



WHAT DOES IT REALLY
TAKE TO BE GREAT?

Life Sport



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FOLLOW UP BIBLE STUDIES

The Follow Up Bible Studies are written to introduce the athlete or coach to what the Bible has to say about the specific issue dealt with in the Critical Issue. They are very simple and focused Bible Studies based on one or two Bible passages. Each one contains a life and/or sport application and closes with a simple prayer. These can be given to an athlete to go through on their own or walked through with the coach, chaplain or mentor. It should take about 20 minutes. As you are finishing up a Critical Issue with an athlete you can simply ask them a questions such as, "I hope this has been helpful to you. If you are interested, I also have a similar piece which explains what the Bible has to say about this issue which has been developed for athletes like yourself. Would you be interested in meeting again and looking at that together?" Additionally, after you have gone through a Critical Issue and Follow Up Bible Study with an athlete, you can also offer them the Theological Perspective to work through on their own.

Finally, if you are presenting these materials or walking an athlete or coach through them, it is important to not present yourself as more credentialed or qualified than you are. We are not trying to replace sport psychologists, nutritionists, or financial planners. It is best to print and present only one issue to an athlete or coach at a time, so as not to overwhelm or confuse them. Simply print out the Critical Issue that deals with the felt need you are trying to address and present that to the athlete or team you are working with. Then if you have opportunity to follow up with them, move on to the Follow Up Bible Study for that particular Critical Issue.

It is our prayer that these materials allow you to serve the athletes and coaches with whom God has given you influence, or perhaps to open doors for you to serve an athlete, coach or team. We pray that these materials will not only help athletes with practical problems they are facing, but also lead to discipleship and growth of these athletes in coaches as they wrestle with the areas they are passionate about from a Biblical perspective.

**The beliefs and opinions expressed in this curriculum are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the athletes pictured therein.*

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

If you are taking an athlete through a Critical Issues or Follow up Bible Study (see below), it may be helpful to read through the Theological Perspective piece under which the Issue falls. Currently there are eight Theological Perspectives. These pieces have been written to give you more understanding of what the Bible has to say about the larger areas such as emotions, the body or money. Because we cannot all be experts in every issue an athlete or coach may deal with, we have enlisted experts (biblical scholars and sport practitioners) to deepen our understanding of these issues from a biblical perspective. This will help you answer further questions to those you are trying to help and give you deeper insight into the spiritual needs underlying the specific. The Theological Perspectives are intended to help you prepare to walk an athlete or coach through the Critical Issue or Follow Up Bible Study.

CRITICAL ISSUES

The core of the material are the 25 Critical Issues which range in nature from Body Image, to Fear of Failure, to Fair Play. The Critical Issues are written in such a way that the athlete or coach can walk through them on their own or alongside a chaplain, coach or mentor. Each Critical Issue offers practical help with the particular issue the athlete is dealing with to help them succeed in this area of their sport or personal life. The coach, chaplain or mentor can present this practical help to an athlete or a team based on a felt need observed or expressed, a coach's request, or as a personal development curriculum.

The Sport Life series is designed to give practical help to the elite or high level athlete on a wide range of issues from a Christ-centered worldview. There are three types of material in the series: Theological Perspectives, Critical Issues and Follow Up Bible Studies.

USER'S GUIDE

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

the human body

In these bodies we play sports and live life. The human body is linked to the thrill of victory, the disappointment in defeat, and sweat of fatigue. How should we think about and inhabit our bodies as Christ-followers? What convictions and principles help us to make sense of our bodies? If God has made you athletic, then the pleasure you experience in your body should relate to what God says about your body.

IF GOD CREATES AND PRONOUNCES THAT OUR BODIES ARE GOOD, THEN AS THE CREATOR HE GIVES OUR BODIES MEANING AND PURPOSE IN SPORT AND LIFE.

We do not just have bodies. We are our bodies. Our bodies inescapably relate to who we are and what we do in sport and life. No bodies, no sport. Sport is an embodied performance which humans do in the good bodies God created. That means our bodies matter. Since our bodies are good gifts from God, then, what we do with the work of our heads, hands and feet in the games we love to play should support and express the God-given value of the human body. A Christ-centered understanding of the body is informed and transformed by the story the Bible tells about human bodies.

SPORTS SPRING FORTH FROM OUR CREATED BODIES AND EXIST IN A WORLD THAT GOD ENTHUSIASTICALLY DECLARED IS GOOD.

In Genesis 1, we read that God is the creator of all things and God repeatedly announces that everything He made is good. In fact, God summarily concludes after creating everything that all of “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). That means first that whatever God makes is part of his good handiwork, and, as his wonderful creation, He blesses it as a gift. God does not make mistakes. Just as flowers, lakes, and mountains are never merely what we perceive them to be so also our bodies signify divine splendor and gift. Our bodies are instruments of God’s grace and they allow us to explore creatively the good gifts and pleasures of sport (e.g., mastering skills, contesting with others’ bodies, discovering our potential and bodily limits, etc.). These bodily experiences are gifts and they should point to God, for God made us to bring forth excellence and joy in our sports.

Second, it means that if God makes and blesses our bodies as good then they are not fundamentally bad. Now, of course, our bodies can be used for either moral good or moral evil but they are not intrinsically evil. An athlete, for example, can use her body as a weapon to harm others, which when done is morally wrong, or she can coordinate and discipline her bodily movement skillfully to serve her teammates and co-contestants, which is morally right. Unfortunately, there has been an unhelpful belief adopted both by both committed believers and not-yet-believers that the body is inherently evil or indifferent. If our bodies are evil, then physical exertions and contests such as sports would be blameworthy from the start. It also means that there are two sources of creation: one god who creates good things, like souls, and another god who creates bad things, like bodies. If true, then anything we do in our bodies would be evil. Bad bodies, bad sport. When followers of Jesus have wrongly believed this, it has often meant that ministry, for instance, is more about the soul and spiritual matters since these are perceived as inherently good, leaving what we do with our bodies as not really important. If applied further to sport, then sport gets identified as secular, part of this supposed bad world, while evangelism, prayer and Bible study are spiritual and thus, where real sports ministry and kingdom work occurs. This results in athletes, coaches

and sports ministers who profess to follow Jesus, but have no theological connection of how to relate their bodies to their faith in the world. The apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 4:1-5, argues against this negative view of and indifference to the world when considering food and sex, both of which are like sports, for they are intimately related to our physical bodies and existence. Paul vehemently denies such thinking for he insists that everything God created is good and that we should not reject or deny such things but receive them with gratitude. The writer of Ecclesiastes (2:24-25) says something similar about receiving food and drink as gifts to be enjoyed, for they are from the very hand of God.

IF GOD PRONOUNCES OUR BODIES AS GOOD GIFTS, THEN OUR FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO RECEIVE THEM WITH THANKSGIVING.

When we give thanks for our bodies before, during and after competition, we celebrate to the reality that our bodies are gifts from the hand of God. When we say ‘yes’ to our bodies, we are saying they are good just as God did in the beginning (Genesis 1:31). How we treat and relate to our bodies in attitude, word and deed should correspond to the objective value of goodness and blessing God ascribes to them. The opposite is also true, when we show disgust or hate for our bodies or others’ bodies in our language and treatment, we not only deny or reject bodily dignity but we ultimately curse God for these bodies. Furthermore, any mistreatment of the body trespasses against the goodness of the gift, regardless of the rules or traditions of a particular sport—from fighting and the use of performance-enhancing drugs to eating disorders. And, like all other sins, bodily mistreatment affects our relationship with self, others and God.

SINCE OUR BODIES WILL BE RESURRECTED, HOW WE USE OUR BODIES NOW IN SPORTS SHOULD AGREE WITH THE WHOLENESS WE ANTICIPATE AND HOPE FOR IN THE RESURRECTION.

Although our bodies are created good, the power of sin and death pollute and corrupt human bodies. There is a sin problem in this world which Biblical accounts refer to as “the fall” and this affects all of life including our bodies. When we experience brokenness, disease and the burden of our bodies, it is because sin perverts and misdirects our bodies. The only solution to this problem is redemption in Jesus Christ.



GOD IN JESUS CHRIST CAME TO RECONCILE TO HIMSELF ALL THINGS, WHICH ENCOMPASSES OUR BODIES (COLOSSIANS 1:15-20).

Paul argues that Jesus Christ is Creator and Redeemer which means he is the answer to restoring what sin messes up in God's good created world. This is called "the Good News" concerning Jesus Christ, and it rests on the fact that God came to us in the flesh, a human body. Christ incarnate confirms that our human bodies are good, good enough that the Son of God took on a human body for his body as the way and means for God to redeem us.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul gets right to the point about our bodies and how they relate to the story of Jesus. He concludes that our bodies are important for three reasons: our bodies will be resurrected just as Jesus' body (6:13-14), our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (6: 18-19), and God owns our bodies (6:15-17, 20). The resurrection of our bodies means that the bodies and souls God made in the beginning will remain together as good in the new heaven and earth. God loves us now with our bodies and on into the future. Neither the physical nor spiritual is more sacred; the physical body, as Bonhoeffer states, "possesses a high dignity... Man is a bodily being, and remains so in eternity as well. Bodiliness and human life belong inseparably together."

If our bodies are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then our bodies are sacred and not to be profaned. Paul specifically addresses moral issues related to the body. He addresses sexual immorality, condemning premarital and extramarital sex as wrong, because they offend the very presence of God in our bodies. The Spirit of God connects us more deeply to the moral and physical health of our bodies. However, although our bodies are to be rightly esteemed, they should not be made gods. Their value is linked to God's Spirit, not our bodies in themselves. By implication, any action in sports which harms our bodies shows disrespect toward the Holy Spirit, who now resides in our bodies. If we abuse our bodies, we call into question our Creator and Redeemer's value of our bodies.

Finally, Paul declares that our bodies are under new ownership: God is the Lord of our bodies. When this truth is neglected, players and coaches often think that what they do to their bodies is their own prerogative and they are free to behave as they want with their bodies. Practically, this means that, if you are injured, the team trainers, physicians, coaches and administrators do not own your bodies. You must be honest about your injury while respecting their advice. Playing with pain is never justifiable if it puts you or others solely in charge of what you do with your body and risks further harm to God's care and concern for your body.

NOTES

IF OUR BODIES HAVE BEEN REDEEMED, THEN WHAT WE DO IN OUR BODIES SHOULD GLORIFY GOD.

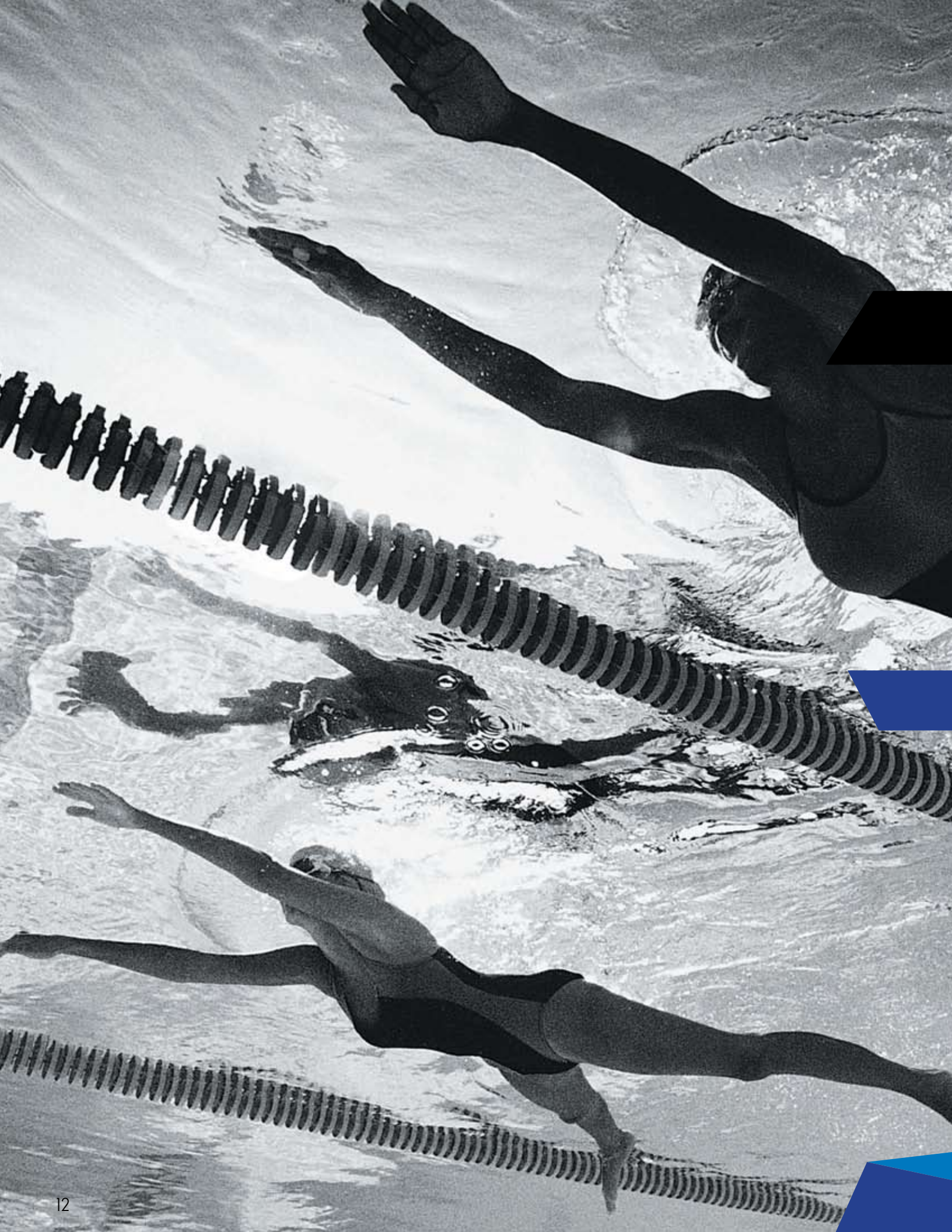
For someone to call him- or herself a "Christ-following athlete," there should be something uniquely Christlike about the way he or she uses the body. Paul makes it clear that as our bodies are owned by God, whatever we do in our bodies should bring glory to God. So, when you run, swim, dribble or pass the ball, you can take pleasure in the body God has given you as a gift to glorify Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is your approach to sports ministry limited to the 'spiritual' (evangelism, prayer and Bible study)? In what ways might you broaden the scope of your ministry to also help sportspeople connect how they relate to their body with their faith?
2. In your particular sports context, in what ways have you observed an under-appreciation of the human body, both in the behavior of others and in your own thoughts?
3. When a star player is injured and the game stops, what is often the greatest concern in the minds of the players, coaches and fans? What about the greatest concern in the mind of God? How might this perspective shape decisions about whether or when the player will return to competition?
4. Imagine you are a sports chaplain or a coach for elite athletes. For the following two scenarios, reflect on how you would address the situation. Allow your knowledge of the God-given value of the human body to inform your approach:
 - > You just met with a football player who is concerned for his teammate who has recently started using performance-enhancing drugs.
 - > A female cross-country runner displays clear warning signs for potential health risks associated with an eating problem. However the head coach continues to allow her to race because she has gotten increasingly faster over the season.
5. In your specific sports context, where do you see each of the following:
 - > Evidence for the created goodness of the human body?
 - > Ways the body is misdirected toward evil (harm toward others or self)?
 - > Opportunities to be an agent for Christ's redemption?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/theology-body



CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

the human body: caring for my body

Imagine your favorite recovery day or out-of-season physical activity—the workout or activity you choose when the training schedule does not tell you what you must do. What emotions, thoughts and senses do you experience as you play on your day off? Does being in your body feel differently on these days than during your intense training workouts?

Every athlete appreciates the importance of systematic training. In order to compete at your best, your time, energy and emotions often need to center on results. It can be useful to view your body as a machine during intense bouts of training. But seeing the body as only a machine can create a disconnection between your physical and psychological self.

ATHLETES CAN CREATE AN IDENTITY BASED ON BODILY PERFORMANCE ALONE AND CAN NEGLECT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF A BALANCED VIEW.

You have probably experienced negative emotions and perhaps even injury following excessive periods of machine-like training. Unbalanced training can cause athletes to burn out.

Playful physical activities provide a reminder that we are more than machines. The enjoyment, satisfaction and rest hint that our bodies are an important part within a whole and balanced system. A holistic view of your identity can allow you to experience meaning within your athletic performances, even the machine-like ones.

Step Back and Evaluate

- Do you view your body primarily as a way to perform and achieve specific goals or skills?
- What is more important for you: experiencing meaning through your sport or the outcome?
- When was the last time you enjoyed a physical activity for its own sake?
- Have you made decisions that you knew would harm your body because you thought it would benefit performance?

	DUALISM	MONISM	HOLISM	
	Parts are distinct. My mind is independent and more important. My body is dependent and less important.	Parts are not distinct. Physicalist: "I am all physical" OR Idealist: "I am all mind."	System can't be reduced to parts. "My whole system determines how parts behave."	MIND & BODY
	I can undervalue my body.	I can create an identity based only on my physical body and neglect.	I view my body as part of a balanced, whole system.	IMPLICATIONS

Tips for Maintaining a Balanced Perspective

- Schedule rest days into your training that do not focus on results.
- Focus on sensations, thoughts and emotions during your workout.
- Engage in relaxation techniques on most days (meditation, prayer, music, etc).
- Use this time to appreciate the connection between your mind and body.
- Pursue interactions and conversations that include more than training details.

*"I am my body."
—Gabriel Marcel,
20th century French
philosopher*

RESOURCES >>> *The Price of Gold* vimeo.com/51345348

BIBLE STUDY

the human body: caring for my body

Our ability to do sport, well or poorly, is highly correlated to the attention we have given to our bodies in the hours, days, weeks and months leading up to the sport event. Sport is a competition of bodies and minds.

The Bible has much to say about how we care for the bodies God has given us. After the completion of creation God declared our bodies, along with the rest of creation, to be "very good." In the New Testament, the apostle Paul transfers the Old Testament concept of the temple of God to the human body. The ramifications of this transfer extend even to how we care for and use our bodies in sport.

4. In what ways do you need to take more care to honor your body, or temple, in and through sport? What things do you need to "flee" in order to care for the body God has given you in and through sport?
5. Based on this passage, does God consider the physical or the spiritual more sacred? Who from your sporting circle would benefit from understanding this distinction?

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE BODY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME. HELP ME TO CARE FOR IT IN A WAY THAT BRINGS HONOR TO YOU AS I DO THIS THING I LOVE, CALLED SPORT. PLEASE PROTECT MY BODY FROM INJURY, AND GIVE ME WISDOM AS I TRAIN AND DEVELOP IT.

READ 1 COR. 6:12-20

1. Name four general observations about the human body from this passage.
2. What value is placed on the body in this passage?
3. The passage gives both positive (caring for the temple) and negative (avoiding sexual immorality) instruction for body care. How can we relate both these positive and negative instruction regarding the body to our use of our bodies in sport? Try to give specific examples.

Additional Bible References on Caring for Your Body >>>
1 Corinthians 15:35-55, 2 Corinthians 5:1-6.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

the human body: performance enhancing drugs

Performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) continue to impact sports on a global scope, despite deaths in the Olympic Games, the Tour de France, and in American professional sports. Anabolic steroids, human growth hormone (HGH), blood doping, erythropoietin, diuretics, stimulants and other PEDs have clear health risks which far outweigh the potential benefit of their use, so why do athletes throughout the world continue to use them?

- *HOW DOES A SERIOUS ATHLETE'S DRIVE TO WIN, TO BE THE 'BEST,' AND PUSH THE BODY TO THE LIMITS AND BEYOND, CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR PED USE?*
- *DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS USED PEDs?*
- *REGARDLESS OF WHETHER IT IS PERCEIVED OR REAL, HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DOES A WIN AT ALL COSTS' MENTALITY FROM YOURSELF, OTHER ATHLETES, COACHES AND PARENTS HAVE ON YOUR DECISIONS?*

Many people describe an elite athlete as having been given a 'gift' a body seemingly created to perform on a level far greater than others. Yet, elite athletes know just how much work has been put into that 'gift,' and just how hard it is to maintain their elite level of performance. The 'gift' can lead to a lifetime of adoration and opportunity. The pressure to maintain the 'gift' can lead to choices in an athlete's life, the results of which will last a lifetime.

The use of PEDs by athletes has been implicated in higher rates of joint and muscle injuries during their career, as well as early onset of heart and vital organ failure, unwanted psychological changes, crippling arthritis and more. It is critical to understand the risks of PEDs, also known as doping. The costs compared to the physical gains are profound. The long-term effects are still not well researched. Many people are devastated and careers destroyed due to a lack of knowledge, and a desire to maintain the 'gift' at all costs. A German university study found that among elite athletes, 10.2% admitted they had used PEDs and as many as 24.7% may have used but not admitted their use.

The choice to use PEDs affects not just the athlete but it has an impact on the lives of those who love them and follow their careers. It has been reported that family members of several athletes have been drawn into the PED behavior by assisting the athlete with the implementation of the drugs or the cover up of the behavior. This has irreversible, life-changing implications on the athlete's loved ones. The behavior of the elite athlete has influence on youth and children involved in competitive sports in all cultures. One U.S. study found that, 5.9% of males and 4.6% percent of females aged 12-18 had used anabolic steroids and another cited that

77 percent of males and parents say PED use in professional sports puts pressure on young athletes to use drugs to get ahead. According to Shuaib Manjra, Chairman of the Institute for Drug-Free Sport in South Africa, "South African doping control stats clearly show the use of performance enhancing drugs is on the increase among adolescent athletes and among the adult population." So how can athletes of all ages and genders resist the pressure to use PEDs?

TIPS FOR LIFE

1. *Develop your leadership role as an elite athlete by learning as much as you can about PEDs so you don't have to depend on the opinions of others.*
2. *Take responsibility to ask questions about what is being put in or on your body.*
3. *Form a small team of fellow athletes committed to being transparent with one another in order to stay drug free in training and competition.*
4. *Learn all you can and compete with wisdom and poise.*

REFLECTION

1. *What does your response to the pressure to use PEDs tell you about how you value the body you've been given?*
2. *If you chose to use PEDs, how would the public report of your use of PEDs impact your loved ones?*

RESOURCES >>> World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) wada-ama.org • Taylor Hooten Foundation taylorhooten.org
Performance-Enhancing Drug Abuse and Cardiovascular Risk in Athletes, British Journal of Sports Medicine, July 2012
Elite Athletes' Estimates for the Prevalence of Illicit Drug Use: Evidence for the False Consensus Effect, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

BIBLE STUDY

the human body: performance enhancing drugs

How did you feel when you found out that a world class cyclist had been lying for years about doping? Did you understand his rationale or were you angry that he had deceived the world? Why?

In the Bible, God does not specifically address the issue of doping but He does have some words of wisdom about how our bodies can be a vessel to honor Him in the midst of a competitive world seeking to get ahead

“A balance between the physical and the spiritual dimensions ensures we do not idolize the body but respect it; not making it an instrument to be improved at all costs, perhaps even using illicit means.” —Pope Benedict XVI

4. Paul suggests in verse two that we change the way we think about life (and sports) in order to discern what pleases God. This can be difficult. How might abstaining from PED's be an expression of gratitude and trust?
5. In Mark 8:36-37, Jesus says that many people will exchange their soul for something temporary and worldly, but in the end they lose out. What kind of loss might He be talking about? How far would you go to achieve what you want? Why?
6. Is there anyone who can help you process this challenge? Or can you think of anyone else who might want to offer their sport to God and get to know Him?

