

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK THREE**

### **Devotional #12 (Oct. 11) Race for the Ultimate Prize**

#### **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

**Explore:** I love the Olympics! I love just about every single event, from track and field to synchronized swimming. If the event is televised, chances are I'm watching it. It's amazing and inspiring to witness top athletes from all over the world come together to compete for the title of "World's Best." And when an athlete from the good ole' USA wins gold, you can't help but be proud. But any athlete who competes in the Olympic games didn't get there by chance. It took years of hard work, dedication and practice to achieve their Olympic dreams. It took special trainers working with them everyday, critiquing, encouraging and training them. It took special diets to give them the nutrition to keep them healthy and strong. So much time and work contributes to their success, and if they have failed in any area of their training, it may cost them the gold.

**Application:** Paul compares the athletic games to that of a Christian race. Notice what he says: "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things." (1 Corinthians 9:25) We as Christians must exercise self-control—always mindful of what we read, what we watch on TV and how we present ourselves. We should constantly train, nurture and feed our spiritual lives, for we as Christians are not running a race for a worldly prize. We are racing for the ultimate prize—eternal life!

**Discussion for the family:** *What are some things that you work hard for? What kind of effort do you put forth to be good at those things? How can that type of determination help your walk with God?* (Read 2 Peter 1:5-11)

**Prayer:** Father, help us in this race we call life. May we choose to run our race with determination and conviction. May we press forward to the eternal prize You have in store for us in heaven.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK THREE**

### **Devotional #9 (Oct. 6) The Baptism of Jesus**

#### **Mark 1:9-11**

**Explore:** One of the thing amazing recorded events in the Bible happens in the very first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. John the Baptist has been preaching the coming of Christ. Imagine hearing this amazing man preach about the coming of a SAVIOR. For weeks people have been listening to him preach, confessing their sins and being baptized. Then the day arrives when you actually SEE the savior, the Son of God, who this man has been talking about, and HE TOO wants to be BAPTIZED! John the Baptist takes the Savior down into the water and baptizes him. As the crowd looks on, the heavens above open and the Spirit like a beautiful white dove descends down and lands on him. Then a voice, thunderous and seeming to come from nowhere but the heavens, says, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11) You know that God has just spoken. God has just named this man Jesus as His beloved Son.

**Application:** Why? Why did Jesus have to be baptized? It's obvious that He is the Son of God, so why would He need to be baptized? What sins did Jesus have that he needed to be forgiven for? The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His ministry on earth. Jesus was baptized to set an example for us to follow. How could He ask His followers to do or be a part of something that He would not do? Jesus showed obedience to God and, at the same time, set a powerful example for us to follow.

**Discussion for the family:** Be ready to discuss baptism. (Mark 16:15; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21) *In what ways can you be obedient to God?*

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for giving us the opportunity to share in the life of Jesus. Help us to know your will more fully as we learn from the life and example of Jesus. Thank you for letting our life intersect the life of your Son through baptism.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK THREE**

### **Devotional #10 (Oct. 7)**

#### **On Guard!**

**Romans 16:17-18**

**Explore:** When you hear the exclamation ‘ON GUARD,’ what does it make you think of? It makes me think of two people facing off against each other across a battlefield. Their swords are raised in anticipation of a fight. They call out ‘On Guard’ because, being gentlemen, they want to give their opponent a chance to prepare before the attack. And that’s really what it means. The phrase ‘On Guard’ means to prepare yourself for attack, to be ready to face the unknown. Paul concludes this book to the Romans by basically yelling at them ‘ON GUARD!’ From the passage we just read, what do you think Paul wants them (and us) to be ‘On Guard’ for? He is warning them to be on the lookout for people who will try to lead them away from the Word of God. Paul knew there would be people who would be very persuasive and make grand promises, but would deceive them.

**Application:** Today we have to guard against the same things. Everywhere there are people trying to teach us things that are not true and make us believe differently than the Bible teaches. Paul says that unless we are on our guard against such people, we will be led away. How prepared are we to compare and contrast teaching that sounds really good against what we already know? Do you practice anchoring your faith directly to the Word of God, so that you won't be vulnerable to deception? Today is a great day to start. How do we guard ourselves against false teaching? We should never take what someone tells us as truth without checking it out for ourselves.

**Discussion for the family:** *What is the only way we can know the truth?* (John 8:31-32) *That’s right, God has given us His written word, the Bible, to guard and guide us away from false teachers.* (Read 2 Timothy 2:15)

**Prayer:** Dear Father, help us to never let our guard down and be misled by false teaching. Help us keep focused on You and to study and meditate on Your Word. Thank you for Your Word of truth. Lead us in Your ways that we may not deviate from Your teachings.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE: WEEK THREE**

### **Devotional #11 (Oct. 10)**

#### **Through the Eye of a Needle**

**Mark 10:17-27**

(Parents: Gather a sewing needle and a short piece of yarn. Hold them both out for your children to see.) I have a challenge for you. I want you to put this small piece of yarn through the eye of this needle.

(Parents: Be ready to reward them if they can complete the challenge. Chances are, they will not be able to do it.) How hard was that challenge? What were some of the problems that you had? (Parents; Spend some time letting your children discuss their problems with the challenge, then read the devotional text.)

**Explore:** You had a tough time with the yarn. How hard do you think it would be to get a camel through there? You’re right! That would be impossible. Jesus uses this to illustrate the impossibility of a rich man entering heaven. Why is it impossible? It is clear from the context that riches tend to destroy the qualities you must have in order to enter the kingdom of God. Remember just prior to this you had this rich young ruler come up to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to follow Him. Jesus told him to keep God's Word, and then to sell everything and follow Him. But the rich guy couldn't let go of all he had—and so instead he walked away. That prompted Jesus to say these words we read in verse 25 about a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle.

**Application:** Now does this mean that everyone who has a lot of money will not go to heaven? No. He is saying we must trust in God and not our wealth. That when it is time to go and be with God, our money will not get us there. Jesus was not condemning money, but was simply pointing out the problem people face when they put their trust in it. Our trust should be in God and not money.

**Discussion for the family:** *What are the true riches in your life? How is it possible to trust in riches, instead of in God?* (Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10) *How can we use the “good gifts” God has graciously given us?* (Read 1 Timothy 6:17-18)

**Prayer:** Father, help us to trust only in You for everything and for every detail of our lives, and not in our riches.