



BECOMING A SPIRITUAL ATHLETE

This lesson will help youth to develop spiritual practices that can help to prevent self-destructive behaviors.

Enhancer of Joy

Spiritual Practices

Duration

60 minutes

Lesson Developed by

Rev. Ruben Ortiz

Goal

Creating Habits That Will Strengthen Your Walk with God

Tips to Prepare

The purpose of this session is for young people to value spiritual practices that on the one hand can lead to a more intimate relationship with God and on the other, prevent behaviors that may be self-destructive.

Materials Checklist

- A variety of different objects for Activity 1
- Paper and pens
- Blindfolds
- Easel paper or large sheets of paper taped to the walls
- Markers or crayons

Setting the Atmosphere

In this session, youth will do some simple activities which will require some concentration and discipline. They will practice a behavior which introduces the idea of spiritual discipline and explore additional possibilities themselves.

Set chairs up in a circle.

Scripture Focus

Select a scripture of the day for the group

Purpose

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Objectives

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Gather

Gather (5 minutes)

- Opening Prayer
 - Greeting One Another
 - Introduction of Session: Have one of the students read the Bible verse of the day. Then say that all of us naturally move away from God every day. Our human tendency is not to seek God. Our tendency is to seek pleasures which satisfy us and not our Creator. Therefore, it takes work to move toward intimacy with God. Today we will learn together about what are spiritual disciplines, their importance and how they can help us move closer to God, become more self-controlled and avoid self-abusive behaviors.
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Engage

Engage (30 minutes)

• Activity 1: Seeing Blindly:

Have chairs arranged in a circle. Place a series of objects in the center of the circle. Hand each student a blank sheet of paper and writing instrument. Have each student select one of the objects that draws their attention. Then place the object they select in front of them. Tell them that they will have 5 minutes to draw the object they selected without looking at their paper and pen/pencil. If it helps, you may blindfold them. After they're done, give them the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about the activity.

• Activity 2: Do As I Mean:

Say that this activity is about attentiveness and discipline. Tell the group that they must follow your command. During the first round say that they must follow your two-word instruction. For example, when you say walk, they must walk around the room. When you say stop, they must stop where they're at. Begin the activity by saying walk, then at some point say stop. Try to trick them by saying stop when they are still and saying walk when they are already walking. After a minute or two, stop the group and explain that you will add the commands "name" and "dance." When you say name, the students must state their name. When you say dance, they must do a dance. Intersperse the stop, walk, name, and dance

commands. Make your commands are easy at first, then try to confuse them by saying “walk” when they are already walking, etc. For the second round say that walk now means stop, and that stop, now means walk. However, name still means name, and dance still means to do a dance. Similar to the first round, intersperse the commands easily at first, then try to confuse the students. For the third round, say that walk still means stop, stop means walk, and now, name means dance and dance now means name. Give the commands as in previous rounds. Start slowly, then give the commands pretty quickly. The young people will have a great time and will enjoy themselves.

Reflect

Reflect (20 minutes)

• **Activity 3: Gallery Walk:**

- While the students are still standing say that spiritual disciplines are exercises that the church has historically practiced to bring our lives into focus with God. Some of these disciplines are common disciplines such as prayer, bible reading, fasting, meditation, worship and solitude. The leader can briefly share what each of these are.
- Then say that there are also many other spiritual disciplines that are not as popular, such as simplicity, service, confession and celebration. The leader may also give a brief description of each of these.
- Say: These disciplines help move us toward a life of self-control which we read about in today’s verse. These disciplines are also a way to care for ourselves. When we nurture the sides or aspects of ourselves that don’t normally receive attention, we are more open to learning and growing, particularly in our relationship with God. Similar to an athlete that exercises simple repetitive activities to make him/her a better athlete. They may do things such as stretching, taking extra protein, quiet or meditative moments, etc. or a singer who may gurgle salt water, read about music theory or may sing vocal scales. Neither of these activities are actually performing the duties of an athlete or a singer, but they are exercised over and over again to improve their performance. These activities keeps them focused on behaviors that contribute to their success on the field or on the stage. Similarly, spiritual disciplines help the believer in their intimacy with God.
- Share with the students that they will be doing a Gallery Walk. Ahead of time make sure that each wall has a sheet of easel paper or similar taped to the wall.
- Break the group down to about 3 or 4 young people per small group. Then give them each a marker or crayon.
- Have them share with each other, what other types of disciplines should be considered that would help young people experience God. Have them write these ideas up on the sheet of paper. Encourage their creativity by stating that they do not have to stick with traditional spiritual disciplines. You can prompt them by having them think about exercises that engage our various senses such as touching, hearing, talking, etc. Then you can also mention

- physical, emotional, mental, and social activities. Some ideas may include: mindful walks, creating or viewing and appreciating a painting, or running your hands through water, etc.
- After they've completed the activity, say the following: You were able to brainstorm some potential spiritual disciplines. What did your small group come up with? Then have them explain their ideas. Comment on how each of these ideas can lead us into a time of devotion or connection with God.
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Send Forth

- Sum-It-Up: Share the following: self-control, self-regulation skills and certain disciplines can help you to better manage your emotions, thinking, behavior and motor actions in different situations. Throughout the day, you need the ability to negotiate sensations, situations and form appropriate responses. This requires you to control your impulses and to stop doing certain things that hurt you and others, and to participate in something even if at times it may be challenging. For example, you use self-discipline skills to control an impulse to move all around the auditorium during an assembly and you are required to sit and watch the assembly even if you may not be highly interested in the presentation. Research indicates that self-discipline is also a predictor of academic abilities. Youth with higher levels of self-discipline have achieved higher scores in reading, vocabulary and math. In addition, some research has shown that the ability for young people to self-regulate or have self-control is associated with higher, future education levels. But it's not just about avoiding bad things or delaying certain things for later, it's also about replacing those things or creating specific habits that will bring about a better relationship with yourself and with God.
- Closing Prayer