

#### The Starting Line: Your New Life in Christ

© 2007 Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Inc.

Fully revised version of the book by the same title © 2004 Fellowship of Christian Athletes

Published by Serendipity House Publishers Nashville, Tennessee

In cooperation with Fellowship of Christian Athletes Kansas City, Missouri

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, without express written permission of the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed to Serendipity House, 117 10th Avenue North. Nashville. TN 37234.

13-Digit ISBN: 978-1-5749-4419-8

10-Digit ISBN: 1-5749-4419-3

Dewey Decimal Classification: 248.83 Subject Headings: CHRISTIAN LIFE \ DISCIPLESHIP \ ATHLETES—RELIGIOUS LIFE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.



1-800-525-9563 www.SerendipityHouse.com



1-800-289-0909 www.fca.org

#### CONTRIBUTORS:

Project Management: Bethany Hermes, Dan Britton, and Ben Colter

Writing: : Ben Colter and Chad Bonham, with various FCA Staff and Volunteers

Editing: Ben Colter, Bethany Hermes, Sarah Hogg, and Bethany McShurley,

Design and Typesetting: www.dClarkCREATIVE.com, with thanks to James Hershberger for design elements

Printed in the United States of America

## **CONTENTS**

	Page
The Starting Line – Les Steckel	. 4
Your New Life in Christ – Getting Started	. 5
DISCIPLESHIP Sessions	
Session 1: The Big Win – What is Salvation All About?	. 6
Session 2: The Final Buzzer – <i>How Can I Experience Eternal Life?</i>	. 12
Session 3: Missing the Mark – How Does God Forgive Me? How Can I Forgive?	. 17
Session 4: Power Up – How Do I Walk in the Power of the Holy Spirit?	. 23
Session 5: Mastering the Basics – What Are the Basic Skills for Growth?	. 29
Session 6: Heart of a Winner – What's the Secret to a Life of Victory?	. 35
Session 7: Rise into Glory – How Can I Discover the Deeper Things of God?	. 42
Session 8: Taking the Challenge – What's My Role in the Great Commission?	. 48
Athlete Profiles	
Aaron Baddeley (PGA)	. 11
Jenny Johnson-Jordon (AVP)	. 16
Thomas Tapeh (NFL)	. 22
Ruth Riley (WNBA)	. 28
Avery Johnson (NBA)	. 34
Chris Byrd (IBF)	. 41
Lance Berkman (MLB)	. 47
Wendy Ward (LPGA)	. 52
A1199 A D	
Additional Resources	
More Than Winning	
Know Your Position	
4 Daily Exercises	
Time with God	
Choosing a Church	
Getting Involved with FCA	. 63
The Comnetitor's Creed	64

## THE **STARTING**LINE

Do you not know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Dear Teammate -

The Starting Line may be the most life-changing study you will ever complete. This powerful book will set the foundation for your relationship with Jesus. Whether you are a new Christian or in need of a spiritual "jump start," The Starting Line will bring focus and direction as you come out of the blocks in your "run" with Christ—both on and off the field of competition.

Going through this eight-session discipleship study is just the starting point of a lifelong race of adventure, sacrifice, and commitment in your life with Jesus. You will gain a deeper understanding of God's assurance through salvation, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit. You will learn the basics of regular Bible study, prayer and involvement in a local church. Finally, you will develop the skills necessary for a life of victory, glory, and mission. Your daily walk with Christ will strengthen as you integrate the suggested training techniques into every area of your life.

Training for your sport requires self-discipline, enthusiasm, and energy. Investing quality time into this study will yield huge results for you personally. Take the challenge to start fast and finish strong!

Abundantly Grateful,

Les Steckel President/CEO

Fellowship of Christian Athletes

Jan Stackel

# YOUR NEWLIFE IN CHRIST

## **Getting Started**

#### What is this?

The Starting Line is a comprehensive eight-week discipleship study for athletes who are new or for experienced Christ-followers who want to understand the vital basics of the Christian faith. Many people accept Christ and decide to follow Him, but they don't fully understand what comes next. This study is designed to ground you in what it means to be a disciple and live your life for Jesus.

This resource is designed to help athletes, coaches, parents, youth leaders, and volunteers to experience dramatic growth in their new faith in Christ. As you engage each session, you will be equipped, encouraged, and motivated to run with Jesus the race—the adventure—that God has already marked out for your life.

#### How can I use it?

The Starting Line can be utilized in three different ways:

- **1. One-on-One:** Two people can commit to this walk through this study together. In order to get the most from the one-on-one approach, it's best for a more mature Christ-follower to mentor a newer believer throughout the eight sessions. The benefit of this approach is that it allows more discussion and personal connection.
- **2. Small Group:** This study is also designed to work well for a small group that wants to interact with this material together. You can use this resource in an existing group or begin a new group. It's best to keep your group size no larger than six people to enable everyone to be fully involved. If necessary, divide the group into two smaller groups with separate discussion leaders to create a better environment for interaction.
- **3. Individually:** This study can also be used personally to help you grow in your faith and walk with Christ. If you study these eight sessions on your own, be sure you share with someone what God is showing you during your time of study.

### SESSION 1 – THE BIG WIN

What is Salvation All About?



As athletes, we have a strong desire to compete—whether we're trying to make the team, set a personal best, win a championship, or simply outplay our buddies in a friendly game of one-on-one. When you look back, it's probably hard to think of a time when you didn't enjoy competition.

- 1. Describe the first time you remember feeling the desire to compete.
- 2. What are some things that motivate you to compete today? What does it mean to you when you're successful in winning a competition?
- 3. What emotions do you feel when you lose or fail to reach your competitive goals?

Did you know that Lance Berkman hit home runs like a true slugger with a breakout season in 2002 that tallied 42 round-trippers and 128 RBIs? Even more impressive is his ability to go deep from both sides of the plate, something most switch-hitters find difficult. In the field, he's committed just 21 errors in 858 chances since debuting with the Astros in July of 1999.

For the serious athlete, the competitive spirit seems wired into our DNA—and that's because it is. God gives us the desire to achieve great things in the first place. He knows that the athlete's heart is never satisfied until victory is achieved.

God uses that very fact to draw us closer to Him. As we work for excellence in sports and all other areas of life, we eventually realize that true satisfaction doesn't come from winning trophies, medals, applause, or high-dollar contracts. True satisfaction comes from having a personal relationship with our Creator. Athletic success can be a great way to share the truth of Jesus and new life with others. But no achievement or award can equal the rush or satisfaction of discovering new life—real life in Jesus.

"I began to look at myself and recognize that I was hypocritical and that I was judgmental. I was very shallow. I had to deal with those things. And as I began to do that, the Lord and I began to trade. I gave Him my ugliness in exchange for His wholeness and beauty and all of the things that He created me to be."

- Mike Singletary, San Francisco 49ers assistant coach and NFL Hall of Famer



The Bible often refers to our new life as Christ-followers in athletic and even military terms, comparing it to a competition or a battle.

#### Read Colossians 1:12-14.

4. According to Colossians 1:12-14, what incredible things are part of the big win God has provided for us?

#### Read Ephesians 2:1-9.

Ephesians 2:1-9 highlights three major differences between the prizes earned here on Earth and the ultimate prize our salvation brings us: *a personal relationship with our Creator and the God of all.* 

## DIFFERENCE 1 — This ultimate prize of salvation is based solely on GOD'S EXTREME LOVE for us (verses 1-4).

- 5. After reading verses 1-3, how do you think people can be "dead" while they're still alive? What defined your dead life before you turned to Jesus?
- 6. How have you experienced God's "mercy" and "great love" (verse 4)?

Unlike our athletic accomplishments—which we achieve thanks to God-given talent—we have not earned the privilege of salvation. God knows that no matter how much we push, we'll always fall short of His standard: perfection. But God made a way to rescue us from the dominion of darkness because He longs for us to be with Him forever.

#### **DIFFERENCE 2 – We are saved by GRACE (verses 5-7).**

- 7. God's grace is His favor toward us who don't deserve it. What role does His grace play now and in the future?
- 8. How has choosing to accept God's incredible free gift of salvation in Jesus changed your life? How do you feel about your life now and looking to the future?

Even though we don't deserve God's grace because of our failures, He still offers it to anyone willing to accept Jesus as Rescuer and Redeemer.

"I had scientifically studied (the Bible) where I believed it. But in my heart I didn't believe so I called out (to God) and said, 'If you show up I will do anything you want me to do.' Then this feeling just came over me and I broke down in tears. He showed enough of Him right then for me to decide that my whole life was going to be dedicated to following Jesus."

- Brian Sumner, professional skateboarder

#### DIFFERENCE 3 – We are saved through FAITH (verses 8-9).

9. How does someone receive God's free gift of salvation (verse 8)? According to verse 9, what has no bearing on your salvation?



God doesn't stop with saving us from judgment. He also elevates us to a level of greatness on His team, lavishing us with "immeasurable riches" in His kingdom.

#### Read Romans 8:14-17 and John 3:16.

- 10. According to John 3:16 and Romans 8:14-17, what privileges do you gain from your relationship with God?
- 11. How does it feel to know that, just because of God's extreme love for you, you've been given so many amazing gifts?

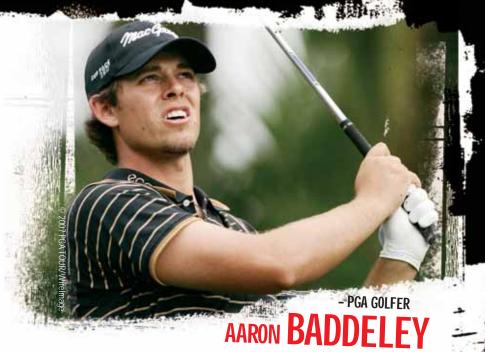
The word "suffer" seems out of place in the Romans 8:17 discussion about being glorified as sons and daughters of God. Yet, in sports, great success is never free. There's always a significant price to be paid and subsequent responsibilities that come with the territory. And while our salvation is assured when we accept Jesus by faith, the game is not over. We're still in the race and the enemy is hot on our heels.

