

MINISTERING TO **PARENTS**



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The Ride Home

What to say right after the game.



Proverbs 29:20

Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him.



Your words matter.

Immediately following an athlete's competition, a flood of emotions runs through their heart, win or lose. This is a critical time for the parent-child relationship. It can either be a time of building up, or it can be a time of tearing down. Your response will have a significant impact on how your child feels and processes the game.

When I was a young student-athlete, my dad was a high school football coach. Though he was relatively mild mannered (I don't remember him yelling or expressing anger toward me after a game), I do remember dreading his coaching points or critiques of my performance on the ride home. I wished there was some way we could have waited a few days for his well-intended coaching tips.

Back then, the worst thing I could imagine was disappointing my father with my performance. I've heard the expression, "Children love their mothers but live for their fathers." That was true in my life. So much of my identity as a child was tied to what my daddy thought after my games.

The hours after competition, when emotions are high and identities are being shaped, are so critical. In fact, I think all the vehicles parents use to drive their children home from games should come with a warning sticker on the bumper: "Warning: Fragile egos on board."

This lesson is intended to better equip you, the parent of an athlete, to navigate those sometimes unpleasant, often volatile, rides home with your child. First, let's see what the Bible has to say about the subject. Prior to opening your Bible, it's a good practice to ask God to help you understand what He wants you to understand. Spend time reflecting over each verse. Then, check out the practice sessions for ideas about how to apply it.

Bible Study

Ephesians 4:29 No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

James 1:19 My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger...

Matthew 15:18 But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person.

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

1. From the verses provided, find some principles being taught or lessons you learned about God or from God.

LESSON ONE

2. Now that you have spent time reflecting on each verse, which specific one is speaking to your heart? Why is that verse the most meaningful to you?
3. Can you remember a time when your words built up your child? In what way did those positive words affect your child? What positive behaviors did your child exhibit?
4. Why do you think it's so difficult for most parents to know what to say right after their child's games?
5. What is one big idea or takeaway you get from these verses, and how might you use it after your child's next game?

Practice Session

- After your child's next game, surprise them by taking them to get donuts, ice cream or their favorite cookie or cupcake for a special treat.
- On your next ride home with your child, refrain from any critique of the game. Don't even mention anything you observed that they need to correct in order to become a better player. Instead, find a positive character trait they exhibited during the game. There will be another time for your coaching tips and suggestions.
- Get your child talking about their experience in the game. Ask questions like: "How did it feel to swish that free throw?" or "...pick up that grounder?" or "...recover that fumble?" Focus your questions on their feelings about the game or experiences during the game. The goal is to get them talking about how they feel, not hearing you talk about how you feel.
- Here are some phrases your child really needs to hear from you right after competition, win or lose. Try these after their next game: (It's OK if you repeat a phrase or use more than one.)
 - "I love you."
 - "I'm so proud of you."
 - "I love watching you play."
 - "There is nowhere else in the world I'd rather be than cheering for you."

Influence or Idol

What should my perspective be about sports?



Exodus 20:3

Do not have other gods besides me.



Sports is what we do, not who we are.

At a young age, I learned that those who could hit a baseball, shoot a basketball or kick a football received a lot of notoriety. It's normal and healthy for children to want to be noticed, accepted and admired, and sports fulfilled this desire in me during my formative years. I caught the "sports bug" early. Maybe a better way to say it is I lived for sports, and they gave me the admiration I craved.

Webster defines idol as "an object of extreme devotion" or "a representation of an object of worship." Yikes... devotion and worship seem like words better reserved for church than a football field. But, when I was growing up, sports were my idol, and I've been fighting the temptation to make sports an idol ever since. The truth is that sports are wonderful competitive activities, but they make lousy gods.

The temptation of idolatry doesn't end when we hang up our cleats, it can follow us into parenthood. My dad was so proud of my early athletic accomplishments, he had a beautiful cherrywood trophy case made to better display the proof of my boyhood sports successes. It was even sometimes referred to as the shrine! Don't get me wrong: A lot of good things can come from a proud daddy's expression of approval and having a display case made for his son's trophies. But, there is also a real danger of placing too much emphasis—do I dare say devotion or worship—on activities that could possibly lead our children to misplace their identities or beliefs. Sports are tempting in that way. The life of the pro athlete seems so glamorous: a life of popularity, wealth and privilege. It seems to come with the sense of accomplishment, you play a game better than most in the world. Who wouldn't want that life for their kids?

As a parent, you play a key role in helping your child develop a healthy perspective about competitive sports. Your child will follow your lead when it comes to determining whether sports is a healthy influence or a destructive idol that never fills the void reserved only for God.

Let's see what the Bible says about the subject. Before you dive in, pause to ask God to show you how to prevent sports from becoming an idol in your family.

Bible Study

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

1 Timothy 4:7-8 ...Rather, train yourself in godliness. 8 For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way since, it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

LESSON TWO

1. From the verses provided, find principles or lessons that will help sports not become an idol in your life.

Matthew 6:21

Matthew 6:33

Luke 16:13

1 Timothy 4:7-8

2. Write down some examples of how you can “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Now, describe how it’s possible to seek God’s Kingdom and righteousness while competing in sports.
3. Luke 16:13 ends with “You cannot serve both God and money.” Do you think it’s possible to serve both God and sports? Explain your answer.
4. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 compares “training in godliness” with “training the body.” Your child is already training their body for their sport. What are some ways you can help your child “train in godliness?”
5. What is the one big idea or takeaway from these Bible verses that you might apply to parenting your child?

