

ISTROUMASPORTS

2023 BASKETBALL DEVOTIONS

GAME 1: REPENT

“To the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” – James 4:17

During an exciting game, sometimes a player can get turned around and unbelievably start running toward the opposing side. Because the coach can't jump in the game and stop him, he frantically yells at the player to turn around. Teammates and the crowd point toward the right direction hoping the player realizes the mistake. The player knows the right way but somehow gets confused and heads in the wrong direction anyway. The team suffers, and the player worries he might no longer be wanted on the team.

It might be easy to laugh at such a mistake, but we've all been there. Sometimes we think we are on track but are really going in the wrong direction. We know the right things to do, but we don't always do them. Unlike a coach who can't intervene in a game, God did jump into our world to keep us from going in the wrong direction by sending His Son Jesus here to save us. He gave us His word, the Bible, to point us in the right direction and show us how to live and do things that are right.

When we choose not to do the right thing, that is called sin. But God is merciful to us and doesn't penalize us for our sin like we deserve because Jesus took our punishment when He died on the cross. Because of His great compassion toward us He isn't content to let us keep going the wrong way. God graciously gives us opportunities to repent which means we tell Him we are sorry we did something wrong, and we want to turn away from that sin. Repenting means we turn toward Him and do what is right.

Even if we are like the player who went the wrong way, we can give glory to God because we never have to fear that He won't want us on His team!

Big Question:

What does it mean to repent, and why is repenting important?

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GAME 2: REPENT

“To the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” – James 4:17

From iPads and bats slammed to the ground, punches being thrown and ‘in your face’ yelling matches, you don’t have to look far to see examples of sports figures behaving badly. By letting their feelings, frustrations and fears get the best of them, they do the wrong things. It’s not that they don’t know the right things to do – it’s just that they choose not to do them.

God has given us His word, the Bible to help us respond the right way to situations we face even while playing sports. Sometimes you will choose the right thing to do, but sometimes, even when you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you may not. That is sin.

Will you give grace to a teammate who costs the team a game and encourage them to do better next time, or will you talk about them behind their backs? Will you show compassion on a fellow player who misses a point, or point out all of the times they have been successful? Will you be merciful to an opponent who has less skill, or will you point out their shortcomings? Will you give glory to God for His help during the game, or elevate yourself as the one responsible for your team’s good outcome?

Remember that God is merciful to us and forgives us when we do go in the wrong direction. He wants us to repent by telling Him we are sorry and asking Him to help us do the right thing. If you have been rude or unkind toward another player or opponent you can repent by apologizing to God and to them. If you have selfishly tried to gain recognition or play time, tell God you are sorry and ask Him to help you recognize the needs of others on your team. If you let your temper get out of control, ask God to forgive you and help you find better ways to deal with your feelings.

God is willing to help us do the right things. And He is faithful to forgive us when we have not. Which will you choose?

Big Question:

Why is it important that we ask God to help us do the right things?

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GAME 3: FORGIVE

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.” – I John 1:9

At the end of the season proudly displayed a gleaming trophy stands as a testament to the fact that this team, this year was victorious. In the after-game excitement, players are given championship t-shirts and hats, proof that they've overcome all odds. Later, a championship ring arrives; evidence lasting a lifetime memorializing the great achievement.

Trophies, t-shirts and hats and championship rings are reminders of hard-fought struggles for victory. God has given us reminders of His love through the hard-fought battle to accomplish forgiveness of sin.

Since the time of Adam and Eve, every person born has been unable to win over sin. Jesus came because sin needs to be punished. We could never do enough good, so Jesus died on a cross to take the punishment we deserve. Only through Him did God provide the way for us to have our sin forgiven. His death on the cross is the testament to the fact that God is merciful and willing to forgive our sins of the past, the present and the future.

When we ask Jesus into our hearts to forgive our sin, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us. God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us live in ways that honor Him. When we get off track and do things that we know are not right, He compassionately reminds us, and gives us opportunities to ask God to forgive us. Our changed lives are proof that God has forgiven us.

