

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (PSG, p. 148) as you introduce **Question #1: What does it mean to walk a mile in someone's shoes?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 149)**. Highlight the author's illustration about the empathy museum.

Reinforce the importance of sharing our faith by reading **The Point (PSG, p. 149): We can better share the gospel when we step into the shoes of others.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask for God's wisdom in understanding His Word in this study. Thank Him for the opportunities we have to share our faith with others. Pray that He will help us to have empathy for people who may not be in the circles we typically encounter, so that we will step outside our comfort zones to lead them to Jesus.

SESSION 6

LIFE ON MISSION



The Point

We can better share the gospel when we step into the shoes of others.

The Bible Meets Life

We tend to define people by the demographics of our church and the circle of Christians we regularly encounter. People who match those

characteristics certainly need Jesus, but so do people outside our circles. To share Christ with these other people requires us to take the gospel into their culture rather than expecting them to come into ours. This calls for us to step outside our comfort zone, but leading people to know Jesus is worth it.

The Passage

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

The Setting

Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth about A.D. 56 while he was on his third missionary journey. He addressed many significant issues and questions the church was facing. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul encouraged the church to lay aside personal rights to reach people with the gospel. Such rights meant little if people did not come to know Jesus. Paul encouraged believers to find common ground with unbelievers to win them to faith.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

- 19** Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people.
- 20** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law.
- 21** To those who are without the law, like one without the law — though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ — to win those without the law.
- 22** To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some.
- 23** Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.

Paul began 1 Corinthians 9 by asserting that as an apostle, he had certain rights (1 Cor. 9:1-14). But he recognized that by exercising those rights, he might hinder the gospel. Thus, he laid aside those rights for the greater good (vv. 12,15-18). Paul was a man who lived his life on mission for Christ.

Step into the shoes of others to share Christ.

1 ▶ **Verse 19.** Paul proclaimed **I am free from all.** We know that Paul was born a Roman citizen and had certain rights associated with that citizenship (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-28). However, for the sake of the gospel he made himself **a slave to everyone.** Paul did not mean that he actually submitted to the role of slave. Rather, he was describing his servant role as he served the churches. His own rights were not important; rather, the gospel was important. The Lord Jesus took upon Himself the role of a slave and came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:7). Paul adopted this strategy **in order to win more people.** He was all about reaching more people, whatever the cost. Today, we live in a society obsessed with personal rights. What rights are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel?

STUDY THE BIBLE 1 Corinthians 9:19-23



20 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 152.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 13: Paul.** Ask a volunteer to read the elements of the poster aloud.



SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on pages 153-155 to explain how the apostle Paul intentionally found ways to identify with all people with one purpose in mind: to win them to Christ.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 150**. In his travels, Paul also experienced many cultural differences. The Roman Empire was massive, which meant it contained people from various backgrounds and cultures who viewed life differently. And they also would see the gospel differently.

Paul made it his goal to share the gospel with all people regardless of their background.

Paul even made himself a "slave" to this task.

Paul was a free Roman citizen and free in Christ, yet he chose to serve these different people in whatever ways would influence them and bring them to Christ.

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 151): **How do we become "all things to all people" to help win them to Christ?**

Verse 20. Paul then affirmed **to the Jews I became like a Jew**. His comment seems strange at first because he was born a Jew (Phil. 3:5). He was an important leader among the Jews prior to his conversion to Jesus (Acts 26:4-5,9-11). Paul adopted this strategy to win Jews to Jesus.

The words **to those under the law** clarified Paul's statement earlier in the verse. He ethnically was a Jew, but he was free from the law because of his relationship with Christ (Rom. 7:4). Many in Paul's day sought to keep the Law of Moses in order to be right with God. Paul said no one ever could be right by keeping the law, but needed God's grace through faith in Christ (3:28). In fact, salvation was always by grace through faith, even in Old Testament times (4:1-5). However, Paul did not want to give offence and needlessly turn people from the gospel, so for this group he became **like one under the law**. He affirmed that he himself was **not under the law**, because it no longer had the power to condemn him. At the same time, Paul felt free to submit to Jewish laws such as keeping kosher or observing the Sabbath. Such practices did not violate his conscience, and his observing them allowed him to step into the shoes of others to share Christ. Paul's goal was to **win those under the law**.

