

Week 1: It's All About Heart

READY

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or his stature, because I have rejected him. Man does not see what the Lord sees, for man sees what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.'"

-1 Samuel 16:7

SET

The Bible talks about the heart all the time -- more than 540 times! The Lord even told Samuel that He looks at the heart, not the external stuff. God looks at the internal -- the heart. As athletes, we need to not only play with our hearts, but also we need to have hearts that are sold out to Jesus. We know what it means to give our all on the field, but do we know what it means to give our all when it comes to loving God?

Here is an easy HEART acronym to remember how to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength:

H: HUNGRY Heart. Do you have a committed heart that is fully His? A hungry heart that devours the Word of God and that prays continually?

E: EXPECTING Heart. Do you expect great and mighty things from a great and mighty God? Are you asking God for more? Do you expect spiritual breakthrough in your life?

A: ABUNDANT Heart. Is your heart full of God's love? Is it overflowing with thankfulness?

R: REAL Heart. Are you the real deal? Is your heart a HOT heart (honest, open and transparent)?

T: TEACHABLE Heart. Is your heart soft? Are you teachable? Are you a "know-it-all" athlete or a "teach-it-to-me" athlete?

Remember, it's all about HEART!

GO

1. Are you an athlete who plays with heart?
2. Why is the heart so important when playing sports?
3. Looking at the HEART acronym, what one do you do the best? Which one needs the most work?
4. How can you play and live every day with HEART?

OVERTIME

"Lord, I want to play and live with heart. Make my heart soft and sensitive to Your leading. I hunger for You. I am expecting awesome things from an awesome God. Grant me an abundant heart that overflows with thankfulness. A real heart that is transparent. A teachable heart that is open all the time."

Week 2: Living Sacrifices

READY

"Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship. 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 12:1-2

SET

Sacrifice is something most people never even consider, let alone complete. Let's consider what it is to be a living sacrifice.

At the time of this writing by Paul, sacrifices were usually killed and laid upon an altar to be burned. The problem with "living sacrifices" is that they tend to crawl off the altar when it gets a little hot. We start with good intentions of making a sacrifice for our teammates, our family, or career, but when it gets uncomfortable we often snatch the sacrifice from the altar and lose the reward that comes from faithfulness.

The good news is that God's grace enables us to offer our very bodies in daily service to Him. He calls it holy, pleasing service that is a spiritual act of worship. We must let God's grace move us to sacrifice whatever it takes to pursue a life "holy and pleasing" to Him.

GO

1. What sort of sacrifices have you made for your athletic career?
2. What have you given up to pursue a life of athletics?
3. Has it been worth it? Why?
4. How is your daily life as a competitor true worship of Christ Jesus?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, I ask for Your forgiveness for the times I have failed to place myself and remain on the altar. I want a lifestyle that is pleasing to You and brings glory to Your name. Show me how to offer my body as a living sacrifice today—a sacrifice that is "holy and pleasing" to You. Renew my mind today so that I may discern what is good. Amen.

**Week 3:
God Doesn't Fumble**

READY

"I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you."
—Joshua 1:5

SET

Coaches work hard in preparing their players to do their best and avoid mistakes. One of the biggest mistakes in football is dropping the ball. Typically the team that fumbles the most in a game will lose. Recently I experienced a back problem that caused me to be in bed for days. A little voice crept in and said, "Why, God? Where are You?" My brother has been diagnosed with cancer. A friend of mine recently lost his sister to cancer. That little voice crept in and said, "Why, God? Where are You?" I find myself sinning again and that little voice of doubt creeps in, "God doesn't like sin—you are separated from Him." God reminded Joshua that He is faithful and will never fail or abandon him. The word abandon also means to drop or let loose. God promised Joshua that He would never drop, fumble, or abandon him. That same promise applies to us. There are times we may feel alone and wonder "why?" We question if God has abandoned us. We may sin and feel God can't forgive us. The truth is that God will not abandon us or drop us. God doesn't fumble. God is with us, holding us tight against Him, not allowing us to be fumbled or dropped. He is our faithful God!

GO

1. How many times in life have we felt like we dropped the ball and made a mistake? 2. How many times have we felt like we are the ball and God has dropped us? 3. What can you do to remember that God is faithful?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, thank You for being a faithful God who loves me and promises to never fail or abandon me. Forgive me for those times I have doubted Your presence. Today I choose to walk in victory, knowing that You are with me! Amen.