Did you know that two-time Olympic weight lifter Shane Hamman is often referred to as "the strongest man in America?" Not only can he squat over 1,000 pounds, he can also hit a golf ball 350 yards, dunk a basketball with two hands, and perform a standing back flip. Now retired from the sport, Hamman travels the country speaking at high schools and youth groups.

#### Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

12.	What life lessons from the arena of competition are highlighted in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27?
13.	How might understanding the ultimate prize that God promises and grasping the unique role He designed you to fill affect the way you live at home?
	In school?
	At practice?
	During competition?
	While hanging out with your friends and your teammates?
	In your community?
14.	God has marked out an unique race and unique role for each of us. How ready are you to give everything you've got to the race He's laid out before you?

Ask God to give you a vision of the big win—the "imperishable crown" He has for you—so you'll stay motivated to discipline yourself and run your race well.



His nickname is "Badds," but using that clever moniker as a literal description of PGA golfer Aaron Baddeley couldn't be further from the truth. Badds has a squeaky clean image both on and off the course, and he often uses the Bible for motivation.

"Sometimes I write Scriptures on my glove as a reminder (of my faith)," Baddeley says. "You can get to a certain shot and you're a little wary about it and you can quote Scripture and get peace."

Born in New Hampshire but raised in Australia, the dual citizen gave his heart to Christ at age 12 but didn't get serious about it until his early 20's. It wasn't until God called him to a six-month sabbatical from dating that his spiritual life finally came into focus.

Since then, Baddeley—now married to Richelle—finally hit his stride as one of the young guns of golf. In 2006, he won his first PGA tour event at the Verizon Heritage and within a year claimed the 2007 FBR Open. Seemingly overnight, Baddeley's raw talent produced real results, including top 10 rankings in the FedEx Cup standings and the PGA money list.

"Everyone's been given a gift," he says. "We've been given that gift for our calling whether that's to be a golfer or to be a preacher or to be a nurse. Take hold of that and use what God's given you, and don't change until God's told you otherwise. God's put you there for a specific purpose."

### **SESSION 2 – THE FINAL BUZZER**

How Can I Experience Eternal Life?



It doesn't matter what sport we play—time is always a major factor. We live in a world of 60-minute games, 30-second timeouts, three-second lane violations, two-minute warnings, and other time crunchers like having two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the ninth inning.

- Describe a situation when time played a role in the outcome of a game or a competition. What adjustments were you or your team forced to make as the clock ran down?
- 2. List three emotions that you felt when under pressure. What impact did those emotions have on your ability to perform?

DID YOU KNOW that at the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, right-winger Jarome Iginla was part of Canada's first gold medal winning team in 50 years. He played in the 2006 Winter Olympics, where he was one of Team Canada's alternate captains. On December 7, 2006, Iginla made a milestone mark in his career when he scored his 300th career goal and 600th career point.

No one likes to think about it, but our time on this earth is temporary. At some point, all of us will have to face those final seconds in the game of life. But thanks to the big win that Jesus Christ achieved on the cross, we don't have to feel the same kind of pressure that comes during the crucial last moments of competition. Instead, we can focus on the quality of our relationship with Him here on earth and on the awesome rewards that await us in our eternal life in Heaven.



#### What We Deserve

When you break a law, the seriousness of the offense increases with the level of damage you inflict. For instance, the penalty is more severe if you steal a car than a candy bar. The seriousness also increases depending on the importance of the person you offend. Hit your sister and she'll hit you back; try hitting a police officer and you'll get more than a slap. God is infinite and more valuable than anyone or anything.

#### Read Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.

- 3. According to Romans 3:23, what is true about all people? What would you say is a just punishment for offending God and deeply hurting Him?
- 4. What does Romans 6:23 say we deserve for sinning against or offending God? Because God cares so deeply about us, He doesn't give us what we deserve. What does God offer us instead?

#### What We Get

When it comes to serving Christ, there's way more to look forward to than trophies, medals, and record-breaking performances. In fact, at the end of our lives here on Earth, those of us who've accepted God's ultimate gift will hear the final buzzer. In that instant, all the pressures, disappointments, and pains of this life will be gone forever.

#### Read John 3:16-17 and 1 John 5:11-12.

5. According to John, why was Jesus sent into our world? What's the one thing we need to have to receive the unbelievable gift of eternal life?

"When I first attended a chapel service on the PGA Tour, the speaker talked about when Jesus said you have to be born again. That's exactly what I needed to hear because I'd heard everything else in church. I could've quoted certain Bible verses. I knew most of the Bible stories. But I was never told that before. I was told I had to be a good person and earn my way to Heaven, and that's clearly not what the Bible says."

- Bernhard Langer, PGA Golfer

#### Read Revelation 21:1-4, 18-21.

6. What will the quality of life be like in Heaven as described in Revelation 21? List at least five cool things about the life God has planned for His people—His team.

As awesome as Heaven will be, it's even more exciting to realize that our eternity will allow us to actually see and touch Jesus, our Rescuer and Redeemer. Now the clock controls our competitions and our lives, but when God greets us at the gates of Heaven, we'll have all of forever to be treasured by Him and to explore the infinite depths and beauty of God Himself.

"There was such a dread and a fear. I felt it in my heart. I felt physical pressure in my shoulders. I felt an overwhelming sensation of being burdened. I got on my knees and cried out for God to save me. Instantly, all of the pressure was lifted."

- Raghib Ismail, Dallas Cowboys (retired)



As athletes, we go to great lengths to achieve great things in the field of competition. We do it for the love of the game and for the love of sport. Our Creator gave us those desires based on His personality. He has also gone to great lengths to chase His dream and fulfill His desire—to have a close, personal relationship with each of us.

#### Read John 17:2-3

7. In this passage, what does Jesus say is the true meaning of eternal life (verse 3)? How can eternal life begin for you even now?

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:12.

- 8. Explain the difference between how we know God now and how we'll know Him in Heaven.
- 9. How does it feel to realize that God wants to connect with you so badly that He sent His only Son Jesus to give His life as the ultimate gift of love—to be sin for us and to rescue us from its power?

DID YOU KNOW that Los Angeles Sparks center Lisa Leslie once scored 101 points in a high school game? And that was just in the first half! There's no telling how many points Leslie might have finished with because the other team forfeited at halftime. Since then, she has won three Olympic gold medals, two WNBA championships, and three MVP awards. Leslie is also the first player to dunk the basketball in a WNBA game.

10. How could understanding that eternal life is about the adventure of a deep relationship with God change the way you look at and live your life now? What are some things you can do to experience a little taste of Heaven (or that eternal life talked about in John 17:3) while still here on earth?

The Scriptures tell us that nobody knows when we will hear that final buzzer and go to Heaven, but when we do, we'll finally be able to see God in all of His glory. Meanwhile, ask God to draw you closer into a more personal connection with Him that includes a lifestyle of prayer and devotion to His Word, the Bible.

## Jenny **Johnson-jordon**

When it comes to women's doubles sand volleyball, most people tend to think of golden girls Kerri Walsh and Misty May-Treanor. But thriving in that formidable shadow is the team of Jenny Johnson-Jordan and Annett Davis—the duo that is known for breaking Walsh and May-Treanor's impressive 89-match winning streak.

Johnson-Jordan and Davis, one of the top teams on the AVP Tour, have played in more career tournaments together than any other U.S. team and that's despite the fact that Johnson-Jordan is happily married and the proud mother of two young children. She says that family, along with a strong faith in God (a faith shared by teammate Davis), has helped straighten out her once misaligned priorities.

"I'm still competitive," Johnson-Jordan says. "I don't like to lose. But it doesn't consume me anymore. I get over it a little bit faster now. I can put things into perspective a lot faster than I could before."

Johnson-Jordan is also known as the daughter of legendary Olympic athlete Rafer Johnson who won silver and gold medals in the decathlon at consecutive competitions (1956 and 1960). And while her father inspired her to athletic greatness, it was a collection of Christian athletes at UCLA—where Johnson-Jordan was an All-American—that helped prod her towards a stronger commitment to the faith.

"There's a tendency to separate God and try to squeeze God into our sport when really it should be the other way around," Johnson-Jordan says. "My relationship with God is first and foremost. It helps me stay humble and realize that whatever gifts and talents I have, I have because He's given them to me."



## **SESSION 3 – MISSING THE MARK**

How Does God Forgive Me? How Can I Forgive Others?



Imagine that the game or match is on the line and your number is called. You make the free throw or you don't. You make the penalty kick or you don't. You make the hole big enough so the four yards can be gained or you don't. You make a birdie or you don't. If you succeed, you win; if you miss, you lose. You either become the hero or the "goat."

- 1. Describe a time when you came through with an effort vital to your team's success. How did that victory make you feel about yourself and life? What preparation went into that success?
- 2. Describe a time when you dropped the ball, fell just short, or really messed up when everybody was counting on you. What did it feel like to be the "goat"? What broke down?
- 3. Why do you think we feel so bad when we fail or miss the mark?

DID YOU KNOW that Indianapolis Colts punter Hunter Smith is also a nationally-signed recording artist? He and his friend Chris Wilson make up the acoustic duo Connersvine, which is now a part of INO Records—the label home of the popular group Mercy Me. Smith and Wilson both lead worship at their church in Indianapolis. The band's record deal was announced just days after Smith helped the Colts win Super Bowl XLI.

