

SERIES OVERVIEW



Running the race well for God means building spiritual habits; this series will walk students through six critical spiritual disciplines to grow in. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 provides the backbone of the series by calling students to run with purpose in every step.

Week 1: Hanging Out with God

A habit of prayer helps you run the race of being a Jesus follower.

Week 2: Accountability

Accountable friendships bring healing.

Week 3: Bible Study

Building the habit of Bible study teaches you more about God and His ways, helping you run the race of being a Jesus follower.

Week 4: Involvement in Church

Church involvement means working together to put others first.

Week 5: Tithing

Giving reveals the heart of the giver.

Week 6: Shared + Sacred Practices

Baptism and Communion are ways to honor and celebrate what Jesus has done in our lives.

Coleader Teaching Format

CAPTURE

Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?

Goal: To captivate students' interest and encourage them to actively engage and learn.

"The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing..." Proverbs 15:2

SCRIPTURE

What does God's Word say?

Goal: To foster a deeper understanding of Scripture among students.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." 2 Timothy 3:16

INSIGHTS

What might this Scripture mean?

Goal: To present key insights in a way that resonates with teenagers.

"The teaching of your word gives light; so even the simple can understand." Psalm 119:130

ACTION

How could we live this out?

Goal: To assist teenagers in implementing God's Word into their daily actions.

"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." James 2:17

DISCUSS

What can we learn from one another?

Goal: To foster meaningful discussions and encourage active participation among students.

"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." Proverbs 18:15

Each teaching comes with two teaching options: (1) an outline, and (2) full manuscript that is flavored with illustrations, humor, photos, videos, object-lessons, and/or stories. All scriptures are NLT unless otherwise noted. Feel free to customize to your own translation preference with blank slides and Word doc.

Teaching Guide

Week 4: Involvement in Church

HABITS

Big Idea

Church involvement means working together to put others first.

Primary Scripture:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Acts 2:42-47

Supporting Scripture:

Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 10:25

[Teacher note: please refer to Coleader Teaching Format for a better understanding of the five teaching sections used. Also, our prayer is that you will feel tremendous freedom to adapt this content to best fit your unique context. No one knows your students better than you, so make this content *your own*.]

CAPTURE ► (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

[Teacher note: At one point in the *INSIGHTS* section, we mention how important it is to share meals together. If you have the resources, this might be an excellent opportunity to surprise your students by providing a meal or snacks during small group conversations.]

[show slide]

Anyone here like football? Anyone really into fantasy football?

[Leader tip: let kids give some responses.]

I need to preface the video I'm about to show you with this comment: I'm not a Dallas Cowboys fan. But I really like this guy who used to play for them, Bradie James. A few years back, he was a defensive player for the Cowboys and played for almost a decade. Check out this video he did for *I am Second*, a series of videos where people make the point that Jesus is first in their lives:

[show video]

Bradie James – A Bigger Audience (I am Second) (3:32)

<https://youtu.be/27Ejwep6MyY>

Here's why I like this video: Bradie James gets it. Did you know the average career in the NFL is only three years? To play ten seasons in the NFL took tremendous discipline. He had to practice, exercise, memorize plays, study opponents, and run drills. But his testimony makes it clear that Bradie James understood it also took discipline, or habits, to pursue Jesus. He spoke of prioritizing church, studying the Bible, and sharing his faith. There's a reason why God frequently uses the imagery of running a race to explain following Him. Let's take a look at the primary verse we've been studying in this series:

[show slide]

24 Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! 25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. 26 So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. 27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 – NLT)

For the past few weeks, we've been looking at six spiritual habits that we've described as essential for running the race of following Jesus well.

