proud of them. They can only cut so much before they start cutting into muscle.

If I can be candid, this is more than decisions about cutting spending and dipping into reserves. This is a development issue. This is about our development as followers of Jesus, becoming people who give faithfully to fund the ministry.

For those of you who give, thank you. For those of you who haven't made this a part of your lifestyle, we invite you give. We invite you to run with us.

I'm always going to cherish this gift from John Steer. A couple of decades from now, I hope that I get to hand this to the next lead pastor. Between now and then, can we carry this together? Can we run to win together?

I love that we are ending today with communion. This is a reminder that all we have, all that we may do and give, and all of our lives are a response of grateful joy for what Jesus has done for us and given to us.

COMMUNION.