Verse 21. Paul also reached out **to those who are without the law**. During the course of his missionary journeys, he often preached Christ to Gentiles who did not know the Law of Moses (Acts 13:46,48). Some Gentiles were philosophers (17:18-21), while others practiced paganism of various sorts (1 Thess. 1:9). As he ministered to these people, Paul became **like one without the law**. That is, he was not bound to follow the Law of Moses when he associated with Gentiles. To do so might have alienated him from sharing Christ with them because he would have insisted on practicing rules and regulations that in their eyes would have had no meaning or purpose. For example, the Jewish people had many laws about what food was appropriate to eat, whereas Gentiles might not. Paul did not restrict himself to Jewish customs and ways as he ministered to Gentiles. At the same time, Paul recognized that he was not **without God's law**. Certain laws of morality applied in every situation (Rom. 2:14-16). Paul always was careful to stay **under the law of Christ** as he lived by his principles. His goal was to **win those without the law**.

Witnessing to people who are significantly different from us can be one of the hardest challenges we face. Most people tend to associate with people like themselves. Many times we find it easier to relate to people with a similar ethnic background or socio-economic status. Perhaps we have ingrained practices and customs that are not part of the gospel but are merely part of our heritage. How can you and your church step across these lines to share Jesus with others?

Verse 22. Interpreters differ over whom Paul had in mind when he talked about **the weak**. The word likely denotes people who are weak in faith, whom Paul had addressed in the context (1 Cor. 8:7-12). He accommodated himself to their weaker knowledge and did not participate in practices that caused them difficulty. Paul spoke sensitively of this group in the prior chapter, always maintaining the value of their immature faith. He did not want to do anything that might cause them to stumble spiritually (1 Cor. 8:13). Paul affirmed **I became weak, in order to win the weak**. Again, the apostle laid aside his own rights and preferences to reach people who were at a different spiritual level than he was.

Crossing such barriers can be difficult. Some people might feel we want to take advantage of them, or that we might be reaching out to them in order to make ourselves feel better. Sharing the gospel often requires us to build relationships, and that takes time. In a society where people often have little spare time, this can be costly, but the results can be great.

Paul's summary statement **I have become all things to all people** is often taken out of context. Churches naturally need to limit the number of programs they offer, and in such discussions someone might say, "We can't be all things to all people." Certainly it is true that we don't have time to do everything, so prioritization is important. However, that was not Paul's intended meaning. Paul meant he would step into other people's shoes in order to better understand their lives, their goals, and their dreams because he wanted them to experience Christ's love personally for themselves. Once they could see Paul's care for them, they might be ready to hear about the Jesus Paul followed. Paul was determined to allow no unnecessary obstacles to come between him and people he was trying to reach. ◀

Does your church have artificial barriers that make it difficult for people to see Jesus? Would visitors feel they would need to act, talk, or dress a certain way before they could feel accepted? How might your church be able to promote a sense of welcome to people different from themselves? Answering such questions is important, because people's eternal lives are at stake. Paul's desire was that

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG pages 151-152**. Paul identified three groups in his culture and sought ways to interact and share Jesus with them

1. **The Jews.** *This is amazing since Paul was already a Jew! Under the grace of Christ, Paul knew he no longer had to follow the customs and rituals of the Jewish law; when interacting with Jews, however, Paul would follow their practices as a way to win their trust and gain a hearing for his message (Acts 16:1-3; 21:23-26).*

2. **The Gentiles.** *The best example of how Paul accommodated the Gentiles ("them that are without law") is his speech at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). He didn't dwell on the law or on Jesus as the Messiah; he began by addressing their culture and the world they knew.*

3. **The weak.** *We can assume Paul is talking about the same weak people mentioned in the previous chapter (1 Cor. 8:7-13). Because these fellow believers had little understanding and a weak conscience, the actions of other believers could become a stumbling block to them. Paul even chose to identify with them to share the gospel with them.*

OPTION: Display a pair of shoes that are obviously not yours. Mention that when we wear our own shoes, it's usually pretty comfortable, but when we put on someone else's shoes, that can be very uncomfortable. Point out that in verses 19-22, Paul describes how he steps out of his comfort zone to reach others, even people who are very different from him, in order to share the good news of Jesus with them.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 152): **How can we walk in the shoes of others without compromising our values?**

(Alternate: What are some different approaches Christians use for sharing the gospel?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses, Paul taught about two important keys to living the Christian life: discipline and self-denial."

by every possible means he might win some to everlasting salvation through Jesus. He was not afraid to take a different approach as the context demanded (Acts 17:22-23). As we align ourselves more completely with God's mission, He will help us step into the shoes of others to share Christ.

