

Motivational Thoughts: "If you live for others approval, you'll die from their rejection." -Lecrae

"And the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven: 'You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'" — Luke 3:22

Audience of One

One of the greatest things about sports is the fans. Ask any athlete in any sport, and they'll tell you that one of their favorite things about playing is the passionate support they receive from the fans.

Sports are what they are largely because of the cheers, screams, groans, gasps and applause that come with rooting for the players and teams you love.

But this year, due to the coronavirus, teams have to compete without live fans — at least for a while. There will be no roars for a hole-in-one, no hysteria for a walk-off home run, no yells for a buzzer-beater in basketball, no sustained euphoria for a "Gooooaallll" in soccer.

Fans will madly cheer from home, but it just won't be the same. Won't feel truly normal until everyone can gather in the stands together once again.

Athletes have to adjust to this. Competing without feeding off the crowd's frenzy in a comeback. Now, it's just going to you and the game against a worthy opponent. It'll be sport in its most basic and purest form.

Imagining what this will be like got me thinking about how easy it is to compete for the crowd. Even though a player does it for the love of the game, they also know how much their performance — good or bad — influences the fans. Inspires or disappoints the fans. Engages the fans. Angers the fans. The fans play a huge role in a competitor's play and career.

For all performers the audience, crowd and fans are part of the motivation. The mantra "Audience of One," teaches athletes of faith to remember that, in reality, there is only One whose applause really matters. When all the noise is stripped away and you've been booed or cheered by others, the approval of your Heavenly Father is truly the only thing that counts.

And what God the Father said of His Son, Jesus Christ, can also be said of us as His children: "You are my beloved; I am well pleased with you" (Luke 3:22).

In the end, we are not what we do or achieve. We are not what others say about us, nor are we even what we possess in this life. As followers of Christ, we are what HE says of us: loved, chosen, forgiven, prized, favored. And, in the absence of man's applause, HIS blessing continues, regardless of the outcome.



Motivational Thoughts: None of us are exempt from the human struggle of bad days.

Even Heroes Have Bad Days

Bad days. We all have them.

But sometimes we have a misconception of people who are considered heroes of our faith. It's as if their bad days didn't exist, or they aren't as bad as our bad days. It can appear, when we read about them in the Bible, they just glided through life full of faith, hope and fulfilled promises from God.

In Genesis 9, we enter into a scene that likely took place a few years after the flood. Having been on the ark for over a year, it was time for Noah and his family to exit. Life on earth was ready to begin again, and there would be much to do in the coming days, weeks and even years.

"Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent" (Genesis 9:20-21, ESV).

This man, so heroic, faithful and passionate about obeying God, was now in the midst of what I'm sure he would have considered a really bad day.

There's a spectrum of bad days. Sometimes, bad days happen because of something that was done *to* us, and other times, they happen because of something we've done to ourselves. They can range from having an anger-filled argument with a friend to realizing there won't be enough financially to get by, or from someone saying something about us behind our backs to us behaving in a way that grieves the heart of God.

Not even Noah. But his bad day didn't define him. In our key verse, Noah is honored in the "Hall of Faith," where heroes of the Bible are highlighted: *"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."*

A bad day or even a bad season doesn't have to define us.

Noah still accomplished all God had for him. We can too. A bad day reveals two things:

1. **The need to change something.** The word *repent* means to change our minds. Bad days can reveal what needs to be changed in our lives. The blessing in the midst of repentance is that a renewal begins deep within us. Change is possible when repentance leads us to counteract habits, patterns and thoughts that lead us away from God. (2 Peter 3:9)

2. **Our need for God every day.** Noah didn't just need God before he entered the ark and on the ark. He needed God after the ark too. It's good that a bad day helps us remember our need for God. These days keep us humble and human. And humans have and always will need God.



Motivational Thoughts: What we want to do is not nearly as important as what we want to be

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Life is not just about DOING but BEING

Growing up we all have ambitions and dreams of what we “Want to do” with our lives. We may even stay things like:

“I want to Make a million bucks."

"Win all-American honors and play professional football."

"Finish medical school and have a practice in Honolulu."

"Become the world heavyweight boxing champion."

"Make a living writing short stories, plays, and novels."

"Travel abroad as a news correspondent."

"Live fast, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse.”

All sorts of goals. Some admirable, some questionable, some crazy, a few stupid. Without wanting to sound needlessly critical I think we were seeking to answer the wrong question. What we want to do is not nearly as important as what we want to be. And the longer I live the more significant that becomes. It's possible to do lots of things yet be zilch as a person.

Doing is usually connected with a vocation or career, how we make a living. Being is much deeper. It relates to character, who we are, and how we make a life. Doing is tied in closely with activity, accomplishments, and tangible things—like salary, prestige, involvements, roles, and trophies. Being, on the other hand, has more to do with intangibles, the kind of people we become down inside, much of which can't be measured by objective yardsticks and impressive awards. But of the two, being will ultimately outdistance doing every time. It may take half a lifetime to perfect . . . but hands down, it's far more valuable. And lasting. And inspiring.

Remember those familiar words from Colossians 3 Twice we read, "Whatever you do . . . whatever you do . . ."

It's almost as if the Lord is saying, "Makes no difference what it is, whatever you do . . . " But then He immediately addresses things that have to do with being. Like being thankful, being considerate, being obedient, being sincere, being diligent. Same pattern—God emphasizes being more than doing.

So then, are you giving thought these days to things that count? I hope so. Goal-setting and achieving are important, especially if we are in need of being motivated. Moving in the right direction is a great way to break the mold of mediocrity. It's helpful to ask, "What do I want to do?”

But while you're at it, take a deeper look inside. Ask yourself the harder question, "What do I want to be?"



