

What's the Cost?

READY

Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish." –Esther 4:15-16

SET

As athletes, we know the cost associated with excelling in sports. We sacrifice our bodies and endure muscle aches and injury to get stronger. We practice hours every day, often sacrificing other things, to refine our skills. What is the cost of following God? The story of Esther gives us a glimpse. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) crowned Esther queen, unaware that she was Jewish. Soon after, Haman (the king's right-hand man) ordered all Jews living in 127 provinces be killed. Esther's cousin pleaded with her to approach the king on their behalf. At that time, anyone who approached the king without being summoned could be put to death. Esther, realizing God had put her in a position to spare the Jewish nation, demonstrated her commitment to God, even when it meant possibly sacrificing her life.

Though we may not be called to save an entire nation, we are called to sacrifice our lives to follow God. Jesus' disciples dropped everything and followed Him, leaving their jobs, families, friends, and homes. In Matthew 16:24 Christ says, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

GO

1. What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross?
2. How did God honor Esther's obedience?
3. Are you willing to surrender your life to follow Jesus?

OVERTIME

Lord, I want to sacrifice daily to follow You. Help me be as bold as Esther was in obedience to You. I know it won't always be easy, but show me how to deny myself and follow You. Amen.

The Athlete's Secret

READY

"When you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." –Matthew 6:6

SET

What's the secret of an athlete? Speed? Strength? Size? Training? Any of those will provide an edge, but none are the real secret. The most powerful secret of an athlete is actually a spiritual discipline—prayer. When was the last time we really pressed into prayer? Not the prayers that say, "God, help me with the big game today," or, "Help me to play well." I'm talking about intense prayer—a time of truly seeking God's face and asking for His will. Many athletes may want to pray but simply don't know how. Here are eight simple tips for praying:

- 1 Reveal, don't tell. Don't report to God what He already knows. Let Him reveal what we don't know.
- 2 Shut the door. Find a place of solitude to meet God daily.
- 3 Open our mouths. Do not think our prayers, but say them out loud. A spoken prayer slows down thoughts.
- 4 Prepare our hearts. Listen to worship music to prepare for prayer.
- 5 Pray Scripture. Pick a Psalm and pray it out loud.
- 6 Petition. Devotion. Intercession. Ask God for our wants. Seek Him. Pray for others' needs.
- 7 Journal it. Write our prayers in a journal.
- 8 Find a prayer partner. Find a partner (maybe a teammate) to pray with each week.

GO

1. Out of the eight tips, what is one that you can start developing? 2. How can authentic prayer be a part of your competition?

OVERTIME

Lord, I admit that prayer is often hard for me. My mind wanders, and it is hard to focus. Today, I ask You to develop in me a heart for prayer. Teach me how to pray, Lord. Amen.



Followership

READY

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Mark 10:45

SET

NBA Player, Chauncey Billups, said, “To be a good leader, at some point you have to be a good follower. I was always a good follower. I always followed the right people and listened to the right things.

Those helped shape me as a leader.” So, are you a good follower?

I can’t tell you how many times I have heard “Are you a leader or a follower?” when I was growing up. A subtle principle was communicated through that question: “be a leader not a follower!”

But if everyone is leading, then who is following? I have never heard athletes confess, “I am just a follower. Leadership is just not for me.” We all want to lead. Volumes have been written on leadership, but very little has been written on followership. You know, the art and skill of being a great follower.

Followership is the beginning of leadership. The best competitors have mastered the art of following. Following means intentionally watching, learning from and imitating others. You observe those who are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, who live with humility and courage, who exhibit integrity and compassion, who make wise decisions, and then you choose to follow in their footsteps. Paul, as he followed the example of Jesus, urged other believers to imitate him in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”

You don’t follow others based on championships, title or position but example and influence. Followership starts at the foot of the cross. Pick up our cross daily and follow Him. Remember, when you follow well, you lead well.

GO

- 1 How can followership change your team, family, school, church and community?
- 2 Why is it hard to be a follower as an athlete?
- 3 Who is a great follower that you know? What makes him or her a great follower?

OVERTIME

“Father God in Heaven, I love You and desire to follow well. Amen.”



One For The Team

READY

“Jesus spoke these things, looked up to heaven, and said:

‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son so that the Son may glorify You.’” –John 17:1

SET

Baseball is a great team sport. Players work together to make their team successful. One of my favorite plays is when players give up their at bat for a possible victory in the end. This is an important play. The home-run hitters get all the glory, but these role players do just as much to help the team win.

