

The World's Greatest Coach

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For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:8

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Introduction

Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable.

Coach John Wooden

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20

God is the world's greatest coach because He gets the most out of people and always wins. There is endless wisdom in the Bible that demonstrates how God is a great coach and the ultimate leader. If we read the Bible, discuss it with others, and have an active prayer life, there is no limit to what God can accomplish through us. The Bible is full of stories where God takes ordinary people, and through His power they are able to accomplish extraordinary feats. Moses stuttered and was afraid to speak in front of people, but led the Israelites out of Egypt. Abraham was too old and Sarah was barren but Sarah still conceived a son. Peter was afraid of death and denied Christ, but spread the Gospel message throughout the world!

It is comforting to know that God does not call the qualified, but qualifies the called. That is not to say that we all don't have gifts and talents that God has given us, but God likes to show His strength in areas where we might seem to be weak. This way all glory can go to God as it ought to for any good things in our lives.

A great coach can make all the difference. In 1986 the Minnesota Twins baseball team finished with a record of 71-91. The following season Tom Kelly had his first full season as manager. His motto, which is still written in silver lettering above the door leading out of the clubhouse at Target field was, "We're all in this boat together. Everybody grab an oar." Kelly knew that everyone had to do their part to have a winning team. It was his job to put the players in the best position to do well and it was their job to deliver when called on. Even the fans did their part in the 1987 season as the former home of the Twins, the Metrodome, had the best home field advantage in all of baseball. The Twins had only one all-star on their team, Kirby Puckett, but they played as a team. They went on to win the World Series in seven games, winning all four of their games at home!

We all need someone to coach and lead us whether it is in sports or life. Christian actor Sylvester Stallone has discussed the importance of a great coach for exercise and the Christian life, “You need to have the expertise and the guidance of someone else. You cannot train yourself. I feel the same way about Christianity and about what the church is: The church is the gym of the soul.”¹ God is the best option for a coach and the Bible is God’s playbook for how to live our lives. God’s wisdom will never fail us and His love never fails us either.

Coaching is the art and practice of guiding a person or team from where they are toward greater competence and fulfillment that they desire. It can often involve hard work or overcoming adversity. God never promises Christians that their life will be easy but can use circumstances for people to grow in their faith and learn more about Him. Pastor and author John Ortberg lists some of the people in the Bible for which God used their situations to help guide them to greater faith in Him. “God could have let Abraham stay in the comfort of Ur, Moses stay in the splendor of Pharaoh’s courts, and Aaron stay in the safety of the crowd. He could

have kept David away from Goliath; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the fiery furnace; Daniel out of the lion's den; Elijah away from Jezebel; Nehemiah out of captivity; Jonah out of the whale; John the Baptist away from Herod; Esther from being threatened; Jeremiah from being rejected; and Paul from being shipwrecked. But he didn't. In fact, God used each of these trials to bring people closer to himself—to produce perseverance, character, and hope."²

A great poem that epitomizes this spirit is by James Casey called, "Climb the Steep."

“For every hill I’ve had to climb

For every rock that bruised my feet

For all the blood and sweat and grime

For blinding storms and burning heat

My heart sings but a grateful song

These were the things that made me strong.”³

Great coaches can motivate their athletes to have a determined mindset, embrace difficulties, and have a positive outlook no matter what happens. From God we know that we can have a resolute mentality because God does not make junk. The Bible says that we are God's

masterpieces. Masterpieces are handcrafted and individually made special and that is what we are. Because of this we know that with God we are capable of handling life's difficulties. We can have a positive outlook on life and inner joy because we know that we have a spot reserved in heaven.

Sports in the Bible

While the Bible does not talk about organized sports there are many connections that can be made to sports. In what should have been a lopsided victory, Jacob wrestles with God as recorded in Genesis 32. However, there is a great lesson that God wanted us to know from this story. God could have easily overpowered Jacob, but wrestled all night with him. Jacob though tired, endured and was blessed by God.

In sports there is a lot of hard work that needs to be put in in order to achieve victories. All of the training and hard work should pay off with either victories or a sense of pride in knowing that one has done the best they could with what they have. This is a similar philosophy that can be carried over to all of life. Coach John Wooden summarizes it

nicely. “Life is about learning—and about using those lessons to become a better employer, better employee, better parent, better sibling, better friend, better neighbor, better steward of our blessings.”

If television had been around back in the time of the Bible, the biggest upset of the century that was pulled off by great coaching would have been all over the news. I am referring not to David and Goliath but the story of Gideon and the 300. In Judges 7 we read how God wanted everyone to know how the upcoming victory over the Midianites could only be attributed to Him. God reduced a fighting force of 32,000 men to just 301. Gideon and the men circled the vast army of the Midianites that was thick as locusts. They blow trumpets, break jars, and hold torches high in the air. The Midianites are thrown into confusion and end up killing each other and fleeing. Only with God’s power and leadership would this have been possible.

The story that you are probably expecting to read and one that is probably the most used sports analogy from the Bible is the story of David vs. Goliath. Growing up my favorite movie was *Hoosiers*. It is based on a true story. The

movie is about a small rural high school, Hickory High, in Indiana that goes on to play for the state championship against a much larger urban school, South Bend Central. In real life the 1954 Indiana high school state championship game featured Milan High (enrollment of 162 students) vs. Muncie Central (enrollment of 1,662 students).

In the movie, before the championship game the pastor for Hickory High reads from the Bible, *“And David put his hand in the bag and took out a stone and slung it. And it struck the Philistine on the head and he fell to the ground.”* 1 Samuel 17:49. In most people’s mind the bigger team from the much larger school, South Bend Central, would be the easy favorite to win; much like the bigger, stronger Goliath is more likely to defeat the smaller David. Anything can happen in sports though, and I have always enjoyed cheering for the underdog. This movie has a compelling and exciting finish!

Something that is a sport now but was used strictly for livelihood back in the Bible times is fishing. We read in John 21 how Jesus coached the disciples in regards to fishing. The disciples had been fishing all night but caught

nothing. Jesus simply coaches them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. The disciples soon find that they have made a world record catch and are not even able to get the net back into the boat because it is so full. The story teaches the importance of listening to Jesus through God's Word. It is also a fitting illustration not to give up; though things may seem hopeless it can all turn around in an instance. There is a great poem that illustrates this message and is great to keep in mind for sports and for life.

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out.
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow.
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man;
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,

And you never can tell how close you are
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit.
It's when things seem worse that you mustn't quit.
-Author Unknown-

By relying on the advice of God's Word our lives are not guaranteed to be easier but we will be better equipped to handle what life brings. A Bible verse that is often used that has a natural sports connection to running a race is Hebrews 12:1-3. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Here the race that is being referred to is our lives. As Christians we need to rely on God and motivated by His love have perseverance to keep the faith until life everlasting in heaven. We also should encourage other Christians to stay strong in the faith and share God's love.

Sports in my life

Sports has always been a big part of my life. I have always enjoyed participating in and watching sports. Growing up with two brothers and sisters we often would play sports together. I also enjoyed playing sports in P.E. classes. I remember in second grade when our substitute teacher taught us how to run and kept telling us to, "Get your knees up!" It might have been to just wear us out, as we all followed her around the playground but it was helpful as well for proper running form. In fifth grade, my teacher Harold Kenow enjoyed pitching when we played softball. He had a pitch that he called the goodnight pitch, whenever he wanted to try to get a strike out. In high school I participated in basketball, football, and track. In college I played football as a safety.

After college, I coached football and basketball for three years and served as an athletic director for two years. One of my finest coaching memories involves the Trinity Lutheran basketball team. We had a small team and only had six players for one game. Two of the players fouled out early in the fourth quarter, which left us with only *four*

players. We had a slim lead at the time and played a box zone defense for the rest of the game. It was not easy, but the remaining players worked hard and moved the ball on offense better than they had the whole game to avoid being double teamed. We went on to win the game!

Sports does an excellent job of teaching transferable life skills to athletes. For example, there are many life lessons that I learned from playing football. I learned the importance of teamwork because everyone needs to do their part on the football team or a good opposing coach will exploit a weak link. I developed communication skills through encouraging other teammates and also by communicating what the opposing team might be doing on offense, defense or special teams. The benefit of hard work is evident in football. Players must be in great shape in order to compete effectively. Mental toughness is also essential. There are times when you fail, but you must learn from this and continue to have confidence and work hard.

Coaches make a big difference

Sports can instill self-worth and confidence. Actor Chuck Norris who gained more confidence through karate

has said, "I've always believed that a child who develops a strong sense of self-worth will have the inner strength to resist peer pressure, including drug and alcohol abuse, as well as involvement in gangs."

In my own life whenever I was playing sports I knew I had to take care of myself in order to play the best. I worked so hard in practice and in training for games or events that I did not want to waste this by not taking care of my body. God coaches us to take care of our lives. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*
1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

God has designed our bodies so that they can do amazing things. We have more than 600 skeletal muscles in our body. If all of them pulled in one direction, you could lift twenty-five tons. The hardest working muscle is the heart. It pumps 2,500 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries every single day. Even more amazing still, the heart has the capacity to beat more than 3 billion times without skipping a beat. No matter how

amazingly our bodies were designed they have to be cared for to function properly. Exercise and healthy eating are essential for an athlete. Great athletes are not self-made and require quality coaching to develop.

One of the greatest coaches of all-time was John Wooden. He won ten NCAA men's basketball national championships in a twelve year period, including a record seven in a row. Wooden was named national coach of the year six times. There are many stories that would illustrate why Coach Wooden was a great coach but here is just one. He went with one of his assistant coaches with a scholarship offer to the top high school player in the country. But during the time he was there, the boy spoke disrespectfully to his mother several times. Coach Wooden left without offering the player a scholarship. The assistant coach was surprised and questioned him about why he changed his mind. Wooden replied, "Any player that doesn't respect his mother won't respect his coach."⁴

When John Wooden was twelve his dad gave him a card with the title, "Making the Most of One's Self." John

loved its message so much that he read it everyday of his life.

Making the Most of One's Self

Be true to yourself.
Help others.
Make each day your masterpiece.
Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
Make friendship a fine art.
Build shelter against a rainy day.
Pray for guidance and
give thanks for your blessings every day.

It is obvious that he carried the message of this card throughout his life, which helped him to be a successful coach and mentor for his players. It is great to note that Coach Wooden was a Christian and his faith drove his coaching technique.

Former NFL coach, Tony Dungy, who is also a Christian describes how basing coaching on Christian values does more than just develop athletes. "It's all about relationships, integrity, and perpetual learning. Success is measured in changed lives, strong character, and eternal values rather than in material gain, temporal achievement, or status. Ultimately, mentor leadership is just as successful in achieving the standards of accomplishment in our society.

But unlike other types of leadership, it is primarily concerned with building and adding value to the lives of people in the process. It's about changing lives."⁵ One of Coach Dungy's guiding philosophies was the following question: What can I do to make other people better, to make them all that God created them to be? These coaches based their lives on living out their faith and had the world's greatest coach, God, as a coaching mentor.

This book will discuss effective characteristics of coaches that illustrate why God is the world's greatest coach. God is always prepared and cares about and takes care of the details in our lives. God is consistent. He is dependable, trustworthy, and mentally tough. God has high standards for us and gets the best out of people. God is an excellent communicator and tells us just what we need to hear. God has all knowledge and is a perfect leader. God is also flexible in His coaching style and is willing to try new things to best reach people. God is also passionate and has the greatest love for helping others and developing everlasting relationships.

Christians are all evident of God's great coaching ability and the Bible has many great stories of how God changed lives for the better and accomplished much more than people could have imagined. Each chapter will focus on one person in the Bible to highlight how God coached and developed them in order to give glory to God in what they accomplished.

Chapter 1: Prepared

A great coach must be prepared in order to have players that are prepared for different game situations. While a coach is the leader of the team, the players still need to lead as well because the coach cannot go on the field or the court to make plays. When I played football in college our defensive coordinator gave us a booklet that had just about every possible offensive formation that a team could run against our defense and what positions each defensive player should be in for each defensive call. It was a lot to know but we were very prepared because our coach had put in the needed time to help us plan well.

In football it is important to be alert and to keep one's eyes open wide. It is natural before contact with another player occurs to close one's eyes, but in order to best make a play on the ball a player needs to keep their eyes open as long as possible to try to catch the ball or knock it away from an offensive player.

Similarly, in our Christian lives God provides advice for us to be alert and to be prepared. *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.* 1 Corinthians 16:13.

Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. Matthew 24:42. In total God wants us to keep our faith in Him and be able to persevere until life everlasting in heaven.

