**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from Ash Wednesday, Feb 22, 2023
Title – Gonna Fly Now**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

It is very good to be with all of you tonight. It is a real privilege for me to share and reflect on God’s Word with you as we begin this holy season called Lent together.

Now, I just want to begin with a question. And this question may seem a little bit out of place at first. But, how many of you enjoy sports? Let’s have a quick show of hands. That is most of us. Whether it is in playing sports or watching sports, that is very common in America. We had the Super Bowl a week and a half ago and that is a big deal, even if you are just watching it for the commercials.

As for me, I have enjoyed sports for much of my life. I have played a few sports and have been privileged to coach a little bit as well.

But while I enjoy many sports, one that I really do not like is boxing. In fact, I struggle to even call it a sport. This is because the whole purpose of the sport is to beat up the other person.

But something that I find very ironic, though, is that I really enjoy the Rocky movies. Do any of you?

I think that it is because they are compelling stories that are about far more than boxing. They are really more about life and overcoming difficult circumstances. And I must admit, I find the music to be very powerful also.

However, there is another reason that I have been blessed by the Rocky movies. They do well in showing the importance of discipline and training. When Rocky trains well, he does well. When Rocky isn’t focused and disciplined, he doesn’t do as well.

Now this may be a bit of a leap, but I believe the Apostle Paul would also enjoy the Rocky movies for the same reasons. I’m sure that Paul enjoyed good compelling stories and most likely he would be blessed by that sound track. But I think that he would also appreciate the training that takes place. It would remind him of his spiritual training to become a strong disciple of Jesus Christ.

Tonight, we will be highlighting a passage from Paul’s first letter to the Church in Corinth. And within this part of his letter, Paul is speaking about his own life as a godly example to follow. In fact, Paul may even sound like a coach to us as we read these words.

Please turn with me now to 1 Cor. 9:24-27

**24Do 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. 25Everyone 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. 26Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27No, 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.**

One thing that is interesting about the city of Corinth was that the people there were very familiar with athletic competition. In fact, Corinth held an athletic competition that took place every other year called the Isthmithian Games. This was very similar to the more well-known Olympic Games that took place in Athans.

Like the Olympic Games today or other high-level competitions, athletes then went into strict training in order to prepare their body for success. The Christians in Corinth certainly understood things like races and boxing. Those sports have been around a long time.

And like Paul does on several places in his writings, he begins in the physical and then moves to the spiritual. While there is value in physical training, there is much more value in spiritual training.

Now, to be sure, Paul is not saying that there is anything nothing wrong with physical training for competitions or whatever. God has a high view of the human body and so should we as His people.

In fact, I have two daughters that do competitive gymnastics and a daughter that is training to be a professional dancer. And I have a daughter that very much enjoys soccer. These girls are in training and practice. There is focus and intentionality in what they are doing. Things are not aimless. They have coaches and teachers to help them excel.

And I also think of those that have served in the military, such as Pastor Thadius here. You have gone into strict training in order to prepare your bodies and minds for service to this country. There is value in this. And a sincere thank you to all of you who have served in that way.

\***But what Paul is getting at in this passage is relating this strict training and discipline to how Christians are called to live out the Christian life**. The Christians in Corinth were not to be aimless and undisciplined in their spiritual training and growing in Christ. Rather, as Paul argues, they were to be active in spiritual training and pursue living a godly Christ-centered life.

What is the big thing that Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthian church here? It is that living the Christian life successfully takes effort and discipline.

The Christian life is not to be aimless and without focus and direction. Instead, it should be lived with intentionality and discipline.

While it is the grace alone that saves people from their sins, by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ and their trust in Him, the grace of God should propel Christians forward in actively partnering with God’s Spirit to grow and mature.

Jesus invites everyone to be His disciple. The word disciple literally means students. This implies that as Christians, the Corinthians were to be students of Jesus.

Students understand that there is always room to grow. Students seek to become more and more like their teachers. Students train for success.

So fast-forwarding to us today, what is the big takeaway for us today? And I believe it is this. We are to live out our common faith with discipline and focus. We are to not be aimless as we seek to mature in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Friends, Jesus is not only our Lord and Savior, He is also our Teacher, our Rabbi. The whole goal of disciple is to become more and more like their rabbi. Jesus is our Rabbi and He wants us transform us by His Holy Spirit to think and act more and more like Him. We are called to be His ambassadors, His representatives, in this world. This is a very high calling and worth our time and efforts.

The Bible is also clear that we have a spiritual enemy we call Satan. He and his minions are very committed to stifling our growth in Christ. If we are going to be successful in living out our God-given callings and living in victory of the forces of darkness that oppose us, we must choose a spiritually disciplined life.

And so this brings us back to Lent. One way to view this season is as a spiritual boot camp. Again, this is not moving away from the simplicity of grace. Rather, it is about intentionally opening ourselves to the transformational work of the Holy Spirit as we focus our attention once again to Christ’s impending suffering for us.

I like to view Lent as one of God’s invitations. It is an invitation to enter into training in some way. This could look different for every one of us. I do not feel led to say that you have to do this or that specific practice in order to train well. Jesus knows what is needed for each of us as we more to greater maturity in Him.

Some of us may feel the Lord calling us to fast. Fasting from meals or other activities can focus us on our need for God and His daily help. Fasting can help make us especially grateful for our daily bread.

 Others of us may feel the Holy Spirit calling us to spend more time in prayer. Still others may sense a stirring from God to read or study more of Scripture. There are numerous other spiritual disciplines as well – from journaling to retreat to confession to service to hospitality. But whatever it is, we are to do it with everything we’ve got. He are called to train as we seek to grow in godliness, looking to Jesus through it all.

Friends, we are gathered together tonight from several churches that share a common heritage in this movement of God’s Spirit called Methodism.

As Methodist Christians, it is in our spiritual DNA to value methods or practices that our gracious God brings to us to help us partner with Him in our spiritual growth and transformation.

Every one of us has been transformed by Christ. Praise be to God! But God is not finished with any of us yet. He continues to transform us in Christ. The Holy Spirit is eager to grow all of us up in this faith we share.

Let us ponder for a minute what was going on within our Lord as He set His face towards Jerusalem – as Jesus began making His journey towards the cross. He knew the pain that was awaiting Him, both physical pain as well as the emotional pain of the betrayal of Judas and denial of Peter. He knew that as He was bearing sin on the cross, He would feel alone. He would feel the weight of human sin upon Himself.

So as much as Jesus found time to get away and pray to God the Father in quiet throughout His ministry, I would think that those weeks leading to the cross would have been especially critical for Jesus as He prepared Himself for His passion.

In Lent we are seeking in some ways to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Lent is an opportunity to deepen our walk with God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

May we steward this Lenten season in a way that enables us to fight the good fight of faith. These 40 days are before us. With the help us God’s Spirit, may we all grow in leaps and bounds.

And in preparing to close this message, I would like to share a clip with the first Rocky movie. In this clip, Rocky is training for his match against World Champion Apollo Creed. As we watch, may we remember that as we train spiritually, we will find supernatural strength from our Lord to not just survive living the Christian life, but to thrive in following hard after Jesus.

*(show video clip)*

May each of us fly high spiritually. And after this Lent, by the grace of God, may we never be the same. Close in prayer…

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YYmfM2TfUA>

**Rocky (8/10) Movie CLIP - Training Montage (1976) HD**