

#1 WISDOM: introduction

Icebreaker Question

- What is your favorite subject in school? Why? *Coaches share.*
- Even coaches at our age can still learn new things.

Sport Application

- We're not in school and this isn't a classroom. But did you know that you can learn things from playing sports? What are some examples?
 - Sport: rules/how to play, how to improve fundamentals
 - Teammates: their names and what school they go to. This helps you become better friends or make new friends on the court.
 - Yourself: do you enjoy pressure or big moments (game-winning free throws), are you a good teammate who cares about the success of other players, are you a good listener to your coaches, do you have fun playing basketball?

Spiritual Connection

- Sports can also teach us about God!
- God created sports as a gift to us, for our joy.
- Does anyone know who created basketball? James Naismith. God gave James his ability, desire, and opportunity to do so.
- Because sports are a gift from God, we should praise Him before, after, and through the game, no matter what happens.
- Proverbs 1:5 - Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance."

Challenge

- Learn the first names of every person on this team.
- Learn the memory verse and recite it to your parents.

Prayer

- Thank God for a new season and the opportunity to learn about each other, about ourselves, about the sport, but most importantly, about God.
- Pray that every player, parent, and coach on this team would see this season as a time to know God better and grow closer to Him.

Memory Verse: Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

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#2 HUMILITY (in winning)

Icebreaker Question

- What is something you think you're really good at (other than basketball)? *Coaches share.*
- Do you talk about it a lot? Do you know what it means to brag?

Sport Application

- Humility is showing a modest estimate of your own value or importance // not thinking too highly or lowly of yourself
- What does humility on the court look like?
 - Don't show off after a big shot, don't trash talk, being a team player
- What does humility at home or in school look like?
 - Asking your teacher for help instead of pretending you know it all
- Is it okay to want to win? Absolutely.
- Winning should be a DESIRE, but should not be a GOAL.
 - The goals you set should fully be in your control. Winning a game requires other factors beyond just the players and coaches on your team. You can't control the referees and you can't control the other team.
- So then... What should our goals be as a team?
 - First, have fun! Improve skills. Execute what we practice into the game. Be humble.

5U/7U can relate winning to things going well, since teams don't technically "win" or keep score

Spiritual Connection

- James 4:10 - Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
- In the world, people try to lift themselves up to be noticed. But in God's Kingdom, the way to the top is to stay low. When we stay humble, God is the one who chooses to honor us.
- Can you think of a way how Jesus was humble?
 - Washed his disciples' feet. The Messiah, God's son, physically lowered himself to wash the dirt off the feet of tax collectors and fishermen. If Jesus showed humility, shouldn't we?
- Instead of seeking attention or bragging on ourselves or our team, give all the glory to God.

Challenge

- Line up to shake your opponents' hands and say "good game" before celebrating with your team.
- Don't show off when things go your way.

Prayer

- Thank God for His son, Jesus, who painted the perfect picture of humility.
- Pray that our focus this season would be on having fun, improving skills, and building character.
- Pray that players, parents, and coaches would be humble and give God glory this season.

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#3 GRACE (in losing)

Icebreaker Question

- Can you think of a time when someone was kind to you? What did they do? *Coaches share.*

Sport Application

- Winning feels great, but losing can actually make a better teacher. It shows us exactly what we need to work on and get better at for next week. Losses or mistakes aren't failures if you use them to get better.
- Do you think it's easier to be nicer when you're winning?
- Sports reveal your true character, especially when the scoreboard isn't in your favor. Being a "graceful loser" means keeping your head up and respecting the game, even when it hurts.
- What are ways we can be kind and show grace, whether things are good or bad for us?
 - Always telling your opponents "good game" and giving high-fives.
- Losing isn't fun. But that's no reason to pout or complain when it happens.
 - Remember last week when we said that winning was a desire, not a goal? If players improved and gave a good effort, then hold your head up high every time.