Verse 23. We benefit from sharing the gospel. Paul affirmed **I do all this because of the gospel**. Paul had come to realize that following Christ was his all-consuming passion (Phil. 3:7-11). Paul had a life of many accomplishments. However, these accomplishments paled in comparison to his relationship with Jesus Christ. As Paul came to know Jesus, he recognized that everything in life flowed from his relationship with Him. His relationship with Christ was more than the most important thing in his life—it was life itself (John 17:3).

Paul's words have powerful application for believers today. Many people confess, "My relationship with Christ is an important part of my life." Others claim, "I want to include God in my plans." But these statements fall short in light of Paul's comments. We cannot really separate anything in life from our relationship with Christ. We have various roles and relationships, but they all have meaning only as they align to that supreme relationship to Christ. Further, God wants to include us in His plan to reach the nations!

Paul desired to **share** in the **blessings** of the gospel. One such blessing was the eternal life it brought to Paul. Another was the joy he received when people came to Christ through his ministry (1 Thess. 2:20). Paul understood the life-changing impact the gospel could have on people. He wept when people rejected its message (Phil. 3:18-19), and he deeply anguished for the Jewish people, most of whom rejected Jesus their Messiah (Rom. 9:1-5; 10:1-2).

All believers benefit from sharing the gospel. This past week, our pastor gave an invitation to salvation, and several people prayed to receive Christ. What a powerful day! Seeing the joy on the faces of those who received Jesus encouraged the entire church. For some of us, it made us think back to the day we first came into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Seeing the joy on the faces of the new disciples was exciting. Our church actually burst into applause as we shared in their blessing! Indeed, blessing comes to the body of Christ when we share in the ministry of bringing people to Jesus.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

24 Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize.

25 Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.

26 So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air.

27 Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Sharing Christ takes discipline and self-denial.

2 ▶ **Verse 24.** Paul switched gears a bit to the arena of sports, using the illustration of **runners in a race**. All runners prepare for the race in various ways, then the race begins, the crowd cheers, and the runners push for the finish line. However, Paul reminded them, **only one receives the prize**. All might put forth their best effort, but in the end, only one winner stands atop the victor's podium. Paul encouraged the Corinthian church: **run in such a way to win the prize**. As the church lived its life on mission, they would see God-sized results. Athletes might train for a competition, but the Corinthians' real "competition" was actually life itself. Paul wanted the Corinthians to win the prize that came from participating in the benefits the gospel brought. As they lived their lives on mission for Jesus, they would strive for and receive the prize to which God called them (Phil. 3:14). ◀

I remember my high school days and how running played a huge role in my conditioning for baseball. Our coach knew that when pitchers tired, they tired because their legs gave out. Consequently, he ran us and ran us and ran us. I often wondered why the coach spent so much time pushing us on our running rather than pushing us on our pitching technique! Yet, when the season began, I understood what he had been doing. Our team had superior conditioning and it showed in the later innings of baseball games when our team

STUDY THE BIBLE 1 Corinthians 9:24-27



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to explain the background of "the prize."

GUIDE: Refer group members to "**Digging Deeper,**" (PSG, p. 154), and the *Biblical Illustrator* excerpt at the end of this session for information about the Isthmian Games.

OPTION: Display a stop watch (or the "stopwatch" function on a smartphone). Note that people who run competitively, keep track of their time, with a goal of improving their time as they train – a runner who trains with discipline should see the times improve. Point out that in verse 23, Paul calls on believers to share the gospel with the same discipline as a runner who trains and races to win.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 153-154**.

Paul was fully committed to reaching anybody and everybody with the gospel.

Paul saw it as a serious task that would require strict discipline and self-control. He underscored this by comparing the Christian life and ministry with an athletic race.

Paul doesn't explain what that prize is other than "a perishable crown." The only other reference Paul made to a prize was "the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). We can be confident that this prize is eternal and of great value.

Paul wanted us to be like him: disciplined and determined to "run in such a way to win the prize."