Recently there was a TV commercial for a new car. The tagline for the commercial was, "It's ready. Are you?" Unfortunately, the fine print at the bottom of the screen read, "Prototype shown." So, apparently the car company was not as ready as they would like you to believe. God is always ready and prepared though; we need to follow the lead of our coach and be alert and prepared as well. God has given us a detailed playbook in the Bible that lets us know what to do in every situation. We can read it and take it to heart. Superb coaches have great preparation and God is the best prepared of all coaches.

Great planner

God is an excellent planner. One of the most quoted Bible verses reminds us that God has a plan for our lives. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Jeremiah 29:11. While we trust that God's plan will

work out in the end, at times we can become impatient when our vision of the plan for our life does not seem to match with God's. It is at these times that we need to remember that we need to trust in God's love. Our lives will not always go the way we think they will go, but we need to continue to trust God. We can focus on the blessings that God provides and the good things in life as we navigate through life's bumps and smooth roads.

Through Moses, God showed that since He is a great planner, He can develop great planners of people on earth to accomplish his will. Moses's life surely did not go as he planned it, but he was willing to listen to God and follow God's will for his life. Moses was not equipped for all that he would have to do, but with God's help and guidance, he was able to accomplish much.

God had a plan all along to get the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Through one experience after another the people learned or remembered to trust in God. When God sent plagues onto the people of Egypt, the pharaoh made the Israelites work harder, but God delivered his people from slavery. When the Israelites left Egypt, they became trapped

at the Red Sea, but God opened a path to freedom. When the Israelites needed food, God provided manna from heaven.

Former Chicago Cubs manager Charlie Grimm had a team that could not win because they couldn't hit well. A scout called Grimm to tell him that he just saw a pitcher strike out every batter and only the last person made contact with a foul ball. Grimm responded, "Sign up the guy who got the foul. We're looking for hitters." Managers need to identify the weaknesses on their teams and try to improve on these with other players.

God often it seems will look for people with weaknesses where they will need strength from above to accomplish their goals. God knows that He can provide the strength for any person to accomplish His will. Moses was afraid to speak in front of pharaoh and in front of groups, but he was picked by God to lead over a million people to the promised land. Coordinating that many people and keeping them all happy and healthy seems like an impossible task, but with God, Moses was able to do the job! *"With God all things are possible."* Matthew 19:26.

Author and leadership expert John Maxwell has an outline for how a leader can chart a course of action to accomplish a plan.

Predetermine a Course of Action
Lay Out Your Goals.
Adjust Your Priorities.
Notify Key Personnel.

Allow Time for Acceptance.
Head into Action.
Expect Problems.
Always Point to the Successes.
Daily Review Your Plan.¹

The outline spells out PLAN AHEAD. This is something that Moses did not have the luxury of doing. God knew when the Israelites were leaving Egypt, but Moses and the Israelites did not have much warning. Moses had to trust that God had a plan and that it would be revealed at the right times. Moses was in communication with God often in order to receive wisdom and guidance for his large task of leading so many people.

God had done so much for the Israelites, yet their unbelief caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years as they were afraid of their opponents living in Canaan. God had promised to lead them into the promised land, but this

would have to wait for their descendants to take hold of God's promise. The Israelites had focused on their fears, in doubting that God would deliver their enemies into their hands, and not on their faith. Fear weakens and disheartens while faith strengthens, empowers, and encourages.

Christian NFL coach Andy Reid has said, "Our faith is that foundation, and it dictates a lot about how we've handled things both in the good times and the bad. Is life going to be perfect? No. Is football going to be perfect? No. Is your faith going to be perfect? Well, the heavenly Father's plan is perfect, but we've all got our weaknesses trying to follow that plan."

If we focus on our weaknesses we lose sight of God's plan for our lives. But if we focus on God, then His plan becomes clearer and our path in life is more manageable.

Organized

Great coaches must be organized. Coaches need to delegate to their assistant coaches so they know their job responsibilities and what is expected of them. Practice time should be maximized so that the most learning and growth can occur. Players thrive on an organized system for play

calls and for development of skills and talents. Coaches have a lot to do during a day so it is important that things flow well so that everything can get done.

God has the most developed organization skills of anyone ever. He had a 6-day plan for creating the earth and created a world that that has vast diversity in species and plant life but still functions well. No one has more to do on a given day than God, yet He knows what everyone in the world is thinking and wants to help everyone. It is nothing like the movie, *Bruce Almighty*, in which Jim Carey simply replies yes to everyone's requests with the click of a button. It is one of the things that is beyond our comprehension and human limitations of our mind as to how God can know everyone that well, but that is why He is God and we are not.

A few of the greatest Bible verses that celebrate God's organization are Jesus' words in John 14. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And If go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be*

with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3. It is a great comfort to Christians to know that God has a place reserved for us in heaven. There is no need to doubt. Your place is secure. Your room will be ready when the time comes.

With the Israelites God showed that He was very organized as well. God provides detailed plans for building the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. Rules are given by God in the form of the Ten Commandments so that the people can live together peacefully in an organized society.

Through the work that he had to do Moses learned the importance of being organized as well. Given that there were so many people, there were bound to be disagreements and grievances to settle. Moses realized that he could appoint leaders over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens so that the responsibilities are shared. Moses then could handle the most difficult cases and monitor to ensure that the other leaders are doing their jobs well.

Detail oriented

Excellent coaches are detail oriented so that in games, players know exactly what to do in all situations. Great

coaches can reassure their players during games that they have been prepared for this exact situation. Coaches want to see the exact opposite reaction to that of Kevin James' character in the movie, *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. When faced with a robbery at the mall, James' character asks himself, "What are you trained to do?...Nothing."

I have never seen a coach more relaxed in games than the volleyball coach at my alma mater Concordia University, St. Paul. Coach Brady Starkey's Golden Bear volleyball teams won seven straight NCAA division II national championships. He has an astounding .911 winning percentage which is the highest active winning percentage of any NCAA volleyball coach at any division. Starkey knows that he prepared his team so well during practices for their matches that at times he is so relaxed that he looks a little bored during games. The players know what they need to do, so coach Starkey knows that the difficult work for him is already done. He has taken care of all the details for the team so now it is up to them to enact the plan. It has worked well for him.

Coach John Wooden was another coach that took care of the details well and put players in position to be successful. Wooden knew each one of his players so well that he knew what their strengths were and how to maximize them. Most of his players shot better in college than in high school. He would observe players shooting and see where they shot the best. He describes his philosophy based on this information, "When I determined the place they made the best percentage of shots, 'their spot,' I would take them to that place and say, 'This is where I want you to shoot the ball. I will design plays to make sure that happens.'"

When an excellent coach has taken care of the details, it is important to follow through on his or her plan. Moses learned the hard way that important details matter. In the desert the Israelites begin to complain that they have no water. God always provided for their needs and does again. Moses is told to speak to a rock and then water will flow. Instead Moses strikes the rock twice and water comes out. Because of this God does not let him come into the promised land. It seems like a small detail for God to have such harsh

consequences for Moses, but details matter. There is an old poem that describes how what may seem like little things can make a big difference.

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the message was lost.
For want of a message the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

What was a small detail in striking a rock instead of speaking to it actually was a much bigger deal. First, Moses did not listen to a direct command from God. He also did not give God all the glory for the miracle that occurred. Before he tapped the rock he says *“must we bring you water out of this rock?”* Numbers 20:10b. Moses took part of the credit for what was to occur. Not only that but he did it in front of the entire assembly of the Israelites. When we hear God speak clearly to us in our lives we should listen and give God all the glory for the good things that occur.

In our own lives, there are times when we feel unprepared for what is to come. We can trust that God can provide help and guidance for us. He is the best coach we could ever have. By reading His Word and through

Christian fellowship we can receive the advice we need to handle what life brings. By studying the playbook of the Bible, we can hear God say with confidence at all times in our lives that, "I have prepared you exactly for this situation. You will do awesome!"

Chapter 2: Consistent

Terrific coaches must be consistent. This includes consistent effort, message, and motivation. In order to do this coaches must be mentally tough, establish trust, and be dependable. Another obvious thing that must be consistent or improving is winning percentage. A president of a university was talking highly of a basketball coach at a banquet. The coach asked, "Would you still like me as much if we didn't win?" The president responded, "I'd like you as much. I'd just miss having you around."

Consistent excellence is not an easy task to do over a lifetime. NBA hall of famer and former coach Jerry West has said, "You can't get too much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good." Coaches know that if they are to expect consistency out of their players, then they must model this as well.

Author Bob Conklin has a poem that relates heavily to how we can be consistent.

I can make you rise or fall.
I can work for you or against you.
I can make you a success or a failure.
I control the way that you feel and the way that you act.
I can make you laugh...work...love.

I can make your heart sing with joy...excitement...elation.
Or I can make you wretched...dejected...morbid.
I can make you sick...listless.
I can be as a shackle...heavy...attached...burdensome.
Or I can be as the prism's hue...dancing...bright...fleet...lost
forever unless captured by pen or purpose.
I can be nurtured and grown to be great and beautiful...seen
by the eyes of others through action in you. I can never be
removed...only replaced.
I am a THOUGHT.
Why not know me better?¹

Our thoughts can greatly influence our actions and everyday decision-making. It is important that our thoughts are influenced and focused on the greatest coach the world has known, God. By focusing on God's Word we will have the right approach for each day as Paul states in Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella consistently has helped to develop champions. He has worked with winners of 84 major golf championships, Olympic gold medalists, NCAA champions in multiple sports, and tennis tournament champions. He helps people to see how much their thoughts can affect their life. He states, "I'm always telling people that

I don't care what their families or their schools or their communities said or thought about them. I tell them, 'You're an adult now, and you get to decide.' So what's the decision going to be? You get to write your life story. Will you be heroic or just someone trying to get by? Will you be the star or someone sitting on the end of the bench?"²

His philosophy is that if someone consistently puts in effort and finishes in the middle of the pack, he or she can still be content. This is because they spent the time and talent that God gave them, finding out how good they could get. This should be our goal as well. To consistently do our best with the time and talents that God has given us. We don't always have to win in sports or in life, but with God on our side we are already victors because Christ has defeated death and the devil and given us the free gift of eternal life in heaven. It is this Good News that can be our focus and guide our thoughts.

Mentally tough

Coaching is a tough profession and coaches need to be mentally tough to deal with losses or criticism. In sports, the more a coach or team needs encouragement from the

fans, the less likely they are to get it. Rarely do fans of a losing team think, “Let us consider how we can spur them on to good deeds.” Too often people who need the cheers the most get them the least.

In life, when things go wrong we all need some encouragement and someone there to help us. In the book of Ruth, Ruth was that person for Naomi. Naomi’s husband and two sons die and just her two daughters-in-laws are left who had no children. Naomi wants them to return to their parents’ homes so that they can remarry. Ruth, however, will not leave Naomi. She knows that they can support each other through this difficult time. Ruth shows that she is determined to go with Naomi and that nothing will change her mind.

Mental toughness to do the right thing in the face of adversity is not an easy task. It takes training and discipline to consistently not give up and to continue to work hard. The right mindset when problems arise is essential in sports and in life. There is a right and wrong perspective that can be taken.

A wrong perspective

Problems are unsolvable

Problems are permanent

Problems are not normal

Problems make us bitter

Problems control us

Problems stop us

A right perspective

Problems are solvable

Problems are temporary

Problems are a normal part of
life

Problems make us better

Problems challenge us

Problems stretch us³

If we look at problems and adversity in the right light, then we can see these instances as times when we can experience growth and perhaps God will bring about something good that we cannot see. In 2008, Florida quarterback, Tim Tebow, was stopped on fourth and 1 with under a minute remaining leading to an Ole Miss upset of then undefeated Florida. After the game Tim Tebow showed extreme mental toughness in the words that he shared with the media.

“I’m sorry. Extremely sorry. We were hoping for an undefeated season. That was my goal—something Florida has never done here. But I promise you one thing. A lot of good will come out of this. You will never see any player in

the entire country play as hard as I will play the rest of the season and you will never see someone push the rest of the team as hard as I will push everybody the rest of the season, and you will never see any team play harder than we will the rest of the season. God bless.”

After this game, Florida went on to win every other game and captured the national championship.

Mental toughness is something that God wants us to have and has given us the capacity for. In 2 Timothy 1:7 we read: *For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.* With the Holy Spirit guiding us and God’s Word as our playbook, we can control our thoughts and focus on God’s plan for our lives. We do not have to listen to negativity, but instead can realize that we are God’s chosen children and are specially made by him for a purpose.

Some of the most mentally tough people are the elite Navy Seals. They are often the most conditioned physically, mentally, and spiritually. Their philosophy states how determined they are to protect good and defeat evil.