Jesus knew He had a role to carry out for His team (His followers) and lived His life accordingly, preparing to take one for His team. Christ knew the plan for ultimate victory. He knew He was to be the sacrifice for our sin, that we might enjoy eternity with Him. Now that is a glory-filled event. Just as in baseball, where one play can change the whole course of a game, Jesus’ glorious sacrifice changed the course for all mankind. When we are asked to do something, or give up something for the team, we need to remember what Christ did on the cross. Surely, we can be Christ-like in making a small sacrifice, when we understand His ultimate sacrifice. Thank You, Lord for going to the cross for me!

GO

1. What is your reaction when you have to give yourself up for the sake of the team?
2. Do you truly understand the sacrifice Christ made for you?
3. How can you make sacrifices in your life to show a Christ-like attitude?

OVERTIME

Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sin. Help me be selfless in my actions. Show me how I can “take one for the team” and allow a teammate, friend, or family member to succeed. Help me have a Christ-like attitude in all I do. Amen.



The Right Path

READY

"So follow the way of good people, and keep to the paths of the righteous."
-Proverbs 2:20

SET

It was the biggest race of the season. All the runners were ready to go. The rugged course was full of hills and rough terrain, but it was THE race of the year. Every runner was excited to go. With a single shot the runners raced toward the opening in the woods. Early in the race seven runners broke from the pack and came to a fork in the path. The lead runner made the choice and each runner followed in stride.

In sports today there are leaders and followers. Some leaders set a great example, but others struggle to make the right decisions, thus leading others astray. They may be leaders, but they are leading their teammates down the wrong path. Many young athletes are very impressionable. They are looking for leadership above them, and will follow those leaders on and off the floor. And it takes an athlete who is strong in mind, body and spirit to discern the right path to follow. Most can easily be led the wrong way. We need to apply today's verse and follow men and women who stay on the right paths both on and off the field of competition.

As the seven runners blazed down the path, they quickly realized they were running the wrong way. This mistake caused all seven to finish in the back of the pack, thus losing the big race. Today, ask yourself whom you are following? What paths are they taking you down? Is yours the straight and narrow path of the righteous or the wide road to destruction? If you are on the wrong path, turn around! Head back in the other direction. It is NEVER too late to turn around and go the right way! Once you are on the right path, continue to follow it until you reach your goal ... your heavenly goal.

GO

1. Is someone leading you astray?
2. Are you leading others down the wrong path?
3. What path are you currently on, and where will it eventually lead?
4. Today, how can you start down and stay on the right path of life?

OVERTIME

Lord, thank You for being my guide through life. Help me to stay on the straight and narrow path that leads to You. Amen.



Extra Hours

READY

"Yet not as I will, but as You will."—Matthew 26:39c

SET

It was 2:20 p.m. I was late for practice. I ran into the locker room, grabbed my equipment, and headed to the training room to be taped. It was a great tape job, taking under four minutes. I ran to the field and greeted my assistant coach, "Sorry, I'm late." He chuckled, "Well, we better get moving it's 2:35 p.m. and the rest of the team will be here in about an hour. There is much work to be done."

He worked meticulously with me for one hour before every practice so I could excel. I knew that the harder I worked, and the more I sacrificed, the more value I would be to my team. I also knew my coach wanted me to make this sacrifice to teach me and discipline me in the fundamentals and reach my full potential. My hard work paid off many times. No time was greater than when our team upset the 10th ranked team in the country! I remember my teammates piling on top of me in celebration. I know that being at practice early every day made that possible. What a glorious hour for my coach and me to share!

My improvement on the field gave my coach great credibility and recognition. He was glorified through my performance. If God is our great coach and instructor, what sacrifices can we make on and off the field that will glorify Him?

GO

1. Are you willing to put in extra time for disciplines that will help you be better in your sport?
2. What are some disciplines that will help you off the field?
3. Are you spending enough time developing your spiritual life? Why or why not?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me and being my coach for life. Help me live a disciplined life that glorifies You. Increase my hunger to know Your Word and to spend time in prayer. Amen.



Be the Best

READY

"Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength." –Ephesians 6:10

SET

Legendary coach John Wooden coined a phrase “competitive greatness,” striving to be the best we can, not trying to be the best.

