



CROSSOVER SPORTS

2021-2022 DEVOTION KIT



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Coach,

Thank you for volunteering your time and energy to invest in your players and their families this season. We hope you know how much we appreciate you and how grateful we are for your sacrifice as well as the sacrifice of your family during this season.

As outlined in our coaches' manual, we want our players to grow on the field/court throughout the season, but if that is all we aim to do, we aren't meeting our calling to invest eternally in these children and their families. To meet that call, we have compiled a set of devotions for you to go through with your team throughout the season. Each devotion has a combination of a prayer and/or discussion questions for you to go through after the devotion itself.

When going through the devotions, you can certainly read it exactly as it is written or if you have time, you may read through it and present it in a more conversational way if you would like. Please understand that we don't expect you to be a pastor or to have an incredible depth of knowledge of the Bible or of theology, but we do expect our coaches to have a love for God and a love for their players that is displayed in a desire to show them the character of God and help them grow in their relationship with Him.

Each devotion will take about 15 min at the most, including the questions/prayer. You can hold your devotion before your practice, in the middle of the practice, or at the end of your time. When you do walk through the material is your call, but it is expected that you do go through each devotion at least once throughout the year.

If you have any questions about the material, the practice of going through devotions, or even questions about our faith in Jesus, please reach out to Kyle McClendon [kyle@sharonchurch.com] or Dwayne McClelland [dwayne@sharonchurch.com]. This is an investment in our walk with God as much as it is an investment in the players' walks. We are here for you in whatever you need--even if it is simply an ear to listen or a person to lean on.

Thank you again for all that you do! We can't wait to see what God has in store for this season!

WEEK 1

TRUE CONFIDENCE COMES FROM CHRIST

“Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.” – Proverbs 14:26

To play top competition, a deftness at the psychological level is required. But our relationship with sports is not a one-way road. Sports are not just physical, nor is the impact they leave on athletes merely physical. Our experiences in sports also shape the way that we interact with the world.

Today, the crossover between the physical and mental components of sports has given rise to many motivational quotes, inspirational sayings and personal mottos. One message we commonly hear is to “believe in ourselves and have faith in our own abilities.” Although developing confidence is undeniably a key part of being an athlete, and research even goes to show there may be a relationship between confidence and performance, there is a fine line between confidence and pride. We must be careful to guard against viewing the confidence we need in order to succeed in sports as the source of our assurance, rather than the result of our worth in Christ.

To acquire true wisdom, we must fear the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” In fearing the Lord, we can be truly confident and free. Because of Christ, we can be secure and fearless despite whatever faces us – not because of an adequacy that comes from ourselves, but because of God, who liberates us from the bondage of sin to ultimate triumph over death. Christ is in whom we place our trust and certainty. In Him we put our confidence first.

Whether you're going through a string of disappointing performances, currently sitting on the bench, were recently let go from a team, or are having the run of your life, remember that your worth is found in Christ alone. God promises His children refuge, and our confidence cannot be lost when it is rooted in the steady Rock of Christ. Nothing can shake what it cannot move.

Focus on believing in God Almighty, instead of believing in your own power and might. He will supply everything you need to meet the challenge in front of you. Take heart in Him, find hope in Him and seek Him with every ounce of yourself. Fear breeds a fixation on self-confidence, but a fear in the Lord results in fastening ourselves to Christ's love. In Christ you can find freedom, joy and victory.

DISCUSSION

1. Has there been a time when your abilities weren't enough to meet your goals or your expectations?
2. In those moments, where does this passage say we should put our faith and hope?
3. Why is it better to put our hope in Jesus rather than in our own ability?

PRAYER

"God, thank you for all the gifts, talents, and abilities you've given us. We ask that you help us to trust you more and trust ourselves less. Help us see that real joy, freedom, and peace only come from knowing you and having a healthy, loving fear and respect for you. Continue to show us more and more of yourself and let us grow in our relationship with you. We ask this through the name of Jesus. Amen."