“I will never quit. I persevere and thrive on adversity. My

Nation expects me to be physically harder and mentally stronger than my enemies. If knocked down, I will get back up, every time. I will draw on every remaining ounce of strength to protect my teammates and to accomplish our mission. I am never out of the fight.”⁴

Most of us in our daily lives do not have to make life or death decisions, but we can have the same mental toughness. We do not need to listen to negativity and the lies of the devil when problems and adversity occur. We can stay focused on God’s love and be committed to helping each other through difficult times.

Hank Aaron is a Hall of Fame Major League Baseball right fielder. When an opposing team would hit a home run, he would not let it get him down. Instead he would move on and focus on the next play. He said, “Looking at the ball going over the fence is not going to help.” In life we need to avoid dwelling on bad things that occur, but instead move on to the next play and see what God has in store for our lives. We can have great hope and mental toughness because we know that eternal life in heaven is our final destination and that through Christ we are always victors!

Trustworthy

Great coaches are able to establish trust with their players by regularly showing them that they care and that they know what they are doing. It takes time for someone to earn trust and it takes repeated occurrences of doing the right thing. Trustworthy coaches stay true to their word.

Coach John Wooden, from the start of his career, showed he was trustworthy and would honor his commitments. Being an alumnus of the University of Minnesota it pains me to tell this story for what could have been. Several schools were jockeying to hire Coach Wooden as their head coach. If he had his choice he wanted to go with the University of Minnesota. Officials from the University of Minnesota set a 6 p.m. deadline to let him know if he would be offered the job. Six p.m. came and went with no phone call from the University, so Wooden accepted the head coaching position at UCLA. Later that evening, he did receive a call from the University of Minnesota. A blizzard had made travel difficult and had prevented them from calling earlier in the day. Although, he really wanted to coach there, he had to turn down the job because he had

already given his word to UCLA. He refused to break from his commitment and UCLA basketball went on to be dominant.

Ruth as well showed to be trustworthy and honored her commitment to help and support Naomi. At the start of the book of Ruth, Naomi is despondent and even wants to be called Mara because she feels that God has made her life very bitter. Ruth continues to see Naomi through her difficult time and even revitalizes Naomi's hope. As the story progresses, Ruth is blessed for her commitment and faithfulness, as Naomi becomes the coach of Ruth, and helps her to get a new husband, Boaz. Boaz and Ruth are even blessed with a child that continues the genealogy that leads to the birth of Jesus Christ. Ruth honored her commitment to Naomi and was blessed by God because of this.

Dependable

Being a consistent coach also means that a coach is dependable. Coaches can be counted on to do the right thing when it needs to be done. If a coach is dependable, you know they will deliver with the right decisions. NBA coach, Steve Kerr, was a very dependable shooter when he played

in the NBA. He has taken the lessons he learned from winning championships as a player and achieved success in his first year as a coach. His players respected him and were willing to make sacrifices for the team. In the 2015 NBA season, Andre Iguodala did not start all year for the Golden State Warriors, even though he had started every game of his ten year NBA career prior to this. In the NBA finals the Warriors were down 2 games to 1, to the Cleveland Cavaliers. Coach Kerr made the decision to start Iguodala and he was ready to make an impact. The Warriors went on to win the next three games and Iguodala was named the MVP. Andre was dependable and ready when his time came.

Boaz proved to be dependable as well. Boaz was an upright, righteous man who had been dependable and consistent for years as he was well-off with many fields of grain. Boaz hears about what Ruth has done for her mother-in-law, Naomi, and takes care of Ruth. He protects her and lets her get food from his field. And when the time came for action, Boaz marries Ruth.

You can count on God. He's dependable, reliable. He

is worthy of your trust. God has never had a bad day. He doesn't wake up in a bad mood. He is consistent and faithful. *I the Lord do not change.* Malachi 3:6. God has the most consistency ever. *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father who does not change like shifting shadows.* James 1:17. Even when we're unfaithful, God is faithful. Even when we're inconsistent, God is consistent. Even when we're unreliable, God is reliable. No matter what changes in the world, there is one thing that is consistent that can be counted on. God will always act the same toward us. His love is constant and unending.

Chapter 3: High Standards

High standards are everything when it comes to coaching. Players can only rise to the level of the standards and expectations that are set by the coach. It is difficult to go beyond this. A sponsor from Compassion International, an organization to help needy children, demonstrated the importance of having high standards through the letters she sent to her sponsored child.

The child wrote the sponsor that he was not good at anything. The sponsor encouraged the child by writing that everyone has talents and gifts, and told him that he is special and unique because God made him and cares for him. Cheered on by the sponsor the child soon wrote back that he was the fastest student in his class. Next he told her that he was the fastest in his school. Even more reason to celebrate came when his sponsor came to learn that the child had grown into a man and was the fastest in his country. He would go on to win a silver medal in the Olympics! It was due in large part to the encouragement he received to know that he was loved by God and that he could have high standards for himself.

Genesis 1:27 states that humans were created in the image of God and that is plenty of reason to have high standards for ourselves. None of the animals or other creatures on the earth have this distinction. Because of this we should act with wisdom and love, making and executing praiseworthy plans just as God did in creation. We should show God's love to others because each person matters because God loves them. Just as we can have high standards for ourselves we should uplift others as well so that they can become what God would want them to be.

God wants the best for each of us and knows that we are capable of great things through His power. A great coach can uplift individuals so that together as a team they accomplish more than they thought was possible. All Christians are part of a team and together with God everything is possible. High expectations are important in the relationships we have with others and how we treat ourselves. Excellent coaches know the importance of this and strive for nothing less than excellence!

Get the best out of others

Outstanding coaches are able to develop players so that they become the best that they can be. Deeply respected coach Pat Summitt was one of the best at doing this. In 38 years coaching women's basketball at Tennessee her teams won eight national championships and had 1,098 victories. One of her former players, Kellie Jolly, states how coach Pat Summitt was able to push players to be their best.

“When you think you can't give any more, she's pushing you to give twice as much—and you don't think you have anything more to give. You feel like she's asking you to be this perfect person, and you just don't feel like that's going to happen. And then you realize...she got you there. She got you to that point, better than you thought you would be.”¹

Great coaches are able to see potential and to know what an individual is capable of and help them achieve this.

The story of Nehemiah is an excellent example of how God coached Nehemiah to be the best that he could be. Nehemiah was a cupbearer in King Artaxerxes's court. A cupbearer did just what you would think. He would hold the king's cup. But he also had the unenviable task of tasting

the liquid in the king's cup to ensure that it was not poisoned. The king would never put a respected friend in this position. However, Nehemiah went from a cupbearer to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with God's help. I am sure that Nehemiah did not think it would be possible for him to lead such a great undertaking.

Nehemiah heard that the city of Jerusalem was in ruins and was disheartened. King Artaxerxes noticed that Nehemiah was sad and asked for the reason. Nehemiah was afraid but told the king about how Jerusalem was in ruins. The king surprisingly asked what Nehemiah wanted. What happens next is indicative of why God was able to get the best out of Nehemiah. Nehemiah did this often. He prayed to God before answering the king. Nehemiah frequently turned to prayer throughout the day. Through prayer he drew strength and direction from God to accomplish what needed to be done. The King granted Nehemiah's request to rebuild Jerusalem and not only that, he provided letters for safe passage and timber to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah needed bravery to be a cupbearer and showed this in his

request to the King. He also showed willingness to take on the huge task of rebuilding a city.

Arnold Palmer, one of the greatest golfers in history, had the same mindset of Nehemiah. Palmer had a poem that he hung in his office and read often.

If you think you are beaten, you are.

If you think you dare not, you don't.

If you'd like to win, but think you can't

It's almost certain you won't...

Life's battles don't always go

To the stronger or faster person,

But soon or late, the person who wins

Is the person who thinks he or she can.

With God we can be assured that we can dare to pursue God-ordained passions. Palmer once said, "The most rewarding things you do in life are often the ones that look like they cannot be done." Nehemiah knew that his task was monumental but also knew that, with God on his side, his work could be accomplished.

There was a story going around for a while about Arnold Palmer that ended up being fictional but still has an

excellent moral. Palmer once played a series of exhibition matches in Saudi Arabia. The king was so impressed that he proposed to give Palmer a gift.

Palmer demurred; "It really isn't necessary, Your Highness. I'm honored to have been invited."

"I would be deeply upset," replied the king, "if you would not allow me to give you a gift."

Palmer thought for a moment and said, "All right. How about a golf club? That would be a beautiful memento of my visit to your country."

The next day, delivered to Palmer's hotel, was the title to a golf club. Thousands of acres, trees, lakes, clubhouse, and so forth.

The moral of the story is: In the presence of the King, don't ask for small gifts.

Nehemiah knew that the real King of Kings was on his side so he placed a large request to the king. **In our own lives we can aim high because God is on our side, and when our requests align with His purpose for our lives, there is nothing that cannot be achieved!**

Expect Teamwork

Coaches know that one of the best ways to achieve the vision of high expectations is through teamwork. The often used saying is true: "There is no "I" in team." Together more can be accomplished than through just individual effort. One of my favorite sayings is: "If you see a turtle up on a fence post, it had help getting up there." Any coach knows that they have a win-loss record but their successes are not just dependent on what he or she does. It takes a team effort between coaches and players to achieve the most.

The well-quoted Bible verses from Ecclesiastes 4 is sage advice for a team. *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.* Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. Not surprisingly Jesus used this wisdom, as well, in sending out the disciples into ministry. *Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two.* Mark 6:7. The importance of teamwork can not be underestimated.

In rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah knew this well. When the Israelites were in the process of

rebuilding the walls, the work got tough and they got discouraged. They also were under threat of attack from the Arabs, Ammonites, and the men of Ashdod. Eventually, the Israelites all but gave up. Nehemiah knew he needed to do something quick. He reorganized the work into teams. Half of the people would stand guard with their spears and swords and protect everyone. The other half would work. Then they'd alternate their positions. Nehemiah also posted everyone by groups and families, so they could encourage and support each other.

Nehemiah cheered the people with a great pep talk. *Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.* Nehemiah 4:14. The best way to dispel fear is to remember the Lord. When the people turned their focus back on God who can do anything, they were reinvigorated to continue and complete their work. They knew that with God they had the strongest team.

Nehemiah knew that each individual was important but together they could accomplish more. Rudyard Kipling's book, *The Second Jungle Book*, has a great poem in it that deftly makes this point.

Now this is the Law of the Jungle---
as old and true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper,
but the Wolf that shall break must die.
As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk,
the Law runneth forward and back—
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.²

Every person had to do their part in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but without everyone working together the work would not have been completed.

Coach John Wooden started something that is now commonplace in basketball. Wooden instructed his players that whenever someone made a basket he should look at and acknowledge his teammate that passed him the ball.

Nehemiah and the Israelites were able to acknowledge God with the work that they did. They knew and all of the surrounding nations knew that the work was done with the help of God. This was because the monumental task was completed in fifty-two days! When the enemies of the Israelites heard this they were afraid and lost their self-

confidence because they knew God was on the Israelites' side. Through the work that Nehemiah and the Israelites did, all glory was able to be given to God.

Hold people accountable

Top coaches know that a large part of having high standards is holding people accountable to these standards. Teams need to have a set of rules and guiding principles for how they conduct themselves both on and off the court or field. Another illustration from Coach John Wooden makes this point, but this time from his own playing days. In high school John was the best player on his team. His team won three state championships in his high school career. Before one game Wooden forgot his uniform and did not want to run the mile home to get it. He thought he was the best player on the team, so there was no way the coach would bench him. Wooden decided to ask a player who didn't play much to give him his uniform; which he did. His coach found out about this however and would not let him play in the first half. The coach said to Wooden, "Johnny, there are some things more important than winning."³

When team USA basketball was training for the 2008 Olympics in which they won the gold medal they created a list of Gold Standards by which they would live by. The team was led by legendary Duke basketball coach Mike Kryzyzewski.