Five-time All-Pro Green Bay Packers lineman Jerry Kramer played from 1958 to 1968. In 1959, Jerry wanted to quit until one day Coach Vince Lombardi told Jerry he could become the greatest lineman in the NFL. Jerry decided to give 100 percent and became one of the greatest. He understood competitive greatness.

Coach Wooden defined competitive greatness as a real love for hard battle, knowing it offers the opportunity to be at our best when our best is required. These three concepts help me grasp competitive greatness:

Be Prepared! Wooden would spend 30 minutes teaching his players to put on socks. He said “I derived great satisfaction from identifying and perfecting those ‘trivial’ and often troublesome details, because I knew . . . that each one brought UCLA a bit closer to our goal: competitive greatness.” Having a passion to prepare will help us face the battle without fear.

Be Disciplined! If integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching, then competitive greatness is working hard when no one is watching. Martin Luther wrote, “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.”

Be Focused! Competitive greatness is focusing on a clear vision and not being sidetracked. Bill Hybels says vision is a picture of the future that produces passion.

GO

1. Who in your life has competitive greatness?
2. In what area of your life is competitive greatness most revealed?
3. How can your team have competitive greatness?

OVERTIME

Jesus, help me be the best athlete I can, so people will know that You are great, not me. Amen.



Smack

READY

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”—John 14:6

SET

You hear it on ESPN, read it in the papers, see it on the news: smack! Smack is a common form of vernacular used by players and sometimes coaches to establish or self-promote their performances. In short, it is trash talking. In every league, game, and team there is someone who has the gift of smack. Usually this person has an ego the size of Texas, humility the size of Delaware, and common sense the size of an M&M®. Smack-talkers usually just talk the talk, but fail to walk the walk.

In Jerusalem, the Pharisees could talk spiritual smack with the best of them. Yet they thought Jesus and His men were the trash talkers. Jesus only spoke the truth. No verse better illustrates this than John 14:6, in which Jesus says He is the only way to heaven. Many thought this was smack of the greatest kind, even blasphemy. Surely this Man could not back up what He was saying! But they found that Jesus really could talk the talk and walk the walk, and is the only way, truth, and life.

Let’s not talk smack. Our walk—our godly walk—should do the talking for us. We need to live for Him because He has given us the way, the truth and the life that leads to Him. Jesus did all the talking for us. We just need to follow His example and make sure our walk matches our spiritual talk!

GO

1. Are you a smack talker athletically or spiritually?
2. Does your walk match your talk?
3. What do you need to change to be more like Christ?

OVERTIME

Lord, help me guard my tongue, and develop a godly character in me. Show me where I need to allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse me, so that I can be more like Christ. I give You all the glory. Amen.



Going Halfway?

READY

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” –Matthew 28:19

SET

This verse is part of Christ’s Great Commission. As followers of Christ, this is an awesome commandment and responsibility we all share. My question is, how often do we go, but only halfway?

As athletes, we are constantly around teammates, competitors, and others who don’t know Christ. We go to practices, competitions, and social events where we are surrounded by people in need of a Savior, yet end up only going halfway—showing up, but not engaging them in what is most important to us: Jesus Christ. What stops us from going the whole way? Sometimes it’s simple forgetfulness or distractions, sometimes it’s fear, and sometimes it’s a lack of confidence or willingness to be different.

I encourage us all to do as Christ commands—“Go . . .”—but go all the way. Don’t stop halfway by only being in the same place, on the same team, or in a close relationship with a friend. Let’s show Christ through our actions and words, making disciples of all nations. As we do this, remember the last part of the Commission, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” We aren’t going alone!

GO

1. How often do you go halfway in Christ’s Great Commission?
2. What prevents you from going the whole way?
3. When and where can you go all the way today, sharing Christ as you go?

OVERTIME

Father, thank You for Your Son and His sacrifice. I admit that too often I fall short of sharing You with others, simply going halfway. I pray for Your forgiveness and ask for a renewed sense of boldness and purpose. I want to go all the way and ask for Your strength to make the most of every opportunity. Amen.

Fake Hustle

READY

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” –Romans 12:2

SET

Matt, an FCA student-athlete, was drafted out of high school in the first round of the Major League Baseball draft. He shared an interesting concept with me. He said that during warm-ups, the pro players did something called fake hustle. When running, they would move their arms faster than normal and over-exaggerate their legs up and down, but they were not running faster. From a distance the coaches thought they were hustling and giving 100%, but actually they were faking it.

