

Wear the Colors

READY

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek." -Romans 1:16

SET

I can still remember when my coaches handed out uniforms to those of us who had made the cut. We were all so proud to be wearing our school's colors. The best part was being able to wear our jerseys to school on game days. Being identified as part of the team somehow made each one of us walk a little taller.

And now I have the blessing of seeing my young sons experience that same thrill of putting on their uniforms and being part of a team. When they put on their jerseys, they seem to grow in confidence, as if they are truly part of something special.

My sons are proud to represent their teams. They know that their teammates are counting on them and that they can count on their teammates. They will give everything they've got. They will leave it all on the field!

The reality is that everyone likes to be identified with his or her favorite team. No matter what are your favorite teams, chances are good that you like to wear gear with their logo on it. We all like to "put on the uniform."

As competitors for Christ, we are called to put on His uniform. The FCA Competitor's Creed states:

I am a Christian first and last.

I am created in the likeness of God Almighty to bring Him glory.

I am a member of Team Jesus Christ. I wear the colors of the cross.

If God passed out a jersey to everyone who was a part of His team, would you be proud to wear yours? Would you grow in confidence knowing that you were representing the Creator of the universe? Would it make you give everything you've got? Would you be proud to "wear the colors of the cross," or would you be ashamed?

GO

1. Are you as excited to be identified with Jesus as you are to be identified with your favorite sports team?

2. What are some practical ways that you can "wear the colors of the cross" when you are competing?

3. How will knowing that Jesus is on your team help you to be more confident when you compete?

OVERTIME

Lord, help me to be eager to be identified with You. Help me to represent You in competition and in life, for I am not ashamed of the gospel! Amen



Heart Check

READY

"Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart." –Ephesians 6:6

SET

Here's a heart check—do we do what pleases our coaches all the time or only when they are watching? Do we do the right thing just to win their favor or because it's right? In Ephesians 6:6, Paul was rather direct with the people of Ephesus about their work ethic.

I often watch teams closely during practice and as they warm up prior to competitions. I see players who give a great effort when the coach is watching, but as soon as the coach's head is turned, some of those players immediately start cutting corners and cheating on drills. Their hearts are not fully with their coaches or their teammates. They fail the heart check.

Our challenge is to give the same effort when no one is watching as we do when the head coach is right beside us. That is called integrity. A whole heart will lead us to do the right thing whether anyone is watching or not.

As we prepare to compete, let's give a whole-hearted effort to the pursuit of a great team victory. When we compete with integrity we don't have to waste time looking over our shoulders.

GO

1. Do you do what pleases your coaches all the time or only when they are watching?

2. Do you do the right thing just to win their favor or because it's right?

3. How about some of your teammates?

4. How would an attitude of integrity change you?

OVERTIME

Father, forgive me for cutting corners when I thought no one was looking. I want to be a person of integrity. Help me be obedient to You and walk above reproach on and off the field. Help me give 100 percent all of the time. Amen.



Rumble Strips

READY

“[Whoever] still won’t obey after being warned many times will suddenly be destroyed. Nothing can save him.” – Proverbs 29:1 (NIRV)

SET

Every now and then when I’m driving I go outside the lines and hit those rumble strips that make my car rattle and warn me to get back in my lane. While they’re annoying, they often keep me from disaster.

In the Bible, God sets up guardrails, or principles, designed to protect us. For example, in Ephesians 5:18 He tells us not to get drunk because it’ll lead to reckless actions. If we stay inside His guardrails, we’ll experience God’s best! However, before we hit these firm guardrails, we can choose to put rumble strips in place that warn us ahead of time. These are personal standards of behavior (e.g. not going to parties with alcohol) that prevent disaster and promote the life of Christ in us. They can be different for everyone, but they help us stay far from sin and decisions we’ll regret.