Gold Standards for TEAM USA 2008

What we do all the time and what we hold each other accountable for:

1. No Excuses
 - We have what it takes to win.
2. Great Defense
 - This is the key to winning the gold.
 - We do the dirty work.
3. Communication
 - We look each other in the eye.
 - We tell each other the truth.
4. Trust
 - We believe in each other.
5. Collective Responsibility
 - We are committed to each other
 - We win together
6. Care
 - We have each other's backs.
 - We give aid to a teammate.
7. Respect
 - We respect each other and our opponents.
 - We're always on time.
 - We're always prepared.
8. Intelligence
 - We take good shots.
 - We're aware of team fouls.
 - We know the scouting report.
9. Poise
 - We show no weakness.
10. Flexibility

- We can handle any situation.
 - We don't complain.
11. Unselfishness
 - We're connected.
 - We make the extra pass.
 - Our value is not measured in playing time.
 12. Aggressiveness
 - We play hard every possession.
 13. Enthusiasm
 - This is fun.
 14. Performance
 - We're hungry.
 - We have no bad practices.
 15. Pride
 - We are the best team in the world and we represent the best country.⁴

Many of these standards, especially trust, collective responsibility, and care could be seen in how Nehemiah worked to help all of the Israelites, especially the poor. When the rebuilding of the wall was occurring there was also an economic crisis among the Israelites. Besides paying taxes to King Artaxerxes, the people were also paying taxes to their own Israelite nobles and officials. It got so bad the people had to mortgage their fields and vineyards to get grain and even had to sell themselves into slavery to repay debt. Nehemiah puts a stop to this by confronting the Israelites in charge. He got them to agree to give the people

back their land and houses and to not demand anymore from them.

Coach Mike Kryzyzewski noted the importance of leaders setting the tone for accountability: “When leaders make clear their willingness to change, it establishes an environment in which everyone can be comfortable adapting.”⁴ Nehemiah set this tone for the people as he was a leader in charge of them. King Artaxerxes had appointed him to be governor of the Israelites in the land of Judah. Nehemiah could have taken food and money from the people as governor, but instead gave the people food and money. This way he led by example and was better able to hold accountable the other officials in taking care of the needs of the poor.

High standards are an essential feature that we must have of ourselves and others. God does not make junk and has created each one of us for a special purpose. *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* Psalm 139:13-14. We do not have to feel less about ourselves based on our job

or position. Nehemiah showed that an active prayer life and living a life for God can lead to God being glorified.

Chapter 4: Quality Communicator

Superlative coaches have to be excellent communicators. Coaches need to clearly communicate to their players what they need to do and also motivate them through inspiring words of wisdom. Many coaches have been players of the sport they are coaching and usually were successful as a player. Anyone who has been a coach or teacher knows that knowing how to do something yourself is much different than trying to teach someone else how to do it. For example, Ted Williams was one of the greatest baseball players of all time and the last person to hit over .400 for a season. After he retired from baseball he became a hitting coach. He had amazing knowledge of hitting and great skill to do it; however his advice to players did not translate into success. He told the players to keep your eye on the ball. The hitters needed more than this advice, though, to get better. If communication is not clear then a team will not achieve as well as they should.

God is the greatest communicator the world has ever known. He gave us the Bible, which contains endless wisdom for our lives. One of the main people God used to

write down His words was Paul. Paul wrote about half of the books of the New Testament. Even while Paul, then called Saul, was growing up God had a plan for how He would use him. God gave him experiences to prepare him for the spreading of the Gospel message. At an early age Saul learned from, Gamaliel, one of the most noted rabbis in history. The school that he attended gave Saul a broad exposure to classical literature, philosophy, and ethics. As both a Jew and a Roman citizen Paul was able to witness effectively to both groups. God prepared him through his experiences and education to be an excellent vessel for the Gospel message. Through clear, patient, inspirational communication God's love and His Word were spread throughout the world.

Clear

Clear communication should be used to benefit and uplift others. Yogi Berra, baseball catcher and coach, has had his communication often repeated by others to bring a smile to people's faces. He had many one-liners that would make people laugh. For example, "Never answer an anonymous

letter." Another one was, "Why buy good luggage? You only use it when you travel."

Yogi Berra's one-liners would also make people think about them a second time to see if they really made sense. For example, "You can observe a lot by just watching." "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded." Some of his sayings were not completely clear, but a main point could still be taken from them. "Baseball is 90 percent mental, and the other half is physical." "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."¹ One of his more famous quotes shows the importance of not giving up and continuing to try your best until the end. "It ain't over till it's over."

Paul was an expert in his writings on having clear communication of the main points of the Gospel message. (1) God sent His son to the earth. *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.* Hebrews 1:1-2.

(2) Jesus did what only He could do, being perfect in every way and both God and man. He rescued people from eternal punishment by being crucified for the sins of the

world. There was nothing as sinful people that humans could do to fix their lives on their own. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.*

(3) After being dead for three days, Jesus was raised from the dead defeating death once and for all. *For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

1 Thessalonians 4:14.

(4) Through belief in Christ Jesus as their Savior, Christians will live with Him forever. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23. If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9.*

Because of what Christ has done for us and in response to God’s love, Christians are motivated to live a life worthy of their calling. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...just as it is written: “The righteous will live by*

faith.” Romans 1:16-18. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Patient

It can be difficult for coaches to be patient with a team that is not playing well because we are in an era where if coaches do not win they will more than likely be fired. Heading into the 2016 season, thirteen of the head coaches in the NFL have been with their team one year or less. Everyone wants to win, so being a coach with a losing season can lead to a firing. However, excellent coaches with a good system know that if they stay true to themselves, and continue to coach their team to improve, that better results will come.

Paul was a model of patience. He went through plenty of tough times, but stayed true to his faith in Christ. He knew that he had the best guidance through faith in Christ, but that there was no guarantee that life would get easier. Paul describes some of the hardships he endured: *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.*

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 2 Corinthians 11:24-27.

Despite all of this Paul stayed joyful and tried to encourage others through God's love. He spent a lot of time in prison, but made the most out of it. In one of the instances he and Silas had just been beaten, but in prison they worshiped God. *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Acts 16:25.* It is a good example for all of us, that despite our circumstances we can still praise God and have hope.

Paul learned to be patient through a thorn in his flesh that he had to deal with as well. We do not know what this actually was, but Paul pleaded with the Lord to take it away from him. Through it though Paul learned a valuable lesson that he displayed in his ministry. *But he said to me, "My grace*

is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so
that Christ’s power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

Paul used the strength he drew from Christ to help, encourage, and comfort others as well. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.*

In our own Christian lives we must keep this in mind. Due to the busyness of the day we can forget about faith and miss opportunities to share God’s love with others. Pastor and author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, states, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will constantly be crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and requests. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, like the priest who passed by the man who had fallen among thieves.” Patience is an important part of good coaching and communication because it can convey that we care for and want to take time for others. Being willing to invest time in

others sends a strong message that they are important and valued.

We can be motivated to do this by what Christ has done for us. Jesus took the time to come to earth and become human. He started off as a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, even though He is the all-powerful and all-mighty God. Through this, Jesus conveyed the message to each one of us that we are worth the time and investment. He sent this message even clearer through His death on the cross and glorious resurrection. Paul says it nicely in Hebrews 12:1-3 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Jesus endured the pain, shame, and suffering for us because each of us matters. He desires for all to be saved and to come to the all-surpassing knowledge of His love and grace.

Inspirational

Some of the most inspirational speeches have been delivered by coaches with just the right words to motivate their team. Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne inspired his team during halftime against Army with the last words of George Gipp, one of the greatest players in Notre Dame history. “Rock,” he said. “Sometime, when the team is up against it—and the breaks are beating the boys—tell them to go out there with all they got and win just one for the Gipper.” Notre Dame went on to win the game!

One of the biggest upsets of all-time occurred in the 1980 Olympics when the U.S. team shocked the world by beating the mighty Soviet Union hockey team. Before the game U.S. men’s hockey coach Herb Brooks delivered a powerful speech to get his team fired up.

“Great moments are born from great opportunity, and that’s what you have here tonight, boys. That’s what you’ve earned tonight. One game; if we played them ten

times, they might win nine. But not this game, not tonight. Tonight we skate with them. Tonight we stay with them, and we shut them down because we can. Tonight, we are the greatest hockey team in the world. You were born to be hockey players—every one of you, and you were meant to be here tonight. This is your time. Their time is done. It's over. I'm sick and tired of hearing about what a great hockey team the Soviets have...This is your time. Now go out there and take it!"

Paul had his own inspirational story to tell about how Christ had changed his life. He went from Saul, the persecutor of Christians, to Paul the protector of Christianity. God worked in his life to perform a miraculous 180 degree turn. God used Paul to help spread the Gospel message throughout the world. There are almost too many powerful and inspirational Bible verses by Paul to mention, but for starters if you ever need some motivation and encouragement, read Romans chapter 12, especially verses 9-21. It's great!

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above

yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

What is encouraged in these verses is only possible through Christ and being involved deeply in His Word. Paul has other verses that state the importance of being in God's Word and gives directions we can follow with the help of the Holy Spirit.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:8,13

Encouragement and motivation for others is vital in the world we live in. There are many advertisements on billboards, the Internet, radio, television, or in magazines. The ads work best when they can convince people that they are lacking or need something. They have to convince you that you are deficient in some area. This can lead to a culture of discouragement.

Christians can have the opposite effect when they encourage and uplift. It helps all of us when someone conveys to us that we are wonderful. There are two types of people in the world. One person conveys you should be happy to see me; while the other person conveys I am happy to see you. We need to be like the second person. That is the type of person Paul was. He would greet others kindly, offer words of support and encouragement, and would stay positive even in dire situations. This can have a large effect. *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.* Philippians 2:14-15. The most important thing that Paul did that we can do also is to talk often about

grace and the Gospel. That is clear communication and true inspiration!

Chapter 5: Knowledgeable

Dynamic coaches have a great knowledge base to draw on. They have a deep knowledge of the sport they are coaching, a quality knowledge of their team and their opponent, and are great leaders. Coaches need to keep growing in their knowledge in order to stay competitive and to continue to have success.

A great example of this is coach Jim White whose story was told in the movie, *McFarland*¹. Coach White started off as a football coach at McFarland high school in California but quickly came to realize their students were not cut out for football. He was knowledgeable about the students and noticed that they did have amazing endurance. Many of the students, their parents, and relatives were fruit or vegetable pickers. The students would work in the fields before school, go to school, and then work in the fields again at night!

Coach White eventually talked enough of the students into forming a cross country team and the students were able to squeeze in practice around their busy schedule. Coach White's vision for the cross country team at McFarland paid off as the team went on to win nine state

championships in fourteen years! Even better still the original seven athletes on his first cross country team all went on to college and graduated even though their parents had not completed ninth grade. They all ran cross country in college as well. Though Coach White had not coached cross country before he was committed to learning and becoming more knowledgeable about the sport and his team.

In the Bible, someone that is known for his wisdom and knowledge is Solomon. He did not start out this way, but grew in knowledge. When given the chance by God to ask for anything, Solomon showed wisdom in asking for a wise and discerning heart to govern the people and to help him distinguish between right and wrong. Coaches need deep knowledge, knowledge of opponents, knowledge of the team, and knowledge about how to be a great leader.

Deep Knowledge of the Game

Great coaches are often called students of the game because they continue to learn and expand on their coaching knowledge. In order to do this a coach must have the right mindset and approach each day the right way. John Maxwell is an expert on leadership who has talked to many coaches

and teams to share his wisdom. He has a vision for how he approaches each day.

Just for today...

- I will choose and display the right attitudes.
- I will determine and act upon important priorities.
- I will know and follow healthy guidelines.
- I will communicate with and care for my family.
- I will practice and develop good thinking.
- I will make and keep proper commitments.
- I will earn and properly manage finances.
- I will deepen and live out my faith.
- I will accept and show responsibility.
- I will initiate and invest in solid relationships.
- I will plan for and model generosity.
- I will embrace and practice good values.
- I will seek and experience improvements.²

For this to best occur, people need to be in a growth environment. Maxwell also talks about what this is.

What does a growth environment look like?

- Others are *Ahead* of me.
- I am continually *Challenged*.
- My focus is *Forward*.
- The atmosphere is *Affirming*.
- I am often out of my *Comfort Zone*.
- I wake up *Excited*.
- Failure is not my *Enemy*.
- Others are *Growing*.
- People desire *Change*.
- Growth is *Modeled* and *Expected*.²

Through years of experience leading and teaching others it is clear that Maxwell has deep knowledge about

how to help others improve their lives and make a difference in the lives of others.

