

THE HURDLES

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PLAYBOOK FOR LIFE

GOD'S WORD (IS THE BIBLE RELEVANT TO MY LIFE?)

THE HURDLE

I've got so many questions that beg for answers but I'm not sure where to turn. Lately I've been thinking a lot deeper about life but people don't usually talk about that kind of stuff in the locker room. I try to turn my mind off, but the questions keep flowing. Some are directly related to my sport: Should I transfer schools? Sit this year out? Some have to do with daily life: How should relationships work? How should I handle the party scene around me? Others are ridiculously huge: Why am I even on the planet?

I have a team mate who keeps talking about gaining wisdom from reading the Bible, but that sounds crazy to me. It's like reading a foreign language. Even if I could understand it, how could a 2000-year-old book have anything to say to me today?

As life gets more complex, where do you usually turn for direction?

A person? A book?

What has your experience been in seeking help from the Bible?

I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college education is more valuable than a college education without the Bible.

William Lyon Phelps
Former professor of English Literature at Yale

I HEAR YA

The Bible records people who struggled to know, trust, and live the word of God. Some were able, some were not ...

To the people of Israel: "If only you had listened to my commandments! Then your well-being would have been a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." (Isaiah 48:18)

Paul to Timothy: "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing." (I Tim. 6:3-4).

Israelites: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes." (Judges 21:25)

Agur: "Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or else He will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar." (Proverbs 30:5-6,)

Ezra learned the word: "Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes" (Ezra 7:10)

The Psalmist: "Strengthen me according to Your word. Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Your Law." (Psalm 119:28,29)

While the Bible was written thousands of years ago and its cultural circumstances are significantly different, it still speaks relevantly to the issues we face today! We can discover its relevance by studying its contents. Whether you believe it should have any authority over your life, however, remains to be decided.

What concerns prevent you from digging into the Bible?

What would keep you from accepting its message as authoritative in your life?

LISTEN UP!

Read II Timothy 3:16-17.

1. When this verse says, "All scripture is inspired by God" (lit.: "God-breathed"), what does it imply about the authority of this book? How would accepting God's authorship change your view of the Bible and its potential influence on you?
2. Just as fundamental skills are essential in sports, learning and applying the truth in God's Word is key to developing the skills and habits needed to live out the Christian life. In verse 16, identify the four benefits of scripture, then describe the practical purpose of each category.

Benefit	Purpose

3. Someone once rephrased verse 16 in a different way: "The Scripture tells you what is *right*, what is *wrong*, tells you how to *get* right and how to *stay* right." If this sentence was referencing your own spiritual journey, which of these four purposes of the Bible do you most need right now?
4. According to verse 17, what is the goal of reading and studying God's word? What does this mean for your life right now?

For THE Record

God wants us to be informed about how to live a wise and fruitful life on earth. He gives us the Bible so we'll know something of His work in the universe and our place in it, equipping us to live wisely in this life and to understand something of the next. When we acknowledge His authority in our lives, His words to us become a standard by which to judge our life and actions, a place to go for counsel, a light on the path of our individual journey. While not literally a "How To" manual for life, it is THE guide for right living, a collection of books whose human characters and spiritual lessons continue to be as relevant as the day they were written.

YOUR MOVE

1. Since the Bible does address real issues in your life, what inhibits you from applying that wisdom to your situations on a daily basis? Check all that apply:

don't know where to start

don't want it to affect my athletic pursuits

don't have a Bible

don't want to give up sinful habits

afraid it might change my life

afraid of what my family/friends might think

don't really have time to think about it

other: _____

2. Just for starters, try a 31-day experiment. Read one chapter of Proverbs every day for a month. As you are reading, consider these questions as they apply to the verses and record them in a notebook:

- What does it say about God?
- What does it say about you or others?
- What does it say you should do or not do?

3. While the Bible continues to top sales charts, it's a book whose contents are seldom read, less understood, and rarely applied. James 1:22 says, "But prove yourself doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Write a prayer of commitment acknowledging that you will not only be a reader, but will commit to doing what God says (even when it's difficult!).

***A Bible that is falling apart usually
belongs to someone who isn't.***

Charles Spurgeon
Preacher/Author

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to learn more about the Bible and how it relates to your life.

THE TRAINING ROOM

(OVER)



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"... AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING." (PROVERBS 3:5B)

A Book About Relationships

- Recognizing His Voice:** John 10:27
- Trusting God vs. Trusting Things:** Luke 18:24-30
- Choosing Friends:** Proverbs 12:26; I Corinthians. 15:33
- Clarifying Friendships:** James 4:4-8
- You Can Always Come Back:** Luke 15:11-24

A Book About Real Issues

- Guidance:** Proverbs 4:14-15
Do not enter the path of the wicked.
- Finances:** Proverbs 13:11
Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished.
- Correction:** Proverbs 13:13
He who despises the word will be destroyed.
- Wise Counsel:** Proverbs 15:1
A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- Parenting:** Proverbs 22:15
Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

A Book About Real Living

- When Trouble Strikes**
(Psalm 46:1; 121:1-2)
- God Hears Our Call**
(Isaiah 65:24; Jeremiah 33:3)
- You Are Salt and Light**
(Matthew 5:13-16)
- Do What The Word Says**
(James 1:22)
- Don't Live A Bitter Life**
(Ephesians 4:31-32)
- The Way To Real Living**
(John 14:6; Romans 10:9, 13)

AS YOU LEAVE

- PRACTICE DOING WHAT THE WORD SAYS.
- PRESERVE TIME EACH DAY TO READ AND MEDITATE ON THE WORD.
- PRAY THAT GOD PROVIDES CLEAR UNDERSTANDING.

GET IN THE GAME

GET IN THE GAME COVENANT RELATIONSHIP (AM I ON THE TEAM?)

THE HURDLE

I love playing on this team. After all the years sacrificing time, personal comfort, and the normalcy other people experience, I've certainly earned my spot. I acquired it through my own effort and it's mine for now. But I know the deal: they're always looking for the next person to replace me, either a current teammate or someone not yet on the team. Whatever can be earned can also be lost, right? So when I step on the field of play today, I need to be just as good or better than I was yesterday. I can't let my teammates down or give my coach a reason to bench me. I belong on this team and deserve to play—I just have to prove it everyday. If I'm honest, sometimes I wonder if God handles people the same way—if he'll "cut" me if I don't act right or don't keep my commitment to him. They say He's different; I hope it's true.

In what ways do you struggle to prove or reprove that you belong on your team or on the field/court?

How do you respond when your performance "earns" you criticism from your coach or teammates? How do you process the criticism? What happens inside your head?

Have you ever felt your "position" with God is dependent on how well you stack up against the next guy?

The relationship between commitment and doubt is by no means an antagonistic one. Commitment is healthiest when it's not without doubt but in spite of doubt.

Dr. Rollo May
Psychologist/Author

I HEAR YA

In the Bible, God says if you belong to Him He will never leave you, but that doesn't keep people from struggling to believe His promise...

David cries out to God: "Do not forsake me when my strength fails." (Psalm 71:9)

Israelites question if God still loves them: "I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness." (Psalm 89:33)

Paul reminds young Timothy of God's faithfulness: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:13)

Israelites fear that God has left them: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

The writer of Hebrews talks of God's commitment: "I will never leave you or fail you." (Hebrews 13:5)



For THE Record

God keeps His promises. That's His nature. Unlike other people, He doesn't break contracts and won't cast us aside when a new and better recruit or free agent comes along. God isn't a fickle coach who uses fear to compel us, nor will we be cut from His "team" when we make a mistake. He's committed to us for the long haul—no matter what happens—a truth both reassuring yet alarming. Who can imagine a love like this? Connecting to the living God and to His family secures a purposeful and endless adventure together, and while His family sometimes wanders, He never rejects us or turns His back on us. Counting the cost to follow Christ includes forming a new allegiance with God, His people, and His purpose for our lives, a covenant that sets us free to risk living and loving to the fullest. By surrendering ourselves fully to Him, we gain ourselves and more in return!

LISTEN UP!

Misunderstanding God's covenant relationship with us will inevitably produce insecurity in us. If we think we initiated the relationship by asking Christ into our lives, we might conclude that we can end the relationship at will. Or if we believe our status with God depends on keeping His rules perfectly, we'll always feel bad about ourselves because we never measure up. We need to understand what God's covenant with us really means if we're to live in confident freedom.

Peter shows us how our covenant relationship with Christ is rooted in work He already did on our behalf, binding us to Him and giving us position and purpose on His team!

Read I Peter 2:9,10.

1. When God forgave you and called you out of darkness into His light, He made you a new creation. Fill in the blanks below with what Peter says is true of you because of your relationship with God.

You are a _____ race
You are a _____ priesthood
You are a _____ nation
You are God's own _____

Though this may be the first time you've read the words above, what do they mean to you?

2. The Bible communicates ideas like being *called*, *chosen*, *belonging to God*, *adopted into His family*. What can you discern from these words regarding who initiates the relationship between God and people, i.e. do we choose God or does He choose us?
3. How much of your life was perfect when He initiated this relationship with you? What do the phrases/words from #1 and #2 imply about God's desire to know you and His ability to "keep" you in spite of your failures and imperfections?
4. God not only places you on His team, He gives you a significant new purpose. Peter states this purpose at the end of verse 9. How would you say it in your own words?



YOUR MOVE

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being “completely uncertain” and 10 being “completely certain”), where would you place yourself regarding the following statement and why:

I know that I am chosen, forgiven and loved by God for eternity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Everyone sometimes feels that they can't hold up their end of the bargain. What might make you feel that your relationship with God is not secure?

- I am not spiritually committed enough
- I will sin and not trust His forgiveness
- My sport will take priority over my new allegiance to God
- Peer or parental pressure
- Other religious ideas

3. Paraphrase the verse below where Jesus speaks about his followers. How does this truth affect your sense of security and desire to follow him?

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:27,28)

4. Are you presently aware of areas in your life that you are “pledging allegiance to” that hinder you from fully following Christ? If so, what are they and what makes them attractive to you?

5. How could you live out God's new purpose for you (“to proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”), through both your words and actions today (especially in areas identified in question #4)?

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to understand more about God's covenant relationship with you.

The Bible is not a record of man's faithfulness to God, but of God's faithfulness to man. We're in the game and stay in the game by His grace alone.

Bruce Dishnow,
Campus Minister, University of Michigan

THE TRAINING ROOM
[OVER] 

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AS YOU ENTER

"FAITHFUL IS HE WHO CALLED YOU AND WILL ALSO BRING IT TO PASS." (1 THESSALONIANS 5:24)

God Knows His Own

Read John 10:22-30

Who are the characters in this scene?

Jesus uses the analogy of sheep to describe His followers. What characteristics does He ascribe to sheep in this passage?

What, if any, information does this passage add to the nature of a believer's relationship with God?

From these verses, how would you summarize the security and/or certainty of a believer's relationship with God?

What is a Covenant?

- A binding agreement
- Involves agreements between groups more than individuals
- One party initiates the agreement and the other party responds to it
- The agreement is binding on both parties
- Violating the agreement results in adverse consequences to the violator

The Bible teaches that God is a covenant-making God. He is into promises, agreements, and faithfulness to His agreements. He is offended when someone backs away from a promise made to Him, yet faithful to keep His promises. Covenants between God and man include:

1. Noahic Covenant - Genesis 9:8-11
2. Abrahamic Covenant - Genesis 12:1-3
3. Mosaic Covenant - Exodus 24:1-8
4. Davidic Covenant - 2 Samuel 7:8-16
5. New Covenant - Matthew 26:26-28

A Marriage Contract

Read the sample wedding vows from weddings.about.com.

"I, (name), take you (name), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part".

"I, (name), take you, (name), to be my [opt: lawfully wedded] (husband/wife), my constant friend, my faithful partner and my love from this day forward. In the presence of God, our family and friends, I offer you my solemn vow to be your faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow. I promise to love you unconditionally, to support you in your goals, to honor and respect you, to laugh with you and cry with you, and to cherish you for as long as we both shall live".

Compare and contrast the difference between a marriage contract between a man and a woman and a covenant relationship between God and man.

AS YOU LEAVE

• REMEMBER: OUR SECURITY WITH GOD IS BASED ON HIS FAITHFULNESS TO US, NOT OUR DAILY PERFORMANCE.

IN-GAME INTERVIEWS

ENGAGING OTHERS (AM I WILLING TO STEP INTO YOUR WORLD?)

