

Don't Waste Your Sports

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[0:00] The following message was given at a Sunday service at Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You can be seated. In 2014, Rory McIlroy was on top of the world of golf.

After winning the Open Championship and the PGA Championship, he was only one major away from the most difficult achievement in golf, the Grand Slam.

In the last 40 years, only one player had accomplished winning all four majors. You may have already guessed it. It was Tiger Woods. Like Tiger Woods, Rory was a young phenomenon.

[1:13] In his first four years on tour, he would win 14 tournaments. The only thing standing between him and legend status was the coveted green jacket and Masters Wind.

Every year the question was asked, is this the year? Is this the year Rory finally does it? And year after year of heartbreaking miss, he would fail.

This would continue for 11 years of struggle. Until finally, April of 2025, Rory stood over a four-foot putt to win the Masters and complete the Grand Slam.

We held our breath as we watched that four-foot putt roll towards the hole and drop. He had done it. He had completed the Grand Slam.

Rory fell to the ground, overcome with emotion, as the moment he'd waited for his entire life had finally come. During the post-tournament ceremony, an emotional Rory was addressing his family and thanking his team, thanking those who had supported him.

[2:27] And then he pauses and he looks at his daughter. He wants to address his daughter. And you expect something foundational for her to carry with her throughout her life.

And he says to her, he says, The one thing that I would tell you is to never give up on your dreams. On our way to church, we passed the Bicentennial Park.

And for most of the year, the parking lot is packed full for youth sports. Not only the weekend, but nearly every night for practice and games, you have football, soccer, and baseball.

Someone told me recently that the little field where the kids play is called the field of dreams. Over time, athletes have gotten bigger, stronger, faster.

New records are continuing to be set, and the competition is stiffer than ever before. If you want your kid to follow their dreams or your dreams of playing in college sports, then you're going to have to start them young.

[3:33] They're going to have to play on the best teams. They're going to have to have the best gear. And they're going to have to have the best coaches so they can be noticed. They'll need to work out and eat well.

And you may need to sprinkle a little bit of salt in their shoes so they grow to be taller than 5'9". Which is average height, by the way. An article by the New York Times put youth sports as a \$40 billion industry.

Families spend year after year forking out thousands of dollars consumed with sports for each kid. Because once you start the process with one, you've got to be fair to the rest, right?

The Babylon Bee put out a fitting article this week. It said \$200,000 spent on travel ball finally pays off with Sun's \$500 college scholarship.

It was all worth it, said Dad Greg Benson. The reverse mortgage. Selling our plasma. Spending a decade crossing six state lines every weekend.

[4:40] I'm just thankful we didn't listen to family members who told us we'd taken it too far. However, it's not just the kids who are consumed with sports.

It's not the kids who pack out 100,000 capacity stadiums week after week. Athletes are among the most recognized and idolized people in our society today.

You want to market your insurance? You get Patrick Mahomes. You want to sell your beer? You show Peyton Manning drinking it. You want to sell anything else? You can get Rob Gronkowski or Nick Saban.

Those guys are in everybody's commercials. Athletes today are taking over the influential scene. It's no longer Hollywood. Research shows that 85 million Americans listen to sports podcasts. And just last year, the sports betting industry had around \$165 billion of bets wagered. So you may enjoy golf or baseball or basketball.

[5:47] You may enjoy hunting or ballet or maybe even a family night of settlers of Catan. But it is clear that sports are a major part of our life.

Whether we are playing or watching or some mixture of the two. So as Christians, how should we view these things? Are sports and hobbies a distraction from the things that actually matter?

Is it a waste of time like we talked about last week? And what is it all for anyway? Well, I believe the main point for us to consider today is whether you are playing or watching, seek to glorify God in your sports, receiving it as one of his many good gifts.

So whether you are playing or watching, seek to glorify God in your sports, receiving it as one of his many good gifts. So before we dive into the topic of how we glorify God in our sports, I think it's necessary to first ask, what does it mean to glorify God in the first place?