Solomon, inspired by God, was able to write three books of the Bible-- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs-- and develop deep knowledge of how to live a life for God. Verses that are probably Solomon's most quoted verses come from Proverbs 3:5-6. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.* It shows the importance of having all of our decisions and knowledge rooted in God's Word and love. If we trust the Lord in all areas of our lives and commit our lives to His will then our path in life will become clear. *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.* Proverbs 16:3

A verse of wisdom written by Solomon that extols sharing God's love with others is Proverbs 11:25. *A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.* The best gift we can give others is the knowledge of God's love and grace. Not only will they benefit, but we as well will be refreshed from seeing the love of God refresh the other person. Former coach and pastor, Robert Smith, tells how a

woman in a nursing home he would visit did her best to share God's love with others. She always told Smith to keep the door open when he would visit. He asked her one time why that was. She wanted the resident across the hall to hear them talk about God. She was trying to witness to her.³

God's love and grace is powerful knowledge. Coach Tony Dungy shares how the most important knowledge of God's love shaped his life. "From my perspective, a genuine sense of self-worth—the kind of confidence that can't be shaken by circumstances—is best obtained through a relationship with God. The knowledge that He created me and cares for me does more for my mental health and overall well-being than any self-help book every could. I am both humbled and empowered by the knowledge that Jesus Christ performed the ultimate act of sacrificial service for me. To know that God loves me that much is powerful."⁴

Know Opponents

If a coach knows his or her opponent well then it makes planning and preparation easier. When I was coaching whenever I had the chance to scout an opponent, my team almost always won the game when we played that

team. Being able to identify a team's plays, their strongest and weakest players, and see how another team makes adjustments to beat them, is extremely beneficial. When I was scouting another team for basketball I saw that a zone defense worked well against them. Even though my team had not run a zone defense all year, I told my players that is what we are going to do. Though they were not sure if it would work, it ended up working great because I had already seen it in action. And we won the game!

The 1995 NCAA women's basketball championship featured Tennessee vs. University of Connecticut. These teams were by far the best two teams in the country and they knew each other well. University of Connecticut was coached by Geno Auriemma. He was confident that what they had done all year would work; while the game plan for Tennessee coach Pat Summitt was to disrupt this. Auriemma described it this way. "We were getting ready to play them and all the geniuses were saying, 'You can't run your offense against them, how you gonna run your offense?' I said, '...the same way. We will run our offense against them.' Uh-uh, they won't let you. The first three times up the floor we

can't make a pass. And I'm like, they must be right."⁵ At the start of the game Tennessee was able to influence what the other team did. In sports that is never good for the other team. In life as well, when we are influenced in the wrong way it can lead to negative consequences.

Solomon started to know his opponents a little too well as we read in 1 Kings 11. Solomon was told by God not to take wives from foreign countries. God knew that Solomon could be turned to worship these foreign countries' false gods. The point should be well-taken that even though Solomon was said to be the wisest person ever, he was also not very smart. I remember sitting in a Bible study when a woman mentioned that Solomon must not have been that wise, because he had so many wives. It is very true as Solomon is influenced to worship false gods. Because of this God says to Solomon, "*you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you.*" 1 Kings 11:11.

Solomon should have listened better to some of his own advice. *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.* Proverbs 27:17. This works best when Christians can

support and encourage one another to stay true to their faith. If we are surrounded too much by non-Christian people and things, then we can be influenced negatively. Instead we can influence non-Christians by showing them God's love and by treating them in ways that they might not expect. *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.* Proverbs 25:21-22.

The phrase "heap burning coals on his head" seems odd at first. However, it might have been an expression for an Egyptian ritual in which a guilty person, as a sign of repentance, carried a basin of glowing coals on his head. By returning good for evil as the verses in Proverbs 25 state, and being kind to your enemy, you may cause him to repent or change.

Know Your Team

Outstanding coaches know their team well; their strengths and what weaknesses they need to work on. Great coaches can put their players in the best positions so that they will be successful. They call the right plays so as to

highlight strengths and minimize weaknesses. It seems like obvious advice, but in sports the coach wants to get the ball to the best player as often as possible. When I was coaching football I was able to find an easy way to do this with an athletic tight end that we had. Whenever we needed yards we could go to this play and it worked almost every time. We would simply put the tight end out wide as a wide receiver and throw a quick pass to him. Since a smaller defensive back was guarding him, he could run for a good gain after catching the pass.

In leading his kingdom Solomon made wise decisions as well. He appointed officials to serve under him that he could trust. In building the temple he also was able to select the best people for the different jobs that this would take. In doing so, the temple could be finished quicker and it could be more beautiful.

The most famous story that shows how Solomon knew his people comes from 1 Kings 3. Two women stake claim to one baby and both are adamant that the baby is theirs. Now a days a DNA test could be run to see who would be the real mother, but that was not an option back

then, so Solomon makes a decision that he would never carry through. He orders that the child be cut in two so that each of them can have half the child. The real mother had compassion for her son and would rather see the child go to someone else than to be killed so she told Solomon to give the child to the other women. The woman who was not the mother cruelly decided that the best decision was to cut the baby in two so that neither one of them would have a child. It was an easy decision for Solomon then to give the baby to the first mother who wanted the child to live.

Good Leader

Coaches need to be good leaders to ensure that their players will follow their vision for what they should be doing. Leadership is not easy and is something that a coach needs to strive to improve on throughout his or her career. An excellent book on leadership that involves basketball coaching is *Lead...for God's Sake! A parable for finding the heart of leadership*⁶ by Todd Gongwer. The book tells the story of a very successful high school basketball coach who is confronted with setbacks, and has to really consider what it means to be a leader and to be successful. The janitor at the

school becomes a mentor to him, and helps him realize what being a truly great leader and basketball coach entails.

The janitor poses a question to the basketball coach: “Why do you do what you do?” It is a vital question to consider because what most motivates us to action usually determines how we attempt to motivate others to action. A major point is that competence is never complete without connection-relationships. The janitor explains it this way. “Jesus taught over and over that our very existence was all about relationships—first with him, and then with others. That’s why God created us in the first place. So it stands to reason that when your *why* answer is self-centered, your purpose, your very reason for existence, is not being fulfilled. And in the long run, you’ll not experience the true peace and joy this life has to offer.”⁶

Reflective questions are an important part of making a good leader. Coach Wooden said that he would ask himself one question everyday. “How can I make my team better?” His focus was not on himself but on others and what could be done to improve them. Three questions that people often ask about their leader are the following: “Can

you help me? Do you care for me? Can I trust you?"⁷ Being an exceptional leader means communicating "yes" answers to each of these questions to your players.

Any leader or coach should pray for wisdom daily or even hourly. Though coaches or leaders will not all be blessed with wisdom like Solomon, through hard work and trusting in God's love to guide our lives, wisdom and leadership can be developed. Seeking out others with more knowledge or expertise in coaching or leadership is an excellent way to learn from others and develop your skills. John Maxwell lists several questions that can be used during a learning session.

What is the greatest lesson you have learned?
What are you learning now?
How has failure shaped your life?
Who do you know whom I should know?
What have you read that I should read?
What have you done that I should do?
How can I add value to you?⁷

As leaders, how we interact with others matters greatly. Solomon knew this and there is great wisdom from the Bible from Solomon's writings. Verses in Proverbs state the importance of considering our words carefully. *The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings*

healing. Proverbs 12:18. A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1. If we season our conversation with God's grace, then our relationships will go better.

Solomon showed his love for his people through his words. In 1 Kings 8 he speaks a blessing over all of the people of Israel.

Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. And may your hearts be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.

The focus of his blessings was for the people to actively seek God and never forget what He has done for them. President Lincoln's pastor was Dr. Phineas Gurley. After hearing him give a sermon one Sunday President Lincoln was asked what he thought. He said, "It was brilliantly conceived, biblical, relevant, and well presented." So it was a great sermon? "No," Lincoln replied, "because it did not ask us to do something great."⁸ Great leaders inspire action through their words and Solomon was no different knowing that God's love is the source of our inspiration.

Chapter 6: Adaptable

Dynamic coaches are able to be adaptable.

Depending on the players that they have and who their opponent is, they are able to come up with a quality game plan that will lead to victory. Great coaches have a system that they believe in, but that does not mean that they do not try new things. Superb coaches are also very self-aware so that they can tell how they are impacting the team and what is working. Coaches should be able to make adjustments and find a way to accomplish what they desire.

Bailey Matthews is an 8-year-old-boy who sought to complete a triathlon. It was a 100-meter lake swim, a 4,000 meter bike ride and a 1,300 meter run. At his age just completing this would be praiseworthy enough, but he has cerebral palsy that he had to overcome as well. Bailey's mother has commented on his adaptability. "Bailey has always been very determined," she said. "If he wants to do something he will find a way to do it, even if it is not the conventional way." Bailey completed the triathlon, even going the last few meters of the 1,300 meter run without his walker. He fell over three times at the end, but got back up

on his own each time and finished!¹ Being adaptable requires a determined spirit! The story of David is a prime example of how God has given us bodies and minds that are capable of adapting to different situations.

Flexible

At times, coaches have to be willing to try new things. If coaches are not working hard to improve, then there are other teams that will surpass their team. In order to be flexible and willing to learn new things a growth mindset is necessary. The growth mindset is the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. In other words you can learn and improve through hard work and perseverance. On the flip-side a fixed mindset is believing that your qualities are carved in stone.

Many people think that Michael Jordan had nothing but natural ability, but do not realize how much time and effort he put into become a legendary basketball player. Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team, so he was not always a lock for playing professional basketball.

A commercial that aired while Jordan was playing helps to dispel the fixed mindset approach and shows how

Jordan had a growth mindset. The text below is what Jordan speaks during the commercial.

“Maybe it's my fault. Maybe I led you to believe it was easy, when it wasn't. Maybe I made you think my highlights started at the free throw line, and not at the gym. Maybe I made you think that every shot I took was a game winner. That my game was built on flash, and not fire. Maybe it's my fault that you didn't see that failure gave me strength; that my pain was my motivation. Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a God-given gift, and not something I worked for every single day of my life. Maybe I destroyed the game. Or maybe, you're just making excuses. Become legendary.”

It is interesting to look at research done on growth and fixed mindset to see how people think about when they feel smart and successful. For fixed mindset people it is when they don't make any mistakes, when they finish something fast, and when something is easy but others can't do it. On the other hand for growth mindset people it is when something is really hard and they end up doing something they couldn't do before and when they work for a long time on something and start to figure it out.² All of us need a growth mindset because that is what the body and mind that God has given is capable of doing. We can all learn new things and improve. *I praise you because I am*

fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14

All-time great and two time Olympic gold medalist U.S. women's soccer player, Mia Hamm, was once asked what is the most important thing for a soccer player to have? With no hesitation she answered, "mental toughness." She has also stated the importance of hard work and perseverance for improvement. "The vision of a champion is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion, when nobody else is looking." Praising someone's intelligence or talent, sends a fixed-mindset message. Instead we should try to focus on the processes that were used—their strategies, effort, or choices—and praise these. This helps to reinforce a growth mindset and flexibility to change and improve.

David is definitely an example of someone that had a growth mindset that was centered on God considering he went from a shepherd to a being a king. Instead of extolling his own greatness, he knew that it was only through God that he was able to be King. He knew that through staying focused on God, his life would have the most meaning and

purpose. In Psalm 37:4 David states, *Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.* This does not mean that people are guaranteed to be rich or successful by the world's standards. But when we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires will match God's desires and we will pursue His plan for our lives.

It is important to be flexible and be willing to go where we are sent and to do what God is calling. On one of the mission trips I have gone on, another person on the trip had a humorous saying that showed her devotion to going where God has called her and adapting to a new culture. "Where you lead, I will follow. What you serve, I will swallow."

When Saul, out of jealousy, was pursuing David to kill him, David had to live in caves and live off the land. Living in the desert would not be an easy life, but he trusted God and still tried to honor him. His flexibility and strength came from God and can be seen in his words from Psalm 51:10 *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

David did not know that he would eventually become king, but trusted God and had the right flexible, growth mindset to be used by God.

Self Aware

Coaches need to be self-aware to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Coaches are often in the spotlight and need to pay attention to what they are saying, how they are acting, and how they make decisions. All of these factors also come into play in how coaches interact with their players and staff. Coaches have to be cognizant of their thoughts and feelings because this can affect how they act and react to others.

David found himself in the spotlight in a way when he had two chances to kill Saul and was being urged on by his men to do it. David made the right decision, though, because he knew that Saul was still the Lord's anointed, still king of Israel, God's people. David still made the most of his opportunity by showing Saul the kind of man that he was. He did not kill Saul, but wanted to show him that he had the chance to harm him. In one instance he cuts off a corner of

Saul's robe and leaves the scene, grief-stricken by even this small act against Saul.

It shows that he took to heart his own words and prayer from Psalm 19:14 that even his action as well would be pleasing to God. *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Later he takes Saul's spear and water jug to again show how he still respected Saul even though Saul was trying to kill him. After this second time Saul realizes his sin and states, *I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly.* 1 Samuel 26:21.

David however, is aware that Saul will more than likely try to kill him again so it is better if he stays away. Through it all it is evident that David knows that it is God that sustains him. *It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.* 2 Samuel 22:33. *I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.* Psalm 3:5.

