

Run to win:

Devotions for Athletes

John Byl

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Preface

This is a devotional book intended to help you as an athlete, or one involved in sport, to honour God through athletics. Concrete examples from athletics provide the context for each devotional. The reading then points you to Scripture and challenges you to execute the theme of the devotional. You are encouraged to take time to do some “extra shooting practice;” studying the extra scripture passages that speak to the topic of the devotional. There is a lot of Scripture quoted, but to cite from the Bible, God says his words “will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

The opening section reminds us of the importance of Scripture. This section also reminds us that all things were created by God, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that God calls us back to him through the death and resurrection of Jesus to renew all things, including athletics. The second section is based on the Fruit of the Spirit. We are reminded of the importance of opening our lives to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to set us free, and therefore, the next section is based on the Ten Commandments. These ten words are meant to keep us free from slavery, bondage, and oppression. The God who sets us free is also personal. The next section deals with the Lord’s Prayer, reminding us that we live in the caring hands of a heavenly Father. However, we easily turn to sin. The seven deadly sins are the most common sins we turn to. As we look at these sins in the fifth section, we will be encouraged to flee the devil. Instead of running aimlessly away from the devil, we need to keep our eyes focussed on Jesus. The next section, based on the Beatitudes concentrates on keeping our focus. Finally, we are reminded of the beauty of the new heaven and the new earth that are being prepared for us.

There are enough scripture passages in the “Extra shooting practice” that you may want to create your own devotionals directly applicable to your situation. You should be encouraged to do so, because understanding how God is speaking to you is most important.

Most of the stories actually occurred. To protect the privacy of individuals, portions of the stories have been changed.

The Bible also speaks with boldness and honesty about difficult topics. Sometimes you'll find yourself encouraged. Other times you may find yourself rethinking the way you compete. Hopefully, every time, you will think about who God is, seek to listen to him speaking, and open yourself to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, encouraging you to honour God and enjoy him forever.

Let's play ball!

John Byl

Thanks

I owe a great debt to the folks at “<http://bible.gospelcom.net/>.” Their Bible Gateways program is an excellent resource for searching Scripture. If you have not used it before I would encourage you to at least take a look at it.

As I taught a course on wellness at Redeemer University College I focussed on better understanding how spirituality affects wellness. The fruit of the spirit provided the structure for the course. I am thankful for Redeemer for the opportunity to prepare and teach this course, and for the many students who shared comments and stories to me about how the Spirit was working in their lives. Much of this work is found in the section on the Fruit of the Spirit.

In the Spring of 1997, our Pastor, Peter Hoytema, did a series of sermons on the Seven Deadly Sins. He published his sermons for interested members of the congregation. These sermons shaped my life and helped me write the devotionals on the Seven Deadly Sins.

Open Gate Korean Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ontario, had enough confidence in me to permit me to preach a series of sermons for thirteen months ending in the Spring of 2000 as an interim youth pastor. The young people of this congregation taught me much about godliness. The experience also forced me to do the homework for this devotional book, one I had planned to complete several years earlier, but lacked the discipline to do so. I had planned to write this book for my children when they were in their early teens, one is now married and the youngest is sixteen.

I want to thank the following people who read portions of a draft version of this book and provided constructive critique and support: Joseph Coles from Belhaven College, John Lederhouse from Wheaton College, David Fisher pastor for the Toronto Blue Jays, Dave Johns from Athletes in Action, Tom Visker from Dordt College, Al Wolters from Redeemer University College.

I want to thank God for adopting me as his child, for purifying me through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and for directing and empowering me through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is my prayer that he would be honoured by what I have written,

and that those who read the words of this book will be drawn closer to God.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Publishing House.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to our children for whom this book was initially intended,
thanks for the blessing you are in my life:

Charis, Matt, Judith, Hannah and Ryan.

I also dedicate this book to my extended Korean Family,
thanks for enlarging my family, and
helping me appreciate God more:

Anna, Daniel, Hannah, Helen, Inhe,
Irene, Jason, Jen, Jimmy, Joshua,
Judy, Kevin, Taewan, and Tommy.

Warm ups

**Oh, the depth of the riches
of the wisdom and
knowledge of God!**

**How unsearchable his judgements,
and his paths beyond tracing out!**

**Who has know the mind
of the Lord?**

Or who has been his counsellor?

**For from him and through him
and to him are all things.**

To him be the glory forever!

Amen.

Romans 12:33-36

God speaks to us

Just imagine, a starting quarterback who never reads the play-book. A basketball player who never shows up to practice and does not listen to the coach during the games. Both players would quickly move from competing, to riding the bench, to sitting in the bleachers.

Just imagine receiving a letter from a friend who loves you deeply and whom you also love deeply. Then imagine not reading the letter or just glancing at it very quickly and then putting it aside. Not likely. You would probably try to find a quiet spot and carefully read every word. Some parts you might read quickly getting caught up in the anticipation of exciting news. In other spots, you might become a bit teary-eyed when you read about some difficulties this person is experiencing or about this person's love for you.

Just imagine that your coach is an expert in your particular sport and has a deep concern for each individual player. Then imagine that your coach wrote a play-book for the sport. Would you read it?

In the Bible, it is written that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). It is a play-book about life. It is written by one that loves us: “for God so loves the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The Bible is written that we might know this Son. “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20: 30–31; also 21:25).

Executing the play: Do you take regular time to read the Bible, this play-book of life, this letter of love?

Extra shooting practice

Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus:

“He began by saying to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21).

“The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, so you also may believe. For these things happened so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’” (John 19:35-36)

Also see: Luke 24:25-27; John 7:42; 13:18; 19:24; 19:37; 20:9; 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Scripture helps us believe in Jesus:

“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:22).

Scripture points to life:

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38).

Scripture brings good news:

“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:22).

Scripture is God inspired

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).

Also see: Acts 1:16

Scripture is true:

“Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Romans 10:11).

Also see: Galatians 3:8

Important to read Scripture:

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13).

Scripture is a guide

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing right” (James 2:8).

God created everything new

I have sometimes wondered if life is merely a dream, that I am not even here but am just a part of another being's dream. When the dream is over, so will be life as I experience it.

Some scientists would argue that I am real and that I came from a big bang in the universe which "created" galaxies, planets, earth, and eventually, through a process of chance and mutations, people--including me. But I am bothered by how dehumanizing it is to think of myself as just a result of chance or of chaotic physical mutations and adaptations.

I am more inclined to the Bible's declaration that all things were created by a personal God who loves us deeply and continues to care for and uphold all of creation. I think of the words of Colossians: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:16-17). This creation includes wood, rubber, bodies, relationships, everything.

In this glorious God-created universe, we are invited to create and to play. I remember a race I waited for all day as a ten year old. Dad and I raced around a small lake on a warm summer day. The hard packed sand near the shoreline felt great under my feet, and as a bonus I beat my dad by at least two seconds. It all felt great. I was young, healthy, full of vitality, and had a gracious father who let me win.

I also remember the pleasures of physical activity as a teen. I can still smell the mud and sweat of 30 young guys trying to get a rugby ball into the opposition's end-zone in a rain-soaked muddy field in the fall. I remember the exhilaration of pointing skis down a hill and racing a buddy down at intense speeds. A tremendous fall provided enthusiastic discussion on the chair-lift back up. We would go down again and again until the chair-lift stopped at the end of the day.

In the Spring, the bikes would come out and just for the fun of it we would bike 40 kilometres. It felt good to pump our legs, force ourselves hard up a hill, and feel the sweat dissipate and our hair fly back as we flew down a hill.

Through all of this I am reminded how God, after he completed creation, including a physical Adam and Eve, looked at them and was pleased. He did not look at them and say, “they look pretty good.” No, he said, they are “very good” (Genesis 1:31). God instructs Adam and Eve to care for all of creation—including people's physical bodies. When we serve God, we do not only do so with our souls. God instructs his people to love him with “all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27; see also Deuteronomy 6:5; 2 Kings 23:25; Mark 12:30).

Executing the play: How do you think this world, the physical and social laws that uphold it came to be and continue to remain in force? How do you see yourself being creatively busy in God’s world?

Extra shooting practice

God created.

“1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day” (Genesis 1:1-5, 31).

“For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:9).

“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

See also 2 Peter 3:5-7.

“4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

God is above creation.

“15 He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. 16 He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. 17 He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? 18 He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. 19 He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. 20 He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD” (Psalm 147:15-20).

God preserves all things.

“Sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3).

“God, for whom and through whom everything exists” (Hebrews 2:10).

“1 There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted” (Romans 13:1-2).

“1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, 5 which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. 6 It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat” (Psalm 19:1-6).

“He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17).

“22 The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; 23 I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. 24 When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; 25 before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, 26 before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. 27 I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, 28

when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, 29 when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. 30 Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence” (Proverbs 8:22-30).

Falling completely short

Athletes risk the negative affects of drugs to stand atop the victor's podium. Two grown men, stand face-to-face and yell at each other (neither listening to the other) about how close a baseball crossed or did not cross home plate. A soccer player cannot get in the open because another player is tugging at her shirt, away from the referee's eyes. A squash player calls a "let" for a ball that was not possible to return. A badminton player calls a tournament winning shot "out" when it was clearly in.

One father kills another father when he repeatedly kicks the other man in the head over a disagreement between these two fans over something that happened during a hockey game they were watching. One figure skater has an accomplice hit a fellow figure skater across the knees with a metal pipe as a strategy to win a championship. A little league championship game cannot be completed because the fans are making life impossible for the umpire. A basketball player falls to the floor in a tussle with another for the ball, the standing player glares at the one lying on the floor as if he is a weak piece of useless excrement.

Locker room talk about the girls in the school belittled them to sexual objects rather than people. Losing a championship game was like the death of a close friend, and months later the athletes had not quite gotten over it. Athletes think sport is life and is all that really matters. The trash talk was not meant to help teammates, but to belittle the opponents and throw them off their game.

In a Christian adult soccer league, one teenage player tells a referee to "tell the old fat fart over there to move." The older person was in his forties, a little over weight, but physically active and an image bearer of God. The teenager was ejected from the game to think this one over.

The Bible teaches that "from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean" (Mark 7:21-23). Before we point our fingers at other people, the Bible also reminds us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The beautiful created potential in sport is often defaced as we take sport and direct it to evil.

Executing the play: Look at the areas of your life as an athlete or fan. Which specific thoughts or actions encourage brokenness and evil? How do you think this can be changed in your life?

Extra shooting practice

The fall.

“16 To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’ 17 To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it,” Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:16-19).

Consequence of the fall.

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22).

“That is why so many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30)

Directing our attention to the evil, Satan.

Satan “the prince of this world” (John 12:31).

“18 Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

“Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God” (James 4:4)?

Directing our attention to good, God.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world” (Romans 12:2).

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2).

See also John 18:36; Colossians 2:8; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:20.

God wants us to partnership in renewal

Athletes can restore sport to being the challenging and healing activity it is meant to be. We can take joy in the following examples. Drug-free athletes stand on top of podiums. A coach and umpire having a constructive dialogue about a play.

Athletes who apologize for inadvertent fouls. Rather than calling a close line-call to the badminton player's own advantage, asks for a replay. Competitors take time to encourage each other before the contest begins, and encourage opponents during the game. A football player extends a hand to an opponent who's on the ground following a tackle.

Parents can encourage positive play on both sides, even when their child was just beaten. Fans can encourage an umpire after a very close and critical call. Fans can express concern or disapproval about competitors not competing fairly or resorting to violence.

Following the games locker room chatter includes laughing about the crazy stuff that happened on the court, replaying the amazing shots, and developing more effective strategy for the next time. Locker room chatter also demonstrates that the game was only a small part of life, and that life goes on with its funny moments, interesting experiences, and unexpected challenges.

I am reminded of a colleagues remark that "God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made" (Wolters, p.42). In our whole life, including our involvement in sport, God gives us a tremendous opportunity to rip away the fallenness of sport and to restore it through Jesus Christ, into something that is healing and brings honour to God.

Executing the play: Look at the areas of your life as an athlete or sport's fan. How does your participation encourage healing and godliness, redeeming of creation?

Extra shooting practice

Jesus Christ is the way to redemption.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life! ... Without me, no one can go to the Father" (John 14:6).

"9 That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9-10).

"21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

"4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13).

God wants to change all things.

"19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:19-20).

God wants us to renew all things.

"18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

"The kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21).NEB

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).

"You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet" (Psalm 8:6).

Renewing involves directing all out purposes to God, not Satan.

Jesus said, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28).

"[Peter] went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Kingdom work.

“4 Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor’” (Matthew 11:4-5).

Do not.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Further reading: For an excellent book (university level) explaining creation, fall, and redemption further, see Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is

**love,
joy,
peace,
patience,
kindness,
goodness,
faithfulness,
gentleness
and self-control.**

The Fruit of the Spirit

At an athletic banquet a speaker said something vulgar and followed it up by jokingly saying, “The Devil made me do it.” Two players try and dig a puck out of the corner. One of the players jabs the butt end of the stick into her opponents belly so the official cannot see it; “it’s all part of the game.” A coach asks the officials if they need some seeing-eye-dogs, all in an effort to keep the officials honest.

The vulgar “devil made me do it” speaker was right. As a Bruce Colburn song once put it, “it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you got to serve somebody.” The speaker was sadly admitting who it was that he was serving. We make choices in life about who we serve. It could be the Devil (no joking matter), or culture’s way of telling us (led by the Devil) how to do things so that “I” come out on top. Much of this attitude involves hate, gloom, conflict, impatience, cruelty, abuse, faithlessness, violence, and outburst. This perspective all leads to brokenness.

How many of us would not want a life full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Yet, how often hasn't our blood curdled in anger, our body been weighed down in despair, our intestinal tract gurgled with anxiety, or our heart raced to keep up with our impatience? Remember how that unkind word felt as if someone had punched you in the stomach or how your body trembled in a conversation that spoke ill of others? How did it feel when a friend stabbed you in the back or spoke harshly to you? How did it feel when you were subjected to physical and emotional punishment by an out-of-control “loved” one? We experience much pain because of a lack of submissiveness to the Holy Spirit.

How can we revive our spirit to experience wellness? In reviewing Scripture, three things stand out: the need to flee evil, the need to trust in a caring and loving God, and the need to live obediently before God.

What are some of the impacts of evil on our wellness? Scripture indicates that “envy rots the bones” (Proverbs 14:30), and that “no one who walks in [the paths of the unjust] will know peace” (Isaiah 59:8). The way to deal with this evil in our lives is to flee from it, to rid ourselves of it, and to open ourselves up to the power of God.

We need to trust in God and be nourished by him if we are to be well. We need to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22) and let him bear fruit in our lives (Colossians

3:12-14). Through God's power He gives us “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3-8; Proverbs 14:26). It is imperative, as a proverb states, to

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones (Proverbs 3:5-8).

We need to be like the woman who sought healing, and worked her way through the crowd just to touch the hem of Jesus' clothes (Mark.5:24-34). We need to cut through the crowd and not let worry, peer pressure, or anything else stand between us and Jesus' healing.

We also need to live obedient lives, to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8; Zechariah 7:9). This walk of obedience is to be a vibrant Christ-like walk, seven days a week, with a passion similar to that of an athlete competing in the Olympic decathlon.

Though achieving wellness requires action on our part, from a human perspective, there appears a paradox within spirituality and wellness. To train our muscles we need to work our muscles, to train our spirit we need to be completely vulnerable to God working in us. Paul writes: “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Even Christ was “crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve” (2 Corinthians 13:4). We must find our strength in the Lord, not in ourselves. We need to be empowered by God. We need to be actively obedient to God allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our life.

How then do we experience the Fruit of the Spirit? We need to consider what is evil--perhaps personal recognition--and flee from it, and to open our life more to the healing power of God. We need to learn more about resting in the loving arms of God and living through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Instead of brokenness, God offers us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This list is the fruit that the Holy Spirit gives us. We don't have to do anything to get it but simply to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In a positive way we can say, “the Holy Spirit made me do it.”

Executing the play: Think about the last time you fouled in a game. Was the foul just an accident and you tried to correct things after that (you accidentally tripped someone and you helped them up)? Or, was the violation deliberate? What spirit motivated you to foul? Did wellness or brokenness result in that situation? Or, remember a time when you worked hard and did not succeed, watching a talented athlete who slacks off in practice, but wins the contest. Did you feel brokenness or wellness? Was the Holy Spirit motivating your feelings?

Extra shooting practice

Flee evil.

“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

See also 1 Timothy 6:11; 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Receive power from God.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

See also Proverbs 21:30; 1 Peter 5:6-7; Isaiah 32:15-17.

Love

I love the beauty of a fairway, the green grass lined with towering trees, and birds chirping from the safety of treed hideaways? Feeling the warm sun and wind on my face feels wonderful. I relish the challenge of hitting a ball straight down the fairway, untouched by trees or sand traps, and clearing the pond that ends 195 yards down the fairway? It feels so good to be challenged. I love creation.

I had the honours and my friends follow. As we walk down the fairway we can talk about the challenges of the next hole, or about a stressed relationship. We can also walk in silence and simply enjoy being with companions. I love my friends.

In some of the silences I can think of God. I can revel in his amazing gifts of creation, friendship, and salvation. I can think of the special person God meant me to be and I can love myself. God created each of us with certain abilities and limitations. I'll never be a Tiger Woods. Tiger received special abilities and has diligently cultivated those gifts to be the fine golfer he is. Even though I'm no Tiger, and sometimes I succeed at golf and other times I don't, I love the me that God made and loves, and I love God.

Do you ever wonder why love is so powerful? 1 Corinthians 13 ends with these words: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (13). Faith and hope will no longer be necessary in the new heaven and new earth. But love will be the distinguishing feature of our new life. As we experience love on earth we taste eternity; that's why love is so powerful. The early part of 1 Corinthians 13 summarizes what it means to love ourselves, others and God: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (4-8)

Executing the Play: In athletics, how do you know and experience the love of God, the love from and for others, and the love of yourself?

Extra shooting practice

Love = an unconditional commitment to care for others in a way that only God truly can; and it brings healing.

God's love.

God made us and provides for us: "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has breath of life in it-- I give every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day" (Genesis 1:26-31).

He offers us salvation from sin: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17; see also John 1:10-14; Isaiah 7:14; Acts 9:1-6; 17-19).

God cares for us eternally: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-4; see also Matthew 6:25-34; John 16:7).

Our love to God.

Loving God for and through creation: "Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.... How many are you works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number--living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.... I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord" (Psalm 104: 1, 24-26, 33-34).

Loving God for salvation:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me" (John 12:23-26).

See also John 15:9-17, Ephesians 5:8-21, 2 Timothy 2:14-16, Matthew 5:16.

Loving God through eternity: “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4; see also Psalm 23:6; Revelation 5:13-14).

Loving others.

Proverbs on love: "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred" (15:17). "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers all wrongs" (10:12). "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (17:9).

Jesus' prayer: "Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:9-13).

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

See also: Romans.5:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 7:47; John 13:34-35; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:23; 3:8;

Love that causes us to care for those easy to love **as well as our enemies** (Matthew .22:39; 5:38-40; Romans 12:18; Acts 7:60).

Loving yourself.

You are special: “God said, ‘Let us make man (and woman) in our image...’” (Genesis 1:26)

See also: Leviticus 19:18; Psalm 8:3-9.

You are a child of God: “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”(Romans 8:15-17; see also Galatians 3:26-28).

Enjoying the victories

Remember the first time of riding your bike without falling? Beating one of your parents in a race? Clearing the high jump bar at a height you did not think possible? Finishing the cross-country run when you thought the end was never going to come? Sinking a forty-foot putt on a sloping green? Sinking a game-winning foul shot? Victories. Sweet victories. Savour the joy. None of this is easy, so enjoy the victory of overcoming difficult obstacles, enjoy the victory of accomplishment.

I knew a volleyball player who competed with positive passion. On serve receive, if the ball wasn't right to the setter he'd challenge himself to do better next time. The next time he usually did improve, and he'd smile and enjoy the victory. If he spiked a ball and it was blocked, he'd smile at the blocker and congratulate him on a good block—a victory, and then he'd signal to the setter to give him another set. He'd beat the blocker that time and took joy in the accomplishment—not in putting the blocker down, but of meeting the challenge the blocker gave him.

Victories in sport are not always easy. Enjoy the victories, whether they be executing a skill, making a play, or winning a contest. Don't ruin the event by walking around with a smug face suggesting it was easy and you'd do it every time over such inferior opposition. Take joy!

The sweetest victory of all is the Holy Spirit occupying all of your life and claiming you as a Christian. One athlete put it this way when asked about any victories in his life: "There are too many victories to mention but I could lump all of the small victories under one major victory: I became a Christian. Much darkness before, much light now."

Do we permit ourselves to receive joy in the Lord's blessings? It is an emotional high to be at a sporting event and experience the joy of watching a basketball go through a hoop, a puck go into the net, or a football go through the uprights. How much more important than these moments of happiness in sport victories are the blessings of God? Let us carry the joy from the sport arena to our church life, to our whole life.

Executing the play: Take some time and write out the blessings and victories God has given in your life (from learning to ride a bike to claiming you as his child). Sit back and chuckle and experience God's joy.