THE HURDLE

I want to move into my teammate's lives but it seems our worlds are so different since I committed my life to Christ. I'm not sure how to stay connected without compromising my own faith. When we're together and issues come up, I'm afraid I'll come across too harsh and judgmental or that I won't know what to say at all. How can I stand up for Christ and Christian values without being a jerk? How do I appropriately get around to talking about spiritual things with my teammates and others without being seen as weird? And if I don't say what I really think, am I just endorsing what they're doing? What if I get pulled into my old lifestyle? I know I'm on God's team now, but I'm not always sure how to relate to my "old" team...

Do you find yourself being one who is too pushy (aggressive, debating, judging) with what you believe about Christ and Christian values or rarely sharing what you believe at all (avoiding, paralyzed, stuck)? Why do you lean in this direction? Would your friends or family agree with your answer?

What challenges do you experience trying to relate as a Christian when interacting with someone who:

- o Parties?
- o Has a terminal disease?
- o Is a family member?
- o Is living a sexually immoral life?
- o Is a Hindu or Muslim?
- o Is an injured teammate out for the season?

How comfortable or uncomfortable are you initiating these types of conversations? Why?

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Howard Hendricks
Professor/Author

I HEAR YA

The Bible shows us people struggling with their engagement of others who embrace different views and values ...

James/John's Judgment: When his disciples James and John saw this (the Samaritan's rejection of Jesus), they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. (Luke 9:54,55)

Peter's Passivity: Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." (John 18:25-27)

Paul's Exhortation: "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness." (II Timothy 2:24,25)

Peter's Growth: "... but set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect..." (I Peter 3:15)

For THE Record

God gives us opportunities everyday to be His hands and feet in the world. Before others will see Christ in us, we have to love people, and the best way to show our love for people is to take a genuine interest in them. By His Spirit, God puts a supernatural love for people inside us, one that manifests itself through our curiosity about others, a willingness to listen before speaking, working to understand how God's truth intersects the everyday happenings of life and being willing to speak about it. Our job isn't to condemn, nor is it to passively participate. Rather, as we improve our communication skills and make ourselves available for the Spirit to engage through us, God provides opportunities to move meaningfully into uncomfortable situations with people, providing wisdom about when to inquire, when to proclaim, and when to be silent.

LISTEN UP!

Relating to others with love and respect without compromise happens as a work of the Spirit in us. As we begin to see people as God does, we'll grow in our ability to meaningfully engage them. Paul describes building blocks that the Spirit uses in his letter to the Colossians.

Read Colossians 4:2-6.

1. The apostle Paul encourages believers toward three foundational but ongoing actions among others who have a different worldview: 1) *devoted prayer* v2, 2) *wise conduct* v5, and 3) *gracious speech* v6. How would you define each of these phrases?
2. Consider: "We should always talk to God about men before talking to men about God." Why is prayer so critical before we hang out with others? What might we pray about? What is Paul's specific prayer request in v3,4?
3. What does Paul mean by wisdom in v5 and what role does it play in how we carry ourselves with others? Explain this quote: "There is a difference between being right and being righteous." How might this idea flavor both our immediate interactions with people but also the way we conduct our lives in general?
4. Paul exhorts us to season our communication with "saltiness." Salt can create thirst, add flavor, and slow down decay. Give an example of how "salty speech" does each of these in real-life situations.
5. After considering each of the three, how are devoted prayer, wise conduct, and gracious speech interrelated with one another?

YOUR MOVE

As Christians, we need to love people enough to respect their current spiritual status while being open to show them what God might have for them. Good communication, comprised of both timely words and silences, forms the bridge between these separate positions. Remember that people are not projects—they are fellow travelers on a journey we all share in common! Becoming a Christian should make us more human, not less!

1. How much you care for people is often reflected in how you work at communication with others. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (1 being “poor,” 5 being “excellent”) on these “good communicator” necessities:

- a) Taking a genuine interest in others by asking good questions _____
- b) Seeking to understand before being understood _____
- c) Responding with clarity and confidence yet without judgment _____
- d) Pointing out destructive habits with compassion and humility _____
- e) Willingness to understand a different point of view _____
- f) Listening more than talking _____
- g) Celebrating and affirming other people as they are _____

What practical steps can you take to improve in your weakest areas?

2. Communication expert Tim Muehlhoff suggests using these four questions as a mental “understanding” grid whenever we interact with someone:

- What does this person believe?
- Why do these beliefs seem right to this person?
- Where do we agree?
- Based on this knowledge how should I proceed?

3. When you interact with non-Christ followers, are you more afraid of what others might think if you take a stand for Christ or of falling back into your old lifestyle because of negative influences? Pray for courage in either case.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** for exercises in Godly communication.

Good question asking is a skill everyone can acquire. Listening to people’s answers with a genuine interest and a curiosity to ask secondary questions almost naturally opens doors to explain the “mystery of Christ,” even when that’s not your primary objective.

Tim Muehlhoff
Communication Expert/Author

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[OVER]



Photo: Chris Wraight 09

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AS YOU ENTER

"LET EVERYONE BE QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO ANGER..." (JAMES 1:19)

Tips on the Tongue

Reflect on each verse in Proverbs and record what God says to you.

10:17
10:19
11:13
12:15
12:18
13:18
15:1
16:24
17:27
27:2
27:6

Wisdom for the Wise

Read James 3:1-18 and contrast the two types of people.

Natural Tendency

Wisdom from Above

Prayer for Protection

"Keep yourself in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy..." (Jude 21-24)

AS YOU LEAVE

- PRAY WITH A BELIEVING HEART THAT GOD WILL GIVE WISDOM FOR THE MOMENT.
- SEE OTHERS AS GOD DOES—LOVED AND IN NEED OF HIS GRACE AND MERCY.
- USE YOUR TONGUE AS AN INSTRUMENT TO BLESS OTHERS.

IN-SEASON AND OUT

EVANGELISM (WHY SHOULD I TELL OTHERS ABOUT GOD?)

THE HURDLE

My teammates are talking about God now and right here in the locker room! I never knew they even thought about spiritual things and now they seem to be seeking out spiritual truth. Do I say something? Who am I to tell them about God? They know my junk, and honestly, I've been struggling with some doubts about my own faith lately. How do I know for sure that Christianity is the right path among so many other faiths? And all subjects are open for discussion except for religion and politics, right? If I did talk about my faith, I wouldn't know what to say. I've only just started to read my Bible. But they keep talking about spiritual things and they really seem interested ...

Can you relate to any of the above thoughts? If so, how?

Do you ever wonder if God may want to use you to help others to come to know Him? Why or why not?

What barriers keep you from sharing God's love with others?

- The culture's view that faith is a private and personal matter
- You're not sure you really believe "this whole Jesus thing" anyway
- Your lack of knowledge about what to tell people
- Fear that talking about God may get you labeled as a Jesus freak and rejected by your teammates or friends
- Lack of love and concern for those around you

What would make you feel more qualified or ready to talk about Jesus with someone else?

Security is mostly superstition. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

Helen Keller

I HEAR YA

Even people in the Bible had to trust God, not sure if they were competent to tell others about Him ...

Jonah runs from God's calling: "Go to the great city of Ninevah and preach." ... But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed to Tarshish ... to flee the Lord. (Jonah 1:2-3)

Moses' insecurity: Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue ... Please send someone else to do it." (Exodus 4:1,13)

Peter denies his association with Jesus: "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." (Peter) denied it again with an oath: "I don't know the man!" (Matthew 26:71-72)

Paul encourages Timothy: "Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy 4:11-12)

For THE Record

People need God, but it doesn't always look like it. They may appear strong, confident, full of direction, but their primary need is spiritual, and until they address this part of life, everything else is an illusion. So God invites ALL people on the planet to hear and understand His invitation for relationship with Him. But instead of writing His message in the clouds, he chooses to use His broken, inconsistent, straying followers to communicate His message to others—he sends you as His ambassador! He's designed the world in such that when we embrace this scary privilege by faith, we will grow closer to Him at the same time. The risks are real (rejection, being marginalized, emotional and physical persecution, sometimes even death), but the rewards include fulfilling your purpose for living on earth while participating in the greatest mission in the universe. So step out in faith and see what God will do!

LISTEN UP!

Read II Corinthians 5:16-21.

1. In v16, the apostle Paul says that we don't view people from a "worldly point of view" or "according to the flesh"? What might he mean? How would one's view of someone else affect relaying the gospel to them?
2. Identify 3 things you see in these verses that God has done for those who know Him?
 -
 -
 -
3. According to v18, God gives believers "the ministry of reconciliation". After reading the following definition of reconciliation, describe in your own words what our role in this "ministry" between God and others might look like.

Reconciliation: *To cause to be friendly or harmonious again; to settle differences; to bring to submission or acceptance.*
4. In Ephesians 2:12, Paul uses word pictures to describe why everyone needs reconciliation with God, even if they don't look like it. How might these phrases demonstrate themselves in a person's life: **"separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship among God's people, strangers to God's promises, no hope and without God in the world"**?
5. What does an ambassador do in the political world? What does it mean for Christ-followers to be His ambassadors today?

YOUR MOVE

1. Think of someone who has influenced your journey with God. Describe their personal qualities and why their approach concerning the gospel is attractive to you.
2. In II Corinthians 5:14, Paul tells us that the “love of Christ” motivates or compels him to share his faith with others. If you are completely honest, what is your level of motivation for sharing the gospel with others right now and why?
 - Very low
 - Moderate
 - Very High

3. Consider two or three people in your world who don't know Jesus. Write their names here and pray for them.

*God, please open the hearts of _____ and _____
and _____ so that they would come to know You. Please prepare
me to be your ambassador by sharing with them something about You.*

4. Get a good gospel tract. Memorize its contents so you have a template in your mind containing the basics of the gospel message. While each conversation is unique, the elements of the gospel remain the same. Ask God for wisdom in applying His truth in your conversations.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to gain more insight about becoming a minister of reconciliation.

**Definition of successful witnessing:
taking the initiative to share Christ
in the power of the Holy Spirit and
leaving the results to God.**

Bill Bright
Founder, Campus Crusade for Christ

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(OVER) 

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AS YOU ENTER

"FOR I DID NOT SHRINK FROM DECLARING TO YOU THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF GOD" (ACTS 20:27)

God's Part

While God invites us to join Him in communicating His love to a lost world, He certainly is not dependent upon us. If we won't speak up, He'll find someone else to experience the thrill of this faith ride. Record your role and God's role in bringing people to Himself from:

Luke 19:39,40 _____

II Corinthians 4:6 _____

Acts 16:14 _____

I Thessalonians 2:13 _____

Isaiah 55:10-11 _____

Evangelism Perspective from the Word

What is God telling you personally as you read these verses?

1. Colossians 4:2-6 – praying for open doors and making the most of opportunities

2. I Peter 3:15 – being prepared to give a reason for your hope

3. Romans 10:9-15 – how one is saved and how God uses people to get the word out

4. Luke 5:1-11 – Jesus' call to his friends to become 'fishers of men'

5. Mark 16:15 – Jesus' charge to his followers to tell the world about Him

6. Revelation 20:15-20 – the eternal consequences of the world's response to the gospel

Story Time

Stories are the way into people's hearts ... consider these.

- Paul's story upon being asked by a middle-eastern King (Acts 26:4-23)
- A woman of a lowly race with an even lower reputation who runs into Jesus (John 4:5-26)
- Your story ... check out this resource (www.sportline.com/testimony) to help you formulate your story of coming to know God

AS YOU LEAVE

- ALWAYS BE READY TO CARE FOR OTHERS IN THEIR MOMENT OF NEED.
- ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE A RESPONSE FOR THE HOPE WITHIN YOU.
- BE PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CHRIST.

ALL HANDS IN FELLOWSHIP (DO WE REALLY NEED EACH OTHER?)

THE HURDLE

After trusting Christ, Mo felt the peace he hoped he'd feel. That's why he was confused when his teammate immediately suggested he get involved in a small group fellowship or start going to church. *I'm not sure about that*, Mo thought to himself. *I might like to go, but I don't have time with everything going on, and it doesn't seem all that relevant. Honestly, I've always thought church a bit boring. Besides, I can grow just as well and probably better by reading my Bible and doing what God wants me to do. All the church people I know have just as many problems as me—some have more! And I'm not sure I'd fit in very well with the people who do small groups. I'll think about it...*

What was your experience with the local church while growing up?

A well-known comedian once joked that “every day people are straying away from the church and going back to God.” What do you think he's trying to suggest?

What value might there be in spending time with other Christians?

