

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 5: Running the Race

HABITS

Big Idea

Giving reveals the heart of the giver.

Primary Scripture:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Mark 12:41-44

Supporting Scripture:

Deuteronomy 14:22; 2 Corinthians 9:7,
1 Corinthians 16:2a; Matthew 6:4

[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?)

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Raise your hand if you have here ever handled an ax?

[Teacher note: allow students to raise their hands.]

Really, how did it go?

[Teacher note: let students give some responses.]

I've been learning about timbersports lately. Yes, timbersports is a real word, and it's AMAZING! Timbersports is a combination of competitions involving axes, saws, and chainsaws. It's WILD. They do things with their equipment in seconds that would take ages for you or me. For them, chopping through a log looks like a hot knife going through butter. If I tried the same thing? I don't care how sharp the ax is; I might as well be using a dull spoon.

I want to share a video with you about Martha King. She's a Christian and currently both a national and world champion lumberjill:

[show video]

Get to Know Martha King: "I'm a combination of sweet and deadly" (3:44)

<https://youtu.be/Et5WFudESfo>

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Did you catch how Martha spoke about training and discipline? To excel in her sport, she needs to work on it constantly; she needs habits that build her as a competitor. She competes all over the world and dominates.

Recently, she performed a demonstration and spoke to the crowd about how she wants to represent her family, her nation, and her God as she competes. She often talks about how she believes God has gifted her in ways that have been such a blessing, and she wants to use those gifts to honor God. She's committed to taking something God has given her and giving it back to Him so He can receive glory. For Martha, there is a direct link between her life as a competitor and her life as a Christian.

Let's take a look at the passage we've been reading for the past few weeks:

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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)

We saw in the video how Martha lives this out and runs with purpose in every step as a lumberjill. In our current series, we've been looking at six spiritual habits essential for running the race well and enabling us to run with purpose in every step as believers. They can all be found in the acronym "H.A.B.I.T.S."

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- **H** – "H" stands for "Hanging Out with God" (we talked about this the first week).
- **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), which we talked about last week.
- **T** – "T" stands for "Tithing" (or sharing your resources like time and money for God's purposes).
- **S** – ***And the S stands for "Shared + Sacred Practices" (These are practices that Jesus specifically commanded. Particularly, baptism and communion)***

These are *habits* we need to have in our lives. These habits, these spiritual disciplines, can make all the difference in how you run the spiritual race.

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

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Today, we will look at the fifth habit, “T,” for **Tithing**.

Tithing is very much a word you hear at church and not anywhere else. Why? Because it was a word that originated thousands of years ago in ancient Jewish worship practices. Let's look at what the word means:

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22 You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year. (Deuteronomy 14:22 – NLT)

So, just like that passage says, the word tithe literally means “one-tenth” or “10 percent,” and the original idea was that each person would set aside 10% of their crops or livestock to offer back to God as a sacrifice. Giving was one of the primary ways people demonstrated their devotion to God.

For the Israelites, this was a command they were required to follow, and there was no real conversation about one's motivation for giving, but God designed it to be a way that His people would express their faith, love, and obedience to Him. However, over time, tithing became less about God and more about following rules, ticking the box on their spiritual to-do lists, and simply doing what was expected.

And that was the culture Jesus grew up in, so He knew how tithing had lost its spiritual significance for most people. There's a moment in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus flipped the culture of tithing upside down and revealed what it was supposed to be about:

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41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. 42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. 43 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. 44 For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44 – NLT)

Before we even jump into what we can learn from this passage, I just want to point out how great it is that Jesus doesn't hold back. I've found that when it comes to topics like money, most people don't like talking about it as it seems too personal. But Jesus just goes for it and says what needs to be said.

So, with that in mind, let's take a closer look at this passage and see how Jesus' strong words can help us as we consider building a habit of tithing.

INSIGHTS ► (What might this scripture mean?)

The first thing that we really need to make sure we recognize is:

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1. This is a true story: A lot of times, Jesus would often make a point by telling a parable, which is a hypothetical story that helps the listener connect to a central truth that might have been difficult for them to understand otherwise. But this is not one of those times. Let's look at how this story starts:

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41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. (Mark 12:41 – NLT)

This event actually happened, and that's important because it gives us a bit of context for what's happening in the story. Knowing that these were real people with real experiences has a way of making this story hit closer to home.