LESSON TWO

Practice Session

- Spend some time reflecting on the lesson you just completed, giving special focus on the Bible verses. Would you be willing to pray this prayer?

**“Lord, I realize my child’s game is just that...a game. Please help me to keep his/her sports in the right perspective. Help me to fight the temptation to place more importance on their sports activities than I do their spiritual growth. Keep reminding me of the danger of his/her sports becoming an idol to me and to them. Help me to always keep Jesus the priority in everything. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen”*

*If you don’t understand how to make Jesus a priority in everything (or these Bible verses do not make sense), it could be because you’ve never yielded your life to His Lordship. You can ask your Huddle Leader to set an appointment to explain the Gospel using a tool called “The FOUR.” Check out “The FOUR” in the Appendix, page 1. It will explain how to begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ with four easy steps.

- Spend some time reflecting on these personal questions:
 - Why do I get so angry when my child does not perform like I know they can?
 - Why is it so important to me that my child be a starter, the best on the team or make the all-star team?
 - Why is it so difficult for me to let the coach do the coaching?
 - When my child does not perform well, do I hurt for them or am I hurt by them?
 - Are my expectations for my child’s sports experience the same as theirs?

Answering these questions will help you identify idolatry and determine why or whether you have the right perspective about your child’s sports.

- Pick one of your child’s teammates as they practice or play a game. Identify some positive attributes they displayed and affirm that teammate to your child or affirm them to their parents. Be prepared to discuss with your Huddle how this exercise increased your appreciation for your child’s team and/or how it might have relieved the pressure you feel toward your child’s performance.

Coach, Are You Crazy?

Boundaries for interacting with the coach.



Romans 13:1

Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.



Coaches coach. Parents parent.

Have you ever thought your child's coach is crazy? Could they be thinking the same about you? The coach-parent relationship can be tricky. The coach ought to coach, and the parents should parent. Each should be given respect and freedom in their respective roles.

In the context of a child's sports experience, the parent is giving a measure of authority and responsibility to the coach, meaning the coach is boss when it comes to their child's sports. Ideally, parents and coaches work together to ensure the best possible experience for the child. Unfortunately, parents and coaches often have differing ideas for what's best.

Coaches have tremendous influence over student-athletes, for good and bad. Many athletes carry lifetime memories from their coaches. Coaches can also influence how athletes approach sports when they become parents. When my two sons were 8 years old, they had an awesome baseball coach and one of the most enjoyable sports seasons of their lives. They both remember Coach Brown as one of their favorite coaches primarily because he cared more for the boys than he did about the team's record. His impact still lives on after nearly three decades.

So, how do you engage with your child's coach in a way that adds value to their sports experience? Here are some best practices when interacting with your child's coach. (Obviously, these do not apply with a coach that exhibits unreasonable personality disorders; other steps should be taken in abusive environments.)

- Do not coach your child from the bleachers. Remember: You're the parent.
- Do not confront the coach prior to, during or after a practice or game. Find out the coach's policy on setting appointments for conversations before the season.
- Do not make derogatory comments from the bleachers aimed at the coach.
- Speak to your child prior to contacting the coach.
- When speaking with the coach, never talk about other players, even for comparisons.
- Encourage your child to speak first with the coach about a concerning issue.
- Ask the coach if you can help them with anything.

Maybe the two most powerful words in an athlete's life are, "Coach said." Do whatever you can to establish good lines of communication and rapport with the influential person your child calls "Coach." Remember: The parent-coach relationship is like all relationships. Don't enter it with the mindset that the coach should think and/or act in a certain way. Instead, consider how you might add value to their coaching experience. Your child will benefit from this approach and be grateful for it.

Before reading through the Bible verses, ask God to show you ways you can be more proactive in your relationship with your child's coach, rather than reactive to what you think is wrong.

LESSON THREE

Bible Study

James 1:19-20 My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but one slow to anger calms strife.

Colossians 3:13 ...bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.

Romans 13:1 Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.

1. James 1:19-20 tells us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak." How might this biblical principle make your sports experience more enjoyable for you and your family?
2. How does Romans 13:1 help you approach your relationship with your child's coach?
3. Unfortunately, grievances often happen between parents and coaches. What guidance do you receive from Colossians 3:13 to apply to future grievances with your child's coach?
4. What is the big idea or main takeaway you get from the Bible verses provided in this lesson?

Practice Session

- Make a list of practical ways you might add value to the coach's job. Exercise one or more ideas from your list with your child's coach this week.
- Initiate a conversation with your spouse or a trusted friend and talk about what causes your negative emotions during your child's games. Ask God to help you be honest with the other person and with yourself. Consider the Bible verses provided. Get to the bottom of the real source of your anger, fear, jealousy and bitterness. Confess it to God. Ask your spouse or friend to pray with you and for you.

Did You Say Surgery?

How to deal with painful injuries and broken dreams.



Romans 8:28

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.



God turns setbacks into setups.

You should expect your child to get injured. It's going to happen. We had four children who were all athletes, and we dealt with injuries including front teeth knocked out, multiple concussions, a broken foot, a dislocated finger and thumb, two shoulder surgeries, two knee surgeries, a broken nose... you get the picture. How you deal with your child's injuries will set the tone for how your child deals with their injuries. Sports injuries sometimes cause dashed dreams, and broken dreams are a big deal. Helping your child navigate broken dreams should be your priority.