The mindset of our time: *Attending church is irrelevant and unnecessary at best, harmful and stifling to spiritual growth at worst.* But the idea of “church” isn't a human invention; rather, God Himself ties our personal growth and our purpose on earth to a regular, committed fellowship with other believers.

The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies—probably because they are generally the same people.

G.K. Chesterton
Journalist/Author

I HEAR YA

The Bible endorses characters that “lock arms” in the journey of life ...

Writer of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If they fall, the one will lift up his friend. But woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he doesn't have anyone to pick him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10)

New Testament Christians: And all those who had believed (in Jesus) were together, and had all things in common ... and day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. (Acts 2:44,46)

Jesus' First Followers: Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every city and place where He himself was going to come. (Luke 10:1)

James: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

Solomon: “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)

For THE Record

God values relationships! We share this likeness with God, and our relationship with Him can only truly be developed in relationship with others—that's the way He's wired the human experience! Even though relationships are challenging and messy, we need each other to become what we otherwise would not. People provide opportunities to practice giving and receiving forgiveness; they supply encouragement and accountability to "do the right thing"; they help us see our areas for growth; they refresh us through genuine fellowship; they add depth to our vision of this life and the after-life. We don't grow in isolation—we grow while connecting in community, in the crucible of authentic fellowship, the sharpening of one life against another.

LISTEN UP!

Our new allegiance to Christ and His purposes also introduces new challenges to our faith. How do you continue believing when others are faithless? How do you persevere in the midst of trials with little or no encouragement? How do you love and serve when it is not reciprocated? We need each other to keep going!

Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

1. In each verse, identify the positive actions believers are to do.

v23

v24

v25

2. *Christian hope* believes that God is faithful and will provide what He promises. How might hope encourage perseverance in your present circumstances?

3. Verse 24 says that we live out our confession by "spurring one another on to love others and do good works." Who has "spurred" you on in your faith and how did they do it?

4. While the text doesn't give us specifics, what consequences might first century believers experience for not staying in regular fellowship (v25)? In what ways might these be the same for you?

5. In Philippians 2:2-3, the apostle Paul says to be "united in spirit, intent on one purpose ... regarding one another as more important than yourself". Why is it easier to pursue a great cause locking arms with others rather than going it alone? How have you experienced this?

YOUR MOVE

1. What prevents you from being in close relationship with other Christians?

- My schedule is too demanding to make time for others.
- We have games and travel on the weekend.
- I can't even keep up with good friends let alone the Christian community.
- After practicing all week, I need a break on Sunday.
- I don't know anyone at church and frankly don't want to meet anyone.
- I feel uncomfortable letting others know the "real" me.
- I'm not good at initiating with other people.

2. New Testament Christians were described as "devoting themselves to fellowship." (Acts 2:42) What adjustments would you need to make in your attitude or actions to be described as devoted to fellowship (authentic, sincere, vulnerable, accountable Christian connections)?

3. Based on the ways people have encouraged you, what could you do for others to encourage them in their faith? Write down their names and what you could do to strengthen their faith.

People Who Need Encouragement	What Can I Do for Them?

4. What practical ways could you get involved with Christian community now instead of waiting for an off-season that never comes? A Bible study? Prayer group? Church?

The solo mountain climber who reaches the summit has but himself to pat on the back. The fighter pilot who engages the enemy without his wingman is asking for trouble. A soprano can carefully hit every note of her song, but the richness and beauty of harmony is unsurpassed. Progress in any field is most often the result of incremental contributions from numerous individuals. (George McGovern, New York NFL/MLB chaplain)

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more ideas on pursuing authentic Christian community!

You can impress people at a distance, but you can only impact them up close.

Dr. Howard Hendricks
Seminary Professor/Author

THE TRAINING ROOM
[OVER] 

THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

“DO NOT MERELY LOOK OUT FOR YOUR OWN INTERESTS BUT ALSO FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS.” (PHILIPPIANS 2:4)

Finding a Christian Community: Your Local Church

While no official Biblical “list” exists to determine a good church, there are several categories to consider:

- Belief in Jesus’ divinity and His exclusivity for salvation
- Preach the Bible and take authority of the Bible seriously
- Leadership accountable to board or someone else
- Active prayer ministry
- Expectation that you’ll use your spiritual gifts to serve others
- Character of people loving and forgiving
- Outreach oriented and committed to discipleship
- Pursue praise and worship of God
- Accept sinners/pursue spiritual growth
- Ideally multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-socioeconomic

Beware of the following characteristics of unhealthy churches:

- Salvation requires baptism or membership in the church/particular denomination
- Salvation is an effect of “Jesus plus” something else
- Legalistic restrictions: what food you can eat, music you can listen to, how you dress, etc.
- Bible isn’t taken seriously; messages filled with interesting topics but no Bible explanation
- Worship or “excessive” praise of historical figures or current church leaders
- Congregation unconcerned about unity with other local churches or reaching out to serve local community

Living in Christian Community: The “One Another” Passages

Read these passages and consider what God may be saying to you.

Galatians 6:2 _____

I Peter 4:8 _____

I Peter 4:9 _____

I Peter 4:10 _____

John 13:14 _____

John 13:34 _____

Romans 12:16 _____

I Corinthians 1:10 _____

Ephesians 4:32 _____

Serving in Christian Community: Discovering Your SHAPE

Read I Corinthians 12:12-27. Paul uses the metaphor of a “body” to describe the interdependence of each individual Christian with all other Christians. Part of growing is learning to function well with all parts of the body. Considering your SHAPE will help you understand how you can best serve the Christian community. After each category, write a few words to describe how God wired you for service. Remember: Others need your gifts as much as you need theirs!

Spiritual gifts - Gifting God gives you for specific acts of service

Heart - Your particular passions and burdens for people and causes

Abilities - Your natural born strengths

Personality - Your temperament and demeanor, how you interact with the world

Experiences - All the events of your life, both positive and negative

For more help thinking about your SHAPE, go to
<http://www.saddlebackresources.com/en-S/Pastors/Focus/FOCUSSHAPE/FOCUSSHAPE.HTM>

AS YOU LEAVE

• REMEMBER: INTERDEPENDENCE IS A MUST FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GROW SPIRITUALLY AND KNOW THEIR GOD-GIVEN PURPOSE IN THIS LIFE!

POWER PLAY

HOLY SPIRIT (HOW DO I LIVE DIFFERENTLY?)

THE HURDLE

I was so excited the day I asked Christ into my life, but now I'd say it's harder to live for God than I imagined. Sometimes my teammates have more influence on how I act than God does. I still find myself getting angry or worrying more about what others think than God. I read my Bible but I don't always do what it says.

My Christian friends remind me that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," but frankly, I don't always feel like it. I don't seem to feel the same passion for Jesus that they do and sometimes I wonder if I didn't get the whole package when I trusted Christ. Some people get emotional when they talk about the Holy Spirit, but that's not my personality. I want to learn but I just don't know how to put the pieces together.

In what ways can you relate?

Have you ever felt:

- Apathy about the things of God?
- Powerless to do the right thing?
- Confused about why many Christians live like non-Christians?
- Your 'lived' behavior doesn't match your verbal commitment?

It's been said that "The Christian life isn't difficult to live—it's impossible to live." What do you think about this statement?

To deny we need and want power is to deny that we hope to be effective.

Liz Smith
Columnist

I HEAR YA

The Bible is full of people who were trying to figure out how to live in the Spirit's power ...

Paul speaking about himself: "I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate ... for the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." (Romans 7:15-19 NASB)

Jesus speaking to Nicodemus: "...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:3,5)

King David after sinning: "... do not take the Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:126)

Paul speaking to the believers in Corinth: "I had to talk as though you belonged to this world... for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires... You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord." (1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NLT)

For THE Record

Christ forgave us, made us spiritually alive, and wants to empower our lives—but we still have the capacity to sin. We naturally want to do things our way, in our time, under our control, and for our gain. If we want to experience the Spirit's power in our lives, we must willingly submit ourselves moment by moment to God, yielding ourselves to Him as a conscious decision. When we ask the Spirit to control us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead gives us new affections and strength to follow through on them. Jesus wants to live in the world through us, but we must purposely allow him constant access to our lives so He can!

LISTEN UP!

Like an encouraging teammate or coach who helps us do more than we could on our own, the Holy Spirit enables us to live a life impossible to live on our own. The gospel according to John has much to say about the Holy Spirit. As Jesus was preparing His disciples to live and love in a totally different way, He knew they would need the person and power of the Spirit to do it.

Read John 14:16,17,26.

1. Identify the words and phrases that describe the role and relationship that the Holy Spirit would have in our lives.
2. In some Bibles, translators use the word *comforter* or *advocate* instead of *helper*. The word is taken from a Greek word meaning "to come alongside to give courage." What does this say about God and His commitment to you?
3. List some characteristics of an influential teacher or coach in your life. Why would it be important to have a constant teacher and guide within you for your new life in Christ?
4. What aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in your life are described here? We not only need guidance to the truth but also correction when we're heading in the wrong direction. How might the Holy Spirit communicate these to you?
5. Romans 8:11 tell us that the Spirit lives in all true believers. If this is so, why do you think most believers don't experience the life that God offers?

YOUR MOVE

The word **filled** in the Bible means controlled and empowered: filled with fear, filled with rage, filled with joy. Being filled describes what takes control or dominates your life. Ephesians 5:17,18 talks about not being drunk with wine, but instead being filled with the Spirit. The writer is not using this occasion to speak against drunkenness; he is using drunkenness as an illustration to help us understand the influence of the Holy Spirit.

1. How do you describe a person under the influence of alcohol? How might being under the influence of the Spirit be similar? Different?

2. You can know the Holy Spirit is in control of your life when you meet 3 conditions:

a. **Yield to God.** Relinquish control of your life—step back and allow the Holy Spirit to run the show!

Are there any areas of your life you are unwilling to yield to God? What? Why?

b. **Confess Sin He Reveals.** Confess means to agree with the Holy Spirit that the sin He shows us is wrong (1 John 1:9). When we ignore sin brought to our mind, we short-circuit His power and grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

Are there sins He is bringing to your attention that you are trying to hide?

c. **Depend on God.** Galatians 5:16 encourages us to walk by the Spirit, turning our attention to Him with moment by moment trust.

What are you afraid God will do if you surrender these areas to him?

3. Memorize 1 John. 1:9. Allow the truth of His grace to wash you of guilt and discouragement, and ask Him to give you courage and strength to live in the freedom His Spirit promises.

4. *Spiritual breathing* is an exercise you can do every moment the Spirit prompts you.

Exhale the impurities (sin) that poison you and others through confession. Identify the specific attitude or action that is impure, destructive, or selfish and agree with God that it's wrong.

Inhale the fresh air of His forgiveness by depending on the Word and Spirit of God to give you truth and power to live as He intends.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for extra exercises on living in the Spirit's power.

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of (them), there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled.

D. L. Moody
Evangelist

THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

“YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU AND YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES.” (ACTS 1:8)

Compare the different aspects the purpose of the Holy Spirit.

Aspect of Work	Primary Passages	Purpose	Explanation
Filling of the Spirit	Ephesians 5:18	Empowerment to live for Christ	We are filled when we meet His conditions; a repeated experience.
Baptism of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12:13	Identifies us with the Body of Christ	True of all believers; a one-time event at salvation; a non-experiential truth; greatly misused term today.
Fruit of the Spirit	Galatians 5:22-23 John 15	Makes us more Christ-like	Character building; the production of godly qualities into our everyday life; grows over time and dependence.
Gifts of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12-14 Ephesians 4:7-16	Equips us for ministry	Every believer is given one or more (never all) spiritual gifts to serve. None are more spiritual than others.
Ministries of the Spirit	John 16:7-15 Romans 8:14-16, 26-27	Convict, lead, teach, assure, pray for us	Everyday involvement in our lives to help us know and follow Christ.

FYI about “Being Filled with the Spirit”

- Though all Christians are indwelt by the Spirit, not all Christians are filled with the Spirit.
- This is a command, meaning we have to act on it. God put the Holy Spirit in us, but we have to allow Him to work.
- The Holy Spirit came in once to stay. Being filled is a repeated action. When we take charge of our lives and walk under our own power, we are not filled with the Spirit.
- Filled does not mean we get more of the Spirit, it means He gets more of us.

Abiding in Christ Produces Fruit

Read John 15:1-11 and answer the following questions:

1. What is necessary in order for the branch to bear fruit?
2. Look up the word “abide” or “remain”. How is this related to your spiritual life?
3. What happens to the branches that are not connected to the vine?
4. Ways to stay connected to the vine: Study God’s Word, Pray, and Fellowship with other Christians. Which ones do you need to spend more time doing?

