

# “Goal!”

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I Corinthians 9:19-27*

A man had 50 yard line tickets for the Super Bowl. As he sits down, another man comes down and asks if anyone is sitting in the seat next to him. “No,” he says, “The seat is empty.” “This is incredible,” said the man. “Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the Super Bowl, the biggest sporting event in the world, and not use it?!” The man replies, “Well, actually, the seat belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she passed away. This is the first Super Bowl we haven’t been to together since we got married in 1967.” “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. That’s terrible. But couldn’t you find someone else – a friend or relative, or even a neighbor to take the seat?” The man shakes his head, “No, they’re all at the funeral.”

Ouch. Fanaticism? Devotion?

Well, today is Super Bowl Sunday! Super Bowl 44! And being a great fan of football, I thought I would enlighten you with some Super Bowl facts. The Indianapolis Colts (their 4<sup>th</sup> time at the Super Bowl) are playing against the first timers, the New Orleans Saints. They are in Miami and the game starts at 6:00 p.m. 74,000 people will crowd the stadium. The Super Bowl will be broadcast in over 185 countries, in 30 different languages. Many will watch not for the game, but for the ads. In fact – 30second ads that cost \$42,000.00 in 1967 today cost \$2.8 million.

Tickets at the first Super Bowl, when Vince Lombardi led the Green Bay Packers to win, cost up to \$12.00, today the most expensive ticket is \$1,000.

Peyton Manning and the Colts are favored to win. Some are declaring that Manning is the best quarterback of the last 30 years. The underdog Saints, some say, might take it, with the karma factor on their side, playing for something larger than the game - a city rebuilding after an epic natural disaster.

Whatever the outcome, the teams, each player will give it his all to win – to reach the goal – to finish victorious!! That goal consumes them this very day, at this very moment! It is on their minds. That is each one’s focus – the Goal! Mediocrity is out! Determination is in!

How many are going to watch this world event?

And what about Super Bowl parties? 15,000 tons of chips will be consumed while watching the Super Bowl, along with 4,000 tons of popcorn – perspective, line up the chips and you get a distance of almost 293,000 miles, or 1.5 times the distance to the moon. The popcorn stringing would ring the earth 5.5 times. The real winner is avocado – 12 million pounds consumed! And then the day after...7-Eleven stores claim a whopping 20% in sales of antacid the day after the Super Bowl.

But back to the game! The game of life!

Coach Paul in I Corinthians does not have in mind couch potatoes, nor armchair quarterbacks in chapter 9.

No way!

He does have you in mind – directly in mind! You – a Christian! A follower of Jesus Christ! You are not on the sidelines. You are not a spectator in Paul’s game. His athletic imagery includes all of us, no matter what physical shape you are in. So don’t ignore his declaration, and just pass the chips and popcorn.

No!

No way!

Paul believes that you, as a Christian are in the game! Life’s game!

Apparently, the ancient world also enjoyed sports, games of skill and stamina. Paul knew what would get people’s attention – the games! Running, working toward the prize, the goal!

In this morning’s text, Paul speaks of “winning”, “gaining” five times! He is making a point! Paul is absolutely convinced that he and others must totally apply themselves to Christ’s way of living. Here, he uses sports imagery. He declares that everything he does, he does to win! He plays to win!! To win, gain what? The “Gospel!” The way to live one’s life! Committed to the ethos of Christ – love, justice, excellence, compassion, caring, and more!

And he has a full playbook, using certain plays that fit for the game.

- To his Jewish people, he has specific plays. How about play #10, 5, 1 – using Moses the lawgiver, with a quick hand off, and then long run by Isaiah – defended by Amos.
- To his non-Jewish friend, he uses what they know – so Paul goes for a long pass to Aristotle, protected by Plato and Socrates.

Goal!

Paul will do what is needed to share this “way of life!!”

He gets more personal.

“Hey, don’t you realize that when you are in a race, you are in it to win? To give it your best?! You are in a competition! Only one wins – so do your best! Mediocrity need not apply!! Some things are serious enough that you train, maintain discipline, and wholly commit yourself to attain your goal!”

Paul believed this, as do I, and many others.

There are far too many armchair quarterbacks, and Paul knew this. “Listen up,” he calls out, “I don’t just run about hither and yon, with no plan, no goal in mind. I work out, I study, I read, I dialogue, I listen so that I am well trained to accomplish my goal!” “I do not throw punches into the air, wasting my effort and strength. No way! I pummel the punching bag, and build my coordination.” If they had football... “I practice throwing the ball to hit the right spot. I don’t just toss it anywhere.”

Paul’s Christianity is one of strength and attaining goals.

Play to win!

Play with purpose – goals!

Practice, Practice, Practice!!!

Discipline, self-control, self-mastery are required!!

As a Christian, actually, as a human, you are in this game. The question is, are you training, committed, or are you dragging your feet, falling way behind, unconcerned about the goal, or if you ever finish? Are you aimless? Are you swiping at the air?

Paul is offering you a challenge –

“Run that you may attain the goal!”

The goal of fulfillment, of purpose through Christ!

Get into the game of life, and play to win!

Amen.