WEEK 2

HEAVENLY PROVISION

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

— Matthew 6:26 [ESV]

We serve a God who abundantly provides for us everything we could ever need. There are so many Scriptures about God’s promise of provision. There are so many stories of God breaking through when His people needed Him and He provided exceedingly. We have a good Father who longs for His children to experience the peace and joy that comes from trusting in His desire to provide.

The famous Psalm 23 begins in a way that perfectly illustrates the heart of one who trusts in God. Psalm 23:1 [ESV] says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Let those words sink in for a second. What would it be like to go through life with the peace and security that comes from wholeheartedly believing you “shall not want”? How would you approach work, finances and relationships if you knew you would never want?

Abundant peace and security are available for you today if you will trust in your Heavenly Father’s promise to provide everything you need. He is a God of grace who loves you. You will not want in this life or for all of eternity.

Allow these Scriptures to stir up your faith and trust in your Heavenly Father:

“I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing” — Psalm 37:25-26 [ESV]

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” — Matthew 6:26 [ESV]

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:19 [ESV]

A large part of trusting God in the area of provision is aligning your desires with His. Trust that He will provide the absolute best life you can live. Whether He provides abundantly in the eyes of the world does not matter.

He is a perfect, loving Father who has absolutely perfect plans for you. If you are truly seeking Him and trusting Him with all your heart, you will live the best life possible. He knows what you need. He knows the desires within you.

Stop looking to the world for examples of what your life should look like and seek His will above all else. Look to loving Him and being loved by Him as the best thing in life and all else will fall into place. May your life be marked by the abundant provision of your loving Father today in all areas as you place your trust in Him.

DISCUSSION

1. Do you sometimes worry about you or those around you being taken care of? What are things you worry about?
2. We just learned that we can trust God to care for us because he cares for the rest of creation--how does it make you feel that God will care for you?
3. Can we trust God to know what we need and to provide for us?

PRAYER

“God, thank you for providing for us in every part of our lives. We know that life can be difficult sometimes and that we can feel lost or worried when things get uncomfortable, but help us to trust that you will take care of us no matter what. You are good. You are faithful. And we know that we can trust you to take care of us and those around us because that is who you are. Remind us of that when we forget. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

WEEK 3

ONLY GOD'S OPINION

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” – 1 Samuel 16:7

Every basketball fan knows the name Bill Russell, the Hall of Famer who helped the Boston Celtics win 11 NBA titles in 13 years. And some basketball aficionados will remember that Russell helped the University of San Francisco to back-to-back NCAA Championships in 1955 and 1956.

However, most likely don't realize that people thought Russell couldn't shoot well. They thought he was just a 6-foot-9 blocking and rebounding machine [who, by the way, was so good at rebounding that the foul lanes were widened to 12 feet from six feet during his playing days].

Ultimately, what people thought of Russell didn't matter. What mattered was what Russell did. He wasn't limited by people, only by himself. If he chose to live up to the standards people placed on him, he would have only blocked shots and rebounded. But his passion was to help his team and do his best, not live up to [or down to, in this case] the opinions of others.

Those opinions were similar to the ones people had of David, who wasn't considered worthy to be king – so much so that he was still out in the field tending sheep when Samuel asked to see Jesse's children so that he could anoint God's choice as king.

Are you living the life God designed you to live, or are you living up to [or down to] what others think or see you as being?

DISCUSSION

1. It's hard to ignore what other people think about us. What did people think of David before he became King?
2. Even though David was small and didn't really look like a King, God called David to be King. Whose opinion should we listen more to: other people or the opinion of God?
3. What do you think God thinks of you? Do you trust that he loves you and cares about you?

PRAYER

"God, we are so grateful for your love for us. We ask that you help us listen to you and who you say we are instead of listening to the opinions of others all the time. Help us take on our identity as your children, and please make your love real to us. In Jesus' name, amen."