AS YOU LEAVE

- TELL GOD EACH MORNING THAT YOU WANT TO LIVE FOR HIM.
- PRACTICE YOUR SPIRITUAL BREATHING EXERCISES EVERY DAY.
- BE THANKFUL FOR THE FRUIT HE IS PRODUCING IN YOUR LIFE.

TROPHY OF GRACE

IDENTITY (AM I GOOD ENOUGH?)

THE HURDLE

Why does this happen to me? Two nights ago after our semifinal win I felt great, helping lead our team to the championship—I was on top of the world! Tonight I feel worthless. I had to watch the last two minutes of my senior year from the sideline because I fouled out on a stupid play committed out of frustration. Everyone was sure we'd win this year—I feel like I let my team, community, and self down. I hate that my self-image swings on how I play the game.

In what ways does your attitude toward yourself change based on your performance as an athlete? Student? In relationships?

What kinds of personal goals have you set? How will accomplishing those goals cause you to feel different about yourself?

How does the stress of trying to measure up to others' (coaches/peers/parents/media) expectations affect you?

I am nothing but a sports slave.

Dennis Rodman

Our culture tells us we have to DO something to be important, to be valuable and wanted by others. But the relentless pursuit of performance to measure our worth is a deceitful trap: we're always just one mistake away (one bad game, one slump, one bad season) from falling short of our ideal. At some level, everyone strives for a secure identity that lasts beyond each performance.

I HEAR YA

Here are a few people from the Bible who also wrestled with the issue of identity ...

The Rich Young Ruler – his identity was built around his good works and his wealth and he couldn't give it up to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16-26).

The Rich Fool – his identity was built around his material possessions (Luke 12:13-21).

The Woman at the Well – her identity was built around her current lover (John 4:7-26).

Zacchaeus – his identity was built around being a wealthy tax collector (Luke 19: 1-10).

Paul – his identity was built around being a religious zealot (Philippians 3:4-10).

As athletes we must understand the importance of finding our identity in Christ alone and not in our athletic performance.

For THE Record

God accepts us because we are His beloved children through Jesus' work on the cross not our talent level or game performance. God's grace gives us a new life in Christ, a whole new way of thinking, freeing us from the addictive, dead end pursuit of worldly success. If God accepts us just as we are and He is our primary audience, we are free to be ourselves with others without chasing their approval or considering ourselves a failure when our performance or circumstances take a turn for the worst. When we see ourselves through Jesus' eyes, we develop the foundation for a secure identity. Over time, being truly loved, accepted, and forgiven by God supplies confidence to play and live in freedom.

LISTEN UP!

While there's certainly nothing wrong with wanting respect from others, seeking human approval becomes a roller-coaster ride that never ultimately satisfies. On the other hand, understanding God's constant acceptance of us offers a security that can set us free. When God becomes our chief audience, we find ourselves less concerned about others' opinions and judgments.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

1. What do these verses say about how you are saved from your sins?

You are saved by _____ through _____ NOT _____.

Grace: unmerited favor toward us

Faith: what you trust in

Works: efforts to gain approval

2. Verse 2:8 says that your salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God. What does the word *gift* imply? How might the giver of the gift feel if you tried to pay him back for the gift?

3. Ephesians 1 describes "gifts" you are freely given based on God's unconditional love for you.

Look at the list below and identify what "gift" you most appreciate. Why?

God chose you (1:4)

God adopted you (1:5)

God calls you Beloved (1:6)

God totally forgives you (1:7)

God lavished grace on you (1:8)

God gives you an inheritance (1:11)

God sealed His promise forever (1:14)

4. What does 2:10 tell us should be a result of God's grace toward us? What is the difference between working *for* acceptance versus working *from* acceptance?

YOUR MOVE

Competitive sports make intense performance demands on us. “Love” and “grace” aren’t usually words associated with sports, so as athletes we shouldn’t be surprised at struggling with the practical implications of God’s love for us. But Christ’s forgiveness sets us free from both His condemnation (spiritual) and the slavery produced by other’s opinions (performance). When God accepts you, all other opinions about you become secondary.

1. Which is true about you and why?

I love sports (I am free to give and express myself) and experience the joy it brings.
I need sports (I am dependent upon sports) because of what sports can give me.

What is the difference between loving sports and needing sports?

2. What role does approval from others play in how you feel about yourself when you win? Lose? When you play all the time? When you don’t play at all?

3. In religious circles, what are “works” people do to pursue God’s love and approval? What kinds of “works” do you do as an athlete or coach in hopes of gaining approval?

4. Which of the truths listed in Ephesians 1:4-14 is most meaningful to you? Why? Claim that truth for yourself and use it against the temptation to ride the “performance rollercoaster.” For example, after a poor performance you can choose to deny inner condemnation and replace it with faith that God’s love is sufficient even when you feel rejected by others.

5. Sports can feed your need for approval without you ever realizing it, and before your acceptance from God will have practical benefit in your life you have to acknowledge your desire to get your approval from your performance. Understanding your identity in Christ is a process of renewing your mind and learning to think differently from the way the world tells you to think. Ask God to help you build your identity in Him and not your performance.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more exercises in discovering what God says is really true about you.

The trophy that matters is not on our shelves or resumes. It is the soul that we become. That is the crown that we will one day cast before God.

John Ortberg
Pastor/Author

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS." (ROMANS 8:1)

Who are You in Christ?

Meditate on one passage each day and thank God for how He has made you special!

New creation: II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20

Child of God: John 1:12; Ephesians 1:4-6

Friend of Jesus: John 15:15

Justified through faith: Romans 5:1-2

Complete in Christ: Colossians 2:9-10

Able to honor God with your body: I Corinthians 6:19-20, 9:24-27

Slave or Free?

Read Romans 6.

1. What does it mean to be a slave?

2. What does it mean to be free?

3. What did Jesus do to free us from our sins?(vs. 6-7)

4. Wages are something that you earn, gifts are something that you receive. What does verse 23 say we've earned?

What gift have we been given?

When You Know Christ ...

Your sins are forgiven by God's grace.
(Colossians 1:13-14)

You are to continue to grow in your faith. (Colossians 2:6)

You have great worth because Jesus paid a great price to redeem you. (I Corinthians 6:20)

You can overcome bad habits and develop new ones. (Matthew 19:26)

You can use your talents to bring glory to God. (Colossians 3:17,23)

You have great power available to you through the Holy Spirit. (II Timothy 1:7)

God will finish the good work that He started in you. (Philippians 1:6)

AS YOU LEAVE

- **ASK GOD TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR WORTH COMES FROM YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.**
- **REMINDE YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN WHO HAPPENS TO BE AN ATHLETE, NOT AN ATHLETE WHO HAPPENS TO BE A CHRISTIAN.**

BIG-TIME SPORTS

IDOLATRY (WHAT IS THE PLACE OF SPORT IN MY LIFE?)

THE HURDLE

I don't suppose there's hardly anything in my life that gets more of my time and attention than sports. It's been that way as long as I can remember and I don't apologize for it. I love to compete, to challenge myself against the best, and if I'm honest, I think I even love the practice it takes to get there! I've heard athletes say after winning championships that they wonder if there's more to life, but I'm pretty convinced if I won the ultimate prize in my sport, that would be enough for me.

Do you ever wonder if sport is worth the time and attention you give it? Why or why not?

Do you think it is possible to be fully committed to God and fully committed to your sport at the same time? Explain.

Would a championship be your ultimate satisfaction? Explain.

Put the Emerson quote in your own words. What do you think about his idea?

The gods we worship write their names on our faces ... a man will worship something ... (so we should) be careful what we worship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
American Poet/Essayist, 1803-1882

I HEAR YA

There are people in the Bible who struggled between worshipping God or something made from man.

God requires exclusive allegiance: "I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:1)

Elijah draws a line: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1Kings 18:21)

The people of Israel served self-made images: "They served idols...they did not listen but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God." (2 Kings 17:12, 14)

Disciples are called to seek God first: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to you ... " (Matthew 6:33)

LISTEN UP!

Idolatry is *an excessive or blind adoration, reverence, or devotion to people, things, or ideas*. While it may seem harmless to offer complete devotion to people or things alongside God, doing so will eventually catch up with you. In Romans 1:18-20, Paul argues that all humans are born with an intuitive sense that God exists, but instead of worshipping Him, they bow down to created “things,” devoting themselves to systems of their own making. In the rest of the passage He explains the unavoidable consequences when we make this “divine exchange.”

Read Romans 1:18-25

1. Verses 23 and 25 show us this “divine exchange” which amounts to idolatry. How do the people in these verses demonstrate idolatry?
2. Idolatry involves exchanging the truth for a lie: worshipping a “false idol” that promises to give you something if you serve it. What does sport as an idol promise to give you in return for your devotion/allegiance (worship)?

How does this differ from what God promises through the “good news” of Jesus?

3. Verses 21 and 22 reveal that when the created order gets reversed (serving sport instead of serving God), the consequences lead to dishonoring God, ingratitude, futile thinking, a darkened heart, and foolishness. Even though we see the negative results and the reality of what any idol delivers, why is sport still such a seductive idol?
4. If God promises to deliver what the idol won't or can't, what might keep you from trusting and serving Him above all else?

For THE Record

God makes it clear that He is jealous for His own place in our lives. He won't share the podium with anyone or anything else. All other idols are imposters; they promise glory for us but deliver death in the end. God promises Life in exchange for our devotion and allegiance. The irony: when we surrender our man-made gods and allow Him to have first place in our hearts and minds, we receive the benefits other gods promise but only One can provide: inner peace, personal security, real love, lasting purpose, future hope, forgiveness, and more. God deserves our worship whether we benefit or not, but in His love for us, giving Him the glory due His name gives us access to life as it is meant to be lived on earth as it is in heaven.

YOUR MOVE

1. C.S. Lewis says, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." Sport takes the place of an idol in our lives when the natural desires of satisfaction, accomplishment and glory turn into self-serving pursuits. If you are honest, what do you sometimes want more than God? After this study, in what ways might this pursuit have become idolatrous in your life?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8,9. Faith becomes evident in your life when you **repent** or turn away from idols and **replace** them with the person of Christ. What do you need to repent of now? What do you need specifically from Jesus to fill the void?
3. What is Lewis trying to communicate in the quote to the right? If what he suggests is true, then how might it change the way you approach personal idols in the future?

"God, I give You _____ in my life. I confess that I trust in this more than You sometimes. I believe by faith that You will give me exactly what I need and I will seek to honor You above all else. Thank You for being a God who is worthy of my trust."

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

- CS Lewis
Author / Professor

Visit **The Training Room** to continue to learn how to worship and serve God above all else.

THE TRAINING ROOM
[OVER] 

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AS YOU ENTER

"YOU TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS TO SERVE A LIVING AND TRUE GOD." (1 THESSALONIANS 1:9B)

Idolatry Examined

Read the following verses below and begin to reflect on what God might be teaching you. Record your thoughts following each verse.

- Acts 3:19
- Acts 14:11-18
- Romans 12:1-2
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Ephesians 5:6-11

Who Gets the Glory?

Many Christian athletes *say* that they want to bring glory to God but instead primarily serve their own egos, reputations, and thirst for affirmation. God wants first place in your life! That means all desires, pursuits and choices are submissive to His leadership in your life. Identify a few areas that you are seeking your will and desires above God's will, confess it as idolatrous, and then offer yourself again as a "living and holy sacrifice to God." (Romans 12:1,2)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Idolatry in Sport

Using the chart below, identify what it might look like when a positive, natural desire gets misdirected away from God. Recognize and repent of your participation in idolatry and replace it with Jesus Christ.

Statement	Positive Natural Desires	Misdirected
Only winning can make me feel important and worth something.	Brings value, accomplishment	I will win ... I have to!
I am regularly jealous of other's successes.	High standards are good	Beating others is better than improving
Sport rescues me from my life's circumstances.	Hope for the future	Success covers my personal pain
I do whatever it takes to win, even if I compromise my character.	Determination and drive	Scoreboard or honor?
I experience tremendous frustration when my goals are blocked.	Goals are motivating	Anger helps me compete better
I desperately want to please my coach and/or parents.	Love for others	I am happy when they are happy

AS YOU LEAVE

- MEMORIZE ROMANS 12:1-2 AND COMMIT YOURSELF TO GOD DAILY.
- ENJOY SPORT INSTEAD OF NEED IT FOR YOUR OWN SIGNIFICANCE.
- RECOGNIZE WHEN THE "DIVINE ORDER" IS UPSIDE DOWN AND KEEP GOD FIRST IN EVERYTHING.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

LEADERSHIP (WHAT CHARACTERIZES A GOOD LEADER?)