This prize is of immeasurable worth, so that Paul practiced discipline in how he lived and served so that he would "not be disqualified." This is not a matter of losing salvation, but missing out on the prize that comes from serving the One who saves us.

still had the stamina to press on. Our coach was not merely training us to compete; he was training us to win. He had the state championship in view.

Paul desired believers to recognize that a life on mission for Jesus means we are totally committed. We will do whatever it takes to share Christ with others, and as we do, we will benefit from sharing the gospel.

Verse 25. Paul continued the parallel between athletic contests and the Christian life. The word translated **competes** is the Greek word from which we get our word *agonize*. It denotes a dedicated effort to a task, whether physical or spiritual (John 18:36; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10). An athlete focused on preparing for competition **exercises self-control in everything**. The word translated *exercises self-control* includes the ideas of both discipline and self-denial. Athletes train hard because they place great value on competing in their particular event or events. They will allow nothing to get in the way of becoming their best. Top athletes attain that level by developing their skills and bodies in an intentional manner. Every four years, we watch the Olympics and marvel at athletes who train for years to participate in an event that may last less than a minute. Paul drew a parallel between the intense dedication of athletes and the intense dedication Christians should pursue as they live life on mission.

On the other hand, Paul drew a sharp contrast between the reward athletes would receive and the reward faithful Christians would receive. Those who compete in athletic contests **do it to receive a ... crown** along with all the accompanying glory. Indeed, the victor of a sporting event receives much honor, but Paul reminded the Corinthians that such a crown involved only temporary honor that would be **perishable**. We likewise see this in our own day: athletes win a championship one year but fail to win the next. Glory is fleeting! On the other hand, Paul affirmed that we who compete for the cause of Christ will receive an imperishable **crown**. The thought here parallels the victor's crown Paul described as he wrote his last letter to Timothy and anticipated martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:8). Paul had eternity in view, and so should we. When we see the results the Lord will bring through our meager efforts, it will be worth it all.

Verse 26. Paul described his approach to life in verses 26-27. The verses describe the logical consequence to the truth he had just proclaimed. He was competing in life, but he was

competing for the sake of the kingdom! His was a life on mission, just as ours should be. His comment **I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air** was not intended to put down those who competed in this way. After all, Paul had just recognized a few verses earlier the seriousness of their preparation. Rather, he was focusing on the surpassing value of competing for an unfading crown rather than one that would fade away (v. 25). Paul did not engage on the level of human competition, as noble as that might have been; he had eternity in view. Today, many interests clamor for our attention, and Christians may give themselves to many worthy causes. At the same time, we must remember our ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God and to bring others to Jesus Christ.

3 ▶ Verse 27. Paul drew a sharp contrast between what he did not do in verse 26 with what he did do in verse 27. The Greek word translated **discipline** also can mean “give a black eye to.” Here it has the sense of treating oneself roughly in training. Paul placed voluntary limits on his actions and priorities so he would have plenty of time to focus on the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

The words **bring it under strict control** come from two Greek words that together literally mean “take into slavery.” In verse 19, Paul referred to himself as becoming a slave for the sake of winning people to Christ. Here, he talked about enslaving his body for the cause of Christ. ◀

Paul drew this section to an end with one final sports analogy. He said he disciplined himself so that when he “competed in his event” by **preaching to others**, the Lord would not judge him as **disqualified** because of some failure on his part. Paul did not fear losing his salvation; rather, he feared he might miss the opportunity to complete his mission. He wanted to serve fully and faithfully.

Sharing Christ is serious business, but the reward is great. Sometimes sharing Christ means we need to step out of our own personal comfort zones. Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial (Luke 9:23). He also calls each of us to invest our lives in the most strategic manner possible to accomplish the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). For some, that will mean walking next door to share Christ; for others, it will mean going to another culture as missionaries. We need to have the courage to pray for ourselves, for our families, and for our church, that God will help us stop at nothing to see people come to Jesus.

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 155): **Why are discipline and self-control so important in the life of a believer?**

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to explain the idea of *discipline* and bringing one’s body “under strict control.”

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 156): **Where do you see the need for discipline and self-control in your life?**

(Alternate: What are some practical things you can do to make sure you aren’t disqualified as a witness for Christ?)