5U/7U can relate losing to things not going our way, since teams don't technically "lose" or keep score

Spiritual Connection

- Romans 5:3-4 - And we also have joy with our troubles because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope.
- God is way more interested in the person you are becoming than the number of trophies on your shelf. He uses hard times, and tough losses, to stretch our patience and build character.
- The result is hope. Our hope shouldn't come from a winning streak, but from God and His love for us.
 - No matter the outcome, we can still have hope and joy because we know our value doesn't change based on a final score.
- Grace is the free and undeserved kindness of God. Part of grace is also offering or asking for forgiveness.
- Don't let mistakes, losses, or failures bring you down. Instead, accept the loss, forgive yourself, and move on to the next practice and game.

Challenge

- If something goes wrong (a turnover, the opponent scores a wide open layup, or a loss), you aren't allowed to complain or blame anyone else. Instead, tell yourself, "It'll be okay, I'll get it next time," and keep playing hard.

Prayer

- Thank God for the grace he has shown us, even though we don't deserve it.
- Pray for good attitudes and kindness towards others at all times.

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#4 **COMPETITION: performing at 100%**

Icebreaker Question

- Do you have any hobbies other than basketball? *Coaches share.*
- How serious are you about it?
- Do you like it more than this sport?

Sport Application

- Competition or performing in games isn't just about being the fastest or scoring the most; it's about giving 100% of what you have today.
 - This could look like working on memorizing the bible verse every week or running as fast as you can to get back on defense, even when you're tired.
- No matter your position, skill, experience, size, the effort should look exactly the same.
- We define competition as "me with you for God's glory" instead of "me against you for our glory".
 - Remember, our first two devotions talked about praising God instead of ourselves.
- Competition is a good thing. It is an opportunity to test and strengthen our skills.

Spiritual Connection

- Colossians 3:23 - Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.
- We call God the "Audience of One." This means that even if the stands were empty, we would play hard because we are using the bodies and talents He gave us as a way to say "Thank You" to Him.
- God loves to see His children enjoy the gifts He gave them!
- You might not think of sports as church, but playing out here can be just like singing songs at church.
 - God is with us on the court right now just as He's present in a church tomorrow. And when you work with all your heart for God, your sweat and effort become a form of worship.
- Similarly, the bible also tells us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."
 - We ought to love God with everything we have because He first loved us.

Challenge

- Complete your chores the best you possibly can, without complaining.
- Show up to your next game excited to play. Arrive early and tell your coach you're ready to compete. Warm up with a purpose and be focused.

Prayer

- Thank God for the opportunity to work hard, compete, and perform
- Pray for your whole team to put their whole hearts into whatever they do this week for the Lord, not for themselves

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#5 PREPARATION: practice

Icebreaker Question

- What do you want to be when you grow up? *Coaches share.*
- Achieving these goals requires effort. When you enjoy or care about something, it's usually easier to prepare for it.

Sport Application

- Who here likes to practice? Or do you just want to show up on game day?
 - Practice is important. You can't just expect to show up on the first practice and play a real game without any instruction. That would be chaos, wouldn't it?
- These early practices allow us to learn each other's names, discover what positions you're playing, and at the very least, introduce the basic rules.
- Practice can sometimes feel repetitive or boring, but it's where the actual growth happens.
 - While games can be fun, you don't always get better from playing in games. They are a chance to put what you have been practicing to the test.
- Even the best players in the NBA still practice the basics, like shooting free throws and dribbling in place. They do it over and over and over again, so much that it becomes second nature to these pros. This is called "muscle memory."

Spiritual Connection

- If you say that you are a basketball player, maybe even a good one, you're going to want to practice hard to prove that statement right.
 - The same goes for God. If you say that you want to know God and follow Him, you're going to have to put in the work to do so.
- Philippians 4:9 - Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
- To practice your faith, you could attend church (to learn about and praise God), pray (talk to God), or read your bible (learn about God).
 - You could say that some of these are fundamentals of Christian living, like shooting/dribbling/rebounding in basketball.
- Another thing you can do is practicing the topics we have discussed this season:
 - learning (wisdom), humility, grace, and working with all your heart for the Lord (competition)

Challenge

- Practice basketball skills and the memory verse at home at least once this week.

Prayer

- Thank God for the desires and skills He gives us, and the opportunity to strengthen them.
- Pray that all continue to practice their faith and work to grow closer to God.

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#6 **ROLE RECOGNITION: importance & uniqueness**

Icebreaker Question

- If you could have any superpower, what would you want? *Coaches share.*
- Even superheroes, like Spiderman, are part of a team. They have a unique role, or special powers that others don't, to save the day as a team.