**Weeks 4:
It's Not About Me**

READY

"There was a man named John who was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light." —John 1:6-8

SET

John reminds us to focus on God, and not think highly of ourselves. I once spoke at an event for a large number of kids. Before me, another speaker fumbled through his words in a monotone voice. As I listened, my sinful side said, "Dude, those kids are going to love you compared to this guy." I couldn't believe what I was thinking. My pride rose up and I hadn't even stepped on stage. I was soon reminded, it's not about me. The host introduced me as a youth pastor—which I'm not; and in the closing prayer, thanked God for me—using the wrong name. I drove home laughing. Those kids had no idea who I was or where I worked. God sent John the Baptist to tell everyone about the true light. His mission in life was to point others to Jesus Christ. John knew it wasn't about him. He didn't allow his pride to swell. He was content with not receiving the glory, because he knew all the glory belonged to God. God blesses us with gifts and talents, allowing us to succeed. Let's thank Him for our talents, gifts, and success, and point others to Him. I was wrong for thinking highly of myself. I'm here to point to Jesus.

GO

1. How do you feel when athletes take all the glory? 2. When have you taken all the glory or allowed your pride to swell up? 3. How can you point others to Jesus?

OVERTIME

Heavenly Father, please forgive the times I have allowed my pride to swell up. You are the giver of all gifts and talents. Thank You for placing me in a position to succeed. May all glory and praise be to You! Amen.

Week 5: Facing the Competition

READY

“For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.” –2 Timothy 1:7

SET

Every once in a while we encounter an opponent in competition who, by all accounts, is unbeatable, and it prompts fear in our team. Some opponents seem to grow larger and larger as we approach game day. The media reports and general word-of-mouth discussions depict them as giants. How should we approach such an opponent?

Your opponents on the athletic field are worthy of your respect. They are not, however, worthy of fear! The work of God’s Spirit within us does not bring fear. It brings courage.

Instead of fear, God has given us:• Power—not just physical power, but power that comes from deep within.• Love—not an emotional attraction to someone, but a powerful force that desires the highest good for those around us. Concern and sacrifice for teammates, coaches, and family—that’s real love.• Sound judgment—not just doing well in school, but having a mental soundness that is related to doing the right things and accurately assessing the truth.

As we approach competition, we must not fear our opponents, but exercise power, love, and soundness of mind in a day of greatness in competition.

GO

1. Are you afraid of facing anyone in competition? 2. How can you overcome that fear? 3. What are some creative ways that will help you focus on God’s gift of a sound mind?

OVERTIME

God, give me the strength and courage I need to face my opponents. Help me to see them through Your eyes and not my own. Amen.

Week 6: Jesus Tough

READY

“Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.” –James 1:2-4

SET

Life demands toughness. I thought it was tough being a student. Then I got a real job. Tough! I thought it was tough playing in the NFL. Then I got married. Tough! I thought it was tough being married. Then I had kids. Tough!

One of the great lessons sports can teach us is how to be tough. But it’s not about toughness alone. Some of the toughest people I know are homeless. They are tough but without a purpose. James 1:2-4 refers to toughness with a purpose. Being a complete player or Christian is not about performance as much as about relationship. If we are rightly related to Christ, He will show us His plan and His toughness will carry us through pain and struggles. The key to being tough is keeping our eyes on the prize. For athletes, it’s the ring. For Christians, it’s the Lord saying, “Well done!”

Tough is doing what you are asked to do. Jesus tough is playing to the level of your coach’s vision for the team. Tough is playing with pain. Jesus tough is allowing your teammates to challenge you to play above the pain. Tough is receiving criticism for making a mistake. Jesus tough is admitting you were wrong without excuses. Tough is suffering the consequences of bad choices. Jesus tough is accepting responsibility for bad choices and learning from them. Tough is being a leader on the field. Jesus tough is being a leader in every area of life.

GO

1. What “tough” situations have you experienced? 2. Did you rely on God during those experiences? 3. How do you plan to become “Jesus tough”?

OVERTIME

Lord, I don’t pray for an easy life. I pray to become strong for Your service. Amen.