[show slide]

- **H** – “H” stands for “Hanging Out with God.”
- **A** – “A” stands for “Accountability” (or helping each other keep our commitments).
- **B** – “B” stands for “Bible Study.”
- **I** – “I” stands for “Involvement in Church” (or youth group).
- **T** – “T” stands for “Tithing” (or sharing your resources like time and money to help grow God's Kingdom).
- **S** – *And the S stands for “Shared + Sacred Practices” (These are practices that Jesus specifically commanded. Particularly, baptism and communion)*

These are habits that we, as followers of Jesus, must have in our lives. These habits, or spiritual disciplines, can make all the difference in how each of us runs our spiritual race.

SCRIPTURE ► (What does God's Word say?)

[show slide]

Today, we will look at the fourth habit, the “I”, which stands for **Involvement in Church**.

What do I mean by this? Involvement in church is something bigger than just being a part of our youth group. That is *part* of it, but that's not all of it. I love having you here each week, but running the race of following Jesus well means being a part of the *whole* church, not just *this* (youth) part of it.

To help us understand what it means to be part of the whole church, let's look at what the church was like when it first started. To give you a little context, the passage we're about to read takes place only a few weeks after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Essentially, the movement we know as Christianity had just left the starting line.

[show slide]

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 – NLT)

Can you imagine what it must have been like? What we call church today looks quite different from what they called church back then. There weren't any church buildings with rows of seats and a stage. There were no lights, no projectors, no screens. They didn't have a fancy church logo. The early church didn't even have a name. It was just the “Church.”

But even though there is a lot that's different between church today and church back then, this passage shows us that there is still a lot the same. From this passage, I want us to notice three things about what Involvement in church means.

INSIGHTS ► (What might this scripture mean?)

1. Involvement in Church means that together, we focus on what's important: Did you catch the very first verse we read? It said:

[show slide]

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. (Acts 2:42 – NLT)

We may do these four things differently now than the early Christians did two thousand years ago. But these are still the essential things that make up most of what we, as Christ-followers, do when we gather. Let's consider each of them:

[show slide]

- **The Apostles' Teaching** - Back when the church was first starting, the only way they had to learn about Jesus and what it meant to follow Him was to hear from people who had spent time learning directly from Jesus Himself. Today, we still carry on that same tradition by teaching the same truths. It began with the Apostles who taught others, and those people taught others, and so on, until today, we have people who teach in churches worldwide. Each time we gather and listen to someone teaching, we're participating in a two-thousand-year-old legacy that started with those few who knew Jesus best.
- **Fellowship** - Fellowship is a fancy way of saying that we spend time together in meaningful ways. We don't just spend time *around* each other but *with* each other. Sometimes, this means having serious conversations about our faith, but sometimes, it means just having fun together and enjoying each other's company. So, every time we play a game, it's fellowship. Every time we serve others in Jesus' name, it's fellowship. Fellowship also happens every time we have deep conversations in our small groups.
- **Sharing in Meals** - I'm unsure why, but something significant happens when we sit and eat together. When we share meals, we let our guards down, tell stories, and get to know people. Food seems to always make a good time in fellowship together **even better**. [Teacher note: this next part is optional. Feel free to replace "pizza" with any meal or snack you can provide for your small groups. If you aren't able to provide a meal or a snack, simply remove this next part.] That's why we will be providing pizza in your small groups tonight!

- **Prayer** - We talked about building a habit of prayer a few weeks ago, and we called it the habit of *Hanging Out with God*. We focused on how important prayer is in building our relationship with God. Praying together takes the idea one step further. Instead of your prayer being a conversation between you and God, it becomes between a group of people and God. Sure, praying in a group can be a little awkward at first, but I've found that praying with others is a great way to build trust with them. And it's also great way for everyone to experience how we can continue praying for and encouraging others.

It's incredible that when you reduce the church to its basics, what we do and how we are involved in it, it isn't all that different from what early Christians did when the church began!

Another thing that we can learn from this passage is that:

[show slide]

2. Involvement in Church means putting others first: After reading about the four actions early Christians devoted themselves to, we start reading about how some of these things played out in everyday life:

[show slide]

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. (Acts 2:43-47a – NLT)

There was so much going on in the early church! There were miracles. Everyone was sharing everything. People sold their homes and belongings to give money to the needy. They met every day to worship together. They invited each other into their homes, and they shared their meals.

