

training table

S T R E T C H Y O U R
S O U L

“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...” Colossians 1:9

August 1

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2

WHEN I AM WEAK, HE IS STRONG

I recently heard my pastor say, “Trials don’t make you weak, they only bring out your weaknesses.” Not everything goes the way we want it to in life, or even in sports like when we get a bad call and don’t play as much as we feel we deserve. If we react rashly to a bad call, it shows our weakness of holding our tongue and controlling our anger.

Likewise, when we are treated unfairly by coaches or teammates, for us not to continually give our best effort and attitude towards them shows we are weak in that area. If we remain bent out of shape, it only shows our weakness of trusting in God who ultimately has everything under control.

When we go through trials, many times we blame the trials for our frustrations and struggles, when in fact the trials are only showing us how easily we get frustrated.

Trials are inevitable, but how we react to those trials is up to us. Stay grounded in the Word to overcome these trials and let Christ be strong when you are weak. - Leah Metcalf

August 2-3

And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." Romans 15:11

WHERE’S MY PRAISE?

As a former athlete, I remember working hard and not always getting the positive reinforcement I yearned for. When you work and do everything you can to get better and you don’t receive the recognition you feel you deserve, it can really test your patience and more often than not hurt your work ethic. But when you finally receive that praise you have been thirsting for, it is like a breath of fresh air.

Christianity is along the same lines. Christians constantly question God and wonder where their praise is for what they have been doing for Him. When God does show praise, our spirits are uplifted and we are ready to continue our fight. But we must remember, God is always praising us for what we are doing in our relationship, however, He can be subtle or show it in a drastic way. We must stay true to God and He will always stay true to us. - Ryan DeFaber

August 4

“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” Matthew 23:12

IS BIGGER BETTER?

In a time where bigger and better is the way to go, we as Christians forget how we should carry ourselves.

Our culture continues to bombard us with advertising and slogans that influence us to be flashy. Humility is a trait that has abandoned our generation. As a minor leaguer, I see a lot of cocky and prideful guys that like to talk about themselves. They don't realize it, but that attitude makes them look unattractive to other people and God frowns on it. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus openly talks about the dangers of being prideful. Try not to fall victim to our culture by trying to obtain as much stuff as possible.

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus comments on the subject. Remember, it doesn't matter if you roll up to heaven in an Escalade or a Pinto, God will exalt you for your meekness and humility. - Matt Trent, Minor League Pitcher

August 5

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

One thing can be said about most true sports fans: they will give almost anything to be in the stadium or arena or right there on the court or field when a game is being played. They'll sacrifice time, money, and energy because that's where the action is, and fans want to be up close and personal with the sport.

Well, that's how the Bible says Christians should feel about being close to God. Psalm 84:10 says, “Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere.” More than anywhere else we would want to be, we should desire to be with our Lord. The only way we can see the “action” in our Christian walk and watch the Lord move, is to get up close and personal with God.

Are we willing to sacrifice other things to be in His courts? The rewards will be greater than we could ever imagine. - Krystil Wade

August 6

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:28-29

BE THANKFUL

Remember to always be thankful for what is given to you. So often we forget to be thankful for what Jesus did for us and what God has given us. We tend to always dwell on what we are not gifted with and what we have failed at in our lives, that we lose track of what is truly important in our lives - the love of Jesus Christ.

In athletics, dreams are shattered if we lose the big game or make an error in the field. But from our faults and flaws, our character grows. If we do not thank the Lord for our flaws, it is almost as if we are not thankful for anything we have. Our flaws are what make us human. If we were without flaws, then we would be perfect and we know that no one beside Jesus Christ is perfect.

In athletics we only see these icons praising the Lord when they win or make the big play, but rarely do you see them swallow their pride and thank the Lord for losing the big game. I know that it is difficult to be able to thank the Lord for having flaws, but Hebrews 12:28 says we are “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. So, how difficult can it really be? - Ryan DeFaber

August 7

“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ He said, ‘why did you doubt?’”
Matthew 14:31

DOUBT

Doubt is something that everyone has to deal with. There will be doubt that you can perform in the big game or make the game-winning shot. Doubt is everywhere, especially in athletes. It is normal to doubt your ability at some points; it is human nature.