Extra Shooting Practice

True joy is a gift (Psalms 4:7). It is the ability to **respond to God's triumphs**: seeing, feeling, and expressing celebration in God's victories. It is a response often shared in a festal manner with others. It is not a simple add-on in the Christian life, but is listed significantly as the **second fruit of the Spirit**--does experiencing joy have that kind of priority in our lives?

Joy is not gained from hilarity over too much alcohol, laughing about perverse or profane jokes, or momentary cheer derived from getting things not ours.

Also see: 1 Kings 21:7; Ecclesiastes 2:1; Proverbs 14:13; Is.16:9-10; Jeremiah 48:33; Lamentations 2:15; 5:15; James 4:7-10.

Joy in God's gift of salvation.

(Isaiah 9:3; 12:2-3; Matthew 13:44; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

This life-changing event causes "rejoicing in heaven" (Luke 15:7,10).

Transforms our mourning into dancing (Psalms 30:11; Jeremiah 31:13).

Jesus brought joy to the world.

Little John the Baptist, while a baby in Elizabeth's womb, "leaped for joy" when his mother Elizabeth heard the greetings of the pregnant Mary (Luke 1:44).

The women, who had found the tomb empty and been told by the angels that Jesus had arisen, "hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy" (Matthew 28:8).

When Jesus showed his followers his hands and feet, these apostles could hardly believe their eyes "because of joy and amazement" (Luke 24:40-41).

Even after Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples "worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Luke 24:52-53).

Joy is also a response to God blessing us.

When the Israelites returned from captivity, they were possessed with gladness. The Psalmist writes, that Israelites were "like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy" (126:1-2).

Proverbs reminds us that (10:28; 12:20)

"A happy heart makes the face cheerful" (15:13),

a cheerful heart is "good medicine" (17:22), and

"has a continual feast" (15:15).

Can you imagine the feeling of allowing gladness and joy to overtake us (Isaiah 35:10; 51:3,11; 52:8)?

It is instructive to recall that David danced for joy when the ark returned and his wife Michal remained barren because she was a kill-joy (2 Sam.6:17-23).

Joy, expressed through singing, instruments, and dancing, often filled the worship services in Jerusalem.

Songs of praise: James 5:13; Psalms 5:11; 65:8; 92:4; 107:22; 132:9,16; 149:2-5;

Joy in the tabernacle: 1 Chronicles 15:16; 2 Chronicles 30:23,26; Psalms 27:6; 32:11; 47:1; 63:5; 71:23; 81:1; 95:1-2; 98:4,6; 100:1; Isaiah 12:6; 24:14

Jerusalem, the place where God was in the Old Testament, was meant to be "the joy of the whole earth" (Psalms 48:2).

And party they did. Their joyful noise was so loud at times it "could be heard far away" (Neh.12:43).

Creation cannot restrain itself from praising God with joy.

Do we hear the trees of the forest, the meadows covered with flocks, the valleys mantled with grain, and the mountains and rivers as they sing, shout, and clap for joy before the Lord? Creation's joy: 1 Chronicles 16:33; Isaiah 55:12; 65:12-13; 96:12; Psalms 98:8.

Though we so often violate the earth, the prophet Isaiah says, "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy" (Isaiah 35:1-2).

In the change of the seasons, do we experience God's faithfulness in joy (Genesis 1:14; Psalms 104:19; Daniel 2:21)?

Too crushed by circumstances to experience joy.

Think of David. In his confession about the sin with Bathsheba, he asks of God, "let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice... restore to me the joy of your salvation" (Psalms 51:8,12). He was also able to confess that God's "consolation brought joy to my soul" (Psalms 94:18-19).

Or as Isaiah later asked of God: "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear...' Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy" (Isaiah 35:3-6; Romans 15:13; Acts 8:8).

Though we will experience painful times in our lives, God will provide victory and joy. Joy in victory: 1 Samuel 18:6; 1 Chronicles 12:40; 2 Chronicles 10:27; Ezra .6:16 & 22; Esther 8:16-17.

God provides joy: Isaiah 29:19; John 16:20-21; Luke 6:23.

Joy in God's justice.

That too ought to give us joy (Psalms 67:4; 68:3; 97:11).

Even God's laws, though law may seem restrictive, in fact gives freedom to people and honour to God. Therefore, the Psalmist can proclaim that God's "statutes... are the joy of my heart" (119:111; Romans 14:17-18).

Jesus pleads with us to obey "my Father's commands." Why? "So that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:9-13).

Or we can think of Ezra, who after reading the long-silent law of God, said that "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Paul says, "**Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice**" (Philippians 4:4-7)!

Peace

We went to the ball park chanting “two, four, six, eight, who do we really hate?” We’d follow that by shouting, “The Panthers!” We were a city team, they were a farmer’s team. There was no way us city kids were going to lose to a bunch of farmer’s kids. During batting practice, we’d pop home runs and look at the Panther player’s and shrug those hits off as if we could hit them anytime and anywhere. If the ball didn’t go over the fence we’d pretend it was because we weren’t really trying. During their batting practice, we would look impressed every time they hit a home run as if that was quite an accomplishment for someone belonging to the Panthers.

In the first inning our lead-off batter hit a single. With a three-and-one count our coach signalled for a hit-and-run. As soon as the ball was pitched our runner on first was off to second. The ball was hit right to the short stop—a sure double play. Our lead-off runner did a feet-up slide showing spikes as he slid into the second base player. Second base caught the ball from the short stop, got one out, and relayed the ball to first for a double play. The spikes had dug into the second baseman’s shins. Our next batter flied to left field and the inning was over.

Next time our lead-off batter came up, the pitcher threw the ball inside and caught the batter right on the elbow. It was pay back time for the earlier slide at second. A couple innings later when their big hitter was up, our pitcher returned the favour and threw a ball inside that caught the batter on the shoulder. The batter walked to first but half ways there he changed direction and charged the pitcher. Both benches cleared and there was such mayhem that the game was cancelled. Our chant of “two, four, six, eight, who do we really hate,” was shouted with increased intensity on the way home. There was no peace at this game or in our hearts.

How does God want to leave us? He asked his priests to bless people with these words: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). As we part from an athletic contest may we be open to the Spirit to say these words to our competitors.

Executing the Play: Before, during, and following your next contest look at yourself and your competitors and bless everyone with God’s peace. Blessing requires more than lip service. How would Christian ball players have executed each of the situations above peaceably?

Extra shooting practice

Peace = To have peace is to live in harmony with God and others and to experience personal wellness within.

No peace. Sometimes things trouble us and we cannot find peace—"Too long have I lived among those who hate peace" (Psalm 120:6; see also Proverbs 13:10; 16:18; 29:23; Ezekiel 7:23-25).

Joseph's brothers could not "go back to your father in peace" (Genesis 44:17...).

Why the ungodly seem so at peace (Job 12:6; 21:13).

"There is no peace for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21; Romans 3:10-18);

"'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14-15; 8:11; 14:19; 28:9; 30:5; Ezekiel 13:10, 16; Micah 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:3).

God gives peace.

By offering his Son to us—"We have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Romans 5:1; see also Acts 10:36, Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 5:5; John 1:14; Colossians 1:20; Genesis 15:15; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chronicles 34:28; Isaiah 57:1-2; Jeremiah 34:1-5; Luke 2:29; John 14:27; Luke 2:10-14; Matthew 2:10).

God blesses us with peace through the power of the Holy Spirit. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13; see also Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 29:11; 85:8; 121; 147:14; Isaiah 26:12; 52:7; Ezekiel 34:25; John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 14:33.)

"God of peace will crush Satan." (Jude 6:20-24; see also Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 3:16; Hebrews 13:20; Ephesians 6:10-15.)

Jesus does not offer peace as the world does (Luke 19:42).

Peace through obedience.

Following God's commands. "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble" (Psalm 119:165; see also Proverbs 3:17; Zechariah 8:14-19; Leviticus 26:6; Isaiah 26:3; Hebrews 12:11; 2 Peter 3:14; Isaiah 48:18; Ezekiel 37:26; Malachi 2:5-6; Romans 7:6-7).

Serving the needy: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. Of it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-23; see also Romans 14:17-19; 1 Peter 3:11-12; Proverbs 16:7; 29:2; Isaiah 60:17; Zechariah 8:20; Romans 12:17-19; Hebrews 12:14; James 2:16; Romans 2:10).

The Israelites offered Peace offerings: (Exodus 20:24; 29:28; Leviticus 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 17:5, 19:5-8; 22; 23:19; Numbers 7; 10:10; 15:8; 29:39; Deuteronomy 27:7; Joshua 8:31; 22:23 & 27; Jude

20:26; 21:4; I Samuel 10:8; 11:15; 13:9; 2 Samuel 6:17; 24:25; I Ki.3:15; 8:63-64; 9:25; 16:13; 1 Chronicles 16:1-2; 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:7; 29:35; 30:22; 31:2; 33:16; Ezekiel.43:27; 45:15-17; 46:2-12.).

Needed to live Obedient and just lives. “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5:22).

"Fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out" (Leviticus 6:13)

Obedient and just lives leads to peace among the nations:

“I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations” (Zechariah 9:10)

See also: Genesis 26:28-31; 1 Samuel 7:14; 2 Samuel 10:19; 1 Kings 4:24; 5:12; 22:44; 1 Chronicles 4:40; 19:19; 22:9,18; 23:25; 2 Chronicles 14:6-7; Psalm 122; 125; 128; Isaiah 54:7-10; Zechariah 9:10; Acts 24:2).

Between friends:

“Jonathan said to David, ‘Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord’” (I Samuel 20:42)

See also: 2 Samuel 9; Acts 9:31; Ephesians 4:2-3; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Be a peace-maker—“seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14; see also Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Numbers 25; I Kings 2:5-6, & 28-35; 2 Kings 9:22; James 3:17-19).

“Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife” (Proverbs 17:1).

Be like John the Baptist—“to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:79).

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9; see also Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15).

Pass on God’s peace.

As we come.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7).

See also (I Corinthians 1:3; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 1:3; Jude 1:2; Revelation 1:4.)

As we go:

“Peace be to all of you who are in Christ” (1 Peter 5:14).

See also 2 Samuel 3:21, 15:9 & 27:2 Kings 5:19; Ezekiel.10:19; Matthew 10:13;
Mark.5:34; 9:50 Luke 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; Acts 15:33; 16:36; Romans 15:33; 2 Corinthians
13:11; Ephesians 2:15-17; Ephesians 6:23; 1 Peter 5:14).

“I will make peace your governor” (Isaiah 60:17).

Patience through injuries

Patience, the ability to be long-suffering, is well told through the lives of two athletes.

Jessica wrote me: “I often need to hang in there when I am injured. I am a very active person and hate to be tied down with injuries. A couple months ago, I injured the ligaments in my knee while playing soccer. I had to wait on the Lord for this and allow him to heal me in his own time. I was tempted to give up when I saw the rest of my team going out to play. I was tempted to throw away my crutches, ignore the pain and play anyway. People who have had their knee injured before helped me to be patient. They warned me over and over again that once a knee is damaged, it must be given lots of time to heal properly or it will never heal right. They told me that if I played soccer right away, I would damage my knee even further and never play sports again. The thought of never again doing something that I love was enough to make me wait for complete healing. I believe that the Lord spoke through these people and they helped give me the strength to be patient.”

Eugene, another athlete I know, slipped on the squash court, hit the back of his head on the floor and was unconscious. At the hospital, doctors felt he would probably lose two weeks of school before the head-aches would subside and he could return to studying. A few months earlier, he had twisted his knee against a make-shift referee stand beside a volleyball court. Though the knee was temporarily supported by braces, it would require surgery in the future. If he damages the knee again he will likely become crippled. Yet Eugene goes on, hurting at times, but mostly with a continuing smile on his heart, trusting that somehow God will also use these situations for good. It will just take time.

These athletes knew the importance of patience in healing and in understanding new opportunities the Lord is preparing for them. Both athletes remembered that “those who wait in the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 40:1-3; 130).

Executing the Play: Is there something you need to be patient with? Memorize Isaiah 40:31 above and think of it when you want to give up.

Extra shooting practice

Patience is.

“A patient man has great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29; 20:3; 14:16-17; 29:20).

“Love is patient” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Patience is the first thing said about love.

One of a list of virtues Paul considers he had modelled as a missionary: “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings” (2 Timothy 3:9-10).

“9 Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Colossians 1:9-13).

God is patient with us.

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

Wait for God.

“The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:1 & 14).

“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes” (Psalm 37:7).

Kindness

A friend and you both try out for the team. You make the final cuts, your friend does not. You go over and give your friend a hug; that's kindness. Or, a teammate is stressed out by a school paper, he's written a paper but needs it typed, and you type it for him. Then there is a teammate who is having a tough time finding a summer job. You suggest, "let's go look for jobs together." A fellow player broke up with her boyfriend. She takes this pretty hard. You listen to her and you pray with her to a God who "will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). On your way to a pre-game lunch, with your lunch bag in hand, you cross an obviously hungry beggar, you offer him your sandwiches. That's kindness.

For a championship game the other team has bus trouble on a cold winter evening. They arrive cold and anxious right at game time. The rules state that they must be on the floor ready to start within fifteen minutes of game time or the game is defaulted. What an opportunity! You tell the officials and fans that the game will be delayed by one hour; you provide them with the best change room; you ask if there are other ways they need help; you let them warm-up on the court till they are ready, and when they are ready to compete the game begins. An opportunity for kindness, an opportunity to play fair.

A scriptural understanding of kindness focuses on knowing another's need and helping to fulfil it; particularly to relatives, guests, and those that are in some way dependent on us (Acts 28:2). Opportunities to share the healing power of kindness in sports are plentiful.

Listen to these words from the Bible. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:29-32).

Executing the Play: Take a moment to learn in a small way the power of kindness. You may have experienced the tension you feel when you are angry at someone. Find someone and say something kind to them—especially someone with whom you have had or have a disagreement with. Feel the healing power of kindness. Or how

about preparing a unique encouraging note for each of your teammates and slipping it into their lockers before a practice? Experience the healing power of kindness.

Extra shooting practice

A scriptural understanding of kindness focuses on knowing another's need and helping to fulfil it; particularly to relatives, guests, and those that are in some way dependent on us (Acts 28:2).

When we do not show kindness, particularly for the poor, the Bible informs us that those “who oppress the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” ((Proverbs 14:31; 14:21; 17:5; 21:13; 22:9; 25:21-22),

and “keeps the Devil at bay” (Ephesians 4:26-27; Proverbs 37:8).

God provides fruit that involves giving to others, and in giving this fruit it becomes a sign of being one of God's chosen (Colossians .3:12).

God "exercises kindness" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Especially through giving us Christ Jesus to save us from sin. “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:3-5; see also Rom.2:4; 11:22; Eph.2:6-8).

He is a God who "will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

For our part, Paul encourages us to:

Get rid of things like bitterness and anger (Proverbs 11:16-17; 15:1; 30:33; 1 Timothy 2:8; 2 Titus 2:24; James 1:19-20).

He encourages us to speak words that are upbuilding; "sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24; 11:24-25; 15:4).

Paul also encourages us to be "kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians .4:29-32; Colossians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:1-3).

Scripture notes that **those who pursue righteousness and kindness, will be blessed** by finding "life and honour" (Proverbs 21:21).

Hate evil, love good, do justice

I remember a group of players walking into a gymnasium and sneering at its smallness, poor floor, and lack of modern logos. “We can’t play in this coach,” was their common cry. I have also seen the opposite, where a group of players walked into a huge gymnasium with seating for thousands, an excellent floor, and electronic display boards. “We ought to have a gym like this coach,” was their jealous chorus. I’ve heard similar cries about adequate food that wasn’t considered “up to snuff for players of our calibre.” “How are we supposed to play on that?”

My brother went on a mission trip to a poorer country than ours and shared his testimony in a local school. The school building was a primitive structure housing 50-60 students per classroom. It had no gymnasium and only a limited playing field on which one could not play a regulation game of soccer. Though the students looked healthy, their meals were meagre by comparison to many in North America.

Then I wondered about the words of a poor farmer prophet in the Bible named Amos. Some of his people lived in mansions and slept on ivory beds. They spent their days lying around on couches, playing instruments, drinking wine by the bowl fulls, and rubbing their body with lotions. They had poisoned justice by depriving the poor a fair hearing. The rich had trampled on the poor and forced them to give grain and even their shoes to the rich.

Amos pleaded with his people. “Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy” (5:15). If they refused to listen, they would be “among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end” (6:6). Instead of putting people down, remember that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. . . eager to do what is good" (Ephesians 2:10)

Executing the Play: Describe one act in the last month that showed your care for the poor in your neighbourhood. During the next couple weeks, and often thereafter, allow the Spirit to lead you to doing good, especially for the poor.

Extra shooting practice

Goodness also demonstrated in the words of Micah, "He has shown you... what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

Look at God's goodness in your past.

"How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you" (Psalms 31:19).

"4 Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John (the Baptist) what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.'" (Matthew.11:4-6).

To see what happens when people forget God's goodness read Nehemiah 9:23-26.

Look at God's goodness in the present.

"9 So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" 14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed" (Luke 11:9-14).

Anticipate God's goodness in the future—especially during those tough days.

"10 Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me... 13 I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. 14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD" (Psalm 27:10-14).

See also: (Exodus 33:18-20; Psalm 23:6; 69:13-16; 86:16-17; 109:21-22; 142:6-7).

Accepting or rejecting God's goodness.

"5 For this very reason, (God having shared his goodness with us) make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:5-11).

Consequences of worshipping the goodies, not celebrating God's goodness.

"33 In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. 34 Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them. 35 Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways. 36 But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. 37 Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the

kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress” (Nehemiah 9:33-37).

To God’s goodness of compassion to all, lifting the burdened, and hearing the wounded we respond with meditation, proclamation, celebration, song, and speaking.

“3 Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. 4 One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. 7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. 8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. 9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. 10 All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. 11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, 12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. 14 The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. 15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. 16 You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. 17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. 18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. 19 He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them” (Psalm 145:3-19).

Other ways of responding to God’s goodness see: (Romans 7:7-25; Galatians 5:22; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 142:6-7; 116:12; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Titus 2:8-14; 3:8.

God blesses those who do good—(Titus 3:14; Psalm 34:12-15; 37:27-29; Proverbs 12:2; Romans 2:7-10).

“2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (1 Peter 1:2-4).

Faithfulness

Susan was biking to school. As she crossed an intersection a truck ran a red light, caught the back wheel of Susan's bike, she was thrown to the pavement, and lay there unresponsive. At the hospital she lay in a coma, and not knowing how long she would remain in a coma the family decided to take turns sitting at her bedside 24 hours a day. When her teammates heard of this they volunteered to also sit at her bedside and gratefully took their turns. Several days following the accident Susan slowly came to and the teammates faithfully continued to visit her. Susan thankfully remembered nothing of the accident and nothing of her coma, but appreciated the friendship of her teammates as she recovered. Susan offered little to her friends, but they remained faithful to her and continued to visit and help her until she was fully recovered.

On the flip side, coaches give players simple assignments and athletes are not always faithful in doing them. Coaches might ask that each athlete pray for each team member once a day. Athletes are asked to complete a set number of workouts on their own or with a buddy. A play book may need to be read before next practice. Athletes are to be in bed with lights out at 11:00 pm on nights before games. A player struggling with a tobacco addiction is to meet a couple times a week with another player as an accountability partner. Athletes are supposed to manage their time to keep their grades up to stay on the team. These are all small opportunities to act faithfully, acts that strengthen the individuals and the team. When players are unfaithful, athletes are not helped, teammates feel cheated and get angry with each other, individuals don't perform as well as they could, communication breaks down, and the team begins to fall apart.

Jesus recognized the importance of faithfulness. He told a story of a servant who received two talents to work with in his master's absence. The servant doubled the investment. His master was pleased upon his return and said "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:23)! Faithfulness with sacrifice was also something Jesus understood. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Executing the Play: List two ways you can be more faithful (were you unfaithful even in the last week) to your team, friends, family, and God.

Extra shooting practice

Faithfulness = building a relationship despite the other's shortcomings. Part of faithfulness is recognizing our reliance on others.

Faithfulness blesses others.

Easier said than done: "Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find" (Proverbs 20:6)?

It does bless: "She (a great woman) speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (Proverbs 31:26; also Isaiah 1:26).

Faithfulness bless us--"A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 28:20; see also 2 Samuel 20:19).

Faithful servant is rewarded-- "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness'" (Matthew 25:23; read all of Matthew 25:14-30 or Luke 12:42-48)!

Faithfulness in prayer--"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Faithfulness to the end--"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Faithfulness a characteristic of a Christian--"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2; Biblical examples see Numbers 12:7; 2 Chronicles 31:18-20; Ezekiel 48:11; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 1:1; 6:21; Colossians 1:2, 7; 4:7-9; 1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 5:12; Revelation 2:13; 14:12).

Unfaithfulness is from the Devil--Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men (Psalms 12:1; see also 78:8 and 37).

Unfaithfulness hurts:

"Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble" (Proverbs 25:19).

"Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble" (Proverbs 25:19).

"The unfaithful have a craving for **violence**" (Proverbs 13:2; also Isaiah 1:21; Proverbs 13:15).