DEAR LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE BODY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME. THANK YOU FOR THE ABILITY TO TRAIN IT AND ENJOY IT THROUGH SPORT. HELP ME TO ACCEPT THE LIMITS YOU HAVE GIVEN ME AND TO LIVE WITHIN THE LAWS I AM GOVERNED BY. HELP ME TO HONOR AND WORSHIP YOU WITH MY BODY AND PLEASE GIVE ME STRENGTH AND GRACE TO PLEASE YOU ABOVE ALL ELSE.

READ ROMANS 12:1-2

1. What ideas come to mind when you read how the apostle Paul describes the purpose of the body in this passage?
2. Verse one says to “offer” or “present” your body to God as a gift offering of thankfulness. When you give a gift to someone, what is your motive? Have you ever considered that your athletic pursuits and your body could be an acceptable way to thank God?
3. As believers, we are to live differently than those around us (*not being conformed to the world* in verse 2). If PED's are used to gain an unfair advantage over others and God's heart is about fairness and sacrifice, why do you think so many athletes and coaches prescribe the use of drugs?

Additional Bible References on Substances & Your Body >>> Romans 13:1-5 *God has established governing authorities to ensure fairness to all.* 2 Timothy 2:20-21 *Our bodies are to be a vessel of honor.*



THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

play, sport, competition

Although the good of sport is often misdirected by human-centered motives, sport is a gift from God for the betterment of individuals and communities. This gift calls us to treat competition as an act of worship (saying thank you), and to play in a Christ-like manner: demonstrating love, honor and respect to the game and all who participate.

SPORT AND A BELIEF IN CHRIST ARE INTERTWINED.

Sport and religion have long been intertwined. Sport has at various times been seen as a vehicle for communion with the divine (e.g. the ancient Olympics), a frivolous exercise and a distraction from the serious business of living (e.g. the Puritans) and a means of character-building and moral improvement (e.g. the “Muscular Christianity” movement). More often than not, Christ-followers have had a negative view of sport because they think that time could be better spent, that the competitive side brings out the worst in us, or that sports are associated with sinful practices such as drinking and gambling.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that our ability to play and enjoy sport is part of God’s creation, thus there is no need to have any reservations about participating in sport. Rob Ellis goes further in arguing that sport “can be a significant contributory factor in the human flourishing that is part of the larger context in which Christian understandings of salvation must be set.” Sport expresses God’s creativity and offers enjoyment through the development of the human body.

SPORT IS AN EARTHLY GIFT FROM GOD DESIGNED TO OFFER ENJOYMENT THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

Genesis presents God as the creator of all things. Of the creation the writer adds, “and God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). The biblical view of creation rules out any notion of dualism. We are not to feel guilty when we enjoy the physical or material, thinking that we should be more spiritual. The material world matters and it is good to enjoy it. Physical participation in sport and play is part of God’s creation and it is therefore in itself good. When the participants play contrary to God’s design, then sport becomes a vehicle for man-centered and misdirected activities.

In Romans, Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). God made us with the capacity to play, co-create and be in relationship, thus enabling sport to become a fully embodied act of worship wherein the mind, body and spirit together give thanks to God. What matters in sport is that we are playing unto a God who gave us our lives and our ability to compete, knows our motivations when we play and loves us no matter what. Athletes who follow Christ are ultimately to play before an audience of One.

What does this look like for an athlete? This does not mean one sings “Amazing Grace” while lifting in the weight room or shouts “hallelujah” when spiking a volleyball. It means that in everything a believing sportsperson does, God is to be the object of his or her expression and adoration. Whether you are playing a game in front of thousands or training alone, every repetition, sprint, pass, or shot is an opportunity to shout thank you to God. A Christ-like athlete works hard to develop physical competence, character, and gratitude as a living “thank you” to the One who made it all possible.

WHEN SPORT IS MISDIRECTED AND MAN BECOMES THE CENTER OF THE ACTIVITY, THE GAME, ITS PURPOSE AND PARTICIPANTS BECOME MALIGNED.

Sport, which is part of God’s creation, is good; however there are ways of relating to sport that are bad. In Romans 1, we see that human’s sin often derives from an inversion of the intended order of creation. Paul says, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” (Romans 1:25). As we have discussed, God is to be the object of our expression—including the ultimate reason for one’s competition. But when man becomes the object and reason for sport, the game and those who participate get misdirected away from what God intended. When the gift of sport is directed toward ourselves, we worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.

One way in which the good of sport is misdirected is through the belief that winning is most important. In sports there is a winner (and losers). This is a necessary aspect of competition. We need competition in order to judge our own performance. Even if we compete simply to find our own limits of performance, this can only be established by comparison with others’ performance or with recognized national standards. The statement “I am an 8 handicap” immediately tells you where the speaker sits in golf’s hierarchy. The misdirection occurs not in having winners and losers, but in viewing this particular outcome as definitive of athletic success. American football coach Vince Lombardi famously said, “Winning isn’t everything—it’s the only thing.” There is another saying in sport, “Second is the first loser.” Both quotes reinforce a misplaced value on winning.

But does the outcome on the scoreboard truly define athletic success? We can play well yet lose to a better opponent. Is there anything to be ashamed of in that? Equally, we might play really badly and win because the quality of the opposition was low. Is there much to be pleased about in that? Thus winning and losing is an inadequate means of evaluating our performance in the sports arena.

There is also significant tension within the sportsperson between the performance-based activity of sport and the grace-based message of the gospel. As Shirl Hoffmann, author of *Good Game: Christianity and the Culture of Sports*, says, sport “celebrates the myth of success harnessed to a theology that often stresses the importance of losing.” The tension consists in the perceived lack of compatibility between the performance-based values of the world of sport and the theology of Christ-followers based on grace and undeserved favor. The values of sport teach a person self-reliance and meritocracy; Christ teaches that man’s only hope is to be found in God’s love and mercy. The self worth of the player who follows Jesus is not dependent on their sports performance, but on the fact that God has made them and that Jesus died for them. Simply put, winning and losing is an inadequate measure of success, especially for believers.



When sport becomes performance-based and money-driven we exchange the love of the game for a means to personal glory. Playing is no longer for the love of the game but rather a means to some other end. The film, *Stroke of Genius*, is about extraordinary golfer Bobby Jones who remained an amateur so as not to lose his love for golf. It includes the prophetic quote, "Money, it will ruin sports." When winning, recognition and money are the key motivators for competition, man is the center of the activity and the love of the game is stifled. What really matters in sport is not the public assessment of our performance but that we are playing before God, who has gifted sport to us for our enjoyment, development, and service to the community.

AS CHRIST-FOLLOWERS WE ARE TO LOVE OUR SPORTS NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES.

We compete before a God who lovingly created every human being, and "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Jesus taught His followers to love their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:39), and to even love and pray for one's enemies (Matthew 5:44). Applying the concept of loving one's neighbor in competition may seem revolutionary. What does it look like to love the teammate who has been chosen to take your starting position? What about loving the opponent who has just hit you illegally, or the official whose mistake has just cost you the game? The word competition was formed by the combination of two Latin words, *com* ("together") and *petere* ("to seek"). When we understand that true competition is about *striving together* rather than *striving against*, the concept of loving one's sports neighbor is not so revolutionary at all.

In his book, *InsideOut Coaching*, Joe Ehrmann describes his experience playing opposite John Hannah, one of the greatest offensive lineman's in National Football League (NFL) history. He says, "With almost every collision after the snap of the ball, I felt we weren't so much attacking each other as trying to achieve something together." His words offer a profound antidote to the win-lose concept of competition, which often leads us to demonize the other player or team. A Christ-centered approach to sports values the betterment of community rather than the success of a single individual or team. Joe Ehrmann says his purpose for coaching is "to help boys become men of empathy and integrity who will lead, be responsible and change the world for good." Christ's command to love one's neighbors, and even enemies, is to be carried into competition and not left on the sidelines.

NOTES

AS CHRIST'S REPRESENTATIVES IN THE WORLD OF SPORTS, WE MUST PLAY IN A CHRIST-LIKE MANNER.

For an athlete who calls him- or herself a follower of Christ, there should be something uniquely Christ-like about the way he or she plays. When we choose to follow Christ, we take up the honor and responsibility of bearing His image to others. We are His representatives. Each of us are given a unique sphere of influence, or slice of life, in which we get to live this out. One significant piece of an athlete's sphere of influence is in his or her sport. Sportspeople have a unique opportunity to witness to Christ through their sport.

However, it is not enough for athletes and coaches who believe to simply give verbal credit to God for their success in post-game interviews or for speedy recoveries. Sport should be a witness to God in how we play and not just what we say. "What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:14-26). For the life of an athlete to be transformed by the gospel, she must surrender everything—including the way she plays—to be crafted in a way that reflects Christ. Simply put, we must play in a Christ-like manner.

To play in a Christ-like manner requires we constantly be comparing the way we play to the way marked out for us in Scripture. It requires that one continually be asking what it would look like for the things which matter in God's kingdom (e.g. reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, justice) to matter in sports. It requires that one embody honor and respect in his approach to coaches, teammates, opponents, officials and the game itself. Some Christ-followers in sport use the phrase, "Pray, Play, Say," as a reminder to pray before God, play with others in a way that is honorable, and say about Christ in word and deed. When one rightly understands his or her sport as an opportunity for worshiping God and fostering community with one another, the opportunities to represent Christ in the world of sports are endless.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How is it possible to love your opponent in the heart of the competition?
2. How can you enjoy a game that you have just lost on the field?
3. What affect does win at all costs and money have on elite sports?
4. How does one witness in sports without words?
5. Does this new definition of competition change the way you view your opponents? How?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Daniels, Graham and Weir, J. Stuart. *Born to Play*. Frampton House Publications, Bicester, *Christian Athletes and the Culture of Sport: Dilemmas and Solutions*, 2004.
Download for free: www.veritesport.org/?page=book

Ellis, Robert. *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion and Sport*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014.

Weir, Stuart. *Competition as Relationship, The Image of God in the Human Body*. Edwin Mellen, 2008.
Download chapter for free: www.veritesport.org/?page=theologyofsport

White, Cindy and John. *Game Day Glory: Biblical Principles for Sport*. S.D. Myers Publishing Co, Akron, OH, 2006.



“The drive to win is sport’s most compelling emotional force, and its deepest source of myth and mystery.”

—John Heil, Sport Psychology consultant for US Fencing

At a typical Olympics over 10,000 athletes compete for about 300 gold medals. Everyone is looking for the winning edge over their opponent. How do you approach winning, when it is sought after but not guaranteed? What do you think of when you hear, “You don’t win silver, you lose gold?”

Winning is not guaranteed but is still seen as the most important achievement in a sporting career. Sacrifices must be made to be successful at the highest level. But where is the balance? How can you strive to win but not destroy yourself or those around you in the process? How much are you willing to sacrifice to win?

Examining how you think about winning is critical not only to your competing and training now, but also after it all fades away.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

play,
sport,
competition:
winning

3 VIEWS OF WINNING

WINNING DOESN'T MATTER	BALANCED VIEW	WINNING IS EVERYTHING	
Devalued: Overemphasis on fun, inclusion, equality, and instilling personal value.	Valued tension: Winning involves a process (means) and an outcome (end). Both are important	Overvalued: Overemphasis on the outcome. Identity determined by winning, and external rewards.	VALUE OF WINNING
Based on the degree of inclusion in the fun	Intrinsic value: Human dignity is not based on results or opinions of others.	Extrinsic value: Results, statistics, and opinions determine worth.	IDENTITY & SELF-WORTH
Co-cooperator	Necessary to achieve our best.	A means to an end; an enemy to be beaten and humiliated.	OPPONENT
Serve to achieve equality and protect feelings.	Sportsmanship: Do what is right; rules insure fairness and safety for all competitors in their pursuit toward excellence.	Gamesmanship: Do whatever it takes to win; rules are only important when they are to my benefit.	RULES
How much fun can I have?	How should I play to win? It is a serious contest pursued responsibly and enjoyably.	What must I do to win? It is a bitter duel that obligates me to do whatever it takes to win.	COMPETITION
DEFICIT	EXCELLENCE	EXCESS	

- Which view of winning do you most identify with?
- How do you typically respond after a win or a loss?
- What are you willing to sacrifice to win? i.e. health, friends, family, reputation, character, conscience, team, reputation of country or club, etc.

QUESTIONS

RESOURCES >>>

www.charactercounts.org/sports/Olympic/olympic-report-ethicssportsmanship2.htm
www.josephsoninstitute.org/sports/newsletter/sportsnews-2009_08.html

BIBLE STUDY

play,
sport,
competition:
winning

In the very early days of Christ, the Greeks had widely influenced the whole Mediterranean area with their language and culture. They were incredible sports fans, with one of the most intense desires for winning of any people in history.

One historian describes it this way, "The competitive spirit of Greek athletes was fierce; victory was the only reason for competition. After all, the Greeks worshipped Nike (Victory) as a goddess. Defeat was a disgrace." It was into this culture that the Apostle Paul and others began to connect with and spread the message of Jesus. Paul would often use Greek athletics to illustrate his teaching.

4. Because Paul is not a competitive athlete, he is looking at the bigger picture in life. How might this apply to your sport? Your life?
5. Read back through the chart from the "winning" critical issue, evaluating each aspect listed in the left-hand column of the chart to the description Paul gives in 1 Corinthians. What is he saying to you? Put that perspective into your own words.
6. How could you begin to share this perspective with your teammates or coaches?

GOD, YOU KNOW ME, MY COMPETITIVE NATURE AND MY ATHLETIC CULTURE. PLEASE GIVE ME WISDOM AND PERSPECTIVE ON MY DESIRES AND THE PRESSURES TO WIN. WHAT LESSONS CAN I LEARN FROM MY WORLD OF SPORT THAT I CAN APPLY TO MY SPIRITUAL LIFE AND OTHER AREAS OF LIFE?

READ 1 COR. 9:24-27

1. What is the general picture that you receive from this brief description of Greek sport? Is it similar to your situation?
2. What do you think were the athletes' reasons/motivations for competing in the ancient games?
3. What did the ancient athlete have to do to become successful?

Additional Bible References on Winning >>> Matthew 6:24-34. 2 Timothy 4:7-8.
Additional Resources >>> Dunkle, R. Athletics, War, and Aggression in the Greco-Roman World.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

play,
sport,
competition:
fair play

The desire of all sportspeople is to participate in fair competition. When fair play breaks down in sport everyone involved is disappointed; correction and justice are demanded. Consider evaluating your own application of fair play and your response to unfair play.

SPORT IS DESIGNED TO BE FAIR

- Each team or participant has the same opportunity to win.
- The court or field is the same for each team. Teams switch sides to account for conditions that might give an advantage.
- The rules apply the same to each team.
- The referee is expected to be unbiased.

NOT ALL THINGS IN SPORT ARE FAIR

- Athletes vary in size, weight, strength and speed.
- Weather conditions in some countries favor certain sports for longer training periods.
- Athletes have different access to coaches, expertise, training facilities and funding.
- Countries with large populations have access to more potential athletes.

MOST ATHLETES TRY TO FIND WAYS TO GAIN ADVANTAGES OVER THEIR PEERS. THIS CAN BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF TRAINING AND COMPETITION. WHICH OF THESE METHODS DO YOU CONSIDER "FAIR" AND WHY?

Training for longer hours, taking performance enhancing substances, selecting a qualified coach, improving diet, breaking a rule if the ref cannot see you, developing a strength gaining program, "trash talking" an opponent, filming your own practice sessions and games, delaying a game to gain some rest or composure, scouting an opponent, wearing illegal equipment.

Sport is full of unfairness. When we try to make it completely fair, we often come away disappointed. We can lose control when we point fingers at competitors who cheat, but we can control our own reactions to unfair situations. We can also control our ability to play well without worrying about others. How do you handle an unfair situation in your sport?

- If everyone played fair, what would sport look like?
- What do you think is the source of our desire to see sport played fairly or the source of our desire to gain advantages in unfair ways?
- In your experience, do those who do not play fair in sport display successful lives outside of sport?
- Compare the results of unfair play in sport with unfair play in relationships or marriage.
- How can learning to deal with unfair play by others in sport help you in your life outside of sport?

"Fair play gives sport the character of beauty."

*–Jeno Kamuti,
President of the
International
Committee for
Fair Play*

RESOURCES >>> www.fairplayinternational.org/fairplay/the-essence-of-fair-play
www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1065.pdf
 Good video on examples of fair play: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4slheYpV7sk

BIBLE STUDY

play, sport, competition: fair play

In competitive sport, it is often tempting to slide under the radar of the rules and gain an advantage. "As long as I don't get caught, then is it really wrong?" Why are rules established for sport in the first place? Is it possible to play by the rules and still play against the spirit of the game?

In the Old Testament book of Micah, God indicts His people for observing certain rules but missing the whole point of character and morality. God's standard is higher than the rules or the scoreboard. In order for people to flourish and live in harmony, the rules and the spirit must be equally emphasized.

4. How might humility increase your ability and willingness to be just and kind in sport, especially with your opponent or officials? In life?
5. Employees at a successful international organization were challenged to ask themselves four core value questions before making any decision. Look at the list below and check your character scoreboard. This week, how can you encourage a friend to grow in one of these areas?
 - Is it the truth?
 - Is it fair to all concerned?
 - Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
 - Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

GOD I ADMIT THAT I AM SOMETIMES TEMPTED TO BEND THE RULES TO GAIN A PERSONAL ADVANTAGE. HELP ME BECOME A PERSON OF INTEGRITY, HUMILITY AND CHARACTER IN SPORT AND IN LIFE. I ASK THAT YOU GIVE ME COURAGE TO FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE.

READ MICAH 6:8

1. What does God require of you in this passage? Which requirement do you gravitate toward? Why?
2. Describe the difference between justice and kindness/mercy. What might these differences look like in competitive sport?
3. The last phrase, "to walk humbly with God," implies a friendly relationship between God and man. Do you consider yourself to have this kind of relationship with God? Why or why not?

Additional Bible References on Fair Play >>> *Philippians 4:8-9 Living out what is good, right & true. Proverbs 29 The wise and the foolish. 1 Corinthians 9:27 Playing by the rules as a way of life.*





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

play, sport, competition: role of the coach

“A good coach will change a player’s game. A transformational coach will change their lives.” –Joe Ehrmann, author “Inside out Coaching”

Coaching—so rewarding, yet so challenging! Motivating individuals to train and compete with maximum effort regardless of how they feel or what circumstances they face is both exhilarating and exhausting. Though there are many approaches to get the job done, Ehrmann groups them into two categories: transactional coaching or transformational coaching.

“Transactional coaches,” he says, “cut deals (make agreements) with their players to get what they want out of them: ‘Give me this kind of work and I’ll give you minutes on the field.’ Transformational coaches help shape and guide who their players are.”

TRANSACTIONAL

Leads with negotiation, manipulation and threats

Punishes poor performance by yelling or withholding praise, playing time or participation

Players exist to serve the coach’s pursuit of success

Physical performance is all that matters

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Leads by inspiring and motivating to produce positive change

Offers individual support and encouragement to each player

Has clear vision for the desired impact on players’ lives

The goal is to develop the whole person

Here are three principles of coaching to provide a framework for evaluating your philosophy and where you fall on this spectrum. How do you rate your coaching in these three areas?

1. Competition: skilled performance; physical and mental training, nutrition, strategy.
2. Celebration: love of the game, fun, enjoyment of the process.
3. Character: respect for others, perseverance, attitude, honest about abilities and limitations.

Obstacles which make these three principles challenging include:

1. The pressure to win (not only to keep your job, but also to please fans, parents, federations.
2. Your own weaknesses, and the overwhelming number of things required of you to manage the program.
3. All of these factors create stress, which tends to lead coaches toward transactional coaching methods.

Assuming a transformational model of coaching will not only improve the motivation and productivity of your athletes, but you will all be healthier and happier in the process.

TIPS FOR LIFE

- Use these questions to discover and/or clarify the foundational values and philosophy of your coaching: Why do you coach? Why do you coach the way you do? What does it feel like to be coached by you? How do you define success? What kind of person are you becoming? Becoming better outward requires looking inward.
- Embrace the big picture by understanding that coaching is part of your life (not all of it). Refuse to allow it to rule your life and relationships. Spend quality time with family and develop other hobbies or interests.
- How many of the athletes you coach will reach a level in their sport which will allow them live from the sport? Based on this percentage, how will the way you coach shape those athletes you coach for the rest of their lives?
- Find safe people for encouragement and accountability (people who know nothing about your sport are particularly refreshing to befriend).

RESOURCES >>>

www.coachforamerica.com/images/stories/pdfs/coc_coach.pdf

www.devzone.positivecoach.org/resource/article/double-goal-coach-job-description

www.sirc.ca/blog/motivational-coaching-it-matter-carrot-or-stick

BIBLE STUDY

play, sport, competition: role of the coach

Coaches are leaders designed to lead others in a direction toward excellence. As Christ-followers, we do not just coach the skill of the athlete, but we are called to coach the heart of the athlete. We are called to be transformational coaches, not just transactional coaches.

Jesus Christ was able to transform His disciples and followers in the way He loved them and served them. That may sound like a tall order, beyond your capabilities and energy, but an athlete will be more motivated toward growth on and off the field when you focus on their total development.

4. Jesus was God in the flesh and still He did not hold onto His power for Himself. List three ideas where you might serve your athletes physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually?
5. Do you know other coaches you could lead toward this type of coaching philosophy? Or others who could help you to become a transformational coach?

LORD, I PRAY THAT I WOULD BE ABLE TO SERVE MY ATHLETES AS YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR CHILDREN. PLEASE HELP ME GROW MY TEAM, NOT ONLY IN THEIR SKILL LEVEL, BUT ALSO IN THEIR HEARTS. FINALLY, LORD, I PRAY THAT YOU WOULD MOLD MY HEART AND TRANSFORM MY MIND TO BE MORE LIKE YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-7

1. What in this passage speaks to you the most?
2. Describe the characteristics found in Jesus that you are to imitate.
3. In what ways can coaching be selfish? How could being a servant and other-centered help you become a more transformational coach?

Additional Bible References on Role of the Coach >>> | Peter 5:1-3 *Lead with eagerness, be a good example.* | Timothy 4:7-8 *Lead others toward God-likeness.*



THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

character

Sports are formative influences that can contribute to the development of character, which we define as the ability to reflect the good nature of God in being and doing. Jesus Christ is our perfect model and guide to integrity, humility, justice and mercy—pillars of godly character. Through Christ's redemption, which restores God's good image, all people—including sportspersons—have the capacity to achieve and develop character that displays God's glory unto the world.

SPORTS: DEVELOPING OR REVEALING CHARACTER?

The notion that participation in competitive sports develops character has existed for decades. But if this notion is true, then why are we repeatedly confronted with headlines of athletes abusing their bodies with drugs or getting caught fixing matches? Why are we so familiar with stories of coaches who have turned a blind eye to compliance violations or sexual misconduct among their players? Did these athletes and coaches lose their character in the heat of the moment, or did they have very little to begin with? Was the sport environment itself the culprit? Who is ultimately responsible for the development of character among individuals and teams?