WEEK 4

LEARNING FROM FAILURE

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” – Psalm 73:26

Are you afraid to fail?

If so, sports may be tough for you. Athletes fail all the time, and oftentimes they fail on the biggest stages with millions of people watching. You can imagine it's tough for those within the game – scouts, writers, agents and those in front offices – whose primary goal is to predict future stars of the game. It's just so hard to predict what people will do, especially in a sport where failure occurs so often.

Our failures aren't always magnified like those of athletes, but our failures can be much more costly. As followers of Christ, we all struggle at times to live up to expectations, as we all sin.

Thankfully, we have a Lord and Savior in Jesus who has died for our sins, and God gives us forgiveness when we fail. God also gives us the ability to follow Him, and He provides us with special gifts and talents to do wonderful things in His Name, despite being imperfect people. Even though we fail at times, we welcome the challenge of learning from our mistakes, which allows us to help not only ourselves but others. It also makes getting it right – getting that base hit, following Jesus – feel that much better.

Let's give God praise today for sending His Son, Jesus, and for being there for us. He helps us through our adversity and helps us conquer our fear of failure.

DISCUSSION

1. Are you afraid to fail? Why or why not?
2. How does it make you feel that because Jesus died for our sins, we don't have to be afraid of failure?

PRAYER

"Thank You, Lord, for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins, as well as for Your forgiveness. Thank You for the gifts You've given us through our special abilities. Help us to forever give You praise through our actions and our success in the little things. In Jesus' name we pray, amen."

WEEK 5

GREATER THAN GOLD

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” — Matthew 6:19-21

He titled his book “Greater Than Gold” because he wanted the world to know that Olympic success isn’t his only aim. It was merely secondary. He knows what it means to chase athletic glory ... and fall short. He knows what it means to pursue all the things people say will make you happy ... and still lose. But he also knows that knowing God changes things. In fact, it changes everything.

His name? David Boudia. He’s been the face of USA Men’s Diving for more than a decade, and is one of the most recognized athletes in Olympic sports. He has a colorful collection of Olympic, collegiate and professional medals, but, as his book title reminds you, that’s not what he wants you to really know and remember him for. As he put it, he competes for something — for Someone — greater than gold.

David’s testimony is a raw and real one. He doesn’t sugarcoat anything when he shares the struggles he’s had in his past. The addictive behavior, the ego, the depression — he tells about all of it. But he also shares that what he most hopes we’ll see is who God is and what He’s done to change a rebel’s heart. The Gospel proved sufficient to call a wandering heart to God’s side, and David knows that’s the reason he can compete for a higher purpose. Win or lose, David knows the story is the Lord’s, not his.

Since coming to know Christ prior to the 2012 Olympics, during which the world watched him win gold, fans of his sport have seen David honor God in both victory and defeat.

He has gone on to mentor many other divers and athletes, and to share his testimony in many settings. And his greatest hope is that the same Gospel that reached him can reach somebody else through his story.

Often, we make athletic or professional achievement of any kind the sole priority, when Jesus proves there is so much more for us beyond that. God offers us everything we've ever craved or hoped for in the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son, and makes it clear to us that chasing accolades and hardware here on earth is not all there is. After all, 1 Timothy 6:7 reminds us that we won't be taking any of those things out of this world anyway when we die. The only thing worth having in this life is a real and active relationship with God Himself.

Look, aiming for excellence and wanting to win championships and medals isn't bad. But only wanting that is. So what are you competing for? Actually, Whom are you competing for? Are you competing for the equivalent of "gold" in your life, striving after worldly applause and achievement, looking to earthly things to satisfy your need for fulfillment and meaning? Or are you competing for the only One whose pleasure and validation really matters?

DISCUSSION

1. Is winning the most important thing for you?
2. What does this story we just heard tell us about what is really important?