Later on in his life, David learns the importance of having others hold him accountable in case he is not as self-aware as he should be. David messes up royally when he sleeps with Bathsheba and has her husband Uriah killed in battle. However, it takes the prophet Nathan to come to David to help him realize his sin. It shows the importance of having trusted Christian friends who are willing to speak truth. If we can not see our sin and what road our lives are going down then it is important to have others who can bring back our self-awareness. The child that David and Bathsheba conceives dies, but later they are able to have a son, Solomon, who will become king.

Through the loss of his child, David lives and learns the importance of his verses that he wrote in the Psalms. *You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.* Psalm 30:11. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* Psalm 103:12. *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* Psalm 34:18.

In all of our lives, I am sure we can look back on times when God has sustained us through difficult times.

There have also been times when we have sinned and messed up and we know that God's forgiveness and grace is there for us. That is the most important knowledge to hold on to and to not forget as we strive to live better lives motivated by God's love. We can be grateful for what God has done for us and is doing in our lives. The question posed by David is an apt question for us all and we are blessed that God considers us so special that he is willing to love us. *Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?* 2 Samuel 7:18.

Talented

In order to be adaptable it takes talent, which of course can be developed through hard work. Coaches have to be excellent communicators, knowledgeable, great teachers, quality leaders, and organized. It is no surprise then that many great coaches get asked to speak to a wide variety of groups. People understand that even though coaches have expertise in their sport, the principles and ideas that they employ daily can be related or connected to a variety of fields.

David was a talented individual who gave glory to God. David defeated Goliath and was not intimidated by him, even though at the time he did not have much experience in fighting people. As a shepherd he had protected his sheep from wolves and other predators and he used this knowledge against Goliath. David's sling was a powerful weapon that he had used before and he was able to find his mark with a smooth stone to Goliath's head.

David also had musical talents. He was able to play the harp and even did so to soothe the nerves of Saul. Over half of the Psalms were written by David and many of them have been made into songs. "Your love, O Lord" is a song by a band called Third Day based on Psalm 36:5-6 *Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.* Another song is "How Majestic is Your Name" by Michael W. Smith based on Psalm 8:1 *O Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

David was even a dancer. He was filled with so much joy when bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem that he leapt and danced to the sounds of trumpets.

Even when one of his wives felt he was being undignified and not acting as a king, he could do nothing but say, *I will celebrate before my Lord*. He did not worry about how it would look because his joy for the Lord was great. He encouraged Israel, as its king, to put their trust in the Lord. *My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore*. Psalm 131:1,3.

Probably the best known Psalm of David in the Bible is Psalm 23. There is a story that tells the true meaning of talent and what it means to trust in God through one's whole life.

Everyone in a town came to a banquet to hear an amazing actor recite poetry, sing, and eloquently display his skills. He did several pieces after everyone had eaten and everyone was very impressed. Then he asked if anyone had any requests. An old man in the back stood up and weakly said that he would like to hear the actor recite Psalm 23. The actor said that he knew this piece and that he would only do it on one condition: if the old man would recite it after him.

The actor vigorously and powerfully recited the Psalm. At the end everyone clapped and gave a standing ovation.

The old man had to follow that. He began and in his voice that was cracking at times and with the weariness of many trials, he recited the Psalm. At the end there were no applause, but there was not a dry eye in the banquet hall, as everyone was crying. Later someone asked the actor what he thought of the old man's recitation. The actor replied, "I knew the Psalm, but that man knows the Shepherd."

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 23

Chapter 7: Passionate

Coaches need to have a love and passion for the game. If coaches are going to invest a lot of time in coaching, then there needs to be a passion; otherwise the time spent will not seem worth it and they might just do enough to get by. Everyone has things that they are passionate about in life. Often this is the reason for why we do what we do and how we spend our time in life.

The reason behind the why we do what we do is the passion that fuels people. In 1990 Buster Douglas faced off versus Mike Tyson for the heavyweight boxing championship. At the time Mike Tyson was the undefeated heavyweight champion and Buster Douglas was a huge underdog. Tyson had a 37-0 record with 32 knockouts.

In the 8th round of the fight, Tyson knocked down Douglas and many thought that was it. However, Douglas got back up with one second to spare after a 9-second count. In Tyson's eyes it didn't matter, because he came out in the 9th round determined to finish off Douglas.

Buster Douglas said after the fight, "Listen to me, it's really simple. Before my mother died she told the whole

world that I was going to beat Mike Tyson.” Douglas’s mother had died a few weeks before the fight, which got him down, but Douglas decided to dedicate the fight to his mother and make her prediction true. At the end of the 8th round, in his dazed state, he thought, “I can wake up and live for mom.”¹

In the 9th round a crazy outcome began to take shape. Douglas started to fight back with everything that he had. In the 10th round Douglas did the unthinkable and knocked out Mike Tyson in the biggest boxing upset of all-time! His “why reason” was greater than Tyson’s punch. His “why reason” was greater than defeat.

For Christians we know that we have the greatest “why reason” ever. Because of Jesus suffering and death on the cross and resurrection three days later we are motivated to live lives worthy of the love we have been shown. Our passion can be to give glory to God in all that we do and to share His love with others.

Sometimes life will knock us down, but we know that we have to keep getting back up and moving forward. We know that God can get us through any problems,

sadness, or setbacks. God is our passion that we need to keep focused on and everything else will be put into perspective.

In the Bible, Joseph was a person that endured quite a few knockdowns but got back up each time, trusting in God throughout his whole life. He had a passion for life and lived this out no matter where he ended up. Because of this God was able to use his life to help many people.

Love what you do

From an early age Joseph was blessed for loving the Lord His God in all that he did. He did not always have it easy but was blessed because he had a relationship with God.

Too often people can have a luke-warm feeling about their faith though. People know about God's grace but do not want this to affect their life much or only when they feel they need something. Wilbur Rees has a poem called "\$3 worth of God" that describes this approach.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man

or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.²

This is not the life that God calls us to live. God desires our whole hearts and whole beings to serve and love Him. *Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."* Matthew 22:37-38. Joseph's life is a fitting illustration of this and how we can show God's love to our neighbors as well. Though Joseph ended up with much power and possessions, there is no guarantee that this is the case for Christians. We will have highs and lows like Joseph, and we can look to how God sustained Joseph to draw strength for our lives.

When Joseph was sold into slavery he could have become despondent, but he was determined to do a good job for his Egyptian master, Potiphar. Potiphar noticed this and Joseph was given greater responsibility because it was obvious the Lord was with Joseph. *So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.* Genesis 39:6.

Later Joseph was wrongly imprisoned but still did his best to love God and to show this love to others. Like Potiphar, the warden eventually saw that Joseph was trustworthy and honest and put him in charge of all those in the prison. *The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.* Genesis 39:23.

After being in jail for several years, Joseph did not lose hope. He was given the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dream and was blessed through this. Again another person saw that Joseph could be trusted and that He was committed to God so his responsibility grew. *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."* Genesis 41:39-40. This shows that if we love God with our whole heart and show this love to others, then others will take notice of God.

Love helping others

Jack Lengyel was sitting at home with his family on Nov. 14, 1970, watching television when he first learned of the tragic airplane crash that killed 75 Marshall football players, coaches and fans a few hours after a 17-14 loss at East Carolina.

“My heart sunk,” Lengyel recalled. “My first thought was, ‘But for the grace of God there goes I as a football coach, my football team.’” The crash would change lives forever, including Lengyel’s own.

Lengyel was the head coach at the College of Wooster, an NCAA Division III school in Ohio. Lengyel applied for the Marshall job and got it. “I got to thinking, ‘Well, maybe I can help.’ So I applied,” Lengyel said. Though the school thought about cancelling the upcoming season, the players and Coach Lengyel were determined to rebuild the program and honor their lost friends. More than three decades later the story of Lengyel’s resurrection of the program was turned into a 2006 movie entitled, *We are Marshall*.³ Lengyel had a notion that he could help the university, town, and students and so he took a difficult job

that many others would not.

Joseph similarly noticed sadness and sought to help others. While Joseph was in prison the cup bearer and baker both were sent to join him and looked dejected. They both had dreams but were not sure what they meant. Joseph gave God credit and then offered to interpret the dreams to help the two men.

Later Pharaoh also has a dream that needed interpretation and again Joseph gave credit to God when asked if he could interpret. *“I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”* Genesis 41:16. Joseph goes on to tell about the 7 years of abundance that will come and then 7 years of famine. Because Joseph had helped others, he was given the opportunity to help even more people as Pharaoh put him in second command of the whole country!

Through this Joseph was even able to help his family when they came to receive food during the years of famine! *Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near*

me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Genesis 45:9-11.

Even though Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, he held no ill-will towards them because he trusted in God's plan. No matter what happened he continued to try to help others through living out his faith and giving glory to God. It reminds me of a poem by Linda Ellis called, "The Dash". It speaks to how we spend our time on earth and that we should use our time to help others and make a difference. Christians know that our passion for helping others comes from Christ and we can give all credit to Him!

I read of a man who stood to speak
at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
From the beginning...to the end

He noted that first came the date of her birth
and spoke of the following years with tears,
but he said what mattered most of all
was the dash between the years.

For that dash represents all the time
that they spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved her know
what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own
the cars... the house... the cash.

What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard.
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
to consider what is true and real
and always try to understand
the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger
and show appreciation more
and love the people in our lives
like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect
and more often wear a smile,
remembering that this special dash
might only last a little while.

So when your eulogy is being read
with your life's actions to rehash...
would you be proud of the things they say
about how you spent your dash?⁴

Look for the good in any situation

Passionate coaches are positive and find the best in any situation to continue to motivate their team. This was a lesson that I learned from my players when I was coaching football. For two years I coached 8 man football at Trinity Lutheran High School in Reseda, CA. When I got there the

team had not won a game in three years so I knew it was going to be a difficult task.

Early in the season we played a very tough team and ended up falling behind 50 to 0. The guys kept playing hard, though, and on the next kick return one of our players brought it back for a touchdown! The team was happy because they scored on a tough opponent. After the game I should have focused on the positive effort the team displayed and the improvement we were showing. Instead I told them that we should feel bad because we got beat by so much and still have a lot of work to do. One of the freshmen on the team said to me, "What am I supposed to do, sulk and be down about the game? What is done is done. I am not going to let it get me down." It was a fitting lesson for me and I agreed with the player. Later that season we were able to pick up a victory because the team stayed positive and continued to work hard.

In the Old Testament, Joseph, as well, did not get down when times were tough for him. He continued to focus on positive things like the love of God and living this out to others. At each stage in his life, Joseph tried to be the

best that he could be. He did not always have many possessions or the best of circumstances, but he was still happy. It is a lesson that we can take with us. Happiness happens not when our circumstances change, but when our attitude towards them changes.

Coach Bill McCartney coached football for the University of Colorado Buffaloes who had not beat Nebraska for 23 years. He decided that he would change his players' attitudes before the next time that they played in 1991. He challenged every player to call an individual and tell them they loved them and were dedicating their performance to them. Every play was going to be a dedication to the person they called. Coach McCartney then had the final score of the game put on 60 footballs so that each player could give the ball to their loved one. The final score: Colorado 27, Nebraska 12.⁵

Most people spend 86% of their time thinking about themselves, but only 14% of their time thinking about others. It was clear that in Joseph's life that this was not the case. He gave credit to God and was working towards helping and taking care of others no matter where he was.

Many people have held grudges against their brothers or family for far less than being sold into slavery, but Joseph did not. He was an optimist and trusted in God's plan that good can come out of a bad situation. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Genesis 50:20 where Joseph is addressing his brothers after their father has died. Joseph's brothers think that he may try to get back at them now for what they have done. Joseph however sees all of the struggle and hardship that he had to endure differently. *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

It is evident that Joseph would agree with the words in Philippians 4:11-13 that we should all take to heart, as well. *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Because of Christ's love for us, our mindset can be one of gratitude. We can show God's love to others by

loving what we do, working to help others, and looking for the good in any situation. Everyone has a passion. Christians know where their passion comes from—from the boundless love of God— and that is more motivating than anything else. When we work hard to show God’s love to others and to give glory to God we are successful no matter what our circumstances or the outcome.

Chapter 8: Great Life Teacher

Winning a lot of games does not make a coach successful. True success comes in the development of individuals to maximize their God-given talents and to give God glory in all that they do. Coaches work with hundreds to thousands of athletes in their careers and can make an impact with each one of them. Teaching athletes just how to play a game is not enough. Outstanding coaches know that the lessons learned from sports should carry over to all aspects of life. Striving for excellence is not just for the court or for the field but should be done with work, friends, family, church, and community.