The truth is that none of us was ever intended to be the "goat." God intended men and women to be perfect heroes and champions. In our messed up world, however, we all fail and fall short of the glory God desires. Sooner or later, everyone blows it in sports and in life. The amazing thing with God is that we don't have to live in failure and sin!



#### Messed Up

In living for God, it seems we drop the ball a lot. In times when we need to love, we treat someone badly. When our thoughts need to be pure, we lust. When we should tell the truth, we lie. When we should honor our parents and listen to their advice, we do our own thing. When we should give our all in practice, we give in to comfort and slack off. When we should love God and our neighbors, we ignore them.

#### Read Isaiah 64:5-6.

4. According to verse 5, how do our failures and sins affect God's feelings? What does verse 6 say about our best efforts to hit the mark?

The word "sin" is actually an athletic term that means "missing the mark." God has a bull's eye that we miss regularly. Missing God's mark could leave you discouraged and feeling like God should kick you off His team. Thankfully, God doesn't work that way!

"When you start out with a reputation, it is always hard to uphold it. You have to be on guard at all times, and you have to be ready for any temptations that may come your way."

- Cat Reddick-Whitehill, U.S. Women's National Soccer Team

#### Read Psalm 103:13-14.

5. What in Psalm 103:13-14 reassures you that God understands your human weakness? Describe God's heart attitude toward His children.

#### God Longs to Forgive and Restore Us

God knows what we're made of and recognizes that we're not capable of saving ourselves from our messed up human condition. Because of His deep desire to be in relationship with His children, however, God made a way!

#### Read Colossians 1:13-14 and Ephesians 1:7.

6. According to Colossians 1:13-14 and Ephesians 1:7, only God has the power to rescue, redeem, and forgive us. From what things does He rescue us? What is the attitude of His heart toward each of His people?

Those who don't have Christ in their lives will never be able to hit the mark, but we who put faith in Christ have the chance to do things right—even when we miss the target! Once we invite Jesus into our lives, He releases us from the guilt of our failures. He redeems—buys or wins back—our freedom, totally canceling any debt we owe.

"It doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are, you can still be a Christian and live for God. It's not easy but that's why we have God's Word, and He forgives us when we do something we shouldn't be doing. God sent His son to die for us and He paid that sacrifice so you can go to Heaven."

- Dwight Howard, Orlando Magic

#### Staying On Target

Our heart's desire not be the "goat" helps us realize how our relationship with God works. If you blow a big play, you're not off the team, but your relationships with your teammates and coach can be affected. Likewise, if you blow it in life with God, your wrong choices will affect your relationship with Him and your effectiveness in life.

#### Read 1 John 1:6-9.

7. How does 1 John 1:6-7 describe the impact of our sins? When we blow it, what do we have to do to receive God's forgiveness and get a fresh start?

To keep open our relationship with God and to maintain our freedom from the sinful garbage that would ruin our lives, all we're asked to do is confess our sins. Confession means, "to agree with." God simply wants you to agree that you fell back into an old rut—a wrong, hurtful attitude or behavior pattern. Each time you do that, God promises to forgive you, to wash out the junk, and to help you start clean. Believe it!



#### The Traps of Unforgiveness

Just as God's enemy and ours—the Great Deceiver, Satan—wants to mess up our relationship with God, so too he hopes to ruin our other relationships and keep us from experiencing the freedom that Jesus won for us on the cross.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Hebrews 12:15, and Matthew 6:14-15.

8. Look carefully at each of these three passages. What traps are set for us when we don't take the path toward forgiving those who have offended us?

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 -

Hebrews 12:15 -

Matthew 6:14-15 -

9. Why do you think forgiving others is so important to God?

DID YOU KNOW that Olympic triathlete Barb Lindquist got her start as a world-class swimmer? After winning medals at the 1987 and 1991 Pan American Games, she gave up formal competition. She gave the triathlon a try thanks only to the encouragement of some friends. Lindquist eventually turned pro in 1996 and made the 2004 Summer Olympic team after barely missing the cut in 2000.

#### Freedom from the Traps

God doesn't minimize our offenses or sins, and we shouldn't minimize the offenses or hurts that others inflict on us. Authentic forgiveness does not deny hurt or ignore anger. It doesn't excuse a person's wrong or hurtful actions. Forgiveness does not forget, but it does make room for another's humanness (we're all "dust").

#### Read Colossians 3:12-15.

- 10. Verses 14-15 highlight three godly traits that we need to put on like clothing if we're going to be able to forgive. What are the traits and where do they come from? How strong are these traits in your life right now?
- 11. Verse 13 says, "Just as the Lord has forgiven you." Why do you think this phrase is included? Consider the implications this should have on the way you respond to people who have hurt you.

#### Read Romans 12:16-19.

- 12. A destructive cycle begins when we hurt people and they in turn hurt us. How do we break out of this destructive cycle (verses 16-18)?
- 13. What does it mean to "leave room for God's wrath"? Why do you think God is so possessive and assertive about vengeance belonging to Him (verse 19)?

We can only forgive because God first forgave us. Forgiveness doesn't come naturally. It's a process that can take some time, but once we've allowed ourselves to truly feel anger, sadness, and hurt, we can move toward forgiveness. As we forgive, we take our offender off our hook and put him or her on God's. God is far more protective of us than we are, and He's far more qualified to avenge our hurts. As we release the desire for revenge, we can live in freedom, love, and hope. In forgiveness, we prevent a root of bitterness from destroying our hearts, joy, relationships, and effectiveness.



thomas Tapeh

When Thomas Tapeh reads Jeremiah 1:5, he can't help but think of the unique circumstances behind his birth in March of 1980. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you," the Scripture reads. "Before you were born, I set you apart ..."

The passage is special to Tapeh because his mother was just minutes away from an abortion when an angel visited her in the operating room and told her not to terminate the pregnancy. Tapeh didn't learn about

the encounter until high school, but now he has a much greater appreciation of the power of divine destiny.

"That just goes to show that everyone has a plan for their life and no man can stop it," Tapeh says. "You can do what you want to do and you can run from it, but when God has something for you, He's going to get to you. We're not going to get what we're supposed to get until we go through Him."

When he was nine years old, Tapeh and his siblings moved to Minnesota, where their mother was working to provide a new life for them. An avid soccer player, he became a quick study on the football field and set several conference records while playing at Johnson High School. He then played college ball at Minnesota.

Tapeh has overcome injuries and doubts about his own abilities to earn a spot as the fullback for the Philadelphia Eagles. But it was a challenging rookie season that he says helped him understand what it means to be a man of God.

"When I was going through camp, it was tough," Tapeh says. "It was too fast, and I couldn't respond the way I did in college. I was thinking, 'Am I really doing the right thing? Is this really for me?' I thought I was ready, but I realized I couldn't do it on my own. I knew I needed help, and that's when I had to change my life. I had to stop living for me and start living for God.

### SESSION 4 – MASTERING THE BASICS

What Are the Basic Skills for Growth?



Every sport requires players to learn fundamental skills that lay the foundation for excellence. At times, the basics can be unexciting and unglamorous. They can even be difficult to learn. But in any sport, mastering these basics is always the key to success.

- 1. What three basics have you mastered in your sport or your position?
- 2. What has motivated you to work on the basics? How has learning and staying focused on the basics helped your performance?
- 3. List some barriers or struggles you've encountered in learning, mastering, and maintaining your proficiency in the basics of your sport.

DID YOU KNOW that wheelchair racer Jean Driscoll has won the Boston Marathon a record-setting eight times? In the process, she broke her own world record five times. Confined to a wheelchair since the age of 14 due to spina bifida, she has won multiple Olympic and Paralympic medals and was listed 25th on Sports Illustrated's "Top 100 Female Athletes of the 20th Century."

The Competitor's Creed (page 64) captures the attitude of a person willing to invest the "sweat equity" required to master the basics: "I am a Competitor now and forever. I am made to strive, to strain, to stretch, and to succeed in the arena of competition. . I give my all—all the time. .... I am the Lord's warrior—a competitor by conviction and a disciple of determination."



Much like fundamental skills in sports, a core set of basics will guide you in living a life focused on Christ. There are three areas of basic training essential to a successful endurance run with God.

#### BASIC 1: Study God's Training Manual—the Bible

In most sports, a rulebook helps maintain competitive fairness. Some sports have playbooks that give teams the tools to succeed. Each sport has its training manual or training program to develop excellence. For the Christ-follower, the Bible is like a rulebook, playbook, and training manual rolled into one. Its inspired words come from the heart and mind of God.

#### Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

4. What are the four benefits of reading and studying the Bible? What are some specific ways these benefits might equip you and impact your life?

#### Read Hebrews 4:12.

5. Why do you think Hebrews 4 describes the words of God as "living" and actively "effective"? How does the Bible differ from other books?

"I'm confident now that bull riding was a part of God's purpose and plan for my life because I was so passionate about it. But at the time, I thought it was all about me. Looking back at my career, it had little to do with me and everything to do with Him, where He's got me now, and the doors that God has opened through my success in bull riding."

- Cody Custer, Professional Bull Rider (former PBR world champion)

The Bible has power because it's the written words of God. It contains piercing truth about God, life, who we really are, our mission and destiny, and the condition of our individual hearts. Its message is basically simple and yet deeply powerful.

Studying the Bible may feel like studying a complicated playbook. At times, it might seem confusing and overwhelming, but God can reveal new insights each time you open it. As you begin to see the big picture and the basic principles contained in it, God's person, plans, and purposes becomes increasingly clear. Discover life-changing wisdom, powerful beliefs, new attitudes, principles for success, and God Himself.