In a way, doubt is a good thing because it constantly makes you ask more questions and makes you more willing to learn and gain knowledge. The same goes with our relationship with Christ. The more you question, the more you are willing to learn about His word and truth. With many different beliefs in this world, there will be times you are tested and doubt will arise. To conquer that doubt, you must have confidence in Jesus and His Biblical truth. Knowing His word will provide you with the answers to all your doubts. - Ryan DiNunzio

August 8

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26-28

GREATNESS

What is greatness? If you stopped 100 people on the street today and asked them what it means to be great, how would they respond? Many people may say that Tiger Woods is great because he is one of the best golfers in the world! Others may think Albert Einstein was great because of his intelligence and understanding of physics. Still others may say that Michael Jordan is great because he’s a legendary basketball player.

In the Bible, Jesus is very clear about the characteristics of great people. They are humble. They are servants. They will make sacrifices for others. Jesus gave us the perfect example of greatness by sacrificing his life on the cross so that we may live with him in eternity. So remember, no matter how much money, power, talent or prestige you have, you are not truly great until you serve another. - Lindsay Adams

August 9-10

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” Romans 12:4-6

GIFTS

As a runner, I was always a good finisher. In the 400, I used that last ounce of energy to pass people on the back stretch. I was a closer. But my start was a completely different story. I almost always started off too slow and spent the entire race catching up. There was another girl on my team who had the exact opposite problem. She was a great starter, but could never hold on in the end. Although we had completely different running styles, we ran about the same times. We began to practice together and we fed off each other’s strengths. She came out strong, so I learned to do the same. My start improved tremendously as did her finish.

In life, God gives each of us different gifts- unique ways to share our faith and love in Christ. Working together with our special gifts, we can accomplish more as Christians. You should always realize the great potential of using your gift to encourage the growth of others and yourself. - Brooke Thompson

August 11

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." II Corinthians 5:20

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

When I hear the word "ambassador," I think of someone who represents a place or someone else. In II Corinthians 5:20, we all called "Christ's ambassadors." This means that we are representatives of Christ and we thus have the responsibility of sharing and imitating Christ here on earth. Athletics offer a great tool for us to reach others and impact their lives for Christ, especially for those in leadership positions.

Sometimes people view athletics as a separate entity of their lives, but we should also let our light shine through what we do in sports. Are you representing Christ in how you perform in athletics? It is so easy to get caught up in the pressures of sports. We start to focus on our name or reputation as a player and increasing our stats that we lose sight of our true focus of representing Christ's name; so let's keep that first priority. - Leah Metcalf

August 12

"Be doers of the Word and not hearers only." James 1:22

TAKE ACTION

Coaches are teachers. Their job is to instruct players. Great coaches work hard to prepare their players for competition. They study their opponent, and come up with a game plan to produce the best possible outcome. Great coaches are constantly looking for ways to improve. But for all the hard work and effort great coaches give, it's meaningless if their athletes don't respond.

Imagine a coach doing his or her best to teach the team, prepare them for competition and then once the athletes got in the game, they all decided not to do what they had been taught. The coach would be upset and the team would be unsuccessful!

James 1:22 tells Christians, to "be doers of the Word and not hearers only." Sometimes we know what we are supposed to do because we know what God's Word says, but we just decide not to do it. God wants us to read His Word and listen to Him, but if that's all we do, then we are forgetting the most important part. It's in "doing what He says" that we let the world know that Jesus loves them, that He died for them, conquered sin and death, and wants a personal relationship with them. So keep listening to God, but make sure you take action as well.

August 13

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."
Deuteronomy 8:17

GETTING BETTER WITH AGE

At the age of 44, Roger Clemens returned for his 24th year in Major League Baseball. He came back to help the New York Yankees make the postseason. Those who have played with him say his training routine is one of the hardest they have ever seen and those who try it for the first time are almost guaranteed to get sick. With seven Cy Young awards, I would argue that he is the greatest pitcher ever to play the game, and it can all go back to how much time he takes training to be the best that he can be. His career record, the awards and championships he has won show you how hard he has worked to get where he is today and the odds he has beaten by playing an unbelievable 24th year. Just as it is written in Deuteronomy, Clemens has used the strength not only in his hands but throughout his body to produce the wealth he enjoys today. - Ryan DeFaber