As a competitor, we know if we are giving it our all. We do not fool ourselves. Fake hustle can fool others at a distance. Our goal should be to become the real deal and not be fake. It has to come from the heart. When our hearts are right, then our lives will automatically be transformed. If our hearts are not right, then we try to fake it.

We think that if we clean up the outside, then the inside will change. Actually, we need to be totally transformed by changing the inside first. The Lord Jesus Christ first wants your heart. When He has all of you, then the outside will change. From the overflow of our hearts, our lives will be transformed. In order to live for Christ each day, we must give our entire bodies to Him for His purposes. All our time, desires, and behaviors will belong to Him. We are called to be a living and holy sacrifice. We are not required to bring anything else along, but to deny our own selfish desires and follow God.

GO

1. Have you ever done the “fake hustle” in practice?
2. Have you ever fake hustled in other areas of your life or in your spiritual life? Why?
3. If you lived life inside out, how would your life be different? Be specific.

OVERTIME

Jesus, I desire to be the real deal. May I live from inside out, not outside in. Help me to change my game so that I can honor You. Amen.



Influence with Integrity

READY

The one who lives with integrity lives securely, but whoever perverts his ways will be found out. Proverbs 10: 9

SET

In today's world of sports, it seems that anything done for an advantage is fair game—as long as you don't get caught.

As a Major League pitcher, I have seen it all. Managers who spend their entire careers stealing the signs of other coaches from the dugouts and down the baselines. Players who reach base do the same thing. Pitchers are supposed to throw a clean, unscratched ball, but you can do some pretty cool things with a scuffed baseball.

As Christians, however, we are held to a higher standard. Our goal should be to live a life that's pleasing to God and that allows us to have influence on those around us. People seem to gravitate toward those who do things the right way. And on the other hand, if you're not living with integrity, your influence will quickly be torn down. If you're not trusted, then your relationships will have little eternal significance.

In the book of Daniel, we read about a young man who lived with great integrity. When he was given the chance to turn his back on God's commands, Daniel stood strong and gained influence over an entire kingdom. And, of course, there has been no greater example of integrity than Jesus Christ. He was who He says He was, and He lived a sinless life despite many opportunities to succumb to temptation.

Living with integrity in this day and age isn't easy. You might say it's harder than ever before. But with God's Word and the Holy Spirit guiding your steps, it is possible to be the person of integrity that He created you to be.

GO

1. What are some things that make it difficult to maintain integrity in today's world?
2. How would you define the relationship between integrity and influence?
3. What can you start doing today that will help set you on a path toward godly integrity?

OVERTIME

Lord, I want to walk upright in Your sight. Give me the determination to live with integrity through all that I say and do. Help me build trust within my relationships so that I might influence others for Your Kingdom.



Peace to You

READY

He said, "Don't be afraid, you who are treasured by God. Peace to you; be very strong!" As he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."—Daniel 10:19

SET

Sometimes we are up against opponents who may seem insurmountable, like an all-state player to guard or an all-conference tackle who has completely buried us in the past. Sports psychologists and coaches agree that the way we prepare for competition determines how we will perform in the heat of battle.

Daniel saw a vision of how the world was going to end and was so frightened he was shaking. An angel placed his hand on Daniel's shoulder and reminded him of a few things.

Don't be afraid. That is a command, not a suggestion. Our training prepares us to meet any challenge. We may not overcome every opponent, but as children of God, we do not need to have fear. God treasures us. He loves us very dearly and will take care of us.

God gives us peace. No matter what happens, God is in control and with us at all times. His incredible peace can only be given to those who know Him. Be very strong. How? Remember God's promises: we don't have to be afraid; He treasures us; and He gives us peace.

Do these promises mean we will always beat our opponents? Not necessarily. But with God in our hearts and a clear understanding of who He is and what He can do, something incredible just might happen.

GO

1. How do you react when a situation is out of your control?
2. Do you have the peace that the Bible promises?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, thank You for this reminder that I am Your treasured child. Help me stand strong in Your promises and deliver me from all fear. Thank You for living in my heart. Continue to teach me how to walk in Your ways. Amen





Northwest Louisiana FCA

12-Week Devotional

2015-2016

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”
1 Corinthians 15:57