#### BASIC 2: Stay in Constant Communication with Your Life Coach—Pray

Whether we play a team sport or compete individually, success on the field becomes increasingly difficult without a mentor, coach, or trainer to guide us along the way. We need personal one-on-one interaction to learn how to correct the flaws in our game and to maximize our abilities. The same is true in our relationship with God. We need to meet personally with Him through direct communication—prayer.

#### Read Matthew 6:5-15

- 6. In Matthew 6, Jesus gives us a model for communicating with God. What attitude should we have when we pray (verses 5-6)? What things should we avoid doing when we pray (verses 7-8)?
- 7. Rephrase Jesus' prayer (verses 9-13) in your own words, noting specific things for which Jesus prayed? How might sincerely praying those things impact your life and your relationships with others?

Prayer should never be just something you do. Talking to God is about sharing your heart with God and allowing Him to speak into your life. Learn to relax and be totally honest with God. Learn, too, to slow down long enough to listen for His voice.

"It's a blessing to be able to play this sport. I recognize that God is always in charge of my life. Even when we're on the road and there are boos, I know 'no weapon forged against you will prevail.' The crowd may root against us, but 'who can be against us?'"

- Lisa Leslie, L.A. Sparks

Prayer is a powerful tool that can change your life and the lives of those around you. Keep a journal or written record of things you ask of God, His responses, and also the things He shows you through the Bible and prayer.

#### BASIC 3: Lock Arms with a Winning Team—Find a Church

As athletes, we must depend on the support of others if we hope to reach our competitive goals. This is especially true in team sports where every position plays a vital role throughout the course of a game. Imagine a quarterback trying to pass the ball without the protection of the offensive line or a pitcher trying to throw strikes without the direction of a catcher.

It's no different for us as Jesus' followers. From the beginning, God designed people to be together. He has always put people together with different talents, abilities, life experiences, and strengths. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the idea of friendship and community developed into the church—a group of Christ-followers gathered to work as a supportive team with the single-minded goal of doing God's will.

#### Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

- 8. What does the Apostle Paul tell us about the importance of teamwork within the church (verses 12-20)? How do you think being a part of this type of team might improve your personal walk with God?
- 9. What attitudes should we exhibit to others in the church (verses 21-26)? How can maintaining these attitudes build up unity and make the church more effective in its efforts to impact the world for Christ?

10. List the different types of gifts God has placed within the church (verse 28). What talents and abilities has God given you that you can contribute in the church?

#### Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

11. What does Hebrews 10:24-25 say about the importance of meeting together as the church? List some ways to encourage one another to "love and good works."



DID YOU KNOW that NASCAR driver Bobby Labonte is the only person to win both the Cup championship (2000) and the Busch Series championship (1991)? He and his brother, Terry Labonte, are also the only siblings who have both won a Cup title. Bobby Labonte can also add an International Race of Champions (IROC) series title (2001) to his impressive career.

Set aside a daily time to pray and read your Bible. Keep this regular routine just like the basic training schedule you maintain in your athletic life. Start by following the PRESS method described on page 61. Journaling accelerates your development and is an effective way of building your faith, reminding you of how God is working in your life.

12. How will taking time to talk with God and read His Word each day make you a better athlete? Teammate? Student? Friend? Son or daughter? Brother or sister?

If you're not active in a church, find teammates or school friends who attend church often. Ask them questions about their church. Learn more about how to choose a church on page 62. Once you find the right church for you, consider using the talents and abilities that God has given you. Go to the leaders of the church and tell them you want to get involved. Be willing to serve wherever you can. This will help you grow even more in your relationship with God.

## wnba/san antonio silver stars ruth Riley

Ruth Riley has found success everywhere she's played the game of basketball. The 6' 5" center from Indiana was an Honorable Mention All-American at North Miami High and the 2001 Player of the Year at Notre Dame, where she lead the Fighting Irish to the national championship her senior year. Add to that list two WNBA titles and a gold medal at the 2004 Olympics, and Riley is still always quick to deflect any praise.

"My faith is definitely my source of strength," Riley says. "With basketball, there are so many emotions involved. You may play great one day and the next day have the worst game you've ever played. My faith helps me to stay grounded through injuries

or circumstances and see the bigger picture."

Riley has experienced those highs and lows firsthand. In her rookie season at Miami, she missed the first part of the season with an injury. When the club folded after the 2002 season, she went to Detroit where she was a starter on the Shock's WNBA championship teams in 2003 and 2006. Then, Riley was surprisingly traded to San Antonio leading into the 2007 season.

No matter where Riley plays, she has always made an impact on the court. The one-time All-Star is one of the league's most prolific defenders with just under five rebounds per game and 1.5 blocks per game. But it's off the court where Riley tries to have a much more significant presence.

"Basketball is a platform for me to reach out to little girls that look up to us as athletes," Riley says. "With peer pressure, it's so hard for kids to be open and put their faith out there, so the more they see people that they respect doing the same thing, it makes it a little easier for them."



## **SESSION 5 – POWER UP**

How Do I Walk in the Power of the Spirit?



As athletes, many factors play into our success on the court or field of competition. Fitness, nutrition, rest, proper attitude, and mental focus are just some of the less visible factors that determine how we'll perform. Even though these things are not as visible as skills training or weight training, they play a vital role in being game ready.

- 1. What does your daily fitness and nutrition routine look like? In what ways do those things empower you to perform at the highest level?
- 2. Describe a time when you felt physically, mentally, and spiritually prepared going into a game or competition. How did that complete preparation show up in your performance?

DID YOU KNOW Seattle Seahawks running back Shaun Alexander set the NFL record for touchdowns in a season with 28 during the 2005-06 campaign? He also tied Priest Holmes' record of 27 rushing touchdowns in a season. But these amazing records were both short-lived as San Diego Chargers star, LaDainian Tomlinson, racked up 31 total touchdowns and 28 rushing touchdowns during the 2006-07 season. Both players earned MVP honors for their stellar efforts.

3. Describe a time when you failed to bring your "A" game because you were down mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. How did that affect your ability to give your best?

4. There is so much we don't understand about how to fully prepare ourselves for success on and off the field. Name a person who has been instrumental in helping you to improve in your sport. What advice or counsel did he or she give you?

Each week, it takes hours of training, practice, and coaching instruction to help us reach our fullest potential in competition. It's the total package that gives us the power to achieve great things. The same holds true when it comes to our new life with Christ. Once you decide to follow Him on the adventure He's set out for you, you'll need a source of power to help give us the inner strength, courage, and wisdom to keep moving forward even when no one else seems to be on your side.

"I can't imagine being successful without being a Christian. When you experience a lot of success, you found out it's almost a curse because you want more. There's always the fear of coming down from that success. While you're in the midst of obtaining it, it's so much hard work that you don't get to sit down and enjoy it. It's awesome to be successful but if that's all your life is based on—how successful you are in your profession—it can be empty."

- Lorenzo Romar, University of Washington (men's basketball head coach)



One critical lesson we all need to learn in sports and in life is that we don't know everything. Because athletes learn to listen to their coaches and parents for guidance, they are more prepared to listen to God in a unique way.

Just as coaches teach us the finer points of our sports, when Jesus walked on earth, He taught His disciples how to follow His lead and grow into maturity. How amazing it must have been to have access to an unlimited supply of knowledge, wisdom, and power! But as Jesus prepared to leave the earth and return to Heaven, He knew that His followers couldn't survive or carry on the mission He called them to without someone else to guide them. We need that same guidance and power today.

Read John 14:16-18, 26.

5. Who did Jesus say was coming to take His place in the lives of His followers? What are some of the words Jesus used to describe this representative of Heaven?

#### Read John 16:7-14.

6. Just as our Heavenly Father is fully God and Jesus is fully God, The Holy Spirit is fully God. Also, just as Jesus takes a unique role in our lives, so does the Holy Spirit. According to John 16, what is the Spirit's role and why is the Spirit so important in our lives?

DID YOU KNOW that former Notre Dame All-American and NFL player Raghib "Rocket" Ismail is the co-founder of hip hop record label COZ (City of Zion) Records? Ismail, who played with Toronto in the CFL and Oakland, Carolina, and Dallas in the NFL, started the label with his wife Melani in 2000 partly in an effort to jumpstart his own career as a Christian rap artist.

7. Describe a time when you were with your team and you could have benefited from the Holy Spirit in His role as:

Counselor -

Comforter -

Guide -

8. Describe a time when you were with friends or family and you could have benefited from the Holy Spirit in His role as:

Counselor -

Comforter -

Guide -

As athletes, we often have to fight the desire to slack off in our training. The same is true in our walk with Jesus. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to keep from giving up or giving in to our desires to go our own way instead of taking the journey with God.

#### Read Romans 8:12-15.

When the Bible talks about the "flesh," it's not referring to our bodies. Think about cleaning up after a practice and putting on fresh, clean clothes, but carrying around your smelly sweat socks inside your new, clean clothes. Your "flesh" is like those smelly socks that still stay with you after you become totally new. Jesus made you a new creation when you accepted Him as your Savior, but you still carry around your old habit patterns—those well-worn ruts of thinking and behavior that you keep falling back into when you become weak or tired.

9. According to Romans 8:12-13, what will happen to those who live "according to the flesh?" What will happen to those who live "by the Spirit?" What do you think it means to live "by the Spirit?"

10. What does Romans 8:14-15 say about people who are led by God's Spirit? How does it feel to be "adopted" by God? How does being God's son or daughter empower you to keep moving forward even in the face of difficult times?