August 14

“Correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” II Timothy 4:2b

MOTIVATION

Do you remember your favorite coach growing up? Consider for a moment why you liked him or her so much. They probably believed in you, and challenged you to do your best. I remember my favorite coach. Practices were actually fun because he was so positive, upbeat, encouraging, and motivating. Somehow, he made working hard enjoyable. And when I didn't perform well, I never heard phrases like, “What were you thinking?” I never even got a cold shoulder. He was continually there, encouraging me to look forward to the next opportunity. I believed in myself because of his belief in me, and his dedication to positive encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 5 says we are to, “encourage one another and build each other up,” and “respect those who work hard among you,” and “be patient with everyone.” As a fan at a sporting event, do you yell encouraging remarks to your team, or out of disappointment, do you yell harsh, degrading comments? If you are a coach, do you let your anger get the best of you and crush players with your words when they don't perform well? Or, do your players feel inspired, uplifted, and encouraged by your belief in their abilities even when they mess up? - Lindsay Adams

August 15

“In the same way, faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James 2:17

LEARNING IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS

Growing up in Shelby, N.C., I spent most of my days on the basketball court. It was a small dirt court behind my house - but nevertheless it was a court. As a ball player I was always noted for my jumping ability, hence the nickname “Skywalker.” People always asked “how did you get to be such a great leaper?” Sure, some of it was genetics, but most of the ability came from all my days on that little dirt court in my backyard.

As a kid, I always dreamed of dunking a basketball, so everyday I did jumping drills wearing ankle weights. I went to gym, lifted and then did more drills-all wearing my ankle weights. I would jump around the house knocking over plants, lamps and anything else that got in my way. Needless to say, my mother wasn't too pleased. But if that was what it took, that was what I was going to do. Anything to accomplish my goal!

Later in life I realized that I needed to be that dedicated and devoted to God and his word. Because Jesus died for our sins, we all have that “natural ability”, we are all saved. But to have a lasting, strong relationship with Christ, we have to cultivate it. We have to read the Bible, pray continually, seek God in all our doings and encourage others in Christ.

I may have been a good jumper without all the extra drills- but to become a **great** jumper I had to work. This is true of all Christians; we must put in that extra work for Christ in service, in faith and in prayers. Our goal is to be pleasing to the Lord; we should do any and everything to accomplish that goal- the ultimate goal. - David Thompson

August 16-17

PLAYING BY THE RULES

What would a game be like if all the players had heard the rules and understood them, but then chose to go out and play by their own standards? No matter what sport you play, everyone needs to follow the same regulations or else there is chaos.

The same is true for Christians. We hear the Bible taught and know how Christ tells us to live, but if we approach our Christian walk following our own set of rules, our lives will be chaos. Romans 2:13 says, “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.” God is looking not only to see that we know the rules of the game, but also to see that we play by them. That is when He is pleased by our lives. - Krystil Wade

August 18

“He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves.” Job 34:11

IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

Professional athletes sometimes have the mindset that because they are athletes that the laws of the land do not apply to them. Unfortunately they are sadly mistaken, and that is what we have witnessed in past off-seasons with a few NFL players. A handful of football players have been called to meet with Commissioner Roger Goodell, who has brought suspensions that some deem unfair.

But continuously being in trouble is cause for drastic measures. Like Job 34:11, Goodell brought punishments that these players deserved. In everyday life we deal with the same situation, but we do not answer to a commissioner, we answer to the Lord. The Lord will repay us for our good deeds, but He will also make sure that we get exactly what we deserve for each situation. What we all need to realize is that God is always looking over us and gives us what our conduct deserves. - Ryan DeFaber

August 19

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken” Ecclesiastes 4:12

THE ETERNAL TEAM

Kobe Bryant, Gary Payton, Karl Malone and Shaquille O’Neal- the Lakers line up seemed more like an All-Star team. You would think such a star-studded team would be a sure bet to win the championship. But here they were in Game 5 of the Championship and down by 20 to the Detroit Pistons. They were going to lose and Detroit would be the 2004 NBA Champions. How could this happen? How did this team of “all-stars” lose to the Pistons, a team with no real superstars?

If you take a look at how both teams approached the game, you can see why the Pistons were victorious. Some of the players on the Lakers squad seemed to be more concerned with their own individual performances than with the team’s success. Basically, they were not playing as a team. At times they looked lost on the court as if they had never played together. The Pistons on the other hand had a strong front. They banded together as a team and shut the Lakers down.