THE HURDLE

Being on the team gives me opportunity to influence people, but I wonder if I'm really making the kind of difference I want to make. I guess I'm still not exactly sure what it means to be a leader. If I'm not a high scorer, the captain, the most popular, the most vocal, or the one getting media attention, can I still be a leader on the team? In my years on the team, I've seen some of my teammates play a ton and others not play at all, so playing time doesn't seem like it's the key issue when it comes to impact. But even if I play all the time, I'm still not clear what it means to be an effective leader.

If someone asked you, "What is leadership?", what would you say?

In what ways do you see yourself as a leader?

It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.

Tom Brokaw,
Former news anchor

I HEAR YA

The Bible records an assortment of different leaders, some who were ultimately commended, others who were rebuked ...

David: And David shepherded them (God's people, Israel) with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them. (Psalms 78:72)

Solomon: "I undertook great projects; I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them ... I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem ... and again, all was vanity and chasing after wind." (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11)

Pharisees: (Jesus speaking) "Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Matthew 15:14)

Joshua: (Moses speaking) "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them." (Joshua 1:6)

King Baasha: (God speaking) "I lifted you up from the dust and made you a leader of my people Israel, but you ... caused my people Israel to sin and to provoke me to anger by their sins." (1 Kings 16:2)

Gideon: "Watch me. Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of camp, do exactly as I do." (Judges 7:17)

For THE Record

“Not so with you.” With these four words, Jesus exhorts his followers to distinguish themselves from those embracing the world’s system of leadership. While others clamor for titles, position, and power, Jesus teaches (and models with his own life) that true leadership is about service—pouring out one’s life on behalf of others. As we follow Christ, he transforms our character to be more like His own, an inside-out renovation that enables a completely different approach to life. When Jesus marks our character in this way, we can leave a legacy that lasts long after the scoreboard is forgotten. Leadership marked by service always leaves a distinct impression on those who are served—and God gets the glory! *Christ-followers lead by serving others!*

LISTEN UP!

Jesus explains how His followers should lead in Mark 10:35-45. *Note: The probable context of this passage finds Jesus and the disciples heading toward Jerusalem in the final days of Jesus’ earthly life.*

1. Thinking that Jesus might be ready to set up his earthly kingdom, James and John, two of Jesus’ twelve disciples, ask Jesus to grant them positions of power, influence, and prestige in his kingdom hierarchy. Do you think this is an appropriate request? Why or why not?
2. How did Jesus respond to the request? Are you surprised that Jesus answered James and John in this way? Explain.
3. When the other ten disciples heard the request that James and John made, how did they respond? Why would they be indignant (angry, offended, resentful)? Do you think they were justified in feeling this way? Why or why not?
4. Jesus used the request to teach the twelve about his model for leadership. Using the chart below, identify the different characteristics of leadership for each model according to this passage.

Model of the “Rulers of the Gentiles.”	Model of Those who Follow Jesus

5. Jesus’ model is contrary to our typical notions of leadership. Do you think His approach works in general? In the sports world? Why or why not?

YOUR MOVE

1. "If the high road of leadership doesn't take you across the low road of servanthood, you need to get some new directions." (Anonymous)

a. Are you on the road serving others or on the road seeking to be served by others?

b. What would it look like for you to live more consistently on the low road of servanthood?

c. Identify what might be keeping you from that road.

2. While leadership is taking responsibility to influence others, the most difficult person to lead is yourself. What immediate adjustments would make you more effective in leading your own life? Check all that apply.

- Making more purposeful decisions with my time
- Not wasting as much time on the television, games, computer, etc.
- Being more concerned about others' needs than my own accomplishments
- Growing in confidence in my own strengths and working on my weaknesses
- Learning about what godly leadership really looks like
- Spending more time with people who are having a positive influence on others

3. Many times in his life, Jesus assumed the role of servant. In John 13:1-17, Jesus chooses the towel (symbol of humility, others-centeredness, help) rather than the robe (symbol of power, authority, status). Among your teammates and opponents, how could you compete with God-honoring intensity and still reflect the servant qualities of Christ?

4. "Lord, I give you my _____ that keeps me from really serving others. Help me to be more like Christ, even in sports."

For additional work, on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to learn more about effective servant leadership.

***We are never more like Jesus
than when we serve others.***

Duane Elmer
Author/Teacher

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"HE LEADS THE HUMBLE IN JUSTICE, AND HE TEACHES THE HUMBLE HIS WAY." (PSALM 25:9)

Leadership Training Session 1

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

- How does the author contrast self-centered leadership with servant leadership?
- What choices did Jesus make while living out his role as servant?
- What is most challenging to you in this passage?

Leadership Training Session 2

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

- What character traits are listed in this passage?
- Servant leadership is marked by challenge. What challenges might you encounter in your leadership journey?
- In what ways does Jesus give us encouragement to keep going in the

Qualities of a Leader

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey teaches about ways to develop as a leader. Look over the list below and see where you are doing well and consider ways to improve yourself as a leader.

- Habit 1.** Be proactive. Take personal responsibility for yourself vs. reactive by blaming others.
- Habit 2.** Begin with the end in mind. Set long-term goals and a vision for your life.
- Habit 3.** Put first things first. Set short-term goals that support your priorities in life.
- Habit 4.** Think Win/Win. Have an attitude where others can benefit as much as you.
- Habit 5.** Seek first to understand, then be understood. Listen and empathize before giving advice.
- Habit 6.** Synergize. Work in teams to solve problems, make decisions, and share strengths.
- Habit 7.** Sharpen the saw. Take care of yourself with a balanced life in all areas of development.

AS YOU LEAVE

- CONSISTENTLY SEEK OUT WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS.
- SERVE IN YOUR STRENGTHS AND GROW IN YOUR AREAS OF WEAKNESS.
- BE AROUND OTHER PEOPLE WHO MODEL CHRIST-LIKE LEADERSHIP.

GOT GAME FOR GOD!

GOT GAME FOR GOD

LORDSHIP (WHO RUNS MY LIFE?)

THE HURDLE

People want so much from me. My coach expects me to give 110%. My academics call for total dedication. My family and friends—including the people I date—have their own expectations of me. When I hear that Jesus is calling for more commitment from me, I'm not certain how that is possible. If I give God 100%, will I have anything left over for my sport, academics, friends, or family? How am I to make sense of all these commitments?

What do you find most difficult about establishing priorities in your life?

Where does Jesus fit into the equation for you right now?

A star basketball player in his second year of college began a relationship with God. During a bus ride one of his coaches said, "If you spent less energy on this Jesus stuff, you'd be scoring more points on the court." It's worth asking: If you listen to Jesus' call to "love the Lord our God with all your heart" will you become a less effective athlete? Why or why not?

The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ.

C. S. Lewis
Author/Professor

I HEAR YA

Even people in the Bible faced the challenge of being fully-devoted followers of God ...

Israelites Turn Away: "The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

About King Josiah: "And before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might." (2 Kings 23:25)

John to Laodiceans: "Because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16)

Paul in Athens: Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this" ... but some men joined him and believed. (Acts 17:32, 34)

Jesus to disciples: "No one can serve two masters ... you can't serve God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

GOT GAME FOR JESUS

LISTEN UP!

Read Luke 14:25-32, where Jesus issues a challenge to the multitudes to become true disciples, putting God first in their lives.

1. What do you find most shocking about Jesus' words in this passage? Why?
2. In verse 26, Jesus uses the extreme to demonstrate the degree of allegiance He requires. Why do you think He would choose these particular relationships as a test of discipleship?
3. Jesus uses the word *hate* as an expression that means one must love everything else, even those relationships closest to us, comparatively far less. On a scale of 1-10, where would you place the importance of Jesus in your life right now? Explain.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all				Average				Supreme value		

How does your commitment to Jesus stack up against your commitment to your sport?

4. Jesus describes two scenarios to help disciples understand the cost involved in following him:
1) A person who wants to build a tower and 2) a king who wants to fight a war.

What are the consequences of not giving adequate consideration before moving forward with these two projects? What is the consequence of a Christian athlete proclaiming the name of Christ but not following through on his/her commitment to Him?

For THE Record

Jesus promises that when we surrender to Him as our highest priority, we'll experience life in a way simply not possible when he is second. Discipleship (following Jesus) doesn't mean we're shackled to endless misery—it means opening ourselves to the surprises of God's astonishing goodness! In placing Him first, Christ enables us to experience everything else in life more freely and purposefully: to play with wild confidence, to deeply love others without reservation, to fully embrace moments in the day that we might otherwise miss, to take healthy risks without fear of failure, to control our passions instead of them consuming us. He knows that we struggle, but His riches await us as we turn to Him over and over again! Are you convinced He is worthy of your complete allegiance?

YOUR MOVE

1. If you examine your life closely (your use of your time and money, your affections, your commitments), what relationships or areas of life currently demand the most allegiance?



2. Look back over the chart above. What area of life are you most afraid to surrender to God? What do you fear losing if you place God in the center of your life?

3. God does not necessarily take things out of your life—He wants them in the proper order. If Jesus were really your highest priority, what adjustment would you have to make? Consider these questions to help you think through areas:

- Are there any attitudes or actions that are wrong or sinful?
- Are there any areas that may not be wrong but are not wise (wasting time)?
- Are you demonstrating your love for God by getting to know Him? How?
- How are you going out of your way to encourage and serve other people?
- Does your sport show that you are living for Christ on and off the field of play?

A prayer of commitment

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me and dying for me so that I might have life, hope and forgiveness. You deserve my total allegiance. Even though it is scary, I give you my dreams as well as my fears and ask You to take them and do with them as you please. You are the ruler of the Universe and of my life. Please give me grace and faith to live that out today and always. Amen.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more exercises to keep Christ as your highest priority.

The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply of shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.

C.S. Lewis
Author/Professor

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE ADDED TO YOU." (MATTHEW 6:33)

Increase Your View of Jesus

It is easier to follow someone you trust. Read the passages and note what makes Jesus worthy of my life.

Colossians 1:15-20 _____

John 1:1-17 _____

Isaiah 40:10-31 _____

Luke 5:1-11 _____

Matthew 11:28-29 _____

Decrease your Dependence on the Approval of Others

Don't allow your life to be shaped by the same fears that motivate the unbeliever's life.

What masters call for your allegiance? (Luke 16:13)

What fears keep you from living and competing freely? (1 Peter 3:14-15)

What would it look like if you learned to play for the audience of One? (Galatians 1:10)

Increase the Areas of Life That You are Submitting to Jesus

As you grow in your devotion to God, you will want to obey His Great Commission to make disciples and His Great Commandment to love others. Evaluate the use of your time, money and talents for one week and ask yourself:

Did it serve a higher purpose?

Did it help build up myself, others or God's kingdom?

Could I have done something more effectively or efficiently?

Do I compete in a way that reflects godliness or promotes self?

AS YOU LEAVE

ASK GOD FOR GRACE EACH MORNING TO ...

- **DO EVERYTHING FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS. (COLOSSIANS 3:17)**
- **YIELD MY LIFE AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. (ROMANS 12:1-2)**
- **HONOR GOD BY HONORING OTHERS IN EVERYTHING. (JOHN 13:5-17)**

TAKING A KNEE

PRAYER (CAN I TRUST HIM WITH MYSELF?)

THE HURDLE

I asked God for one thing. I felt a little guilty talking to Him just because I needed something, but I did it anyway. I prayed my heart out that this time my knee would hold up, but here I sit on the sideline again during what should be the biggest game of my senior season. Does He care about what I want? Did I use the wrong words? What's the point of praying if God can't hear me or help me? Maybe He just doesn't care. Or maybe I'm just afraid God will let me down when I need Him most...

When (if ever) do you pray to God? About what?

Have you ever wondered if God really cares about you or the things that matter to you? What makes you think this way?

Do you sometimes think that you have to say just the right words or that you shouldn't tell God how you really feel? Explain.

Do you ever feel guilty for talking to God only in moments of crisis and seldom at other times?

Basically, I'm for anything that gets you through the night—be it prayer, tranquilizers, or a bottle of Jack Daniels.

Frank Sinatra
Entertainer

Living in a fast paced, independent society will always work against cultivating an honest and consistent prayer life, but our lives desperately need connection with God. It can be difficult to honestly pray to Him if you're hindered by guilty thoughts or incorrect teaching.

