

Play with Purpose

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Moral Issues for Teens · Culture, Life & Christian Witness · game **Glory or Obsession?** · built on **1 Corinthians 9:24–27**, **Hebrews 12:1–2**, and **1 Timothy 4:8**

Your students live in a sports-saturated world. Travel ball, school teams, fantasy leagues, highlight reels, and merch stacks mean athletics are not a side hobby for many families — they are the main event. Some students learn discipline, teamwork, and perseverance on the field. Others sacrifice worship, sleep, and character for a scoreboard that will not last. This session is *not* anti-sports. It is pro-wisdom: train hard, play with integrity, and never let the game replace the God who gave you breath to compete.

Before you teach anything, pray.

Some students' whole identity is tied to a jersey number. Some feel judged because they do not play sports at all. Some families schedule around games instead of God. Ask the Spirit for balance — joy in God's gifts without idolatry, conviction without contempt for athletes. You are teaching priorities and stewardship, not launching a war on Friday night lights.

The heart of the lesson

Scripture uses sports language on purpose. Paul tells Christians to run to win (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Hebrews says throw off hindrances and fix eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:1–2). Timothy admits bodily training has *some* value while godliness holds promise for this life and the next (1 Tim. 4:8). Sports can picture faith — rules, discipline, effort, setbacks, reward. The danger is when sports stop being a gift and become a god: immodest dress, fighting and foul mouths, gambling, hero-worship of athletes, budgets and calendars consumed, and forsaking the assembly because "we have a game" (Heb. 10:25).

Train hard — but never let the scoreboard replace the Savior.

Symptoms in a 12–14 life: rage at refs, cheating because winning matters more than honesty, skipping church for tournaments, betting on brackets, lust stirred by uniforms or dance teams,

language you'd never use at grandma's table, and moods that rise and fall with a final score. The worldly pattern says sports are neutral — whatever it takes. God's pattern says compete with integrity (2 Tim. 2:5), contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3), and seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33).

Glory to God in the game — not obsession that owns your calendar and heart.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So **run that you may obtain it**. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things... I discipline my body and keep it under control."

HEBREWS 12:1-2

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith."

How the session flows

- 1 Name the field.** Where do sports help vs. hijack? ~8 min
- 2 Teach glory vs. obsession.** Scripture parallels and pitfalls. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** "Glory or Obsession?" on screen. ~12-15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home practice. ~15 min
- 6 Close with a plan.** Prayer and one priority reset for the week. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed cards and worksheets, pens. Teach principles students can apply in any sport — no need to shame specific teams or leagues.

Leading it, part by part

Name the field

Ask: what sport (or fan habit) takes the most time and emotion in your house? When does it feel like a gift — and when does it feel like it runs the family? Let them answer without turning it into a roast session. Land this: sports are not evil; *misordered* sports are. Glory honors God with discipline and character. Obsession lets the scoreboard steer worship, money, and mood.

Teach glory vs. obsession

Walk through the positive parallels Scripture offers: exercise (1 Tim. 4:8), rules and integrity (2 Tim. 2:5), self-control and training (1 Cor. 9), endurance with eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12), earnest effort (Jude 3), overcoming setbacks (Eccl. 9:11), and eternal reward (Matt. 25:46). Then name the pitfalls without caricature: immodest apparel, fighting and foul language, gambling, idolizing athletes, fanatic spending of time and money, and skipping the assembly (Heb. 10:25).

God's way out: decide priorities before the season starts, compete to glorify God not only to win, flee gambling and rage (Gal. 5:19–21), dress and cheer with modesty and self-control, keep Lord's Day and worship non-negotiable unless truly unavoidable — and when sports and church clash, talk with parents and elders early, not after three missed Sundays.

Play the game

Run "Glory or Obsession?" twelve to fifteen minutes. Round 1 sorts habits; Round 2 anchors Bible athletic language; Round 3 tackles tournaments, betting, and idolizing stars; Round 4 drills key verses. Bridge afterward: winning points is fun; keeping Christ first is the actual win.

Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Promise plainly that nobody is collecting it. Give five quiet minutes for students to name where sports may have edged toward obsession — without saying it aloud to the room. Protect the silence.

Worksheet

Reinforce verses, T/F on idolatry, one integrity application, one weekly priority. Pairs or homework both work.

Close with a plan

Invite each student to pick one way to play for God's glory this week — language, gambling, worship, or modesty. Pray for families negotiating brutal schedules, for injured athletes, and for students who feel less-than because they do not play. Offer leaders for students whose mood depends entirely on stats.

Take it further

- What does 1 Timothy 4:8 teach about physical training vs. godliness?
- How does Paul use athletic language in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27?
- What does Hebrews 12:1–2 say we should fix our eyes on while we "run"?
- What does 2 Timothy 2:5 require of an athlete — and how does that apply to cheating?
- Why is forsaking the assembly for sports a problem? (Heb. 10:25)
- How does Galatians 5:19–21 connect to fighting, rage, and foul language in sports?
- What does 1 Timothy 6:10 warn about gambling and the love of money?
- How can idolizing athletes be dangerous? (John 12:43)
- What does modesty look like for athletes, cheerleaders, and fans? (1 Tim. 2:9–10)
- How can a Christian compete hard without letting sports become their god?

A final word

Teens need permission to love the game and courage to keep Christ on the throne. Give them both. The goal is not a joyless bench — it is a life where sports build discipline, teamwork, and endurance that point to the greater race. When they learn glory over obsession, they'll still compete — but the scoreboard won't compete with the Savior.