You know, we may misunderstand this to think that God needs us to make his name known. That without us talking about him, he would fade from memory and be forgotten.

[7:12] However, we know from Acts 17.25 that God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything.

The call to give glory to God is not something that God needs from us. Instead, it's a call to magnify and worship the Lord because that is what we are created for.

In the creation of the world, we see that all things exist to worship the holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God.

Psalms chapter 19 verse 1, it says, The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above declares his handiwork.

See, God did not create the earth for us. A vacation from home where we could just hang out and have fun until one day we can go to heaven.

[8:14] Nor did he create the earth because he was bored. And he just needed something to do and now he's just struggling to manage all that he built to keep it from falling apart.

Now, that's not the God we see in the Bible. Instead, we see that everything that the Lord does is ultimately to magnify his own glory.

That might make us a little uncomfortable because in our sin, we kind of can think that God is like us. Maybe just a little bit more powerful. And since it's wrong for us to praise our own name, it would be wrong for God to do the same.

However, God is not like us. And since he is holy and perfect, it would be a sin for God not to glorify his own name.

His glorification is at the root of everything that he does. We see this in Isaiah chapter 43 verses 6 through 7. He says, Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth.

[9:28] Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. So repeatedly, we see that all that the Lord does is to preserve his holy name and to glorify himself.

Creation itself was an unveiling of the glory of God. God, in his perfect love for the Son, magnified by the Holy Spirit, created an entire universe that ultimately points to him.

And in creating us, God chose to make us in his image and bring us into that perfect triune relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And so all the gifts of the earth ultimately serve as a means for us to enjoy that relationship with God. So how does this apply to our topic today?

Well, the first point for us to consider is that sports are a gift from God. It's a gift from God.

[10:43] It's helpful to remember that God created us with physical bodies first. And then he gave us a spirit to dwell in that body. God also gave us senses to enjoy physical things.

Not just here on earth, but also eternally where we will be worshipping God. We look forward to that day. We look forward to the day where we have a new body and the new heavens and earth.

But until then, the good physical things of the earth should be used as a means to enjoy him more fully. Sports can help us do this in many ways.

Through sports, we grow in relationship with each other. We use sports to rest, to play, to celebrate, and to laugh.

We benefit physically, growing strong and pushing the limits of what the human body can do. I think of Alex Honnold that free-climbed El Capitan 3,000 feet of sheer granite with just his toes and fingertips.

[11:56] Or Steph Curry's unstoppable three-point shooting. Or Paul Skeen's throwing 46 pitches over 100 miles per hour in a single game. The Olympics also, they can show us the extremes that the human body can reach.

We may never achieve those levels. But we still have the opportunity to thank God for the abilities that we do have. Sports also give us a perspective of our future joy and fellowship when all things are made new in the kingdom of God.

I think we can all agree that few things give us a glimpse of heaven like college football in October. My in-law's house is a buzz of excitement.

The smell of smoked meat wafts through the air as the fall breeze reminds us. It's officially hoodie weather. Family starts to arrive at their house with all the best kinds of food.

And the TV is rolled out on the porch as the words, It's football time in Tennessee. Brings us hope. Maybe this is our year. Laughter and joy fill the air.

[13:11] The grandkids are forced to wear the ugliest color on the color spectrum. We lift our glasses as the band plays Rocky Top. And keep in mind, the morale is high because the game has not yet started.

It's in these moments. We have such great opportunity to praise and glorify God for his good gift of the season of college football.

No doubt you also have great memories of hobbies and sports that are a staple in your family.

Friday night football. An early morning dove hunt.

An evening run. A board game. Or a competitive game of nine square. They're all gifts that help us direct our attention to the giver of every good thing.

C.S. Lewis, he gives us a helpful illustration on how we can worship the Lord through the enjoyment of his gifts. In the illustration, he talks about sitting in a dark tool shed.