So much going on and it all happened "with great joy and generosity."

For most of us, sharing doesn't come naturally. Think of when you were a little kid, and another kid wanted to play with *YOUR* toy. Uh uh. It's not going to happen, right? That is because selfishness is part of our sinful nature, but through what Jesus has done for us, God redeems this awful quality by giving His people a heart that shares with others.

But this level of sharing from the early Christians is SO amazing! They shared everything with everyone all the time! When I was younger I used to think, "Wow, I wouldn't be able to survive in the early church!" Back then, I was too focused on "*what they did*" when they shared everything with everyone instead of considering the "*why they did it*" part of the equation.

And that's something I want to make sure we don't miss. These early followers of Jesus didn't only share with each other because it was the right thing to do, they shared because they realized something crucial: each person's life was forever changed because of the love and sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus gave His own life for them because He loved and valued them. The only response that made sense to them was to love and value others as Jesus had done. It's not always easy, but because of what Jesus has done for you, the natural response as His follower is to love and value others, putting them first and serving them.

I love how the Apostle Paul wrote about sharing, loving, valuing, and serving our fellow Jesus followers in his letter to the young church in Rome. Let's look:

[show slide]

9 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. 11 Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. 12 Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. 13 When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13 – NLT)

And the last thing that I want to call out in this passage is that:

[show slide]

3. Involvement in Church means inviting others into the journey of following Jesus: The church in Jerusalem went from a few dozen people to thousands in a very short time. It's easy to think that this resulted from what the early Christians did, how skilled they were at sharing the good news about Jesus with others, and how brilliantly they knew how to live out their faith to attract others to Him... but that was not the case. Let's look at how the passage ends:

[show slide]

And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47b – NLT)

Notice that it didn't say, "People joined the church because of how nice the believers were." And it didn't say, "People joined the church because they served up the best dried fish and fig pizza." The truth is that the early church grew because God was working in those believers' lives. All the early Christians had to do was invite others to join them and make them feel welcome.

That's why it's crucial for us to make sure we welcome everyone who shows up here. It can't just be that we tolerate the people who show up. We must genuinely value and love each person in the same way the early church did because it is the doorway God uses to open their hearts so He can work in their lives just as He has worked in ours.

ACTION ► (How can we live this out?)

I realize how difficult this can be. But no one ever said it would be easy to follow Jesus. That's one of my favorite things Bradie James discussed in the video we just watched. It's challenging to shift from living only for yourself to living for others. And please hear me when I tell you that I don't get this right every time, but I need you to know that making the effort is worth it.

The early church saw what could happen when Christians make church involvement a habit and invite others to join them on the spiritual journey of following Jesus. The result was nothing short of world-changing.

But how do we replicate those early Christians' involvement in church, where they actively participated in God's mission to grow His Kingdom? How do we get started? I have a few ideas that I hope you will choose to put into practice as you consider building this habit of involvement in church:

[Teacher note: In the following point, feel free to edit the content in order to speak to your church's theology regarding church involvement, be it to discuss baptism, confirmation, or church membership.]

[show slide]

1. Choose to make church a priority in your life.

Every single one of us is busy. I know that. You know that. It's not like we're going to slow down anytime soon. And we all know that the busier we get, the more often we'll have multiple commitments fighting for our time simultaneously.

You have sports, school clubs, choir, band, orchestra, homework, after-school jobs, boyfriends, girlfriends, and many other things that fight for your time and attention. And I need you to hear this: none of those involvements are bad. Most of them are awesome. But, as you know, science has not yet discovered a way for us to be in multiple places simultaneously.

What's my point? Since you can't do everything, you must learn to prioritize the most important involvements in your life and values.

So, let me ask you: where does church involvement rate in your list of priorities? If we're serious about building the spiritual disciplines that will help us run the race of following Jesus, making church involvement a priority needs to be high on our lists.