It is important to be on Jesus’ team because no single person can defeat the devil. We cannot win that battle on our own. But teamed with Jesus Christ and a great play book- the Bible- we can WIN! We shouldn’t stop there, as Christians we need to encourage one another and work together for God’s glory. Alone we are helpless, but together we are unbeatable! - David Thompson

August 20

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” Isaiah 12:3

TRUE JOY

There’s no doubting the joy and happiness that come from hitting that game-winning home run or last-minute buzzer beater. You’re a hero when you succeed – but what about when you miss the shot? It’s easy to be joyful when everything’s going perfect, but what about those times when things aren’t going quite as you expected? Doesn’t the Bible teach us to praise God no matter the circumstances?

Learning to have joy in life is a lot like saying wedding vows. We as Christians must remember to express our love and faith “through good times and bad.” Just because life is throwing a few curve balls doesn’t mean God has stepped off the mound. God wants us to learn to find joy even on the not-so-joyous days. Once we can find that type of faith, it becomes easier to give him praise on the hard days.

Remember, God has more than just a few plays—He has the game plan for your life! - Natalie Creech

August 21

“Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment.” John 7:24

COURT VISION

During orientation week at North Carolina State I ran into Joe Cafferky, one of the members of the varsity basketball team. With him was a “midget” with cut-off jeans who looked to be all of 13 years old. Joe introduced him saying, “This is your new teammate, Monte Towe. He’s a freshman, too.” I was stunned. He had to be kidding. This guy was 5-foot-7 in his sneakers. There is no way this guy could be in college. There is no way he could actually play ball!

Later that day we played some pick up games and his team won every game because he controlled the tempo. Throughout our time at N.C. State, Monte proved not only that he could play ball but also that he was a leader and a winner. Monte was a great point guard who could shoot from downtown and distribute the ball at the right time to the right guy. He made all of us better. Under his leadership, we won the NCAA national championship in 1974. Monte was an All- American and continued his career playing professional basketball for two years. Needless to say, my first impression of him was completely wrong.

In life, it is easy to make stark judgments and assumptions. We often rely on what we see on the outside and never take the time to really understand things before forming an opinion. Appearances can be deceiving and that is why Jesus encourages us to “stop judging by mere appearances” so we can make the “right judgment.” It is important to understand things before making rash decisions or reaching faulty conclusions. Jesus encourages us so that we may seek knowledge and ultimately obtain truth. - David Thompson

August 22

“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.” I Chronicles 16:8

THANK YOU

Thanksgiving may be months away, but there’s no reason to stop thanking the Lord. You hear all the athletes on television say how they thank the Lord when they win. Why not thank him when you lose? Sure, winning’s great—the adrenaline, the excitement—but it takes a real winner to thank Him when you lose.

In fact, don’t even look at it as “losing.” Look at it as transforming a seemingly negative situation into a positive one. Thank the Lord that you had the opportunity to compete in something you enjoy. Thank Him for having the passion for a team—maybe you play for them or maybe you’re just the number one fan. Either way, you have a passion that you can be thankful for. Be thankful for the humbling experience that comes with losing. Soak up all that you can learn from the loss. That’s not to say that winning is bad—winning is fantastic! Just keep in mind which team you’re playing for, through the ups and downs. - Natalie Creech

August 23-24

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ” Philippians 3

WHY WORRY?

Some of my most memorable childhood memories come from playing basketball with my dad. I was only 11 years old and my dad was a professional basketball player, so my chances of winning... well, I had no chance. Everyday we played, and everyday I lost. He would let me score until I almost won and then he would score 10 in a row to beat me. What a cruel game! I ran home crying every single time- I could not stand to lose.

Now, it’s funny for me to look back and see how ridiculous I was. Winning was the most important thing and losing was the end of the world. There are so many things in life that we place our importance. We often end up stressing out and worrying about these things until they consume us. But, if we look at these problems with an eternal perspective, almost all of them are just as trivial as winning the games I played with my dad. The only truly important thing we have to worry about is our relationship with Jesus and how we serve and glorify Him in our life. - Brooke Thompson

August 25

"The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me." 2 Samuel 22:21

STRATEGY

In all aspects of life, we have a plan or a strategy that we try to adhere. In sports, you always plot out your next play, shot or pitch. The same thing applies in the business world; each company goes by their company handbook or business plan to try and stay ahead of the competition. Of course, along the way there will be bumps in the road and obstacles that will try and derail you or delay you from your plan.