The day my daughter was told she made the varsity basketball team as a high school freshman, she tore her ACL. She was devastated; her 9th grade year was one of the most difficult of her life. We had no manual for parenting a 15-year-old athlete through zero sports participation, knee surgery and rehab over 12 months. She faced mental, physical and spiritual challenges.

After surgery, I committed to be her rehab coach. I took her to multiple physical therapy sessions for two months. Once released from PT, we would go to a gym after school where I coached her through painful exercises her physical therapist taught us. During those months, my daughter and I developed an unusually strong bond. We saw each other at our worst: She was distressed, and I pushed her through it. But I also saw my daughter at her best: determined, strong and persevering. The qualities she developed during that year are the same qualities she demonstrates today as she serves on the mission field in North Africa. God took a terrible situation and used it to prepare her for even more challenging circumstances she would encounter later. God allowed me to experience a closeness with my daughter that would not have otherwise happened without ACL rehab.

My daughter's injury kept her from becoming the basketball player she dreamed of, but it contributed to a resilience which has benefited her in her Kingdom work. My daughter's basketball dreams were replaced with a bigger dream to serve God on the mission field. Redirected dreams are equally hard on both athletes and their parents, but hard is not bad. Would you pray right now and ask God to help you help your child turn their setbacks into setups?

Bible Study

Joshua 1:9 Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Isaiah 41:10 Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you—"this is the Lord's declaration—"plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

LESSON FOUR

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

1. What stands out about the character of God in these verses? (Try finding more than one characteristic of God.) How does God's character bring you comfort and/or peace? (Be specific, using a current situation in your life.)
2. What is the main truth being expressed in Romans 8:28? How does that truth help you parent your child through a setback like a sports injury?
3. Which of the verses provided seem to be speaking to your heart the most? Explain why.
4. What is one big idea or main takeaway you might apply to your own life, from the Scriptures provided?

Practice Session

- If your child's injury has altered their participation, it has most likely impacted their dream for playing sports. Have a conversation with your child about dashed dreams. Share something from your own life about when you had to recover from the death of one of your dreams.
- Are you showing compassion to your injured child, or have you told them they need to "gut it out" or "suck it up." You might consider erring on the side of compassion.

The Golden Rule in Sports

Encouraging sportsmanship, respect and honor.



Matthew 7:12

Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.



Sportsmanship is not outdated.

What is the end goal for your child's sports experience? Is it to win the T-ball championship? Is it to earn a college athletic scholarship? Is it to create a "win at any cost" mentality? Or, is it to develop respectful, Christ-honoring kids who become Kingdom-minded adults? If your answer is the latter, then you can begin by setting a standard of sportsmanship, respect and honor with your child.

Do not be enticed to think that competing to win and competing honorably are mutually exclusive concepts. I played 25 years of organized sports beginning at age 5, and I tried my best to win every game. But I also did what I could to honor and respect my opponents (and refs) and exercise good sportsmanship by recognizing poor sportsmanship: taunting, bragging, cheap shots, trash talking, booing, yelling/cursing the ref and demonizing opponents. I realize in today's sports culture, the aforementioned actions are celebrated, but most parents do not want to encourage these boorish behaviors in their children. Right? Do you want your children to become culture followers or Christ followers? The Golden Rule still applies, even in sports competition.

Sports are a laboratory for learning how to respect and honor opponents and refs. Yes, your child can exhibit good sportsmanship and still compete hard for the win. You can help produce good sportsmanship by modeling it in the stands. You can build up your child during competition without tearing down someone else's child. Come on, Mom and Dad: Embrace good sportsmanship by respecting and honoring all those participating in the game. By instilling this character trait in your child, you will make a deposit that pays huge dividends throughout the rest of their life, long after they cease playing competitive sports.

Before reading how the Bible addresses honor and respect of others, take a moment to ask God to help you understand and apply the verses provided.

Bible Study

Matthew 7:12 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

James 4:6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore, he says: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Proverbs 24:17-18 Don't gloat when your enemy falls, and don't let your heart rejoice when he stumbles, or the Lord will see, be displeased...

LESSON FIVE

1. What do these verses say about how God looks at a “me first” mentality? How might this lesson help you parent your child?
2. Can you think of a high-profile athlete or coach who has exhibited humility while excelling as a competitor? Describe what you observed in this person.
3. Romans 12:10 and 1 Peter 2:17 teach about honoring one another. In the sports context, describe what it means to honor an opponent or ref.
4. What is your big idea or takeaway from the Bible verses provided in this chapter on sportsmanship?

Practice Session

- Make a list of a few practical things you can do to honor another during your child’s next game (e.g. offer a kind word to the parent of the opposing team, welcome opposing team parents to your home gym or field, etc.).
- Have a discussion with your child about sportsmanship. Get a sheet of paper and draw two columns at top. Title one with “good sportsmanship” and the other with “poor sportsmanship.” Ask your child to write in behavior examples of each.
- Share one or more of the Bible verses provided in this lesson with your child. Ask them what they believe the verse is teaching. Ask them how they might be impacted or influenced by the verse(s) in their next game.

Let's Pray!

Prioritizing prayer for your kids.

“ 1 Thessalonians 5:17
“...pray constantly...” ”

Prayer is a conversation not a transaction with God.