Coach Bob Ladouceur was the high school football coach at De La Salle high school during their improbable 151 game winning streak from 1992 to 2004. His goal was to prepare young men for life through Christian principles. He said, "Winning a lot of games is doable. Teaching the kids there's more to life, that's hard." Coach Ladouceur was successful at both in his football program.

Too often athletes can be absorbed with just sports, and not realize life's bigger picture. *For physical training is of*

some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:8.

Recently on the TV show, "60 minutes," a superbowl winning quarterback was interviewed. He stated that now that he has been a champion, he feels like there should be something else, but he doesn't know what. If athletes put their entire lives into sports, then when the time comes for their careers to be over they can be unsure of what to do next. Excellent coaches prepare their players for success on the field and off the field into the future.

There really can only be one Person who was the greatest life teacher of all; that is Jesus. He showed in all that he did and said that he cared about everyone's current and future lives. He knew the game plan when he came to earth was to defeat sin, death, and the devil. He stayed focused on this main objective, but did not neglect those he came in contact with, and showed God's love to all through healing the sick and feeding the hungry. It was not just enough for Jesus to achieve victory over the devil. His goal was to improve the lives of all humanity through His saving grace. He wanted all to have a better guaranteed future in heaven.

He gave the world great hope for what the future would bring, but also taught people how to live their lives on earth.

More Than Just a Game

Coach Dean Smith was a legendary basketball coach at University of North Carolina for 36 years. He grew up in a small Kansas town and was the son of Baptist school teachers. When he retired in 1997 he had 879 victories, which was the NCAA Division 1 men's basketball record at the time. For all his accomplishments on the court, he had equal triumphs in working for and developing his players for success off the court. Smith was a champion for racial integration recruiting the first black athlete, Charlie Scott, to the University of North Carolina. Once a fan of an opposing team called Scott a racist name, and Coach Smith got so upset that he had to be held back from going after the fan. Scott commented that, "It's one of the very few times I ever saw Coach Smith become that angry and volatile. It surprised me, but it also made me proud that he was my coach."¹

Smith cared about his players' lives and not just about basketball. His players graduated with an astonishing

96 percent graduation rate, which is much higher than the university's overall graduation rate! It could be, in part, due to his one firm rule that he told his assistant: If any of his players ever needed to talk to him, his assistant should interrupt whatever he is doing, no matter how important it seemed. He also kept in contact with his players after graduation and would send them letters of encouragement when things were going bad if they were struggling with something.

An editorial once had four lessons that can be learned from Dean Smith's life. They are:

1. It's not about you — even when it is.
2. Family isn't just your relatives.
3. Stand up for what you believe in.
4. Small graces loom large.²

You will notice that none of these are about basketball. The first is about humility, the second loyalty, the third about courage, and the fourth about kindness. Dean Smith once said, "You should never be proud of doing what's right. You should just do what's right." It was the way he tried to live his life and it is clearly based on his Christian faith. It was

not fame that Coach Smith sought out but development of men that would carry them beyond the basketball court into excellence in all areas of life.

Just like a basketball team has 12 players, Jesus had a close team of 12 as well; his disciples. Jesus was not just concerned about the time He would spend with them, but wanted them to know that even after He left the earth, He would never leave them. *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Matthew 28:20.

Jesus talked often about God’s love and heaven with His disciples because He cared for their current and future lives. The parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl in Matthew 13 convey the message that heaven is so valuable that one should be willing to give up all one has to get it. This is not to imply that heaven can be earned, but that it is more amazing that anything our human minds can comprehend! We know that even more unbelievable is that heaven is a free gift that God offers to us. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16.

Great coaches develop players that are better when they leave the program than when they enter. It was the same with Jesus. When Jesus left earth, He never really left the disciples. He could always be reached by prayer and the disciples received the Holy Spirit as well. It is the same gift and power that all Christians receive. We have the Holy Spirit within us to guide and direct our ways. The disciples were emboldened when they received the Holy Spirit and Christians are as well. Max Lucado, in his book *Come Thirsty*, states:

“Lord, I come thirsty. I come to drink, to receive. I receive your work on the cross and in your resurrection. My sins are pardoned, and my death is defeated. I receive your energy. Empowered by your Holy Spirit, I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength. I receive your lordship. I belong to you. Nothing comes to me that hasn’t passed through you. And I receive your love. Nothing can separate me from your love.”³

As Christians we are all on Jesus’ team. He cares for each one of us and wants to stay in contact with us. Jesus desires nothing less than a 100 percent graduation rate. Our

graduation day is when our time on earth is done and our place in heaven awaits us. We can be confident that Jesus has a firm rule: that no matter what time it is or what we have done, we can always come to Him and ask for advice, encouragement, or whatever help might be needed.

Good Role Model

Coaches spend a lot of time with their athletes and have a lot of influence over their athletes so it is vital that they are good role models. It can be obvious when an athlete has not had good role models because most likely they will behave in similar ways. There was a championship boxing match not too long ago that featured polar opposites on the “good role model” scale. A few twitter posts detailed the differences in the two fighters’ approaches and views on life. One of the fighters posted a photo of himself in front of several luxury cars and a private jet with the caption, “Welcome to my world.” The other fighter posted a photo of themselves in their car with their family with the caption, “On our way to church! Have a blessed Sunday everyone. God bless.” It would not be surprising based on this to see

that one of the fighters was focused on money, while the other had the motto that all glory and honor belongs to God.

Christian athletes know that God can use wins and losses to have His name be praised. Golden State Warriors MVP point guard Steph Curry has said, “Being a Christian athlete doesn’t mean praying for your team to win. God doesn’t give an edge to those who pray, over those who don’t; hard work does that. Being a Christian athlete means competing for Christ, in a way in which you always give your all for Him, and win or lose, you thank him for the ability and opportunity to play. It means giving all the glory to God, no matter the outcome, because you trust in His plan for your life.”

It reminds me of TobyMac’s song, “Steal My Show”.

If You wanna steal my show, I’ll sit back and watch You go

If You got something to say, go on and take it away

Need You to steal my show, can’t wait to watch You go

So take it away.⁴

Good role models want all of the attention to be on God.

They give God the glory in the good and bad times.

TobyMac in his song is saying that he is willing to follow

God's plan for his life and that he does not want any of the credit for his performance. He wants God's light to shine through what he is doing, because he is doing it all for Him.

Jesus was the best role model the world has ever known. Only He could live a perfect life. He gave glory to God in all that He did and wanted his disciples to do the same. *"I am not seeking glory for myself.* John 8:50. *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* John 15:8.

There are many lessons that can be gleaned from Jesus' life and teachings that Christians can follow, motivated by God's love and with His help. Here are just a few.

(a) To serve is to be great. *"Whoever wants to be become great among you must be your servant."* Matthew 20:26. True leaders are servant leaders. They lead by example and people respect them both for what they stand for and what they have done.

(b) Love is most important. When asked what is the most important commandment Jesus replied, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all*

your mind. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:37,39. If we truly strive to love God with all our hearts, soul, and mind and show this love to others, than our lives will have great purpose and peace. By focusing on the goodness, grace, and love of Christ our approach to life will be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

(c) Forgive others. *“And forgive us our sins, as we also have forgiven those who sin against us.”* Matthew 6:12. *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* Matthew 6:14-15.

Jesus’ whole ministry was about the forgiveness of sins. The reason that He came to earth was for the atonement of the sins of the whole world. He modeled this even in His most difficult hours when he was on the cross. *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* Luke 23:34. Jesus did not need any forgiveness but He was willing to suffer and die for **our** sins because He loves us that much! Motivated by God’s love we can forgive the sins of others

because we have been forgiven much ourselves.

(d) Pray often and speak truth. *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.* Luke 18:1. We should pray often throughout the day to communicate with God. It will give us strength, peace, and help us be more worry-free. When we pray to God we can speak freely because God wants to hear our true feelings. *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* 1 Peter 5:7. Prayer grows our relationship with Him. In our dealings with others we can speak truth also. Jesus never avoided difficult conversations and often would speak what people needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear. Jesus reminds us of this when he prayed, *Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.* John 17:17.

Honest

Coaches that are great life teachers need to be honest. Athletes need to know that they can trust their coach and build a relationship where their coach can best help them. Don Meyer was one of the most honest coaches who, when he retired in 2010, held the record for most wins by a college basketball coach. He had a list of ideas for how coaches and

players can treat each other to build relationships and a sense of community:

Coaches and players with great team attitudes... (1) Listen to each other. (2) Are courteous to each other. (3) Show concern for each other. (4) Help each other out—share the load. (5) Say what they feel, but watch how they say it. (6) Don't put each other down. (7) Celebrate success. (8) Don't talk behind each others' backs. (9) Praise each other. (10) Treat everyone's opinions as important. (11) Treat mistakes as learning experiences.

On Don Meyer's website, there is a Bible verse that describes his faith: James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* Later in verse 17 the wisdom that comes from heaven is detailed: *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

How do we know what such a life looks like? We can look no farther than Jesus' life for an example of honest living and living through God's wisdom. Jesus is truth. He

states in John 14:6, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

When Jesus discussed with others he did not sweeten his message to get more people to like him, but instead just spoke truth. In Luke 14, we read that large crowds were following Jesus and he turned to them to speak. Author Kyle Idleman humorously states what Jesus could have said at this moment. *“What a great crowd! I want everyone to go invite one friend and come back tonight for a carnival. We’ll have live music. All the loaves and fish you can eat. We’ll even have a ‘water to wine’ booth...And whoever invites the most friends gets one free miracle. Let’s pack this hillside out.”*⁵

Instead of softening his message to make Christianity seem as appealing as possible, Jesus spoke truth. *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”* Luke 14:26-27. We know that Jesus does not really want us to hate our family, but he was making the point that we should love and be

dedicated to God above all else; even to the point of death. Nothing, not even our own life, should come before our dedication to God, as was shown in the fact that many of Jesus' disciples were martyrs for their faith. God should be the most important thing in our lives and guide all parts of our life.

Almost all of us will not have to face death for our faith like the disciples did, but we do face many things that try to take the place of our faith in God; possessions, popularity, money, status, power, and even family or loved ones. We can look to these things to give us what only God can give. Nothing on this earth can fulfill us like God's love! Jesus was being honest as to what it takes to truly follow His Word. No one lived a perfect life except Jesus, so there will be times when we sin, but motivated by God's love, we can strive to put Him at the forefront of our lives. We can remember the words of the great song, "In the morning when I rise," throughout the day. "In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus. You can have all the rest, give me Jesus."

Jesus was the greatest life teacher because His truth sets us free from the power of sin. Without Jesus, we would

be lost and condemned to hell for our sins. With Jesus we are declared holy and perfect and receive His righteousness. Because of this we can follow Jesus' example set on earth for how to live out God's love in our lives. Motivated and empowered by His Word this is possible.

We can take to heart these words about Jesus from Pastor Max Lucado. "I believe that He is a fountain of living water that will never be exhausted. I believe that He is a source of wisdom and strength that will never be expired. I believe that He has grace for every sin. He has answers for every question. He has an authenticity, a realness to Him that can captivate your heart. I believe that He can do for you what no possession can do, what no promotion can do, what no election can do, what no circumstance can do. I believe He can."⁶ What we have in Jesus is greater than anything we have or don't have in life!

Chapter 8: The World's Greatest Coach

God is the world's greatest coach because only He can do things that no human coach can do. God has an undefeated record, always makes the right decision, never cuts anyone from His team, and has a great eye for talent. There have been debates since the beginning of professional sports about who is the greatest coach of all time. The debate always focuses on number of wins and championships won. Some times the focus is on the players that the coach has trained. With God, Christians know we are all a part of His team. We agree that our coach is what matters and it is not any great things that we as humans have done. It is all the work of our loving Father and Creator.

God's coaching greatness is evident through the lives of Christians when we focus on the good things that God gives us. *Every good and perfect gift is from above.* James 1:17a. The previous chapters have focused on people in the Bible that God has helped to accomplish great things. Through their lives we have gotten a glimpse at the greatness of God. In this chapter we will look directly at the wisdom of God through verses in the Bible. No one has the knowledge that

God has and no one ever will. Through the Bible, we are given wisdom for our lives so that we can get a glimpse of God's majesty, power, and grace to help us in our time on earth and into life everlasting in heaven.

Coaches are known for their quotes and God has some of the best. Biblegateway.com is an excellent resource for looking up Bible verses and seeing different translations. It is becoming more and more popular. They have a blog that listed the most-read Bible verses at their website. It is not surprising that John 3:16 is number one. Number two is Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.* Number three is Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

The top searched verse, John 3:16, is often called the Gospel in a nutshell. It reveals the love of God in sending His one and only Son into the world to save the world from eternal death. The number two and number three verses let us know that through all things God has a plan for our time

on earth and ultimately everything will work out because God is in charge and He loves us so much.