Deception a way of being unfaithful--" If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do--4 when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, 5 or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering" (Leviticus 6:2-5; also Proverbs 11:6; Numbers 5:6).

Unfaithfulness in marriage (Numbers 5:12; 5:27; Judges 19:2).

“The unfaithful are **destroyed by their duplicity**” (Proverbs 11:3; see also Proverbs 2:22; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Hosea 4:1).

God is unfaithful to the unfaithful.

“‘I will hide my face from them,’ He said, ‘and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful’” (Deuteronomy 32:20;).

See also: 2 Chronicles 26:16; 26:18; 28:19; 28:22; 29:6; 30:7; 36:14; Proverbs 22:12; Jeremiah 3:7-11; 3:20; 5:11; 9:2; 31:22; 49:4; Ezekiel 14:13; 15:8; 17:20; 39:23; Hosea 2:5; 4:12; 6:7; 9:1).

God is faithful—“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made” (Psalms 145:13; see also Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalms 146:6; Revelation 19:11).

God is faithful to the repentant.

Old Testament passages—“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deuteronomy 7:9; see also 1 Samuel 2:35; 2 Samuel 22:26; 1 Kings 3:6; Nehemiah 9:8; Psalm 18:25; 25:10; 31:23; 33:4; 37:28; 89:19; 97:10; 101:6; 111:7; 116:16; Proverbs 2:8; Isaiah 49:7; 55:3; Jeremiah 42:5; Zechariah 8:8).

New Testament passages—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (John 1:9; see also 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 2:17; 3:2-6; 8:9; 10:23; 11:11; 1 Peter 4:19; Revelation 17:14).

Blessing—“from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 1:5).

Gentleness

I recall a coach reaming out a player in front of the rest of the team at the beginning of a practice for a poor play made in last night's game. The team was deadly silent as the coach replayed the error over and over again with expletives that most of the team did not know were in the dictionary. The athlete yelled at could feel her heart sink, and with tears in her eyes she left the practice before it ever began. Not gentleness.

It was match point in game five. Sam was set to serve. The serve was made, good velocity, the ball cleared the net, went to the weak serve receiver, and continued, untouched, out-of-bounds. A point for the opposition. The match was over. Sam knew that he had made a big mistake. He was disappointed, his teammates were disappointed, the home town fans were disappointed, and his coach was disappointed.

What is his coach to do? To ream Sam out would add unnecessary misery to a painful loss and make him less confident in a similar situation in the future. Sam was a responsible player who missed few serves, but he buckled under pressure this time. The coach walked to Sam with a reassuring smile, gave him a quick hug and said, "a tough way to lose, but you were not the only one that made a mistake during that last game. We'll work on it in practice." The coach's response was gentle.

There is a sequel to the story of the gruff coach. After some of the other players spoke to the coach about the incident, the coach and offended athlete later met for coffee to reconcile their differences. Following an apology by the coach, the coach confided that she was experiencing difficulties in her own life, and that her gruffness and cutting humour were inappropriate ways of coping with these difficulties. The coach's gruffness put a knife between these two people as they entered a practice; gentleness and forgiveness over coffee brought healing. Lack of gentleness brings pain; gentleness brings healing and wellness.

The Bible teaches that gentleness must especially be evident in those in leadership positions (1 Timothy 3:3), because people grow when nurtured by gentleness. Gentleness does not produce anxiety precipitated by fear, but recovery nurtured by love. Can you imagine the healing that takes place when we gently restore someone, and when someone does it in return? We need to go beyond this; Paul

asked Titus to remind the people “to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all” (Titus 3:1-2). Let's do that as athletes and coaches.

We receive gentleness as a gift from the Holy Spirit (Jam.3:13-18). Christ's kingly mission on earth was exemplified in gentleness (Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9). Jesus invites people to him: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). “Like a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7), Jesus died on the cross, so we can have peace and rest.

Executing the Play: If you lacked gentleness in a recent situation, apologize to that person and experience the Spirit's powerful healing.

Extra shooting practice

Violence is the opposite of gentleness.

“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked” (Proverbs 10:11).

See also the following Proverbs: 4:17; 10:6; 13:2; 21:7; 24:2; 26:6; 16:29; 3:31.

Led by evil equals no gentleness, led by the Holy Spirit leads to gentleness.

“16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate (gentle), submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:16-18).

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Encouragements to be gentle.

Leaders:

“Not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle” (1 Timothy 3:3).

Paul and his assistants were “like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

A sign of “God’s chosen people” (Colossians 3:12).

When someone is caught in sin, Scripture encourages us to restore such a person with “gentleness” (Galatians 6:1).

Evangelism: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

Instead of evil: “But you... flee from all this (evil), and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

Christ’s gentleness.

His kingly mission on earth was exemplified in gentleness; He came to Jerusalem, “gentle and riding a donkey” (Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9).

“6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:6-7 & Jeremiah 11:19)

Paul tries to model Christ and appeals to his readers “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:1).

In conclusion--“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

Self-control

Two young women asked me how they could help their husbands. Both men were gentle at home and caring at work. Friday nights was their men's night out on the rink. They'd put on their hockey equipment, lace up their skates, and buckle up their helmets. They did not or would not say a prayer. They wanted to be in control this night; not God. On the ice they were goons, spending a quarter of their scheduled playing time in the penalty box for penalties related to rough play and fighting. In their defence they would say, "this is hockey." To their denunciation, this is hockey without God. Or at best, hockey with player's backs to God.

Our family watched a Christian team play a semi-professional basketball team. There had been some poor officiating and in the second half a player from the semi-pro team threw a punch at one of the Christians. The Christian would have hit back had he not been restrained by two other players. Both players were ejected. No sooner had they left the floor than the Christian player saw an opening and ran after his combatant. Again, thankfully, two other players interfered and prevented the fight from escalating.

On my way home from the game I asked one of my children if they thought the team was Christian in the way they played. The response was a quick, "No. One of the players even got in a fight." I think my child was right. Fighting is not the way God intended us to live or resolve differences.

We need to recognize our powerlessness over things; especially in tough situations. As in the words of Alcoholic Anonymous literature, we need to depend on a power greater than ourselves. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Executing the Play: Approach each contest, practice, and tense situations with a prayer to open yourself to the power, love and self-discipline of the Holy Spirit.

Extra shooting practice

Proverbs puts it pointedly.

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a **quarrelsome wife [or husband]**” (21:9; 25:24; see also 19:13; 27:15; 21:19).

“Do not make friends with a **hot-tempered man**, do not associate with one easily angered” (22:24; see also 15:18).

“**Reckless words** pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (12:18; see also 10:19; 26:2).

“**A gossip** separates close friends” (16:28; see also 11:13; 20:19).

“Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a **beautiful woman who shows no discretion**” (11:22).

Quarrels:

“Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out” (17:14)

“He who loves a quarrel loves sin” (17:19).

See also: 20:19; 22:24; 23:20-21; 25:28; 26:2,17; 27:15; 28:23.

“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a **man who lacks self-control**” (25:28).

“**Better** a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city” (16:32).

The concept of self-control in the Bible also deals with.

Protecting a Christian from **sexual defilement** (1 Corinthians 7:9).

Evangelism--Paul notes that "everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training" (1 Corinthians 9:25). But this training is not a self-control for its own sake, but rather to "win as many [converts] as possible" (1 Corinthians 9:19).

Be conformed to God:

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

Ten Words

Exodus 20:1-20

And God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.

On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Freedom from bondage

Joe wanted two things in life. The first was to win the regional championships. The second was to have the head cheerleader, the most popular girl in the school, as his girl-friend.

Weight training seven-days a week made Joe strong, steroids made him stronger. Drugs were against the rules but the Association never did any drug tests, and he was sure he would not suffer any of the ill-effects of steroids people often talked about. As the final minutes of the championship game wore down, Joe's team had won. Joe achieved his first goal in life. His parents were out-of-town for the weekend and he knew they were pleased with the team's accomplishment when they phoned later that night.

Joe's parents did not want him dating in high school. He thought they were prudes. There was a school dance to celebrate the championship the following night. Joe asked the head cheerleader if she would go to the dance with him—his parents were gone, they'd never know anyways. His heart skipped when she said "yes". He was not allowed to use the family car but his parents were gone anyway. He picked up his date the next night, they danced the night away. On the way home they parked for awhile, climbed into the back seat of the family car, necked and would have gone further had not a police officer pulled up beside them and told them to move along. Before they parted that night, he asked the cheer leader to be his girl-friend, and she agreed.

Later that night, alone in his house, alone in his room, he wondered what he had really accomplished. He had won his championship, he had his prize girl-friend. Now what? Is that all there really is to life? It was his final year so there would be no championship next year. If the new girl in his life up and left him, would his life be totally destroyed? He felt uncomfortable that he had contributed to a drug-enhanced winning season; he wondered how he would have done without the drugs. He had a good relationship with his parents, they trusted him to be alone for the weekend. However, he felt uncomfortable that he had a girl-friend against his parent's wishes, had used the car without permission, and was suddenly scared by the thought how far he and his new girl would have gone had the police not showed up, would he have lost his virginity that night, would she have gotten pregnant, how could he be a father? What would he say to his parents when they asked how the weekend had gone?

He felt a slave to his goals and trapped by them; having accomplished his goals, he knew there had to be more to life. The Ten Commandments were written on a plaque on his wall, and he glanced over the first few words, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of... slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2). He turned to his Bible and read “the fear of the Lord leads to life: then one rests content, untouched by trouble” (Proverbs 19:23), and “I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts” (Psalm 119:45). Joe thought to himself, “I don’t want to be a slave. I want to be free!”

Executing the play: How was Joe a slave to his goals? A church confession states a goal for life is to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” What are your life goals? What happens with your life when you achieve your goals or fail to do so? Do your goals lead to freedom or slavery?

Extra shooting practice

Decalogue=Ten words.

“7 **The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.** The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Psalm 19:7-8).

“30 **‘Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31; Romans 13:10).

Slaves apart from God.

“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin’” (John 8:34).

See also 2 Peter 2:19; Nehemiah 5:5; Hebrews 13:5.

Call to God for freedom.

“Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me” (Psalms 142:7).

See also Psalms 25:17; 31:4; Exodus 2:23.

The Lord your God who brought you out of slavery (Exodus 13:14; Deuteronomy 5:6; 6:12; 13:5; 13:10; Joshua 24:17; Judges 6:8; Jeremiah 34:13; Micah 6:4).

“He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free” (Psalms 146:7).

See also Exodus 3:7; 6:6; Deuteronomy 7:8; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 118:5; 129:4; Luke 13:12.

God gives us freedom.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

“Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

“For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freed man” (1 Corinthians 7:22).

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

God adopts us as children through his Son.

“Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever” (John 8:35).

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:7).

Use your freedom well.

To do right:

“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

See also Genesis 2:16; Psalms 119:32, 45; Romans 6:18-19; Galatians 5:13; James 2:12; 1 Peter 2:16.

To approach God;

“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

See also Psalms 105:17.

Not to fall back into slavery--“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

Not to bring others down--“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (Corinthians 8:9).

To free others:

As Christ was prophesied to do: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1 & Luke 4:18).

See also Jeremiah 34; 1 Corinthians 9:19; Hebrews 2:15.

To enjoy: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Romans 6:22).

A Biblical example of God’s freeing love--The prodigal son Luke 15:11-32 11.

No other gods.

The ancients had small hand-made objects that they put in a public place, in their home, or in the city centre. These objects were thought to bring them much happiness and were therefore worshipped.

If I only make the team, then I'll be happy. If only I make the college team, then I'll be happy. If only I make the pros, I'll be happy. If only I make a lot of money, then I'll be happy. Within a season, if only we win the city championships, then I'll be happy. If only I win the regionals, then I'll be happy. If only I win the nationals, then I'll be happy. Some pour all of their life into in a search to find personal happiness through winning at sport. Trophies on mantles, window sills, and trophy cases are thought to bring us happiness. Those plastic, medal, and wooden objects are the recipients of a lot of time and money, and are often little different than ancient gods.

People often try for teams and don't make them, play games and lose, make the pros and don't make a lot of money. This will dishearten them if winning gives happiness. But when you make a team, win a lot of games, make a lot of money, and are still discouraged, do the teammates, the wins, or the money help you experience true happiness?

I remember Al who was four pounds over his weight class, 12 hours away from weigh-in, 14 hours before the wrestling meet was to begin. He was not going to win in his present weight class. He wanted that gold medallion so bad he could taste it. He had to cut weight. He had dreamed of wrestling for the team at the local university. A gold would certainly increase his chances of making the team and getting those scholarships. He had to cut weight. He had already lost six pounds during the past few days with a lot of running, and eating only pieces of oranges and crackers. He only had four pounds to go.

That night he gave it a big push. He went to school, where his coach met him. He took his exercise bike into the showers. Over his shorts and T-shirt he put on some plastic garbage bags. Over the bags he put on a sweat suit. He turned all the showers on hot till the room was steamy hot. He got on the bike and pedalled. After an hour of biking he was sweating profusely and wanted to drink but could not because it added weight. He stopped pedalling, took a shower and went on the weight scales. He had a pound to go.

After a few minutes of rest he was back onto the bike again. He was hot, tired, and thirsty, but he had to push on. A half hour later he went back to the scale. This time he leaned on the walls for balance as he walked. He felt like he was on fire. He could hardly take his clothes off. His legs shivered. Before he could reach the scales, he collapsed, his heart stopped, and he died.

Jesus reminds us that “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24). Jesus tells a related story of the “Lost Son.” This is a story about a young man who takes his inheritance, spends it wildly till it is gone and ends up as a hired hand wishing he could eat the food he is feeding pigs. He finally comes to his senses and apologetically returns home where he asks to be a hired hand. The father ignores the request and throws a party for the return of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). This story of the lost son well illustrates the emptiness and bondage of pursuing money, and the love and freedom found in worshipping only God.

Executing the play: What do you strive for and worship in life (spend lots of time and money on)? How does what or who you are worshipping bring you happiness—especially during tough times?

Extra shooting practice

Keep from other Gods.

“Keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritualists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:31).

“10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18: 10-12).

“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only”” (Matthew 4:10).

Love God alone.

“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.... But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him’” (Jeremiah 17:5 & 7).

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matthew 22:37).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Worshipping idols?

We want to serve God so we buy a necklace with a cross on it. Before each race we kiss the cross and expect to gain extra focus and strength from it. We've made God small by putting him into a golden cross where we can control him, rather than be controlled by him. We've taken gold that God has made and put him into it--though the cross might be a good reminder of God's presence in our life and a declaration of the God we love, the cross itself will not give any power. God is much larger than we can imagine, or think, or make.

Churches develop doctrines, words that describe the characteristics of God. We expect these words to give us strength and comfort because we have figured God out. We've made God small by putting him into words that we think fully explain him, rather than let him continually explain himself to us in the new situations of every day. We've taken words that God has made and put him into them--though the doctrines provide helpful organized statements about God, these words have no power and are often used to divide God's people. God is much larger than we can imagine, or think, or make.

The Bible reminds us that "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). We try to put God in a box but forget "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 12:33-36).

Executing the play: Are there ways that you put God in a box? Are there ways you manipulate God instead of letting him lead you? Does God owe you anything? How will you let God out of the boxes you have put him in?

Extra shooting practice

The main reminder for freedom.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

The folly of idols.

From a God who made all to something he has made?

“They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass” (Psalm 106:20).

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14.)

See also Deuteronomy 4:16, 23; 5:8; 9:12, 16; Isaiah 40:18; Acts 17:29; Romans 1:18..

The power of idols:

“They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood” (Hosea 4:12).

“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his creation; he makes idols that cannot speak” (Habakkuk 2:18).

See also 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 9:22; Ezekiel 8:12; 14:4; 23:49; Acts 7:41; 1 Corinthians 8:4.

Flee idols:

“My dear friends, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).

See also Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3.

God wants our undivided love.

Provoked to anger:

“If you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking him to anger” (Deuteronomy 4:25).

See also Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 32:16, 21; Joshua 24:19; 1 Kings 14:22.

Provoked to love:

“The LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people” (Joel 2:18).

See also Zechariah 8:2.

Read about **the golden calf** in Exodus 32 to see why people built an idol and how God dealt with them. Ask yourself, what do you do when you do not hear from God for a while?

The Name of the Lord

I teach and coach at Redeemer University College. It's a great name for a school. Sometimes I'll be on the phone with someone, and they'll need my mailing address. I give them the name of the institution, and they ask me to spell it. The first time, it caught me off guard. I thought everyone knew how to spell Redeemer, one of the names of my Lord. Since then I see it as an opportunity of at least introducing a name of God to people.

To redeem means to make a single payment to purchase someone's freedom. Naming God my "Redeemer" honours how he has paid the full price for my sin and has set me completely free. As a professor, coach, or athlete, having REDEEMER emblazoned on my letterhead or uniform is a powerful statement of who my Saviour is. Everyone who watches Redeemer personnel or athletes has an opportunity to see firsthand what it means to be redeemed. What an opportunity!

An opportunity does not come without its challenges. How does one who has REDEEMER written on one's jersey talk with teammates? How does one talk to opponents who are trash-talking? How does one deal with an official's debatable call at an important spot in the game? How does one celebrate scoring a big point? How do I pray before a game? How do I show thankful acknowledgement to God's gifts after the game—win or lose? How do I give positive support to a weaker player? There are many more questions we could ask ourselves, but the main one is this: "Is God's name lifted high in everything I do?"

The Bible teaches: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7 & Deuteronomy 5:11). Or stated more positively, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). God sets people free.

Executing the play: You might not have REDEEMER written in bold letters on a jersey or helmet, but ask yourself, in the way I compete is the name of God written on me, offering freedom to others? If not, how should I change my behaviour to honor God's name?

Extra shooting practice

Do not misuse or profane God's name.

Enemies of God--"They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name" (Psalms 139:20).

Injustice and immorality on the part of God's people dishonours the name of God--"They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name" (Amos 2:7).

Serving idols:

"As for you, O house of Israel, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Go and serve your idols, every one of you! But afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols" (Ezekiel 20:39)

See also Leviticus 18:21.

Offering pure lives:

"They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the LORD by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy" (Leviticus 21:6).

See also Leviticus 22:2 & 32.

Do not swear falsely--"Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:12).

Consequences of misusing God's name--"Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16).

His name dwells in the temple--("Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16)?).

"Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name--there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 12:11).

See also: 1 Kings 8:43; 2 Chronicles 6:33; Deuteronomy 16:6, 11; 26:2; 14:23; 16:2; Jeremiah 7:12; Nehemiah 1:9; Psalms 74:7; Revelation 13:6.

Calling on the name of the Lord.

"In that day you will say: 'Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted'" (Isaiah 12:4).

See also 2 Kings 2:24; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Deuteronomy 28:10; Genesis 13:4; 26:25; 21:33; 26:33; 12:8; Psalm 79:6; 80:18; 99:6; 116:4, 13-17; 105:1; Lamentations 3:55; Nehemiah 13:25; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Chronicles 16:8; 1 Kings 18:24-25; Acts 9:14, 21; Genesis 4:26; Zechariah 13:9; Zephaniah 3:9.

Praise his name.

“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens” (Psalms 148:13).

See also Deuteronomy 32:3; 2 Samuel 22:50; 1 Chronicles 29:13; Psalms 52:9; 54:6; 61:8; 63:4; 48:10; 66:2; 66:4; 68:4; 86:12; 9:2; 18:49; 30:4; 44:8; 72:19; 74:21; 100:4; 102:21; 103:1; 113:1; 122:4; 135:1; 135:3; 138:2; 140:13; 142:7; 145:1-2; 145:21; 148:5; 149:3; 22:22; 7:17; 99:3; 92:1; 96:2; 97:12; 15:9; Isaiah 25:1; Joel 2:26; Nehemiah 9:5; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:16.

By the name of Jesus.

Believe:

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

See also: 1 Corinthians 5:4; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48;

Experience healing:

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’” (Acts 3:6).

See also: Acts 3:16; 4:10; 16:18; 19:13

Do everything:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

Also: Mark 9:39; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 1:2; 1 John 3:23; Acts 5:40; 15:26; 19:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; 3:6; Ephesians 5:20; Hebrews 13:15.

May his name be used well by all--“Th at at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Philippian s 2:10).

God rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and made it holy

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Most of the Ten Commandments are just a few words long. It is ironic that the one that tells us to rest and to take a break, is the longest, and tries to cover any possible loop holes. To put the first section of these words into an athlete’s world might read something like this. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall practice and compete in games, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not work-out, not you, nor your teammates, nor your coaches or trainers, nor your competitors.”

Some teams and athletes try and push themselves to the limit. They train intensely seven days a week, week in and week out. Then they wonder why little injuries don’t heal, and why half-way through the season they feel psychologically burnt out. People, athletes and coaches included, need a break. We need at least one day a week to have focussed time on God, one day a week to get away from the pressures of daily life, sit back and relax in the loving arms of God and the companionship of family and friends. Why is this so hard to follow?

Why do we need to do this? We are given the following reason, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” God created everything in six days, and on the seventh day he rested. It was not that God was tired, he just wanted to sit back and enjoy all that he had done the week before. It’s a pattern he wants us to keep.