I'm married to a prayer warrior. She believes in prayer, she practices prayer, and she is empowered by prayer. When our kids were young, she was notorious for her nighttime prayer raids—crawling on her knees from bed to bed and praying while our four children slept. She has prayed for base hits, touchdowns and free throws. She's prayed for injury prevention and for her children to just get in the game. She's prayed on most of the high school fields and courts close to our hometown and in college stadiums throughout the Atlantic Coast Conference. I've learned a lot about prayer by watching and listening to my wife pray for and with our children. She has praised God for amazing victories and has sought God's comfort for distraught children after a loss. She has faithfully modeled the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray constantly.” It's no wonder that our children have all been greatly impacted by the prayers of their mother.

Our two sons started playing organized football in a league for 9-and 10-year-old boys. One evening, we drove to the field and saw, what seemed to us, a local high school football team practicing. But, we soon discovered it was the team scheduled to play our boys' team! I heard my wife start praying out loud, “Please Jesus, you have to do something and do it quickly!” Can you believe that 15 minutes later, the referee realized the opposing team did not have enough boys to participate that night, so they forfeited the game! This became our sons' team's only win that season. You should know not all of her prayers have been answered with such dramatic suddenness, and I'm still not sure how that prayer fit into God's cosmic purpose, but that doesn't change the fact our prayers matter to God.

Why should parents pray with and for their children? Because Jesus commanded that we pray, because Jesus modeled how we should pray, and because our prayers move God. It's not so much that we are trying to change the heart and mind of God with our prayers, but rather, our hearts and minds are being changed when we pray. True prayer brings alignment with God's will being accomplished “on earth as it is in Heaven.” Prayer is the conduit through which we get in sync with the will of God. Don't you agree that takes precedence over points on a scoreboard?

Prayer is mysterious, yet miraculous. You can't really explain it, but you can experience it. You may not fully understand it, but Jesus told us to undertake it. You may not know prayer's boundaries, but you can know its benefits. If you're not sure how prayer works, just be satisfied in knowing that it does. Prayer is probably the most misunderstood discipline of our faith. Ask God to help you better understand the mystery of prayer by discussing the Bible verses below.

Bible Study

James 4:3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives...

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.

Ephesians 6:18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

LESSON SIX

Philippians 4:6-7 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

1. What is something you learned about God or His character from the verses provided?
2. Mentioned in the verses provided, there are correct ways and incorrect ways of approaching God in prayer. What are some of those ways, both right and wrong? (Think attitudes, motives, heart.)
3. If you ever experience stress or worry during your child's games, how might Philippians 4:6-7 settle you during the next game?
4. The Bible teaches us that God is not a celestial Santa Claus or a magic genie who is obligated to fulfill your every wish, but a good and wise Father who wants to be in a relationship with His children. How do these verses encourage you to approach God as a good Father rather than Santa or a genie?

Practice Session

- If you need help organizing your prayers, refer to Appendix, page 2 and review the ACTS method for prayer. Your Huddle Leader can explain the ACTS prayer methodology.
- Ask your child to pray with you on game day. This might happen before they leave the house for school, during a lunch break, or even while you're driving them to the game. If your children are taking a bus or driving themselves to the game right after school, ask for a time you can pray over the phone with them. If you're not used to praying out loud with your child, you could pray something like:

"Dear Lord, please keep (their name) from any serious injury today. Will you help him/her be a great teammate? Help them represent you well, no matter what happens, during the game. Will you help him/her exhibit grace and sportsmanship to the refs and opponents? I'm asking you to calm his/her nerves and to calm mine, also. Please help (their name) play with great effort and determination. Help him/her know what a blessing they are to me, but more importantly, help everything (their name) does on the field (or court) be pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

What Motivates Them?

Identifying your child's psychological tendencies.



Colossians 3:23

Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people.



Play for the audience of one.

There is great diversity in the psychological makeups of young athletes. That's why there is no cookie cutter template for parenting; all children are so different. Your child might be a perfectionist, or afraid of failing, or blame themselves for every team loss, or exhibit laziness and little motivation. Identifying these psychological tendencies and personality traits early in your child's life can be helpful in navigating the pitfalls that accompany them.

I'm not a psychologist, but I have observed coaches and athletes for six decades. Let's look closer at some personality traits that surface in the competitive environment of youth sports.

Perfectionism

The perfectionist is satisfied with nothing less than performance perfection, which is unattainable. Thus, you will have a dissatisfied child. A perfectionist child usually makes their parents proud and other parents jealous. But, the psychological toll of never achieving the goal of perfection usually prevents them from long-term life satisfaction and stability. If your child exhibits perfectionist tendencies, you will want to remind them that they are playing for an audience of One: Their creator and the only One to whom they should strive to please. Ultimately, your child has nothing to prove to anyone, except God. God judges the heart and motivation of the athlete and not their performance. Perfectionists live or die by comparison; they measure their performance by comparing it with others. The Bible teaches this is no way to live; in fact, it's called foolishness.

Fear of failure

The child who exhibits fear of failure will often transfer those fears into most every area of their lives, resulting in never trying anything because they're afraid of not being successful. This child will be hard pressed to try out for a sports team because the sports environment is one of many failures. The best hitters in the MLB fail two out of every three at bats. The best quarterbacks in the NFL fail one out of every three pass attempts. And the best shooters in the NBA fail in over half of their shot attempts. Someone who fears failure will never experience success in sports or any endeavor of life. This child will need a surplus of encouragement to keep trying, for the sake of the Lord. Fear almost always paralyzes the athlete, whereby faith almost always mobilizes them.