In addressing questions such as these, it is helpful to consider sports as a microcosm of all of life. From this perspective, we can see that sports, like all of life, are filled with situations which test our character and reveal the sort of people we are in the midst of conflicting values, confusing role models, and competitive natures. Sport is not merely a physical test, but a test of character. Russell Gough, in his book *Character is Everything*, draws a link between sportsmanship and ethics, describing them as being two sides of the same coin. While ethics is a matter of being good (character) and doing right (action), sportsmanship is a matter of being good and doing right in sports (Gough 19-22). How one exhibits sportsmanship in the heat of competition will reflect his or her character displayed in all of life.

Victor Frankl, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, began his inquiry into the constitutional make-up of a person while living in a concentration camp, an unimaginable test of character. Frankl's observation and analysis concluded that while the camp environment shapes a consistent and uniform response to pain and suffering, there were some prisoners who maintained their dignity, finding meaning and purpose, and others who did not. Those who achieved the personal victory of preserving their "inner hold," according to Frankl, all had similar attitudes toward life and its purpose. They had a faith in something beyond themselves, hope in more than release from camp, and a community of love from their past and present.

Cultural experiences, such as playing sports or even living in a concentration camp, reveal, challenge and develop character. The development of character is the responsibility of all who choose to participate in sports. The development of character in sports should be of utmost concern to those who are conscious of the One to whom they and their sport belongs.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS, INCLUDING SPORTSPERSONS, BEAR THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE INNATE CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE AND DEVELOP CHARACTER.

This means that humans, through their intellect, emotions and will, have the ability to reflect the nature of God at all times, in all places and all circumstances. Not only are we capable of reflecting God's nature but it is the purpose for which we have been created. Humans along with all of God's creation have been designed to magnify God's glory. In other words, we have been created so that God might be displayed through our character, which shines through our earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). Therefore, character in its truest sense is about living this God-ordained purpose. It is about displaying God through our entire being, beginning with the heart.

Unfortunately, in the world of sports we have often reduced character to merely playing by the rules or helping a fallen opponent. While these actions are good, the idea that these behaviors encompass what it means to have character in sports demonstrates a short-sighted understanding of character. True character, understood as reflecting the good nature of our Creator, runs much deeper than outwardly visible action. It passes the test when nobody is watching, applauding or counting. True character is lived out in the weight room and in practice as much as in the important games and matches -- in private as much as in public. True character stands when all others have fallen to peer pressure, and when there is nothing to be gained. True character is a matter of integrity.

While the Israelites saw themselves as upstanding and righteous people, God saw through their facade. Throughout the Old Testament, God repeatedly indicts his people for their hypocrisy, pretending to be people of character when in reality they were putting on a show. They lacked the true embodiment of character grounded in integrity - where the inside matches the outside. In the book of Micah, God confronts them, rhetorically asking if they ought to perhaps offer more sacrifices, money, or even their bodies to please Him. Then, God lays out his simple yet challenging requirements: "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). No man-made religion or attempt to earn God's favor would do; the people of Israel needed a change of heart before there was any hope for them to be a light, displaying God's image to the nations. While character in sports and in all of life manifests itself in action, it begins in the integrity of one's heart, in one's particular attitudes toward God, life and others.



THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST IS OUR EARTHLY VISION OF CHARACTER ON DISPLAY.

Jesus is our model of a solid “inner hold,” our example of good character rooted in integrity and a proper perspective toward God, life and others. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). So when we want to know what good character looks like, we have no better example than Jesus who is the fully embodied vision of faith, hope and love. Giving glory to God, which is synonymous with being a person of character, is to represent Christ on earth in humility, justice and mercy. This means showing kindness to the strangers, marginalized and children. When accused or suffering, it means not retaliating but forgiving and trusting God who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-25). It is also embodied in offering provisions to the hungry (John 6:1-14), blessing the generosity of one in low social standing (Luke 21:1-4), and seeking to serve rather than be served (Mark 10:45). Sportspeople can strive for this inner victory by learning to incarnate Jesus through embracing the kingdom values He exemplified. Theologian N.T. Wright concludes in his book, *After You Believe: Why Character Matters*, that we need a true “transformation of character that takes us beyond our earthly pursuit of money, sex, and power into a virtuous state of living that allows us to reflect God and live more worshipful, fulfilling lives.” The person of Jesus Christ is both the means and measure of such transformation of character.

THE SPORTS CULTURE IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE, FOR GOOD OR BAD, BUT SPORTS CANNOT CONTROL THE DESTINY OF PEOPLE.

Sport has the unique ability to affect the total person physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Therefore, it stands to reason that sport can and does provide an environment to influence all manner of character, both good and bad. But sport also reveals character, who we really are as a person. We hear brash boasting, disregard for authority, and expletive-laced language, and we often see cheating, questionable tactics, and unsportsmanlike conduct. Less frequently however, we are blessed with humble winners, selfless sacrifice, and fair-minded players. The difference depends on the values we are adopting - those of the coach, the local cultural system, or kingdom values? Jesus states clearly in Luke 16:15, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” Is it possible, in our sports-crazed culture, that we could unknowingly be promoting qualities that are detestable to God? In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged the powerful Roman culture and their closely held beliefs. As we examine our own beliefs we must ask ourselves, “Does this character trait display God’s character to the nations?” Coaches, parents, athletes and fans must identify and intentionally direct character development to rightfully reflect Christ. In Matthew 15:18-20, Jesus says that the things which flow from our mouths reveal our hearts, our true character. Proverbs 4:23 warns us, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” While sport has the ability to affect the entire person, it does not have the power to determine a person’s character. Character development starts within the heart of a person and the decisions he or she makes along the way.

GODLY CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED BY LEARNING WHAT IS GOOD AND RIGHT AND TRUE, PRACTICING THOSE PARTICULAR VIRTUES ON A DAILY BASIS, AND ENGAGING IN A COMMUNITY THAT VALIDATES AND ENCOURAGES GODLY CHARACTER.

While over-simplistic, it is safe to say that human beings are formed by a combination of the following: their inherited constitution from God and their biological parents, environmental surroundings and experiences as a child, and those who have been in a position of influence (parents, teachers, coaches, ministers, peers). All of these factors work together to affirm particular values and behavioral norms, whether for good or bad. Former professional athlete and minister Joe Ehrmann, in *InSideOut Coaching*, describes his own formation as it relates to family and sports. He grew up in a violent, alcoholic home where his father was either physically or emotionally absent. At age twelve he was gang-raped. Understandably so, his shame and rage went deep. He was a walking volcano; he had a reason to hit people and was good at it. This made him a perfect fit for American football. Coaches celebrated his aggression, which only fueled his anger. Joe wasn’t dealing with the heart issues. Joe did not experience love, respect, and value from anyone. The sport community reinforced his aggression, thereby validating a misguided representation of the person he was created to be.

But as we have stated, past experiences in sport and in life do not have ultimate authority over a person’s character. Frankl rejects this predetermined destiny, saying,

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way... it became clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision.” (66).

Regardless of past or present circumstances, there is always hope to be reformed through truth, practice, time, grace and the support of a validating and encouraging community. The journey is long and there are no shortcuts, but each step enables us to more fully embrace the godly character we were intended to reflect. Imagine the potential transformation that could take place in the lives of sportspeople if the experiences in their sport are allowed to foster their journey toward godly character.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is the scoreboard the only litmus test for success? How can character development become the goal and the scoreboard merely a result?
2. Do you go out of the way to show love and respect for players, opponents, referees? How?
3. Should revenge or retaliation be part of the game plan?
4. How would those around you evaluate your character? Are you, your team members, your players or children growing in character or only skill?
5. How can you avoid allowing sport to become a means for self-validation or for affirming the worth and dignity of another?
6. How can your sport-community affirm the value of every athlete, not only those who are successful?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Clifford, Craig and Randolph M. Feezell. *Coaching for Character: Reclaiming the Principles of Sportsmanship*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1997.

Frankl, Viktor. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006

Gough, Russell W. *Character is Everything: Promoting Ethical Excellence in Sports*. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997.

Willard, Dallas. *Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation and the Restoration of the Soul*. 25.1. (Spring 1998): *Journal of Psychology and Theology* pp 101-109.

Wright, N.T. *After You Believe: Why Character Matters*. HarperCollins Publishers, NY, 2010.



CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

Consider these scenarios: Jake and Jose are pro basketball players. They have similar statistics (points, rebounds, assists), yet Jake is always getting in fights and boasting publicly about his accomplishments. Jose takes time for autographs and invites teammates into his community to be big brothers.

Suzanne and Victoria are competitive soccer players. They both play center mid and are great distributors of the ball. Suzanne regularly gets angry when the striker fails to score. She even complains to the coach that she wishes more teammates were as good as she is. Victoria celebrates the success of her strikers and keeps feeding them good passes. Her positive spirit is contagious and players like her.

WHICH PLAYERS WOULD YOU WANT ON YOUR TEAM? WHY? WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Both scenarios have comparable talent. The difference is the person underneath the skill. One of the best volleyball coaches in the world said that he does not just recruit players, he recruits people. Sport shapes the person either for good or for bad, depending on the character traits that are being developed. True sportsmanship is the combination of acting right (rules and skill) and being good (motivation and attitude) in the context of sport. Sport is beautiful when the full expression of the human being is experienced and witnessed.

"Sport, properly directed, develops character, makes a man courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor; it refines the senses, gives intellectual penetration, and steels the will to endurance. It is not merely a physical development then." Pope Pius XII

character: sportsmanship

TEMPERANCE/ SELF-CONTROL	FORTITUDE/ COURAGE	JUSTICE/ FAIRNESS	PRUDENCE/ WISDOM
No retaliation with bad calls, no gossip with limited playing time, trust the coach, refusal to be jealous over other's success, respect the fans and the marriage covenant.	Great effort even when losing, congratulating an opponent over victory, working harder than everyone else in the weight room, willing to step down when it's time.	Maintaining standard of conduct even for the best players, providing opportunities for those with few resources, allowing every player a realistic shot of competing, appealing to coaches or officials respectfully.	Considering the personal and organizational outcomes before decisions are made, developing the person as much as the skill, listening to another's side of things, being willing to stand up for what is good and right beyond the scoreboard.

Ancient Greek philosophy discussed the Classical Cardinal Virtues. What might they look like in sport today? Can you imagine the opposite? A team without standards and a team without character? Result: chaos, violence, pride, jealousy, laziness, greed.

REFLECTION

1. How could the good habits of character practiced in competition transfer over to other areas of your life?
2. What particular virtue listed above do you need to improve on? How will you do that?

BIBLE STUDY

character: sportsmanship

How are we to improve in the virtues of sportsmanship if we have no reason to do so? Why stop yelling at the umpire or your competitors or teammates? As former professional basketball player Allen Iverson once said, "I would rather win than have good sportsmanship."

Acting in an unsportsmanlike manner does not help us, our teammates or opposition; but how can we change and grow? Which virtues from the list in the Critical Issue did you identify as areas for improvement?

4. How does your reaction reflect your character? What do you learn about the character of Jesus in this passage?
5. What are some things that you can apply from the character of Jesus in your sport which will help you to react or act in a more sportsmanlike manner, both in and out of competition?
6. Is there anyone else who needs this information? Or do you know anyone who is struggling with similar issues whom you could share this with?

DEAR FATHER, THANK YOU FOR THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS, WHO WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT BAD CALLS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL PEOPLE. I PRAISE YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TO PARTICIPATE IN AND ENJOY SPORT HERE ON EARTH. HELP ME TO LEARN THROUGH SPORT TO LIVE MY LIFE IN A WAY THAT HONORS YOU AND BUILDS UP THOSE AROUND ME. HELP ME TO REST IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU KNOW ALL THINGS AND WILL CARE FOR ME.

READ MATTHEW 26:57-68

1. What jumps out to you in this passage? On your first read, is there anything in the text that speaks to you?
2. What character traits does Jesus exhibit under pressure that could also apply to high-pressure sports situations? Would demonstrating such virtues be considered counterintuitive or opposite of what you might expect?
3. How do you usually react when you are wrongly accused, or when there is a bad call from an umpire, official or your coaches?

Additional Bible References on Sportsmanship >>> Galatians 5:10-25 *Think about what character qualities you would like to possess and how these might help you to be a better sportsperson.*





Simply stated, your success as an athlete is a combination of your character and competency. Character is largely who you are on the inside and competency is largely who you are on the outside.

What is character? It is the will and the strength to do what is right even when it is difficult or not popular. Character involves the internal strength and ability to do things like:

- Build effective relationships.
- Define who you are and who you are not.
- Handle hardships, setbacks and temptations.
- Understand and manage your skills and talents by placing them into a larger life mission.

Where in your life, either on the field or off the field, are you experiencing disappointment, failure, rejection, discouragement, anger or fear? When have you sensed the warning signs of a character failure? If you ignored the signs, what did it cost you? A friendship? A spot on the roster? The trust of a coach and teammates?

Athletes and coaches who compete at high levels have put in many hours honing their skills and developing their talents success on the field. But remember that success not only involves competence, but character as well. How much time and energy are you devoting to the development of your character?

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

character: character in sport

PERSONAL CHARACTER INVENTORY

Athletes and coaches are always being evaluated. Your performance is constantly being measured. But who is evaluating your character? Primarily, that is your opportunity and responsibility. Since there is much at stake, why not commit now to assessing, developing and strengthening your character and the person you are on the inside?

1. Take note of where you are experiencing pain, hurt, emptiness, anxiety, fear, doubt, etc. What mistakes have you recently made? Are there patterns and connections you can make? Look below the surface for clues to your inner person.
2. Thomas Macauley, a British historian said, "The measure of a person's real character is what he would do if he would never be found out." Ask yourself, "Am I a different person when no one is around?"
3. Ask trusted friends, teammates and coaches to give you feedback. How would they describe your character? What kind of friend are you? It is wise to learn to embrace the hard realities of truth.
4. Developing solid character is a "team sport." It takes several safe and trusted friends to help you build strong character. How many people can you name who believe in you regardless of how you perform? Chances are good that you need to add to that number.
5. Realistically, how effective are you in identifying your need for character growth and then asking others for help? Athletes do not wait when injured to ask for treatment. Identify your needs as best as you can and then ask others for help.

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

*—John Wooden,
basketball coach*

BIBLE STUDY

character: character in sport

Globally, there are end-of-season or annual sports awards, and usually these awards have a namesake, someone the award is named after. What characterizes that person in your sport? Is it solely about how good they were, or, is the essence of the award also about who they were in and out of competition? Does the award also celebrate the character of the recipient and it's namesake?

American Journalist Heywood Broun said, "Sport doesn't build character, it reveals it." It may do both, if we allow it to. There are many ups and downs in a day of sport and they can prove to squeeze an athlete, how they respond, how they learn, how they react next time both builds and reveals character.

5. What are some areas that you see as character flaws that you could ask for help from others and God to grow in?
6. Does anyone you know dismiss this area of their life? How do you think they could benefit from this? Could you share this with them?

GOD, YOU ALONE HAVE PERFECT CHARACTER, I SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS AREA OF MY LIFE, IT IS REFLECTED IN EVERYTHING I DO AND SAY. PLEASE HELP ME TO LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING CHARACTER, WILL YOU ALLOW TRAINING AND COMPETITION AND ALL THAT IS INVOLVED IN SPORT TO BE A WAY TO GROW MY CHARACTER? MAY YOU BE THE ONE THAT I LOOK TO FOR A SPIRITUAL AND MORAL RADAR IN THE WORLD.

READ MATT. 21:28-32 & 16:26

1. What sticks out to you in these passages? On your first read, is there anything surprising or interesting to you?
2. How do you think the character of the brothers is revealed through their action?
3. What circumstances have you encountered that have either revealed and/or built your character?
4. How might growing in character help your performance? Your relationships? Your team?

Additional Bible References on Character >>> Romans 5:3-5, Matthew 5: 1-16.



THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

emotions

The believer's worldview offers a transformative perspective by which to interpret the vast array of emotions experienced by elite athletes. While sport is a joy-producing gift from the Creator, this treasure is covered up by a performance-based identity, which saturates the culture of contemporary competition. Only the knowledge of God's ever-present and unconditional love can correct unhealthy, performance-driven patterns and liberate athletes into a life of enduring joy.

ELITE ATHLETES ARE OFTEN GIVEN UNHELPFUL, LITTLE OR NO ADVICE ON HOW TO RESPOND TO THE WIDE RANGE OF EMOTIONS THEY EXPERIENCE.

Clearly, emotions are completely intertwined with being a competitive athlete. Champions cannot forget the joy of their first major achievement. Nor can they always block out the horror and embarrassment of a major loss—those painful memories always seem to pop back up when it's least helpful. And what about anger? Anger at opponents; anger at coaches; anger at how others have treated them outside of competition; anger at the shortcomings—or even complete absence—of a parent; anger at oneself for losing. So many elite sportspeople live with anger. The question for athletes who follow Christ is: What should I do with these emotions?

Some folks think elite sportspeople should learn to harness all the passionate energy coming from these emotions to use it as motivation for excellence. Jesus, however, does not condone destructive emotions. Galatians 5 makes clear that the fruit of the Spirit cannot come from the works of fallen human nature. Athletes who rely on negative feelings to spur them on to victory will find they cannot simply turn them off after the competition is over. Anger and fear of shame will rule their personal lives as well (Romans 6:16), often resulting in hurt and harm to the people around them. Jesus, however, wants to transform the negative emotions that happen in sport into something positive and life giving. He wants sport, like everything else in an athlete's life, to be a source of real, abiding joy. After all, that's why God gave them the gift of sport in the first place.

TALENTS AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE GOD-GIVEN GIFTS DESIGNED TO BRING JOY.

The first reason God gives good gifts to human beings is for pure joy. As a witness to His providential care for humankind, God gives the people of Earth the sun and rain, plenty of food to eat, and the opportunity to turn their hand to a variety of activities in order that they may have joy (Deuteronomy 16:16; Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17). The Psalmist recognizes sport as one of these joy-giving activities: 'In the heavens [God] has pitched a tent for the sun which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course' (19:4b-5).

By comparing the feeling champions experience when performing their sport to a honeymoon—intense physical satisfaction and emotional contentment all at the same time - the Bible could not offer much higher praise for the joy of sport. As a God-given gift, every race, every game, every performance is an opportunity to experience afresh the thrill that comes from doing something God designed the heart of every sportsperson to love.

THE JOY OF SPORT, HOWEVER, BECOMES HIDDEN WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO USE IT AS A MEANS OF PROVING OUR WORTH AND SIGNIFICANCE.

Born estranged from God, we lack the sense of wholeness that can only come from being in a right relationship with Him. Like Adam and Eve hiding from God in the Garden, we turn to the natural capacities He has given us and "make fig leaves" in an effort to cover our nakedness and shame at feeling empty (Genesis 3:7). We use our talents to prove our worth and significance to others and, even more importantly, to ourselves. As a result, the greatest pastoral need for elite athletes is to understand that the Gospel is the antidote to their bondage to performance-based identity.

A PERFORMANCE-BASED IDENTITY PERVADES THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF ELITE ATHLETES.

So many factors in competitive sports encourage athletes to base their identity on what they are able to prove they can do. When sportspeople buy into this lie, they completely mess up their emotional guidance system. More often than not, they are trained to feel good about themselves only when they are winning. When they lose, they are expected to internalize a deep personal dissatisfaction with themselves. This faulty theory perpetuates the notion that if their emotional experience of losing is sufficiently horrendous, they will they find the willpower to make every sacrifice necessary to claw their way back to self-respect by winning the next time. Current psychological research only confirms that performance-based identity leads to fear of failure among elite sportspeople before an event, and a deep sense of worthlessness as well as shame afterwards if they lose. After all, as one athlete told a researcher, "If you lose, you're nothing."

THE STORY OF ANDRE AGASSI OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH A PERFORMANCE-BASED IDENTITY CAN GRIP THE LIFE OF AN ATHLETE.

According to Agassi's deeply honest autobiography *Open*, by the age of seven he associated winning tennis tournaments with emotional safety: safety from his father's rage at his not being good enough, safety from his own sense of shame at failing to prove he was good enough, safety from the deep self-hatred he felt as result - a self-imposed emotional abuse which the mature Agassi labeled as 'torture' (2009, pp. 37-38). At age ten, a well-meaning coach told Andre how to harness his internalized anger and shame for success:

"You're hurting right now, hurting like heck, but that just means you care. Means you want to win. You can use that. Remember this day. Try to use this day as motivation. If you don't want to feel this hurt again, good, do everything you can to avoid it. Are you ready to do everything? I nod." (2009, p. 55)



At twenty-two, however, Agassi discovered that even winning a Grand Slam was not enough to heal the wounds from all the self-torture he had inflicted on himself to gain such an achievement. After his victory at Wimbledon, he realized that, “winning changes nothing . . . a win doesn’t feel as good as a loss feels bad, and the good feeling doesn’t last as long as the bad. Not even close.” (2009, p. 167). Because so many elite sportspeople instinctively shame themselves as the price of, and power for, excellence, most champions compete not to win—since the thrill of victory is so short-lived. Rather, they compete not to lose—so as to avoid the bitter sting of their own deeply cutting emotional self-torture.

GOD’S STEADFAST AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE ALONE LIBERATES AN ATHLETE’S PERSONAL WORTH FROM THE BONDAGE OF PERFORMANCE.

The first step in helping elite athletes to gain emotional wholeness is to teach them how to separate their personal worth from their athletic performance. For only love has the power to make human beings feel truly significant, not achievement. Only knowing they are loved unconditionally will give them a sense of worth and value that will not go away, even when their athletic prowess does. Failure to make the crucial distinction between significance and achievement will hold hostage the self-esteem of athletes to the ups and downs of competition, and make their emotional lives a complete wreck as a result.

Of course, the only source for an assured, steadfast, unconditional love is God Himself. Sportspeople who follow Jesus, therefore, have a wonderfully clear opportunity for a different source of worth. According to the Bible, their worth and value is to be found solely in the love God proved He has for them by dying for them on the cross. While we were yet enemies, Christ died to reconcile us to God (Romans 5:8-10), and through the gift of personal faith (Romans 3:23-24), sinners are reckoned righteous, despite their evident shortcomings (Romans 4:5). There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). They are adopted as God’s own children forever (Romans 8:15-17). Nothing in all creation can ever separate believers from the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:31-39).

THE BELIEF THAT GOD IS THE ULTIMATE COACH FOR WHOM WE PERFORM SPIRITUALLY IS A MAJOR SPIRITUAL TRAP FOR MANY CHRIST-FOLLOWERS IN SPORT, AND NEEDS IMMEDIATE CORRECTION.

Always remember, however, the Bible’s teaching about God’s grace is an especially important principle to communicate to elite athletes who already follow Jesus. Why? Because so many outstanding sportspeople who believe still think they have to earn God’s love. They look at our Heavenly Father as the ultimate coach who rewards or punishes their spiritual purity with success or failure in sport. When they win, they think that their spiritual faithfulness has gained them favor with God, and like a good luck charm, this divine blessing gave them their competitive edge. But when they fail, such thinking comes back to bother them. They end up listening to the lie of the Devil who points out their sins (Revelation 12:10) and says, “God knows you weren’t spiritually good enough today—that’s why you lost.” Only a proper understanding of grace will save Christ-following athletes from seeing God as the worst ever ‘bad dad’ sports coach who cuts them from the team in the face of spiritual failure. The only thing worse than experiencing the pain and loneliness of losing, is not being able to go to God for assurance and hope, because you think He is punishing you for letting Him down.