And if it is, and I hope it is, what does making church involvement a priority look like in real life? Let's keep it simple and upbeat: it's not about keeping score. It's not about ticking off boxes like having perfect youth group attendance. It's about moving toward consistency. I'm not saying that if you choose a sport's practice over coming to youth group, you've done something wrong. Sometimes, life will get in the way of church involvement, even when you don't want that to happen. Never forget that God loves you for who you are, not for what you do or don't do!

Still, as you consider all the commitments and activities requiring your time, I want to encourage you to remember something that has helped me keep my priorities, including that of my involvement in church, especially during busy seasons:

Whenever you say "yes" to one thing, you also say "no" to something else. Saying "yes" to church involvement means saying "no" to something else, even when that something else is "good." Giving up the "good" by choosing the "great" can be challenging, but it is always the best decision!

When you choose to grow in the discipline of involvement in church, I want to encourage you to tell people who are close to you, like people in your small group, that this is a high priority for you so that together, you can help each other stay accountable and focused on what's most valuable and important.

Remember that we looked at how the early church valued and loved others? Here's an idea for how we can grow to be more like them:

[show slide]

2. Choose to go out of your way to call out the value in others.

As we continue to meet regularly as the early followers of Jesus did, we have the opportunity to encourage one another in our common faith. We can build each other and affirm the value that each of us has. And this is something that the author of the book of Hebrews pointed to when we read this:

[show slide]

25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25 – NLT)

So, as we gather here regularly, choose to go out of your way to affirm the value of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Please don't assume that others know how you value them. They can't read your mind. People only know how you feel about them if you tell them.

Sure, it might be a little awkward at first, but can you imagine how encouraging it would be if everyone went out of their way to call out value in others? For example, instead of just thinking it's fun to hang out with your small group, tell them it is! Or, instead of being impressed when someone absolutely crushes that week's game, tell them you're impressed. And, instead of just missing someone when they aren't here for a week, tell them you missed them.

If we start going out of our way to call out the value in others, it won't take long for the initial awkwardness of doing so to disappear. It will just become who we are. And imagine what it would be like if God decided to bring more and more people to our church just like He did with the early church. If I had never been to church before, and I show up one week, and everyone is calling out value in each other, that's a place I'd want to stay.

And that brings me to one last action we can all take as we build this habit of involvement in church:

[show slide]

3. Choose to extend an open invitation to those beyond our church.

Imagine this scenario: the early church is a few dozen people, and they're doing all this awesome stuff, right? And then, like Scripture says, the Lord brings TONS of new people to join in with them. But let's imagine that when those people arrived, all the people who were there treated them like they didn't belong.

That would have been horrible! And, in this scenario, the church may have ended almost as soon as it started! Thankfully, that's not what happened. It's safe to assume the early church became good at welcoming new people. And I want us to become great at the EXACT same thing.

Not only should we invite our friends to join us each week, but we need to think about what we can do to help this be a place where people always feel welcome.

In just a moment, we're going to head to our small groups, and one of the things we're going to consider is how we can make sure that we never become a place where new people feel like outsiders. As we continue to build the habit of Church Involvement, let's make sure that we're doing everything possible to help others do the same.

DISCUSS ► (What can we learn from one another?)

[Note: These discussion questions are designed to be used in a small group setting.]

1. What stood out to you most about the Bradie James video?

2. Have you ever lost any friends because you are a Christian? If so, what was that like for you?
3. How have you seen the church “basics” of teaching, fellowship, sharing meals, and prayer play out in our church? Of these four, which is your favorite and why?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being least and 10 being most), how would you rate our church on how well we share with one another? Explain your answer.
5. It’s been said that “your schedule reveals your priorities.” What does your schedule reveal about what things you value most?
6. Are you satisfied with your priorities? Why or why not?
7. Do you think our group is welcoming to others? How so, or how not?
8. How can we improve to become more welcoming to others so that no one ever feels like an outsider?
9. How can we, as a group, pray for and encourage each other throughout the week?