Taking the blame

The child who takes the blame for everything in life, including their team's failures, is a child who needs to learn how to receive grace. Constantly taking the blame is not only unhealthy, it's unbiblical. The Bible speaks much about the undeserved favor of God known as grace. Always taking the blame leads to dissatisfaction with wins and devastation with losses, which is not a great formula for enjoyment in sports.

LESSON SEVEN

Laziness

A child who is unmotivated to participate in sports could suffer from plain old laziness. The Bible addresses this personality trait. Children who don't seem to have the gumption to give maximum effort can create frustration and even chaos in the family dynamic. (Assuming the child is not being forced to participate in a sport but has willingly expressed their desire to play. Children being forced to play sports because it fills a void in the parent is a lesson for another day.) A child who expresses their desire to participate, but does not demonstrate effort while playing, is incredibly difficult for parents. This child will need a lot of love and understanding, in addition to a lot of discipline and structure.

Parental Warning

Be careful not to place your child into a box by making their psychological tendencies or personality traits their identity. Be careful to not label or refer to them as a perfectionist, a slacker, etc. These traits are not permanent, and they can be worked through with the help of loving parents like you. Before considering the Bible verses provided, pause to ask God to give you wisdom as you address any unhealthy personality traits you've observed in your child.

Bible Study

2 Corinthians 10:12 But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast.

Proverbs 18:9 The one who is lazy in his work is brother to a vandal.

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

1. Which of the verses provided seem to speak to a personality trait your child struggles with? How might this verse help you encourage your child?
2. Which of the verses provided seem to speak to a personality trait you have struggled with? How might you apply that verse to your life?
3. What is the big idea or takeaway you gained from this lesson?

LESSON SEVEN

Practice Session

- Do you see consistent traits in your child's personality that fall into one of the four categories mentioned in this lesson? If so, think of a way you can engage your child in a conversation about what you have observed in them and share the Bible verse that might be helpful. (If you're able and if applicable, include your spouse.)
- Ask your spouse or a close friend to identify any of your unhealthy personality traits when it comes to your child's sports. You might already know a trait that causes considerable temptation but you've never discussed it before, or you may learn something new about yourself. Would you be willing to have a conversation and confess to him/her and the Lord any sin that derives from the personality trait exposed?

Where Were You?

Why attending practices and games matters.



John 1:14

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.



His presence with us matters. Your presence to your child matters.

During my formative years, my father worked as a driver's ed teacher and head football coach at a local high school. But when I entered high school, he retired from the coaching part of his job primarily to free up his late afternoons so he could attend my high school football practices. Our practice field was built into a valley with about a 100-foot bank on one side, and most days, I could see my dad standing at the top of the embankment watching practice.

Sometimes he watched the beginning of practice, other times the end. He never said a word, and I was probably the only person who even knew he was there. But, I was the only one who really needed to know he was there. We never talked during practice and we rarely made eye contact, but I knew where he was. The sight of him at my practices and games always gave me a little lift, a boost of confidence and maybe even some security that no matter what happened, everything was going to be OK because dad was there.

What's the point of my story? The mere presence of my dad at practices and games was huge for me as a young athlete dealing with teenage insecurities and fears. Just the sight of him standing on that hill made a lasting impact on my sports career and my life. The power of presence is a mysterious phenomenon, but it's real. I'm different today because of the power of my parent's presence in my life. It has impacted the way I now parent my own children. It was rarely about what Dad said and always about where he was. Remember: Your child's sport is a big deal to them. Your physical presence at their sporting events communicates to them that it's a big deal to you, too.

The Bible talks about ministry of presence. Let's look at some verses that might be applicable to you and your family's sports experience. But first, let's ask God to help you gain some wisdom from these Bible verses.

Bible Study

John 14:28 You have heard me tell you "I am going away and I am coming to you."

Psalms 139:7-10 Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.

LESSON EIGHT

1. What do you learn about God's character in John 1:14 and John 14:28? How does this attribute of God relate to parents attending their child's sports activities?
2. Using Psalm 139:7-10, what do you learn about God's presence in our lives? How does God's presence in our lives encourage/empower/inspire you to be more present in your child's life?
3. In the verses provided, what connection do you see from being present in another's life and one's encouragement to another? Give an example from the verses provided.
4. What is the one big idea or takeaway from the verses provided? How should you respond to the truths found in these verses?

Practice Session

- Have a conversation with your child. Ask them the following questions:
 - How does it make you feel when I'm present at a practice or game?
 - How does it make you feel when I'm not present at a practice or game?
 - Have I ever done anything at one of your games to embarrass you? If so, what?
 - What would you like for me to do or stop doing at your practices or games?
- Think of one or two practical ways you can better organize your schedule so you might be more present at your child's practices and/or games. (Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the other parents in your Huddle.)

What To Say When They Don't Play.

Lessons learned from the bench.



Psalm 34:18

The Lord is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in spirit.



Sitting the bench is hard!