Sometimes when we sin, we feel we have done something so bad that God would never want to forgive us. But God is a God of grace, and He has given us His word, the Bible that tells us otherwise. Our memory verse for this week is a reminder to us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. Because God cannot lie, and because Jesus already took the punishment for our sin, He always forgives us. His word is the evidence that our sin will be forgiven, an achievement lasting for all of eternity.

Championship trophies, t-shirts and rings represent great accomplishment. But the greatest accomplishment of all is Jesus' death on the cross so that we could have our sins forgiven.

Big Question:

Why is it important that our sins need to be forgiven?

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GAME 4: FORGIVE

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.” – I John 1:9

You might not always be happy with them, but chances are, you are probably very forgiving of your favorite teams and players. When your team blows a game you remind yourself that things may be better next week. You don't look for a new team to follow. Why? Because they are important to you. You value them even when they don't perform well. If players have a problem in their personal life or misbehave during a game you don't give up on them. Why? Because you believe they are worth your loyalty, and you sympathize because you've done the same.

Like forgiving sports fans, God is very forgiving of each one of us. There are so many times when maybe you've blown it. But God doesn't give up on you. Why? Because He is a merciful God. In His eyes, you are of great worth and ever so valuable to Him.

Even when you have had ugly or unkind thoughts you can ask Him to forgive you and He graciously will. When you do things that are wrong or misbehave, you can tell Him you are sorry, and forgiveness is yours. If your words have been damaging or insulting to others, confess that to Him. Not only will He forgive you, but He will help you to ask forgiveness of those you have hurt because He values them, too. If you've had a poor attitude or have gotten angry with others, God is willing to forgive that when you ask.

God doesn't dump you when you sin. He doesn't write you off to go find someone else who can speak, think, and act better. When Jesus came to earth, He was not only God, but He was also human. As a human, even though He was tempted to sin, He never did. That helped Him to be able to sympathize with us and to be compassionate in our weakness.

Because you are of great value and worth to Him you can be confident God will honor His promise to forgive every sin you confess to Him.

Big Question:

What keeps us from asking God to forgive us for our sin?

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GAME 5: SACRIFICE

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.” – I John 3:16

The ad reads: “Wanted: Player who has superior knowledge of the sport looking to play a key leadership role on a new team. Benefits include placement in top positions, choices of playing times and opportunities, as well as rewards and recognition for achievement .” Well, you say, “Sign me up!” But as you read farther you notice in fine print the Job Requirements: “Must be willing to sacrifice all of the above.” So, would you stay or play?

Every sport comes with sacrifice. Whether it’s time or money, comfort, or activities with family and friends, there are going to be sacrifices. When Jesus came to earth, He didn’t come for fame or recognition. His sole purpose was to sacrifice everything in order to save us.

He sacrificed the beauty and glory of heaven so that those who trust Him as Savior can one day be with Him there. He gave up His plans preferring His Father’s plan for our sins to be forgiven. He sacrificed being with His family and friends in order for us to be part of His family. His personal comfort was sacrificed as He spent many days on trekking rough terrain with no permanent earthly home so that we could have the comfort of a close relationship with His Father.

With compassion, He sacrificed His reputation suffering misunderstanding in order for us to understand how much God loves us. Enduring hatred, He forfeited His rightful recognition as the Son of God so that we could be called children of God. In His mercy, Jesus suffered rejection so that we don’t have to worry about being rejected by God. But, most of all, Jesus obediently went to the cross paying a sin debt He knew we couldn’t pay.

Sacrifice is never comfortable. Sacrifice is never easy. It isn’t easy for us, and the Bible reminds us that it wasn’t easy for Jesus. We can give glory to God that He was willing to sacrifice His sinless perfection so that we might be sinless before God.

Big Question:

How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus sacrificed everything for you?

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GAME 6: SACRIFICE

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.” – I John 3:16

If your game is early, it may mean you sacrifice a little shuteye. Grumble. If it is late, that could make for a hectic evening schedule and giving up plans with friends. Groan. If the sun is blazing or rain falls you surrender any hope of being comfortable as your uniform starts sticking like glue. And not just any glue, but super glue. Complain. If there are more players on the team than there are positions, you may forfeit play time and sit out part of the game. Sigh. Or you may be asked to forego playing your favorite position when it is given to a less experienced, less skilled player. Growl.