"I have an obligation to stand up for Christ. Whether I'm doing an appearance, talking to kids, or training at 9 o'clock in the morning when it's freezing cold and no one's watching. Or whether I'm playing on national TV with 50,000 fans there, my true purpose on this earth is to glorify Christ. If anyone is drawn to me or what I say or what I do on the field, it's not what I've done, but what He does through me."

- Chris Klein, Real Salt Lake



We all have times when we feel like we can't live a Christian life in a world so full of temptations and distractions. But thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit available to God's children, we have the power to say no to our wrong desires. The Spirit also empowers us say yes to our deepest desires for connection to God and for joining Him in the great adventure He has for us.

#### Read Galatians 5:16-23.

- 11. What are some ways that we can give in to our flesh and fail in our walk with God (see verses 19-21)? What will the consequence be for those who refuse to stop doing these things (verse 21)?
- 12. How can wrong desires affect your athletic performance? How can wrong desires affect your relationship with your teammates? Friends? Family?
- 13 What are some characteristics that will show up in our lives as we follow the Holy Spirit (verses 22-23)? Which of these do you most need to ask the Spirit to develop in your life?

Allow the Spirit to be your constant Guide. Tap into real power as you listen for and accept His direction, encouragement, and power. Take a moment now to ask the Holy Spirit to do the following things in your life:

- \* Lead me in the right direction.
- \* Teach me how to be more like Jesus.
- \* Give me the courage and boldness to share my faith with others.
- \* Empower me to resist the temptation to give in to temptations.

## NBA/Dallas Mavericks Avery Ohnson

For 16 years, Avery Johnson was the epitome of hard work. Playing with seven different NBA teams, the undersized point guard became known as one of the best passers in the game and ,in 1999, he teamed with superstar David Robinson to help San Antonio win its first ever NBA championship.

Johnson is now the head coach of the Dallas Mavericks, where he led his team to the NBA finals in his first full season at the helm and was named 2006 Coach of the Year. He brings the same kind of work ethic to his new job that he did as a player. His fierce dedication helps to erase the myth that Christians aren't as competitive as non-Christians.

"My standards are so high because of Who I serve, but it doesn't put any water on my fire for winning," Johnson says. "I'm still an intense person. You can be intense and saved. You can compete and still be saved. You can challenge a guy and still be saved. There was nothing soft about me as a player, and there isn't anything soft about me as a coach."

Johnson understands that his number one job as a coach is to win games and, ultimately, to win championships. But he's just as serious about other responsibilities such as conducting himself in a Christ-like manner and setting a Godly example for his team.



"You want to be a man of integrity, and you want the players to know that you care about them," Johnson says. "Whether or not they still like you or not is a whole other deal. Players will run through a wall for you if they think you care."

## **SESSION 6 – HEART OF A WINNER**

What's the Secret to a Life of Victory?



Sport by its nature is competitive. It seems most of us are born competitors, with the quest for challenge, adventure, and victory arising from deep inside us. Athletes are always striving to win, to be the best. Perfecting skills and attaining goals motivates any athlete. We're willing to give our blood, sweat, and tears to defeat an opponent.

- 1. What goals do you have for excelling in your sport? What are some reasons that winning or victory over an opponent can be so important?
- 2. How do you prepare for a game or competition against a ruthless rival who you really want to defeat? What motivates you to push yourself to gain the victory?
- 3. Describe the toughest opponent you've ever faced. What made that opponent so challenging or menacing?

Did you know that Miami Dolphins cornerback Michael Lehan struggled with athletics in middle school until doctors discovered he had asthma? In addition to playing pro ball, Lehan is now a spokesperson for asthma, even featured in public service announcements on television in Cleveland during his time with the Browns.

It's no surprise to find the Bible frequently describing life in athletic and military terms. Competition gives a clear picture of the two opposing sides in the spiritual realm that are battling fiercely to win the prize. Good and evil—God's army and Satan's forces—are battling for your allegiance and your heart. Because of your value to God, you are the prize.



#### **Our Ruthless Opponent**

Once we begin to recognize the battle being waged for our hearts and souls, the struggles in our lives come into focus. The Enemy strategically works to distort our identity—our view of who we really are. This distortion can keep us out of the glory in which we were intended to live and the intimacy God wants us to share with Him.

"Somewhere in the world's mind, a Christian has to be weak. They can't go out and win the game and they have to be poor. They've got to barely make it. And I just don't believe it. I believe that God's children are the kings. They stand up. They're dominant. They're the ones that have the money to help the poor that are needy. They're the ones that will be victorious."

Shawn Alexander, Seattle Seahawks

#### Read Ephesians 6:10-12 and 1 Peter 5:8.

4. Who is our unseen adversary and what does he intend for our lives and relationships according to these verses? Do you think we'll ever be free from temptation and the need to fight to retain the freedom we have been given?

5. Identify some examples of weakness or temptation where you're vulnerable to enemy attacks. Ask some close friends or teammates to pray for you.

Although God has already sealed Satan's fate through Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan is still "prowling around" (1 Peter 5:8), using his primary tactic of deception to take us out! He tries to get us to believe that God is not good, he puts a twisted perspective on every event, he wreaks pain and havoc in our lives, and he ultimately works to destroy us. The Bible makes it clear that the Devil and his demons are ruthless and purposeful.

#### Strong Offense and Defense

To protect against enemy attacks, we will need disciplined preparation, a strong defense, and a strong offense. Seven strategies built around the word "PREVENT" (adapted from Stop the Madness by Serendipity House) will be our allies as we resist the Enemy as well as the temptations that come from our own distorted desires (those that are in the "flesh").

Second John 8 warns: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully."

#### PREVENT Strategy 1: Prepare

The first strategy is advance preparation. We can't wait for an opposing team to rush our end zone before we figure out how we're going to set up to stop them!

#### Read 1 Peter 1:3 and Ephesians 5:15-17.

6. What are some ways highlighted in 1 Peter 1:3 and Ephesians 5:15-17 that will help us prepare before we face the temptations that will come?

#### PREVENT Strategy 2: Reevaluate and repent

We must continue to evaluate ourselves. When we're wrong, we promptly admit it, and turn back to truth and light. Turning from sin and to God is called "repentance." The word "repent" comes for the Greek word metanoia, which means to change (meta) our mind-set or understanding (noia). The word "metamorphosis" is a related term, meaning a change in form or substance. It's used to describe what occurs when a caterpillar goes into its cocoon to emerge as a butterfly.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 6 and Romans 12:1-2.

7. According to 2 Corinthians 4, what is God's part in radically changing us from the inside out? What's our part? What two decisions do we need to make in order to allow God to renew our minds and transform us (Romans 12:1-2)?

"The success that I've had is all due to God's grace and to the gift that He's given me. I just want to use it to the best of my ability to glorify Him. That's what keeps me motivated."

- Allyson Felix, World Champion Sprinter

#### PREVENT Strategy 3: Envision Your Future Glory

It's easy to get bogged down in routines and struggles. We must continually shift our focus back to the larger story, as we live out of our glory and long for all that awaits us.

#### Read Romans 8:16-19.

8. What's the value in keeping the eternal vision and plan of God constantly before our eyes? What practical ways can we accomplish this individually and in groups?

#### PREVENT Strategy 4: Value Your Heart

If we value and guard our hearts, we will set boundaries to protect them, and keep our hearts connected to God.

#### Read Proverbs 4:23 and Psalm 119:9-11,.15-16.

9. Why is it so important to guard our hearts rather than just controlling our behavior (Proverbs 4:23)? What are some ways that we stay connected with our hearts and with God (Psalm 119)?

#### PREVENT Strategy 5: Escape Temptation

Sometimes temptation jumps into your lap, and there's no avoiding it. When you find vourself in a tempting situation, take off in the opposite direction as fast as you can!

#### Read 1 Corinthians 10:12-13.

10. What false beliefs about God, the Enemy, or ourselves can prevent us from taking the escape hatch that God always provides during temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)? What are some ways we can continue to transform our false beliefs?

#### **PREVENT Strategy 6: No Provision for the Flesh**

If you spit into the wind, you'll regret it. If you eat contaminated food, no matter how good it tastes, you're going to pay dearly. If you continue to live in a way that leads to trouble, you will find it. It's foolish to put yourself in a position where you'll fall back into your old ways.

#### Read Romans 13:12-14 and Ephesians 5:6-8,10-11.

- 11. The "flesh" is the old baggage we still carry inside—distorted desires and old habit patterns. What does "make no provision for the flesh" (Romans 13) require of us?
- 12. Give some examples of practical steps we can take to "lay aside the deeds of darkness" (Romans 13:12) and "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

#### PREVENT Strategy 7: Teamwork and Accountability

There is great value in the power of a team of people who can hold up and lift up one another. Christianity is a team sport. The Enemy would like nothing more than to isolate us again so he can drag us back into the sewer.

#### Read Hebrews 10:24-25 and James 5:19-20.

13. What are ways we can we be there for each other in our daily lives? If you don't already have a completely open, honest accountability relationship, jot down a couple of names of people who might be willing to become your partners.

DID YOU KNOW that Orlando Magic center-forward Dwight Howard was the first rookie drafted out of high school to start in all 82 games? Howard, the NBA's first overall draft pick in 2004, also averaged a double-double for the season with 12 points and 10 rebounds per game. He followed up that feat by leading the NBA in total rebounds with 1,022 during the 2005-06 season.



We're engaged in a brutal competition for our hearts and our legacies. However, as children of God, we have access to divinely powerful weapons. Stay in tune with the Holy Spirit at all times, and execute the plays as He directs the action.

#### Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

14. How can we keep from simply avoiding or ignoring thoughts? What are some ways we can "take every thought captive" and make it obedient to Christ (verse 5)?