Week 7: Get Up

READY

“For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.” – Ephesians 6:12

SET

It was a week before the big game. Coach knew how to prepare his team. Every day he broke down the opponent’s offense and defense so his team knew them almost better than they knew themselves. For that week, he added one task to the end of every practice, firmly believing it would make a difference.

A game plan is vital for every contest. Throughout Scripture, God’s game plan was instituted among His coaches. Jesus provided the greatest example of preparing for battle. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. Satan thought he had the perfect plan, but Jesus was so prepared that every time Satan tempted Him, He came back with an impenetrable defense: God’s Word.

Christ was alert and ready for every move because He was prepared for everything thrown His way. What was this post-practice assignment the team performed each day? After practice, the coach brought out ladders, and the team cut down the nets. To be champions, we have to act like champions. The team defeated their tough opponent and cut down the nets just like they had all week. Jesus set the example that being alert and ready is part of being prepared for battle. Just as Jesus “got up” for Satan, the team “got up” for their big game. What do we need to do to “get up” and face our trials and temptations?

GO

1. How do you “get up” for the big game? 2. Are you alert and ready for life on a daily basis? 3. How will you get up to stand up for Jesus?

OVERTIME

Lord, I realize my fight is not against anything in this world, but against Satan. Help me be prepared the next time Satan tries to discourage me. Help me wear the full armor of God today. Amen.

Week 8: Bigger. Faster. Stronger.

READY

“Train ourselves to be godly. 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 Tim. 4:7-8

SET

Growing up, sports were my life. No matter what the season, I had a ball in my hand. When I got to high school, I realized that I had to train with more focus and intensity. I needed to get bigger, stronger, and faster. Over 95% of an athlete’s time is spent training and less than 5% competing. Training prepares us for game time. We make sacrifices to get better. Tim Tebow says “hard work always beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” Some athletes want the results without the work, but that’s not the way it works. Our desire needs to be matched by our do. Spiritually speaking, most of us spend very little time training for life. We call it devotions, but we aren’t very devoted. We call it quiet time, but then rush through to tackle the noise of the day. If we’re honest, most of us don’t even have a plan. And our hit-and-miss approach is littered with excuses that we’re too tired or too busy. We need to put ourselves in position for God to do what only He can do – transform us from the inside out. We need to show up and put in some time. We can’t be weekend warriors. If we want to experience real life-change, we have to train. Make a sacrifice, get a plan, and show up for the workout. There are no shortcuts to godliness. We must do the training and let God do the changing.

GO

1. What are some things that you could do on a daily basis that will increase your spiritual capacity? 2. If you could do one thing for maximum spiritual growth and life change, what would you do?

OVERTIME

Father, give me the desire and discipline to begin and stick with a spiritual training program that increases the capacity of my heart and soul. When I show up and train, you will bring change from the inside out. Amen.



Week 9: Use Your Gifts

READY

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” -Matthew 25:29

SET

No matter what sport we play or coach, each one of us has been given specific gifts. Whether we compete at the middle school, high school, college or professional level, each one of us has been given gifts. When we put those gifts to use according to God’s purpose for them, great things happen.

God is the giver of every good thing. No matter where we are at in our athletic life, God gave us what we are using. He is the reason we can run, jump and throw. He is the reason we can swing a racquet, club or bat. There are even some world-class athletes who don’t run, but still use God’s gifts of athleticism. For instance, did you know that this year’s Boston Marathon was covered in less than two hours by an amazing athlete in a wheelchair?

No matter how we play a sport, the fact that we are able to play at all is truly a gift from God. When we realize that God created the universe, it is easier to comprehend that He gave us athletic ability. The question then comes down to whether or not we are using those gifts to bring glory to Him or to ourselves.

The world tells us that we play to win. I’ve heard (and even said myself) the statement, “If they didn’t care who won, they wouldn’t keep score.” I don’t know a single athlete or coach who likes to lose. But, if our only goal is to win the game, we aren’t using the gifts God has given us in the way He wants us to.

Today, whether you win or lose, realize that God has blessed you with the ability to compete. Then, go out and do your best to honor Him with what you’ve been given.

GO

1. Why do you compete? 2. What is one thing that brings an athlete success? 3. What are you doing daily to become the best athlete you can be?

OVERTIME

“Father, today, let us give thanks to You, the giver of all things. At the end of the day, let us be able to say that we competed not for earthly wins but for Your glory.”