Saturday is really the official “Sabbath;” that’s why Jews and Seventh Day Adventists worship on Saturdays. In the New Testament we see a shift in emphasis

from the seventh day to the first day of the week as the special “Day of the Lord.” Christians gather together on Sundays to celebrate the resurrection of Christ weekly. In many ways, the fourth commandment is no different from the others. Each of the commandments teaches us to find freedom in God. Celebrate Jesus’ resurrection and rest.

Executing the play: If God rested on the seventh day, why don’t we? Are there other gods we serve? How can we rest better? Do you have a Sabbath rest in your week? How does that rest give you freedom?

Extra shooting practice

First Sabbath.

“1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:1-3).

Holy.

“13 ‘If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.’ The mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

See also Deuteronomy 5:12; Exodus 16:23; 31:14; 35:2; Jeremiah 17:22-27; Nehemiah 9:14; 10:31.

A day to bring offerings to the Lord:

“The burnt offering the prince brings to the LORD on the Sabbath day is to be six male lambs and a ram, all without defect” (Ezekiel 46:4).

See also Leviticus 23:15; Numbers 28:9-10; Ezekiel 46:12; 1 Corinthians 16:2.

A time to read scripture:

“For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21; Matthew 12:5).

A time to rest.

“The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do” (Deuteronomy 5:14).

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

See also Exodus 35:2; 16:23; 31:15; Leviticus 16:31; 23:3, 32; 25:4; 26:34.

Jesus and the Sabbath.

Teaching on the Sabbath:

“On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues” (Luke 13:10; see also Mark 1:21).

Healing on the Sabbath:

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. . . . Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it’” (Luke 6:7, 9 (Luke 14:1, Mark 3:2-4))?

See also Luke 13:14; John 5:16; John 9:14.

Working on the Sabbath:

“One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels” (Luke 6:1 (Matthew 12:1, Mark 2:23)).

He is Lord:

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath’” (Luke 6:5).

Honouring Parents

I watched two parents at the soccer field the other day. One was a father who walked up and down the side-lines telling his child when to run, when to walk, how quickly to go, where to go, where to move, who to watch.... It was quite amazing as he kept this up non-stop for the entire game. The child seemed to have a difficult time of it though and several times held back tears when she made a mistake. One suspects her ride home was probably a half-hour play-by-play critique of all the errors made. Most of this is not helpful.

Another parent sat on the side-lines of the soccer field and read a book and only occasionally watched the game. When an offside was called she looked a bit puzzled because she did not see any blue line. Her child was neither discouraged or encouraged by her spectatorship.

Some parents fail in bringing their children up well. Some succeed. Most probably try to do well and fail a little and succeed a little. The Bible says, "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12 & Deuteronomy 5:16). This may mean forgiving them for wrongs or oversights and thanking them for the right things and thoughtful actions they did.

Some parents are aggressively domineering and physically and/or emotionally abusive. Children, for their own safety, ought not to stay in those situations. These children need to find an adult they trust in, such as a teacher, coach, or minister, explain their difficulties, and ask for help. Part of honouring is confiding in others who may be able to help out. It may be safer to be away from home awhile at a home of supportive people. Even there, still respect and care for your parents. Pray for them.

Executing the play: When was the last time you told your parents how much you loved them? If it has been awhile, tell them sometime today. How else can you honor your parents? How do you think that will give you freedom?

Extra shooting practice

Honouring parents is to care for oneself.

“Honour your father and mother”--which is the first commandment with a promise” (Ephesians 6:2).

See also Mark 7:10 & Matthew 15:4.

Proverbs on honouring your parents: Is this us?

“8 Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. 9 They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (1:8-9).

“A wise son [or daughter] brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother” (10:1).

“A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother” (15:20).

“He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace” (19:26).

“If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness” (20:20).

“Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (23:22).

“May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice” (23:25)!

“He who robs his father or mother and says, ‘It’s not wrong’-- he is partner to him who destroys” (28:24).

“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother” (29:15).

“The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures” (30:17).

Jesus and his parents read Luke 2:41-51.

Jesus honoured his Father.

“For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (2 Peter 1:17).

See also John 8:49; 12:26.

Kill ‘em

For our football practices, conditioning played a critical role, a conditioning of both our bodies and our minds. We took a three-point stance at the bottom of the hill with our football gear on. At the coach’s command, we ran up the hill growling all the way. We quickly ran down and got in position to do it all over again. The coach yelled, “Who are we going to beat on Friday night?” “The Tigers,” we all yelled back. “What are we going to do to them?” Yelled the coach. “Kill em, yea, Kill em!” We yelled back and growled as we ran up the hill.

How would we kill them? Our coaches taught us how to hit an unwary linebacker across the knees when they were not looking; that would be one less starting linebacker to worry about since they were gone for the game and possibly the season. Our coaches taught us to stick our helmet in the back of a ball carrier as he was going down; the next time the ball carrier would be less willing to carry the ball.

When we walked through downtown at night wearing our school jacket and would meet a group from the Tiger’s school, there would be some anxiety. If we were outnumbered, we’d inconspicuously slide into a store or cross the street. If we were the larger group, we’d get ready to taunt, ridicule, and victimize the Tigers. It was all about hate, about putting others down so we could be on top.

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,” and that is how our coach coached us. Jesus continued, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). The game with the Tigers was not about life, but death.

Calling the play: Have you been guilty of “killing” your opponent? If so, how? Do you intend to view opponents as God-created competitors which make the game possible, athletes who challenge us and are challenged by us? Or, are these people less than that?

Extra shooting practice

The first killing.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." (Genesis 4:1-12)

The penalty is to be treated as you treated others.

12"Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. 13 However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. 14 But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death. (Exodus 21:12-29)

Unrepentant murder leads to eternal judgement.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 21:8; see also Hosea 4:2; Mark 7:21; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:29; Revelations 9:21 & 22:15)

Even to hate is murder.

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. (1 John 3:15)

Jesus and murder.

After his birth **Herod sought to kill him.** (Matthew 2:13-18)

Through his life, while people tried to kill him, **he healed.**

But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. (Matthew 12:14; see also Matthew 23:37; 26:4; Mark 3:4-6; 14:1; John 5:18; 7:19)

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Matthew 16:21; see also Matthew 17:23; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:32; 19:27)

He died instead of the real murderer:

Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will. (Luke 23:13-25)

Love gives freedom:

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Romans 13:9; see also Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deuteronomy 5:17-19,21 2.9 Leviticus 19:18)

Adultery

A night with the head cheer leader was the prize for the quarterback who just lead his team to a regional championship. The athlete who's travelling with the team to a distant city finds a bed partner for the night; a partner who hopes to be loved but is only used—some professional athletes claim to have slept with hundreds of women. These athletes are not alone. Studies indicate that thirty percent of teens have intercourse by age fifteen. Dating for teenagers is often more about having a status symbol than a serious opportunity to consider marriage.

Are these prizes of freedom or bondage? If the people in the above paragraph are not married is this promoting free love? Would any of the participants worry about sexually transmitted diseases that make people uncomfortable at best? Would either fear about getting AIDS which will eventually kill? Two teenagers treating each other as toys will play itself out years later. Would either consider the proverb that when two people have a different sexual partner before marriage that four people go to the marriage bed? The memories of that first night of love with a person go with you for your life. Is that free sex?

To help people understand the freedom of sexuality in a marriage relationship you could read Song of Songs in the Bible where a man and a woman in love are fascinated with each other, and a King tries to steal away the woman from her true lover. Though the analogies might not fit our culture, enjoy reading the beauty of the freedom of love found between an engaged couple. The man (“My lover”) says:

Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. . . . You have stolen my heart. . . my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon. Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance

may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits (4:8-16).

The woman (Shulammite) says:

My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. his appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem (5:10-16).

What freedom! That's why the Ten Commandments, the ten words of freedom, simply says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

Executing the play: God gave the desires for men and women to love each other. These desires are normal and beautiful. If you want to live in freedom, preserve sexual intimacy for marriage. If you have already been sexually active outside of marriage ask God to forgive you and begin a new life of chastity today.

Extra shooting practice

Proverbs on relationships.

Temptations to pull you away from a positive relationship:

A crafty prostitute—"a deep pit" (7:10; 23:27).

"Reduces you to a loaf of bread" (6:26).

"Preys on your life" (6:26).

Seductive woman (2:16; 7:5).

Captivation of an adulterer (5:20; 6:25).

"Those under the Lord's wrath fall into it" (22:14).

"Lips drip honey, speech is smoother than oil" (5:3).

Adulteress—"I've done nothing wrong" (30:20).

"Charm is deceptive" (31:30).

Elements which break down a relationship:

Immoral person (6:24).

A wayward person (2:16; 6:24; 7:5)

A person with no discretion—"like a gold ring in a pig's snout" (11:22).

Foolishness (14:1).

A disgraceful spouse like "decay in bones" (11:22).

Embracing another's spouse—"no one who touches her will go unpunished" (5:20; 6:29).

Quarrelsome spouse

Like "a constant dripping" (19:13; 27:15).

"Better to live on the corner of a roof" (21:9).

"Better to live in the desert" (21:19).

Builders of a relationship (see Proverbs 31:10-31):

Be kindhearted (11:16).

A wise spouse builds (14:1; 19:14).

Fear the Lord (31:30).

Be noble—"a noble character is a spouse's crown" (31:29).

"Rejoice in love of youth" (5:18).

Find what is good (18:22)

Respects spouse (31:23).

The cost of unfaithfulness.

Deuteronomy 22:22-27

Offering the temple.

Jesus offered his body:

"18 The Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:18-22).

You are the temple:

"12 'Everything is permissible for me'--but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me'--but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food'--but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." [Gen. 2:24] 17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

Offer your temple to God:

"1 I urge you... in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Romans 12:1-8).

For an excellent book on Song of Songs read Calvin Seerveld's, The Greatest Song—In Critique of Solomon. Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1988.

Stealing

Game point. The ball lands on the line--it's in, I call, "Out!" The game is over. I've won. My competitor questions the call, I stay with my call, "Out." I receive the trophy and go home to congratulations of friends and family. As the initial euphoria wears off, each time I see the trophy I remember the point I stole and wonder how the game should have ended. I don't feel comfortable seeing my competitor later. I know my friends and parents would be ashamed of me if I fessed up. I wanted to accidentally get rid of the trophy and the memories it evoked. But at odd times--even when I didn't see the trophy--it troubled me that I hadn't won fairly. I had stolen the trophy.

Have you ever met an athlete who was on the team just because her parents wanted her to be, or because her friends were on the team? For the rest, the team and the participation meant nothing. She would never take any extra shots or do any extra conditioning. She would never talk to someone about the game--in fact she never really thought about it unless she was actually at the game. This is the athlete that never came to practices except if the coach threatened to kick her off the team. She would even come late to games and would totally disregard any of the coach's advice on getting to sleep on time the night before or using the time before the game to get mentally ready for the contest. Coach did not play her much, and when she was on the bench she would talk about with her teammates on the bench about what happened the day before, a good joke she heard, a player from the other team that has a strange hair-do, and about what they should do after the game. By all of her actions, she stole focus from the team.

What if this athlete's actions were the same towards God? She never read her Bible on her own and never talked about God to anyone. She attends church for social reasons; she comes late and unprepared; she does not sing in thanksgiving to God; and she talks to her friends about what happened the day before, a good joke she heard, a person in another row that has a strange hair-do, and about what they should do after the service--never focussing on what God is saying to her through the sermon. By all her actions, she steals from God.

All of these actions create brokenness and bondage. None lead to freedom. That's why the Bible tells us, "Do not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Executing the play: Ever steal? Still think about it? Was it worth it? If you are a thief the Bible teaches, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must

work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Try not to take away from your life, other’s lives, or what is due to God. Instead, find ways to use those moments you want to steal as an opportunity to contribute to your life, to the lives of others, and to God.

Extra shooting practice

The law.

“2 If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; 3 but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed. "A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft [become a slave]. . . . 7 If a man gives his neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping and they are stolen from the neighbor's house, the thief, if he is caught, must pay back double. 8 But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other man's property” (Exodus 22:2-3, 7-8).

Consequences of stealing.

Bad feelings:

Tense relationships:

“Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods” (Genesis 31:30)?

“We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house” (Genesis 44:8)?

Disgraced--“As a thief is disgraced when he is caught, so the house of Israel is disgraced-- they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets” (Jeremiah 2:26).

Put out--“And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished” (Zechariah 5:3).

Causes of stealing.

Hunger:

“Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:9).

“Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving” (Proverbs 6:30).

Temptation-- “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19).

Friends of stealing.

“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known” (Jeremiah 7:9).

See also Luke 18:11; John 12:6.

Stealing from God.

“Therefore,’ declares the LORD, ‘I am against the prophets who steal from one another words

supposedly from me” (Jeremiah 23:30).

“Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 7:11).

See also Ezekiel 7:22; Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46.

Instead of stealing.

Love--“The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13:9 (Matthew 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Titus 2:10).

Show mercy--“25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ 26 ‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’ 27 He answered: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 28 ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’ 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ 30 In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ 36 Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ 37 The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus and stealing.

Why He came--“1 I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 Then he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.’ 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:1-18).

False testimony

Susan, one of the basketball players, tells the rest of the girls, “Chris really got it from the coach the other day. I walked by the office and she was being yelled at. When I came back a little later she had tears in her eyes. It must have been because she missed a couple of plays last game. Actually, she is kind of slipping lately and deserved a tongue lashing. She missed a few passes yesterday, but she is kind of a snob so doesn’t know how to relate very well to us, so then the team chemistry is off. Do you think she will be cut from the team?”

Anne, one of the girls Susan spoke to, told some of her friends what she had heard. Latter that day, Barbara, who had heard the story about Chris from one person, who had heard it from another person (it had gone around the school), saw Chris heading to the gym and asked her, “Didn’t you get cut from the team?”

Chris said, “No. Why?”

Barbara told the story she had heard. “Your coach and parents were real mad at you because you don’t like your teammates. You don’t talk to them on or off the court. You got so mad at Susan the last game that you threw a ball at her head when she wasn’t watching. That play in the dying seconds of a critical game put the nail in the coffin, and the team lost any hope of making it to the finals. The coach had no option but to kick you off the team.”

Chris sat down in stunned silence. She told Barbara that the coach and her had spoken briefly about the one spectator that was giving the official such a hard time. The coach had mimicked, in a rather loud voice, the spectator. They had both laughed so hard she got tears in her eyes. “But now I’ve got to go to practice,” said Chris.

Proverbs teach us that one of six things the Lord hates is “a false witness who pours out lies” (6:19). It also teaches that “a truthful witness gives honest testimony” (12:17), “does not deceive” (14:5), and “saves lives” (14:25). Jesus says: “Know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Executing the play: Examine how you talk about your teammates, yourself, others, and God? What steps are you going to take to speak lovingly truthful to each other during the next couple of days?

Extra shooting practice

The opportunity to give false witness comes in many forms. We give a false witness when we cheat others because of our falseness, when we teach others falsely, when we practice falseness in our relationship, and when we falsely share what God is doing. When we do any of this we enslave ourselves and others. On the other hand when we speaking in loving truth, teach truthfully, are true in our relationships, and truthfully share what is doing in our lives, we and others will find freedom, life.

Law.

“Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor” (Proverbs 25:18).

See also Exodus 20:16; 23:2; Deuteronomy 5:20; 19:15, 18; 17:6; Numbers 35:30; Proverbs 12:17; Isaiah 29:19.

Jesus.

Supports the law—“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Matthew 18:16).

He really is Jesus, the one sent by the Father:

John the Baptist: “Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him’” (John 1:32).

Apostles:

“I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony” (John 3:11).

“He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony” (John 3:32).

“The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe” (John 19:35 (21:24)).

“Who testifies to everything he saw--that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:2).

“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’” (John 4:39).

Jesus says “I tell you the truth,” eighty different times in the Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

He chooses not to fight false testimony so that He could die for us. “58 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him...59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree. . . . 60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you’” (Mark 14:57 (Matthew 26:62; 27:13))?

Our testimony of Jesus.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and

then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

See also 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 1:6; 2:1; Revelation 12:11 (6:9; 11:7; 12:17; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4).

God’s testimony.

Of Jesus: “9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:9-11).

Legal

False	Truth
<p>False witness:</p> <p>Proverbs 6:19 Proverbs 19:9 (12:17; 14:5) Proverbs 14:25 Proverbs 21:28 (Deuteronomy 19:18) Psalms 27:12</p>	<p>Truthful witness:</p> <p>Proverbs 12:17 Proverbs 14:25 Proverbs 14:5</p>
<p>Hate the truth:</p> <p>Amos 5:10</p>	<p>Hate what is false:</p> <p>Proverbs 13:5</p>
<p>No justice:</p> <p>Isaiah 59:14 Isaiah 29:21 Isaiah 59:15</p>	<p>Justice:</p>
<p>Speaks falseness</p> <p>1 Kings 22:16 (2 Chronicles 18:15)</p>	<p>Have nothing to do with falseness:</p> <p>Exodus 23:7 John 1:47 John 7:18 Malachi 2:6</p>
<p>False reports/charges:</p> <p>Exodus 23:1 Exodus 23:7</p>	<p>True reports/charges:</p> <p>John 18:38</p>
<p>False weights</p> <p>Micah 6:11</p>	
<p>False witness equals lies:</p> <p>Jeremiah 14:14 Jeremiah 23:32 John 8:44 Proverbs 6:19 Proverbs 19:9 (5)</p>	

Teaching others

False	Truth
<p>Declare false doctrines:</p> <p>1 Timothy 1:3 (6:3)</p>	<p>Speak the truth:</p> <p>Psalms 15:2 Matthew 22:16 (Luke 20:21; Mark 12:14) Psalms 25:5 Psalms 51:6 Psalms 86:11</p>
<p>False apostles:</p> <p>2 Corinthians 11:13</p>	<p>True apostles:</p> <p>Revelation 2:2</p>
<p>False prophets and visions:</p> <p>1 John 4:1 2 Peter 2:1 Ezekiel 13:9</p> <p>Ezekiel 22:28; Isaiah 44:25; Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16; Lamentations 2:14; Mark 13:22; Matthew 13:17; 24:11, 24</p> <p>Lamentations 2:14 Zechariah 10:2</p> <p>Ezekiel 13:6-23; 21:29; Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16.</p>	<p>True prophets and visions:</p> <p>Ezekiel 12:24</p>
<p>Do not speak the truth:</p> <p>Jeremiah 9:5 (John 7:18)</p>	<p>Speak the truth:</p> <p>Habakkuk 2:3 Proverbs 16:13 Psalms 15:2</p>
<p>Distort God's word:</p> <p>Acts 20:30</p>	<p>Not distorting God's word:</p> <p>2 Corinthians 4:2</p>
<p>Reject the truth:</p> <p>Romans 2:8</p>	<p>Do not pay attention to the teaching of those who reject the truth:</p> <p>Titus 1:14</p>
<p>Deceptive teaching:</p> <p>Ephesians 4:21</p>	<p>Truthful teaching:</p> <p>Jeremiah 9:5</p>
	<p>Work for truth:</p> <p>3 John 1:8 Revelation 2:2</p>

Right relationships

False	Truth
False siblings: Galatians 2:4	True siblings: 1 Peter 1:22 2 Thessalonians 2:13 3 John 1:3 Matthew 25:40
False humility: Colossians 2:23 Colossians 2:18	True humility: Psalms 45:4
Loving evil: Psalms 52:3	Be truthful in love 1 Corinthians 13:6 1 Peter 1:22 1 John 3:18 2 Thessalonians 2:10 Colossians 1:5 Zechariah 8:19 Ephesians 4:15
Disobeying truth: Galatians 5:7	Obeying truth: 1 Peter 1:22
Shamefulness: 2 Peter 2:2	Renounce shamefulness: 2 Corinthians 4:2
	Living through truth: John 3:21 John 14:17 Proverbs 14:25

God's truth

False	Truth
Walk in darkness: 1 John 1:6	Walk in truth: Psalms 15:2 Psalms 86:11 (26:3) 2 John 1:4 (3 John 1:3-4)
False gods: Jeremiah 16:19 (7:9; Amos 2:4) Psalms 4:2	
	Truth protects: Psalms 40:11
	Freely given, freely shared: Psalms 40:10
False motives: Philippians 1:18	
	Guiding in truth: John 16:13 Psalms 25:5 Psalms 43:3
	God will judge in truth: Psalms 96:13
	Choose truth: Psalms 119:30
	Hope in truth: 2 Timothy 2:25 Colossians 1:5 Psalms 25:5 Psalms 119:43
	Call on God in truth: Psalms 145:18
	City of truth: Zechariah 8:3
Not living by the gospel: Galatians 2:14	Living by the Gospel: Colossians 1:5-6 Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 2:5.
	Fruit: Colossians 1:6 Ephesians 5:9
	Word of God is truth: 1 Kings 17:24 2 Timothy 2:15 2 Corinthians 4:2 Ephesians 1:13 Colossians 1:5
Not believing = death: 2 Thessalonians 2:12	Believing = life: Ephesians 1:13
Opposition to the gospel: 2 Timothy 3:8	Oppose falseness to repentance: 2 Timothy 2:25
Wander when you don't know truth: James 5:19 Zechariah 10:2	

Covet

Athletics ought to be a competition flowing from a thankful response to the gifts and opportunities God has provided. A competition is to see if the plays, talents and conditioning that we have worked on, will overcome the barriers the other team is able to put up.