When you engage an enemy, grab it, tie it down, keep it close, and interrogate it. Find out from any enemy thoughts what you can about the battles in your heart—loneliness, isolation, anger, selfishness, anxiety, or distorted beliefs. Once you've gained all you can from an enemy thought, don't give it another chance!

Taking one day at a time, dumping the garbage, and maintaining accountability will be the core of your program for the rest of your life. God never intended us to push through hardships on our own. He designed us to lock arms and take the journey together.

It doesn't take long to figure out that Chris Byrd isn't your average professional boxer. In a dark world where shady deals are made daily and boxing matches seem more like Vegas nightclub acts than sporting events, the former two-time heavyweight champion is truly a bright, shining light.

"It's a humongous platform," Byrd says.
"A lot of people like my style. A lot of people hate it. But everybody wants to watch it. They either want to see me get knocked out or win. But I want them to see Jesus Christ. That's the most important thing."

Originally from Flint, Michigan, Byrd's father taught him how to box. He

had a stellar amateur career, including a silver medal at the 1992 Olympics in Seoul, Korea. But in 1993, his wife Tracy went to church one Sunday and accepted Christ. Uninterested at first, Byrd eventually tagged along with his family and had a miraculous change of heart.

After that, Byrd felt a desire to move up to the heavyweight division, but he struggled to add weight. He asked God to help him get bigger and stronger, and his prayer was answered as he gained over 40 pounds en route to the sport's top division and the World Boxing Organization (WBO) championship belt. Byrd lost the belt but went on to claim the International Boxing Federation (IBF) title which he held on to for over three years.

But more important to Byrd than knockouts and heavyweight titles is the incredible opportunity to live out his faith in front of the entire boxing community.

"I could care less about me," Byrd says. "I have to take that step back. I have fun in the ring. I'm very energetic. But at the end of the day, if they didn't see Jesus Christ, there is no point to me boxing."



Boxing/Former heavyweight champion chris

### SESSION 7 – RISE INTO GLORY

How Can I Discover the Deeper Things of God?



What is it that allows some athletes to soar to the top of their sport? Many athletes have strong skills, are disciplined, and strive with determination, but a few rise above the crowds into glory and greatness. It's as though some athletes live on a different plane of reality. Consider the golfer who consistently finds her authentic swing: the third baseman whose glove becomes one with his arm; the swimmer who cuts through the water as if it was her natural environment; or the guarterback who's "in the zone," totally unshaken by anything around him.

- 1. Which athlete do you most admire for his or her mastery of a sport? What is it about this athlete that captures your respect?
- 2. Describe a time when you found your authentic swing, when you were "in the zone," or when you rose into a level of play beyond your normal experience. During that time, what was the focus of your heart, soul, mind, and strength?
- 3. Which outside factors or internal beliefs tend to distract you from playing "in the zone" or playing out of your own glory?

"God made me realize He loved me no matter what I do. Now when I get on the starting line, my identity's not wrapped up in being a professional triathlete. That gives me this peace leading up to each race."

- Barb Lindquist, Professional Triathlete

In the same way that passion and single-minded focus on the goal help us find our authentic swing or get into "the zone" in sports, passion and single-mindedness will take us into God's "zone" in a way that discipline and techniques never will.



As competitors, it's easy for us to focus on performance, but the key to rising into the glory of our lives is not about performance. It's about heart and soul. It's about realizing our identity—who we really are, about connecting deeply and personally with God, and about living out of the individual glory God created within each of us. At the center of going deeper with God is grasping God's extravagant love for us—for you.

#### God's Heart Toward You

If you're going to trust God to direct your life, then you need to understand His heart toward you. We all, at times, have doubts about whether God really cares.

#### Read Zephaniah 3:17 and Isaiah 49:15-16.

- 4. Sure God loves everybody because He's God. But how personal is His love for each of His children—for you—according to Zephaniah 3:17 and Isaiah 49:15-16?
- 5. How does it make you feel that God has "inscribed you on the palms" of His hands where you're always before His eyes? What is it that makes you hesitant to fully accept that God really delights in you—you personally (Zephaniah 3:17)?

DID YOU KNOW that in 2005 NHRA Pro Stock drag racer Erica Enders became the first woman in NHRA history to qualify in the top half of a Pro Stock field? That same year Enders, a graduate of Texas A&M, also became the first woman to reach the final round in Pro Stock. The 2003 Disney Channel movie, Right on Track, is about her and younger sister Courtney Enders.

#### Your Favored Position on God's Team

God lavishes His love on His children who place their faith in Jesus. Because of nothing except God's extreme love, we've been given an incredible position that few of us understand, and even fewer live in. The Enemy clearly wants to keep this hidden.

#### Read Romans 8:14-17 and Colossians 3:1-4.

6. What amazing privileges do each of us receive when we become children of God, with the full status of a first-born son (Romans 8:14-17 and Colossians 3:1-4)?

We've already been granted the privileges of sonship, but our position as royalty will not be fully revealed until Jesus returns in His glory. As His followers, we participate spiritually in His death, His resurrection, and eventually in His glorification.

7. How might embracing your favored status as a beloved child of God Almighty reigning alongside Jesus affect the way you approach life during good and bad times?

"My faith helps keep me grounded. I know that no matter what I do here—my success or my failure on the field—that there's a higher thing going on for me with God and with Jesus. To be able to have that kind of faith, it makes the failures, especially here, not as important. The most important thing is my faith and my relationship with God."

- Mark Tiexeira, Texas Rangers



#### God's Pursues Us

We know how much God really enjoys each one of us. He also longs for deep relationships and has deep feelings for us. That's a new revelation to many of us.

The Song of Songs is a love poem that beautifully illustrates marital love as God intended it, but it also clearly depicts God's passion for His people. God often uses the marriage and parenting illustrations to help us understand the depth of His love for us.

#### Read Song of Songs 2:8-10.

8. The "love" or "lover" in Song of Songs 2:8-10 refers to God, and the object of His affection is you. Which words in this poem illustrate God's love toward you? How does this compare with your current views of God?

God also uses the illustration of a shepherd to communicate His care for us. His sheep.

#### Read Isaiah 40:11 and Ezekiel 34:12,15-16.

- 9. What is God's approach to leading and caring for you as one of His sheep (Isaiah 40:11)? How does this align with your views about how God treats you?
- 10. According to Ezekiel 34:12,15-16, how does God deal with us when we get lost in the fog or confused by the darkness in life? How does God's personal promise apply to our own life issues, hurts, and spiritual struggles?

God is thrilled about you, and longs to see you excited about life with Him. He also wants you to rest in His arms, comforted in those times when you're unable to pursue God because you're tired, trapped, or struggling. In those times, He's still pursuing!

DID YOU KNOW that Atlanta Falcons defensive back Kevin Mathis has suffered two serious spinal injuries and a season-ending knee injury—torn MCL and PCL—over the course of his 10-year career? Even though Mathis was told on more than one occasion that his playing days were over, he always came back from near impossible situations. Mathis spends his off-seasons raising money and awareness for the Kevin Mathis Foundation.

#### **Pursuing God**

We also need to be pursuing God to deepen our relationship with Him.

#### Read Psalm 42:1-2, Matthew 7:7-8, 13-14, and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

11. Each of these passages has emotion and passion; that's what God wants from us. What key passion do you see in each of the following verses? How is it demonstrated?

Psalm 42:1-2 -

Matthew 7:7-8 -

Matthew 7:13-14 -

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 -

- 12. What is God's promise in Matthew 7:7-8 as we continue to pursue Him as an ongoing way of life?
- 13. What is the motivation for us to press on in our journey through the hard things of life (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)? How do the struggles we experience in this life compare to the unseen reality that awaits us?

God created you so that your deepest desires would be satisfied only through a close personal relationship with Him. There's no doubt that we can get very excited and passionate about our favorite teams or winning a competition. The question is whether we can get passionate about our relationship with God. In Mark 12:30, Jesus gave us what He called the greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Discovering the deeper things of God is a lifelong journey powered by passion. Spend an extended time with God this week, and ask Him how He feels about you and what He enjoys about you.

# MLB/Houston Astros berkman

Lance Berkman can't get away from the fact that he's one of Major League Baseball's legitimate superstars. After living under the shadows of Astros teammates Jeff Bagwell (now retired) and Craig Biggio, Berkman is now the man in Houston. But even as the team's perennial go-to guy, he still has a hard time cutting through some of the hype.

"I never really understood why people are so crazy about athletics and baseball players," Berkman says. "The only difference between the fans and me is that God decided to bless me with the ability to play baseball. I still feel like I'm playing a game."

Berkman has maintained a down-to-earth approach despite putting up All-Star worthy numbers four times in his career and contending for the MVP award on more than one occasion. Since breaking into the major leagues midway through the 1999 season, he has managed to hit over .300, and in 2005, he led Houston to its first ever World Series. Also, Berkman is only the second switch hitter to ever hit 40 home runs in a season at least twice—the other player is Hall of Fame legend Mickey Mantle.

But none of those accomplishments have changed
Berkman's approach to the game, or more importantly,
his approach to every day life—whether that
shows up in his home, in his community or in
the Houston clubhouse.

"The Bible says we are to be identified with Christ and that we are to take a stand publicly for our beliefs and our faith in Jesus Christ," Berkman says. "I try to be a spiritual leader for some of the younger guys on the team. It's a good position to be in. It's something that I really enjoy. I feel almost that it's a responsibility."

### SESSION 8 – TAKE THE CHALLENGE

What's My Role in the Great Commission?



