

LESSON ONE: Running the Race of Life

Memory Verse:

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing **Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (**Philippians 3:8**).

Early elementary verse in **bold** type.

Bible Basis:

1 Corinthians 9:23–26

Bible Truth:

Winners choose to give their best in the race of life.



You Will Need:

- winner's jersey mounted on a wall
- ribbon #1
- 1 poster board
- simple games (pick-up sticks, jacks, etc.)
- feathers or ping-pong balls
- 8½" x 11" cardboard pieces
- Bibles
- masking tape
- On the Fast Track! #1* take-home paper
- StationMaster Card #1*
- (optional) treasure box
- (optional) snack: granola bars or trail mix, fruit punch or sports drink, cups
- (optional) Activity #1: paper, paper fasteners, markers or crayons, scissors
- (optional) Activity #2: balloons, beanbags, ping-pong balls



When you see this icon, it means preparation will take more than five minutes.



GET SET!

(Lesson Preparation)

- Print today's Bible memory verse on a poster board:
I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).
- Make a copy of *On the Fast Track! #1* take-home paper for each child.
- Make a copy of *StationMaster Card #1* for each helper.
- Make masking tape starting and finish lines in the main classroom area.
- Create a sample jointed self-portrait figure using the instructions in Activity #1 if using that option.
- Set out the winner's jersey for *Use the Clues!* and (optional) treasure box.
- Set up snack and outside play activities if you include these items in your children's ministry.



TICKETS PLEASE!

(Welcome and Bible Connection)

- **Objective:** To excite children's interest and connect their own life experiences with the Bible Truth, children will play simple games to experience winning and losing.

Welcome Time Activity: Games to Win

■ **Materials:** *jacks and ball, pick-up sticks, and/or other simple games*

Set the games you have on the tables and invite children to find one or more partners and play. They can also play “Rock, Paper, Scissors” and simple guessing games like “I Spy” and “Twenty Questions.”

Sharing Time and Bible Connection

■ **Materials:** *feathers or ping-pong balls, 8½" x 11" cardboard pieces*

When everyone has arrived, call children to the lesson area and welcome them. As you move into the activity and discussion to prepare for the Bible story, give every child the opportunity to say something.

Did you all have fun playing those games? Ask the children whether they won or lost their games and how that made them feel. **We would all rather win than lose, wouldn't we?**

Now we're going to play a game that requires some teamwork.

Ask children to pair up and stand in a line shoulder to shoulder. Give each pair a feather or ball, and each player a cardboard piece. Tell them that, as partners, they need to move their feather/ball across the room to a designated spot without touching it with their hands. Tell partners they have 30 seconds to make a plan. Then say “go” and let them play until everyone finishes.

When all are seated again, discuss the game.

- **What did it take for you to be able to finish that race?** (working together, effort, keeping your mind on the race, listening to your partner, keeping your eyes on the goal, sticking to your plan, not giving up)
- **If you've been in other kinds of races, what was important to be able to finish the race?** (endurance, training, discipline, practice, listening to the coach, knowing the rules, doing your best)
- **How is everyday life as a follower of Jesus like being a runner in a race?** (you need many of the same qualities, you can't give up, you do your best, you follow Jesus)
- **Is winning all that counts in a race?** (no, how you run is more important than winning)

Many people think the only thing that counts in a race is winning. God doesn't think that way. He wants most of all for you to run your best. He wants you to be a winner in your attitude and your spirit. Today and for the next twelve weeks, we are going to figure out how to be winners in God's kingdom.

Today we're going to discover what Paul, a great leader of Christians in Bible times, said about running in the race of life.





ALL ABOARD FOR BIBLE TRUTH

(Bible Discover and Learn Time)

1 Corinthians 9:23–26

- **Objective:** Children will study 1 Corinthians 9:23–26 to learn how Paul compared life to a race and what it takes to be a winner in God’s kingdom.
- **Materials:** Bibles, masking tape starting and finish lines

How do we know what is great in God’s kingdom? Accept children’s responses. Point to the starting line on one side of the classroom. **To be a winner, first you have to get into the race.** Point to the finish line on the other side of the classroom. **And then you have to know how to reach the finish line. We’re going to read what the apostle Paul said about life and racing.** Divide the class into small groups of four to six children, with confident readers or helpers in each group. Pass out Bibles to those who need them and have each child find 1 Corinthians 9:23–26. Have confident readers in each group read the verses aloud.

What did Paul write about being in a race? Accept children’s responses. **He said that life is like a race.** Have children all line up at the starting line. **In a race, Paul said all the runners run to try to be the first one across the finish line.** Let children run to the finish line. Those who are unable to run can walk or use other means. Adapt this activity so everyone in your class can move from the starting to ending point.

Did Paul tell us everyone would win the race? No, he said even though all the runners train and run their best, only one will win. Paul said that people should live life as if they were in a race and wanted to win.

Paul gives us some great hints for how to be a winner in life. **What’s one of them?** Pause for responses. **He says we need to exercise self-control. What do you think of when you hear the word self-control?** Accept student responses. **Being self-controlled means we discipline ourselves to do the right things everyday—even when it’s hard. We get up on time in the morning, do our work at school and home to the best of our ability, try not to make sinful choices, and obey our parents even when we don’t feel like it.**

What would happen if all the runners in a race wanted to run in different directions? (it wouldn’t be fair, runners might crash into each other, etc.) **Runners who want to win all run in the same direction, to the same finish line. A winner in God’s kingdom runs the way God says, not any old way that’s easy or feels good.**

Good runners work hard so they have a chance of being the winner. **What are some ways you can think of to be a winner in the race of life?** (praying, encouraging others, being patient, kind, generous, etc.)