Week 10: Contentment in All Circumstances

READY

“I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.” — Philipians 4:11–13

SET

During the 2003–2004 basketball season, I experienced what coaches fear most. We won only two games while losing twenty-five. Most of our games were not even close. The boys tried hard, but we were overmatched in most games. It was a difficult and humbling time. I questioned myself and my ability. About halfway through the season, as the losses mounted and the frustration and disappointment increased, I came across these verses during a study time. Suddenly, everything came back into focus.

As Paul wrote from prison, he expressed that his circumstances had nothing to do with his contentment. It did not matter to him if he had plenty or had nothing. He could be content while in prison or while on the mission field. As I read these lines I substituted my own words. “I know what it is to win games, and I know what it is to lose games. I have learned the secret of contentment in any and every situation, whether winning or losing.” Paul’s secret was his relationship to Jesus Christ. As coaches for Christ we need to remember that the source of our contentment lies not in the victories, but in our relationship with Christ.

GO

1. What is the source of my contentment? 2. Do I “live or die” with every victory or loss? 3. Am I focusing on Jesus Christ or the circumstances of this world?

OVERTIME

Lord, I pray that You will be the source of my contentment. I realize that all of the circumstances of this world, whether positive or negative, are only temporary. The only thing that is lasting is my relationship with You. Teach me to be content in You. Thank You, Lord, for loving me. Amen.

Week 11: Advantage of Adversity

READY

“For I know the plans I have for you—this is the Lord’s declaration—plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

— Jeremiah 29:11

SET

Athletes typically respect one another. We all share a single-minded, committed lifestyle that tends to be laced with adversity, but the adversity is the price we pay to excel. An athlete’s identity and purpose all too often hinge on performance, so what happens when adversity strikes, making our performance less than ideal? If our identity is wrapped up in athletic success, then we are resting on shaky ground.

It’s important to remember that what we see as adversity, God sees as opportunity. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gn 38), and was imprisoned for thirteen years for a crime he did not commit. Nevertheless, at the end of his ordeal, Joseph was able to say, “What men meant for evil, God used for good.” He was right. Joseph became second in command over all of Egypt.

When I was a young man, playing ball meant the world to me. God blessed me with natural ability, and I excelled at my sport. Then adversity struck. The first NFL team that signed me, cut me. I saw myself as a failure and thought that my life was over. Down and out, I grudgingly headed to Tampa Bay to play for the Bandits, part of the USFL. It was there, through the Bandits’ chapel program, that I met Jesus, and then God called me to do youth ministry. God can do great things with circumstances that appear discouraging to us. Whether we are deceived, beaten, jailed, surrounded by lions, or cut from a team, we are being prepped through adversities for divine opportunity.

GO

1. What adversities are you currently facing? What is being revealed about your character? 2. How will you choose to respond to the current adversities you are facing?

OVERTIME

Lord, I pray for grace and humility to see my troubles as opportunity for blessing, both for myself and for others, and as a means for You to be glorified through my life Amen.

Week 12: Courage

READY

“Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go.”

— Joshua 1:6–7

SET

When does sport demand courage? Is it when we face superior competition? Is courage a factor in overcoming fatigue? What role does courage play in overcoming adversity? Today’s Scripture links strength and courage in a powerful combination.

Joshua had just taken leadership of his people after Moses had died. As he assumed this most intimidating role, God told him twice to be strong and courageous, adding the second time to be very courageous. Courage would obviously be a most important quality for Joshua’s leadership.

What situations in today’s competitions may require us to be strong and very courageous? Some situations could be as scary to us now, as replacing Moses would have been to Joshua.

The Lord’s words to us today would be the same as they were to Joshua. He would say, “Be strong and very courageous. Walk boldly into today’s competition with strength and confidence. Take on your opponent with great courage and determination to win.”

GO

1. When does your sport demand courage of you? 2. What role does courage play in overcoming adversity? 3. What are the situations in today’s competition that may require you to be strong and very courageous?

OVERTIME

Father, infuse me and my team with courage as You did Joshua and his followers so many years ago. Enable us to be strong and courageous as we compete in a way that will honor You and our Lord Jesus. Amen.





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12-Week Devotional Guide

“And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Colossians 3:17