With rare exceptions, your child will experience the pain and confusion of little or no playing time. There will come a day when your child's coach will decide he/she will play a reserve role on the team. You likely will be thinking, "Why can't Coach see the potential in my child?" or "What's wrong with Coach's judgment?" or "What does Coach have against my kid?" Or... maybe you'll be grateful your child made the team and you will be perfectly satisfied with bench time. Whatever your initial reaction, you need to know that helping your disappointed or angry child through their time on the bench is the opportunity of a lifetime. They need you more than ever.

When I think back over the years of my four children's sports experiences, there were many seasons of frustration when one of them was relegated to reserve status. There were summer nights driving home from neighboring cities, after youth travel baseball games, when one of my sons did not get playing time. There were years after my daughter came back from a major injury to play on her high school basketball team, only to realize she would be a reserve for her three remaining years on that team. There were years my son played Division 1 college football only to get on the field occasionally throughout his career.

Did I hurt for my children? Of course. What parent does not want their child to experience the joy of success and contribution to winning seasons? But all these circumstances were opportunities for my children to learn, mature and develop other skills that would help them for a lifetime. Life skills like perseverance, unselfishness, servanthood and work ethic are not learned in a classroom, they are imparted by life experience. And your child's sports participation just might be the very experience God will use to develop your child into a strong and mature follower of Jesus Christ. I'm thankful for the successes my children experienced in sports, but I'm just as grateful for the hard times that produced a different kind of fruit in their lives, fruit that is lasting even to this day. Consider these few tips as you help your child thrive while sitting on the bench:

1. Don't blame the coach in front of your child. Depending on the child's age, encourage your child to ask his/her coach how to get more playing time. What tangible things can they do to get on the field or court?
2. Be transparent with your child about disappointments in your own life, maybe even in your athletic career. Tell them how you felt and what you learned or gained from no playing time.
3. Listen. Let your child express his/her frustration, but don't let it digress into a whine session. Remind them of other benefits to being on a team, they don't have to be the star player or even a starter.
4. Remember that God is shaping and molding your child into the person He wants them to be. He could be using this trial to develop your child.

Ask God to help you understand the Scriptures below and use them to help encourage your child who is not getting much playing time.

LESSON NINE

Bible Study

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the Lord’s declaration—“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

1. How might one or more of the verses provided help you give your child a biblical perspective about their lack of playing time?
2. What is something you learn about God from these verses that you can share with your child?
3. What is being promised in Romans 8:28?
4. What is your one big idea or takeaway from these Scriptures?

Practice Session

- Spend some quiet time considering who is more frustrated with your child’s lack of playing time: you or your child? Be honest with yourself and the Lord about your own feelings, and ask God to help you be a good example for your child as you confront this together.
- Ask your child to sit with you and brainstorm things they can do to be the best teammate while riding the bench. Ideas to get you started:
 - Be the first, during time outs and breaks in the game, to encourage those who are playing.
 - Work harder in practice. Be more attentive to Coach’s instruction.
 - Pray for your teammates. Confess any jealousy or envy toward them.

How Do I Sound?

Why analyze if you are tearing down or building up.



Proverbs 16:24

Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body.



Sweet words bring health.

One huge benefit of playing organized youth sports is that your child will learn to be challenged. The Bible calls this “exhortation,” and it means to pursue a course of action that you normally would not take on your own. Yes, your child will be pushed and stretched by their coach, teammates and opponents. But if your child is like most, they will NOT want to be challenged or exhorted by their mom or dad. This puts the parent of the athlete in a conundrum that requires much wisdom and patience.

One of my daughters put every ounce of aggression and effort into any sport she played. There was something inside her that caused this all-out effort; she didn’t learn it, she was born with it. But, despite her intensity, there was a sensitivity to her spirit. Meaning, I had to be very circumspect in what I said to her about her performance and aware of how it might come across. I believe she placed more pressure on herself than most of her teammates. The last thing she needed was for me to place extra pressure on her. This child did not need any more pushing or exhorting, she needed affirmation and love from a father who could not have been more proud of her.

The point is: Some children need extra encouragement in their sports to help them work through their lack of effort or motivation. Others need only a word of encouragement to keep them from succumbing to the self-imposed pressure with which they naturally battle. The intent of this lesson is that you consider approaching the “encourage vs. pressure” tension with a new outlook. How do you sound through the ears of your child?

Here are a few tips to consider before you ask God to help you apply the verses provided.

1. Before you say anything to your child about their performance, think about their heart. Harsh words about performance usually find their way to the heart.
2. Ask yourself the question: “Are my words going to build him/her up or tear him/her down?” (You communicate a lot to your child with your body language of disapproval, which can be just as hurtful as harsh words.)
3. Long term, what matters most to your child? That they are impressed with your knowledge of reading defenses, or that they gain security in knowing you care for and love them?
4. Don’t let the emotion of the game or competition cause you to lose your composure or raise your voice. There is enough yelling and loss of composure coming from coaches, opponents and teammates. Someone needs to exhibit self-control to your child, and that someone is you.

Bible Study

James 3:5-6 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

LESSON TEN

Romans 14:19 So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

1. What do you learn about the tongue from the Bible verses provided?
2. How do these verses help you better build up your child as he/she participates in sports?
3. What is the big idea or main takeaway you found in this lesson?

Practice Session

- Ask your spouse or close friend to set aside time to discuss whether they've heard you use words that could be interpreted as tearing down rather than building up your child.
- Get one-on-one with your child and ask them if you have used any words or phrases with them that made them feel torn down rather than built up. (Don't be defensive, justify or rationalize.) Commit to your child that you will ask God to help you do better with your words.