Paul lived his life so he could learn to know God better. **He used self-control so everything he did would be pleasing to God.**

Like Paul, if we learn to run the race of life well, we’ll be winners. **Winning the race of life and being a winner in God’s kingdom isn’t about being the fastest or strongest. It’s about how we**



live and how we follow Jesus. Giving our best to Jesus means we'll be great in God's kingdom. Over the next twelve weeks, we'll find out how to be winners from other Bible time people too.



Use the Clues! (Bible Review)

- **Materials:** masking tape starting and finish lines

Okay, let's see what you remember.

Show the children the winner's jersey and explain that each week, the class will add a new winner's ribbon to the jersey. The symbol on the award will help them remember what they learned from the Bible that week.

Divide the class into two teams and have the teams each select one representative "runner." Direct the runners to stand behind the masking tape starting line. As you ask each review question, watch for the team member who raises his hand first. If that child answers the question correctly, then his runner can take a giant step toward the finish line. If the child doesn't answer correctly, give the other team a chance to answer. Feel free to keep the race relatively even by asking the other team for alternative answers.

- **How did Paul say we should run the race of life?** (run to win)

- **What are some qualities Paul said we need to win the race of life?** (self-control, discipline)
- **What are some ways we can be self-controlled?** (do the right things, obey even when we don't feel like it, try hard all the time)
- **What race should we all aim to win?** (the race of life to be a winner in God's kingdom)
- **Do we all have to have strong bodies and be fast on our feet to be winners in God's kingdom?** (no, we win by the way we live and the way we follow Jesus)

Choose a child from the winning team to pin ribbon #1 on the winner's jersey. Remind children on the losing team that, although they didn't win this particular race, they can be winners in God's kingdom every day by following Jesus and loving others. Ask the child with the ribbon to identify the symbol (pair of running shoes) and how it's a reminder of this week's Bible story (life is a race we run to be winners in God's kingdom).



BIBLE MEMORY WAYPOINT (Scripture Memory)

Philippians 3:8

- **Objective:** Children will hide God's Word in their hearts for guidance, protection, and encouragement.

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

To help children memorize today's verse, read it aloud from the poster, and then read it with the children as you point to the words. Use this game to further practice the verse. Have children line up on one side of the room. **We're going to have a slow motion race. You can take a step when we all say a word from the memory verse.** Say the memory verse with your students. The first time through, you should say a word and have your students repeat it. When they repeat it, they can take a step forward. The goal is to reach the other side of the room as quickly as possible. Continue repeating the memory verse until students are able to walk quickly to the other side of the room.



PRAYER STATION

- **Objective:** Children will explore and practice prayer for themselves in small groups.
- **Materials:** Copies of StationMaster Card #1 for each adult or teen helper

Break into small groups of three to five children. Assign a teen or adult helper to each small group and give each helper a copy of *StationMaster Card #1* (see Resources) with ideas for group discussion and prayer.



SNACK STOP: HIGH ENERGY RACE SNACKS (Optional)

If you plan to provide a snack, this is an ideal time to serve it.

- **Materials:** granola bars or trail mix, fruit punch or sports drink, cups

Have you ever seen a real running race? When it's a long race, people on the sidelines will hand runners a drink as they run past to keep them from getting too hot and tired. This snack is a good one for keeping your energy up. What other kinds of food give you lots of energy? Discuss with the children that reading the Bible and learning it is spiritual food to keep us running in the race of life for God. Let children tell you some verses they've memorized as they finish their snack.

Note: Always be aware of children with food allergies and have another option on hand if necessary.



APPLICATION

- **Objective:** Children will have opportunities to show how the lesson works in their own lives through activities and take-home papers.

Some children's ministries may allow children to play outside at this point. If yours does not, choose one of the following activities.



Runner Figures

- **Materials:** paper, paper fasteners, markers or crayons, scissors

Show children your sample jointed self-portrait figure. They should draw themselves on the paper, taking up as much of the sheet as possible (a small drawing is harder to cut out and successfully join with paper fasteners). Once they've drawn themselves, show how to cut it out so that the legs and arms are separate pieces, then joined to the trunk with paper fasteners. After they've made the figures, have them play "Winner Says" with them (adapt the same rules as "Simon Says" for this game).



Relay Races

- **Materials:** balloons, beanbags, ping-pong balls

Depending on the physical abilities of children in your class, plan some relay races like passing a balloon down the line, balloon volleyball, a beanbag toss where team members toss the bag back and forth to each other a certain number of times, or blowing a ping-pong ball across a table top. Choose games that allow everyone in the class to play, even if they have a physical limitation.



ON THE FAST TRACK! (Take-Home Papers)

Introduce the treasure box: **Who would like to choose a prize from the treasure box?** Expect excited responses. **Today I'm going to give each of you an *On the Fast Track!* paper to take home. When you've done the activities and memorized the Bible verse, ask a parent or guardian to sign the ticket** (show ticket). **When you bring this back next week, you'll get to have a turn at the treasure box.**

Distribute the take-home papers and jointed figures, if made, just before children leave.