So, since we know this is a true story, there are a few details we can know from history that might help us have a clearer picture of what was going on:

- **The Temple** - The Temple was the primary place of worship for the Israelites. It was a MASSIVE building where people believed that heaven and earth literally met. The priests would offer sacrifices to God at the temple. It was also a place where people would come to worship and pay their tithe. And the way the tithe was collected was pretty simple. There was a locked box with a slot in it, and people would put their money through the slot. This is where Jesus is sitting in the passage we just read.
- **The Collection Box** – Over time, putting money in the collection box had become something like performance art. These collection boxes had metal funnels the money would drop through, and people would intentionally change their money into smaller value coins so the coins would make more noise when they were dropped in. Often, wealthy people would make a big show of loudly dropping their coins in the collection box so everyone would look at them and be envious of their perceived spiritual status.

- **“Perceived Spiritual Status”** – This was a big deal to the people because, as I said, in Jesus’ day, tithing had lost much of its spiritual significance. Giving had been reduced to a belief that if a person was wealthy, it was a mark of God’s blessing on them. So, the rich were seen as the spiritual giants, and the poor (who were most of the population) were believed to be in poverty because God had judged them for having done something terrible. They were seen as the spiritual slackers and were looked down upon by the wealthy.

So far, what Mark is describing is nothing out of the ordinary, but there is one other detail that I want to call our attention to: Jesus is literally sitting next to the collection box, *WATCHING* as people gave their money.

I’ve got to believe that if something like this happened today, we’d think it was bizarre behavior. It would be like someone watching to find out how much you donated to a charity, or how much you tipped at dinner. At a minimum, Jesus is doing something that most likely would have made any of us uncomfortable. But more accurately, He’s doing something that we would probably even consider offensive.

Now that we know more about the setting of the story, I think we can have a better appreciation for the key lesson I want you to learn:

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2. Giving reveals the heart of the giver: The wealthy put lots of coins in the collection box, hoping that those around them would see and hear how much they put in so that everyone would think about how righteous they were. But Jesus didn’t praise them.

Why? Because He knew their hearts. He knew they weren’t giving out of their love for God but rather their desire to receive people’s praise. That type of giving reveals a sick heart, not a healthy one.

But, remember the wealthy aren’t the only ones who put money in the collection box:

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42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. (Mark 12:42 – NLT)

Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for anyone to publicly put two small coins in the collection box after so many people had just made so much noise from their giving? I think there’s a good chance that it would have been pretty embarrassing for the widow. But is it possible that her actions also say something about the condition of her heart?

According to Jesus, the answer is “absolutely!”

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43 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. 44 For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.” (Mark 12:43-44 – NLT)

In God’s eyes the gifts given have absolutely nothing to do with the number of coins put in the collection box. Jesus made it clear that God cares more about the intention (or motivation) of the giver. The widow decided to give everything, even though she was only required to give 10%. On the other hand, the rich people in the story gave what was required, but in their hearts, their motivation was more about impressing others than being obedient to God.

In the end, giving is more about the size of your heart than the size of your wallet.

ACTION ► (How can we live this out?)

Since giving is more about the heart than the money, how might you develop the habit of tithing? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

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1. Decide in your heart what you want to give.

Remember, in the Old Testament, God gave a command requiring each person to give 10% of their crops or livestock. In a lot of ways, this was an excellent system that worked for a while...

But, as we learned, that system got pretty messed up by the time Jesus is on the scene. Giving had become more about the gift amount and less about the relationship between the giver and God. Thankfully, the Apostle Paul went out of his way to set the record straight. This is what he says in 2 Corinthians 9:7:

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7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” (2 Corinthians 9:7 – NLT)

God doesn't want you to give just to give. He also doesn't want you to give because you think you're supposed to. He only wants you to give if you can do so joyfully. He wants a habit of tithing to be something that helps you grow closer to Him, not something that pushes you further from Him.