DO: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on **PSG page 156: “Life Is Like a Race.”**

LIVE IT OUT

5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**

We can better share the gospel when we step into the shoes of others.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out** (PSG, p. 157; see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that because of who we are in Christ, we have the obligation and the great opportunity to share the gospel with others.

PRAY: "Father, help us to see others the way You see them and to love them the way You love them as we share Your good news."

LIVE IT OUT

How will you step into the shoes of others this week?

- ▶ **Pray.** Identify a person you personally know who does not know Christ. Pray for this person and ask for guidance in knowing how to bring the gospel of Christ into his or her life.
- ▶ **Learn.** Choose a people group that resides in your community. Learn what you can about their beliefs and customs. Pray that the gospel would penetrate their culture. Ask God how you can get involved.
- ▶ **Step out.** As a group, plan a ministry project to a person or group that requires you to step out of your comfort zone. Find a way to connect with the person or community in order to share Christ.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR

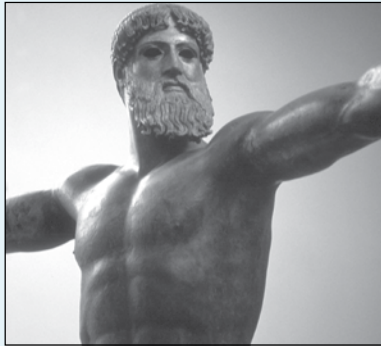


Figure of Poseidon, the patron deity of the Isthmian Games.

A set of four games came to be known as the Panhellenic (“all Greek”) Games because they were open to competitors from any Greek city in the world. The four games ran in a staggered cycle so individual athletes could compete in all four and in at least one per year. The Olympic Games were held at Olympia every four years in year one of the cycle. Both the Isthmian Games near Corinth and the Nemean Games near Nemea took place in different months of year two. In year three the Pythian Games were staged near Delphi.

Year four featured the Isthmian and the Nemean Games again. Then the cycle repeated.

Held at the chief religious centers of Greece, these games honored eminent deities. Olympia honored Zeus; Delphi, Apollos; Nemea, Zeus; and Isthmia, Poseidon. These games formed part of the worship of the gods. Each athlete offered his very best to the gods both before and during competition.

At least one scholar believed the Isthmian Games may have played a large part in shaping Paul’s itinerary in Greece. The apostle likely moved with deliberate haste toward Corinth so he could arrive before the spring festival in A.D. 51. Corinth would have offered Paul better business opportunities to practice his trade of tentmaking because of the games nearby.

The excerpt above is from the article “The Isthmian Games and Paul” (Summer 2005), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

The apostle Paul was passionate in his quest to present the gospel to all people. That same passion for those yet to believe in Jesus motivates us to share the gospel so that others say yes to God’s grace.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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COMING IN SUMMER

Real Relationships

Real Relationships is a six-week study on how to live in community—relationships that are far from superficial. The study is written by Alvin Reid, Senior Professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

June 4	Session 1	Love Like Christ	<i>John 15:9-17</i>
June 11	Session 2	Forge True Friendship	<i>1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:4-7; 20:10-13</i>
June 18	Session 3	Respect Authority	<i>1 Samuel 24:3-12</i>
June 25	Session 4	See Their Worth	<i>2 Samuel 11:1-9,14-17</i>
July 2	Session 5	Share Christ	<i>John 1:35-49</i>
July 9	Session 6	Encourage One Another	<i>Acts 11:19-26</i>

Special Focus: First Things First

July 16		First Things First	<i>Haggai 1:2-13</i>
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Broken Vessels: How God Uses Imperfect People

Broken Vessels: How God Uses Imperfect People is a six-week study written by Daniel Im, Director of Church Multiplication for NewChurches.com and LifeWay, showing how God desires to remove our brokenness and do great things through us.

July 23	Session 1	A Fresh Start	<i>John 18:15-18,25-27; 21:15-19</i>
July 30	Session 2	Objections Overruled	<i>Exodus 3:11-12; 4:10-17</i>
August 6	Session 3	The Gift of Grace	<i>2 Corinthians 12:2-10</i>
August 13	Session 4	A Channel of Comfort	<i>2 Corinthians 1:2-7</i>
August 20	Session 5	A Passion to Share the Gospel	<i>2 Corinthians 5:11,14-21</i>
August 27	Session 6	Right Here, Right Now	<i>Mark 5:1-2,8-15,18-20</i>