[14:20] And it's nearly pitch black dark in the shed. But there is a crack above the door. And there's a beam of light coming into the tool shed. And in that shed, the most amazing thing to look at is that beam of light.

The specks of dust floating in it. But then, he moves his eye to look along that beam of light. And he can see out of the dark tool shed and into the world outside.

He can see the trees. He can see the leaves rustling in the wind. And beyond that, he can see the sun millions of miles away. In the same way, we can be amazed by the beam of light.

Which, in this case, is the gift of sports. But instead, we need to look through that gift. And be amazed by the one who is ultimately the source of that gift.

Sports also have a way of bringing us together as a community. Last week at Rooted Youth Retreat, I watched some intense competition.

[15:28] As our church competed in the biggest game of knockout you've ever seen. In case you're wondering, that's a basketball game. If you're wondering what kind of violent people go to church here.

It's these types of settings where strangers can bond over the fun and the laughter. And friends go closer through competition. When people who don't take themselves seriously, but instead take loving the Lord and loving others seriously, great things can happen.

My friendship with my dad and my brothers was, in a lot of ways, forged over the many hours that we spent at the golf course together. Golf was a gift.

It was a gift to our family that helped bond us together. And it's something that we were able to enjoy together. Now, sports are a gift from God.

We've seen that. But when you bring the sinful human heart into play, it can complicate things pretty quickly. That brings me to the second point of how we waste our sports.

[16:41] In his book we just read, John Piper, he says, We waste our lives when we do not pray and think and dream and plan toward magnifying God in all spheres of life.

God created us for this. To live our lives in a way that makes him look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that he really is.

So on one hand, you can enjoy all the benefits that come from gathering together with others. Using God-given talents to compete and using sports with a desire to enjoy God more.

But on the other hand, what we more often see is sports turned into an ugly expression of selfishness, pride, and anger.

You don't have to look very far to see pride in sports. How easy it is to become self-focused.

Thinking only about how impressive you would be if you made the game-winning shot.

[17:52] Or did the one thing to change the trajectory of the game. I always heard that golf is 90% mental, 10% physical.

Which I guess is why I never made it very far. The moment that I might be in contention in a tournament, I would start to imagine, what if I won? I would start to think about all the texts and calls that I would get from friends and family.

And then I would chunk it into the water. I'd make triple bogey. Bring me right back to reality. So maybe you aren't as weak-minded as me.

But what motivates you in sports? Is it ultimately for your success and glory? Is it so that others will respect you and be impressed by you?

A lot of athletes' self-worth is defined by their success. They're on cloud nine when they win. But down in the dumps when they lose.

[18:53] What about you when you watch your team lose week after week? Are you depressed? Treating your family poorly because of a game that you ultimately can't control?

Another way that we can waste our sports is by reacting in sinful anger. When I was 16 years old, I considered myself a pretty good ping pong player.

You ask, how did I know that I was pretty good? Well, I could beat the few guys that I played against in the church youth group. So that meant I was good, right? Well, for a time, we had a ping pong table in our garage.

And my little brother and I would play for hours on end. About 12 years old, he was about four and a half feet tall. And only his shoulders were visible above the table.

Night after night, we would play. And night after night, I would lose to the most competitive kid you've ever seen in your life. And when I would watch my little brother clap his hands or fist pump when I failed to return his shots coming at lightning speed, I would react in anger.

[20:06] And as you already know, the angrier you get in ping pong, the worse you're going to play. I did. Many innocent ping pong paddles were destroyed in that garage.

And it's funny in a way, but I'm embarrassed at how I reacted to losing. And what should have been fun and lighthearted turned more often into anger and fighting because of my sin.

Proverbs 15 verse 18 says, A hot-tempered man stirs up strife. Stirs up strife.

But he who is slow to anger quiets contention. See, the thing about anger is it seems to enjoy company. We lash out, tearing someone else down.

And in doing that, we stir up anger in others as well. Even in something as docile as a board game or a card game, it's revealing to see how quickly it can turn into arguing and attacking.