As believers in Jesus, we are no longer under the Old Testament rules requiring us to give a 10% tithe. We are free to decide what we want to give, but it is assumed that we will give. For some, giving will be less than 10%, and for others, it will be more. The percentage and amount of what you give isn't the point. The point is to give generously from the heart because you love God. And whatever you decide to give stays between you and God.

So, if you've decided to give, but you don't have any money, what should you do?

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2. Remember that money isn't the only thing you have to offer.

Remember how we said that giving isn't about the amount that we give? Jesus makes it clear that giving is about the heart of the giver. And if that's true, then the best thing we can ever do is give God what we value.

For some of us, that's money. If you have a job or you mow lawns in your neighborhood, I would definitely encourage you to set aside whatever amount you decide and give it back as an offering to God. However, I know that some of you may not have the ability to give money. But that doesn't mean that you can't still give something of value.

For some, it might be your time. As busy as we all are, I think it's safe to say that our time is extremely valuable. So maybe for you, the best way to build a habit of tithing is to spend you time volunteering or serving. [Teacher note: if your church has specific areas where students are encouraged to serve, this would be a great place to highlight those opportunities.] You could volunteer to help younger kids at school with their homework, or you could serve here at church by being a greeter or volunteering in our kids' ministry. And we're always looking for students to join our tech team! Or seniors, maybe you're reaching a point where you are feeling like God wants you to help an adult lead a middle school small group. There are several ways you can give God your time as a gift.

And for some, it might be your talent. If you are really good at something, I think it would be really cool if you found a way to do that thing as a gift to God. Do you sing or play an instrument? There are tons of opportunities for you to use those talents for God. Or do you know American Sign Language? How cool would it be to help people with hearing impairments to be able to participate in our services? Again, those are just a few ideas. Get creative! There are many ways you can give God the gift of your talent.

Ok, so if you've decided to give your money, your time, or your talent as a gift to God, what else do you need to know?

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3. Give regularly.

Giving once is awesome, but we all know you have to do something more than once for it to become a habit.

A long time ago, the Apostle Paul was asking churches from all of the surrounding areas to raise money for the church in Jerusalem. And instead of asking them to just send one large gift, let's read how he encouraged them to give:

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2 On the first day of each week, you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned.
(1 Corinthians 16:2a – NLT)

You see, habits are built when we repeat our actions. And as you give regularly, not only will you build the habit, but it's amazing how God will also work within you to make you more and more generous.

And lastly,

4. Don't draw attention to your gift.

This is the mistake wealthy people made when they gave at the Temple. When we call attention to the gifts that we give, in a lot of ways, it takes attention away from the One who's receiving the gift. And when we're giving our gifts to God, it's always best to keep the attention on Him.

Jesus had something to say about this, too:

4 Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. (Matthew 6:4 – NLT)

I know it's easy to want others to see how generous we can be, but I want to encourage you to use giving as an opportunity to let God be the focus.

And before we go to our small group conversations, what if you aren't sure that you want to develop a habit of giving your money, time, or talents to God? My encouragement to you would be to start small. And if you find that giving a little bit of money, time, or talent ends up being a blessing in your life and the lives of others, then maybe you take a bigger step of faith and give a little more.

And if you're ever stuck trying to figure out what you can give God as a gift, just remember people like Martha King from the video we watched. If she can give God the gift of her talent through timbersports, I can guarantee that if you get creative enough, you'll figure out what's right for you to give.

[close in prayer]

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

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

1. Have you ever tried a unique sport or activity like timbersports? If so, what was it and how did it go? If not, what's a unique sport or activity you would like to try?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word tithing?
3. What do you think the difference between giving out of obligation and giving cheerfully is? What do you think giving cheerfully really looks like?
4. Why do you think God only wants someone to give if they can give cheerfully? What does that tell us about God's character?
5. If someone your age wanted to develop the habit of tithing, would you encourage them to start with giving their money, time, or talent?
6. What are some ways that you can think of that our group could give our time or talent here at church? What about specifically in our youth group?
7. What are some causes we might give to outside of our church that advance God's Kingdom?
8. How do you think developing a habit of tithing would impact your relationship with God in the long-run?
9. How can we, as a group, pray for and encourage each other throughout the week?