PRAYER

“Jesus, we are so grateful that we don’t have to feel the pressure to perform perfectly all the time. We don’t have to win every game, make perfect grades, or have a perfect life of “success” all because of your sacrifice for us on the Cross. You want us to play well, to give good effort, and to try hard, but we don’t have to live and die with the result of our games. Medals, wins, money, cars, and fancy things will all fade away but you never will, so please let us play and live for more than success. Give us a heart that wants to live for you and play for you. Thank you for everything you do for us. We love you so much. Amen.”

WEEK 6

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” – John 1:1-5

Some of the most powerful words in Scripture come at the beginning of each book. Genesis gives us the eloquent account of how God created the world, and it starts with the famous words, “In the beginning...” [Genesis 1:1].

The Apostle John, who walked with Jesus, borrows from this imagery and launches his gospel account of Jesus by reminding us that in the beginning, not only was there God, but Jesus was present too. John gives us two specific descriptions of Jesus in his intro. First, Jesus is the Word of God. We use words to communicate, and John very specifically reminds his readers that Jesus was God’s chief way of communicating His love to humanity.

The second description of Jesus is that His life is the light that illuminates God’s presence in the world. In the beginning [Genesis] there was nothing. There was darkness, but as soon as God’s presence burst forth, light came on the scene and everything has been different ever since.

Light chases away the darkness. Darkness and light cannot coexist in the same place. You either have light or you have dark. Even the smallest of lights can bring life to a room. Our lives are no different. It is no secret that there is darkness in this world and that darkness can seem overwhelming, but just as God burst through the darkness in creation, the light of Jesus is able to light up the darkest of hearts and the darkest of circumstances, and bring light and life to places that desperately need it.

DISCUSSION

1. How do darkness and light interact? Can there be any darkness where light exists?
2. With that in mind, what does Jesus do for the parts of our life where things are tough, dark, or challenging?

PRAYER

“Jesus, thank you for your goodness in our lives. We know that no matter what we go through, you bring goodness and light to every part of life. Please show us more and more of your light and help us to show others your light as well. Amen.”

WEEK 7

JESUS GIVES US WORTH

“AGAIN JESUS SPOKE TO THEM, SAYING, 'I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.'”

— John 8:12

Our worth is not quantified by our mistakes or our regrets, our successes or our triumphs. Our worth is not defined by our hidden shame, our proclaimed victories, or anything in between.

Our worth is not defined by our playing time, our accolades, a winning season, or the praise of our coaches. Our worth is, quite simply, defined by the Cross.

Our worth is unmoving and unchanging and infinite because the God of the universe sent down His Son to take our sin upon Himself. It is immeasurable and fixed because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever [Hebrews 13:8].

And with the certainty of who God is, the same application should be given to the certainty of our worth.

Truthfully, in our own power, we are not worthy. We are human — fallen people who make mistakes and continually fall short.

But that is exactly what makes the proclamation of our worth so beautiful. God extends grace, unmerited favor, and when we accept that gift of grace He showers us with mercy.

It is easy to fall into a pattern of striving to “do good” by our own volition. However, doing so will only leave us vacant and empty — ultimately unsatisfied yet prideful in the attempt.

In sports specifically, the bar for success is continually rising, and even if you reach the pinnacle of what your sport defines as “success,” there will always be something else to strive for in order to prove your worth.

It is a nightmare of a merry-go-round as the pride won’t allow us to accept that we were unsuccessful, so we try even harder to rectify, to fix, to improve. Friends, lay it down. Lay down the compulsion to prove your worth.

God is giving you permission to lay it down.

Resist giving authority and power to others’ opinions. They are as uncertain as falling leaves in the wind, their opinions changing direction with the breeze. Stand guard against even your own feelings as they are too easily influenced by unreliable sources.

Against the ever-changing swirl of chaos in this world there is one thing you can know for certain: your worth. Let it be heralded by the beacon of light that is Christ.

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” [John 8:12].