[21:20] Because if you're going to lose, might as well ruin somebody else's night too. Last week we heard about how to not waste our time.

I thought what Steve said, what he said last week was so helpful. How the scripture commends and commands us to be intentional with our time.

Time never stops. You only have a limited amount. And that limited amount of time is something that is entrusted to us by God to steward well.

One of the biggest dangers that we often see in sports is that it can dominate our time. I remember when I was about to get married, some of the older guys at the golf course, they told me, make sure before you get married, you tell her that Saturdays are your days to play golf.

When you get married, she'll already know what to expect. She'll know not to expect anything from you. When talking about their hobbies, people often say, this is my time.

[22 : 31] During which their families know not to expect anything out of them. Do you consider the time that you spend on sports and hobbies as your time?

Is it possible that you should reconsider how you are using the time that God has given you and using it wisely?

See, in our minds, we can rationalize and justify about anything. We are uniquely talented in that way. We might say, oh, it's just my way to diffuse.

I need this. Or I'm just, I want my kids to have more opportunities than what I had. Or I'm just being a provider.

I'm putting meat on the table. Is your gravestone going to say that he was a great outdoorsman but nothing else? It's wise to consider, is this the right amount of time and money spent on this thing?

[23 : 39] Or has it become an idol being used for selfish gain? The point here is not to say that you need to cut sports out of your life.

Many professional athletes use their time intentionally, using it not only as a way to provide, but also as a way to point others through Christ and use it as a way to enjoy God more in their profession.

So if our purpose is to magnify the Lord and enjoy Him, let's look at some ways that we can do this practically. Which brings me to the last point, which is glorifying God in sports.

Glorifying God in sports. How do we do this? Is it pointing to the sky after a touchdown? Is it putting a Bible verse on your gear?

Or is it thanking God when you win the championship? Everybody thanks God when they win the championship, right? And there's value in these things, but I believe we must go deeper than that.

[24 : 52] C.J. Mahaney wrote a little book on this topic where he lays out several ways that we as Christians can glorify God through our sports. We do this through humility, gratefulness, and serving others.

Humility, gratefulness, and serving others. Scripture is clear that the humble get God's attention. Isaiah chapter 66 says, God is decisively drawn to the humble.

And in this sense, drawing His attention also means drawing His grace. We see this in James chapter 4 where it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

So what does humility look like on and off the field? Well, for one, a humble athlete recognizes their limitations. No one has unlimited skill.

[26 : 06] Even the best athletes are limited and will fail. This is just a good opportunity to point us to a God who has no limits and who never fails.

Another sign of humility is the athlete who is gracious in defeat and modest in victory. Losing is guaranteed. However, a gracious attitude in defeat is not guaranteed.

The humble athlete recognizes that their opponent played better and they congratulate them in their win. In the same way, when in victory, a humble athlete does not brag or excessively celebrate. Instead, they're modest. They seek to bring attention to God and not themselves. Proverbs 27 verse 2 is a great verse.

It says, let another praise you and not your own mouth. Let another praise you, not your own mouth. You ever notice how attractive it is when an athlete honors their teammates and their coaches and doesn't direct the attention to himself?

[27 : 29] In humility, we should always recognize the accomplishments of others instead of highlighting our own. As parents, are you helping to contribute to your kids' arrogance?

Is your pride in boasting, teaching them that they are the center of the universe? I think it's helpful as we talk about humility.

It's not just thinking less of yourself. Genuine humility is when we honestly assess ourselves comparing us in our sinfulness to God's holiness.

when we realize the vast difference between us and God, it only makes us see our need for a Savior.

It pushes us to worship Him to spend less time thinking about ourselves. another characteristic that marks a Christian athlete is gratefulness.

[28 : 41] 1 Corinthians 4, verse 7 says, What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Though we deserve nothing, God is gracious to give us good gifts, isn't He? We play and watch sports because it's a lot of fun.