IN KNOWING OF GOD’S GRACIOUS AND ENDURING LOVE, WHICH WORKS ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR GOOD, ATHLETES CAN FIND JOY THAT ENDURES THE TRIALS OF BOTH SPORT AND LIFE.

Of course, the joy of the Lord is the sportsperson’s ultimate strength (Nehemiah 8:10). But athletes can only have abiding joy when they know that God is a good steward of pain in sport—not its source. As sure as Easter Sunday follows Good Friday, Jesus promises His followers that He does indeed work all things together for good (Romans 8:28). All the pain that they have experienced in sport won’t have the last word. Redemption and wholeness will come, but in God’s way and God’s time. As one Olympic chaplain always tells athletes, “God’s love takes us on journeys we do not wish to go; He makes us travel by roads we don’t wish to use; but only because He will take us to places we never wish to leave.” (Davis, 2008, p. 169). Only knowing this kind of gracious love from God will save elite athletes from performance-based self-torture in their sport and in their faith. That’s why the Gospel is essential for a sportsperson’s emotional health.

NOTES

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How did I treat myself after I lost a big match?
2. How do I look at myself after I sin?
3. What gives me joy in sport?
4. What steals my joy in sport?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Ehrmann, Joe. *InSideOut Coaching: How Sports Can Transform Lives*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Null, Ashley. *Real Joy: Freedom to be Your Best*. Holzgerlingen: Hänssler Verlag, 2004.

Null, Ashley. *Finding the Right Place: Professional Sport as a Christian Vocation*. Found in Donald Deardorff and John White (Eds.), *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and Sports* (pp. 313-66). Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2008.

Weir, J. Stuart and Daniels, Graham. *Born to Play!* Bicester: Frampton House, 2004.

White, John and Cindy. *Game Day Glory: Life-Changing Principles for Sport*. Xenia: S. D. Myers, 2006.



“Failure makes you despondent and irritated with yourself and it affects your play badly...”
—Elite teenage athlete, answering a survey on failure in sport

Fear of failure can trick athletes into thinking that their worth and value as a human being depends on how they perform in sport. This mindset can become ingrained and not only rob an athlete of the joy of competition, but also steal the joy of life.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

emotions: fear of failure

- ARE YOU CONSTANTLY THINKING ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU LOSE OR DO NOT PERFORM WELL?
- DO YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING ANXIOUS EVERY TIME YOU THINK ABOUT COMPETITION?
- DO YOU FIND IT HARD TO ENJOY DAILY ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE OF INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE NEXT COMPETITION?

Stress in sport is normal and can be very helpful in preparing you to perform at your best. However, chronic stress from fear of failure can deplete your body of the resources it needs to compete. Fear that your value is at stake can trigger the same neurological and physiological responses that occur when you are physically threatened. Chronic fear of failure has many negative impacts on your emotional health, can impact your relationship with your loved ones and carry over into your life after sport. It can lead to burnout, feelings of depression and anxiety, and negative views of self. And this is all in addition to limiting your ability to achieve your best sport performance. Some signs include:

- fear of letting others down
- fear of meeting others expectations
- fear of the unknown consequences
- fear of shame/embarrassment
- fear of losing love and support

Principles for Avoiding Fear of Failure:

1. Recognize your own worth and value apart from sport.
2. Become more aware of your body sensations and thoughts associated with fear of failure.
3. Foster relationships with people who have an interest in you beyond your athletic performance and to whom you can disclose your fears.
4. Invest in your own emotional health by developing healthy coping skills, not only for dealing with fear but also for life satisfaction

“Of all the liars in the world, sometimes the worst are your own fears.”

—Rudyard Kipling,
British Author

RESOURCES >>>

www.idealife.com/fitness-library/failure

www.mindtools.com/pages/article/fear-of-failure.htm

www.sportsfitnessnetwork.com/2014/09/the-phenomenon-of-fear-of-failure-in-sport/

BIBLE STUDY

emotions: fear of failure

Before going into any competition you have to prepare yourself mentally and physically. This preparation gives you strength to go up against an opponent. Fear of failure is perhaps one of the greatest opponents an athlete or coach experiences.

If we are unsure or doubtful of who we really are, fears creep in. Trusting God's love for us minimizes our fear of failure and allows us to compete freely. As people who are always judged by their performance and record, it is crucial to remember that you are not alone as you seek to follow Jesus.

Remember that Christ did not die for those who are righteous, perfect, and who never fail. In fact, he died for the opposite. He died for those who know they are weak, who are flawed, and who sometimes fail (Matthew 9:13). He knows we can't be perfect, that is why He took that burden from us and was obedient, perfect, sinless for us. We rest in Jesus's performance, not ours. Because he did NOT fail, we are free TO fail. This is the kind of love that "casts out fear."

5. How might you think about and treat your fears differently if you believed God's promises of love, to be true for you?
6. Are you or someone you know enslaved to the fear of failure? What truths from the Scripture texts above (or another one you know) would be important to remember when the fear of failure comes into your mind and emotions?

LORD, ALTHOUGH I FEAR FAILURE, I REMEMBER THAT I HAVE THE PERFECT RECORD OF JESUS CHRIST, A PERSON WHO NEVER GAVE IN TO FEARS AND DOUBTS. HOLY SPIRIT, HELP ME GROW IN RECOGNIZING AND BELIEVING GOD'S UNBOUNDED LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE FOR ME, REGARDLESS OF MY PERFORMANCE. WHEN I AM TEMPTED TO FOCUS ON MY ACHIEVEMENTS OR MY FAILURES, REMIND ME THAT MY LIFE IS HIDDEN IN CHRIST ALONE, WHOSE STEADFAST LOVE NEVER FAILS AND IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO ME, GIVING ME PEACE, GRACE, AND HOPE

READ 1 JOHN 4:18 & ZEPHANIAH 3:17

1. From the Scripture text above, what is said about love? What is said about fear?
2. In competition, what are you most afraid of? Why?
3. Does it surprise you that God has that kind of love for you in the midst of your failure? Why?
4. How do you, others, and the culture's voices treat and speak to you when you fail?

Additional Bible References on Failure >>> Exodus 14: 5-31. Psalms 32 & 61.





*“I am the unluckiest athlete at these games!”
—A competitor at a major sporting event*

He had just pulled his hamstring in the final where he was leading 20 meters from the finish line. He was actually demonstrating classic characteristics of grief and loss in sport. He was one of the 97% of Olympic athletes who return home without securing a medal. Grief is the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. Sports is about competition, therefore sportspeople have to deal with loss and grief on a regular basis. How well are you prepared for losses in sport and in life in general?

Grief, loss and transition are found in sport in winning and losing, injury, being benched, not being chosen, not achieving personal bests, changing clubs, etc. Outside of sport, grief is experienced in relational breakdowns, illness, financial changes, abuse, miscarriage, change in family status and much more.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

emotions: grief & loss

RESPONSES TO GRIEF

PHYSICAL	Fatigue, feelings of exhaustion, palpitations, nausea, light-headedness, dizziness, aches and pains, insomnia, change in appetite, change in sex drive.
EMOTIONAL	Emotional swings, sadness, anger, irritability, panic, anxiety, helplessness, self-blame, fear, guilt.
BEHAVIORAL	Forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, emptiness, continually re-telling the stories surrounding the grief incident.
SOCIAL	Overly sensitive, dependent, withdrawn, hyperactive / under active, relationship difficulties.
SPIRITUAL	Doubting belief system, questioning spiritual values, loss of faith, feeling betrayed by God.

The Olympic athlete mentioned above experienced three emotions in two short minutes: denial (this can't be happening), anger (why is this happening to me?), and depression (I am too sad I don't know what to do.) During a match, you must be able to process all five stages, sometimes within minutes of a disappointment, in order to be ready for the next play or within a day to be ready for the next competition.

5 STAGES OF GRIEF

<i>“This can't be happening to me.”</i>	DENIAL
<i>“Why is this happening? Who is to blame?”</i>	ANGER
<i>“Make this not happen, and in return I will ____.”</i>	BARGAINING
<i>“I'm too sad to do anything.”</i>	DEPRESSION
<i>“I'm at peace with what happened.”</i>	ACCEPTANCE

Some questions to help you process:

- Have I accepted the reality of this loss?
- How will I “wear my pain” or experience it or talk about it?
- How am I adjusting physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, practically?
- How will I respond, re-engage, and re-invest back into my sport and life?

RESOURCES >>> www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm
www.lifejourney.co.nz/grief-counselling-auckland?gclid=CMSt9mjnsECFcMJvAodcKMAgg

BIBLE STUDY

emotions: grief & loss

Grief and loss come in various forms, the most tragic being the death of a loved one. In sports, however, grief and loss are part of everyday reality, whether through injuries, or sitting on the bench, or being traded.

Even Olympian Medalist Valerie Adams, who has won over 55 international shot put events in a row, has had to deal with grief and loss. In the 2012 Olympics, Valerie was defeated by Nadzeya Ostapchuk, who was later stripped of her gold medal for testing positive for illegal drugs. Both of these women experienced loss. Valerie was later awarded the gold but still experienced the pain and heartache surrounding the circumstances.

In the Old Testament, Job experienced deep pain and loss. He lost his family, his possessions and his health. During his crisis, Job learned to trust God even when the answers were not there.

READ JOB 1:21-22

1. What is Job's initial response to the pain and suffering he has experienced? What does this say about Job? About God?
2. If you were to be really honest about your own grief, what would you want to tell God or ask Him? Don't worry, He can handle your doubts or accusations.

READ JOB 42:1-6

3. In verses 1-3, what position does Job take before God? How might seeing Job's example help you in your own situation?

Additional Bible References on Grief & Loss >>>

Mark 4:35-41 *Trusting Him in the storms.* John 11:33-36 *Jesus listens and weeps.*

4. What is the difference between only hearing about God and seeing Him personally? Has your grief and loss made you bitter or better? Why?
5. How has Job grown in his view of God from his initial response in chapter one to his later response in chapter 42?

READ JOB 42:1-6

6. The Psalmist declares that no matter what happens, we can turn to God in time of need. He is always there. He is all knowing, and He is all-powerful. How can you begin to throw yourself into the caring arms of God? Who else can you share these words of comfort and hope with?

ALL POWERFUL AND CARING FATHER, IN THOSE TIMES OF PAIN, GRIEF AND LOSS, MAY I SEE YOU CLEARLY AND TRUST YOU EVEN WHEN IT IS HARD AND CONFUSING. JESUS, YOU KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE SO PLEASE HELP ME NOW.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

emotions: self-talk

During intense competition it is easy to get discouraged or distracted by a poor performance or difficult situation. How you react mentally is crucial. Research has shown that athletes who utilize positive self-talk are more successful.

Positive self-talk begins by changing your definition of success. Evaluate your effort against your current phase of training, not against your opponents' performance.

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK DETRIMENTAL TO PERFORMANCE

- I am an idiot!
- It's the referee's fault.
- If only I could have...
- I will never recover.
- We are not playing well today.
- These conditions are terrible.
- I can't. I feel like quitting.
- My shot is weak.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK ENHANCES PERFORMANCE

- Instructional**
- Keep your eye on the ball.
- Take a deep breath.
- Motivational**
- I deserve to be here.
- I can do this.
- I have dreamed of this moment.
- Let's go!

"If everyone did what we are capable of we would literally astound ourselves."
—Thomas Edison, American inventor of electricity.

S.T.O.P. Negative Self-Talk

Try this exercise after practice or a game.

- S** **creen it.** Evaluate – What situation or event triggered my negative thoughts? Describe the situation. i.e. I missed an easy lay-up, etc.
- T** **arget it.** Define – What am I believing and saying about myself in my interpretation of the above event? Describe how you responded: feelings (anger, worry, anxiety, fear, guilt, confusion, embarrassment, disappointment) and behavior (did you curse, yell, sulk?).
- O** **wn it.** Search – Where did I get this idea about myself? From parents, bad experiences, coaches, friends/peers, teammates?
- P** **lace it.** Decide – Are you willing to get rid this negative thought? Throw it away.

START Positive Self-Talk

Self-talk is just "telling yourself what is really true," giving yourself encouragement and putting yourself in the best mental state to perform well. How much do you hurt yourself by telling yourself lies or discouraging things in your performance? Evaluate whether your training and living environment enhances truth-telling.

RESOURCES >>>

- www.winallraces.wordpress.com/tag/self-talk/
- www.sportpsychindia.wordpress.com/tag/optimal-level-of-arousal/
- www.ausport.gov.au/sportscoachmag/psychology2/listening_to_the_voices_in_your_head_identifying_and_adapting_athletes_self-talk

BIBLE STUDY

emotions: self-talk

Controlling what we say about ourselves and to ourselves is a challenge for all of us. Would you like to take a look at how the Bible describes the challenge and how we can manage it?

Often when we think about rules or standards for our speech, we think in terms of how we should be communicating with others. But in competitive sport an athlete is also constantly talking to himself or herself. And what you say to yourself has a real effect upon your performance.

4. Much of this passage dwells on the negative effects of the tongue. In what ways does negative self-talk in your life affect your performance or other areas of your life?
5. Look at the four proverbs below. What kind of effect does positive self-talk have on people? How could you begin to apply this in your own life?
Proverbs 12:18 *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
Proverbs 15:4 *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*
Proverbs 18:21 *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*
Proverbs 21:23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.*

Who can you pass this wisdom on to? By modeling it in front of them? By talking to them about it?

READ JAMES 3:2-9

1. What pictures does the author use in showing the important role of the tongue in guiding our behavior or actions?
2. What consequences do you see that come from an uncontrolled tongue?
3. Think about this passage in terms of how we talk to ourselves. How do the words and messages you tell yourself "set your life on fire?"

Additional Bible References on Self-Talk >>> *Philippians 4:8, Talk to yourself with these truths. Read Ephesians 1:3-13 out loud. Replace the words "us", "you" and "we" with your own name.*

FATHER SHOW ME ALL THE WAYS THAT I TALK TO MYSELF AND TO OTHERS IN NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE WORDS. HELP ME TO REPLACE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND WORDS WITH INSTRUCTIVE OR ENCOURAGING WORDS.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

emotions: pressure to perform

There's no time left on the clock, you are at the free-throw line, you must make both shots to win the game... it's come down to penalty kicks and you are chosen to take it... your Dad is in the audience and you feel like you have to please him... it feels like the expectations of your whole country, city, team or family are sitting on your shoulders...

Have you ever found yourself saying something like, "I have practiced this 1000 times and know how to do it, but in this situation I am not sure if I can do this." Physically, you often feel more muscle tension, sweaty hands, increased heart rate, etc.

JUST AS YOU LEARNED PHYSICAL SKILLS, PRACTICED THEM AND THEN PERFORMED IN COMPETITION, YOU WILL ALSO NEED TO LEARN NEW SKILLS, PRACTICE AND USE THEM TO DEAL WITH PRESSURE.

Dealing with Mental/Emotional Symptoms

Avoid focusing on external things (money, trophies, results), uncontrollable things (opponents, press comments) and distractions (weather, crowd size). Instead, focus on things you can control (your game plan) and tell yourself the truth (you are ready, fit, prepared, and deserve to be here).

Dealing with Physical Symptoms

Relaxation techniques can be helpful if pressure is felt physically (muscle tension, high heart rate). Controlling your breathing pace and depth is most easy to learn and use.

Evaluate Your Own Activation Level

The positive side of pressure is your own activation level. Learn to evaluate it and discern how much you need for your own stimulation.

- How much activation/excitement is good for you? When do you perform your best?
- Can you control your activation level or does it control you?

*"[The media attention] is nice, but when 100 people approach you a day, everyone wanting something from you, it is more than one person can handle. I need to either wear a mask or go hide in the woods to clear my head before the competition."
—Barbora Spotakova, Czech javelin competitor*

UNDER STIMULATED	OPTIMAL STIMULATION	OVER STIMULATED
Lethargic Bored Sluggish Not Enough Challenge Too Much Mastery Over-Controlled Overconfident Under-Committed	Calm Focused Energized Optimal Challenge Mastery In Control Confident Committed	Nervous Scattered Hyper Too Much Challenge Not Enough Mastery Out of Control Under-Confident Overcommitted
"WHY BOTHER TO DO IT?"	"I CAN DO IT."	"I HAVE TO DO IT."

Create a pre-game external environment that will boost the stimulation level you need (music, location, people you allow near you). Create a pre-game internal environment where you choose to take control of what you are thinking about (focus on what you can control).

- Have you taken the time to evaluate the sources of your pressure or why pressure affects you?
- If it's external pressure ("it feels like a steamroller rolling over me"), are you too concerned with the outcomes of your competition? "I have to win because..."
- If it's internal pressure ("It feels like a volcano inside of me."), are you comfortable with yourself whether you win or lose? "I have to win to feel good about who I am?"

REFLECTION

RESOURCES >>> The Edge: "Coping Up" Under Pressure www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-edge-peak-performance-psychology/201002/the-edge-coping-under-pressure
Reducing Anxiety in the Competitive Environment www.appliedsportpsych.org/resource-center/resources-for-coaches/reducing-anxiety-in-the-competitive-environment/

BIBLE STUDY

emotions: pressure to perform

You can't really get rid of outside (external) pressure. There is always someone or something that has unrealistic expectations for you (family, coach, fans, press, federation, sponsors). It's part of the reality when you pursue sport at an elite level. The goal is to learn to manage the pressure.

Pressure from the inside of yourself (internal) is a little different, but is usually a response from the external forces. Where is it coming from? Often, it's a question of what you are feeling and believing about yourself that determines the type of response to the pressure. For his followers, Jesus provides a role model for dealing with the external and internal pressures.

4. God does not often change the circumstances; He changes us. Did He do anything? How did Jesus respond?
5. When you go to God the Father in distress, what do you need to believe about Him and yourself to find peace and perspective? Is there someone in your life with whom you can share this insight, so they can also find peace?

LORD, YOU KNOW ABOUT AND UNDERSTAND MY INNER STRUGGLES AND FEARS. HELP ME TO LET THEM GO AND ENTRUST MY FUTURE TO YOU. I PRAY FOR A SENSE OF YOUR PRESENCE AND PEACE WHEN I FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON MY SHOULDERS.

READ MATTHEW 26:39-46

1. What pressures do you think Jesus felt as He headed to the cross? What outside pressures that caused of this internal turmoil?
2. How would you rephrase verse 42 in your own words? What does this say about Jesus' relationship with His Father?
3. When Jesus felt the weight of the world on His shoulders and His disciples did not support Him, where did He get his strength and perspective?

**Additional Bible References on Pressure >>> Philippians 4:4-9 Finding peace in pressure.
Luke 4:1-14 Dealing with physical, emotional & spiritual pressure.**





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

emotions: anger

“I CAN’T PLAY BEING MAD. I GO OUT THERE AND HAVE FUN. IT’S A GAME, AND THAT’S HOW I AM GOING TO TREAT IT.”
—KEN GRIFFEY, JR., PRO BASEBALL PLAYER

You may have been taught that anger is the best form of motivation for the elite athlete. If so, you may need to evaluate whether anger is a common emotion when you play and whether you can manage your anger in competitive situations.

Anger is a natural response to being misunderstood, experiencing pain or injustice. Everyone wants to be respected and valued and everyone has a desire for fairness. When that doesn’t happen, the tendency is to want to punish someone. While the feeling is normal, your response is critical to your performance and your development as an athlete and a person.

Anger has the potential to be directed positively or negatively, and the energy it creates can be focused toward your goal or turned into aggression, violence, or self-judgment in sport. If it is not managed appropriately, people will get hurt, including you. Anger will never recover your dignity and reputation. Are there better ways to handle your frustrations?

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ANGER

BEHAVIORAL	BIOLOGICAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	EMOTIONAL
A coach, parent, team culture, or athlete has modeled it.	My body and mind are reacting to injury, drugs, sleep loss, or diet.	I am responding to injustice, a tragedy, a loss, or performance stress.	My deepest needs for identity, value, acceptance and relationships are not being met through sport.

TIPS TO PRACTICE WHEN FEELINGS OF ANGER ARISE DURING COMPETITION

- *Honestly evaluate if what is triggering your anger is really an injustice or just you wanting to get your own selfish or competitive driven way?*
- *Keep your anger focused on the action that took place rather than on the person who carried it out? When you react, it distracts you from your performance or hurts your team in some other way.*
- *Choose a response that is honouring to the spirit of sport and will not hurt you or your teammates’ performance.*

RESOURCES >>>

<http://davidwoolfson.co.uk/what-can-you-do/>
<https://www.competitivedge.com/yellinganger-sports>
<http://www.stack.com/2012/03/27/sports-anger-management/>

BIBLE STUDY

emotions: anger

Anger is a common emotion and easily expressed in sport.

It can often be confused or entangled with other emotions that are also present during competition, such as frustration, intensity, will to win, pressure to perform or reaction to pain. It can be helpful if we evaluate our anger and then learn to control our behavior and responses.

LORD JESUS, HELP US TO TRUST YOU SO WE DON'T HAVE TO PUNISH OTHERS. HELP ME TO EVALUATE MY EMOTIONS AND RESPONSES IN THE HEAT OF COMPETITION AND LIFE. YOU TOOK AWAY OUR SIN AND NOW WE ARE FREE TO LOVE EVEN WHEN WE DON'T FEEL LIKE IT. HELP US NOT TAKE REVENGE OR RETALIATE EVEN IN SPORTS. WE TRUST YOU AS THE SHEPHERD AND GUARDIAN OF OUR SOULS.

EVALUATING YOUR ANGER

JUSTIFIED ANGER

Exodus 32: 7-10, John 2:13-16
A God-given emotion.

A correct response to injustice or evil.
Example: A willful wrong call by an official.

Difficult to discern honestly in the heat of the moment, combined with my desire to win.

Ephesians 4:26
What are some ways that I can handle this justified anger?

UNJUSTIFIED ANGER

Emotional response arising from our "flesh."

An immature response when I try to use sport to meet a God-given need (acceptance, value).
Example: I need affirmation and want sport to meet that need through coaches, fans, and refs. When they don't, I react with anger.

A challenge to evaluate how I look to false sources (sport) to meet my deepest needs.

Proverbs 14:17, 29, 19:19
What are some ways that I can handle this unjustified anger?

READ 1 PETER 2:21-25

1. How did Jesus respond to injustice? What did He do? What did He not do?
2. What names are used to describe God in verse 25? How does knowing His care for you give you peace and comfort in the midst of trials?
3. Verse 24 says that Jesus was punished to take away our sins? Have you come to a place to receive Christ's forgiveness so you can forgive others? Why or why not?

HOW CAN I APPLY THIS IN SPECIFIC WAYS IN MY SPORT? James 1:19, Ephesians 4:31, Romans 12:17-19



Additional Bible References on Anger >>> Proverbs 15:18, 17:27, 21:19, 29:22.
Additional Resources >>> Hiebert, D. *Angry Athletes and the Almighty.*

relationships

While God created us for interdependent and harmonious relationships, sin hurts our ability to relate healthily as God intends. In Christ, however, humanity finds reconciliation with God, others, self and all creation. As sports persons who have experienced God's life-changing reconciliation, we have a responsibility to lead others to experience it as well, to foster this reconciliation in our sport, and to offer ourselves for the good of others.