DISCUSSION

1. Do you sometimes doubt that you are “good enough”
2. How does it feel to know that Jesus gives us worth and value through his love for us?

PRAYER

“God, thank you for showing us love and giving us value in Jesus. Please remind us that our value doesn’t come from what others think or from how we perform. Let us find our value and worth in how loved we are by you. In Jesus name, amen.”

WEEK 8

GOD CHOSE YOU FOR HIS TEAM

“BEHOLD, TO THE LORD YOUR GOD BELONG HEAVEN AND THE HEAVEN OF HEAVENS, THE EARTH WITH ALL THAT IS IN IT. YET THE LORD SET HIS HEART IN LOVE ON YOUR FATHERS AND CHOSE THEIR OFFSPRING AFTER THEM, YOU ABOVE ALL PEOPLES, AS YOU ARE THIS DAY.”

— Deuteronomy 10:14-15

What does it mean to be chosen?

When I was in school, I remember the panic and dread of playing dodgeball in gym class. The boys would throw the ball with such force it would sting.

However, the painful slap of the ball wasn't the worst part. The most difficult time occurred when the leaders picked the teams. The teacher would select two captains who would alternate back and forth choosing their players from members in the class.

I felt such relief when I was accepted on a side because I worried about being the last person to be chosen. While I disagree with this particular method for creating teams, the process highlights how awesome it feels to be picked.

Humanity responds positively to the experience of inclusion, to being chosen when someone decides he or she wants us on the team.

In Deuteronomy 10:14,15, we see how amazing and powerful God is. He remains the Master of all things in heaven and on earth. Moses [the author of Deuteronomy] didn't simply speak about the virtues of God. Rather, he set us up to understand the true value of relationship with God and our worth in His eyes.

The literal Creator of the universe loves us and cares for us every moment of our lives. He wants to be in relationship with humankind. He appoints each one of us in the same fashion that He selected the leaders and individuals written about in the Bible.

God chose us, not because of our 40-yard dash times, jump shots or tennis serves. God Almighty seeks to have a loving relationship with each one of us, to share His precepts and goodness, and to use us to bring the good news of the gospel to those in our surroundings.

God picked us to be on His team because of His unconditional love. He accepts us, and this acceptance should fuel us to further our relationship with Him and to be the light of Christ in the world.

As we walk onto the field, the mat, the court or the track, we know that God's hand is upon us. This doesn't make us better than anyone else on the field, but it does provide a purpose and a responsibility to honor and share the relationship and love God graciously bestows upon us.

DISCUSSION

NO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRAYER

"Lord, thank you for choosing us. Even though we don't deserve it and we didn't earn our place, you chose us to be a part of your family. Help us see that this is only possible through Jesus, and that you sent Jesus to bring us into your family. If we don't know you, please stir up questions within us to want to know you more. If we do know you, help us play like it and show other people the love that you show us. In Jesus' name, amen."

WEEK 9

PRAY LIKE A CHILD

"PRAY THEN LIKE THIS: 'OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME.'"

— Matthew 6:9

Think for a moment about your sport of choice. What is that one thing – a core fundamental – that you never grow beyond? You can hone that skill to the nth degree, but you can't ever drop it from your game or you're done.

In the Christian life, that one thing is prayer. Yes, there are many other things we need to do [read our Bible, live in community, share our faith], but none of them get any traction apart from our conversations with God. Prayer is how we start our relationship with God, and it is the essence of our union with Him every day thereafter.

So, it's no surprise that Jesus gave us a basic blueprint to follow in our efforts to connect with our Creator. It's not so much a script to recite as it is an outline prompting us to pray in light of who God is and what we most need as His children.

Speaking of children, that's how Jesus tells us to approach God; as sons and daughters of a heavenly Father. He is the One who made us. He is the One who sustains us. And He is the One who sacrificed His Son so that we could be adopted into His family.