Rumbles strips do several things:

- 1 Wake us up. Sometimes we don’t realize the decisions we’re making could lead to big mistakes. Going over a rumble strip can open our eyes.
 - 2 Keep us on track. God’s narrow road leads to life (Matthew 7:14). He has an amazing adventure planned for us, but choosing detours creates delays and robs us of a deep relationship with Him.
 - 3 Prevent disasters for us and others. Our choices affect more than just us. Others will get hurt when we cross rumble strips.
- Pay attention to God’s warnings, and set up rumble strips in key areas of your life (relationships, alcohol, etc.) that will warn you of danger and keep you on the path that leads to life.

GO

- When are you most vulnerable to fail?
- What rumble strips do you need to keep you from disaster?

OVERTIME

“Father, show me where to put rumble strips in my life that protect me from sin and promote life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

Waiting

READY

“But those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.” –Isaiah 40:31

SET

Waiting is one tough job! In sports, players and teams are waiting . . . waiting patiently for their time to shine. In God’s Word, Isaiah wrote in chapter 40 that waiting is a good thing. The word “wait” does not measure time spent, but is rather a process of strengthening until fulfillment. Let me suggest three reasons why we must wait on the Lord: (1) waiting creates time during which we can trust God more (Psalm 27); (2) waiting prepares us to have our real needs met (Psalm 40); and (3) waiting encourages us to always be prepared for Christ’s return (Matthew 24).

What are we waiting for—an answer to our prayers, a loved one to come to Christ, or an opportunity to play for our team? Regardless of the reason, we know through God’s Word that waiting will be worth it in the end.

Do we trust God during our season of wait? Do we lean on Him or blame Him for the things we are waiting upon? We must let Him give us strength during our wait to allow us to soar, walk, and run in Him when His time of fulfillment in and through us comes.

GO

1. For what don’t you like to wait?
2. Are you growing weary of waiting on God to act in your life?
3. Today, how can you find strength, patience, and rest in waiting upon the Lord?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, forgive me for being impatient at times when I am not getting what I want. Help me to see waiting not as a measurement of time, but rather the process of training and strengthening until fulfillment. Today I choose to trust Your perfect, sovereign timing. Amen.



Sharing Your Faith

READY

When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what must we do?” –Acts 2:37

SET

I remember a teammate coming to me and asking, “So how do I become a Christian?” After trying to share Christ with this guy for two seasons, he was finally open! Here was a great window of opportunity and I choked! My answer was pretty lame!

We may pray for our teammates, encourage them, give them literature, provide positive role models, and hopefully shatter their misconceptions of what they perceive a Christian to be; but are we prepared when they ask, “What must we do?” Do we have a response? Sometimes we are so focused on preparing the message that when it comes time to deliver, we blow it.

Can we explain the basics of Christianity? The Apostle Peter emerged as a brilliant communicator, but it wasn't a natural gift. The Holy Spirit gave him the words and he proclaimed them fearlessly. He was prepared. In Acts 2, we learn from Peter's very effective proclamation that first, he and his friends had been praying; second, he had guidance by the Holy Spirit; third, he used Scripture to communicate the good news; and lastly, he was genuinely eager for them to be saved. Having the opportunity to share our faith with a friend will be one of the most significant opportunities of our lives. We need to be prepared and get some training. At the least, if we are caught off guard, we can say, “Let me show you what Peter said when somebody asked him about spiritual matters. Let me show you Acts 2.”

GO

1. Have you shared your faith with anyone recently?
2. What can you do to make sure you are prepared for if/when you get the opportunity?

OVERTIME

Father give me the words and opportunities to tell my teammates about You. Amen.

You Will Suffer

READY

“Now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.” –Acts 20:22-24

SET

I remember starting practice for fall sports after a lazy summer. Practice often included two-a-days—working in the morning and afternoon to get in shape for the season. If we didn't stay in shape during the summer, we were going to suffer.