It's an amazing honor to be included in the Hall of Fame, reserved only for those who have persevered, stepped up to the challenge, and achieved greatness in their sport. With overwhelming pride, we look back on past accomplishments. It will be even more fulfilling to look back on our lives at the end of the journey and know, without a doubt, that our lives counted for something big. Because of fear, people too often step away from challenges that could have given their lives meaning and adventure.

- 1. How do you think it would feel to be accepted into the Hall of Fame for your sport?
- 2. Recall a time when you avoided taking on a challenge. What caused you to step away from it? What feelings did you carry with you as you left that opportunity?
- 3. Describe a time when you successfully stepped up to a challenge even though you were a bit nervous or fearful. How did things turn out? How did you feel?

DID YOU KNOW that former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden was the first person to be enshrined into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach? Wooden led the Bruins to a record-setting ten NCAA national championships including another record-setting seven consecutive titles. He was a member of the 1932 national championship team while playing at Purdue.

Read Hebrews 11:30-39 to see part of God's Faith Hall of Fame.

4. What noble, heroic roles have been played by people included in God's Faith Hall of Fame? What makes stories of courage, passion, and sacrifice so fascinating?

We'll never know what we can achieve if we don't accept the challenges that are presented to us. If we allow fear—fear of change, the unknown, failure, ridicule, not following the crowd, our own inadequacy, or dozens of other things—to set the course for our lives, we'll miss so many rich and fulfilling opportunities. This principle is as true in life as it is in sports. God has a spot in His Faith Hall of Fame waiting for you. Will you take His challenge and join Him for the adventure of a lifetime?



#### You Were Created with a Purpose

#### Read 2 Timothy 1:9 and Romans 8:28-30.

- 5. According to 2 Timothy 1:9 and Romans 8:28-30, for what and whose purposes were we created and saved?
- 6. When did God set your purpose and destiny in place? Each person that is saved by faith in Jesus has an eternal purpose, but what do you think God's "holy calling" (2 Timothy 1:9) for you might be in your life now?

Steve Fitzhugh, former NFL player and national One Way 2 Play—Drug Free spokesperson for FCA, has talked to more than a million youth about purpose and destiny over the past 10 years. Here's how Steve explains our holy calling: "Losing the game, may bring disappointment but you'll bounce back. When you don't get the starting position, you may be frustrated but you'll overcome. But if you die without knowing Jesus and the purpose and destiny He's designed for you life, you've lost it all."

"It is unbelievable how much impact that all of us can have on the people around us. I'm seeing that I don't let any opportunity slip by me. I'm on fire for building the kingdom. So when I see my friends, I look for every opportunity to share the love of God with them. I'm seeing my friends' lives being changed every single day. I see people coming to the Lord every single day."

- Christian Hosoi, Professional Skateboarder

#### The Great Mission

We're drawn to stories of heroic deeds and great sacrifice because the heart of a hero or heroine is planted deep inside each of us. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God "planted eternity in [our] hearts." We were created for a great eternal purpose and destiny, but our purpose now is to join Jesus in His mission.

#### Read Isaiah 61:1-3 to see how Jesus defined His mission.

7. What are the key elements of His mission outlined in this passage? Reread Isaiah 61:1-3 aloud and replace the word "me" with your name.

#### Read Matthew 9:35-39.

8. How does Matthew capture the way Jesus feels about the hurting and lost people of the world? What does He ask for (verses 38-39)?

DED YOU KNOW that LPGA golfer Lorena Ochoa was the first Mexican to be ranked number one in the world? Before entering the tour, she collected back-to-back NCAA Player of the Year honors while at Arizona (2001 and 2002). Ochoa is also noted as a superb all-around athlete, having competed in tennis, track and field, swimming, volleyball, soccer, and basketball. She has climbed Mt. Nevado de Colima (14,300 feet) six times, climbed Mt. Iztacihuatl (17,324) one time, and ran in two half marathons and an Ecothon.



#### Your Great Commission

Jesus has invited each of us to play a heroic role in His Great Mission. In the early church, people called Jesus' followers "Christians" ("little Christs"). Jesus *the* Christ is the Rescuer, Redeemer, and Hero. In His image, we were created to be "little heroes."

#### Read Matthew 28:18-20.

9. Matthew 28:18-20 records Jesus' final words, often called "The Great Commission." With what great task did he charge us? What needs to be our focus as His disciples?

#### Read 2 Timothy 1:6-9, 1 Peter 3:13-15, and Hebrews 12:1-3.

- 10. What has God given us to accomplish the Great Commission (2 Timothy 1:7)? How can fear hold us back from sharing our stories about the "reason for [our] hope" or "the testimony about our Lord"?
- 11. People don't end up in the Hall of Fame by sitting on the sidelines. They go for it! What characteristics of a winner do you see in 1 Peter 3:13-14 and Hebrews 12:1-3?

"I want (people) to see Jesus Christ. That's the most important thing. I could care less about me. I have to take that step back. I have fun in the ring. I'm very energetic. But at the end of the day, if they didn't see Jesus Christ, there is no point to me boxing."

- Chris Byrd, former IBF Heavyweight Champion

You'll achieve greatness only if you fear living insignificant lives more than facing your fears and challenges. Every athlete who follows Jesus Christ has a unique story; no two stories are the same. Your story will impact people that nobody else could reach.

If you're ready for an extreme adventure and the chance of a lifetime, accept Jesus' invitation to join Him in His mission! Will you take the challenge?



When Wendy Ward was growing up in San Antonio, her family would attend the 9:30 a.m. church service and still have plenty of time for an 11 a.m. tee time at the public nine-hole golf course. That dedication to the game vaulted Ward to the top of the Texas high school scene and into an All-American career at Arizona State.

But during her time in college, she started to question the role that faith had played in her life, and she suddenly realized that going to church every Sunday wasn't making the cut.

"There's still that time when you have to ask yourself, 'Do I have a personal relationship

with Jesus Christ?' and I didn't feel like I had one," Ward says. "So I went to an FCA meeting, and I just fell in love with the atmosphere and the music. ... I realized that the people in that room had something that I didn't, and I was jealous. I wanted to be that on fire for life."

Ward says her commitment to Christ made her a better golfer and a better student. After graduating, she moved on to the LPGA tour where she has claimed four titles, five runner-up finishes and over \$3.7 million in prize winnings. And throughout her career, Ward has learned just how important it is to rely completely on her faith every time she steps foot on the golf course.

"It gives you a sense of peace when you know that God's already played out the cards," Ward says. "He knows what's going to happen at the end of the day. He knows how I'm going to finish this tournament. So there's no pressure. All I've got to do is go along for the ride and try to do my best. He'll be pleased if I act and obey according to His word and His purposes."



# OCC than Winning Your Game Plan for Life

# GOD'S PLAN

In most athletic contests, a coach prepares a game plan ahead of time. God designed a plan for our lives before the world began.

God is holy and perfect. He created us to love Him, glorify Him, and enjoy Him forever.

### WHAT IS GOD'S STANDARD?

The Bible, God's playbook, says that the standard for being on his team is to:

#### Be holv

"Be holy because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:16

#### Be perfect

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48

### WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN?

God created us to:

#### Love Him

"He said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37

#### Glorify (honor) Him

"Our Lord and God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created." Revelation 4:11

#### **Enjoy Him forever**

Jesus said, "... I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance." John 10:10

Why is it that we cannot live up to God's standard of holiness and perfection and fulfill God's plan for our lives?

#### Because of ...



# MAN'S PROBLEM

Man is sinful and is separated from God.

### WHAT IS SIN?

Sin means missing the mark, falling short of God's standard. It is not only doing wrong and failing to do what God wants (lying, gossip, losing our temper, lustful thoughts, etc.), but it is also an attitude of ignoring or rejecting God which is a result of our sinful nature.

"Indeed, I was guilty when I was born ..." Psalm 51:5

### WHO HAS SINNED?

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

### WHAT'S THE RESULT OF SIN?

#### Separation from God.

"But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God..." Isaiah 59:2

#### Death

"For the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23

#### **Judgment**

"... just as it is appointed for people to die once—and after this, judgment." Hebrews 9:27

This illustration shows that God is holy, and we are sinful and separated from him. Man continually tries to reach God through his own efforts (being good, religious activities, philosophy, etc.) but, while these can be good things, they all fall short of God's standard.

"All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment." Isaiah 64:6

There is only one way to bridge this gap between God and man ...



# GOD'S SUBSTITUTE

God provided the only way to be on His team by sending His son, Jesus Christ, as the holy and perfect substitute to die in our place.

### WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

#### He is God

Jesus said, "The Father and Lare one," John 10:30

#### He is Man

"... the Word (Jesus) was God ... The Word became flesh and took up residence among us." John 1:1.14

### WHAT HAS JESUS DONE?

#### He died as our substitute

"God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

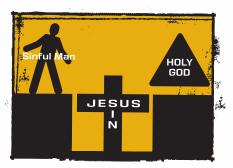
#### He rose from the dead

"Christ died for our sins ... he was buried ... He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and ... He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time ..." 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

#### He is the only way to God

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

This diagram shows that God has bridged the gap between himself and man by sending Jesus Christ to die in our place as our substitute. Jesus defeated sin and death and rose from the grave. Yet, it isn't enough just to know these facts. The following page tells how to become part of God's team and experience His plan ...



# MAN'S RESPONSE

Knowing a lot about a sport and "talking the game" doesn't make you a member of a team. The same is true in becoming a Christian. It takes more than just knowing about Jesus Christ; it requires a total commitment by faith in Him.

### FAITH IS NOT:

#### Just knowing the facts

"You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder." James 2:19

#### Just an emotional experience

Raising your hand or repeating a prayer is not enough.