Perfect decision-making

Sometimes when coaches are calling plays it seems like everything will work. It can be one first down after another, one made shot after another, one hit after another, or one out after another. In 2010 Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga had recorded 26 straight outs. It was an amazing feat in itself and he was just one out away from a perfect game! In over 135 years of Major League Baseball history, which is over 200,000 games, there have only been 23 perfect games. History was about to be made. Armando got a ground ball from the next hitter to the first baseman Miguel Cabrera. The ball required Cabrera to move to his right moving away from first base. This made Armando have to run over to first base to receive the throw from Cabrera. The runner was going fast to the base but the throw hit Galarraga's glove before the runner touched first base. Galarraga started to celebrate. The only problem was the umpire called the runner safe. It was an unbelievable mistake given the history that was going to be made.

After the game the umpire watched the replay and realized his mistake. He went into the locker room and could only say two words, “Lo siento”, which means I’m sorry. Galarraga responded with class and said, “No one is perfect.”

Though in sports there can be glimpses of perfection, no one is able to sustain it for more than a game or two. God however, has pitched a perfect game for an eternity. He was around before the world began and will be around for eternity. In all of that time, He has never made a bad decision. *As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him. Psalm 18:30. He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. Deuteronomy 32:4.*

Often in sports a great coach or player makes those around them better as well. A humorous story of this is a quote from Chicago Bulls player, Stacy King, who was asked after a game, in which Michael Jordan scored 69 points, how he would remember it. “I’ll always remember this as the night Michael Jordan and I combined for 70 points!” God

definitely makes those around him and those that know him better. His word is powerful, life-changing, and transforming!

In sports, statistics are often kept that detail the highlights and lowlights of a game. Negative plays including turnovers, missed shots, strikeouts, errors, and incompletions, all detail the mistakes that players have made. In our own lives, we know that we all will have times when we sin and mess up. In sports, mistakes go down in the permanent record, however, in our Christian lives we know that God forgives us our sins and they are completely erased forever. There is a poem by Louisa Fletcher that details the thoughts many might have at one time or another in which a person would want to start over. The beauty is that, in Christ, each day we are made new as forgiven and free children of God.

The Land of Beginning Again

I wish that there were some wonderful place
In the Land of Beginning Again.
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
and never put on again.
I wish we could come on it all unaware,

Like the hunter who finds a lost trail;
And I wish that the one whom our blindness had done
The greatest injustice of all
Could be there at the gates
like an old friend that waits
For the comrade he's gladdest to hail.
We would find all the things we intended to do
But forgot, and remembered too late,
Little praises unspoken, little promises broken,
And all the thousand and one
Little duties neglected that might have perfected
The day for one less fortunate.
It wouldn't be possible not to be kind
In the Land of Beginning Again,
And the ones we misjudged
And the ones whom we grudged
Their moments of victory here,
Would find in the grasp of our loving hand-clasp
More than penitent lips could explain...
So I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches,
And all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
And never put on again.
-Louisa Fletcher-

My campus pastor in high school, Rev. Timothy Berner, once gave a sermon in which he started, "I want everyone who sees themselves as perfect to raise their hands." Not a single person raised their hands. He went on to explain how each of us should have had our hands raised. Because we are forgiven by God and have His grace, then we are no longer sinners but saints. God does not see our

sin, but sees us as perfect and holy; therefore we should see ourselves in light of His grace as holy.

God does not keep a record of our wrongs. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* Psalm 103:12. Because God was willing to sacrifice His very Son for our sins, our sinfulness is replaced by holiness and perfection. *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* 1 Peter 1:15-16. God desires a better life for all people. When sin entered the world, God did not forsake us, but set in motion His plan for our salvation. God always makes perfect decisions even when we are not perfect and the world we live in is not perfect.

Has an eye for talent

Coaches need to be able to judge who should be on their team, what position they should play, and how often they should play. Legendary Notre Dame college football coach, Lou Holtz, once said, "I have coached good players and I have coached bad players. I'm a better coach with good players." Once a coach identifies talent it is important

that they instill in their players confidence in their abilities so that they can perform well.

The movie, *Moneyball*¹, is a true story of how the Oakland Athletics used mathematics and statistics to identify talent in players that would be a good fit for their team, given their budget. One scene in the movie shows Jeremy Brown, a portly 240 pound minor league catcher that needs a boost of confidence. Brown hits a long fly ball to the outfield. He almost never goes to second because he is afraid of getting thrown out. This time, however, he gets up speed to go for it, but is so nervous that he falls over rounding first base. He crawls back to first base while everyone is laughing. However, they are not laughing because he did not make it to second, but because the ball went about 60 feet over the fence for a homerun.

It is a fitting illustration that fear can cause us to stumble and not notice our powerful talents and capabilities that God has given us. Brown proceeds to get up and round the bases getting high fives from the players on the other team. God has given us all capable bodies and minds that

can learn new things and grow. God sees each one of us as special and knows that we are His beloved.

Author and Pastor, Jack Hayford, noted in the book, *On this Holy Night: The Heart of Christmas*, that the Greek words, “highly favored,” are used only two times in the New Testament.² The first time is in Luke 1:28 when the angel is telling Mary that she is highly favored. This makes a lot of sense giving that she will carry Jesus for 9 months and be the mother of the Savior of the world. The second time is in Ephesians 1:6 *So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.* It is amazing to note that we are highly favored as well! That is how much God cares about each one of us. Because of this we can be bold and have confidence in who we are as children of God. We are made special by God for a purpose and we should do our best to live this out.

Pastor, author, and motivational speaker, Robert Schuller, has asked, “What would you attempt to do if you knew you wouldn’t fail?” It is a motivating question to get moving on what we would like to do in our lives. God has made each one of us with the ability to work hard and to

learn so we are able to try new things and, even through our failures, learn and improve.

We are more likely to act ourselves into feeling rather than feel ourselves into action so it is important to be willing to take action. Leadership expert, John Maxwell, suggests saying, "Do it now," 50 times in the morning and before going to bed.³ The following poem can also be used as motivation, keeping in mind that God loves us and wants us to use our gifts and time wisely to glorify him.

If there were ever a time to dare,
To make a difference,
To embark on something worth doing,
It is now.
Not for any grand cause, necessarily—
But for something that tugs at your heart,
Something that's your aspiration,
Something that's your dream.
You owe it to yourself to make your days here count.
Have fun.
Dig deep.
Stretch.
Dream big.
Know, though, that things worth doing seldom come easy.
There will be good days.
And there will be bad days.
There will be times when you want to turn around,
Pack it up, and call it quits.
Those times tell you that you are pushing yourself,
That you are not afraid to learn by trying.
-Author unknown-

No one is cut from the team

John Gagliardi took over the St. John's college football team in Collegeville, Minnesota in 1953, and liked the job so much he was the leader of the team until 2012. He is the winningest football coach in college history with an astounding 489 wins! His teams won four national championships and won a remarkable 77.5% of their games! Some of his most famous quotes are, "We don't have goals, we just have high expectations." "We don't have a mission statement of any big philosophies. We just do it."

For all of Gagliardi's success he had quite an unorthodox approach to coaching. He called it "winning with no's." Gagliardi made no cuts to his football team. Sometimes he had over 100 freshmen players on the team, but believed in letting anyone be on his team. Some of the other no's included: no whistles at practice, no calling him coach, no mandatory weight lifting, no practices longer than 90 minutes, and no hitting at practice. The last one he instituted so his players would not get hurt at practice. The team practiced plays until they could be run with precision

and with little thought. St. John's showed that allowing anyone to play football can still lead to great success.

God has the same philosophy in that He does not cut anyone from His team. His goal is to have all come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Savior. *This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.* 1 Timothy 2:3-4. While some people may reject the free gift of eternal life, God wants **all** to be saved!

Because Jesus paid the painful price for our sins and the sins of the whole world, we can live our lives for Him. *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* 2 Corinthians 5:15. In response to Jesus' love we can live out our faith in thankful devotion to Jesus.

One of the pastors at my church, Pastor Bo Brink, preached a sermon once on what it would be like if Pentecost happened at our church with thousands of people gathering to see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! In Las Vegas there is a great demand to see the shows and there are long lines to get into the night clubs. People are willing to

spend a lot of money for these experiences. Sadly often church is only packed on Easter and Christmas. It would be a great problem to have if all year round there were waiting lines to get into church or if people had to be turned away so as not to violate the fire code. These problems could be readily and eagerly solved.

Similarly, what if the church had to tell people that they have given too much and should not give any more of their money, time, or possessions to the church? This occurred in Moses's time when their sanctuary was being built. *"The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done."* Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: *"No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary."* And so the people were restrained from bringing more. Exodus 36:5-6.

Always wins

No coach wins all the time except God. Everyone likes to be a part of the winning team and that is what we have in Christ. There will never be a losing season. There will never be a loss. There is never going to be a close game. God wins in a blowout every time. Billy Graham, speaks of

this confidence, "I've read the last page of the Bible, it's all going to turn out all right." *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:57.

Jesus Christ secured the victory over sin, death, and the devil once and for all with His death on the cross and His victorious resurrection. Because of this, death and the devil have no power over us.

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:55. That does not mean that evil does not exist and the devil is going to give up. However, we know that we are victors in Jesus Christ and that God triumphs over evil. *With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.* Psalm 60:12.

God wants us to pay attention and focus on His love in our lives through studying and discussing His Word, worshipping in church, and being active in prayer. That way we can block out the lies of the devil. Max Lucado had a sermon on our thoughts and what we should focus on. Gnats are annoying and pestering creatures, but instead we can focus on the thoughts that come from our free gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Devil

God

G-God-less

G-God-centered

N-negative

I-inspirational

A-amplified

F-factual

T-thoughts

T-thoughts

Each day we need God as the focus in our lives!

There is an old saying that seven days without God makes one weak. A post was circulating on social media to show how each day we do worse when we don't focus on God.

For each day there is a different name. Sinday, Mournday, Tearsday, Wasteday, Thirstday, Fightday and Shatterday.

We need God's presence and help in our lives every moment of every day.

In the Lord's prayer, we pray for God's will to be done. Luther's Small Catechism explains what happens when God's will is done. "He breaks and hinders the plans of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which try to destroy our faith in Christ Jesus...He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith and helps us lead God-pleasing lives."⁴

No matter what moment it is in our lives, we are better off being close to God. A beautiful hymn written by Sarah Flower Adams is "Nearer My God to Thee." It is based on Jacob's dream at Bethel in Genesis 28:11-19. Through the dream God spoke to Jacob and let him know, *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.* Genesis 28:15. It is the same promise that He makes for us.

When the ship, the Titanic, was sinking, the band members choose to stay on board and play this song so that others could be saved in the life boats. They knew that they faced almost certain death, but were confident in their sacrifice because they knew that heaven awaited them. This was the act of people that know they are victorious through Christ. Only Christians could have this sense of calm and peace before meeting death because they know that death is not the end. It is only the beginning of a beautiful life in heaven. The second line of the hymn means that Christians are willing to bear their crosses even to the point of death and still sing with gratitude their hearts desire of nearer my God to thee.

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;

Still all my song would be nearer, my God, to Thee,

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!⁵

Our hope can be that we draw nearer to God throughout our lives. Motivated by His love we can accomplish this through the work of the Holy Spirit and grow in our relationship with Him.

Graduation is often a great moment of victory for graduates and a time to celebrate. Pastor Mark Batterson once spoke at a college commencement and shared this advice. It is advice that we can keep in mind knowing that we are victors through Christ. We do not have to earn our place in heaven. It is a free gift of God.

Quit living as if the purpose of life
is to arrive safely at death.

Set God-sized goals. Pursue God-ordained passions.

Go after a dream that is destined
to fail without divine intervention.

Keep asking questions. Keep making mistakes.

Keep seeking God.

Stop pointing out problems and become part of the solution.

Stop repeating the past and start creating the future.

Stop playing it safe and start taking risks.

Expand your horizons. Accumulate experiences.

Enjoy the journey.

Find every excuse you can to celebrate everything you can.

Live like today is the first day and last day of your life.
Don't let what's wrong with you
keep you from worshipping what's right with God.
Burn sinful bridges. Blaze new trails.⁶

Great coaches can motivate others and God's grace
and love is the greatest motivation. God is the world's
greatest coach because He is the ultimate victor and has
freely given us the greatest prize the world will even know;
eternal life in heaven!

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