I HEAR YA

The Bible is full of people who pray to God in all different circumstances, hoping He cares about what matters to them and will do something about it ...

Jeremiah: "Why do you (God) forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days? ... Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us."
(Lamentations 5:20-22)

The Early Church: "So Peter was kept in prison, but the Church was earnestly praying to God for him." (Acts 12:5)

David: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"
(Psalm 13:1)

Paul: "... there was given to me a thorn in the flesh ... three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." (2 Corinthians 12:7b-8)

For THE Record

God knows about your situation better than you do; nothing comes into your life that He hasn't allowed, including the desires of your heart. He cares for you the way a perfect father cares for his child, though sometimes it may not feel that way in the moment. He wants us to trust Him so we can discover that He had our best interests in mind all along, even when He seemed silent or far away. He is working all things together for His glory and our good—even in the dark days when hope seems lost. We'll know and understand His ways better as we fully open our hearts and minds to Him, bringing our real hopes, fears, desires, and sins to His feet. While He may not always give you what you want, He can be trusted to do what's best for you and He will always give you what you need most: Himself.

LISTEN UP!

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

1. As you read through the passage a second time, write down the actions we are to do or not do.
2. Do you ever think some of your requests are too insignificant or too big for God to answer? Why?
3. How might rejoicing in the Lord with a thankful heart instead of dwelling on your circumstances help you to approach God?
4. What is the result when we communicate with God as described in these verses (see verse 7)?
5. The "peace that will guard your heart" is contrasted with what in verse 6? What difference could this make in your prayer life?

YOUR MOVE

1. The following are common hindrances to communicating freely with God. Which of these false thoughts can you most identify with? Why?

- He won't do anything for me.
- He will respond like my earthly father.
- He doesn't care about what matters to me.
- He won't hear me because I'm not living the way I should.
- He already knows what I feel, so why say it?
- He wouldn't like what I really think about this situation.

To some degree, we *all* think these things at one time or another—it's human nature. Yet despite how many think/feel the fact remains: God cares deeply for us and everything we're going through! Though he already knows our every thought, he wants us to communicate with him.

2. To what degree are you motivated (hardly, somewhat, extremely) to move past the hurdles that keep you from talking to God and trusting that He wants to hear from you—anytime, anyplace, about anything?

3. Think of a person or situation that is difficult to bring before God. Make a list of at least ten things for which you are (or could be) thankful related to this person or situation. Remember: peace and perspective come from God when we choose thanksgiving over complaining.

4. Take five minutes each morning or evening. Bring your requests to God and see what happens to you in the process. Consider writing in a journal and including the ACTS of prayer when you talk to God.

- Adoration:** Lifting God up and praising Him for who He is.
- Confession:** Acknowledging your sin and desire to change.
- Thanksgiving:** Gratitude for every bit of your life.
- Supplication:** Praying on behalf of other people.

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to develop your honest relationship with the Living God.

To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Henri Nouwen
Teacher/Author

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



AS YOU ENTER

"NOT MY WILL BUT YOURS BE DONE." (MATTHEW 26:39)

Different Areas of Prayer

- Praises:** Psalm 145; Philippians 4:4
- Corporate confession:** Nehemiah 1:3-11
- Personal confession:** Psalm 51; I John 1:9
- Desperation:** Matthew 15:21-28; 26:38-44
- Intercession:** Genesis 18:20-32; Romans 8:26-28
- Unanswered prayer:** 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

The Model Prayer Matthew 6:9-13

Read Jesus' model prayer and then talk to God in your own words.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"
(Let God know how great He is.)

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
(Trust God for His will to be done amid the darkness in and around you.)

"Give us today our daily bread"
(Tell God your needs and ask Him to meet them today.)

"Forgive us our debts"
(Tell God all your sins of thought, word and action.)

"As we also have forgiven our debtors"
(Forgive those who have offended you and offer them grace.)

Your Heavenly Father

Knows all about you and loves you just the same (Psalm 139)

Will always be with you to give you strength and power (Isaiah 41:10)

Is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness (Jonah 4:2)

Has forgiven you all of your sins (Colossians 1:13,14)

Will finish the work in you that He started (Philippians 1:6)

Delights in His unchanging love for you (Micah 7:18)

Has a mansion in heaven prepared for you (John 14:2)

AS YOU LEAVE

- MAKE TIME IN YOUR DAILY SCHEDULE TO COMMUNICATE WITH GOD.
- START A PRAYER JOURNAL TO SEE HOW GOD WORKS IN AND THROUGH YOU.
- PRAY HONESTLY ABOUT EVERYTHING AND TRUST THE LIVING GOD!

PERSONAL FOULS

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX (WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?)

THE HURDLE

You would think having a successful relationship, whether sexual or not, would be an easy thing these days. People have been hooking up for thousands of years, and today we've got books, magazines, and endless talk shows that discuss how to be happy in a relationship. So why are broken relationships the norm? Seems like marriage ceremonies are really only a first stage of the divorce. I sometimes wonder whether a genuinely loving relationship with the same person is possible. But I'm still holding out hope that it is—but I'm not sure where to look for help. The crazy thing is, Christians don't seem to be much better at maintaining relationships than non-Christians.

If you have seen or could imagine a loving relationship with the opposite sex, what would it look like? Describe it.

Even if deep down you wanted meaningful, loving relationships, given the current divorce rate and culture, do you think it is possible? Why or why not?

What unique relational challenges or temptations do athletes face in light of popularity, power, money, and the sport itself? Are men different than women in these areas?

Whenever I date a guy, I think, "Is this the man I want my children to spend their weekends with?"

Rita Rudner
Writer and Comedian

I HEAR YA

The Bible has much to say about relationships and sexual expression.

God created relationships: "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18)

Relationships express sexual intimacy: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me." (Song of Solomon 7:10)

Uncontrolled lust turns to lies and murder: "David...saw a woman bathing; and the woman was beautiful in appearance ... so David sent and inquired about the woman." (2 Samuel 11:2-3)

God owns your body: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord." (I Corinthians 6:13, 19-20)

Our culture sends plenty of messages about relationships and sex, but it's easy to forget that God created them both. He offers a plan to experience life at its fullest, even in the sexual area.

LISTEN UP!

Read I Thessalonians 4:3-8.

1. What is your initial reaction to God's command to "abstain from fornication" (sexual immorality)?

Definition of sexual immorality: The word fornication (sexual immorality) comes from the Greek work, *porneia* which means *sexual practice that lies outside the circle of God's revealed will, namely adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, and homosexuality.*

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

2. What criteria do you use about whether or not sex will be a part of your relationship? How might men and women differ in their approach to sex?
3. The apostle Paul challenges the Thessalonians in this text to live out God's will by being different (sanctified), set apart from the world's standards and way of living. According to these verses, how and why are we to be different?
4. God's negative commands ("Don't do this...") exist to protect us and provide for us. How might God's admonition to us about sexual immorality both protect and provide?
5. The New International Version in verse 4 says that we are to control our own bodies in a way that is holy and honorable (pure, different). In a culture where we are constantly encouraged to participate in sexual pleasures, what is wrong about lustful passion and what are the consequences to you or others?
6. What does it communicate to another person when you are self-controlled and other-centered? How would this contribute to a meaningful, loving relationship?

For THE Record

God created relationships and sexual expression for human fulfillment, but when we don't follow His plan, it results in brokenness and confusion. When you introduce sex into a relationship outside of marriage, it's self-serving and destructive, even if it doesn't immediately feel that way. Sex outside of marriage unites you another person in a way that is irreversible. Ironically, when we care more about the welfare of others than ourselves, we honor God and ultimately get what we're after in the first place—real love. To rid ourselves of the world's view of sex takes a lot of work and courage to follow God against the norm. Our attempts to fulfill legitimate needs illegitimately always end in ruin for us and for others, but God promises the possibility of a different ending for those who listen to His leading.

YOUR MOVE

1. List three ideas from this study that you have never heard previously or something that just challenges your thinking or behavior.
2. In your own sexual experience, whether limited or extreme, what has been your primary motivation?
 - ___ It makes me feel loved or valued
 - ___ It makes me feel powerful or respected
 - ___ It just plain feels good
 - ___ I don't want to miss out
 - ___ I have to test it before getting married
 - ___ Just another trophy on my shelf/ just wanted to see if I could get him/her
 - ___ I love this person and wanted to show it
 - ___ Pressure from partner

While the above motivations are legitimate human needs or longings, if we pursue them illegitimately (sex outside of marriage), we won't get what we really want in the end (loving, meaningful relationships).

3. Why is it important to be dating someone who shares the same Christian values?
4. What boundaries do you need to set now and for your future relationships in order to have other-centered relationships and to remain sexually pure? Who can you share this information with who will encourage you and hold you accountable?

Visit **The Training Room** on the next page so that you can continue to grow in godly, fulfilling relationships.

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

C.S. Lewis
Author, *The Four Loves*

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"WE HAVE INSTRUCTED YOU HOW TO LIVE IN ORDER TO PLEASE GOD." (1 THESSALONIANS 4:1)

Becoming the Right Person

A good relationship is more about becoming the right person than finding the right person. What do these verses say about the person God wants you to become?

- Romans 12:1, 2
- Micah 6:8
- Colossians 3:1-10
- Philippians 2:3, 4
- 1 Corinthians 15:33

30 Day Challenge!

For 30 days, "sensitize yourself" to all of the messages you see and hear about sex and relationships (friends, television, computer, magazines, etc.) and identify the messages being sent. Are they godly or self-centered? Do they invite self-control or unrestrained passion?

Codependency

Codependency is not just about same-sex relationships. In many ways, we are all codependent since we are trying to meet our needs through other people. Look at the list below to see if you may be codependent to the degree that it affects your daily life. Melody Beattie, author of *Codependent No More*, developed this check list:

- Do you feel responsible for other people--their feelings, thoughts, actions, choices, wants, needs, well-being and destiny?
- Do you feel compelled to help people solve their problems or by trying to take care of their feelings?
- Do you find it easier to feel and express anger about injustices done to others than about injustices done to you?
- Do you feel safest and most comfortable when you are giving to others?
- Do you feel insecure and guilty when someone gives to you?
- Do you feel empty, bored and worthless if you don't have someone else to take care of, a problem to solve, or a crisis to deal with?
- Are you often unable to stop talking, thinking and worrying about other people and their problems?
- Do you lose interest in your own life when you are in love?
- Do you stay in relationships that don't work and tolerate abuse in order to keep people loving you?
- Do you leave bad relationships only to form new ones that don't work either?

AS YOU LEAVE

- ASK GOD TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT HEALTHY, GOD-HONORING RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE AND TO PROVIDE YOU WITH EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW.
- PRAY FOR STRENGTH AND SELF-CONTROL AS YOU FACE THE SEXUAL TEMPTATIONS OFFERED BY THIS WORLD.
- MEMORIZE A FEW VERSES THAT WOULD REMIND YOU OF THE TRUTH AND FORTIFY YOUR SOUL IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE.



LIVIN' LARGER

SOCIAL JUSTICE (AM I MADE FOR MORE THAN SPORT?)

THE HURDLE

At every level of competition, I've always thought of my participation in sports as fun for me and entertainment for others. But after recently hearing a sermon on social justice, I wonder: As a Christian athlete, should I be concerned with using my sport and the influence it provides to somehow lessen other peoples' suffering? I suppose that seems pretty dramatic, but now I can't get the question out of my head: What does being a Christian athlete have to do with caring for marginalized or hurting people? I've been focusing on being a good person myself by working hard, not cheating, respecting competitors, having a positive attitude, but now I'm wondering if that's enough.

My Christian friends seem to be at one extreme or another when it comes to this issue. One says we should work on separating ourselves from the "world" and its cares, emphasizing only the spiritual dimension. Another friend involves herself with lots of community service but never seems to speak directly about Christ with anyone.

Why is it difficult to think of the words "sport" and "compassion" in the same sentence?

Can you think of a situation recently where your heart was moved to compassion for others?

Can you relate to either of the scenarios described in the second paragraph above? How?

**Science may have found
a cure for most evils,
but it has found no
remedy for the worst of
them all—the apathy of
human beings.**

Helen Keller
Blind and Deaf Educator

I HEAR YA

The Bible is full of people who struggled to understand the harmony between being good and doing good, between loving God and loving their neighbor.