Coveting is to see something someone else has and decide we must possess it for our happiness. It is competing to take away a trophy from a team. It's about demonstrating how great you are so that the boy or girl you are after are so impressed they'll run into your arms. It's about proving that you are better than another player so that you can make more money. It's about putting other teams down so we can feel on top. It's about demanding the best practice times, best coaches, best food, and best uniforms, because we are more deserving than other teams at our school.

What should our desires be for other people? In the verses in the extra shooting practice you'll see that we ought seek for other people's blessings, help people to be saved, encourage them with our love, pursue equity for all, and desire to give of ourselves to others.

For ourselves, it is helpful to learn from Paul who "learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11-13 (1 Timothy 6:8)).

Executing the play: Your athletic desires, are they desires that will please God? If any of them are not, how will you let God change these desires and give you freedom?

Extra shooting practice

Coveting is about.

Other gods--“The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 7:25).

Sin:

“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire” (Romans 7:8).

But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed [hardly freedom]. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15).

Food can do that—listen to these words from Proverbs:

“Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive” (23:3).

“Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies” (23:6).

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel— not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer” (31:4).

God’s desires.

He desires:

“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Psalms 51:6).

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6 (Matthew 9:13; 12:7)).

He desires to bless his people:

“You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry” (Psalms 10:17).

See also Psalm 20:4; 21:2.

Our desires—what should they be (gold, victories, fame)?

Are for God:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” (Psalms 73:25).

See also Isaiah 26:8; Colossians 3:1-2.

Are for God’s wisdom:

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation”

(1 Peter 2:2).

See also Proverbs 3:15 (8:11).

God's will:

"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalms 40:8).

See also Hebrews 13:18; Romans 7:18; 9:16.

Examples of desiring God's will:

Faithful desire of husband and wife--"I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me" (Song of Solomon 7:10).

Desire that people would be saved--"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Desiring God's gifts:

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Desire to give--"And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so" (2 Corinthians 8:10).

Desire equality--"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:13).

Be content with your pay--"Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay'" (Luke 3:14).

Christian desires end up for good:

"What the righteous desire will be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

"The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath" (Proverbs 11:23).

Two Biblical examples:

God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king" (2 Chronicles 1:11).

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). How would we deal with what happened to Job?

God wants us to find our fulfillment in him--"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one,
for yours is the kingdom
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

This, then, is how you should pray

Two very different friends, Sam and Luke. Sam really enjoys hanging out with others. He loves to talk, play games, watch TV, and have fun with others. Sometimes he'll talk a lot with his friends, other times he enjoys just sitting in their company not saying anything; it feels good just to be with each other. If he does not see his friends in person he'll give them a phone call or send an email. If something exciting happens he'll call up his friends and they will celebrate the good news together. If he is going through some difficult times, he'll share that with his friends as well and appreciates the help they give him. A lot of their conversation is about things that are happening in their lives. But some conversations are also about helping other people and understanding other people's joys and sorrows. When a friend does something he appreciates, he'll stop and thank him. If a friend does something he does not understand, he'll talk to the friend about it—but the friendship is not at stake. Sometimes they'll just talk about how neat their friendship is.

Luke's life is a little busier. He doesn't take much time to hang out with his close friends. If he does call up a friend, and that's not very often, it's because he needs something. He doesn't care much about what his friends are doing unless they seem to get in his way. Once in awhile he might get teed off at his friends for things he sees them doing. Sometimes he'll let them know that, but even then he usually cannot be bothered. In a way, Luke doesn't really have a friend because he wants to live by himself, he doesn't need anyone else.

God delights in us when our relationship to him is as Sam's is to his friends. It was one of the things the Israelites appreciated about God. Moses noted: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him" (Deuteronomy 4:7)? We are encouraged to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), or as one person once stated it, "we must pray as we breath"—in other words pray all the time, and pray if you want to live.

God shows his friendship and invitation to dialogue with him in the following Bible passages: "Is anyone of you troubled? He should pray" (James 5:13). "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). "Be not anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Executing the play: If you have never prayed before, simply speak to God as you would a good friend. Jesus taught us about prayer through the “Lord’s Prayer;” we’ll learn more about that in the next few devotions. Be sure to set formal times and use informal times during the highs and lows of a day to spend time in the presence of God.

Extra shooting practice

God's royal presence.

He is near:

“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him” (Deuteronomy 4:7)?

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14).

See also (Psalm 17:6; John 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 1:5)

Why is God sometimes far away?

“2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:2-4).

See also Proverbs 15:8, 28:9; Matthew 6:5; 20:20-23.

Biblical examples of those who pleased God before us.

God's answer:

Negative answer:

Jesus asked before he was to be killed, “39 My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew. 26:36-45). The answer was no and Jesus was crucified and died on the cross.

See also 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Positive answer:

“They were helped in fighting them, and God handed the Hagrites and all their allies over to them, because they cried out to him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him” (1 Chronicles 5:20).

“The Lord is near to all who call on him” (Psalm 145:18).

“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:22).

Prayers of crying out or groans:

“They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father” (Jeremiah 31:9).

“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans

that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26).

See also 1 Samuel 1-2; Isaiah 38:5.

Intercessory prayers:

For success (Genesis 24:12).

Healing--barren wife (Genesis 25:21).

King/government (Ezra 6:10).

Peace of Jerusalem (Psalm. 122:6).

For all nations (Isaiah 56:7).

For all saints (Ephesians 6:18).

For people in positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Thanksgiving (Luke 17:11-19, Ephesians 3:20; 5:20; Philippians 4:6-7).

Praise (Psalm 33:1; 34:2-3; 103:1; 146:2; 150:3).

Confession (Daniel 9:1-20; 1 John 1:9).

House of Prayer (Matthew 21:13; Acts 2:42).

Jesus' need for prayer (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:9, 12, 18, 29, 22:41).

Importance of prayer.

“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

“19 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:19).

Examples of prayer.

Hannah's prayer--1 Samuel 1:9-20 & 2:1-10.

Daniel's prayer--Daniel 9:1-20.

Jesus in prayer--Matthew 26:36-45 (Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-46).

The Lord's prayer--Matthew 6:9-13.

Our Father in heaven

A four-year old boy came home one day to find his mother in tears speaking with a police officer. The boy ran with fear in his heart to his mother, and they held each other tightly. He soon learned that his father had died suddenly in a car accident. He cried then and often thereafter when he thought about it. He missed his dad. A number of years later he was a star ball player, but one that was often plagued with injuries. He had been a determined person throughout his life. Through rolls of tape applied by the team trainer, the athlete could play on, and he played as though he had no injuries. It took time for the trainer to tape the athlete before each practice and game but it was time used for a grown man to care for a younger man. They could talk about how to help a player in a slump or about dealing with relationships with girls. The time between trainer and athlete was also a time for the trainer to become a father figure to the athlete and for the athlete to become like a son to the trainer.

Some fathers are positive examples of God's fatherliness. Others are poor examples. All fathers die, and leave their children fatherless. God is superior to the fathers we know. He wants to love us in awesome ways and will never leave us alone. Jesus says to ask our heavenly Father "and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew. 7:11; see also Luke 11:11-13). The apostle John reminds us: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are." (1 John 3:1). May we take delight knowing that the King of kings is also a loving Father for us.

Executing the play: Take some time and get to know your heavenly Father, the intimate relationship He wants to have with you, and his awesomeness as Lord of all.

Extra shooting practice

Prayer begins with an intimate Father.

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans. 8:15; see also Galatians. 4:6).

A Father who wants us to be his children; for us not to adopt other fathers.

“16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ 17 ‘Therefore come out from them and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. 18 I will be a Father to you.’” (2 Corinthians.6:16-18; see also Matthew 5:44-45;12:46-50; 18:14).

A perfect Father (see table).

Spoiled children walking away—a pained Father-God.

“1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.... 7 My people are determined to turn from me” (Hosea 11:1-7; see also Deuteronomy 32:53-6, Isaiah. 64:7, Jeremiah. 3:19).

A loving Father inviting us back.

Jesus points us back—“Then they asked him, ‘Where is your father?’ ‘You do not know me or my Father,’ Jesus replied. ‘If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’” John 8:19).

Inviting us back through Jesus—Read Luke 15.

Jesus:

Came from the Father—“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14; see also John 5:36, 8:29-51).

Depends on the Father—“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” (John 15:1).

Brings glory to the Father—“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

Our Father “in Heaven.”

“‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ Declares the Lord, ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:23-24; see also Acts 17:24-25).

“‘1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.’ 5 Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don't know where

you are going, so how can we know the way?’ 6 Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him’” (John 14:1).

Approach our great “Father in Heaven.”

“12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. 14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:12-15; see also Hebrew 10:19-22).

A Perfect Father

Earthly father	Heavenly Father	Text
Plant a seed	Creator	“O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).
Some things come from	All things come from	“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:6).
Sometimes at work	Always at work	“Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working’” (John 5:17).
Protects as he can	Protector	“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them” (Psalm 34:7; see also 125:1-2).
May adopt	Adopts	“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. 6 God sets the lonely in families. . . .” (Psalms 68:5-6).
Imperfect	Perfect	“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).
Changes	Unchanging	“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).
Imperfect discipline	Disciplines for life	“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live” (Hebrews 12:9)!
As compassionate as possible	Compassionate and source of all comfort	“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).
Gives some grace and peace	Giver of all grace and peace	“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:3,4,7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; 6:23; Philippians 1:2; Colossians. 1:2; 1 Thessalonians. 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Titus 1:4).
Forgives	Forgives all sins	“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

Knows some of our needs	Knows all our needs	“For your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8).
Gives gifts	Gives good gifts	“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:13)! “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)?
Father for a little while	Everlasting father	“David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, ‘Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting’” (1 Chronicles 29:10).
May give an inheritance	Will give an inheritance	“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Hallowed be your name

“Sticks and stones will hurt my bones but names will never hurt me.” This was a childhood response to those who hurled insults at us. It was meant as protective armour. But insulting names did hurt, and do hurt. When a close friend insults you it really hurts. You thought you could depend on that person and now they have belittled you. Ouch!

Let’s try some word associations with names. Read the following list of names with a slight pause in between and what is the first descriptive word that comes into your mind. Barbara. Matthew. Chris. Glen. Susan. John. Descriptive words might be: uncertain, calm, funny, caring, athletic, thief, loving, insecure, angry, quiet, friend. Try it with some other names. It is interesting how much baggage a name has—teachers sometimes have a hard time picking a name for their newly born children, because they know the names and lives of so many people.

As we think about prayer, I’m reminded of several Christian hockey players I know. None of them want to pray before they compete. Why? Because they know that when they pray for God’s name to be hallowed they cannot go onto the ice and be a bunch of goons. They do not want to drag God’s name through the dirty slush on the ice or on their blood-crust-ed fighting fists. God does not belong in the penalty box. Yet on Sunday these same hockey players sit in church and pray, sing songs of praise, and listen to God’s word explained. How does God feel when these Sunday friends insult his name on the ice?

The Ten Commandments warn us: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7 & Deuteronomy 5:11). On the positive side, holding God’s name high gives us tremendous freedom and abundant life. Listen to these words of God: “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” (Malachi 4:2).

Executing the play: If you are a “Christian,” how will you hold that name high in the way that you compete?

Extra shooting practice

What's in a name?

Good and bad names a part of a person:

Good names:

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

See also Deuteronomy 25:6-7; Ruth, Ecclesiastes 7:1; Song of Solomon 1:3.

Bad names--Deuteronomy 22:14; 22:19.

Bible names defining the person--Adam, Gen. 2:7; Ishmael, Gen. 16:11; Abram-Abraham, Gen. 17:5; Isaac, Gen. 21:3; Reuben, Gen. 29:32; Jacob-Israel, Gen. 32:28; Peter (Simon), Mark 3:16.

Naming a purpose of people--Genesis 2:19

God's names.

Some of God's names:

I AM (Exodus 3:15, 15:3)

The LORD (Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 42:8; Jeremiah 16:21; 23:6; 33:2, 16; Amos 9:6)

Most High (Psalm 83:18)

Redeemer (Isaiah 63:16)

Holy (Isaiah 57:15; Luke 1:49)

Lord Almighty (Isaiah 45:4; 48:2; 54:5; Jeremiah 10:16; 31:35; 32:18; 46:18; 48:15; 50:34; 51:19, 57; Amos 4:13; 5:27)

Jealous (Exodus 34:14)

His name protects and gives strength:

Protects us:

Proverbs 18:10

Psalm 20:1,7; 119:132; Isaiah 56:5, John 17:12

Gives us strength:

“Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalms 124:8).

See also 1 Samuel 17:45; Jeremiah 10:6

For the sake of his name:

He guides us Psalm 23, 3; 31:3.

Forgives us Psalm 79:9; Jeremiah 14:7; Luke. 24:47; Acts 10:43; 1 John 2:12.

Will not reject us. 1 Samuel 12:22; Revelation 3:5; Jeremiah 14:9,21.

Puts his name in us. “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27).

God’s knows our name:

Exodus 33:12; Isaiah 45:3 I

Isaiah 43:1, 7; Daniel 12:1.

Our response:

Believe in his name		
Believe in his Name	John 1:12	John 2:23
Bear his Name	Daniel 9:19	
Anticipate persecution	Luke 21:12	Acts 5:40-41; 9:14-16; 15:26; 21:13; 1 Peter 4:14-16; Revelation 2:3
Take oaths in his name	Deuteronomy 10:20	1 Kings 22:16; Jeremiah 44:26
Walk in his Name	Zechariah 10:12 Colossians 3:17	

Trust his Name		
Concept	Example	Additional Texts
Call on the Lord’s name	Genesis 4:26 John 14:13	Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; 1 Kings 18:24-26, 2 Chronicles. 7:14; Psalm 80:18; 99:6; 105:1; 116-118; Isaiah 12:4; Lamentations 3:55; Zephaniah 3:19; Zechariah 13:9; Matthew 18:20; John 15:16; 16:23-26; Acts 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2
Seek healing through his name	Acts 3:6	Mark 9:38-41; 16:17; Acts 3:16; 4:10, 30; 16:18; James 5:14
Experience trust and hope in his name	Psalm 9:10	Psalm 20:7; 33:10; 52:9; Isaiah 51:15; Zephaniah. 3:12
Remember	Psalm 119:55	

Adore his Name		
Give God glory, majesty and exaltation	1 Chronicles 16:29 Isaiah 26:8 Psalm 115:1	I Chronicles 16:10, Nehemiah. 9:5; Psalm 8:1, 9; 29:2; 34:3; 66:2; 86:12; 96:8; 105:3; 111:9; Isaiah 24:15; 26:13; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 5:4; John 12:28; Revelation 15:4
Praise his name	2 Samuel 22:50	Psalm 7:17; 9:2; 18:49; 30:4; 44:8; 54:6; 61:8; 63:4, 11; 66:4; 69:30; 72:19; 92:1; 96:2; 97:12; 99:3; 100:4; 102:21; 103:1; 113:1-3; 122:4; 135:3; 138:2; 140:13; 142:7; 145-150; Isaiah 25:1; Daniel 2:20; Joel 2:26; Matthew 21:9; Hebrews 2:12
Give thanks to his name	1 Chronicles 16:35	Psalm 106:4-7; Ephesians 5:20
Rejoice with joy before God	Psalm 5:11	Psalm 89:12, 16; 97:12

Promote his name		
Proclaim and make his name known	Deuteronomy 28:10; Psalm 89:1; 105:1-6; 3 John 7	1 Kings 8:41; 10:1; 2 Chronicles 6:32-33, Ps. 22:22; 48:10; 102:15; Isaiah 59:19; 64:2; Jeremiah 26:20; Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 12:21; 18:5; Acts 9:27-28; Romans 9:17
Confess his name	1 Kings 8:35	
Pronounce blessings in his name	Deuteronomy 10:8	2 Samuel 6:18; 1 Chronicles 16:2; Psalm 129:8
Speak on behalf of God	Exodus 5:23 (6:3)	Deuteronomy 18:7, 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:6
Baptize	Matthew 28:19	Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48; 19:5

God's meeting place—where is name is placed as a banner:

The temple a place to put God's name: Deuteronomy 12-16; 2 Samuel 7:13; 1 Kings 3:2; 5:3-5; 8:17-29; 2 Kings 21:4-7; 23:27; 1 Chronicles 21:19-21:16; 2 Chronicles 6-7; Jeremiah 7:10-14, 30; 34:15; Daniel 9:18

Church: Ephesians 3:15; 1 Corinthians 5:4; Hebrews 2:12

Live by Jesus' name.

Jesus' name--Matthew 1:21& Philippians 2:9-10

Which name saves? Proverbs 30:4

Salvation through his name: Acts 4:12; 2:2; Romans 10:13; John 20:31.

Eternal life through his name: Revelation 19:13; 19:16;

Abundant life through his name: Malachi 4:2 .

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Halfway through grade ten I decided to attend spring training for the senior high school football team. I wanted to make that team, but I also looked down the road and wanted to get a scholarship to play football for a big US university; the University of Hawaii appealed to me most, simply because of their great weather and it seemed glamorous.

I attended spring training but disappointedly discovered that football was not for me. I was too slow to be in the backfield and too small to be on the line. After spring training was over I decided not to try out in the fall but to offer my services as equipment manager. I figured God had different plans in store for me.

As an equipment manager my major responsibility was getting all the equipment ready for the players before and during the practices. During one of the practices I returned balls for the kicking team. I wasn't much at throwing for distance so I kicked them back. I sent beautiful spirals sailing past the kickers. Next thing I knew they called me down and I became the team kicker.

After one practice and learning to shorten the number of steps I took, I was off to my first game. The centre and I had not practised together. The first time I was on the field the snap went sailing over my head. With a mob of huge linemen on my tail I desperately tried to pick up the oddly bouncing ball. Next thing I knew they had scored six points as they got the ball before I did.

The next time I was on the field the snap was short. I had to move up to get the ball. When I was about to kick, the two blockers in front of me were too close and I sent the ball sky high but only for ten yards.

The next time we were to kick the ball, the coach sent in the regular kicker. The next day I handed my equipment in and quit the football team. I was neither player nor manager. Football was over and so were my scholarship opportunities.

I kicked well and sometimes I wonder what would have happened if the coach would have worked more with the centre and me. Would things have worked out? Would I have ended up kicking footballs in front of thousands of fans in Hawaii? But the Lord had a different plan for my life. I was reminded of that when I visited grandma. She had a plaque on the wall which read, "In his heart a man plans his

course, but the LORD determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). After supper that night she read words of scripture that gave me comfort and direction. “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Executing the play: What do you think God’s plan is for your life? How will that advance his kingdom?

Extra shooting practice

Your Kingdom come.

Psalmist's taste of God's kingdom:

“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made” (Psalm 145:13).

See also 45:6; 103:19; 145:11; 145:12.

Jesus' examples of the kingdom:

Parable	Explanation	Additional texts
Matthew 13: 1-10 Parable of the Sower Matthew 13:36-43 The Parable of the Weeds explained	Encouraging growth Need to be born again Look to God Plant seeds—share the gospel Anticipate hard times	John 3:3, 3:5 Luke 9:62 Matthew 24:14, Acts 28:23, 31 Acts 14:22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.
Matthew 13:31-33 Parable of the Mustard Seed and Yeast	Small but powerful Healing	1 Corinthians 4:20 Matthew 4:23; 9:35
Matthew 13:44-46 The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl	Is worth everything	Colossians 1:12-13
Matthew 13:47-50 The Parable of the Net	Understand consequences of living against God Living for God	Matthew 7:21; 8:12; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 2:2; 5:5 Matthew 8:11; 25:34 "

Matthew 18:1-9 The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven	Know what is important The rich The really rich	Matthew 11:11 Mark 10:23 Matthew 5:3; James 2:5; Matthew 5:10; Romans 14:17
Matthew 20:1-16 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard	Anticipate great reward	Luke 12:32; Revelation 5:10 (1:6)
Matthew 22:1-14 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet	Accept God's invitation	2 Peter 1:11
Matthew 25:1-13 The Parable of the Ten Virgins	Be prepared to meet God	Matthew 3:2 (4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15) Mark 15:43

Our living in the kingdom:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

“You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites” (Exodus 19:6).

Seek first his kingdom, share his glory, be a healing influence, and be holy as you:

Decide on and prepare yourself for a job
Date and marry one you love.
Relate with others.
Spend your time.
Spend your money.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

Doing God's will.

Do God's will by coming to him—give your life over:

We are called: “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1 Corinthians 1:1 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

Be ready: Luke 12:47; Acts 22:10-15

Be transformed: Romans 12:2; Ephesians 6:5-8

Keep God first: 2 Corinthians 8:1-8

Do his will by doing it—“After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do’” (Acts 13:22)

God will help you know his will: Colossians 1:1-9; John 9:31.

Don't be hypocrites: Matthew 21:31; Romans 2:17-24.

Don't follow evil: Ephesians 5:11-20.