Suffering, pain, and hardships are not things we look forward to. How often do we pray for anything on that list—or thank God for such difficulties? We avoid them! We would rather experience God's blessings, favor, and success. Yet Paul not only experienced persecution on a regular basis, the Holy Spirit led him into it.

This passage doesn't fit our usual image of God—led by the Holy Spirit into hardships? facing prison? What about making me lie down in green pastures or leading me beside quiet waters?

The next time we suffer through a grueling training session, we should remember Paul. God led him into situational suffering to produce everlasting fruit for His kingdom. Are we up for the challenge? Are we willing to go where God leads to testify about His Grace—even if it means hard times?

GO

1. Have you ever obeyed God and suffered for it?
2. Does this idea that God leads us into hardships stretch your picture of God?

OVERTIME

Father, I want to be ready and willing to go wherever You lead, even if it includes suffering. Please help me to be faithful and obedient to Your will. Amen.



Rules, Rules, Rules

READY

"Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. . . . If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone." –Romans 12:9,18

SET

As a young coach I had a sign on my office door: "Rules for Our Program. Rule 1. The Coach is always right. Rule 2. If you think the coach is wrong, see Rule 1." My players always thought that was funny and, remarkably, true most days. Throughout athletics, rules govern the game. Our lives are no different. In Romans 12:9-20, you read a lengthy list of strong suggestions on how to live a godly life. As you look through the list, you will find the "do's" outweigh the "don'ts" over three to one. God's Word is filled with amazing truths of how we should live out our lives to be different from the inside out. Too many people who follow Christ look at these instructions as negative things they cannot do, rather than focusing on the positive to enhance their faith and lives. Love, learn, and live—all key elements of today's passage—are great words to live by even today. This message from God's Word is not just a list of rules to bog down your life, but to give you hope, to give you direction, and to give you a sense of God's plan for your life. Your obedience and response to these godly rules will determine your outcome in the game of life. Remember my two rules? They are really God's rules for life. Just take out "the coach" and insert "God." Trust and obey, and follow His way!

GO

1. What are the rules for your program or team? Do you agree or disagree with them? Explain.
2. Read through the "do's and don'ts" in Romans again. What "do's" are the biggest struggle for you? What "don'ts" challenge you the most?
3. How can you apply God's rules to your life each day?

OVERTIME

Lord, help me to learn Your rules, then help me follow them. Amen.

Not as You Thought

READY

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." This is the Lord's declaration.—Isaiah 55:8

SET

Life rarely turns out as we thought it would. Sports aren't any different. It may be fun to dream of the players we could be, but things do not always turn out as planned. Sometimes it's hard to see, but looking back we realize it all worked for the best. I am glad for the things that are not as I had intended, because I would have missed a lot.

God does not often work in the ways we may think He would. He works beyond them. He does not fit in the box in which we are prone to put Him. In fact, He seems to do what does not make sense. The Savior of the world came as an infant, became a carpenter, rode on a donkey, served alongside fishermen, and died alongside criminals.

Yet, it was this carpenter who gave sight to the blind, fed thousands with a few loaves, and raised people from the dead. Talk about a story that was not as one might predict. In fact, it was so far from what the Pharisees thought it would be or should be that they missed it. They missed their Savior. How often do we miss the thing that could save us because it doesn't look as we think it should? Wrapped up in pain and disappointment, we miss our opportunity for something better. Don't miss your opportunity for joy—it's probably riding on the trial at your feet.

GO

1. Can you think of a time when something upsetting ended up as a blessing?
2. What trial are you facing? How can you turn it into an opportunity for joy?

OVERTIME

God, thank You for the times when the things I thought were failures turned out to be blessings. Knowing that You are working for my good, I choose to trust You. 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.

Coach's Correction

READY

"A rebuke cuts into a perceptive person more than a hundred lashes into a fool." –Proverbs 17:10

SET

How do we respond to our coach’s correction? How do we react when a teammate tells us our technique needs improvement? The answers could reveal a lot about our character.