This all relates to our faith. As Christians we all are looking to please God and go by His rules that are laid out in the Bible. Our ultimate goal or plan is to end up in Heaven with Jesus, but Satan is always looking to try and derail us with temptation, lust, greed, etc. We all must remember, however, that God has a plan for all of us, and if we follow the Word our lives will be rewarded. - Ryan DeFaber

August 26

"Let him not deceive himself by trusting what is worthless, for he will get nothing in return." Job 15:31

TOTAL FAITH

What do quarterbacks looking for completions, and point guards making assists have in common? They both have to put total faith in their teammates to follow through on what they have practiced.

Plenty of teams go through team building activities before the season starts. In recent years, some corporations have turned to those activities to increase productivity in the workplace. They all boil down to a key element for success: TRUST. At the same time, don't be fooled by false prophets (sometimes disguised as friends) looking to deceive you. Be sure you're trusting in the right path that will lead you to God. Don't get discouraged if sometimes you falter. As long as you put your trust in God, He will get you back on track.

Daniel had to trust in God to give him knowledge to interpret Belteshazzar's dream or risk being killed by the king's decree. That takes a lot more faith than trusting a teammate to be in the right place. - Natalie Creech

August 27

"And who knows if you have come to royal position for such a time as this" Esther 4:14

GOD'S PLAN

For as long as I can remember, I always aspired to be a basketball star. After many years of hard work, I accomplished my goal- I made it to the pros! At the pinnacle of my career, I was the highest paid professional athlete. David Thompson was a household name, little kids patterned their games after the "Skywalker." The fame felt good, but then it all ended.

Through my trials and tribulations, God stood his ground and carried me through. He was my refuge. After I had recovered, my basketball days were over - I was no longer able to play, but I was able to tell my story and share that without God's grace I would have never overcome my problems. And although I missed inspiring people on the basketball courts, I was motivating people in a much more important way; encouraging them to grow in their relationship to Christ.

In the Bible, Esther was placed in the kingdom "for such a time" to save her people. God places us in a variety of situations and circumstances, and although we may be unsure of his reasoning, He is always in control. He has a plan for our lives. So in each situation you find yourself, think of how you can use it to help others grow in the Lord. Maybe you were placed there for such a time as this! - David Thompson

August 28

WEARING THE RIGHT UNIFORM

Athletes prepare for their sports in many ways, but one thing they pay close attention to is what they wear. A race car driver wouldn't get on the track without a helmet any more than a basketball player would get on the court in football pads.

There are certain things to put on to be an effective player, and they identify someone as a member of a specific team. As believers, we are to put on particular attributes in order to be valuable players in God's Kingdom. Colossians 3:12 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." These are the garments Christ wore every day, and we are expected to live as He did. These clothes are like our helmet and pads; they show the world that we're on His team and will help us be effective players. - Krystil Wade

August 29

"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:8 (King James Version)

DO YOU MIND?

Have you ever tried to put up a tent in the middle of a storm? How about inhaling while under water, or in a smoky room? Well, there is nothing wrong with putting up a tent or inhaling, but the right thing at the wrong time can be just as devastating as the wrong thing at the same time.

The same principle applies to life and our minds. Try making a decision in the heat of the moment, or try calming your own mind to understand one person in a room full of shouting babies.

The Bible says that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Therefore, it is imperative that we set our minds on this: God is God, He is in control, and no one or thing is greater than He that dwells within us. So, set your mind, and do it before anything happens and before the heat of the battle or before you hear thousands of other voices. Set your mind on Him, and the truth that He says about you. Then and only then can you truly walk in the midst of any situation and be confident with the right mindset. - Eric Harris

August 30-31

"In everything set them an example by doing what is good." Titus 2:7

BE A WITNESS

As a junior on the track team, there was a guy who would run "all-out" every day. He wasn't the best runner on the team, but he was definitely the most dedicated. He came to practice eager to improve; and although after each trial he was worn out, in the end he was better for it. In fact, he became one of the top 400 meter runners in the conference. I would watch him in awe. You could just see the determination in his face as he struggled to use that last ounce of power to outrun his opponent in the last stretch of the race.

As I watched my friend practice, I was inspired to practice harder. His determination and desire encouraged me to emulate his actions. In the same way, our fervor for Christ will encourage others to grow. God wants us to be eager to improve; He wants us to bring our A-game every day so that we can inspire others to do the same. Through our actions, others can see Christ's love and that can be the most valuable and effective witnessing tool we have. - Brooke Thompson