Instead:

Be sanctified: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7.

Be kind: 2 Timothy: 2:22.

Suffer for doing good: 1 Peter 3:17.

Give thanks: 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Submit to authority: 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Jesus did his Father's will:

In his birth: John 1:13.

In his life: Matthew 26:42 (Luke 22:42); John 5:30; John 6:38-40.

In his death: Hebrews 10:7-10.

Do as Jesus did: 1 Peter 4:1-19.

Accept the healing of following his will:

Does not want any lost: Matthew 18:14; Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 1:4-12.

For those who do not accept: Matthew 7:21.

For those who do accept: Matthew 12:50 (Mark 3:35); Hebrews 10:32-39; 1 John 2:17; 1 John 5:14.

Give us today our daily bread

It was Wednesday noon. Time for the team to meet in the cafeteria for their weekly lunch. It was a tradition. It was a time the team looked forward to each week.

The meal was mostly fun. They would laugh over some newly learned jokes or listen quietly as one of the team members described a family difficulty. There would be some discussion about tests players had done well or not so well in. The sports pages, movies, and what was happening with friends filled a lot of the other conversation.

The food was always great. Each player's name was put in a hat. At the practice before Wednesday's lunch, players would draw a name from the hat. The person they drew was the person they prepared a lunch for. Making a lunch meant knowing enough about the person that peanut butter sandwiches were not made for someone who despised peanut butter, or adding mayonnaise to someone's sub sandwich when they didn't like that added. It was a neat opportunity to serve and be served.

One of the highlights of lunch was a weekly award. A different person was highlighted each week. Each team member came to the luncheon with a descriptive word and a Bible text they thought well-suited the athlete being spotlighted. This was an encouragement to the athlete and a time to remember our dependence on God.

At the end of the meal one of the players offered a prayer of thanks to God for food that was provided, for Jesus who came to earth to die on our behalf, and for fellowship that they could experience together through a relationship with God. It was an athletic team, but it reminded me of the early church where the members "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:42, 46; see also Acts 20:7, 11; Acts 27:35).

Executing the play: What about having lunch with your team as a weekly time of encouragement in the Lord?

Extra shooting practice

We need bread (food).

“To show partiality is not good-- yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread” (Proverbs 28:21).

See also Genesis 25:34; 45:23; 1 Kings 13:9; Proverbs 30:8; Lamentations 1:11; Lamentations 2:12; 4:4; Amos 4:6.

God provides bread.

Manna:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions" (Exodus 16:4).

See also Exodus 16: 4-32; Deuteronomy 8:3-9; Psalms 105:40.

God provides for all:

“27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day” (Genesis 1:27-31).

See also Psalm 37:25; 104:15; Isaiah 33:16; 36:17; Matthew 7:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:12.

Jesus provides (5,000 & 7,000–8 months wages [\$30,000]–Mark 6:34-44).

Jesus is the bread of life.

Jesus is:

“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2).

See also John 6:1-58.

Sacraments are celebrations of Jesus’ life giving power:

Feast of unleavened bread–“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come” (Exodus 12:15-39).

Negative leaven: “Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. . . .” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Communion:

With each other:

“9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (John 21:9, 13).

See also Exodus 18:12; Psalms 41:9; Mark 14:20 (John 13:26).

Remembering the Lord:

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19).

See also Matthew 26:26 (Mark 14:22); 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-28.

Conclusion.

Bread provided for us by God.

Remember to give thanks for God’s providence.

Everyone needs bread, pray for us.

All Christians are part of the same loaf–fellowship with them.

Death and resurrection of Jesus remembered in breaking of bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors

I remember having felt betrayed by a coach and how it took three years before I could go to the coach's office and put the incident and negative feelings behind us. I could not do it earlier, despite the fact that the incident left a constant pit in my stomach. It took three years of hiking before I took the final step on top of the mountain of forgiveness. I was ready for that last step. In some ways it was the same as a thousand steps before it. But having made it, I knew it was done. The scenery on top was beautiful. The pit in my stomach was gone. The bounce in my step was restored. I learned again that we ought to forgive as God forgave us, and that love binds people together and builds people up.

A student explained to me the blessings of being forgiven. She said, "In high school I won the 'all-around student' at school. My marks were good, I was an athlete, and I was involved in service projects. I had a good reputation. However, at a chapel service at the school, the principal declared a 'cheating amnesty.' We the student could confess to cheating, wipe our slate clean, and not get suspended (cheating was taken very seriously at our school). I knew that I had cheated and taken short cuts in my training. I was convicted that God was speaking to me. Pride was also telling me not to admit it. What of my reputation? No one needs to know. Somehow I overcame that pride and 'fessed up. It was hard, and I wondered how our principal would react. Would he be angry? Would he be disappointed? I was afraid. He simply said, 'It hasn't shattered my image of you.' I did a double take. What? Where was the lecture? What about the reprimand? He wasn't condoning what I'd done. To me he was saying like Christ said to the adulterous woman. 'If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7). I had been forgiven. We were still friends. Nothing had changed. He was faithful to me, even though I had messed up. I learned that true forgiveness carries no attached strings, no fine print, no conditions."

Executing the play: Do you need to forgive anyone? Do so today. If you are unable to do so seek help from a trusted person. When you forgive you will experience Christ's forgiveness. I owe a debt I cannot pay; he paid a debt he did not owe.

Extra shooting practice

Ask for forgiveness—for sins we have committed.

Acknowledge that:

God is in authority over us: “For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great” (Psalms 25:11; see also Psalm 79:9; Daniel 9:19).

That we are under judgement: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

That we are humbly dependent on God: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Bible examples:

Various offerings “and he will be forgiven.” (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Numbers 15:26)

Ask on behalf of: Moses: “In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now. 20 The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked” (Numbers 14:19).

“Hear and forgive.” (1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39; 2 Chronicles 6:21, 25, 30, 39).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Receive God’s forgiveness.

“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy” (Micah 7:18).

See also Psalms 32:1; 103:3; 130:4; Jeremiah 31:34; 33:8; 36:3; 50:20; Hebrews 8:12.

He does not forgive when people willfully and consistently chose other gods.

“The blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32 (Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10)).

See also Deuteronomy 29:16-20; Jeremiah 5:1-7; Joshua 24:19.

As we have forgiven others.

We must forgive—to rid ourselves of bitterness:

Bible examples:

Isaac asks Joseph to forgive his brothers (Genesis 50:17).

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37; see also Mark 11:25; Luke 7:47; 17:3; Matthew 18:21-35).

Learn from God’s forgiveness--Spurgeon--“Go to Calvary to learn how you may be forgiven, and then linger there to learn how to forgive.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

See also Matthew 9:1-8 (Mark 2:5-10; Luke 5:20-24);

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28; see also Hebrews 9:22).

“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots” (Luke 23:34).

Conclusion.

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; see also Luke 24:47).

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace” (Colossians 1:14; 3:13).

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one

Temptations, those voices that invite us to do wrong are so powerful because they speak to our weaknesses. Rather than finding strength in the Father we pray to (the one who gives us so much), we fight in our weakness and usually stumble and fall.

We are scared that even with all the training in the world, we will never have enough strength to make the team and we are tempted to use steroids instead of being at peace with who we are or perhaps finding other activities we are better suited to.

A school lies about the eligibility of an athlete because it fears it would lose without this person, instead of competing with who they have and letting the results come as they do.

The opposite sex tempts us to touch them, and we lie alone with the person and fall to the temptation, instead of protecting ourselves by going out to movies, diners, and other events in groups.

Someone left a wallet in the change room with a half-dozen twenties in it. You could use some extra money and are tempted to steal, instead of returning it to a supervisor who would return the wallet and all of its contents to the rightful owner.

We want to know what the future will bring and we get together with some friends to play with our souls over an Ouija board, instead of waiting patiently on what God our loving Father has in store for us.

We need to remember that “no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Executing the play: The temptations you experience are likely ones almost everyone undergo's, don't fight them, simply flee from them into the loving arms of God. Think about one or two temptations that are strongest in your life and develop specific strategies to avoid them or how to deal with them when they arise.

Extra shooting practice

Temptation–Biblical examples.

Examples:

“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5).

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

Leads/Falls into temptation:

Scared:

Abraham leads Pharaoh, “18 So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go” (Genesis 12:18-19)!

For a similar story see Genesis 20; 26

Peter denying Jesus three times before his death; Matthew 26:69-74.

Challenged to lie--Balak tempts Balaam, Numbers 22-24.

Lied to--The old prophet of Bethel by the prophet of Judah, 1 Kings 13:15-19.

Wealth:

Jacob, to defraud Esau, Genesis 27:6-13.

Achan, Joshua 7:21.

Adultery--David, to commit adultery, 2 Samuel 11:2-5 (read 11 and 12).

Other Gods:

Adam and Eve, Genesis 3:1-19.

Gideon leads Israel into sin, Judges 8:25.

Solomon, to become an idolater through the influences of his wives, 1 Kings 11:4.

Resisted temptation:

Joseph resists the temptation to commit adultery, Genesis 39:7-12.

Listened to God.

Balaam, in refusing to curse the children of Israel, Numbers 22:7-18; 24:12,13.

The prophet of Judah, 1 Kings 13:7-9.

Micah did the unpopular, 1 Kings 22:13-28; Job 1:6-21; 2:4-10.

Rechabites remained faithful, Jeremiah 35.

David did right not to injure Saul, 1 Samuel 26:5-25.

The people of Jerusalem trust Jehovah, 2 Kings 18:30-36.

Never tempted by God.

“13 When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

See also Psalms 26:2; Lamentations 3:40; James 1:12.

God will protect you--1 Corinthians 10:13

Jesus’ temptations.

Matthew 4:1-11 (Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13); Hebrews 2:18; 4:15.

Jesus’ temptations.

“1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ 4 Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ [Deuteronomy 8:3]’ 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’ [Psalm 91:11,12]’ 7 Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ [Deut. 6:16]’ 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ 10 Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’ [Deuteronomy 6:13]’ 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him” (Matthew 4:1-11 (Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)).

“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Pray--“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matthew 26:41 (Mark 14:38); see also Luke 22:40-46).

Seven Deadly Sins

**Pride,
envy,
anger,
sloth,
avarice,
gluttony,
and lust**

From entanglement to focussing on the finish line

I watched a 1500m run at a race with athletes who had various disabilities. All but one of the runners ran close together. The lone runner dropped behind, and as the race continued he dropped even further behind. As the second last runner crossed the finish line the last place runner was 200 metres behind. The lone runner kept running and remained focussed on the finish line. Within 20 metres of the finish a few spectators encouraged the athlete and began to clap, and quickly the whole crowd was clapping. Unfortunately, this was not the kind of encouragement this runner needed. The competitor stopped running and was visibly disoriented. The clapping was a total distraction, he stopped running, and try as he could he distressingly could not get himself oriented to the finish line to end the race. The announcer spoke on the PA system and asked everyone to stop clapping. As the crowd stopped, the athlete got his bearings and completed the race. The crowd once again applauded.

The Bible compares our life to a race. It says in Hebrews, “since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (12:1). The witnesses are heroes of the faith as they are described in Hebrews 11 and include historic Bible characters such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Samson. They are God-fearing people that have lived life before us (with success and failures, with high moments and low ones), and they are in the stands watching us race through every moment of our life.

The clapping interfered with our disabled athlete, as sin entangles us, disorients us, and prevents us from running to a Godly finish line. Five hundred years after Christ was born, Pope Gregory I, based on the work of monks that preceded him, adopted what have been called the seven deadly sins which include: pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice (greed), gluttony, and lust. These are seven ways the devil wants to take our focus away from God.

Literature built stories and poems around these seven deadly sins. For example, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, in “The Parson’s Tale,” describes these sins as “the trunk of the tree from which others branch.” In Spencer’s epic poem, “The Faerie Queene,” each sin is depicted as riding on an animal (sloth rides a donkey, gluttony a pig, lust a goat, greed a camel, envy a wolf, anger a lion; and pride in a coach drawn by peacocks). Each sin is also afflicted with a disease (sloth shakes with fever, gluttony afflicted with dropsy, avarice is tormented by gout, lust suffers the

effects of syphilis, anger rages with cholera, and envy is plagued with leprosy). In Dante's "The Divine Comedy," people need to do penance for a particular sin (proud are weighed down with stones, and the gluttonous starve), and people enter heaven by a correspondingly virtuous angel (humility receives the proud, peace the angry, zeal the slothful, mercy the envious, generosity the avaricious, chastity the lustful, and temperance the gluttonous). Fifteen hundred years later, we (don't point the finger at others because these sins ensnare each of us in different ways) still get entangled with the same sins.

Hebrews 12 not only warns against entanglement in sin but gives us a solution to successfully crossing the finish line. It is written, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (12:2-3).

Looking at the seven deadly sins is not only an opportunity to look at what entangles us, but it is also an opportunity to remain focussed on Jesus.

Executing the play: Think about your goals and activities of this day and remember there is a stadium full of heroes of the faith that are watching and encouraging you. Remember Jesus standing at the finish line of all the activities (practices, games, dates, conversations, driving, eating, downloading), calling you to come to him. Run your life focussed on Christ!

Pride

A junior high school volleyball team got into the van and the coach asked if everyone was in the van. One of the starters said, “Yes, we’ve got six players and four subs.” It was a proud joke. The player was proud to be a starter and tried to elevate himself higher by putting others down. The player’s goal in life was to be number one.

The team was in first place with a 10-2 record and were going to play the last place team with a 1-11 record. In the van, the players reminded each other how easily they beat the last place team two weeks earlier. They joked about how clumsy some of the other players were. They wondered if any one on the other team was going to get hurt by a big, unstoppable spike. In jest they wondered how many service aces they were going to get and put up wagers on who was going to get the most aces. The players were proud at the expense of the other team.

As they drove into the other school’s parking lot they continued to build themselves up by putting others down. “Look at that fat kid.” “That girl’s uglier than sin.” “Look at that skinny wimp.” “Those clothes are from fifteen years ago.”

In the gym it did not get much better. One of the starters did not start the game as he expected. As he watched his teammate hit several good balls, he would scornfully laugh when his teammate hit the ball out-of-bounds, and mockingly asked, “do you know where the court is?” When the water bottles needed refilling the non-starting starter was asked to run and fill them up. He told one of the subs to do it instead. Filling up water bottles is below the dignity of a player of his stature.

Scripture reminds us that “pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). As proud as this team was at how well they beat other teams in their league, they did not stand a chance regionally, much less nationally or internationally. If you rank yourself by others, remember there are more teams and players in this world than just the ones in your league. It is also worth noting that as important as this junior high volleyball team felt about themselves, at least five-billion people in the world knew nothing of their game or who their team was.

If we are going to look at people below, we need to look to Jesus, the King of Kings, who looked down on his people, came to live among them, to serve them, to die for them.

Executing the Play: Pride is sometimes called the greatest sin because in its heart it is rebellion against God. Next time you are inclined to elevate yourself by putting others down, think of Jesus who came down to lift you up. “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will raise you up.” Who’s filling up the water bottles next practice?

Extra shooting practice

Pride results in.

Other negative companions:

“Idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions” (Galatians 5:20).

“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16).

“Pride only breeds quarrels” (Proverbs 13:10).

“Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence” (Psalms 73:6).

One upmanship--“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Your downfall:

“But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 26:16).

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

See also Proverbs 29:23; Isaiah 2:11(2:17)

Pride against God.

"Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.' But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god'" (Ezekiel 28:2).

For example--Eve and Adam: "4 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 5 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:4-6 4).

See also 2 Kings 19:22 (Isaiah 37:23); Psalms 10:4; 62:10; Proverbs 8:13; Jeremiah 13:17.

God overthrows pride.

“I will break down your stubborn pride.” (Leviticus 26:19; Isaiah 23:9; 25:11; Daniel 4:37; 5:20; 11:12; Jeremiah 49:16; Obadiah 1:2)

“I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless” (Isaiah 13:11; 10:12; 28:3).

See also Isaiah 13:19 (Ezekiel 7:24; 32:12); Isaiah 23:9; Zephaniah 2:10.

God forgives those who repent of pride.

“Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chronicles 32:26).

Also read an interesting story about Naaman and pride in 2 Kings 5:8-14.

Positive pride.

Proclaiming God– “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation” (Romans 15:20)

Being with God:

“But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower” (James 1:10).

See also 1 Thessalonians 4:11; James 1:9.

Godly parents--“Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children” (Proverbs 17:6).

In God's people:

“I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds” (2 Corinthians 7:4).

See also Isaiah 60:15; 2 Corinthians 5:12; 8:24; Galatians 6:4.

Conclusion--“ 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: `Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:25-31).

Envy

Envy is about resenting someone else's success so much that you will do anything to take that success. It goes beyond winning at any personal cost.

The coach that is so envious of the other team's potential success, spikes the other team's water bottles with a sedative. The soccer player realizes that her competitor went by her, grabs her shirt to slow her down. The coach is so envious of the other team's potential success, instructs the players to cut the competitors down by the knees to take them out of the game. A figure skater is so concerned her rival will win that she arranges an accomplice to hit the other skater across the knees with a steal pipe as she waits her turn to compete. A volleyball player goes up for a block and lands on a teammates foot. The blocker goes over his ankle and is out for the game. The other team delights in the other team's misfortune.

Players and fans are so envious that they not only cheer for their team's great plays, but also at the other team's missed shots. An opposition player misses a last-second, game-tying foul shot and that is cheered. An opposition volleyball player serves a match-point serve into the net, and that is cheered. An opponent misses a short putt on the golf course, and that is cheered.

Not being able to live with the prospect of losing to someone else is to be entangled in sin and to lose focus on Jesus. Proverbs reminds us that "a heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (14:30). Look to Jesus, receive peace, and experience and encourage an abundant life.

Executing the Play: Enjoy well-executed athletic performance regardless of whose team accomplished it. Use that standard as a target to reach for and go beyond. Challenge others in your competition to do the same.

Extra shooting practice

What envy does--“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple” (Job 5:2).

Biblical examples.

Cain and Abel. Genesis 4:4-8.

Joseph’s brothers. Genesis 37:4-11,19-20.

Saul against David. 1 Samuel 18:8-9,29.

David against Uriah. 2 Samuel 11-12.

Envy’s friends.

“Greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly” (Mark 7:22).

See also Romans 1:29; Galatians 5:21; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:3; James 3:16; 1 Peter 2:1.

Don’t be tempted by envy.

“And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

See also Proverbs 3:31; 23:17; 24:1; Psalms 68:16; 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Jesus.

In his death:

Jesus was rival to teachers. “For he [Pilate] knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him” (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10).

A popular rival—crowds followed him.

Christ’s enemies knew He was right.

May we:

Be charitable and loving rather than envious.

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

See the world through Jesus’ eyes, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Anger

It's odd that sport, an enjoyable opportunity to contest our skills with others, is also home to much anger. Anger is expressed at all levels of sport.

Coaches throw chairs onto the playing court to get the attention of the officials. Coaches ridicule their own players when they don't perform as expected. Coaches come home after losing a game they should have won and family members slide into the woodwork for fear of what anger might come undeservedly their way.

Athletes are no different. They get slightly bumped during the contest, and they rag the official for the next few minutes. The next time the same player bumps into them, off come the gloves and we're into a full blown fight; over what? If that was not bad enough, these players threaten each other at the end of the game to look out the next time they meet. One team is losing to a team they should beat, and frustrated losers angrily cuss at each other for broken plays.

Fans are no different. They will publicly berate an official for what they felt was an obvious missed call. They will stand and cheer when a fight breaks out, as if dealing with anger through fisticuffs is the epitome of sport, the moment we were all waiting for. How many leagues have not banned parents from watching the games because of the negative influence they have on the contest.

Those times when we feel unrighteous anger coming we need to look to the finish line and refocus on Jesus. He is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2). We should also not allow anger to distract us from the finish line, the Psalmist advises: "Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil" (Psalm 37:8).

Executing the Play: If you are quick to anger look to Jesus; if you look to the one offending you, think of that person as Jesus. We ought to share in God's love by helping to heal broken lives which are often the causes of anger. Sometimes the only way to stop irrational anger is by experiencing equally irrational forgiveness; what would happen if someone was really angry with you and you said sorry and gave them a big hand shake and a hug on the middle of the court? Are there other ways you can curb anger? For more wisdom on anger read the "Advice against ungodly anger" in the "Extra Shooting Practice" that follows.

Extra shooting practice

God's anger.

With those who serve other Gods:

“Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you” (Jeremiah 25:6).

There are at least fifty times in the Bible one reads these warnings. See for example Deuteronomy 29:23; Jeremiah 8:19; 44:3; Romans 2:8.

With those who live in disobedience to him:

“If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you” (Joshua 23:16).

There are at least one hundred times in the Bible one reads these warnings. See for example Exodus 4:14; 2 Kings 22:13; Isaiah 30:30.

Biblical examples of unrighteous anger (mad=insane for ancient Greeks).

Balaam toward his donkey, Numbers 22:27,29.

Balak toward Balaam, Numbers 24:10,11.

Eliab to his younger brother David before he battled with Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:28.

Saul against his son Jonathan for being a friend to David. 1 Samuel 20:30.

David against Nathan for not returning a favour, 2 Samuel 12:5.