How deeply impressed would we be by 100 blows to our back? Pretty deeply I suppose. For athletes this may be 100 laps around the gym floor. I hope it wouldn’t take 100 to make an impression. For fools it seems that it takes 100 blows to make a good impression. For people of understanding, it takes something else.

Scripture states that a rebuke makes a greater impression on a person of understanding than running 100 laps would. One correction to a wise person is of greater effect than doing 100 up-downs. One closed-door conference with the coach goes deeper into the smart player than 100 trips up and down the bleachers.

GO

1. How do you respond to your coach’s correction?
2. How do you react when a teammate tells you your technique needs improvement?
3. When do you sense the Lord’s correction for your life?
4. How do you respond when the Holy Spirit prompts changes in your life?

OVERTIME

Lord, I don’t want to be a fool. Help me be open to correction. Keep me from getting defensive. Let me be quick to listen and slow to speak. Please make me a person of understanding and surround me with people who desire wisdom. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.



Stand

READY

"This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand." – Ephesians 6:13

SET

You may be familiar with the story of James J. Braddock, which was told in the film Cinderella Man. Braddock was a former successful boxer who lost everything he had in the Great Depression. He couldn't get work (much less a fight), couldn't pay his bills, and was running the risk of losing his children. In 1934, Braddock got a chance to fight against the number-two contender. He accepted the challenge even though he hadn't trained or eaten a decent meal in a few years. He stepped into the ring for the money, but while in there, something clicked. At one point, his opponent hit him with a powerful clean shot across the mouth. The only thing on Braddock's mind was his freezing children. Amazingly, he stayed on his feet, walked across the ring to pick up his mouthpiece, and asked for more. Braddock won the fight outright. The Greek word for "stand" in Ephesians 6:13 is *histemi*, which also means to appoint or establish. When we stand firm after life delivers what seems like a shot to the head, we send a strong message to both those who meant harm and those watching. More people are watching than we know.

GO

1. What tough hits have you taken recently?
2. Are you trying to stand on your own strength or Christ's?
3. What motivates you to stand during the tough times?

OVERTIME

Jesus, there are many times I feel like I'm losing the fight. Please help me when I feel worn out. Teach me to use the full armor of God—from the helmet of salvation to the feet prepped with the peace of the gospel. Help me serve You wholeheartedly when things get tough. Thank You, Lord. Amen.

Sacrifice

READY

"No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends."—John 15:13

SET

In lacrosse, there are many essential pieces of equipment: gloves, elbow pads, shoulder pads and, most important, helmets. After mentally preparing myself for my final collegiate game, I started getting ready physically. I put on my game shorts, then my shoulder and arm pads. I laced up my cleats. All that was left was my helmet. I reached into my bag and found gloves, some tape, socks, a few lacrosse balls, but no helmet. I looked around thinking someone might be playing a prank on me, but this was no joke. I had left the most important piece of equipment three hours west in my locker.

The coaches looked at me in disbelief, "How could you possibly do this?" On the final day of my playing career, the only way I could play was if one of my teammates sacrificed his own ability to play and gave me his helmet. Sometimes Christ shows up in unlikely places—in this case, a locker room. In my moment of need, my teammate Ryan became a model of Christ, sacrificing his last chance to play so I could.

We need to model Christ to others, our words and actions reflecting Him. Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary use words." Ryan did that by giving me his helmet.

There are plenty of opportunities to serve our teammates: helping carry water or doing something big like Ryan. It doesn't matter how big or small, it is still serving. Let's find a way to model Christ to our teams.

GO

1. Has anyone ever helped you in a crisis?
2. How did that make you feel?
3. If the opportunity arises, are you willing to help people, even if it means putting aside your own needs?

OVERTIME

Lord, may my words and actions bring You glory. Show me ways I can serve my teammates, even if it requires sacrifice from me. Amen.





Northwest Louisiana FCA

12-Week Devotional (2)

2015-2016

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