Some of the sacrifices you'll make for the team will be big, some small. Either way it isn't easy. Jesus understood that because His death on the cross wasn't easy. He didn't complain, grumble, or argue but showed us how to handle sacrifice in ways that glorify God.

When playing conditions are difficult or when you are tired, like Jesus, you can choose not to protest about having to give up some of your personal comforts. When practices or games interfere with other things that you want to do, you can decide you won't grumble and ask God to help you with your schedule.

If you have to give up your position to another player or forfeit time in the game, you can follow Jesus' example and graciously sacrifice what you want so that others benefit. When other players are recognized for their accomplishments and you are not, you can ask God to help you forego saying any angry words. Ask Him to help you replace them with words that graciously acknowledge others' achievements. If another player or opponent injures you or hurts you, like Jesus you can choose to lay down your right to get back at them.

Jesus didn't complain that it wasn't fair that He had to sacrifice His life on the cross. He knew that what He was doing was for our good. As opportunities for sacrifice come your way, will you grumble, complain, groan or growl or will you handle those experiences like Jesus?

Big Question:

What is the hardest thing about having to make sacrifices?

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GAME 7: TRANSFORM

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” – 2 Corinthians 5:17

In the past it wasn't unusual for stadiums to be shared by two or more sports like baseball and football. Making the shift from one season to the next required workers to rely on a model in order to create fields set up with the exact specifications and dimensions of the next sport. During the conversion, they had to continually consult blueprints in order to make the transformation absolutely perfect.

The Bible says if we are in Christ, we are a new creation. For the rest of our lives God works to transform us from our old life to a new one. Jesus is the model He uses. Just like Jesus was completely obedient to His heavenly Father, God will give us new desires so that we want to obey Him. Jesus always gave glory to God in everything He faced on earth. God will help us recognize that we can give Him glory even when we face tough times as we learn to trust that He is always working things for our good. Jesus was compassionate toward those who loved Him and those who didn't, and God will transform our hearts so that we are able to do the same. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He was merciful to those who were responsible and asked God to forgive them. With God's help, we can forgive those who hurt us.

Just like the fields of a stadium, the transformation doesn't just happen automatically. We have to consult God's blueprint – the Bible in order to become more like our model Jesus. When we read and study the Bible, we can learn what Jesus was like. It helps us understand the things that God wants us to do and how He wants us to relate to those around us. The Bible helps us learn what is pleasing to God and what is not. We can rely on the Bible to guide our thoughts and our attitudes and even our words.

God is always at work on our transformation. We can take heart that He is patient and willing to help us even when we struggle because He knows that the end result is a new creation.

Big Question:

How is Jesus the model for your life?

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GAME 8: TRANSFORM

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” – 2 Corinthians 5:17

It's game day. You crawl out of the covers with a serious case of 'bed-head' and barely enough strength to bring your spoonful of Captain Crunch to your mouth. You put on your uniform, gather your gear and head to the game. You join your teammates chattering excitedly waiting for the game to begin. The cheering crowd gets you pumped. The coach's pre-game talk energizes you. Earlier you could barely get out of your own way. Now you're like a new person - transformed, charged up, ready for any challenge.

Transformations involve change. When we trust Jesus as our Savior, God will help us make changes in our lives, so we think more like Him, act more like Him and speak more like Him.

If we think about things that are wrong or impure, we can ask God's help to think about things that are good and true. If our thinking is more about our wants, God will help us be grateful to Him for what we have. If we think selfish thoughts, we can ask God to help us put others first. We can ask His help in giving Him praise and glory in every situation we face.

If we act in ways we know are not right, we can ask God's help to transform our behavior. If we do things that are harmful to others, God will help us be more compassionate and helpful. When we develop attitudes that are disrespectful, we can ask God to help us transform those feelings into respect for others.

If our words are not good or pleasant, we can ask God help to say only those things that are honorable. If our words hurt others or cause pain, God is willing to help speak words of grace building others up. If our words are not truthful, God is available to help us transform them, so we speak only those things that are true.

As new creations, God is always eager to work in our lives so that we might be transformed, charged up, ready for any challenge.

Big Question:

What areas of your life do you think God wants to transform?