Naaman, because Elisha directed him to wash in the Jordan, 2 Kings 5:12.

Haman, because Mordecai did not salute him, Esther 3:5.

Nebuchadnezzar, on account of the insubordination of the three Hebrews, who refused to worship his idol, Daniel 3:13,19.

People of Nazareth, toward Jesus, Luke 4:28.

God is merciful through Jesus to his children who love him.

“Correct me, LORD, but only with justice--not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:24).

Plea for God's mercy--“Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour” (Psalms 27:9; see also 6:1; 7:6; 27:9; 30:5; 38:1; 74:1; 77:9; 78:31; 80:4; 85:5; 86:15; 90:7-11; 95:11; 103:8-9).

God is merciful to those who repent:

“Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath” (Psalms 78:38).

See also Joshua 7:26; 2 Chronicles 29:10; Isaiah 60:10; Ezekiel 16:42; Hosea 14:4.

God is slow to anger:

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness’” (Exodus 34:6).

See also Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3.

We ought to share in God’s righteous anger.

For example:

Simeon and Levi, on account of the humbling of their sister, Dinah, Genesis 49:5-7.

“‘All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, “Go, you and all the people who follow you!” After that I will leave.’ Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh” (Exodus 11:8).

Advice against ungodly anger.

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26 & Psalms 4:4).

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

“A gift given in secret soothes anger” (Proverbs 21:14).

“Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy” (Proverbs 27:4)?

“Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger” (Proverbs 29:8).

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control” (Proverbs 29:11).

“For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife” (Proverbs 30:33).

“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

“If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest” (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

“For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder” (2 Corinthians 12:20).

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8).

“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:8).

Sloth

International-level athletes will spend most of their time practising. It is not unusual for soccer players to practice 10 hours for every hour of play, for rowers to practise 52 hours for every minute of rowing competition, or for marathon runners to run 100 hours in practice for every hour of competitive running. It takes perseverance.

In the weight room it seems so tempting to cheat. You are supposed to do 15 repetitions three times. But you are tired and pressed for time and so you do 10 repetitions for each. When the coach asked us if we were doing our weights, we all said that we did. I figured others were fudging their results a little, and so it did not hurt if I did a little of the same.

Sometimes a player may have developed a poor stroke or shot and the coach will want to help the player change. In the short term, things will probably get worse. Those who were having trouble blocking a spiked ball before will have even more trouble blocking a spiked ball. But once the errors have been corrected and the skills mastered, the athlete's performance will have improved.

How similar are you to a sloth? Sloths are mammals that crawl at a rate of ten feet a minute, build no nests, seek no shelter for their young, sleep 15-22 hours a day, rise late in the afternoon to eat whatever may be close at hand, have no teeth, and are so passive they are virtually untrainable. Is that me, not interested in doing what needs to be done? Think of the following proverbs: "The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions" (12:27). And, "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway" (15:19).

Jesus tells the following story: "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:26-30). God does not take kindly to a slothful treatment of talents he has given each of us, but rewards those who use their gifts well.

Executing the play: God has given you talents. Are you doing all things, “not as pleasing men (even yourself) but God” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Extra shooting practice

Negative effects of sloth.

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth” (Proverbs 19:24, 26:15).

“If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks” (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

Also see Matthew 25:26-30; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 6:9; 10:26; 20:4; 22:13, 26:13; 24:30; 26:14; 26:16.

Negative effects of sloth compared with diligence.

“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Proverbs 10:4).

“The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied” (Proverbs 13:4).

Also see: Proverbs 12:27; 6:6; 15:19.

Slothful spiritual life.

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11).

Also see: Acts 17:21; Hebrews 6:12.

Remedy is doing what God calls us to do--“27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ 29 Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day” (Genesis 1:27-31).

Look to Jesus who did what need to be done--“39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation.’ 41 He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 ‘Why are you sleeping?’ he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’ 47 While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus asked him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ 49 When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, ‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’ 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. (Luke 22:39-51)

Avarice–Greed

Greed is about loving and wanting all that MY money can buy. It is about ME getting MY cloths (with the right labels), MY wheels, MY food, MY WAY. It is about taking comfort in possessing more and more things. It is about forgetting to live simply so all may simply live. It is forgetting that miser and misery have the same roots. It is forgetting that as Jesus waits at the finish line, he also provides all we stand in need of.

Greed, and the consequences of greed, are well told in a deadly amusing story in Chaucer's Canterbury tales. Three loyal friends hear of a treasure of gold buried under an oak tree. Being afraid to unearth the treasure during the day, they decide to wait until night has fallen. In the meantime, the youngest of the three is sent into town to buy bread and wine for the feast they will share once they claim the gold for themselves. The Pardoner explains what transpired:

As soon as he had gone the first sat down and thus began a parley with the other: "You know that you can trust me as a brother; now let me tell you where your profit lies; you know our friend has gone to get supplies and here's a lot of gold that is to be divided equally amongst us three. Nevertheless, if I could shape things thus so that we shared it out--the two of us-- wouldn't you take it as a friendly act?" "But how?" the other said. "He knows the fact, that all the gold was left with me and you; what can we tell him? What are we to do?"... "Well," said his friend, "you see that we are two, and two are twice as powerful as one. And look; when he comes back, get up in fun to have a wrestle; then as you attack, I'll up and put my dagger through his back while you and he are struggling, as in game; then draw your dagger too and do the same. Then all the money will be ours to spend, divided equally of course, dear friend. Then we can gratify our lusts and fill the day with dicing at our own sweet will." Thus these two miscreants agreed to slay the third and youngest, as you heard me say.

Before anyone starts to feel sorry for the young friend who had gone to town, we need to hear more from the Pardoner of how he too had succumbed to the folly of avarice. For him too, the intoxicating effects of the prospect of instant wealth cheapened the previously insoluble bonds of friendship. The youngest of the three also devised a clever plan to secure all the gold for himself. He poured poison into

two of the three bottles of wine he purchased and made certain that only he would drink from the untainted bottle. The Pardoner continues:

Why make a sermon of it? Why waste breath? Exactly in the way they planned his death They fell on him and slew him two to one. Then said the first of them when this was done. "Now for a drink. Sit down and let's be merry, For later on there'll be the corpse to bury." And, as it happened, reaching for a sup, he took a bottle full of poison up and drank, and his companion, nothing less, drank from it also, and they perished both.

Another ancient but true story involves King Solomon. God told Solomon to ask for anything and he would give it to him. What would you ask for? King Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge to govern his people. God responded to Solomon by saying, "11 Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, 12 therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have" (2 Chronicles 1:11-12).

It is probably better to pray "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread" (Proverbs 30:8). It is helpful to look at the animal world where "The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God" (Psalm 104:21). May we have the strength of a lion and gratefully live out of the hands of God, seeking nothing more, and nothing less.

Executing the Play: Do your possessions give you freedom, or do they cause anxiety as they are protected behind locked doors? Were there possessions you had years ago (running shoes, a jacket, a cap) that you "died" to get, and are now gone, worn out, perhaps even thrown in the trash? How can you simplify your life so that you are satisfied with what the Lord gives you? Ask God to give you the "wisdom and knowledge" to be a good and godly friend, athlete, student, family member.

Extra shooting practice

Consequences of greed and warnings against it.

Bible warnings:

“Then he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’” (Luke 12:15).

See also Proverbs 19:22; Matthew 23:25; Luke 11:39; Mark 7:22.

Bible warnings against riches—don't allow wealth to rule you:

Bribery—“Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside” (Job 36:18).

Boasting in wealth:

“Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf” (Proverbs 11:28).

See also Psalms 49:6; Isaiah 10:3; Jeremiah 9:23; 48:7; 49:4.

Riches don't last:

“Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Proverbs 23:5).

See also Psalms 49:12; Proverbs 27:24.

Stolen wealth:

“Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool” (Jeremiah 17:11).

See also Psalm 62:10.

May cost your life:

“A man's riches may ransom his life, but a poor man hears no threat” (Proverbs 13:8).

See also Luke 8:14; 16:11; Mark 10:24.

Examples of the consequences of greedily living for riches:

For wealth.

Lot, in choosing the plain of the Jordan, Genesis 13:10-13.

Laban,

in giving Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, Genesis 24:29-51;

in deceiving Jacob when he served him seven years for Rachel, Genesis 29:15-30;

and in deceiving Jacob in wages, Genesis 31:7,15,41,42.

Jacob,

in defrauding Esau of his father's blessing, Genesis 27:6-29;

in defrauding Laban of his flocks and herds, Genesis 30:35-43;

and in buying Esau's birthright, Genesis 25:31.

Balaam, in loving the wages of unrighteousness, 2 Peter 2:15, with Numbers 22.

Achan, in hiding the treasure, Joshua 7:21.

Samuel's sons, in taking bribes, 1 Samuel 8:3.

Gehazi, in taking a gift from Naaman, 2 Kings 5:20-27.

Jews,

in exacting usury of their brethren, Nehemiah 5:1-11;

in keeping back the portion of the Levites, Nehemiah 13:10;

Money changers in the temple, Matthew 21:12,13; Luke 19:45,46; John 2:14-16.

The rich young ruler, Matthew 19:16-22.

The rich fool, Luke 12:15-21.

Judas, in betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, Matthew 26:15,16; Mark 14:10,11; Luke 22:3-6; John 12:6.

The unjust steward, Luke 16:1-8.

The Pharisees, Luke 16:14.

Simon Magus, in trying to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:18-23.

The sorcerers, in filing complaint against Paul and Silas, Acts 16:19.

Demetrius, in raising a riot against Paul and Silas, Acts 19:24,27.

Felix, in hoping for a bribe from Paul, Acts 24:26.

Demas, in forsaking Paul for love of the world, 2 Timothy 4:10.

For a person--David, of Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11:2-5.

For things:

Ahab, in desiring Naboth's vineyard, 1 Kings 21:2-16.

in building fine houses while the house of the Lord lay waste, Haggai 1:4-9;

For food:

Eli's sons, in taking the flesh of the sacrifice, 1 Samuel 2:13-17.

The people following Jesus for the loaves and fishes, John 6:26.

For people wanting to be like God--Eve, in desiring the forbidden fruit, Genesis 3:6.

Get rid of greed.

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

See also Romans 1:29; Ephesians 5:3.

God wants to richly supply us with all we need.

He gives tangible riches for godly wisdom:

“With me are riches and honour, enduring wealth and prosperity” (Proverbs 8:18).

See also 1 Kings 3:13; 2 Chronicles 32:27-29; Psalms 112:3; Proverbs 3:16; Isaiah 45:3; 60:5; 61:6; Joel 2:22.

Follow Jesus:

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”(Philippians 4:19).

See also Romans 2:4; 11:33; Ephesians 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16; Colossians 1:27; 2:2.

Don't be like “The Rich Fool” (Luke 12:13-34).

“33 Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Gluttony

Chris was a sweet and generous person who always thought of others before herself. Some of this resulted from poor self-esteem. Doing things for others was a sure way to get a pat on the back. She longed for love, and she could not remember the last time dad said, "I love you."

She was a small, beautiful girl and an able gymnast. At a competition one of the judges mentioned to her that she was looking a little chunky. Determined not to lose her gymnastics career she set out to lose weight by eating very little. At supper time she would give excuses for not being hungry. She would say she and her friends grabbed a hamburger on the way home or she had had an extra big lunch that day. None of this was true. Once in awhile she would have a huge meal. She would follow this at a moment when no-one would realize by going to the washroom and vomiting her supper back out. She felt good about this because she thought she was controlling something (food), and that felt good.

It was not as if food was not important to her. Food was on her mind day and night. Food obsessed her. She seized opportunities to bake cookies or cakes. She loved to go grocery shopping. She thought about food during the day and dreamt about it at night. She sought love from boys, but they only used her as a sexual toy. She often had nightmares where she dreamt of killing them. She longed so much to be loved by someone. Getting her body thinner would make love possible.

Finally she became too thin and lost all energy and was unable to compete in gymnastics. Getting out of bed became difficult and she was hospitalized. Intravenous brought much needed nourishment to her body, but when she returned home she'd stand on the weight scale and look at her body in the mirror and see nothing but fat. She'd lose weight and again end up in the hospital. It was there, two weeks before her seventeenth birthday that she died. Let's remember to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Executing the Play: Parents, take this opportunity to tell each of your children how much you love them. If you struggle like the person above, talk to your parents or doctor about getting skilled help to assist you to see Jesus and be motivated by his love rather than seeing anorexic models which dominate you. We all need to focus more on loving people for who they are and less on outward appearance.

Extra shooting practice

Food: a gift of good.

“27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day” (Genesis 1:27-31).

“13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. 14 He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate-- bringing forth food from the earth: 15 wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart” (Psalm 104:13-15).

“Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time-- for strength and not for drunkenness” (Ecclesiastes 10:17).

Jesus said: “I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Food: a gift gone rotten.

Gone rotten:

“However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry” (Exodus 16:20).

See also Judges 3 and Hebrews 12:16 (Gen. 25:30-34).

Therefore don't eat food like it is owed to you:

“18 If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, 19 his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. 20 They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.' 21 Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

See also Luke 12:16-23 and 21:34.

Food: a memory of God's forgiveness.

Our bodies:

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained. 17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is

destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:14-21).

See also Romans 13:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:30-58; 1 Peter 4:1-8.

Jesus’ body--“26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ 27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-27).

May we:

Do as Jesus would have us do, and “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” (Matthew 5:6).

May we be fed by Jesus, as were the thousands on the hill side, who “all ate and were satisfied” (Matthew 14:20).

Be like David and “thirst for” God (Psalm 63:1).

Lust

Lust: wanting more, and more, and more. With hormones running high during the teenage years and mass media pushing sexuality, lust is often associated with sex. It is seeing someone and dreaming of them and wanting more and more of them. You want the person's sight, their heart, their kisses, all of them, and you cannot stop till you get it all. Certainly the sport world is not innocent in promoting this. The idolization of healthy athletes makes them prized possessions of those who manage to go out for a date with them. Cheer leaders and football players lust after each other's bodies in one-night relationships of revelry following a season winning football season. One wonders if the next one-night-stand will be better. One wonders how many different one-night-stands one can have or which member of the team can have the most. But all of these non-married relationships weaken life-long relationships and makes people objects of meat and objects for self gratification, not real people who matter.

Lust goes beyond sexuality. It is the athlete's relentless thirst for records. Once the records have been achieved there is another record to conquer. It is the desire to win, win, win, and pound the opponents into the ground. But then you want to pound the next team even deeper. The professional athlete who continually pushes for a higher salary, but then the new salary is not enough. It is the irrepressible urges to get more and more and find happiness in the getting. But it is a vicious cycle and once a person has reached their goal, the lust for more continues, their thirst is never satisfied, and happiness continues to be just around the next corner, and then the next corner, and the next. Brokenness is left in lust's trail.

Happiness will never be found in lusting after things of this world. Happiness is only found in untangling ourselves from lust's grip and focussing on Jesus. The Bible teaches: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Executing the Play: Check your motivations. Is your purpose in sport about glorifying and enjoying God? If it is not, see how your life is becoming entangled, burdened and oppressed by lusting after things that do not give ultimate meaning.

Extra shooting practice

A Thirst For More that breaks relationship with God.

The consequences of lust. Friends you want to hang around with?

“29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:27-32).

“Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Ephesians 4:19).

Jesus quenches the desire.

“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14).

“4 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

“31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:31-32)?

Try these practical steps and ask God to lead you to victory.

Humbly focus on Jesus and ask for help:

Die to lust:

“4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:4-7).

See also 1 Peter 4:3; Colossians 3:5.

Walk in the Spirit--“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16).

Renew your mind--“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Put away everything that appeals to the flesh and focus on God:

“17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. 20 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. 21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Resist and flee:

“Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house” (Proverbs 5:8).

“7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8).

A Test Case: David and Bathsheba read 2 Samuel 11 and 12, and Psalm 51.

Beatitudes

Matthew 5:1-12

**Now when Jesus saw the crowds,
he went up on a mountainside and sat down.**

**His disciples came to him,
and he began to teach them, saying:**

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they will be filled.**

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are you when people insult you,
persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you
because of me.**

**Rejoice and be glad,
because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who
were before you.”**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

It has been said, “It is better to give than to receive.” On the other hand, to receive is very special. I can still remember receiving my first baseball glove and football. I still enjoy receiving a squash ball for my birthday just before squash season starts in full force. I always appreciate it when someone encourages me to have a good day. A highlight of each week for me occurs during most Sunday worship services when I can receive a gift from the Lord, his blessing. The minister often says on behalf of God: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

In Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus blesses us nine times. The blessing given to us, as we look at it today, is the kingdom of heaven. Note how Jesus says that “theirs is.” The Kingdom of God is among us today; it not something we receive only in the future. This gift is much bigger than my first baseball glove. God wants to bless me and you with this. The kingdom of heaven is given to us when we are poor in spirit.

Athletes are often very self-reliant, with a “when the going gets tough the tough get going” or a “success breeds success” mentality. Instead of these attitudes God asks us to be poor. God asks us to recognize our sin, to ask him for forgiveness, to ask him for strength to fight evil, to ask, to be in need, and to be poor. Can we do that? Are we sorry enough for our sins that through the power of the Holy Spirit we will try not to sin? Do we love God enough not to cheat on our opponents, belittle them, or use our athletic status in sinful ways? God says, “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15; 66:2). He blesses us with his kingdom.

Executing the Play: Can you bow down on your knees each day and ask God for forgiveness, and for his strength to overcome evil? For your poverty, God gives you the kingdom of heaven.

Extra shooting practice

Who are the poor?

“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2; see also Isaiah 57:15).

Introduction to the beatitudes—sermon on the mount

God wants to bless his people:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

See also Psalm 1; 32; 1 Peter 1:8-9.

The kingdom of God is one of the main themes. See Matthew 5:3, 10, 17-20; 6:10, 33; 7:21-23.

Jesus had other mountain retreats. See In Matthew 17; Matthew 24-25; Matthew 28.

Examples of the poor? “Not the best.”

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:4-11).

In Luke 5:8 we read, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees. . ." and then he made a strange request. What was it? "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31-32).

See also Isaiah 6:1-7; Luke 15:21.

Not so poor.

Jesus said to the church of Laodicea: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Jesus spoke: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:24-26).

Poverty of spirit? “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like

other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of what I get." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner"" (Luke 18:9-14).

The solution.

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10-12, 23; see also Mark 7:21-22).

Mourning for being side-tracked

Remember watching three-year olds run a race. Mom or dad stand at the finish line and at the signal the children run into their parent's loving arms. They don't know about finish lines or personal best times, but they know to run to their parents and not somewhere else. They fix their eyes on their parents and run.

The Christian life is like that. Our race is around seventy years long. Some have a shorter run, others a longer one. But in that race through life we need to focus our eyes on God. God is the loving parent waiting at the finish line.

There are times when we forget this and we start to wander around the track as we indulge in alcohol, take illegal drugs, partake in extramarital sex, attempt to be number one, cheat to gain a victory, and deliberately injure opponents. During these times we no longer look to God as the parent, the one who provides all things, but we look away from God. God weeps when we do that, and we too should also mourn when we get side-tracked. St. Augustine once said, "He truly repents of the sins he has committed who never commits the sins he has repented of." Are we really sorry when we get side-tracked, or do we go there again and again?

If you do not know the purpose of your life, look to Jesus. Don't delay. Don't run around like a quarterback who cannot find any receivers, a marathon runner who does not know which route to take, or a boxer who does not know where the opponent is. Look to Jesus, today.

Sometimes we maintain our run and focus but watch others get side-tracked. It is important during those times to help others get focussed again. Though we may be frustrated at the distractions, we must feel the pain of God as someone turns away from him. It might be funny if three-year olds ran for the ice cream truck instead of their parents. But if these children never wanted to go to their parents, in the race, at meals, travelling, or anywhere; that would hurt to watch. If these children sat in the presence of their parents, but refused to look at them, refused to speak to them, refused to listen to them, and could hardly wait to get away from them; that would hurt to watch. As people find it difficult and strained to be in the presence of God, we ought to hurt over the situation so much that we seek to help these people see God again as one who loves them.

Executing the Play: Is the focus of your whole life on God--including the way you

compete and live as an athlete? Prayerfully consider what is important to you, what drives you, and what causes you great joy or sadness. Does any of this have a focus on running life's race with God at the finish line?

Extra Shooting Practice

Not blessed are those who do not mourn their sin.

Jesus said, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." (Luke 6:25)

On the last day they will hear the terrible words of Christ's judgment as recorded in Matthew 7:23, "Away from me, you evildoers!"

Godly mourning.

"What a wretched man I am!" (Romans 7:24)

Also see: 2 Corinthians 7; Acts 11:18; and also the stories of King David (2 Samuel 12:13-23) and that of the prodigal son (Luke 15:21).

Godly sorrow for my sin.

"Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them." (Luke 7:36-38)

"Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Psalm 51:4)

The prodigal son said, "I have sinned against heaven. . ." (Luke 15:21)

Zacchaeus said? "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8).

See also: 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Godly sorrow for other's sin.

"Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed." (Psalm 119:136)

See also: Daniel 9 and Ezra 9-10.

Motivation for Godly Weeping.