Who Makes the Call?

Deciding when and what your child should play.



James 1:5

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.



The Lord will help you make the right decision for your child.

When legendary basketball star, Pistol Pete Maravich, was growing up in the 1960s, he would beg his father, a college basketball coach, to let him join a youth basketball league. Pistol Pete's dad delayed allowing his son to play organized basketball until Pete had begged long enough. The rest is history. Pistol Pete had one of the most remarkable basketball careers ever played. Now, I'm not advocating for making your children beg, but when my two sons came to me wanting to sign up for the local football league when they were both 7 years old, I told them to work on passing and catching the football, and when they turned 10—if they still wanted to play—I'd sign them up. That plan seemed to work for our family and the boys thrived in their football experiences.

Helping your child decide when and what to play may be one of the more important decisions during their formative years. Here are a few common scenarios:

1. The child doesn't show any interest in playing sports.
2. The child wants to sign up for every sport, but never wants to finish a season.
3. The child adjusts seamlessly in the competitive sports environment.
4. The parent is pushing his/her child to participate before the child is ready. Every child has their own internal time clock when it comes to their readiness for organized sports. And let's face it: Not everyone is made to play organized sports.

Here's some reasons for encouraging your child to play organized sports:

- Young children need to learn how to navigate environments when things don't always go their way. Youth sports provide that kind of environment.
- Young children need to learn how to keep their emotions under control (e.g., not throw a tantrum) when they encounter difficulties like not winning or not scoring the goal or basket. Youth sports will help.
- Young children need to know they are not the center of the universe. Youth sports will instill this in your child.
- Young children need to be trained how to cooperate with others (it doesn't come naturally). The sports team environment can help.

This benefits list doesn't include the myriad of qualities like competition, perseverance, focus, toughness, facing fears, courage, unselfishness, etc.—all virtues most parents want to see exhibited by their children. Sports is one of the best places for your child to learn all these great life lessons.

So, who decides when it's the right time? Ideally, both the parent(s) and child will be in agreement. Unfortunately, many times, one person is not totally on board. The first step in a healthy youth sports experience is unity among Dad, Mom and kid. (The single parent might solicit help from a family member or friend at church in making these decisions.) There are so many great introductory sports options for your child, you should be able to find one that fits your child's physical, mental and emotional maturity. Choosing the right sport is equally important. Obviously, the more physical contact required by the sport, the more mature the child should be before starting sports like tackle football, wrestling, ice hockey, etc. Some parents will need to help their child decide when they need to step up their game by moving to a

LESSON ELEVEN

more competitive environment. This would apply to club sports more so than school sports. Some thrive with greater competition whereas some may never recover from being rushed into more competitive sports environments. Being a big fish in a small pond versus being a small fish in a big pond is a decision that needs parental guidance. The Bible verses for this lesson should help you.

Many parents must overcome their own fears of sports before allowing their children to participate: fear of injuries to their child; fear their child will not succeed or be included; fear their child won't make the team. These are legitimate concerns all parents must determine before encouraging their children to play sports. There are risks to almost any activity for our children. Be wise not to replace a risky sport with another activity that is even more unhealthy for your child's development. If you commit this decision to God, He will give you guidance. Pray for that guidance as you consider the Bible verses provided.

Bible Study

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Isaiah 30:21 And whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: "This is the way. Walk in it."

1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

1. How do these Bible verses help you make parenting decisions? Give the specific verse/verses.
2. What is something you learn about God or His attributes from these Bible verses? (Remember to use James 1:5 at the beginning of this lesson.)
3. How does 1 Peter 5:7 bring comfort to you when making big decisions concerning your children?
4. What is the big idea or main takeaway you get from these Scriptures?

LESSON ELEVEN

Practice Session

- If you are in the process of determining the “when” and “what” of your child participating in organized sports, do you have any friends you trust who have already signed up their children for organized sports? Can you ask to talk with them about it? Make a list of two or three friends to have that conversation.

(Nearly 10 years ago, a young mother talked with my wife about the fears she had in allowing her twin sons to play high school football. My wife encouraged her NOT to prohibit them from playing football if they really wanted to play. That mother of twins just saw us for the first time since that conversation a decade ago and informed us of the wonderful experience her twins have had... they just completed four years of playing college football. She thanked my wife for her wise counsel years ago.)

- Talk with your spouse or a trusted friend about any unhealthy fears you bring to this decision that come from your own sports experience as a child. Be open and honest about those fears. Be careful not to let your children inherit your unhealthy fears about playing sports.

Thy Will, Not My Will

How to raise Kingdom-minded kids.



Proverbs 22:6

Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it.



Train your kids for God's Kingdom.

Occasionally I'll hear a father say something like, "I'm not going to interfere with my child's faith journey, I'm going to let them figure that out on their own." Can you imagine a parent saying, "I'm not going to interfere with my 2-year-old child playing near the street, they can figure that out on their own."? No, it's the responsibility of the parents to set their children on paths that are healthy and fruit-bearing, which includes their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. So how do parents set their children on healthy life pathways? Your child's sports environments are life laboratories for exploring both healthy and unhealthy paths.