Jesus questions the religious: "If you love those who love you, what reward have you?...and if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?" (Matthew 5:46,47)

Moses challenges those who are blessed: "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother. Rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs." (Deuteronomy 15:7,8)

John explains real love for God: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (I John 4:20)

James encourages a faith in action: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15,16)

For THE Record

True religion demands seeing the world as God sees it, broken beyond human repair and in need of both spiritual and physical transformation. While the "kingdom of God" will not be fully experienced until Christ returns, His followers bring a taste of heaven to earth every time they act contrary to its brokenness in His name. God's spiritual renewal in our lives is not solely for our benefit, but so He can live through us: healing broken hearts, restoring damaged relationships, redeeming material creation. A personal ethical cleansing is only part of our commission—touching the world around us with the compassion of Christ fills it out. Jesus uses the unique shape of our lives—personality, talents, experiences, spiritual gifts, even athletic influence—to bless the dark corners of the world with life-giving involvement. Ministering to those in need around us is not a community-service box to check; it IS the Christ-following life lived out.

LISTEN UP!

A religious man in Jesus' time tried to prove he was righteous without being caring or compassionate. Jesus uses a story to illustrate that "true righteousness" is evidenced by how well we love and care for others, especially those who cannot care for themselves. He challenges the man to rethink what it means for God's love to be demonstrated in the world through His people.

Read Luke 10:25-37

1. Describe what happened to this 'No Name' man going to Jericho.
2. When you read about these types of situations in the news, how do you tend to respond initially? Do you lean toward compassion or toward judgment? Why?
3. Identify the three people who saw this hurting man and their initial response to the situation.

	Person	Response	Possible Reason
a)			
b)			
c)			

Luke mentions that each person "saw" this man in the same situation. What might they have "seen" from their perspective and why do they observe it so differently?

4. Describe in detail what the Samaritan did for this man. What were the possible risks involved personally, socially, and economically?
5. Which person in the story can you most identify with and why?

YOUR MOVE

1. Describe when you have “been on a journey” and passed by someone hurting in need of help, either on your team or elsewhere. How did you feel and what are possible reasons you passed by?

- You were in too big of a hurry
- You didn't really know how to help
- You didn't really want to be inconvenienced
- You already have enough concerns of your own
- Your help really is nothing compared to the needs in the world

2. After learning about the Samaritan's response in this study, does your view of what it means to live out the gospel of Jesus need to change? Would you do anything different above?

3. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is trying to bridge the gap between loving God and loving neighbor, between an individual spirituality (vertical) and a social concern for others (horizontal). American churches historically tend to organize themselves around one of these two extremes below. Which side do you tend toward?

Individual Spirituality

Word oriented
Tract evangelism
Spiritual need focused
Separate from the culture
Systematic theology
Conservative politics

Social Concern

Action oriented
Feed the poor
Physical need focused
Engage and restore the culture
Practical theology
Liberal politics

4. If the gospel of Jesus demands caring for both the spiritual and physical conditions of people, how might leaning too hard on one column or another hinder you from living out the entirety of the gospel? If you see yourself solely in one of these camps, what adjustments in your perspective need to be made?

5. Write the names of two people on your team or in your work setting that you avoid simply because they are *insignificant* or *different* (racially, socially, economically, physically, etc.)? In what ways (if any) are these people viewed differently by those who have money, power and influence? What steps could you take now toward being a Good Samaritan to them?

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more exercises to challenge your heart and increase your capacity to care for others.

Those whose names are written in gold letters in the honour roll of humanity are not those who looked at their fellow-men with a conscious and a contemptuous superiority, nor are they those who regarded the struggles of mankind with a cool detachment; they are those who cared so much, and who sorrowed so much, that the sorrow of their hearts drove them to spend their lives in the service of mankind.

William Barclay,
German Theologian, 1907-1978

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLLY WITH YOUR GOD?" (MICAH 6:8)

Are You Prejudice?

Being prejudice means that you 'prejudge' or are impartial to someone for particular reasons: social or economic status, religious background, color of skin, popularity, etc. Most people would not admit to being prejudice but everyone is to some degree for we cannot escape our own worldview shaped by our culture, family background, and experiences. Reflect on the passages below to see what God might be saying to you about your own prejudices.

James 2:1-13 Are there certain types of people you applaud or honor?

Isaiah 58:1-12 Does your 'religion' embrace social needs?

Matthew 25:31-46 Do you care for the hurting or marginalized?

Community Service or Relief Work

While seeing and meeting needs as you journey is ideal, it may help your heart and confidence to get involved with community service or relief work in your town. Not only will it help others, but will also unify your team around a higher purpose for existing together.

Here are some ideas:

- Organize prison sporting events or visitation (Angel Tree)
- Serve in soup kitchens or clothes closets (Social Service or churches)
- Help to repair homes (Habitat for Humanity or churches)
- After school programs or tutoring
- Big Brother Big Sister Program

Sports and Social Justice

Sports, like music, plays a powerful role in culture, transcending language, social and economic barriers. Can you imagine what could happen if there was racial unity and generosity embraced and modeled in sports? If athletes and coaches were willing to stand up and lock arms for social justice, the world might take notice that people who are often considered in a high position can go low enough to be kind and compassionate toward those who are hurting. Reflect on the book of Esther in the Old Testament, especially chapters 1-4, and make observations about Esther.

Heritage and family background:2:1-7

Character and courage:4:1-17

Esther realized that an opportunity was knocking for her to stand up for the marginalized even though it might cost her. Esther 4:14b could read "who knows whether you have not attained 'this position' for such a time as this?" **If not now, then when? If not you, then who?**

AS YOU LEAVE

- **MEDITATE ON JAMES 2 AND ASK THE LORD TO GIVE YOU COMPASSION TO SEE OTHERS AS HE DOES.**
- **WAKE UP EACH DAY INTENDING TO SERVE OTHERS NO MATTER THEIR SOCIAL STATUS OR COLOR OF SKIN.**
- **PRAY FOR COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES.**



TIME OUT

SOLITUDE: (IS MY INNER LIFE TOO CLUTTERED TO “LIVE WELL”?)

THE HURDLE

In my sociology class a professor said, “We’ve become a society with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone.” I didn’t agree with her at first, but the more I’ve thought about it I’m not exactly sure where “quiet” can even be found anymore (even if we did want it!). TVs hang in the fitness rooms, cell phone messages and texts flood in constantly, coaches and teammates and other relationship expectations come from every direction. I never thought of headphones, billboard advertisements and social media updates as forms of negative “noise,” but I suppose it all adds to the constant cluttering of my mind. I never thought about all the mental busyness that makes up my day as being something bad—is it?

Are you more of a “being” person (introspective, reflective, person-centered) or a “doing” person (task-oriented, busy, product over people)? Explain.

Do you believe one approach to life is better than the other? Why?

Which is valued more in our society? What makes you say this?

What do you think Pascal means by his quote? (to the right)

The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.

Blaise Pascal
Philosopher (1623-1662)

I HEAR YA

There are people in the Bible who tried to balance quiet trust with zealous activity.

People of God wait in silence: “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him.” (Psalm 62:5)

God calls out His people: “In repentance and rest you will be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength, but you were not willing (to listen).” (Isaiah 30:15)

More isn’t always better: “Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

A challenge to slow down: “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

For THE Record

Like Jesus, separating ourselves from the sensory onslaught of daily life is a choice with a cost, but it's an option that pays immeasurable returns. Moving away from the constant noise of life enables us to fully experience God and all that He has for us so that when we interact again with others, we are anchored by a steadied soul and an ability to interact more fully with all that surrounds us. Purposeful solitude empowers us to be in right relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, and with creation around us. Regularly stepping away from the relational and sensory demands of daily life enabled Jesus to remain focused on His purpose for being on earth, producing a clarity and peace of mind and spirit now made available to all who follow His pattern. *There are no short cuts: doing God's will on the outside requires first carving out time toward being a different person on the inside.*

LISTEN UP!

Throughout the gospels, crowds pressure Jesus everywhere he goes. They want his time. They want his teaching. They want his power. Ironically, while Jesus certainly wants to help people, he knows his effectiveness *with* them depends on the quality of his time *away* from them.

Mark 1:35-39

1. In verse 35, Jesus got up early and literally went to an "uninhabited" place. What do you think prompted him to go to a place with no one around first thing in the morning?
2. How might someone in the crowd have felt if they had a real need and Jesus was unavailable to meet it because of His time in the "uninhabited place"? Do you think he's justified/right in His choice to separate? Why or why not?
3. How might Jesus' time in the "uninhabited place" affect his own relationship with God, himself, and other people?
4. What might Jesus lose by obliging the crowds all the time? What might He lose by staying in solitude all the time?
5. How is this snapshot of Jesus' life potentially applicable to your own?

YOUR MOVE

1. Knowing your own temperament, how difficult is it to separate yourself from the constant sensory stimulation of daily life? Are you able to create space in the midst of daily life to work on your “inner” life and fully experience all God has for you? Explain.

2. Using the list below, identify the top three obstacles that keep you from creating space for solitude.

- I have never thought about it or felt the need
- I am undisciplined
- Facebook keeps me connected to people
- What else would I do?
- I cannot stay focused very long
- Everyone else’s demands of me
- The silence makes me uncomfortable
- I am scared of my own thoughts or of being alone
- I am afraid of what God might tell me

Why are these obstacles for you?

3. How would the following relationships benefit if you created space in your life?

- relationship with God
- relationship with yourself
- relationship with others

4. Consider the following quote:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. (Henri Nouwen, teacher/author)

What will it take to move from good intentions to actually creating space in your soul?

For more help in creating space in your life to renew your mind and soul, visit **The Training Room** on the next page.

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



The intentional stripping of our creature comforts, creating a context where we are miserable without our iPods, vehicles, laptops, kitchens, debit cards and friends, is a gift to our souls. It reminds me of what matters, who matters, and the person I long to become.

Donald Whitney
Teacher/Author

THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

“JESUS DEPARTED OFTEN AND WENT TO A LONELY PLACE; AND THE MULTITUDES WERE SEARCHING FOR HIM, AND CAME TO HIM, AND TRIED TO KEEP HIM FROM GOING AWAY FROM THEM.” (LUKE 4:42)

Mountaintop Experience

Climbing mountains is hard work, but the effort brings both peace and perspective. From the mountains you can see clearly—getting a birds-eye view of both what dwells beneath and what lies on high. In the same way, silence and solitude are means of experiencing those same benefits. Read the passages below and record what happens on the mountains with these particular people, then place yourself in their story.

Moses in Exodus 19:1-6 Get away to hear from God (What is God telling you?)
Peter, James and John in Matthew 17:1-5 Get away to gain vision (Where is your place?)

Elijah in I Kings 18:17-39 Get away to intercede (What are you begging God to do?)

Jesus in Matthew 5:1-16 Get away to teach (Who can you bring with you?)

Desert Experience

Intentionally restrict yourself from electronics or some other modern conveniences for three days (iPod, cell phone, stereo, texting, radio, television, computer, etc.) and record how you feel. Consider these questions: Was it hard for you? Did you have extra time? How did you fill the time? What did more quiet or space feel like? Did you have any compulsive needs? Were you able to experience any personal benefits?

I will restrict: _____ for _____ days

I felt:

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Sharpen Your Saw!

Sharpening your saw when cutting wood may take some time but the results are worth it...greater capacity, productivity and enjoyment. The same is true in your own life. Stephen Covey in *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* writes that “sharpening your saw” means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have—you. It means having a balanced program for self-renewal in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual. Feeling good just doesn’t happen. Living a life in balance means taking the necessary time to renew yourself. Creating space in your life where you can withdraw from your compulsions and clutter will give you freedom to think, feel, reflect, and pray. If the Son of God needed to withdraw, how much more do we finite creatures need it?

AS YOU LEAVE

- **REMEMBER: SOLITUDE IS NOT A LUXURY—IT’S A NECESSITY!**
- **SAY NO TO COMPULSIVE “CLUTTERING” AND SAY YES TO REAL LIFE.**
- **CHOOSE TO MAKE TIME ON A DAILY BASIS TO GET AWAY SO YOU CAN THINK, FEEL AND PRAY.**



YOUR REAL OPPONENT

YOUR REAL OPPONENT SPIRITUAL WARFARE (WHO IS OUT TO GET ME?)

THE HURDLE

I've always been a competitive athlete and now I'm a Christian, but lately I've become more unsettled with how I've been influenced to think and act as an athlete. If I'm honest, a lot of my thoughts are layered with stress, anger, bitterness—toward my coaches, the other team, the refs, sometimes even myself. The relentless pressure to perform leaves me wondering if I'm measuring up, consuming me with what others think of me. I know I'm supposed to love God and others, but that's probably impossible in sports. Sometimes I think, "Don't just play hard. Kill 'em!" or "You're an idiot for missing that play" or "We lose this game and our season is nothing." Something just doesn't seem right with all of it. I want to do right by God and sports but there sure seems to be a lot of negative stuff that just passes for 'normal' in the athletic world. Where does all that junk come from?