WE WERE CREATED TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS.

In Jean Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*, three characters are stuck in a waiting room bound for hell. Trapped with neither a sense of time nor hope for a way out, they proceed to pick away at one another's outer protective shells, which had served to distance them from other people during their earthly life. By simply stating the unfiltered truth, they claw at one another's insecurities, annoying each other toward a frayed breaking point. Garcin, the singular male character in the room, recognizes the ironic reality of their predicament: While they desperately need one another to reflect their own existence, they already despise one another for taking their precious space and reminding each other of their personal flaws. He summarizes their situation by saying:

"So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is—other people!"

While obviously seeking to provoke, Sartre nevertheless illustrates a contemporary ethos all too prevalent in our age—a belief that other humans are the primary problem in life! It's an inescapable dilemma - we have a desperate need for human connection and yet people bring inevitable conflict, pain, and problems into our lives (Of course, we also bring difficulty into the lives of others). This tension leads some to believe we are in a post-human age where technology and artificial intelligence can replace our need for humans. At its core this is simply an unsatisfying modern way of dealing with the same unavoidable tension—we can't live with people, but we certainly cannot live without them!

God created us to be in relationship—with Him and with others. By design, we need other people and need to cultivate meaningful relationships with other humans. But what does it mean to relate healthily with other people? How should we view other people and our relationship to them? Why do relationships with others inevitably demand a Spirit-filled response? Why does the athletic context foster deeper relationships with teammates while at times making it more difficult to trust others? In the context of sports, how should we think about ourselves in relationship to our teammates, our coaches, our competition, our spouses, or our partners?

WE WERE MADE TO LIVE INTERDEPENDENTLY, NOT IN ISOLATION.

When God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone," in Genesis 2:18, He is not making a statement tied solely to gender. While this passage may certainly be understood in the context of males and females and the prescriptive ordering of man and woman together in a marriage relationship, it should not be limited to its gender qualifications.

By suggesting that it is not good for "man" to be alone, God generically makes a statement about all humankind and His desire for them to be in relationship with others like themselves. As Adam wandered through the land and saw the many animals hanging out with one another, he couldn't find another like him anywhere. The creation of Eve not only provided a companion for Adam but fulfilled God's desire for mankind to be in interdependent relationships with one another (Genesis 2:18-24). Just as God maintains harmony within the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—so also mankind would have the opportunity to live in harmony with one another.

Indeed, we were created with a positive and healthy need for other people, a need for interdependent relationships. When we are *independent*, we operate as though we do not need anyone and seek to navigate life alone. At the other extreme, dependent persons have no idea who they are apart from other people and rely on others to take responsibility for their lives. *Codependency* arises when a person attaches himself or herself to the addictive behavior of another and allows their emotional, physical, and mental status to be determined by the ebbs and flows of the others' behavior. But *interdependence* occurs when a person has a secure sense of who they are and then chooses to be mutually dependent on other people, bringing their strengths and weaknesses as individuals to bear on one another for the betterment of both persons. In sports, we see examples of intricate systems of human interdependence. Coaches, players, opponents, referees, and spectators are all integral pieces which work together to form the experience we know and love. In sport and in life, we cannot escape our need for one another. This interdependence is God's design for relationships—at varying degrees of intimacy—of all sorts.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS ARE CORRUPTED BY SIN.

When Adam and Eve chose disobedience over obedience in the garden, every future relational aspect of the human journey became damaged. In Genesis 3:14-24, we learn that, due to sin, enmity would characterize humanity's relationship with God, one another, and the rest of creation. After rebelling against God, Adam and Eve hid from God and from one another, introducing both blame and shame into the human emotional vocabulary, while also creating separation in every version of relationship available to them. Thus, even under the best of circumstances, every human relationship struggles for harmony.



In the world of sports we see countless examples of disharmony and enmity in human relationships. Elite coaches can easily view recruits not as people but as tickets to their program's success. Athletes often view their opponents as enemies to be destroyed or conquered. Sex is often sought selfishly to assure a false concept of masculinity or femininity rather than treasured as a true gift to foster unity in marriage. Being on the road for half the season, it is difficult for professional athletes to honor their marriage commitments and maintain mutually supportive friendships. Like any human, an athlete or coach longs for intimacy and connection but regularly turns to inadequate substitutes in an attempt to fill the void. It is common for sportspersons to make their sport an idol, hoping their worship of it will fill a void created by the absence of relationship with Jesus Christ. We mistake the superficial, performance-conditioned praise of people for real and genuine connection. When we live apart from God in the brokenness of sin, our relationships with self, sport and fellow competitors cannot function harmoniously as they were intended. The presence of sin in all its various forms continues to wreck havoc on human interactions today. Only a confrontation with sin allows for relationships to potentially experience the vulnerability, closeness, and depth they were intended to promote.

HUMAN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS RESTORED THROUGH THE RECONCILIATION HE PROVIDES, FORESHADOWING THE POSSIBILITY OF RECONCILIATION WITH EACH OTHER.

Paul asserts that in Christ a person is made into a "new creation," that Jesus brings about a transformation in a person that reconnects their spirit to God the Father (II Corinthians 5:17). Relationship with God is restored—indeed, "reconciled"—through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in a place of judgment and alienation. Thus, with relationship to God restored, humans are empowered not only to "walk" with God through the day, but they are also given a "ministry of reconciliation" toward others as well (II Corinthians 5:18). That is, every Christ follower should view themselves as an ambassador for Christ, as one charged with helping others to experience relational reconciliation with God also (II Corinthians 5:20, 21).

Out of this reconciliation with God comes not only a new perspective on life as seen through "kingdom" eyes, but a new view of other people as well. Paul suggests that from now on the believer in Christ will no longer view others "according to the flesh"—that is, according to outward appearance, social standing, or human categorization—but instead will view others as God views them, as people with a desperate need for God, a broken existence because of sin, and a wonderful future because of the potential for reconciliation with God and others (II Corinthians 5:16).

Reconciliation to God lays a foundation for the renewal of harmonious relationships in sports. Reconciliation is paramount to putting sports and praise in proper perspective. When Christ is worshipped as Lord, all other satisfactions associated with sports become secondary. Athletic skills and success serve and submit to the Creator rather than the other way around. No longer looking to find her value in her sport, an athlete is freed to enjoy the gift of competition and surrender her performance as an act of worship unto the Lord. She is also empowered to seek reconciliation with coaches, teammates, and opponents. Rather than viewing opponents as enemies to be destroyed, is it possible they can be seen as fellow travelers with whom we are striving for excellence?

A PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY IN LIFE INVOLVES ENGAGING OTHER PEOPLE AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO LIVE WELL, THE WAY GOD INTENDED.

The writer of Hebrews wrote to a group of people who, like all people in all times, were having relationship tensions. They were busy, distracted by personal concerns, and were not engaging one another in meaningful ways. The writer urges them to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25). He essentially says, "You need each other! Make sure you are intentionally spending time together, and not just to socialize, but to purposely help each other love well and do right!" He wants them to actively engage one another, to provoke, to stimulate a desire in each other to do loving good works.

Indeed, he wants them to love one another into loving others! This love equals an agape approach to people, valuing them not as a result of feelings or familial status or a particular level of friendship, but out of a desire for their own growth and flourishing. It is an unselfish love, a sacrificial approach to people that stops asking "What can I get from this relationship?" and instead repeatedly asks, "What can I do to help you flourish—to live out God's plan for your life?" It is a love that accepts people right where they're at, but never lets them stay there—it pulls out the God-given best that resides inside others, first by helping them to be reconciled to God, then by continuing to help them live out their new life in Him. Instead of asking what others might bring into our own lives, the maturing Christ-follower asks, "What is best for you in this situation and how might I be a part of bringing that end about?"

Jesus says there is no greater love than the type that is willing to sacrifice of one's self for the good of another (John 15:13). When a sportsperson is reconciled to God, he is equipped to be an advocate for the good of others in sport, as well as for the good of sport itself. A coach who has experienced such a renewed perspective is able to see his players not as tickets to success but as people, and his purpose not as crafting a winning program but ultimately to transform lives for good. A renewed and reconciled athlete fosters among her teammates and opponents a healthy sense of competition, which is characterized not by hatred and an attempt to destroy but by respect and mutual striving toward excellence. Reconciliation in Christ restores all relationships to point toward God's good plan for all creation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Consider two or three significant relationships in your life (e.g. spouse, friend, family member, teammate). Which most closely describes the nature of your relationship with each: independence, dependence, codependence, or interdependence?
2. In what ways have you observed or experienced broken relationships in your life? In your specific sports context?
3. How does God's reconciliation bring healing in each of the broken relationships above?
4. What should be the ultimate purpose of our relationships (e.g. with our teammates, coaches, spouse, competition, sport)?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Allender, Dan. *The Healing Path: How the Hurts in Your Past Can Lead You to a More Abundant Life*. Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2000.

Augsberger, David. *Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Toward Others*. Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 2009.

Downs, Tim and Joy. *One of Us Must be Crazy...and I'm Pretty Sure it's You*. Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2010.

Muehlhoff, Tim. *I Beg to Differ: Navigating Difficult Conversations with Truth and Love*. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2014.

Nouwen, Henri. *Wounded Healer*. Image Books, 1979.



CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

relationships: conflict resolution

“Every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential. It can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation, and growth—or rage, fear, shame, entrapment, and resistance. The choice is not up to our opponents, but to us, and our willingness to face and work through them.”
—Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith, Conflict Management Consultants

Conflict is embedded in the very nature of competitive sports. Coaches are trying to keep their jobs, teams are trying to keep their fans and sponsors, and athletes their spot on the team. Anything blocking that goal creates conflict, interpersonally and/or organizationally.

RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

AVOIDANCE / NEGLECTING	Stay away and avoid being identified with either side.
COMPETING / DOMINATING	The goal is to win whatever the cost.
COLLABORATE / INTEGRATING	Get all parties involved to reach agreement.
COMPROMISE / SHARING	Win a few so losing a few is more acceptable.
ACCOMMODATING / OBLIGING	Preserve the relationship at all costs.

Conflict often has a negative connotation. But if you can step into a conflict with a new view of increased growth, understanding, intimacy and production, you create a pathway to manage or resolve the conflict successfully. Conflict is like the ropes that secure a tent: too little tension and it is worth nothing, too much tension and it tears, adequate tension from all corners and the tent is useful and satisfying.

Ground Rules for Conflict Conversations

1. Make sure all parties are allowed to disagree without feeling guilty.
2. Each person must be allowed to state his or her position with energy and honesty.
3. Protection from being hurt and hurting others must be sustained.
4. Remind conflicting parties when progress is achieved.

Tips During Conflict

1. Choose your fight. Is it critical? Make a difference? A skunk can beat a dog but it isn't worth it.
2. Define the conflict. Is it a problem in the past? Decision for future? The source of most conflicts can be boiled down to knowledge, skill, attitude, or systems.
3. Center on the issue. Don't let emotions sidetrack you from understanding the issue and taking steps toward goals.
4. Identify the options. Allow for creativity and tension. The best decisions are made when several approaches are considered.
5. Identify possible consequences. Think through the likely outcome of a particular decision. Is it really helping solve the issue the best way for all parties concerned?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Has your view of conflict kept you from embracing and appreciating the nature of conflict?
2. How does your current style of managing conflict make it challenging for others (on your team, in your life) to work toward resolution?
3. Does your sport experience make your ability to manage conflict harder or easier? Why?
4. How does your ability or inability to handle conflict affect your team's ability to improve? How does it affect your ability to be coached, your performance, your training?

RESOURCES >>> www.huffingtonpost.com/joyce-marter-/conscious-relationships_b_4504510.html
 Webinar: “Why can't we all get along?” www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKygpAFlAJ8#t=32

BIBLE STUDY

relationships: conflict resolution

Conflict is challenging and often confusing but conflict can be an opportunity to strengthen relationships, produce greater results and demonstrate the love and power of Christ.

4. Forgiveness is giving pardon to the offender. Why should we forgive?
5. Reconciliation is the movement toward restoring friendly relations. What would hinder you from forgiving and moving toward reconciliation?
6. Share with someone in your life who could use a word of encouragement and grace (4:29).

**ADDITIONAL VERSES FOR STUDY >>> MATTHEW 7:1-5. EXAMINE YOURSELF FIRST
MATTHEW 5:23-25. INITIATE WITH THE ONE WHO OFFENDED YOU
ROMANS 12:18-21. DO ALL YOU CAN TO BE AT PEACE**

READ EPHESIANS 4:25-5:4

1. What encourages or challenges you in this text?
2. Make a list of what to do and what not to do according to this passage.
TO DO | NOT TO DO
3. How might this way of living be a good starting place for managing conflict in your life?

Additional Resources >>> www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/relationship-challenges/conflict-resolution/a-biblical-guide-to-resolving-conflict





Elite athletes marry at about the same rate (73%) as everyone else, but their divorce rate is considerably higher. The divorce rate among all pro athletes in the US is estimated at between 60 to 80 percent, according to The New York Times and Sports Illustrated. In addition to infidelity, issues dealing with money, fame, travel and time all can play a part in putting stress on an athlete's marriage.

Most couples enter into marriage expecting to succeed. They believe divorce statistics will not apply to them. Researchers tell us that 48% percent of those marrying today will become part of those statistics. But, when a person is in love, they believe that their love will last forever.

What is the definition of marriage?

What makes a marriage a marriage? Is it standing in front of a minister, a priest, a rabbi, some other religious official, a justice of the peace, a ship captain? Is it the ceremony or the commitment? The traditional definition of marriage is a covenant, a legal, public exclusive, permanent commitment between a man and woman to share every part of your life together. Some say that is old-fashioned and even suggest that marriage should be entered into in three-year segments, renewable at the end of the term if both spouses want to proceed.

What makes a marriage a good marriage?

Bookshelves are filled with books written about things that go wrong in marriage, but what makes them go right? Dr. David H. Olson in his book *10 Strengths to Make a Happy Marriage* says, "In strong marriages there is a balance between separateness and togetherness. These couples make togetherness a top priority, ask each other for help, like doing things together and spend most of their free time together." This is often a major challenge to sports people who travel a lot and have to spend much of their marriage separated from each other.

Generally there are three types of marriages—*independent relationships, dependent relationships and interdependent relationships.* One of the goals of a good marriage should be to grow from an independent or dependent relationship to an interdependent relationship. When a person is independent they operate as though they don't need anyone and seek to navigate life alone. Dependent people have no idea who they are apart from other people and rely on others to take responsibility for their lives.

Interdependence occurs when a person has a secure sense of who they are and then chooses to be mutually dependent on another person, bringing their strengths and weaknesses as individuals to bear on one another for the betterment of both persons. This requires a loving servanthood and mutual submission. This attitude allows each spouse to grow in an atmosphere of love and grace. Each spouse will feel loved and cherished. In this environment each person can learn:

- *the ability to hear criticism without being crushed*
- *the ability to give criticism without crushing*
- *the ability to forgive people without residual anger*
- *the ability to take your mind off yourself*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What kind of marriage do you have? (dependent, independent or interdependent)*
2. *How does your sport life affect your marriage?*
3. *Have you talked honestly with your spouse about your sporting dreams? Are you pursuing those dreams together?*
4. *Do you have relationships outside of your sport life which encourage togetherness in your marriage?*

BIBLE STUDY

relationships: marriage

Nobody signs up for marriage with the thought, "I want a lousy marriage." The desire to have a strong, healthy, good marriage is noble and God-given. Genesis 2:18 claims, "it is not good that man should be alone," which is the only thing God says is not good. We were created to cultivate a relationship with God and with others, the most intimate and intense of which is in the marriage relationship.

Like sport, a good marriage does not just happen by accident but requires hard work, practice and discipline. In our teams and sport communities we see the consequences when a marriage does not work. How is it possible to have a relationship where one can give and receive criticism without being crushed or crushing? Can we forgive without lingering anger and can we really take our mind off ourselves?

4. The Ephesians passage is in the context of being filled with the Holy Spirit, which is allowing the Spirit of God to teach you, mediate for you, and convict you. This requires being open to Him. What prevents you from being open to God's Spirit in your life?
5. Why does Paul say a man must "leave his father and mother and be united to his wife?" What else do we have to leave to have a good marriage?
6. What does it mean that husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies?
7. If a husband and wife love each other and respect each other, what effect will that have on your sport team and community?

FATHER, PLEASE MAKE OUR MARRIAGE A MARRIAGE AS YOU INTENDED IT TO BE. WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LOVING AS YOU LOVE DOES NOT COME NATURALLY TO US. HELP US TO LOVE AS YOU LOVE, SACRIFICIALLY, WITH GRACE AND TRUTH. GIVE US THE POWER THROUGH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT TO HAVE A REALLY GOOD MARRIAGE.

READ GENESIS 2:18-25 & EPH. 5:21-33

1. Why do you think God said it was not good for man to be alone? What does it mean when God says, "He will make a helper suitable for him?"
2. Genesis 2:25 says, "The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." Why is that important? Where does shame come from? How does shame affect the relationship?
3. Submission is not always a positive thought, yet Paul says to "submit out of reverence for Christ." How might this make a difference when it comes to loving and serving one another?

Additional Bible References on Marriage >>>

1 Corinthians 13 *Description of love.* **Ephesians 4:29** *Use your words to build up.*





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

relationships:
team unity

When you are winning, there often is more tolerance for stressed relationships. Everyone feels better about themselves and their teammates. Increased losses, poor umpires, and angry coaches likely increase the teams' impatience and frustration with one another. If you feel like your own team is breaking down from the inside (coaches and players yelling at each other on the sidelines), there is a growing sense that you have no chance to compete on the outside.

Describe experiences when you have really felt a part of a great team that had a common vision, you worked hard and enjoyed the relationships on that team. What non-tangible elements do you believe helped to create that?

ELEMENTS OF A DIVIDED TEAM

LACK OF VISION	People don't know where they are going and why. Winning isn't enough.
PRIDE AND EGO	I want to succeed more than I want my team to succeed.
WEAK LEADERSHIP	Team leaders give confusing or conflicting directions and do not balance demands with a caring attitude.
DISRESPECT	People are unwilling to understand and move toward personality and cultural differences.
CRITICAL & NEGATIVE SPIRIT	Condescending and destructive actions and words kill the spirit.
LACK OF ROLE DEFINITION	Communication is not clear that all team members have a significant role on the team, whether the star, trainer, or injured.
TEAMMATES WHO ARE OPPONENTS	Fighting hard for a position turns into a winner and loser relationally.
NO VENUE FOR HONEST COMMUNICATION	Expected to shut up and obey even when it is obvious that fractures are occurring.
LACK OF TRUST	You can't trust the others: just take care of yourself.

TIPS FOR BUILDING TEAM UNITY

CREATE VISION FOR UNITY.	Through verbal and visual communication. Write and speak individual and team goals that support the whole.
COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS FOR UNITY.	Teach dignity and respect. Develop lessons in good communication.
CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF UNITY THROUGH LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE.	Support successes, failures, trials, and challenges. Create a culture or attitude of supportive accountability.
BUILD UNITY OUTSIDE OF YOUR SPORT.	Plan recreational games, meals in homes, fun nights, team excursions, team building exercises.
BE AN EXAMPLE OF UNITY.	Model vulnerability to other team members. Speak truth and grace to others.
ALLOW PLAYER ONLY MEETINGS.	Coaches are not present. Players work through issues together. Player leaders can emerge.

Questions for Reflection

As an athlete or coach, what things can I do to contribute to team unity? Can you identify one or two areas that need to be addressed immediately? What goals can you put into place right now and for next season that will help to build team unity?

BIBLE STUDY

relationships: team unity

Mother Theresa got it right: "I can do things you cannot. You can do things I cannot. Together we can do great things."

Isn't it so much more satisfying to work toward a common goal (whether sports, work, family) with other people who help you to be your best? Who raise you up when you are down, who challenge you when you have more to give? God has designed us to lock arms with others to help us become who He wants us to be on and off the field.

4. As you viewed the Critical Issue, what areas do you see in your life or on your team that bring division instead of unity? Is there something you can do about it?
5. Are there others around you who need a hand up through a word of encouragement? A positive challenge to another to raise the level of performance?

LORD, RELATIONSHIPS ARE HARD. WE ARE ALL TRYING TO COMPETE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL AND SOMETIMES MY SELFISHNESS AND EGO GET IN THE WAY OF BUILDING OTHERS UP. HELP ME TO BE VULNERABLE AND TO BE THE BROTHER OR SISTER YOU HAVE CREATED ME TO BE. PLEASE GIVE ME THE RIGHT WORDS AT THE RIGHT TIME AND THE ABILITY TO GO OUT OF MY WAY TO BE A PEACEMAKER ON MY TEAM.

READ ECCL. 4:9 & PROVERBS 27:17

1. What part of these texts is most encouraging to you? Why?
2. According to these verses, what role are we to play in one another's lives?
3. Describe an experience when you have known this to be true. How did it motivate you or shape you to be better in your sport? In your life?

Additional Bible References on Unity >>> Ephesians 4:29 *Words spoken are for the building up of another.* Romans 12:18 *Do your part to be at peace with everyone.* Hebrews 12:14, John 17: 20-22 *The world will see Jesus if we are in unity.*





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

relationships: LGBT teammates

Are LGBT Athletes Respected and Valued?

1. Describe a time when you felt disrespected, or when you have disrespected someone else.
2. What are some sport situations that have caused you to feel hurt, afraid or angry?

Timeout for Reflection

An international study on homophobia in sports, Out on the Fields, reports that 85 percent of LGBT* athletes have either experienced personally or witnessed homophobic abuse. Approximately half of those responding to the survey stated they had been threatened verbally, been bullied, experienced violence or excluded from their sport due to their sexuality.

The overall success of a team involves many factors, with team chemistry and unity being significant ones. LGBT athletes and coaches have often been assumed to be “a distraction” to a team’s success, hindering that chemistry and unity. While more and more have decided to challenge that assumption by coming out, others remain fearful of the consequences of being honest with their teammates and therefore hide their sexuality. This hiding can create stress in an athlete, which can negatively impact their athletic performance, emotional well-being and ultimately their self-image. “I’ve endured years of misery and gone to enormous lengths to live a lie. I was certain that my world would fall apart if anyone knew,” National Basketball Association (NBA) player Jason Collins said when coming out.

Being a part of a team means always respecting and valuing teammates—both as fellow human beings and fellow athletes. Unfortunately, many LGBT athletes live in fear of losing the respect, appreciation and friendship of teammates if they are open about their sexuality. We can help teammates be the best athletes possible by respecting them and their personal lives, regardless of our views. Showing them respect, love and acceptance as a person can help free them from the struggles that distract them from their sport.

COMMON EXPERIENCES OF LGBT ATHLETES

**LGBT stands for the terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered. Other common terms are Transexual, Two-Spirited and Queer.*

Hostility and Derogatory Remarks

Team members tell gay jokes, call each other derogatory LGBT names, and state “that’s so gay.” Often others join in or stay silent, but don’t counter those remarks.