Before anything else, Jesus wants us to remember we're talking to our Father, not some impersonal, all-powerful being in the sky. Athlete, our heavenly Father loves His kids more than we are even able to fully comprehend.

In light of all that our Father is, and all that He has done for us, He alone is worthy of praise and honor from the hearts of His children. After acknowledging God as father, we're prompted to pray that He [His name] would be hallowed; this means to be held in the highest regard, holy and exalted above all, and by all.

Jesus tells us to pray that God would be made great in our hearts and in our world.

Whether you're new to prayer or a seasoned vet, take some time today to talk to God about what it means to you to call Him Father. After that, praise Him for all of His attributes/qualities and pray that His holiness would be evident in your life to the people around you.

DISCUSSION

1. Is prayer important? Why?
2. How should we approach God in prayer?
3. How does it make you feel that you can talk to God whenever you want to or need to?

PRAYER

“Our Father in heaven, the one who created the heavens, the earth, and every single person in this group: help us see the power and the value of talking to you. Remind us that we are speaking to our Father who is GOOD and is POWERFUL. Would your name be made great in our hearts, in our league, in our homes, and in our community. You are so good and so generous to us. Thank you for who you are and for sending Jesus to die for us so that we can spend time in prayer with you. Amen.”

WEEK 10

SHOWING SYMPATHY TO THE OUTSIDER

"HE EXECUTES JUSTICE FOR THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOW, AND LOVES THE SOJOURNER, GIVING HIM FOOD AND CLOTHING. LOVE THE SOJOURNER, THEREFORE, FOR YOU WERE SOJOURNERS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT."

-Deuteronomy 10:18-19

Our lives are full of people who are dear to us, including friends and family who provide support, encouragement and assistance.

However, Jesus says in Luke 6:32 [NIV], "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them." God desires for us to be sympathetic toward our enemies and to those beyond our circles.

In Deuteronomy 10:18 we see that God protects the orphans and widows, those without protection who have meager social standing and few resources.

As the Creator of the world and Provider of all things, God loves all humankind, including those who are lost or who go without. He asks us to do the same in our neighborhoods, schools and on our athletic teams.

People in need fill the sidewalks and halls around us. God requests of us to step up and be friends to the schoolmates whom other kids shun and refuse to talk to.

He wants us to show kindness to the young person whose family struggles financially and who may be devalued in our materialistic culture. We should help protect classmates from getting picked on or bullied.

While God aspires to grow you as a teammate and as an athlete, He primarily wants to grow you into a Christ-like person.

How we choose to treat the people around us reflects who we are in Christ. Our reaching out to a person in need while sitting in class or playing on the field is important to God. Why should we extend a hand to others?

God reached out to us, and so we should do the same to others. Deuteronomy 19 says that we should love foreigners because we were once foreigners. The word “foreigners” signifies outsiders or strangers.

We sinned and turned our backs on God, separating ourselves from Him. Out of His immense love, He forgave our transgressions and provided repair of that relationship through connection with Jesus. After restoration through Christ, we are no longer outsiders but “insiders.”

God offered His amazing grace to us as a gift and as an example. We should treat others who may be on the “outside” as “insiders.” Today, let’s focus on being a blessing to those on our teams and in our schools who may need a little extra protection, friendship and assistance.

DISCUSSION

1. How does God view those who might be considered “outsiders” in our world?
2. How should we treat those around us?
3. Give some examples of places or people we can bless by showing them the love, protection, generosity, or presence of Jesus.

PRAYER

“Jesus. Thank you for your love for us and for bringing us into your family. We know we don’t deserve it and yet you still show us grace over and over. We were once outsiders and you call us into your presence and call us sons and daughters. Please give us the grace and the heart to do the same to others around us who may be hurting, who may be in need, or who may just need someone to show them some love. We know that you love the outsider and the oppressed, so Lord please help us show others your love in our classrooms, our teams, our families, and our friend groups. We ask all this in Jesus’ name. Amen”