### FAITH S:

#### Repenting

Turning to God from sin.

"godly grief produces a repentance not to be regretted and leading to salvation ..." 2 Corinthians 7:10

#### Receiving Jesus Christ

Trusting in Christ alone for salvation.

"But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name ..." John 1:12,13

#### Look at the diagram

On which side do you see yourself? Where would you like to be?

Jesus said, "I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life." John 5:24



# REPLAY OF GOD'S PLAN

**Realize** God is holy and perfect; we are sinners and cannot save ourselves.

**Recognize** who Jesus is and what He's done as our substitute.

**Receive** Jesus Christ by faith as Savior and Lord.

"But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name ..." John 1:12.13

**Respond** to Jesus Christ in a life of obedience.

"If anyone wants to come with me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Jesus, Luke 9:23

Does God's plan make sense to you? Are you willing to repent and receive Jesus Christ?

If so, express to God your need for him. Consider the "Suggested Prayer of Commitment" below. Remember that God is more concerned with your attitude than with the words you say.

# PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

"Lord Jesus, I need you. I realize I'm a sinner and I can't save myself. I need Your forgiveness. I believe that You loved me so much that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead. I repent of my sins and put my faith in You as Savior and Lord. Take control of my life and help me to follow You in obedience. I love you Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen."

"... 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 ... for 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 10:9,10,13

Once you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, it is important to understand what your position is on this team ...

# **KNOW YOUR POSITION**

Too many people make the mistake of measuring the certainty of their salvation by their feelings instead of the facts of God's Word. In Jesus Christ you have a new life. See what God's Word says about your new position on His team ...

- N Lam a New Creation in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17: Galatians 2:20
- E I have Everything I need for life and godliness. 2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 1:3
- f W Lam a  ${\it Witness}$  for Christ and am His  ${\it Workmanship}$ , created for good works. Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:10
- I am Loved and accepted completely in Christ. Ephesians 1:6; Romans 8:39
- I am Indwelt by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 1 John 4:4
- I am Forgiven and Free from condemnation. 1.John 1:9: Romans 8:1-2
- E I have Eternal Life in Christ. John 5:24: 1 John 5:11-13

Trust God! Put your faith in His Word, not in your feelings: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5:13

# 4 DAILY EXERCISES

Just as physical growth demands physical exercise, spiritual growth as a Christian demands spiritual exercise. To build spiritual muscle here are four daily exercises.

# 1. Daily Seek Christ

Spend time every day reading God's Word and devoting time in prayer.

"... they welcomed the message with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Acts 17:11

"I praise You seven times a day ..." Psalms 119:164

# 2. Daily Share Christ

Share Jesus every day through your words and actions.

- "Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that the Messiah is Jesus." Acts 5:42
- "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us." 2 Corinthians 5:20

# 3. Daily Lead Others

Lead others by serving as Christ did. Every day die to self and yield complete control of your life to Jesus Christ.

"The greatest among you will be your servant." Matthew 23:11

"If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Luke 9:23

# 4. Daily Love Others

Take every opportunity to show others around you that you love them.

"... love your neighbor as yourself ..." Mark 12:33

"But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today ..." Hebrews 3:13

Do these exercises and you will grow strong in your Christian life and be an effective member of God's team.

If you made a commitment to Christ, or rededicated your life to Christ, FCA wants to know. Please do one of the following so we can support you:

- 1. Log onto www.morethanwinning.org and record your decision.
- 2. Contact us at 1-800-289-0909 or fca@fca.org, or contact your local FCA office.

# TIMEWITH GOD

Every morning, set aside a special time often called a "Quiet Time." During this time you can talk with God and let Him talk to you through the Bible and His Spirit. There are many effective methods that can be used for your daily time with God. The PRESS method is the one we suggest.

**ray...** Begin by thanking God for the new day, and then ask Him to help you learn from what you will read. Ask God to settle your heart and mind. You may find listening to worship music helpful.

**Read ::** Read a Bible passage. A great way to start is each day to read a proverb (there are 31 chapters in Proverbs, so you have one per day), a psalm, and a chapter out of the New Testament or Old Testament. Another way is to begin with one of the Gospels such as Mark or John, and then move to some of the shorter letters such as Ephesians or James.

**Examine...** Ask yourself these questions about what you read: What do I need to LEARN about God, myself, other people, and life? What do I need to STOP doing – sins, bad or selfish habits, hurtful actions? What do I need to CHANGE in my beliefs, attitudes, or actions? What do I need to DO in obedience to God's leading and direction?

# Summarize... Do one of the following:

- 1. Discover what the passage reveals about God and His character, what it says or promises about you, and what it says or promises about others—your parents, friends, teammates, and so on. Capture this in a personal journal.
- 2. Rewrite some of the verses in your own words.
- 3. Outline what each verse is saying.
- 4. Give each verse a one-word title to summarize what it says.

**Share...** Talk with God about what you've learned. Also, take time each day to share with someone what you learned in your time with God.

Setting up a daily time with God is extremely important, perhaps the key to developing spiritually. If you will commit to doing these over the next month, you will have established a habit that is bound to change your life in amazing ways. Keep the habit going by reading through other books of the Bible.

I will commit to establishing this habit.

Signed		
· -		
Today's Date _	 	

# HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR **CHOOSING A CHURCH:**

- 1) Look for a church where the Bible is taken seriously, taught clearly, and applied practically. (See 2 Timothy 3:14-17.)
- 2) Look for a church that welcomes youth and even has a great youth group. A strong youth group can give you the encouragement that you need, and it can help you grow in your relationship with Christ.
- 3) Look for people who are responsive to the claims Christ makes upon them in His Word. Christianity shouldn't be something we put on and take off with our Sunday clothes. Ask yourself if the people in this church live in continuous repentance and faith. Are they maturing in character? Most of all, do they love one another? (See John 14:15 and James 1:22-25.)
- 4) Look for a church that will train you to serve. A good church should treat you as a responsible person that is capable of ministering, and it should hold you accountable for that ministry. (See 1 Timothy 4:6-8.)
- Look for a church that's reaching out. Ask yourself, "Do they sacrifice their time, money, and talents to see that others at home and abroad experience the good news of Jesus Christ?" (See Matthew 28:18-20.)
- 6) Beware of the ever-present cults. These false churches take from, add to, or twist the meaning of the Bible.
- 7) Find a church that's a "house of prayer for all people" (see Mark 11:17). The early church brought together in one community the young and old, rich and poor, the variety of races, and new converts.

# GETTING INVOLVED WITH FCA

**Vision:** To see the world impacted for Jesus Christ through the influence of athletes and coaches.

MISSION: To present to athletes and coaches, and all whom they influence, the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.

VALUES: Our relationships will demonstrate a steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word through Integrity, Serving, Teamwork, and Excellence.

**COACHES MINISTRY:** The very first and most important ministry we have in FCA is ministry to coaches. Coaches are the heart of FCA. Our role is to minister to them by encouraging and equipping them to know and serve Christ. FCA ministers to coaches through Bible studies, staff contacts, prayer support, discipleship, and mentoring, resources, outreach events, and retreats. We believe that coaches are incredibly valued by God, first for who they are and then for what God has created for them to do.

**CAMPUS MINISTRY:** The Campus Ministry is initiated and led by student-athletes and coaches on junior high, high school, and college campuses across the country. Campus Ministry has many different expressions. For many years we simply had Huddles, but as God has blessed FCA the Campus Ministry has expanded to include Huddles, Team Bible studies, Chapel Programs, One Way 2 Play—Drug Free, and Special Events, even networking with other campus Bible clubs.

**CAMPS MINISTRY:** Camps are a time of "inspiration and perspiration" for coaches and athletes to reach their potential through comprehensive athletic, spiritual, and leadership training, FCA offers various camps: Sports Camps, Leadership Camps, Coaches' Camps, Youth Camps, and Partnership Camps.

**COMMUNITY MINISTRY:** FCA Ministries has ministries that reach the community through partnerships with the local churches, businesses, parents, and volunteers. These ministries not only reach out to the community but also allow the community to invest in athletes and coaches. Stewardship Ministries, Adult Ministries, Sport-Specific Ministries, Clinics. Resources, and Professional Athlete Ministries are our main areas of ministry in the area of Community.

Visit FCA.org or call 800-289-0909 for more info.

# TEAM FCA THE COMPETITOR'S CREED

I am a Christian first and last.
I am created in the likeness of God Almighty to bring Him glory.
I am a member of Team Jesus Christ.
I wear the colors of the cross.

I am a Competitor now and forever.

I am made to strive, to strain, to stretch, and to succeed in the arena of competition.

I am a Christian Competitor and as such, I face my challenger with the face of Christ.

I do not trust in myself.

I do not boast in my abilities or believe in my own strength.

I rely solely on the power of God.

I compete for the pleasure of my Heavenly Father, the honor of Christ, and the reputation of the Holy Spirit.

My attitude on and off the field is above reproach—my conduct beyond criticism.

Whether I am preparing, practicing, or playing;
I submit to God's authority and those He has put over me.

I respect my coaches, officials, teammates, and competitors out of respect for the Lord.

My body is the temple of Jesus Christ.
I protect it from within and without.
Nothing enters my body that does not honor the Living God.
My sweat is an offering to my Master. My soreness is a sacrifice to my Savior.

I give my all—all of the time.
I do not give up. I do not give in. I do not give out.
I am the Lord's warrior—a competitor by conviction and a disciple of determination.
I am confident beyond reason because my confidence lies in Christ.
The results of my efforts must result in His glory.

LET THE COMPETITION BEGIN.

LET THE GLORY BE GOD'S.

© 2007 Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Inc.