Fear of Reprisals

When LGBT athletes are exposed to a hostile atmosphere on their teams, they may fear losing starting positions, playing time, scholarships or friendships, especially if the coach is not supportive.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Have you ever made hurtful or derogatory remarks about LGBT teammates or athletes in general? If so, think about what in you prompted this (upbringing, religious beliefs, a need to prove “I’m not one of them,” a need to fit in with others doing it).
2. Is there anyone you need to apologize to and ask forgiveness from?

APPLICATION

All people, including teammates, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of whether or not their sexual preferences agree with the moral values and religious beliefs of others, and vice versa. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

“I’m just at a point in my life where I’M TIRED OF HAVING TO PRETEND TO BE SOMEBODY I’M NOT. I’m tired of having to hide my feelings about the person I care about. About the person I love... Whether people think that’s right, whether they think it’s wrong, I don’t care... But I’m tired of being miserable... it has been miserable. And it hurts.”

—Sheryl Swoopes, WNBA player/coach

BIBLE STUDY

relationships: LGBT teammates

All people, including teammates, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of whether or not their sexual preferences agree with the moral values and religious beliefs of others, and vice versa.

Throughout much of history, passages in the Bible have almost universally been understood to state that same-sex sexual relationships are outside of God's design and plan for His children. God designed sexual relations exclusively for one man and one woman in a married relationship.

However, in making this known, Christ-followers have often treated the LGBT community very harshly, and thus have been outside God's design for how they should love their neighbor.

4. Where does the power to love others come from? Read 1 John 4:19 for insight on this. Are you experiencing God's love for you?
5. Are there teammates or friends who would be encouraged or challenged by you sharing these truths with them?

DEAR GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOVE FOR ME. PLEASE HELP ME TO LOVE YOU AND OTHERS MORE DEEPLY IN BOTH ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS. I CONFESS I HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN LOVING TOWARD TEAMMATES WHO ARE DIFFERENT THAN ME. HELP ME TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS WITH YOUR LOVE.

READ MATT. 22:37-39 AND ROMANS 13:8-10

1. What stands out to you most about these two passages? How do they encourage or challenge you?
2. Why do you think Jesus selects these two commands as the greatest in Matthew 22? What insight does Romans 13:8-10 give you toward this answer?
3. What do these verses say to us in terms of how we treat LGBT teammates? Are there changes you need to make in light of this, such as things to start doing, things to stop doing? Are there things you are encouraged to continue doing?

Additional References on LGBT Teammates >>> John 8:1-11. *Andrew Marin*, Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community. *Sam Allberry*, *Is God Anti-Gay?*



Sportspersons who follow Jesus need a strong theological framework with which to understand life's trials and

suffering. While pain is an inevitable reality of the broken world in which we live, God is able to achieve good through even the most challenging of circumstances. God uses the painful experiences we have to draw us toward dependency on Him, to work redemption in our lives, to make us more like Jesus, and to stir in us hope for His coming Kingdom.

OUR VIEW OF GOD DETERMINES OUR RESPONSE TO PAIN.

Jesus assures us that in this world there will be pain, tribulation and suffering (John 16:33). No one is exempt from facing grief or pain, even the most mature believer. Pain is simply the reality of life outside the garden, where the comforts of Eden are buried under a long history of humans in rebellion toward God. That all will face pain in some form is a given, but how we respond to pain will reflect our view of God and determine the journey of our life.

The Psalmist says, "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'" The problem of pain in the world is likely a person's greatest apologetic for this conclusion. While the conclusion that there is no God is faulty, an insistence on asking where an all-powerful and all-knowing God intersects human suffering is honest and profound. How we wrestle with the problem of pain will strongly shape the course of our lives. This is because pain ultimately demands a response, and the choices at our disposal lead to growth or demise; they push us toward God or further away from God.

Athletes are taught to endure physical pain for the sake of stretching their body to reach full athletic potential. Thus, they are tutored by maxims that become routine as one progresses up the chain of competition. A few of these include: "No pain, no gain;" "Pain is just weakness leaving the body;" "Suffer the pain of discipline or suffer the pain of regret." Therefore, elite athletes are predisposed to have a category for enduring physical pain for the sake of athletic success.

However, there are other types of pain that even physical training cannot contain. Laurell K. Hamilton writes, "There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds." Athletes have all sorts of experiences that cause emotional or spiritual pain. Some of these include: a season-ending injury, the benching that calls into question all previous training, the betrayal of a teammate or coach, a season-ending loss, or the end of a career. Many elite athletes mask deep insecurities, which may drive competitive success but cripple their psyche. An athlete must therefore establish a theological framework in which to process their experiences of pain.

GOD USES PAIN AND SUFFERING TO DRAW US TOWARD DEPENDENCY ON HIM.

While our natural reaction to pain is to avoid or numb it, pain is a signal to our psyche that something is wrong that needs to be fixed. J.K. Rowling's sage character in the Harry Potter series says, "Numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it." Indeed, it has been said that some people won't look up to God until they are put on their backs, which usually involves some form of pain. Perhaps God allows pain to strip away the veneer to reveal who and or what we really trust.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain* that while we can perhaps ignore pleasure, pain will insist on being attended to—one way or another. He said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Lewis also says that pain, when surrendered into God's hands, can be the most redemptive of gifts for our journey because it forces us back to God.

All pain and suffering is a result of sin, disobedience to the Creator. All of humanity—indeed, all of creation—groans under the weight of the initial human act of disobedience, and all matters regarding the flow of human history strain toward rectifying this initial sin. Pain is a reminder that something is wrong in the human condition, that we are in need of something to make things right again and save us from what appears to be an impossible situation. As Lewis suggests, God calls to us in the midst of pain, reminding us that our greatest need is to be restored to right relationship with Him. For the Christ follower in pain, suffering serves to both remind us of the fallen condition of the world while also encouraging us to trust God with whatever it is that is causing hurt. But He also promises to use pain and suffering to achieve redemption in our lives.

GOD USES PAIN AND SUFFERING REDEEMPTIVELY IN OUR LIVES FOR OUR GOOD AND HIS GLORY.

In Romans 8:28, Paul says that, "for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." In making this statement, Paul is pointing out the reversals of fortune that come through the hand of the Father in Christ. That is, no matter what happens to a Christ-follower, God will take that happening and use it for good in that person's life.

In the final ten chapters of Genesis, Joseph becomes an example of one who is able to properly see the hand of God in the midst of his own trials. Joseph was betrayed and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. His reputation was trampled under deceptive accusation. He was thrown in prison for a crime he didn't commit. Fellow prisoners broke a pact that would have set him free. He suffered countless injustices at the hands of a foreign people. After rightly interpreting the king's dream, Joseph rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt. Many years after being betrayed by his brothers, Joseph was able to confront them. Not knowing Joseph's true identity, they come to him for food in the midst of a drought. During the encounter, Joseph reveals that he is their brother. Now with power on his side, Joseph finally has a chance to get even.

Trembling in his presence, the brothers fully expect Joseph to pour out retribution in the place of grain. But in Genesis 50:20, Joseph offers a bewildering response, saying, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Incredibly, instead of storing up years of anger and



bitterness toward those whose evil choices appeared to sabotage his life, Joseph acquires the wisdom of a greater perspective, seeing God's ability to turn evil toward good. How much more true is Joseph's insight in light of the cross of Christ? God works all together for good.

To "redeem" something literally means to pay a required price to buy something back. But it can also mean to take a situation that looks bad and turn it for good, to create a transforming reversal of fortune for those involved. When God redeems a moment of grief into something beautiful, as He did for Joseph, He reveals His favor towards sinful humanity. Christ died for us and paid the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8), but He also continues to nurse our wounds, piecing every aspect of our broken lives back together again. Christ's ultimate payment on the cross manifests itself in a multitude of other mini-redemptions, weaving a tapestry made up of everything that happens to us and through us for His own glory. Granted, our definitions of "good" and "bad" regarding what happens to us must also be baptized and transformed to reflect the mind of Christ. This takes time. But what a comfort it is to know that anything that happens to me, which I would now label as "bad," in the hands of Christ will be redeemed into something "good" that glorifies Him and benefits me in the long run. God takes the brokenness experienced in our pain and uses it to strengthen us, to make us immovable under similar weight in the future, and ultimately to make us useful in serving someone else in similar travails.

GOD USES PAIN AND SUFFERING TO MAKE US MORE LIKE JESUS.

If we are to share in Jesus' glory, we must first share in His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). Sharing in Jesus' sufferings means experiencing pain that comes through identifying with Him as Savior, but also as human. The human condition presupposes a broken world, complete with more than enough pain to go around. Jesus subjected Himself to this brokenness by entering through a dirty manger and leaving on a dirty cross. Between these points, He felt the anguish of losing friends, disappointment with comrades, grief at others' losses, and knowing that some people would not turn from their path of destruction.

Jesus displayed a strength that emanated from His inner man. The biblical account tells us nothing about his outer stature but much about his inner strength, a strength forged through the empathetic suffering that comes through fully engaging the lives of those around Him, a strength forged through standing firm against Satan's attacks, a strength developed while enduring the brokenness of a world He purposely entered from heaven.

NOTES

Paul suggested that to truly know Jesus we would first have to suffer as He did. This conviction even led Paul to rejoice in pain, saying, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death," (Philippians 3:10). Our relationship to Christ is bound to fully experiencing the weight of sin in this world through suffering—as He did while on earth. We are also promised that if we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, we can also expect to share abundantly in His comfort (2 Corinthians 1:5).

GOD USES PAIN AND SUFFERING TO GIVE US HOPE AND HELP US LONG FOR OUR HEAVENLY HOME.

Romans 8:21-22 speaks of the "whole world groaning and travailing together in pain," but the book of Revelation describes a day when evil will be judged and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." Indeed, God will one day make things right by bringing judgment on all that causes pain and suffering. That time will not come until we are liberated from the sin of this world and brought to our heavenly home with the Lord.

The brokenness of the world spurred the writers of the Bible to long for another reality. While we are to be fully present in this world as God is working redemption both in and through us, we will experience the fullness of this redemptive work in another age. Thus, Paul was able to say, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18)," and the writer of Hebrews could assert, "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). This "city" will be a place where all things are made right, where Jesus will wipe away every tear, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain because the old order of things has passed away (Revelation 21:4). In this future place Jesus will make all things new. There is no doubt that we will face instances of great pain in sports and in life, but it is possible for these trying experiences to stir in us hope for the wholeness we will find in the age to come.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways have you experienced pain in sports? How have these experiences shaped you as an athlete?
2. In what ways have you experienced pain in your life? How have these experiences shaped your relationship with God and the person you are today?
3. Imagine you are a sports chaplain, what are some helpful ways you might support an athlete who has just suffered a career ending injury?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Brand, Paul. *The Gift of Pain: Why We Hurt and What We Can do About it*. Zondervan, 1997.

Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Dutton Adult, 2013.

Kreeft, Peter. *Three Philosophies of Life*. Ignatius Press, 1990.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. Bantam, 1983.

Sittser, Jerry L. *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*. Zondervan, 2004.

Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* Zondervan, 1997.



“This restriction has become the focus of my life; it has hit at the inner core of my being.” –Injured Athlete

YOU OFTEN DON'T THINK ABOUT INJURIES UNTIL YOU HAVE THEM, AND THE MORE SERIOUS THE MORE IMPORTANT IT IS TO RECOVER PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND MENTALLY. LIKE PLAYING THE GAME, RECOVERY NEEDS A GAME PLAN.

Coping with Injury: The Psychology of Being Sidelined

Injuries can be devastating, especially to individuals who are consistently active and training. The emotional and psychological impact of major injuries has the potential to restrict you for months or even years. You can quickly suffer from a feeling of disconnect, especially if you are used to being part of a community of athletes. Feelings of being unwanted, envy, shame, guilt, isolation and fear of re-injury are common with severe injuries. There is risk of depression. However, with a game plan by the coach, trainers, rehab instructors and you, recovery can happen.

- Decide on a long-term goal for your recovery. Make yourself accountable to someone who can help you set smaller goals to reach your long-term recovery goal.
- How will you “celebrate” the successes of achieving these smaller goals along the way?
- What do you need to do to ensure there are no long-term threats to your health as a result of this injury?
- Who can you stay connected to, both from the team and from other areas of life, who can help you through this time when you could feel isolated?

CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

Trials & transitions: dealing with injuries

TIPS & PRINCIPLES FOR THE ATHLETE

Stay Connected: Connect with people, either from the team or outside of that environment.

Injury Information: Learn about the injury and become familiar with the rehabilitation process.

Acceptance: Accept what has happened. Recognize that setbacks do happen.

Be Active: Doing some kind of training is more positive than sitting around feeling depressed.

Goal Setting: Set both long-term and short-term goals.

Celebrate: Reward yourself often enough to be motivated.

Stick to the Plan: Don't force recovery but be diligent in doing what you need to do.

Positive Self Talk: Use the word “YET” (e.g. I can't run “YET”).

Mindfulness: Mindfulness works, in part, by helping people to accept their experiences—including painful emotions—rather than react to them with aversion and avoidance. Helps you answer the question, “What do I want to do today?”

Relaxation and Imagery: Athletes have used imagery to increase blood flow to injured areas and reduce recovery.

FOR THE COACH / FITNESS PRO

Keep in Touch: Build emotional support. Demonstrate positive empathy. Be a compassionate listener. Visit, phone, email, Facebook etc.

Build Rapport: Understand that frustration, vulnerability, anger, confusion are normal. Show emotional support by fostering contact and involvement

Injury Reminders: Avoid repeatedly mentioning the injury during trainings.

Be Welcoming: If the athlete isn't welcomed around trainings they could begin to feel a sense of loss from the change in relationship.

Recovery Plan: Lay out a specific recovery plan as this helps the athlete feel more confident and capable.

Goal Setting: Help the athlete set personal performance goals and strategies. Ensure these are specific and achievable, based on movements, strength and endurance.

Stress: Stress leads to tension in the muscles so be mindful of issues that may cause extra stress on the recovering athlete.

Establish a Contract: When an athlete is continuing with “destructive behavior”.

RESOURCES >>> psychologywod.com/2013/05/19/coping-with-injury-the-psychology-of-being-sidelined/
On Mindfulness: helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm. On Coping with the Emotional Stress of a Sports Injury: sportsmedicine.about.com/od/sportpsychology/a/Injury_Coping.htm

BIBLE STUDY

trials & transitions: dealing with injuries

Injuries in a sport are devastating, and cause a great sense of despair in what our purpose is and where God is calling us to be. Why would God allow these trials and sufferings in our life? Have you ever felt this way?

In this passage, James writes to fellow believers about persevering through trials and the testing of faith. Put yourself in the position of these believers receiving this letter while they are suffering persecution.

4. While God does not cause the injury, He deeply cares for you as a person. Why might God allow pain and suffering through our injuries?
5. What are some practical ways that you can choose to overcome the troubles you have and find hope and joy in your daily life? How might you begin to grow in your trust in God's bigger picture?
6. As you go through your day, who else is facing trials similar to yours and how could you be an encouragement to them?

GOD, I TRUST THAT THROUGH MY SUFFERING AND TRIALS YOU ARE PRESENT IN MY LIFE. THROUGH THIS HARDSHIP, LET ME CONTINUE TO SEE YOU AND OTHERS IN NEW WAYS THAT I MAY NOT HAVE SEEN BEFORE. I BELIEVE YOU HAVE SOMETHING MORE IN MIND FOR ME. AND AS I HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED BY YOUR WORD, LET ME ALSO ENCOURAGE MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST.

READ JAMES 1:1-12

1. What strikes you either positively or negatively in this passage?
2. If games or matches are a test of our ability and conditioning, then how might a trial such as an injury be a test of your faith?
3. What do you think James meant when he said, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him?"

Additional Biblical References on Injury >>> Romans 8:32-39, 1 Peter 1: 6-9





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

trials & transitions: adversity

“The strongest oak of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It’s the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.”

—Napoleon Hill, motivational speaker (1883-1970)

Adversity is part of life. Everyone encounters difficult situations and some tragedies. Sport is no different. Keeping going is what differentiates those who succeed and those who don't. When going through hard times, ask yourself:

- What has kept me going when some difficulties have come my way?
- What has helped me get through my hardest training sessions rather than just give up?
- Who are some of the people in my life that I could turn to for help?
- What am I doing NOW to ensure I am developing a healthy relationship with these people?
- What are some creative outlets I enjoy? (E.g. drawing, listening to music, painting, walking in nature and meditation). How can I build them into my life on a regular basis?

Being shattered physically and emotionally has two possible outcomes: You become the **VICTOR** or you become the **VICTIM**. Adversity can help you grow both as a person and as an athlete. You can't control what happens in life, but you can control how you deal with it.

HOW TO DEAL WITH ADVERSITY

DO'S

- Develop a game plan to overcome obstacles instead of...
- Own the situation instead of...
- Calm down and focus on the next opportunity instead of...
- Embrace the battle; it will strengthen you and give you confidence instead of...
- Let yourself experience strong emotions instead of...
- Spend time with the people you love instead of...
- Meet the demands of daily life instead of...
- Take time for rest and recovery instead of.....

DON'TS

- Blaming others
- Dwelling on it
- Losing your temper
- Focusing on “Why me?”
- Keeping them inside
- Isolating yourself
- Avoiding problems
- Continuing to push yourself

PLAN TO BE THE VICTOR NOT THE VICTIM

- *How can you make a personal action plan with these strategies today?*
- *Who can you connect with now to build relationships that will help you become the VICTOR?*

RESOURCES >>>

Tips for Overcoming Adversity www.essentiallifekills.net/overcoming-adversity.html

3 Ways Great Leaders Handle Great Adversity www.forbes.com/sites/mikemaddock/2013/11/26/three-ways-great-leaders-handle-great-adversity

BIBLE STUDY

trials & transitions: adversity

One of the great things about sport is that it is so much like life. Nobody wins every match or game, and everyone has to learn to live with and deal with adversity. Some of what we are dealing with is self-inflicted and some of it has come upon us in ways that are totally beyond our control.

If I make a poor decision, I really cannot blame anyone but myself for the consequences. However, if I face personal or emotional injury, I have to learn to deal with that in a totally different way. We cannot always find a reason or find someone to blame.

4. Paul doesn't say be thankful for everything but in everything. How can you begin to practice that? What are the results in verse 6?
5. Paul says he has learned to be content in whatever the circumstances (v.13). He is writing this letter from prison. How has he learned this? What is the secret?
6. Are there others in your community who are dealing with difficult circumstances? How can you begin to help them from what you have learned today?

FATHER, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOVE AND FORGIVENESS FOR MY FAILURES. PLEASE HELP ME TO DEAL WITH THE ADVERSITY IN MY LIFE WITH THE STRENGTH YOU PROVIDE. MAY I SEE YOUR PURPOSES IN THIS PAIN AND GROW THROUGH THE CHALLENGE? I PRAY THIS IN JESUS' NAME.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-13

The apostle Paul went from being a self-righteous attacker of Christ-followers to the most fervent defender of their faith. He described himself as the chief among sinners in the Scriptures. That attitude filled him with grace and grit that allowed him to survive both his own shortcomings and the endless adversarial circumstances he faced in his missionary journeys.

1. What are some of the attitudes or perspectives that Paul has as you read through the passage?
2. How can we rejoice in the midst of adverse circumstances we face personally and as a team (v. 4)?
3. His next attitude is gentleness (v. 5). Why would that be important on your team?

Additional Biblical References on Adversity >>> 2 Corinthians 11: 24—12:10. Philippians 4:10-13.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

trials & transitions: decreased playing time

“You accept squad rotation, but when you are on the bench week upon week it does become difficult when you feel you have got so much to give.”

—Footballer Darren Fletcher, after transferring from Manchester United to West Bromwich Albion.

You're a dedicated sports person. You've spent your life putting everything you have into training every day. Then you find yourself on your dream team, but with little playing time. Will you choose to handle the situation with dignity and sportsmanship that makes a contribution to your team OR to pout, complain and indirectly share your misery with everyone around you? How could you use your position on the bench as a source of motivation to improve? Really GREAT athletes are those who make everyone around them better. What can you do on the bench to help your teammates play better and feel better about themselves?

Role Players. Unsung Heroes. True Warrior.

To a large extent, an athlete's identity is found in the sport, so when this is taken away through lack of playing time it can be a staggering blow. For the team to be as good as possible, everyone is needed. Substitute players are vital to the success of any team. Your teammates playing ahead of you are probably people you respect, so there is no solace in wanting them to play poorly so that you can get playing time. Maintaining a positive, winning attitude can be frustrating when you feel you are not getting a chance to prove yourself.

8 PRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES TO COPE WHEN NOT PLAYING

ASK THE COACH	Don't complain or make demands; instead ask the coach what you can do to improve your chances of earning more playing time.
WORK HARD	When you're not playing, frustration sets in, so giving your all can become quite challenging.
BE READY	Always retain the mentality of a starter. Keep hope alive and prepare yourself daily as if you're going to play the entire game. It may happen.
KEEP IT QUIET	Other than the coach (see #1 above), it's best not to talk to others about your frustrations. Venting can only hinder your chances.
BE A GREAT TEAMMATE	Being a supportive teammate to players who are getting more playing time—time you want—can be difficult. Dealing with conflicting emotions will make you a better player and a better person.
REMAIN PASSIONATE	Maintain your love for the game. Continue to be a fan of the game. Watch and enjoy other teams and players perform.
SERVE SELFLESSLY	Serve the player you are in direct competition with by helping them with their game. You can use your insights when you enter the game.
SHED YOUR SELF-ABSORBED STATE	Look at the bigger picture, such as team success, other player's plights and the stress the coach can be under.

Playing time can be a very selfish issue. Being a true team means players thinking about WE. How much of the ME are you willing to sacrifice for the team's WE?

- What strategies do you think you could start doing immediately to help your situation?
- Which strategy do you think you will find the hardest to do? Make up a plan to work towards improving this strategy TODAY.

RESOURCES >>>

Competitive Advantage www.competitivedge.com/starting-bench-warmer
The Role Player www.coachesclipboard.net/RolePlayer.html
www.layups.com/8-ways-to-encourage-a-bench-player

BIBLE STUDY

trials & transitions: decreased playing time

Everyone loves to play; that is the attraction of sport. At the elite level everyone is a great player but not everyone gets to play. How can I gain perspective to help me while I wait for my turn to play?

4. If you are not getting much playing time what are other valuable contributions can you make to your team based on your strengths and your roles?
5. Who in your team or organization can you encourage with what you have learned from this passage?

LORD I AM FRUSTRATED. I WANT TO PLAY MORE! HELP ME TO GAIN A LARGER PERSPECTIVE OF MY DREAMS TO INCLUDE THE PEOPLE AROUND ME. HELP ME CELEBRATE THEIR STRENGTHS AND GROW TO UNDERSTAND MY STRENGTHS AND ROLE ON THE TEAM

READ 1 COR. 12:14-26

1. As you read this passage what words would you use to describe the attitudes we should have when we are involved with any group of people?
2. Even though this is written to a church or "body of Christ", what kind of things do you see that would apply to your team or athletic situation?
3. What are the different roles and strengths that you see in various people on your team and organization? What role and strengths do you contribute? How would you describe their value and your value to the team?