Sport Application

- Every sport has different positions that require different skills.
 - Your team needs someone who can dribble (point guard), someone who can shoot on the wing (shooting guard or small forward), someone who can shoot in the paint and rebound (power forward and center).
- Positions are different and equally as important. You might not be able to win with a team full of 3-point shooters. Your team needs players to grab rebounds, cut to the basket, and defend.
- Teammates need to fulfill their role to put the team in the best position to succeed.
- Basketball can be so fun because it requires bringing individuals together to form a complete team.

Spiritual Connection

- 1 Corinthians 12:12 - Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.
- The Bible says in that chapter that the church is like a human body. An eye can't do what an ear does, and a foot can't do what a hand does.
 - As important as hands are to basketball, you don't want a body of only hands, do you?
- We've talked about in the past how God has given us the gift of sports and the gift of being able to play sports.
 - God also purposely gave you specific personalities and other talents, some of which are different from your teammates'.
- God cares about you so much to make you unique.

Challenge

- Ask your parents what's one way you can help your family, your team at home, this week.
- Ask your coach for one specific thing to focus on at the next practice and game.

Prayer

- Thank God for being specifically created by Him.
- Pray for your players to use their personalities and talents to help the team.

Memory Verse: Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

#7 TEAMWORK: encouragement & selflessness

Icebreaker Question

- What's one of your favorite birthday gifts you've received? *Coaches share.*
- Is it hard to share that new toy? Why?

Sport Application

- Imagine playing a game without any teammates. You're on the court by yourself. 5 vs 1... Once you pick up your dribble, you can't pass the ball to anyone. Covering five opponents on defense would be exhausting. That would be pretty tough, right?
- Thankfully, there's 5 players on the court. So you don't have to just rely on yourself to do everything. You have teammates!
- There's more to being a good teammate than getting your other players involved. How else can you help your team?
 - Cheering them on, high fives, encouragement after a missed shot, doing what your coach tells you to without complaining.

Spiritual Connection

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Encourage one another and build each other up.
- Last week, we learned that all positions, though different, are valuable to a team. Similarly, all of you are equally as important to this team.
- Every player is important because we are all created in the image of God. Because of this, we should respect, be kind to, and build up each teammate.
- The bible tells us to "love your neighbor as yourself". "Neighbor" doesn't just refer to people living in houses next to you; it refers to anyone around you like classmates and your own family.
 - The bible also says that there is no command greater than this, except to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (discussed this in the competition devotion).
- It's important that we obey these commands from God, to be nice to both teammates and opponents.
- It's a big deal to put your teammates above yourself.
 - This could be agreeing with your coach when he sits you during the last period of the game or passing to a teammate even though you really wanted to score a bucket.

Challenge

- Give one specific, verbal encouragement to a different teammate each period.
- Give one specific complement to each of your family members every day this week.

Prayer

- Thank God for placing you on this specific team.
- Pray for players to learn how to be good teammates - be selfless, encourage, and build each other up.

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#8 REMEMBRANCE: recap

Icebreaker Question

- What was one of your favorite moments that happened this season? *Coaches share.*
 - (*Kids might shout out blocks, step-back threes, or game-winning shots.*)
- Yes, those were cool, but...
- What about a moment that was not a basketball play?
 - Maybe a teammate cheered you on or an opponent encouraged you.

Sport Application

- Recap the 7 lessons:
 - Wisdom (learning)
 - Humility (in winning)
 - Grace (in losing)
 - Competition
 - Preparation
 - Role Recognition: you are important and unique
 - Teamwork: being a good teammate
- Which lesson stood out to you?

Spiritual Connection

- God can teach us these things through sports, but they can help us off the court too.
- Psalm 103:2 - Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.
- Even though the season is over this weekend, it's important to remember what we talked about and what God has done for us.

Challenge

- Thank each of your coaches and players for a fun season.
- Discuss some of your favorite moments and what you learned about God with your family at home.

Prayer

- Thank God for this season: memories that were created, friendships that were formed, fun times that occurred, skills that were improved.
- Pray that all would remember God's goodness from the past couple of months and continue to learn about God even after the season is over.

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