Do you ever experience thoughts or feelings of discouragement, an inner "voice" that says "You're not good enough as a player or person so you might as well give up?" When or why?

Can you describe a situation where you or your teammates griped about others or each other, causing division, distrust and factions?

Do anger and revenge fuel your life more than love and gratitude? Explain.

**Warfare is one thing:
it is a philosophy of
deception.**

Sun Tzu
Chinese Military General

As crazy as it may sound, there is a spiritual world where battles are currently being fought. The situations discussed above are settings for what the Bible calls "spiritual warfare." You may be surprised to learn that you have spiritual enemies who are committed to ruining your life.

I HEAR YA

The bible is full of people who experienced the challenge of this warfare ...

Adam and Eve: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?" (Genesis 3:1-2)

David: Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Jesus: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

The Early Church: "Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so that they are unable to see the glorious light of the good news that is shining upon them." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Satan wants you to despise yourself so that you don't experience God's love for you. He divides and conquers, creating division so that God's people are not unified. He deceives people into thinking that his way (the world's way) is the best.

These are subtle but specific strategies of Satan, an invisible spiritual opponent of God and his followers. Failure to see or believe in him does not hinder him from messing with your life.

YOUR REAL OPPONENT

LISTEN UP!

Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

1. In verse 12, what words are used to describe our spiritual enemy?
2. God commands us to put on the full armor of God, to suit up and be prepared to face our opponent. What is the purpose of armor in battle? What happens if you fail to suit up?
3. Ephesians 6:14-17 describes the “armor of God” provided for every Christian. Look at the chart below. Write a simple definition or synonym for each piece of armor, then consider its opposite under “Strategies of Satan”.

Armor of God	Definition	Strategies of Satan
Truth		
Righteousness		
Peace		
Faith		
Salvation		
Word of God		

4. Equipped with the “Armor of God,” what does it mean for you to “stand” (v. 11, 13, 14) against Satan?
5. The nature of competitive sports today provides tremendous opportunities for Satan and his army to attack. Can you identify situations in your sport experience where this true?

For THE Record

God is not surprised that at times we gravitate back to our old habits of thinking and acting, especially since Satan tempts us to do so. But when Jesus died on the cross, he broke the power of Satan and opened a door for us to live free of his control—not free of his influence or temptations, but free to choose Life instead of Death. God leaves us in a world system currently controlled by Satan, surrounded by people in rebellion to the things of God—but he does not leave us alone! He gives us a salvation that sets us free; a true righteousness we don’t have to earn; a peace that knows He is in control, His Word which tells us the truth, and faith to stand strong against doubt. So suit up!

YOUR MOVE

1. If you were Satan, how would you attack *you*? What areas in your life would you target: negative thoughts about self, doubting God, lack of discipline with your body, anger toward others, destructive habits, apathy, etc?

2. As you understand your vulnerabilities, identify one or two pieces of armor that would directly combat those areas. For example, if you are taking advice from a teammate that perpetuates retaliation toward others, begin to trust God's Word as the highest standard for living, and instead offer compassion and forgiveness.

Weakness:

Armor:

Weakness:

Armor:

3. Begin to pray Warfare Prayers. You might pray something like this: "God, You are Lord of my life and Satan can no longer use _____ to maintain dominance over me. I will put on my armor each day and trust You to fight my battles. I take my stand with You and accept the authority you've given to me. Thank you for the power to resist the schemes of Satan in my life!" Consider writing your own and keep it with you.

Prayer is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God ... It is for those on active duty.

John Piper
Pastor/Author

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page to grow stronger in battle against the enemy of your soul.

THE TRAINING ROOM
[OVER] 

***There is no neutral ground
in the universe; every
square inch, every second, is
claimed by God and
counter-claimed by Satan***

C.S. Lewis
Author/Professor

THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"WE DON'T WANT SATAN TO WIN ANY VICTORY HERE, AND WE'LL WE KNOW HIS METHODS!" (2 CORINTHIANS 2:11).

Know Your Enemy

Deception- Satan is called a liar, the father of lies (John 8:44), clouding people from the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is also called the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9) and an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), looks good but evil on the inside.

Division- Divide and conquer is an old military strategy because a unified front is much more difficult to defeat. Anger, slander, and unforgiveness break relationships. (Ephesians 4:25-31)

Fear -of the unknown, fear of failure or a fear of engagement with the enemy, Satan uses to his advantage. Christ has stripped him and his demonic hoard of their power. (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15)

Temptation and Enslavement- Satan wants to enslave us to sin or destructive thoughts (2 Peter 2:18-19). Temptation leads to sin which leads to shame which leads to cover up.

Guilt & Shame- Satan will address sin by accusations (called "the accuser", see Zechariah 3:1). He says, "You are such a hypocrite, such a loser. You call yourself a Christian?" The cross has freed us from guilt and shame so that we have forgiveness and hope.

Fight in God's Strength

Power Source: Word and Prayer - Ephesians 6:13-18 remind us that the Word and prayer are what's needed to constantly sustain our life in order to be clear-headed and prepared for Satanic attacks. The simplest way to explain those two commands is to so saturate yourself in the Bible so that your thoughts and your prayers begin to take on the perspective and desires of God. "Prayer is foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons."

Power Realized: Authority of Jesus - The primary aim of the cross was not only to save us but also to defeat Satan. We see Jesus driving out the cosmic murderer (John 8:44; 12:31), destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), disarming "rulers and authorities" (Colossians 2:15) and rendering powerless the devil (Hebrews 2:14). He gives us that authority and outfits us with power to continue expanding His kingdom and engaging the brokenness of this world.

Sample Warfare Prayers

Read a passage and pray back to God in your own words.
2 Thessalonians 3:3-5
James 4:3-8
1 Peter 5:6-10
1 Peter 2:9-12
2 Corinthians 10:3-5

AS YOU LEAVE

- REMEMBER CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION DEFEATED SATAN ONCE AND FOR ALL.
- STAND FIRM IN THE SPIRITUAL ARMOR THAT GOD PROVIDES.

SHOW ME THE MONEY!

STEWARDSHIP (WHAT DO I DO WITH MONEY?)

THE HURDLE

It'd be nice to have a multi-million dollar contract for playing sports and promoting products, but that's not my reality right now. Money is always on my mind. I often talk to myself about how much I'm going to need, how I'm going to get it, the things I will own, the places I will go. If I'm honest, I probably think more about money and "stuff" than just about anything else. But what's wrong with that? Taking care of me and my family is an important pursuit, isn't it?

How much time and energy do you spend thinking about money? Why is/isn't this an issue for you?

Do you consider money more of a burdensome responsibility or a pleasurable pursuit?

When you think about God and money at the same time, what comes to mind?

Particularly in the American culture, money plays a huge role in our thinking about education, lifestyle, access to pleasure, etc. Every day books are published, TV and radio shows broadcast, and seminars taught on how to increase our wealth.

I'm tired of hearing about money, money, money, money. I just want to play the game, drink Pepsi, and wear Reebok.

Shaquille O'Neal
Professional Basketball Player

I HEAR YA

The Bible includes examples of people and their approach to money ...

Solomon: ...God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." ... Solomon answered, "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people." ... The Lord was pleased ... so God said to him, "Since you have asked for this—not long life or wealth for yourself ... I will do what you have asked. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honor..." (I Kings 3:5-13)

Haggai: "The silver is mine and the gold is mine declares the Lord of Hosts." (Haggai 2:8)

A Poor Widow: "But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more in the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.'" (Mark 12: 42-44)

Jesus: "So do not worry, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33)

For THE Record

God owns it all! Though the resources and amounts He gives vary from person to person, we're each responsible to boldly invest "our" resources in what God deems important. The key idea in both directions is trust: He wants to entrust us with His resources and we trust Him by seeking ways to bless others with what He gives us, keeping our hands open so He can give and take away as He pleases. When we close our hands we short-circuit the flow of trust in both directions. We must embrace His ultimate ownership of "my stuff" and allow Him to trust us with more or less as He sees fit. Investing resources with a kingdom mindset in this life pays dividends both here and in the one to follow, guaranteeing a "well done, good and faithful servant" for all who take His promises seriously!

LISTEN UP!

Read Matthew 25: 14-19.

1. How does the master treat each servant the same? Differently?
2. While the servants have differing amounts at their disposal, they each have to decide what they will do with it. Make a general list describing how they might use the money.
3. In summarizing verses 20-30, we discover the master labeled the first two servants "good and faithful" for investing his money and getting a return on their investment. The last servant, who buried his money and gave it back to him unchanged upon his return, is deemed "wicked and lazy". What do you think about the master's response? Do you think he is justified in casting judgment on his servants for what happened with the money? Why or why not?
4. According to vs. 24-25, why did the last servant hide the master's money? What role does fear play in your handling of money?
5. How might the first two servant's attitudes toward the master affect what they did with the money?

YOUR MOVE

1. Do you really believe that “your” money is actually His money? What has shaped your current belief?

2. As you consider your thinking and use of money to this point in your life, are you mostly a spender, giver, saver, worrier, hoarder, or something else? Why? If you viewed money the way God does, how would you manage your money differently?

3. Sometimes we use money in an attempt to satisfy a deeper need. Look at the examples below and see if you are trying to meet deeper needs through money.

- Money gives me power to rule over others
- Money lets others know I am smart and/or successful
- Money keeps me from being under someone else’s control
- Money gives me freedom to do what I want
- Other _____

What is wrong with this belief?

4. How is your view of money challenged after doing this study? Be honest about what you’re still struggling with when it comes to stewarding money. Ask God to help you surrender your thoughts to His will for you in this area.

A Wise Prayer: “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God (Proverbs 30:8b-9)”

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for practical exercises in managing the Master’s money.

Money and possessions are a very effective tool God uses to grow us up. Therefore, we shouldn’t ask, ‘God, why are you doing this to me?’ but ‘God, what do you want me to learn?’

Ron Blue
Financial Counselor/Author

THE TRAINING ROOM

[OVER]



THE TRAINING ROOM

AS YOU ENTER

"IF WE HAVE FOOD AND COVERING, WITH THESE WE SHALL BE CONTENT." (1 TIMOTHY 6:8)

Meditation about Money

Pick 3 days to read and meditate upon these 3 passages. We are in a growth process where God uses money as a ...

- **Tool** to teach us contentment, balance and interdependence (Philippians 4:10-14)
- **Test** of our faithfulness and trustworthiness (Luke 16:10-12)
- **Testimony** of Jesus living through us producing good works and leaving a "good taste" in the mouths of others (Matthew 5:13-16)

Money is a major topic in the Bible! Sixteen out of 38 of Jesus' parables deal with money. The New Testament speaks more about money than heaven and hell combined. Money is written about five times more than prayer, and while there are 500 plus verses on prayer/faith, over 2,000 verses deal with money and possessions.

God wants to guide our hearts and minds toward a proper perspective about money. While His instruction is challenging, it is also the gateway to fully enjoy the riches He entrusts to us!

My Personal Budget

Put together a simple personal budget. Record for 2 months ...

- what you earn as wages
- what you receive as gifts
- what you give back to God and others
- what you spend on needs and wants
- what you save for the future

What changes do you need to make to become more responsible and generous with what God gives you to manage?

Your Heart Is With Your Money! (Luke 12:34)

Read these statements and verses then write down what God is saying to you through them.

- If you attend to your financial plans and dreams, your investment strategies, your clothes closet, and your salary package more than knowing and serving God, than your heart isn't really with God. (See Matthew 6:19-24)
- Don't try to fool God with "appearances" for how giving and generous you are! (See Acts 5:1-4)
- Loving and longing for money leads to all sorts of evil and sinful actions (see 1 Timothy 6: 7-10)

A Wealthy Landowner: Speaking to the people, he (Jesus) went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot." Then he told them this story: "The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop... Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!' "Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barn full of goods—who gets it?' "That's what happens when you fill your barn with self and not with God." (Luke 12:16-21)

How do these truths stir your thinking?
What specific challenges do you think they provide accomplished athletes and coaches?

AS YOU LEAVE

- OFFER YOUR HEART TO GOD DAILY
- CONFESS GREED, FEAR, COVETING
- SEEK WAYS TO BLESS OTHERS FINANCIALLY