But we also benefit from a health standpoint. We benefit by resting from our labor. We benefit by building relationships with each other.

All of these things are reasons for us to give thanks to God. So the next time you're in a tree stand, thank the Lord.

When you're gathered around the table dealing the cards, thank the Lord. When you're about to play that pickup basketball game, thank the Lord.

[29 : 43] And when you're cozy on the couch about to watch that rivalry game, thank the Lord. And don't just do it in your heart. Do it publicly. Let it be clear to your friends and family to whom you give credit for your life.

Giving thanks to God, it glorifies God. And it takes us out of the spotlight and it places Him at the center where He belongs.

Lastly, a Christian athlete is marked by serving others. NBA Hall of Famer Tim Duncan had one of the most impressive careers in the league.

However, even in his great success, he was known for his humble servant leadership mentality. After his retirement, Duncan stayed along to help train the new guys that were coming along to the Spurs.

and during one intense training session, one of the rookies threw up all over the court. Instead of waiting for the cleanup crew or making the rookie clean it up, Tim Duncan grabbed some towels and immediately ran over and started cleaning up the mess himself.

[31 : 06] This is what servant leadership looks like. It means being willing to do any job that can be classified as inferior.

And it's one thing to serve publicly where everyone can see and be impressed by you. But what about serving only when God sees? Are you willing to serve when no one else knows about it? What about serving people who are ungrateful and don't deserve it? Philippians 2 verses 3 through 8. They say, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you not, let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Having this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

[32 : 38] If Jesus humbled himself, served others, and died the death that we deserved, what does it say about us if we live to only serve our own desires?

You know, one thing that sports can do is reveal our natural desire to sin. If we take an honest inventory of our hearts, we can find selfishness, pride, and envy.

We want our way and nothing else. Without a new heart, we fail to worship God, not only in sports, but in every aspect of life.

And before a holy God, we stand condemned. If you feel the weight of your sin this morning, and you feel your need for forgiveness, I just want you to know that the Lord is faithful to meet you. You no longer have to walk in the bondage of sin and shame, basing your self-worth off of your circumstances. Instead, you can walk in freedom, knowing that your worth is sealed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 01] Repent. Repent and believe in Him. No longer waste your life pursuing things that only lead to emptiness.

Trophies rust and decay. Winning seasons just become another statistic. the fame and glory fade when someone else comes to take your place.

And eventually, all your worldly accomplishments will be forgotten. They'll be forgotten. I want to remember the quote that we've heard throughout this last month.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. You know, King Solomon, he lived the life that all worldly people aspire to.

[35 : 05] He had recognition, respect, unmatched wealth, women, beautiful homes, and any food or entertainment that he desired.

His conclusion after gaining the world is such a gift to us if we have the wisdom to listen. He says, then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it. And behold, all was vanity and striving after wind. there was nothing to be gained under the sun. Solomon came to realize what not just athletes but anyone who finally accomplishes all of their worldly dreams realize.

Is this it? Is this all there is? A lifetime of work for just a few moments of satisfaction. Then the moment is gone and they start looking for the next thing to fulfill them.

A life wasted is a life full of self-seeking for our own recognition and our own praise. But a life lived in response to the gospel is full of humility, gratefulness, and serving others.

[36 : 37] A life well spent is one that seeks to glorify the Lord. Enjoying Him and pointing others to find joy in Him which can only be found through redemption and relationship with Jesus Christ.

So whether you are playing or watching seek to glorify God in your sports receiving it as one of His many good gifts.

Let's pray. Amen. Father, Lord, we thank You for Your good gifts.

I pray that You forgive us in how we fail to worship the gift instead of You, the only one worthy of all of our praise.

Lord, help us to walk forward enjoying Your gifts as a way to enjoy and grow in our love for You.

Lord, I thank You for Your steadfast love towards us in Jesus Christ.

[37 : 48] And I pray that You would help us to live in a way that glorifies You. In Jesus' name.

Amen. You've been listening to a message that was given at a Sunday service at Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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