Additional Biblical References on Frustration >>> John 20: 20-28. John 21:15-22.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

trials & transitions: dealing with a critical incident

In 1993, the Zambian National Football Team was enroute to play Senegal in a World Cup qualifier. Tragically, their flight went down just 500m off the coast of Libreville, Gabon, killing all 25 people on board. Never before had this nation had to cope with a sporting catastrophe of this magnitude.

How do you think you would respond if you experienced a critical incident in sport or involving sports people? Do you have the tools to process the event over time or to help others do the same?

A critical incident is an emergency situation that causes a person to experience unusually strong thoughts, emotions and/or physical effects which may impair their ability to cope, either at the scene or later. Critical incidents are not unique to sport. Yet, in the world of high profile sports, critical incidents do gain a lot of media coverage. Critical incident stress management can help you value, recognize and normalize reactions to an abnormal event.

STEPS IN MANAGING THE STRESS

1. Group Defusing

Within 8 Hours of the Event. Allow 20 minutes to 1 hour.

Group defusing, which must happen away from the incident location, allows individuals to share their feelings and recognize that trauma is a natural response to a critical incident. There could be shock, denial or anger. The severity of the incident will determine whether a debrief is required.

2. A Debrief

Within 3 to 4 days of the Event. Allow 2- 3 hours.

A trained professional should conduct the session and questions could include:

- **“What was the worst part of the incident for you?”**
This enables the mind to express the effects on the primal senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and feelings. For instance, the smell of petrol may become traumatic for someone who has experienced a critical incident at a road crash.
- **“How does this make you feel?”**
This helps identify the emotional state of those affected. Athletes often need to help those affected to cope, deal or reconcile the incident for themselves.
- **“Where can you go for help and ongoing assistance?”**
Team doctors, counselors and chaplains, be aware of other symptoms that may surface as a result of this trauma, such as chest pain or extreme anxiety.

A full healing is the desired outcome for survivors and observers of critical incidents. but realize that this will take time.

The Zambian National Football Team created a new team, including the few original players who were not on the devastating flight. That team played in memory of their fallen national heroes, competing in the finals of the 2012 African Cup of Nations in Libreville, less than a kilometer from where the plane crashed into the sea. They won that final and, for many, the healing process was complete.

RESOURCES >>> www.criticalincidentstress.com/coping_with_critical_incidents
Many countries and industries have their response protocol and strategy to critical incident stress management. It is best to look at what your country or industry uses. An example from the UK is www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2007/200708-cba-critical-incident-management.pdf

BIBLE STUDY

trials & transitions: dealing with a critical incident

None of us like critical incidents, especially when they happen to us or to one of our loved ones. Critical incidents in sport are commonplace, so how can we react to them when they occur?

4. How does knowing that the Shepherd is with you in the midst of difficulty help to comfort you? Why?
5. Trusting in the Shepherd brings great confidence. What is the result of following the Shepherd in verses 5-6? Who else in your life needs this type of confidence and comfort?

MY GOOD SHEPHERD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE TO REST MY MIND AND BODY, AND SOOTHE MY SOUL IN TIMES SUCH AS THESE. LEAD ME TO THE RIGHT PERSON—YOUR ADVOCATE HERE ON EARTH—WHO WILL BE YOUR PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND IN WHOM I CAN TURN IN TIMES SUCH AS THESE.

READ PSALM 23

1. What do you observe about the type of environment created by the Shepherd for His sheep? During a critical incident what kinds of things can you do to help create a similar environment?
2. The Psalmist talks about enemies. King David was a shepherd before he became king. He was known to confront the enemies of his sheep, such as bears and lions. In sport, what are potential “enemies” (critical incidents) that sports people face?
3. As you read again through Psalm 23, identify the verbs in verses 1-4 about what the Shepherd does on behalf of his sheep. How would understanding God’s care and guidance help you to respond well to the incident?

Additional Biblical References on Crisis >>> John 10:1-38 *Listening to the Shepherd.* | Peter 4:19-5:10 *Suffering with patience and trust.*



Jesus' call, "Come follow me," is an invitation to be in relationship and to participate in

God's renewal of all creation. God creatively uses our experiences, passions, and gifts to guide us to vocations where we can live out Christ's call. Sports is one of many stations along life's journey where one can live out his or her calling to follow Jesus Christ and participate in God's renewal.

CHRIST-CENTERED VOCATION BEGINS WITH AN IDENTITY ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH A LOVING GOD WHO CREATED US IN HIS IMAGE.

When it comes to the Christ-centered concept of vocation, the question, "What do I do?" is not as important as the question, "Who am I?" God created humans intricately and wonderfully in God's own image (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13-15). God's love is the very fabric of our existence, as well as the driving force behind Jesus Christ's work of joining us and redeeming us (John 3:16). Jesus called his disciples by saying, "Come follow Me." The calling of a believer is ultimately not to a particular task but to the person of Jesus Christ. The foundation for answering the call to follow Christ is to find one's identity as a beloved child of God, created in His image and dependent on His guidance.

The dominant message in competitive sports is that identity is based on achievement and independence. According to today's world of sports, worth and value are based on quantifiable achievements such as a batting average, vertical jump, or number of championships won. Sports Psychologist David L. Cook says the greatest mental hurdle for athletes is the fear of failure because identity and self-worth are tied to a score. Rather than striving to prove one's value by the outcome of competition, an athlete who follows Christ finds freedom in knowing her value has already been determined before competition begins. The first step of answering Christ's call is to separate personal identity from performance and connect it to its rightful source—the love and grace of the Creator.

GOD HAS REVEALED THE PURPOSE OF WORK IN OUR SHARED CALLING AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

Work is an essential component of human life. After God created the heavens and the earth, all the plants and animals, God created humans. Then he gave them a job (Genesis 2:15). Work was part of God's intended design. Therefore, work is good and is meant to point toward God. However, because it is the nature of sin to twist good things, work in the world today does not always reflect God's design. Work is often treated as a means to an end, to build up one's bank account or ego. It is also often dreaded and not enjoyed.

Ultimately, all Christ-followers share the same calling: to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Again, Jesus's invitation to, "Come follow Me," is ultimately an invitation to a relationship. This relationship will shape and redirect our concept of work to point toward God once again. Jesus said to His disciples, "As You (Father) have sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Just as Jesus was sent, we too are sent by God to do His work in the world.

As followers of Jesus, we ought to continually be observing the ways God is at work in the world through what we read in the Bible, our prayer life, what we experience, and the community of believers. Then the task is to apply our understanding of God to the world in which we live. For sportspersons, this world is often the sport in which they

participate. Let's give this a try. Jesus taught, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44) and He demonstrated this teaching on the cross as He died for and prayed for those who put Him there. Therefore, unconditional love is a characteristic of God that has the potential to be spread in one's sporting context. Imagine your teammate quits and returns a week later to find he will have to run fifty hills to get back on the team. What would it look like to run with him? What if you lead players to pray for their upcoming opponents during the week leading up to the match? When we view our sport with our Bible lenses on, the opportunities for participating in God's work are endless.

While defining the shared calling of all Christ-followers should be a task of continual exploration, writer Quentin Shultz offers this helpful summary, "Our vocation is to be caring followers of Jesus Christ who faithfully love God, neighbor and self" (Shultze, 15). In doing this, we are participants in God's work of renewing all things (Ephesians 2:10). Whatever you do, whether you play professional football or paint the lines on the field, your work should be an expression of this purpose. To summarize, God calls us to a relationship of grace and dependence on Jesus. This relationship shapes our shared purpose: to participate in God's work of renewal by loving God, neighbor and self.

GOD USES OUR PASSIONS, EXPERIENCES, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES TO GUIDE US TO "STATIONS," WHERE WE CAN LIVE OUT OUR SHARED VOCATION.

There are many facets to a life committed to God's call. Shultze uses a helpful framework for thinking about vocation in both general and specific terms. He says that, in addition to our shared calling as followers of Jesus, God also calls us to specific "stations" where we can work out our faith concretely. Stations are the specific contexts where God places us to "keep watch" and work for good on His behalf. They include our jobs, situations and relationships (Shultze, 15). Making the connection between our stations and our vocation is a life-long task of discernment. You may be considering whether to pursue your sport at the professional level, whether to start a dating relationship or get married, whether to accept a new coaching position elsewhere, or whether to leave a career in sport to pursue something else. How do we determine the stations to which God may be calling us toward or away from?



“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am” (Palmer, 4). To gain insight into the particular vocation God may be calling you to, it helps to reflect on one’s experiences, passions, strengths and weaknesses. Consider what gives you a deep sense of joy and purpose. What makes you say, “I was made for this!” Consider what you are good at and what you are not so good at. Henri Nouwen says that a sense of harmony and belonging are signs of vocational clarity (Nouwen, 105). When considering a possible career, it is helpful to ask whether it is in harmony with your purpose as a Christ-follower and your understanding of the unique ways God has created and shaped you. Frederick Buechner says, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Buechner, 95). When you find something you deeply enjoy, are gifted at, in which you are also participating in God’s renewal by meeting a desperate need in the world, you have found a good fit that is well worth pursuing.

SPORTS IS A LEGITIMATE VOCATION IN WHICH ONE CAN LIVE OUT HIS OR HER CALLING TO FOLLOW TO JESUS CHRIST AND PARTICIPATE IN GOD’S RENEWAL.

For many, a particular sport is a career. Playing sports often produces feelings of joy, purpose, gladness, harmony, and belonging. In applying one’s entire self—body, mind, and spirit—to strive to complete a goal, one can feel as though he is doing that for which he was created. Play connects human beings to their Creator. World famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma puts it this way:

“One needs to constantly remind oneself to play with the abandon of the child who is just learning the cello,” Ma continues, “Because why is that kid playing? He is playing for pleasure.”

But we are not called to a particular station in life to simply achieve personal gratification. We are called to participate in God’s work of renewal in that activity. We are called, in some unique way, to meet the world’s deepest hunger.

There is plenty of work for renewal to be done in sport. Today’s understanding of what it means to live out faith in Christ as an athlete tends to focus on using sport as a “platform” to share the faith through team Bible studies or the testimonies of star athletes who have achieved cultural success. While God is at work in such ministry, it would help to broaden the perspective.

Following Jesus in sports not only means working with God through sport but also to sport. Jesus challenged the character of the culture in his day. In every sport, played at every level, there are aspects of the game that do not reflect God’s design for play and competition. The win-at-all costs mentality drives players, coaches and organizations to overlook the principles of fairness and integrity to gain an upper hand in competition. The human body is a gift created by God as an act of love. Rather than being treated as such, many athletes use and abuse the body to obtain an intended outcome. These are only a few examples. The world of sports is hungry for holistic healing. Today’s athletes who follow Jesus can participate in God’s work by challenging the standards of their sport when they do not reflect God’s design.

Sportspersons have the opportunity to follow Jesus not only by challenging the culture of sport, but also by setting an example that honors God’s purpose. Author Wes Neal challenges the belief of winning as only scoreboard results, and states that the athlete who believes in Jesus ought to strive for total release. He says, “Winning is the total release of all that you are, mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually toward the goal of representing Jesus Christ in whatever you do” (Neal, 325). In short, sports are a divinely inspired venue for one to experience God’s joy and participate in God’s healing. Therefore, it is a wonderful station in which one can answer Christ’s call to “follow Me.”

AS WE CONTINUE LIFE’S JOURNEY, GOD WILL REVEAL MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE OUT OUR CALLING.

The words of former NFL coach Vince Lombardi, “Winners never quit and quitters never win,” are representative of what the sports world has to say on the topic of quitting (Page, 35). But are these words our best guide in decisions about

whether or when to leave one’s sport? Our best guide is our shared vocation: to be caring followers of Christ who faithfully love God, others and self (Shultze, 15). As we continue to journey through life, God will reveal more opportunities to live out our vocation. Beginning a new job, getting married, moving to a new neighborhood, or having children all present new opportunities to be part of God’s work for good in the world.

Therefore, despite what many around us may imply, it is acceptable and often even wise to walk away from one’s sport (Page, 38). Every facet of the human-mind, body and spirit-is full of gifts intended to glorify God. An athlete may need to consider the sport’s effect on her long-term physical or emotional health. She may also want to reflect on whether the time and energy is being used in a way that fits with her personal joy, gifts, and God’s purpose. Every athlete plays his last career game, but all who answer Christ’s call are on their way to a sacred place where God will hold them in the palm of His hand forever (Nouwen, 107). We may, at times, quit one station to pursue another; however, we never quit following Jesus. God is composing a grand symphony of renewal in which we may play many parts. Though the time may come to pick up a new instrument, we never stop playing music.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Does a fear of failure impact your approach to sports or life? What would it look like if this fear were removed?
2. What are some potential ways you can demonstrate God’s love in your sport?
3. What are you doing when you feel most alive?
4. What in the world breaks your heart? What in your sport breaks your heart?
5. Where does your deepest gladness meet the world’s deepest need?
6. How do you know when it’s time to walk away?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*. HarperOne, 1993.

Cook, David L., PhD. Sports Psychologist. www.davidcookphd.com/about-david-l-cook

Nouwen, Henri. Chapter titled *Test the Call: Discerning Vocation*, in *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. HarperCollins, 2013.

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CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

calling & careers: life beyond sport

Traditionally, there has been a tendency to view the end of an athletic career as a sudden and abrupt event, with the risk of serious emotional consequences and identity crisis.

The average career span of an NFL player is 3.5 years. The average professional athlete's career is over by age 33; for physically demanding sports, a career could potentially end as young as 28 years of age. Another troubling fact is that 78% of NFL players, and 60% of NBA players become bankrupt, divorced or unemployed within 5 years of leaving the game. With these statistics in mind, you need to ask yourself:

- *WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FEELINGS YOU ARE DEALING WITH IN TRANSITIONING OUT OF YOUR SPORT?*
- *DO YOU HAVE A HELPFUL STRATEGY FOR CONFRONTING UNHEALTHY THINKING AND FEELINGS?*
- *WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU CAN TRUST ENOUGH TO BE TRANSPARENT WITH REGARDING WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE YOU?*

Potential Emotional Consequences

Transition out of your sport may be accompanied by the following maladjustment expressions:

- Emotional distress (characterized by an extreme dissatisfaction with yourself and your life, feelings of depression and helplessness, frustration and disappointment).
- Social disorientation (such as feelings of isolation, perceived lack of support, loss of social status).
- Dysfunctional self-perception (overwhelming feelings of loss, loss of identity).

Tips for Those Already Retired

A growing number of studies have shown that transition is not necessarily a sudden "cut" with traumatic consequences for retirees. If you are able to experience the process with gradual phases, the maladjustment feelings decrease. Cultivate feelings such as curiosity (in exploring new fields) and relief (from a sport that is no longer a source of motivation), which can facilitate your transition out of sport.

Tips for Those Not Yet Retired

- Retire voluntarily as long as it is feasible. The feeling of controlling your retirement is much stronger when you retire through your own choice instead of being forced to retire, and has a positive effect on your adjustment strategies.
- Be prepared and make plans for the future throughout your sporting career. Preparation enables you to anticipate your career termination scenario and minimizes the feeling of loss that could occur upon retirement.
- Strive to develop a multiple-defined identity that is not exclusively supported by your success in sport, but also by your social relationships, experiences and successes outside of sport.
- Develop a nurturing and supportive network that will give you encouragement in the transition process and a strong, reliable foundation. Cherish your friendships and social involvement throughout your career.

TIPS FOR LIFE

1. *What aspects of your sport do you value enough to carry into other life activities?*
2. *How has your sport met your need for personal security and significance? How can you creatively attempt to meet that need when you are not involved in your sport?*

"Athletes die twice! The first time is when they retire from sports."

—Daniel Prodan, Romanian retired pro football player

RESOURCES >>> www.zoneofexcellence.ca/Journal/Issue13/Life_After_Sport.pdf
www.olympic.org/Documents/elite_athletes/TRANSITION_ADJUSTMENT.pdf

BIBLE STUDY

calling & careers: life beyond sport

All athletic careers come to a close, whether through age, injury, illness, exhaustion, or change in management. One of the scariest thoughts for an athlete is what to do and who to be post-career. If you are no longer an athlete, then who are you? It is often said that a sports star will die twice, the first time at retirement.

The book of Proverbs was written to give “prudence to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young and to make the wise even wiser” (Proverbs 1:4). Acquiring wisdom and avoiding the pitfalls of foolishness leads to personal wellbeing, happy family relationships, satisfying work, and good community standing. Isn't this what we are all looking for?

4. As you look to the future and plan your life after sport, in what areas do you need to apply these insights right now? Relationships? Finances? Health?
5. Who in your life can offer you sound wisdom? Is there someone in your sphere of influence with whom you can share this?

FATHER, HELP ME TO BECOME A PERSON OF WISDOM AND AVOID FOOLISHNESS IN MY LIFE. I REALIZE THAT MY SPORT CAREER COULD BE VERY SHORT. HELP ME TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS RIGHT NOW, AND THEN IN MY LIFE AFTER SPORT.

READ PROVERBS 2:1-22

1. Pursuing sports takes focus and commitment. What is the Psalmist calling us to pursue with our whole life? How do you think intelligence is different than wisdom?
2. Identify the verbs (actions we take or avoid) used in this passage.
3. What are some of the benefits if we follow this advice? Consequences if we don't?

Additional Bible References on Life Beyond Sport >>> 1 Timothy 6:6-10. James 3:13-18. The book of Proverbs. *Life after Sport: Depression in the Retired Athlete*, Emma Vickers.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

calling & careers: time management

“As athletes, we are often praised for our ability to focus on a goal and achieve it. We are dedicated to our sport and disciplined in following a rigid and heavy training schedule. Unfortunately, however, this focus and dedication to our sport can often be detrimental to other aspects of our life. In order to be the best athlete possible we should try to live a balanced life. But with so much time spent on sport, how can we find this balance?”

- James Tomkins, Australian World & Olympic Champion rower

CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

- MY TRAINING SCHEDULE, REHAB AND COMPETITION SCHEDULE TAKE UP MOST OF MY TIME.
- RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE AFFECTED BY HOW MUCH TIME I SPEND ON MY SPORT.
- I NEVER SEEM TO HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO STUDY OR FOR HOBBIES.
- I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND A GOOD BALANCE OF MY TIME.
- THERE ARE EXPECTATIONS ON MY TIME THAT ARE OUT OF MY CONTROL.

An athlete's time needs to be focused on his sport; it is a 'job' for many. But, it is essential for athletes to learn how to use their time wisely—because how they spend their time and with whom will impact not only their performance, but also their life. If you can find ways to manage your time well as an athlete or coach, you are setting yourself up with a skill that will be valuable for the rest of your life. There are simple tools that can help you maximize your athletic training as well as time spent with family, friends, studies and personal development.

Finding a system that works for you is of the utmost importance.

Find an annual planner and make a plan. Here is an example of a time management plan.

1. Break down your schedule into daily, weekly, monthly and yearly outlines. Start with non-negotiable items and move toward negotiable items so that there may be room for decisions.
 - Pre-season/Lead-up training
 - › Season/Competitions
 - › Post-season/Off-season
 - › Recovery
 - › Study times
 - Exams
 - Assignments
 - › Holiday/Rest periods
2. Set aside 15 minutes at the beginning of the week to review your weekly and daily schedule.
 - Put the times for these daily activities in your schedule for the week:
 - › Training
 - › Gym workouts
 - › Classes
 - › Recovery
 - › Time with family and friends
 - › Shopping for meals and cooking
 - › Other commitments
 - You may also want to accompany your daily schedule with a “to do” list for the week
3. Make sure you have all of these things in one place. If you get a training schedule, study schedule or anything else, put them onto one main document so that you know what is coming up and you are not surprised.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you typically do with downtime or free time?
2. Is your weekly schedule “realistic”? Does it contribute to your mental, emotional and physical health?

RESOURCES >>> www.secure.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/313951/Whipper.pdf
www.olympic.org/Documents/Elite_Athletes/Athletes%20Kit/acp-kit-en.pdf
www.olympic.org/Documents/Commissions_PDFfiles/Athletes/athletes-kit/Education_D_Print.pdf

BIBLE STUDY

calling & careers: time management

Take a moment to think about your last week, what you did, who you spent time with, and even the things that took up your thought life. What we do with our time reflects what we value; it even shapes who we are and who we are becoming.

For the sportsperson, weeks, months and even years can become so predictable that it can almost feel like someone else is holding the reins on your life. It is important not only to schedule time well as an athlete, but to spend some time thinking about why you spend your time on certain things and whether these things are helping you get to where you want to be physically and personally.

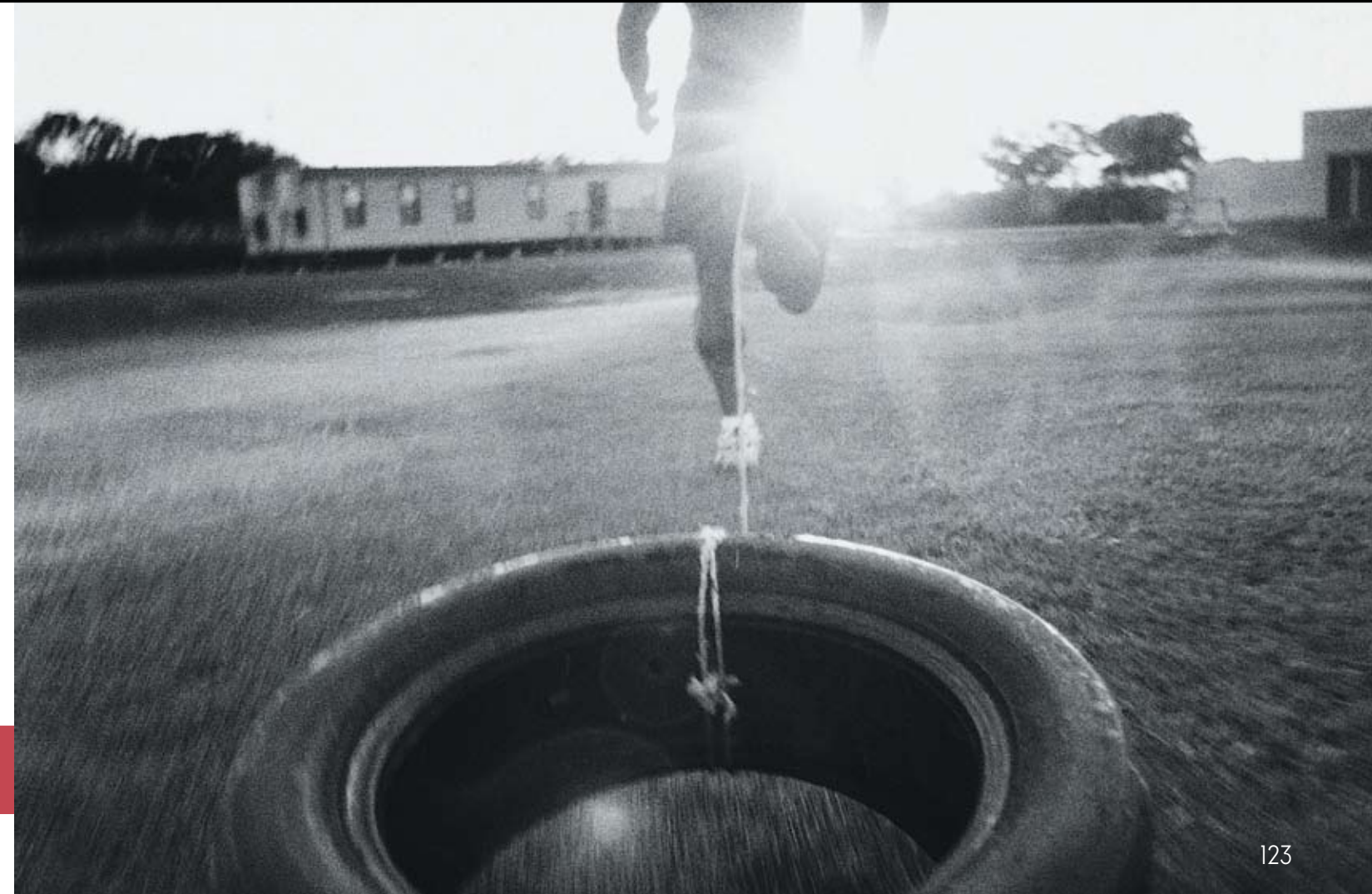
3. In the passage in Colossians Paul is in chains, in prison, where he has little control of his own time; yet he requests prayer for how he uses his time. How does this relate to your life as an athlete?
4. How do the elements which Paul requests prayer for affect your own time management? How do these elements reveal what Paul viewed as valuable in how he spent his time?

FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT YOU EXISTED BEFORE TIME BEGAN. THANK YOU FOR EACH DAY, WEEK AND YEAR THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME AS A PERSON AND AN ATHLETE IN THIS EARTH. HELP ME TO ORDER MY DAYS IN A WAY THAT HONORS YOU, IN A WAY THAT HELPS ME TO BE ALL THAT YOU CREATED ME TO BE. THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE NOT ASKED ME TO BE A MACHINE, BUT THAT YOU ALLOW ME TIME TO HEAL, LAUGH, DANCE AND EVEN MOURN. HELP ME TO MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8 & COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

1. As you read the above passages and reflect on how you have used your time in the last week, what comes to your mind?
2. Based on the passage from Ecclesiastes, how do the different elements of time (change, healing, training, celebration) relate to your life as an athlete or coach? What elements are missing from your time management which need to be implemented or adjusted?

Lord, help me to find balance.





CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

calling & careers: life goals

You know this truth as it relates to your sport. You've set goals and spent thousands of hours pursuing them. Without setting goals you may not have achieved your level of success. How have you done setting goals in life outside sport?

Roles & Responsibilities

Think of all the other roles you fill—son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, student, employee, leader, spouse, etc. Think of the different responsibilities you have beyond those related to your sport—perhaps you must attend class and study, help care for a younger sibling or work to provide for yourself.

Five years from now, what kind of person do you want to be? What character and behaviors do you want to display? What achievements do you seek? These visions shed light on what you're aiming for—your destination. How will you get there? You can't afford to wait until you retire from sport.

Passion

There's much more to you than simply who you are as an athlete or coach. Consider these questions*:

- What most excites you in or about the world?
- What most angers you in or about the world?
- If you could teach three things to others about what excites you in the world, what three things would you teach?
- If you could convey to others three things about what angers you in the world, what would you convey?
- How can you use what most excites you to affect or change what most angers you?

Goals

Greatness doesn't happen by accident in sports or in life. It takes focused effort that starts with written goals. Writing goals down will clarify what you really want, motivate you to take action, help you overcome resistance and let you see and celebrate progress.**

AS YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PASSIONS, SET GOALS WHICH WILL HELP YOU MOVE TOWARD WHO YOU WANT TO BECOME AND WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE. MAKE THEM:

- S** **pecific.** Clear and unambiguous, i.e. "eat dinner with my friend every week" rather than, "Be a better friend".
- M** **easurable.** Results must be able to be measured in some way.
- A** **ttainable.** Realistic and possible.
- R** **elevant.** Connected to who you are and where you're going.
- T** **ime-oriented.** Definite starting and ending point.

Aim for nothing and you'll hit it every time.

*—Zig Ziglar,
author on
leadership*

Many athletes feel completely lost when competitive sports ends for them. Pondering roles, responsibilities, passion and goals will not only help you today, but also give you a sense of direction and purpose to make your transition to life after sports much smoother.

RESOURCES >>> www.globalsportsdevelopment.org/goal-setting-young-athletes/

* from *The Path* by Laurie Beth Jones

** source Michael Hyatt blog; www.michaelhyatt.com/5-reasons-why-you-should-commit-your-goals-to-writing.html

BIBLE STUDY

calling & careers: life goals

For the elite athlete and coach, sport is all-consuming. Rarely is there time to think about life past the next practice or the high quality recruit or the loss from the night before. Go, go, go and never stop to consider life.

The result? Disappointment, lack of direction, confusion, and brokenness. Who are you? What else might you want out of this life? Jesus challenges his disciples to sit down and consider what you are doing and what it will take to get there.

4. If you could change one aspect in each of the following areas, what would it be? (
 - physical body
 - relationships
 - emotional and social growth
 - financial stability
 - spiritual development
5. Who could you talk to so that you have a partner to encourage you and hold you accountable to these ideas? Write down the person's name and make the connection.

READ LUKE 14:28-30

1. What observations about this text are either compelling or challenging?
2. Jesus likens the building of a tower to the building of a life. What happens when the builder does not take time to calculate the costs?
3. Have you taken the necessary time to look at your passions, gifts, and skills, and set goals which go beyond your sport? Why or why not? What may happen if you fail to do that now?

Additional Bible References on Goals >>>

Proverbs 21:5 *Set wise goals.* Matthew 6:33-34 *Seek God before all else.*

FATHER, YOU HAVE GOOD PLANS FOR ME IF I ONLY WOULD SEEK YOU AND YOUR WILL. PLEASE HELP ME TO GIVE THOUGHT TO MY LIFE SO THAT I DON'T END UP LIKE AN UNWISE BUILDER, NOT COMPLETING WHAT WAS STARTED. I WANT TO FINISH WELL. I ASK YOU TO BRING PEOPLE IN MY LIFE WHO CAN HELP ME TO DO THAT.



God rules over all creation, including money, an earthly resource to provide for life's needs. Contemporary sports culture often looks to money as its ruler, which threatens the good of the game and those who play. Sportspersons who follow Jesus have an opportunity to display an alternative set of values and priorities, which acknowledge God's rightful ownership of financial resources and a responsibility to faithfully tend to money for the good of others and ourselves.

GOD IS THE RULER OF ALL CREATION, INCLUDING YOU AND YOUR MONEY.

While we know that God has created and is Lord over all things, we sometimes have a hard time connecting this belief to our day-to-day relationship with money. A proper relationship with money begins with a proper understanding of God as the source, sustainer and supreme ruler of all things. In Romans, Paul says, "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (Romans 11:36). The abilities of a professional athlete and the money she is paid for her performance are created, sustained and owned by God. Therefore, God alone is the rightful master of your life, your sport and your money.

In the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 2:24). Francis Bacon represents the spirit of this verse in his quote, "Money is a great servant, but a bad master." Clearly, the Bible does not identify money as being good or bad. However, when we attempt to satisfy our needs for happiness or security in it, it becomes an idol. It takes a place that only God deserves and we are in conflict with the first commandment. God's promise to never leave us nor forsake us earns him the right to be the only one we rely on.

God, as the ruler of all creation, uses wealth to accomplish his purposes. The Bible is full of instances when God gave great wealth to people as a means of blessing them. In the intriguing story of the spotted, speckled and black sheep in Genesis 30-31, we learn that man cannot stop God's blessing. Another terrific case study on wealth is the book of Job. Job was extremely prosperous with many children and livestock, but God allowed Satan to test his faithfulness by taking them all away. Job's response shows he did not hang his heart on his assets: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). In the end, Job is blessed with more children and his livestock doubled from what he previously owned. Is there any doubt from Job's life that God is allocating wealth not by chance but with purpose? God, who has the ultimate power to give and take away, desires to rule our lives and our money.

MONEY IS AN EARTHLY RESOURCE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FOR GOODS AND SERVICES NECESSARY FOR LIFE.

Out of his love and care, the Master of Creation provides the necessary resources for human life. Alongside God's declaration in Genesis that every plant in the garden has been given for food we also find God's command for mankind to work and tend the garden (Genesis 1-2). Money is an earthly resource to provide for life's needs; work is the means God has given us to obtain this resource. To work means to create a value that can be sold or contribute to one's living. This can

refer not only to the work of a businessperson as well as the opus of an artist. For a professional athlete, his sport is his work. It is biblical to work diligently and faithfully in order to create assets. Proverbs 14:23 says, "All hard work brings profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." Considering work is a part of God's plan for us to earn money to provide for life on earth, it makes sense for professional athletes to earn as much money as they can—within their personal values and convictions.

HOW MONEY IS USED REFLECTS VALUES AND PRIORITIES IN LIFE.

If you want to know what matters to people, one of the clearest indicators is what they do with their money. Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). As Christ-followers, what we do with our money should be consistent with what we believe about God and the resources he has entrusted to us. Money can be used recklessly and without reason or responsibility. It can also be used as God intended to provide for our needs and the needs of others. Our values and priorities should be reflected in how we give, spend and save.

According to a biblical perspective toward money, giving always comes first. In Deuteronomy the people are instructed to dedicate to the LORD every firstborn male of their livestock (Deut. 15:19). Faithfully tithing on all earnings is a way of acknowledging God's ownership of everything. This became so important to me that I urged my children to tithe even when they received their first pocket money. When they were given 50 cents per week they had great joy in choosing how to give their five cents—supporting a poor child in Africa or helping provide a Bible to a child in Cambodia. They gave their five cents before spending anything. Sometimes, with their eyes filled with joy, they would double it and give ten cents. As soon as you become wealthy, ten percent will no longer be the right guideline. Giving from abundance is good, but it is not a sacrifice. The more one receives, the greater his or her responsibility to give. Make giving a central focus of financial decision making for you and your family.



Being a good steward means taking good care of the earthly resources God has entrusted to us. Proper stewardship involves carefully planning for one's future. Luke 14:28 says, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" How you use your money should be determined through a decision making process and not left to chance. After creating a business plan that goes beyond your sports career, develop a budget. Be aware of your assets, income and expected timeline. Since it is difficult to predict the future, consider a best and worst case scenario, as well as a most likely scenario. Spontaneity without planning is chaos. After good planning, spontaneity or adjustments are okay because you have a strong reference point to return to if needed. If you need help, seek the advice of an expert. Stewardship involves working and carefully planning for the future—for the times when you are unable to work or when needs rise above your income.

Accumulating financial resources should never be an end in itself. Income can be given away, spent to support a lifestyle, used for the repayment of debt, to pay taxes, or saved. Lifestyle expenses, debt repayment, and taxes are all consumptive—meaning the money spent is gone forever. Only saving and giving are productive uses of money. Saving allows you to meet long-term financial objectives such as financial independence, college education for your children, paying off debt, major lifestyle desires, major charitable giving, or owning a business.

Decide how much spending is appropriate by defining and quantifying your long-term goals. By doing this you may find a general rule that says: give away ten percent, put aside ten percent for the future, use the rest for you and your family. While this rule may apply if you have a limited but regular monthly income, it does not apply if you are a professional athlete in the middle of your career. The top earning time can end abruptly due to injury or if a contract is not renewed. Even in the best case, the career of a professional athlete is limited to ten to fifteen years. Therefore, professional athletes would be wise to plan their post career lives ahead of time and prioritize investments that will provide a continuous source of income over a long period of time.

Invest wisely and seek assistance from trustworthy experts. Use your income during your career to build a foundation for your post career profession. Investing wisely will increase your assets. Jesus teaching implies that money should never sleep but always work (Luke 19:11-27). This being said, not every business decision turns out to be a beneficial investment. Have business opportunities checked by experts in the investment field and be chary regarding the character and skills of your partners.

These instructions are to enable us to care for our money in a way that reflects our values and priorities as believers. If money makes it possible for you to accomplish good in the world, you can be God's "shareholder." You can provide for your family with great care and still have enough to demonstrate God's unconditional love to others.

INCREASED FINANCIAL RESOURCES SURROUNDING THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CULTURE CHALLENGES THE GOOD OF THE GAME AND THOSE WHO PLAY.

According to the culture of professional sports today, it often appears that money rules all things. The teams with the biggest budgets can recruit the best players and often have the most wins. As financial resources associated with professional sports increase, the dominant motivation for sport shifts from the love of the game to the love of the benefit the game provides (i.e. money). When the primary motivation in sport is money, the good of the game and those who play is compromised by a win at all costs mentality, cheating, gambling, as well as people and systems that seek to exploit athletes for financial gain.

Stay away from gambling. When incomes are high there is significantly more temptation to participate in gambling. The reality is that whenever there is a winner there is always a loser. Sports betting in particular is popular because people want to use their knowledge about sports as an advantage. As the gain is greater in the case of unlikely results, gambling frequently leads to game fixing, which compromises the goodness of the game itself. Never participate in betting for games

in which you are involved. Some choose high-risk investments in a way that flirts with gambling. If you earn more than enough you may choose to invest a limited amount with higher risk, but never risk your basic needs and it is best to err on the side of playing it safe.

Whenever possible, avoid debt. Develop a business plan that allows you to invest from your income. While there are voices that may encourage you to use debt as a principle for better asset management, possibly because of currency depreciation or tax advantages, these are often traps that cause you to pay back three times the amount borrowed. There are certainly exceptions. For instance, when you buy a house instead of renting, your debt is balanced by real value that can be liquidated. Young prospects, such as first round draft picks with a huge contract, are extremely vulnerable to acquiring debt before even turning twenty. With only ten percent of young superstars having a sustainable pro career, many are doomed to suffer financial stress because of their own misjudgment and the poor advice of selfish consultants. While avoiding debt from the beginning is preferred, paying back any debt you may have as quickly as possible is wise, even if this means reducing lifestyle expenses.

While money is an earthly resource to be used for good, it is a source of temptation when it becomes the end we seek rather than a means for provision. Maybe this is why Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). Although money appears to be the god of professional sports today, this does not have to be the case. Christ-followers in sport have an opportunity to approach money radically different than our surrounding culture. We can demonstrate an awareness that all earthly resources have been entrusted to our care by God for our good and the good of others.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some of the messages about money that you have heard in the sports culture around you? In what ways are these helpful or hurtful?
2. How often do you think of your financial resources as belonging to God? How might this perspective affect how you give, spend and save money?
3. Is your money a source of temptation in your life? In the world of sports? How?
4. If you are an athlete, do you have a budget and have you begun planning financially for life beyond your athletic career? What areas need more attention?
5. Are there aspects of your finances that would benefit from the assistance of an expert?
6. As a chaplain, coach or team leader, how might you lead others toward having a proper theological relationship with money? Develop specific ideas for your context.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY >>>

Blue, Ron, *Finances by the Book*.

Fooshee, George, *Ten Financial Principles that are Biblical*.
Viewable: backtothebible.org/10-financial-principles-that-are-biblicalDON



CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPORT

money: managing money

“By the time they have been retired for two years, 78% of former NFL players have gone bankrupt or are under financial stress because of joblessness or divorce... Within five years of retirement, an estimated 60% of former NBA players are broke.”

—How (and Why) Athletes Go Broke

by Pablo S. Torre in Sports Illustrated (March 2009)

Steve Jobs, majority owner and CEO of Apple, reportedly said in an interview shortly before he died: “It was never my desire to become the richest man in the cemetery.”

According to the culture of professional sports today, it often appears that money rules everything. The teams with the biggest budgets can recruit the best players and often have the most wins. As financial resources associated with high level sports increase, the dominant motivation for sport shifts from the love of the game to the love of the benefit the game provides (i.e. money). Elite athletes have trained their whole life for sport but possibly never think of life beyond.

A famous English philosopher, Francis Bacon, once said, “Money is a great servant, but a bad master.” What does he mean? Have you experienced this in your life? If so, how?

HEALTHY MONEY MANAGEMENT

Spending is not a bad thing! But remember that you should only spend what you have available to you.

SPEND 70%

Saving gives you a cushion in case an unexpected expense or emergency.

SAVE 10%

Investing for retirement and future goals in a way which allows your money to accumulate interest.

INVEST 10%

You have been given opportunities as an elite athlete. Give back to your community through your time, money, and care.

GIVE 10%

TIPS & QUESTIONS

- Seek out a mentor whom you can trust to provide you with unbiased advice concerning your personal finances and life.
- Establish a budget and develop good money management habits now.
- Avoid debt and gambling and pay off credit cards monthly to avoid high interest charges.
- Keep the bigger picture in mind. Your athletic career will come to an end at some point so be prepared for the next step in life for you and your loved ones.
- How can you get involved to help fellow athletes properly manage their money from the beginning of their careers?
- How will solid character (discipline, hard work, humility, etc.) help in the area of managing your money?

RESOURCES >>>

Dave Ramsey www.daveramsey.com

Practical Money Skills For Life www.practicalmoneyskills.com

BIBLE STUDY

money: managing money

God is the Creator and owner of all. He is the provider and sustainer of all we have, from our time, bodies and abilities, to our money, influence and families. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," Psalm 24:1.

A steward is a manager of another's household. As stewards, we recognize Jesus as our master and owner of all, and we acknowledge the only reason we have anything is by God's love and grace. Therefore, we seek to steward and invest well everything He has given us.

3. What do you think the master expected? What do you think God expects you to do with the valuable life and gifts in sport He has entrusted to you?
4. What would it look like for you to invest your money wisely? What changes would you need to make?
5. Who do you know who could benefit from God's truth about money? How could you help each other learn more and become better stewards?

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR THE GIFTS YOU HAVE ENTRUSTED TO ME, LIKE SPORT, TALENTS, BODY, MIND, OPPORTUNITIES AND MONEY. YOU HAVE GIVEN THESE FOR A PURPOSE AND I DESIRE TO KNOW HOW TO HONOR YOU WITH THEM. TEACH ME YOUR WAY OF USING MONEY AND INVESTING RESOURCES. YOU ARE MY MASTER AND I DESIRE TO BE YOUR FAITHFUL SERVANT. I ASK FOR YOUR WISDOM AND OBEDIENCE IN THIS AREA.

Earning money from sports performance is part of today's culture. The Bible talks often about money. Many know the verses, "For the love of money is root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10) and "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). The Bible offers wisdom for us as we seek to be stewards who glorify God with what we have been given. One passage that helps clarify what God expects from us as His managers is a parable Jesus told about three stewards.

READ MATTHEW 25:14-30

1. What about this story is new to you? What do you observe about the master and servants?
2. What did the "faithful servants" receive from the master? Why did the third servant not receive it?

Additional Resources on Stewardship >>> Bill Bright, *A Handbook for Christian Maturity*, pp 273.





“An effective player agent can be considered a great equalizer of the bargaining power between an athlete and a professional sports franchise [team], serving to bridge the gap of unequal access to information in a situation where a well-established corporate entity with vast resources sits across the bargaining table from an often young and naïve athlete.

—J. E. Brown, Georgetown University Law Center

As an athlete enters the world of elite sport, more and more time is needed for training, travel, competition and recovery. But other issues must also be attended to such as professional contracts, equipment sponsors, product endorsements, personal budgeting, drug testing, personal appearances, paying taxes etc. Many athletes hire an agent to assist them with all these duties. Each of us must consider what our priorities are and understand the legal implications before signing an agent.

What Do I Need From an Agent?

- Consider the pros and cons of signing with an “important” agency that guarantees the promotion of my profile worldwide or signing with a “small, medium-sized” agency that grows with me and ensures I will be a priority for them in all they do.
- A contract for the next season or more.
- A sponsorship deal.
- Sporting and legal professional counseling.
- A long-term, “holistic” relationship that combines both a professional and personal.
- An authorized person in place to defend my interests.
- Legal support (FIFA / NBA Agent, lawyers).
- Professionalism (knowledge of market, contract management, track record).
- Problem-solving skills (contractual misunderstandings, late payments, internal conflicts..).
- Communication skills (calls, use of social networks).
- Personal attention (visits, answers my calls and text messages).
- Integrity (commitment to principles over their own interests)
- Commitment to realize promotion and search for offers on my behalf.

What Does an Agent Need From Me?

- Loyalty (do I talk to other agents behind my agent's back?)
- Abide by the terms of any exclusive contract if signed (one country, worldwide)
- Accept the consequences if I don't abide by the terms (economic penalty, reputation)

TODAY'S ELITE ATHLETES NEED TO DEVELOP A SMALL CIRCLE OF TRUSTED PEOPLE WHO LOVE AND ACCEPT THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE, NOT JUST FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE OR FAME.

Who do you want in your circle?

Do you want your agent to be part of that circle?

Would you be interested in having a spiritual mentor as part of that circle?

RESOURCES >>> www.sportsnetworker.com/2010/12/08/professional-sports-agent
An Athletes guide to Agents, Making the Selection www.health.jpup.com/ruxin/5e/

BIBLE STUDY

money: the athlete & the agent

Finding and choosing an agent to represent you and your interests is a major decision. The goal of this process is to transfer the burden of dealing with areas you may be unfamiliar or inexperienced in to someone you trust to act on your behalf. This should give you freedom to focus and develop as an athlete or coach. Who do you want to represent you?

We can take comfort in the reality that God knows us and our needs intimately (Matthew 5:25- 34; 10:29-31), He does not hide his will from us (Deuteronomy 4:29, Romans 12:1-2), and He delights in answering our prayers (1 John 5:14-15, Hebrews 4:16). While all of these ought to bring us peace, they do not assure that our hearts and motives will remain pure. Nor do they assure that we will consistently trust God to care for us instead of trusting others or the rewards of our work.

King Saul was the first king God appointed to rule the nation of Israel. Yet he was appointed because the nation of Israel had rejected God as their king and requested a king like all the other nations around them. The prophet Samuel was charged with the task of choosing Saul to develop and represent the nation of Israel. Saul was the first king he chose and David was the second king God led him to after Saul also turned away to idols.

READ 1 SAMUEL 8:4-9 & 12:20-25

1. What do you observe in this passage? As you read it, how does the text speak to you personally?
2. What do you think the people of Israel were looking for in a king? What do most athletes look for in an agent?
3. God does not reject His people for desiring a king, but He does give them severe warnings. Why do you think this is? How are these warnings applicable to your situation?
4. Observe the difference in the first king chosen to lead the nation of Israel (1 Samuel 10:23-24) and the second (1 Samuel 16:7). Identify some characteristics found in an agent that will help you over a long period of time?
5. Observe the three things Samuel commands the nation of Israel to do as they begin their journey with a new king. (1 Samuel 12:24-25). Is there somebody on your team who could use this wisdom?

LORD THANK YOU FOR THE ABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY SPORT AT AN ELITE LEVEL. AS I CHOOSE AN AGENT, HELP ME TO REMEMBER HOW YOU HAVE PROVIDED AND CARED FOR ME. AS I PROGRESS IN MY CAREER, HELP ME TO TRUST YOU AS MY ULTIMATE PROVIDER. LEAD ME TO AN AGENT WHO WILL BE TRUSTWORTHY, DEAL HONESTLY, AND APPLY WISDOM TO HELP ME BECOME WHO YOU HAVE CREATED ME TO BE. I THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORD, FOR ANSWERING PRAYER AND FOR THE COUNSEL OF WISE MEN AND WOMEN IN MY LIFE.



ReadySetGO