God weeps over sin: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit with whom you are sealed for the day of redemption, but I know that I have grieved you by my sins." (Ephesians 4:30)

Weep now, not later. Jesus said, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." (Luke 6:25)

Our tears are precious to God. Psalm 56:8

Tears demonstrate grace. Ezekiel 36:26

The end of tears will soon come. "Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning.."

(Psalm 30:5; also see Revelation 7:17 and 21:4)

Jesus comforts the mourners.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

See also prophecies about this in: (Isaiah 40:1; 53:5; 60:1-3)

See also Luke 15, especially verse 24 “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Concluding remarks.

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (Hebrews 3:15 & 4:7)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

What would you give to inherit the whole earth? God asks of us to simply give ourselves to him and we will inherit the whole earth.

There is no need to stand in the batter's box until your home run has left the ball park; on the other hand, a home run is a considerable achievement and even if it is done by an opposing player he too can be commended for a great hit. Touchdowns are difficult to score, celebrate them, but not in an overly-exaggerated manner that puts the opposition down. Your team manager is not good enough to make it as an athlete, is unpopular, wears out-of-date clothing, but wants to be on the team. The manager always makes sure everything is ready, from equipment to uniforms to water when you come to the bench. You are in a coffee shop and the team manager comes in, you look the other way and don't invite him to join you; you'd be too embarrassed. Why? We are told Jesus "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). Would you ignore Jesus too? It would not be cool to seen with him?

The Bible reminds us that "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Our example is Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:6-8).

We need to be meek enough to accept gentle Jesus' invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Executing the play: Is your soul quiet in the hands of God? If it is not, pray to God and he will still your spirit. The person with a humble heart that kneels before God inherits the whole earth, how does that humbleness follow you on and off the court?

Extra Shooting Practice

Read all of Psalm 37, a psalm Of David. [This psalm is an acrostic poem, the stanzas of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet], which will be referred to often in this section on meekness.

The meek.

Are not weak--“But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace” (Matthew 5:5).

See God--“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Fix their eyes on God:

“Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong” (Psalm 37:1; see also 7-8).

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Trust in God and find rest (not always solved problems):

“Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture” (Psalm 37:3).

“28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28-29).

See also Exodus 4:29-31.

The meek delight in God:

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

“8 I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, 10 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:8-11).

Commit their ways to the Lord--“5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun” (Psalm 37:5-6).

Are still and wait for the Lord:

“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7).

See also Exodus 14:9-13; Isaiah 40:28-31.

Are not angry:

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath” (Psalm 37:8).

See also Deuteronomy 32:35 (Hebrews 10:30); and 1 Samuel 24.

Have an eternal perspective:

“9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace” (Psalm 37:9-11).

“34 Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it. 35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, 36 but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found” (Psalm 37:34-36).

They possess all things now already:

“21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

See also 2 Corinthians 6:10; Mark 10:29-30.

Are to adorn and cloth themselves with meekness:

“As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

Biblical examples of meekness.

Moses:

“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

See also Exodus 2 and 15.

David--2 Samuel 16--As David fled Jerusalem during the insurrection of his son, Absalom.

Teachers--“Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25).

Disciples--“Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1:21).

Elders--“If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

Jesus:

“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey’” (Matthew 21:5 [Zechariah 9:9]).

you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'" (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Executing the play: Do you want God to fill you with blessings? How can you do right in the way you compete? This might mean not tugging at competitors' shirts to prevent them moving down the soccer field. Give two examples that come to mind for you in your sport.

Extra Shooting Practice

Righteousness—complete conformity to the will of God.

Need to be righteous:

Recognize our sin: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18; see also Isaiah 64:6).

Self-righteous: “9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 10 ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ 14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Want to be righteous? “Here I am... I have come to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7-9 (Psalm 40:7-8)).

Jesus makes us righteous—justified:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

See also 1 Corinthians 1:30; and Psalm 11:7; 17:15; Jeremiah 23:6; Isaiah 61:10.

Sanctified living--“3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false” (Psalm 24:3-4).

Seek righteousness intensely--“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’” (Joel 2:12; See also Hosea 6:4).

Seek only God:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” (Psalm 73:25).

See also Matthew 13:45-46; Luke 14:26.

God’s filling us--“9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:9-10).

God fills us now:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

See also Psalm 23:5; John 7:37-38.

Filling is God’s gift to us--“5 They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. 6 Then they

cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. 8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his un failing love and his wonderful deeds for men, 9 for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things” (Psalm 107:5-9).

God keeps his promises:

“But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29).

See also Numbers 23:19; Luke 11:13.

He invites us:

“1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1-2).

See also John 7:37; Revelation 22:17.

He commands us--“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Accept Jesus righteousness today--“22 The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire’” (Luke 16:22-24).

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy

There many ways to be merciful. It's taking a rookie aside at the beginning of a season and explaining team customs and procedures. It's reaching out a hand to a tackled player and helping her onto her feet. It's about scoring a point against a far inferior team and not gloating about it. It's about playing an inferior team and not going down to their level, or mocking them for their inferiority, but rather pushing them and yourselves to play well without pushing them into the ground. It's about simply replaying a play that is too close to call, rather than calling it to your advantage. It's about kicking a soccer ball out-of-bounds when you notice one of the opposition players is down and injured.

Christians have for many years demonstrated mercy and were blessed by God. Many hospitals world wide were first built by Christians and provided a blessing to everyone. If you have ever gone on a mission trip with a team to a poorer country or do inner city works of mercy, you were undoubtedly blessed by the experience. Mercy is to feel another's pain and seek to relieve it as much as possible. When mercy is given, it is also received.

The Bible tells us "do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). One way to do this is to be "kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). You got tangled up in an opponent's feet, you fell, you broke your arm, your season was done. Even though it was not your opponent's fault, when you received a get well card from him, with a brief note saying he was sorry how the injury occurred, you can also forgive.

When we bless others with mercy, we in turn will also be blessed. May "mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance" (Jude 1:2; see also 2 Timothy 1:2; 2 John 1:3).

Executing the play: How have you shown mercy to others as an athlete? How was it blessed? How can you continue to show mercy to others in the future?

Extra Shooting Practice

God is merciful--“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Being merciful.

To your family:

Joseph: “So, then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children” (Genesis 50:21).

Moses: Numbers 12:13.

To your church family--“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

To your enemies--“Jesus said, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you’” (Luke 6:27-28).

Why show mercy?

God is merciful:

“For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath” (Deuteronomy 4:31 (Jeremiah 3:12; Daniel 9:9)).

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

God has shown mercy:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

See also Luke 1:50; Ephesians 2:4 (James 5:11); Romans 12:1.

God delights in showing mercy--“You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us” (Micah 7:18-19).

Part of what God has recreated us to be--“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

It is part of our spiritual sacrifice--“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him” (1 John 3:17)?

At the final judgement--“Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13; See also 2 Timothy 1:16-18)!

God blesses those who show mercy--“He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy” (Proverbs 14:21).

How to show mercy?

Ungrudgingly--“7 If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. 10 Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart” (Deuteronomy 15:7 & 10).

Generously--“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Corinthians 8:2).

Cheerfully--“If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:8).

Humbly--“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink. When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers, you did for me’” (Matthew 25:37-40).

Jesus.

Merciful high priest--“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

“Moved with compassion and healed” (Matthew 4:4; 8:13-16; 9:21-27; 12:15; 12:22; 14:14; 14:36; 15:22-30; 17:15-18; 19:2; 20:30; 21:14).

“Moved with compassion and fed” (Matthew 15:29-39 & Mark 6:34).

Preached:

Jesus: “He began teaching them many things” (Mark 6:34).

Paul & us: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians. 9:16)!

Other biblical examples of mercy.

Luke 15--The prodigal son’s father was moved with compassion and showed mercy to his son.

Matthew 18--A man who incurred an enormous debt, pleaded his case, was forgiven, did not forgive another, thrown into jail.

Luke 10:25-37--The good Samaritan.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

Would you want to drink milk that is not quite pure, or eat raw pork? God is much the same. If we do not come clean with God, we will not see him, if we come to him with pure hearts, we will see him. A little impurity, or lack of commitment to God, can make a big difference. Look at what happens when you misspell “faith” by one letter, it becomes “filth.” God wants one-hundred percent of our heart.

Contributing to a Sunday worship service and saying godly things at youth group are good and positive ways of honouring God. But if you follow that on Monday by lying to your parents about where you are going at night, going with the team to do some illegal drinking as teenagers, and using people of the opposite sex as simple objects of pleasure not real people, then your heart is not pure, and you will not see God. It is not the alcohol that prevents you from seeing God, but it is your half-hearted commitment that will prevent you from seeing God.

It is special that Scripture refers to us as God’s temple (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The temple in the old testament is similar to churches today. The temple was a place where people went to be with God; after Jesus’ death, God’s Spirit came upon his people and they were able to talk with God wherever and whenever. The temple was also a building where people would go for help. Summed up, the temple was a place on earth where people expected to find God. In the New Testament, the Bible says to us, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, on the playing fields and off, you and I are walking temples of God. If we walk pure lives, when people see you and me they will see God.

Scripture invitingly says, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). And, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart” (Psalms 73:1).

Executing the play: You are God’s temple, do people see God in you? Why/when? Why/when not? Are there things you should change in your life to model a temple that is fully pure? You and others will see God.

Extra Shooting Practice

Sin inside.

Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin" (Proverbs 20:9)?

"21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21-22).

Also see Genesis 2-3; 6:5.

God cleans us inside out.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight....In him we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:3-4, 7).

See also Psalm 24:3; 73:1; Matthew 1:21; Romans 8:29, 32.

How does God clean us?

Through faith in Jesus Christ:

"Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1 (3:21-22); see also Acts 15:9).

Through the death of Christ--"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences" (Hebrews 9:13-14; see also Titus 2:14).

Through confessing our sins--"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Through giving us a new nature--"Put on the new self, created to be like God in righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

The ongoing work of God's Spirit in us:

"We... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

See also John 3:6; Romans 8:13).

Through being God's temples:

"19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore Honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Made with “pure gold” (Exodus 25, 28, 37, 39. . .).

We need to allow God to clean us.

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

See also John 13; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:3; 4:19; Revelation 19:7-8.

How about us?

Do we pray for purity of heart?

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Do we examine our life in order to identify sins?

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1; see also 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Do we ask God to examine our heart?

“Search me, O God, and known my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:23-24).

See also Genesis 35:2; James 4:8.

Do we seek fellowship with God’s people?

“1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

See also Proverbs 13:20; 15:26; Acts 2:42-47.

Do we pray daily to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

“13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:13-14).

Do we love the word of God and obey it?

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Psalms 119:9).

See also John 15:3; Ephesians 5:25-26; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:2.

Do we avoid the appearance of evil?

“Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22).

See also Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Philippians 4:8.

Do we do all to the glory of God?

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen”
(Romans 11:36).

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God

I remember a player who had a gift of peacemaking through careful, prompt, and constructive wit. During the middle of a rally in a volleyball game a player from the other team hit a great spike past the block and it went out-of-bounds off the dig. Another player ran after the ball and with a dive popped the ball back into the court. Our witty back-row player did a back-row jump spike and mistakenly hit it into the net. We all sagged a little emotionally. The one who had saved the ball angrily asked the hitter what he was thinking. The hitter said, with a smile, “you should have set it a little closer to the net.” We all laughed, got refocused, and continued to play in peace.

I remember a coach who tried to find a way to keep the players from getting all uptight and swearing when they got frustrated when things were not going their way. He finally said to the players, next time you feel the urge to cuss, you say “blueberries” instead. At the next game one player got frustrated, and called out “blueberries.” His own team laughed, as did the frustrated athlete; the officials and opponents didn’t know what was going on, but it cut through the tension. This coach was a peacemaker.

One athlete shared a story of a childhood friend with whom she had competed with for many years. She always wanted to share her faith in Jesus with this person and would mention small things as she had opportunity, but she mostly tried to demonstrate her commitment to Jesus by her actions. Before these two friends left their own separate ways to different colleges, the non-Christian asked her Christian friend to explain why she believed. It was an opportunity to present freedom in Christ. The non-Christian had many questions, and the two talked well into the night. The questions continued on in emails and phone calls throughout the semester. The student that spoke to me said her friend was pre-Christian. In trying to bring this friend into a peaceful relationship with God, she was a peacemaker, a daughter of God.

The Bible tells us to “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-18, 21). And, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no

one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Executing the play: What things do you need to do to be at peace with others, yourself, and God? List two opportunities to be a peacemaker on your team or in your competitions? Prayerfully develop a strategy to bring peace to certain situations or person’s lives in order to help yourself, your teammates, and others you come in contact with to be blessed by being sons and daughters of God.

Extra Shooting Practice

God makes us dwell in peace.

“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).

See also Leviticus 26:6; Jeremiah 30:10; 34:25; 37:26; 46:27.

Peace with God.

“Make every effort to be spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:14).

“Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Psalm 119:165).

Peace with others because of peace with God.

“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with them” (Proverbs 16:7).

Make every effort to be at peace with all.

“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness: (James 3:18).

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

See also Mark 9:50; Ephesians 4:3

**Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**

During post-game championships with professional athletes, one occasionally hears of a Christian athlete who thanks God and wants to give honour to God for the achievement and for providing the gifts and opportunities to make things possible. I appreciate this honour given God, even though some people think athletes should not mix religion and sport, and belittle these athletes for their muddling of sport with their Christianity. Certainly the commitment of this devotional book is that God is not to be left on the sidelines, or even worse, outside the arena, but that God is in us, with us, and as his temples, we demonstrate for all to see that God is alive.

I've also seen the opposite of the above, where players took all the honour for the victory. Not only in their words after the championship, but also in the way they competed, God was not a part of their sport life.

I remember sitting in a locker room as a teenage athlete and listening to both foul-mouthed language and foul stories. I remember speaking up against it once and the abuse that was sent my way was even stronger, with the exception of the quarterback who told the others to lay off. It is not always easy to stand up for godliness, especially if you do not have the respect of being a star player. One needs to be tactful and caring in the way one discusses matters of importance, but one needs to do it—even when it hurts oneself. I am not talking about being stupid about something, or just being a pain, I am talking about standing up for righteousness.

Sometimes we do not acknowledge the Lord, because we feel embarrassed or scared that we might not have the right words ready. Christ did not worry about embarrassment or having the right words ready; he was in agony about dying for you and for me. He gave his life for us, being slightly embarrassed or ridiculed hardly compares.

This beatitude closes with these words: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Executing the play: Is there a situation that you need to stand up for righteousness but are scared to because of persecution (embarrassment, ridicule, lack of popularity) that may come your way? Prayerfully consider how you can bring God's peace to that situation the next time it occurs. You will be blessed.

Extra Shooting Practice

Christians will be persecuted.

“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

See also Matthew 10:23; 24:9; Luke 11:49; John 15:20; Acts 7:52; 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:4; Hebrews 11:37.

Saul persecuted Christians before God claimed as his own.

“He [Saul] fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me’” (Acts 9:4)?

See also Acts 22:4, 7; 26:11, 14; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13, 23; 5:11.

What to do when persecuted?

Remain faithful:

“Many are the foes who persecute me, but I have not turned from your statutes” (Psalm 119:157).

“Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word” (Psalm 119:161).

“When we are persecuted, we endure it” (1 Corinthians 4:12).

An example of unfaithfulness--“Those who want to make a good impression outwardly... to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12).

Bless the persecutors:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14).

Remember God’s mercy:

“All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause” (Psalm 119:86; see also Psalm 9:13).

“Persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:9).

Look to Jesus--“19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:19-25).

Further reading: For an excellent book exploring current persecution of Christians see Paul Marshall's, [Their Blood Cries Out](#). Dallas: Word, 1997.

Eternity

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“Now the dwelling of God is with men,
and he will live with them.

They will be his people,
and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death
or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said,
“I am making everything new!”

For Bill

Every time Chris went in a car for an evening out with friends, to sport events, or to other events, her father would sit down with Chris and ask for God's blessing on her travels. One time, she returned from an out-of-town tournament and safely came back to school. Before going home it was decided that a brief visit at a friend's house would be fun. Driving down a gravel farm road, with no other car in site for miles, the driver lost control. The car crashed. Several people were injured. Chris died.

Recently, I experienced something similar. My neighbour lady of fourteen years ran into our house shouting, "Bill is dead, Bill is dead." We ran to the house, my wife calling 911, but it was too late. Bill lay peacefully on the couch, but was white and cold, he had already been dead for a little while. He had gone to church in the morning, went home to enjoy some coffee with his wife of fifty years, went for a nap and peacefully went to be with the Lord. As one person stated it, "He went to church in the morning and went Home in the afternoon."

God never meant for us to die. Both Chris and Bill had many plans yet for their day and the week and weeks which followed their death. But death cut their plans short. It makes me think, if I knew that when I finished writing this devotional, or if I knew that the game I am playing today will be the final one before I meet the Lord, would I write or play differently? This question is wrong of course. The Lord is always with us. Though we may pass from this world to the next after an important game, hopefully the way we live and play now will be little different in the next life. God is with us now and always.

It says in 1 Thessalonians, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (4:14). And, "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (5:10).

Even though death is difficult for those left behind, remember these words: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Executing the play: God meant for us to live forever. On account of sin we die. But God resurrects us into eternity. If God calls you home when you are 16 or 76 are you ready to meet him? Jesus offered his life for ours, believe in him and ask him into your life.

Extra Shooting Practice

A Prophecy about Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

“1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53).

People of Jesus' day did not understand him.

“52 At this the Jews exclaimed, ‘Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?’” (John 8:52-53)?

Jesus died.

“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died” (Mark 15:39, 44).

Read also Luke 22-24.

Jesus death gives us eternal life.

“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6:58).

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many” (Romans 5:15)!

See also Romans 5:6; 6:8; 6:10; 7:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Peter

3:4; Revelation 2:8.

Jesus intercedes on our behalf.

“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

How we are changed.

“51 Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ 55 ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

Comfort.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).

Eternity

Half ways into the football game one of our players had scored several touchdowns already. This athlete was fast. Once this player had the ball and a bit of open field, it was an almost certain touchdown or at least a long gain.

This athlete was excited about what had already been accomplished. During one of the plays that followed his body began to jerk uncontrollably, he fell to the ground where his body continued the jerking motions, and then he lay perfectly still, as if he had fallen asleep. The only response we might get was when we reminded him that his girl-friend loved him; he would smile. He had had an epileptic seizure, and though he was in a sleep-like state at the end of his seizure he could hear all that we were saying.

Aside from teasing him about his girl-friend we said nothing else out of the ordinary. He was brought to the sick room to rest and our game continued. This athlete would have seizures every third or so time out and so we had grown accustomed to it. It was like someone who has weak ankles and re-injures them every third or so game. The injury occurs, they are off to the bench, and next game (or several games if the injury is more severe) they are out playing again. God also calls us to care for those who have weaknesses. But we can also look forward to the day when we are completely healed. A time when God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

I was also reminded of a minister who once told me that when he got to the new heaven and new earth that he would like to become an astronaut. He was curious what all the planets looked like and wanted to explore them. Since we live forever, he felt he had lots of time. Heaven for this minister was a continuation of what happens on earth. He wanted to glorify God by discovering more of his majesty as displayed in the many planets, stars, and galaxies. Ever since my minister's story I decided that I wanted to play squash a lot more when I got to heaven.

The Bible does not say a lot about the new heaven and new earth, but does look forward to a time when in the new Jerusalem, “the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there” (Zechariah 8:5). We also read how the “infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:8-9).

Can you imagine having forever to understand and develop your running speed, your ability to jump, to kick a ball, to throw, to catch. . . . More importantly, that this will be done not to please someone, but simply as an enjoyment and praise of our Maker.

Remember, living forever is how we are made—"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Today is just a part of eternity. Our death is only a passing from this life to the next. If it pleases God to see children playing and discovering his universe in heaven, then it must certainly please him that we do some of that today.

Executing the play: When you pass on to the new heaven and new earth how do you hope to please and enjoy God? Are you already doing some of that today?

Extra Shooting Practice

God.

Is eternal:

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 26:4; Jeremiah 10:10; Habakkuk 3:6).

Genesis 21:33; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 9:14

Has an eternal kingdom--“His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:3; also 4:34; 2 Peter 1:11).

Loves eternally--1 Kings 10:9;

Offers eternal life:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

See also John 4:14; 5:24; 6:40-68; 10:28, 17:3; Romans 2:7; 6:22-23; 14:9; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 1:16; 6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Hebrews 5:9; 9:12; 9:15-17; 1 John 1:2; 2:25; 5:11-13.

Gives eternal blessings:

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11

See also Psalm 21:6; 119:89, 60; 2 Thessalonians 2:16

Eternal praise is due God--The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. Psalm 111:10

God will create new heavens and a new earth for us.

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17; see also 66:22).

“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (Revelation 21:1).

Our citizenship--“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20; see also Hebrews 11:13).

Our future:

“We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me [Jesus]. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1-3).

**My dear friends,
continue to work out your salvation
with fear and trembling
for it is God who works in you
to will and to act
according to his good purpose.**

Philippians 2:12-13

I am happy to speak to you further about any questions or comments you might have. Please contact me at:

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