I once heard a Bible teacher say, "More is caught than taught." In the parenting context, that means children observe what their parents model more than they listen to their verbal instruction. (This does not mean parents should stop verbally teaching their kids, but rather parents should be vigilant in what they are modeling about life, especially their faith life.) Ask yourself, "What am I modeling to my child?"; "What are they learning by observing my life?"; "How does what I say line up with what I do?" If you model loving and serving God, then most likely your child will also.

Another parental teaching principle is, "You can't pass on what you don't possess." That means if the parent does not practice a healthy faith life, they will not be able to model it properly before their child. How would you evaluate your own faith life? Is it something worthy of modeling before your child? You might be interested in an excellent tool developed by FCA to help you grow in your faith life. It's called The CORE and it covers eight fundamentals of the Christian faith. You can find The CORE in the Appendix, page 3.

You might consider how your child's sports environments can be used as a stage for the expression of your love for God and people. This transformation brought on by engagement with God becomes a testimony to those around us. Many opportunities for testimonies occur during sports competition, and the more aware of this you are, the more ready you will be to respond in a manner worthy of one who claims to be a Christ follower.

Ask God to use the following Scriptures to help you lead your child down paths of righteousness for His sake.

Bible Study

1 Timothy 4:7-8 Rather, train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged.

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

LESSON TWELVE

1. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 makes a distinction between “training the body” and “training in godliness.” Write down a few examples of “training in godliness.”
2. Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4 apply to both fathers and mothers. Give some examples of parents exasperating their children to the point of discouragement.
3. What is your big idea or main takeaway from this lesson?

Practice Session

- Ask your Huddle Leader to lead you through The CORE with the intent of you leading your child through it later. (Best practice is for both parents to commit to growing in your respective faith lives, if possible.)
- Initiate a conversation with your child. Ask them to identify several ways they train their body for sports. Then make the connection about how they might train “in godliness.”



APPENDIX



<p>A</p> <p>ADORE</p>	<p>Praise God for His character traits.</p>
<p>C</p> <p>CONFESS</p>	<p>Tell God what's affecting your relationship with Him.</p>
<p>T</p> <p>THANK</p>	<p>Praise God for what He has done.</p>
<p>S</p> <p>SUPPLY</p>	<p>Ask God to provide or meet your needs and desires.</p>

THE FOUR

THE GOSPEL EXPLAINED IN FOUR SIMPLE TRUTHS

The FOUR is a simple repeatable way for FCA staff, volunteers, coaches, and athletes to clearly communicate the Gospel. To learn more, go to thefour.fca.org.



GOD LOVES YOU

God made you and loves you! His love is boundless and unconditional. God is real, and He wants you to personally experience His love and discover His purpose for your life through a relationship with Him.

Genesis 1:27, John 3:16



SIN SEPARATES YOU

Sin damages your relationships with other people and with God. It keeps us from experiencing the fulfilling life that God intends for us. The result: you are eternally separated from God and the life He planned for you.

Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Isaiah 59:2



JESUS RESCUES YOU

Jesus died, but He rose to life again. Jesus offers you peace with God and a personal relationship with Him. Through faith in Jesus, you can experience God's love daily, discover your purpose and have eternal life after death.

1 Peter 3:18, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Romans 5:8



WILL YOU TRUST JESUS?

You choose to trust Jesus when you believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and surrender your life to Him. Are you ready to place your trust in Jesus?

Romans 10:9-10, John 1:12, Rev. 3:20, Ephesians 2:8-9

THE CORE



8 ESSENTIALS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH

FCA desires to make disciples who make disciples. To help our coaches, athletes, volunteers and staff make this happen, FCA has developed a brand-new resource called The CORE. This simple, relevant resource helps new believers journey through eight core essentials of the Christian faith.

WHERE TO FIND THE CORE

Visit **thecore.fca.org** to:

- Order The CORE booklets
- Access a downloadable PDF version of The CORE
- Start The CORE YouVersion reading plan

WHAT ARE THE CORE ESSENTIALS?

- CORE 1** Join God's Team
- CORE 2** Live With God's Power
- CORE 3** Train Spiritually
- CORE 4** Communicate with God
- CORE 5** Study God's Playbook
- CORE 6** Team Up With Others
- CORE 7** Know Your Role
- CORE 8** Share With Others

HOW TO USE THE CORE

1-ON-1: A 1-on-1 meeting occurs when two people commit to a mentoring relationship and go through the eight sessions together.

HUDDLES: Go through The CORE with a small group of athletes or coaches. Consistently meet to review each session and share what God is teaching everyone through the study.

INDIVIDUAL: The CORE can be used as a personal Bible study to grow in your walk with Christ.

START THE JOURNEY

Athletes know this best: when you strengthen your core, everything else benefits. You are starting a life-changing journey that will transform the core of who you are as a disciple of Jesus. In turn, you will be empowered to go and disciple others.

To learn more, go to **thecore.fca.org**.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Johnny Evans Bio -- Ministry to Parents Author

Johnny Evans is a former NFL and Canadian Football League punter and quarterback and current radio sportscaster for the NC State Wolfpack football team for the last 38 seasons. He currently is the Eastern NC Multi-Area Director for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, having served on the FCA staff for 28 years. Johnny and his wife, Beth, co-lead a weekly FCA Adult Chapter Bible Study for nearly 500 people in the Raleigh, NC community. They have four adult children—37 year old quadruplets—and eight grandchildren. Beth worked closely with Johnny, providing him valuable assistance developing the Ministry to Parents curriculum.

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