Motivational Thoughts: Your calling is BIGGER than you. It's about the people you are called to IMPACT.

1Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

On Palm Sunday Jesus walked a path towards his calling. The week leading up to Easter was a week of preparation for him to live out his calling.

Preparation is always a part of our calling…Many want to be called to greatness but few are willing to endure the preparation for greatness.

Your calling is going to crush you.

If you are called to mend the brokenhearted, you are going to wrestle with broken-heartedness.

If you are called to prophesy, you are going to struggle to control your mouth.

If you are called to lay hands, you will battle spiritual viruses.

If you are called to preach and to teach the gospel, you will be sifted for the wisdom that anoints your message.

If you are called to empower, your self-esteem will be attacked, your successes will be hard fought and dragged through the mud of gossip, your failures will be highlighted all over, your flaws will be introspected.

Your calling will come with cups thorns and sifting that is necessary for your mantle to be distilled, authentic, humble and powerful.

Your crushing won't be easy because your assignment is not easy.

Your oil is not cheap.

So the buckle stops with Him(spirit) and you because He(Jesus Christ) is the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, the ridicule, the mockery the beating, the stripping while despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God and If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use.

Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work."



Motivational Thoughts: What You Feed Grows…What You Starve Dies.

"I have hidden Your Word in my heart…" — Psalm 119:11

Calling Audibles

When the quarterback breaks the huddle, he comes out with a specific play in mind. But as he gets under center, he may recognize that the defense already has the play figured out. He will then quickly audible to his offensive line, receivers and running back to change the play.

The idea is that the QB hopes the new play catches the defense off guard.

But where does the quarterback get ideas for these audibles? Certainly he can't bring the entire playbook on the field, nor does he have enough time to check with his offensive coordinator in that moment. Instead, he just has several different plays memorized so he can call a play best suited for a particular defense.

As Christians, we have a playbook given to us by the One who knows all the right plays in every circumstance.

No matter which one of Satan's defenses (despair, condemnation, temptation) are thrown our way, we know we have a loving God who has given us instruction through His Word and promises.

God's playbook never fails and it actually changes our heart when we continually study and memorize it. When those difficult circumstances come our way, we need to call an audible from God's Word. If we study and memorize the Bible, we can apply the Word to any situation.

***Psalm 119:105* says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."**

If we read and heed the Lord's instructions, He will show us where to go, what to say, and how to make decisions. His Word also reveals when we're heading the wrong direction and warns us of the consequences of continuing down that path.

Never make a major decision when you are depressed, because at that time your feelings are unreliable and you cannot exercise accurate judgment. Your focus is blurry, and your perspective is distorted.

Benefits of Reading Gods Word

1. **God's Word leads us to salvation.**
2. **The Scriptures guide our steps.**
3. **God's Word directs us to wisdom.**
4. **It lifts our burden.**
5. **The Word of God brings joy.**
6. **The Scriptures give peace.**

"A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."
-Charles Spurgeon



Motivational Thoughts: Not all prisons have walls

Stop allowing FEAR and LIES to call the shots! May the year 2021 be a year of walking in FREEDOM!

Some prisons are shackled by pride, by fear, by anger, addiction, shame, anxiety

Galatians 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

The Bible uses a phrase for someone who is shackled by something that holds them back, its called a stronghold

A spiritual stronghold is an incorrect pattern of thought that has embedded itself into our way of thinking. These strongholds have the capability to affect our feelings, how we respond to various situations in life, and are significant obstacles to our spiritual freedom.

God desires that you be a chain breaker…break the chains that hold you back and prevent you from passing them on

The chains you don't break are the chains you risk passing on

These strongholds become generational curses

Generational Strongholds:

-Anger
-Pride
-Cheating
-Divorce
-Laziness
-Bitterness

2 Corinthians 10:4,5 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds…and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Be a chain breaker
-Break the chain of Lies with Truth
-Break the chain of Habits with Obedience
-Break the chain of Bitterness with Forgiveness
-Break the chain of Hatred with Love



Motivational Thoughts: **May your choices reflect your hopes not your fears.**

Your attitude is a mood created by your chosen focus.

Here are five winning choices you can make that will help determine your destiny:

1. I can choose to get healthier. Instead of bemoaning the fact that you don't have an Olympic body, find ways to increase your energy, lower your stress, get more sleep, and have more power. Psalm 119:73 says, "You made me; you created me. Now give me the sense to follow your commands" (NLT). Improving the controllable factors in your life helps you reduce the impact of the uncontrollable factors.

2. I can choose to deepen relationships. The fear of rejection prevents connection, and the only way to get rid of fear is to do the thing you fear the most. Learn communication skills, replace bad relationships, reach out, and risk connecting with someone. "Let love be your highest goal!" (1 Corinthians 14:1a NLT).

3. I can choose to trust God no matter what happens. "I will always thank the Lord; I will never stop praising him" (Psalm 34:1 GNT). When you get to the point in your life where you can say, "I praise the Lord no matter what happens," that is a confidence that you won't find anywhere in Hollywood, on Capitol Hill, or on Wall Street. That is a confidence built on a relationship with God!

4. I can choose what I think about. Throughout the 20th century, scientists believed the adult brain could not be changed. When a Nobel Prize winner proved that you can rewire your brain, science finally caught up to the Bible: "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Romans 12:2b NLT). Your self is created by your memories, and your memories are created by your mental habits. Feed your brain with truth: God's Word.

5. I can choose Jesus as my Savior. I'm not just talking about Jesus saving you from your sins. I'm talking about letting Jesus be your Savior every day. Letting Jesus save you gives you the power to follow through on the choices you make. "Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17 GNT).



Motivational Thoughts: It's hard to beat a person who never gives up.

Being a C.L.U.T.C.H player

We all grew up on the playgrounds of our neighborhoods living out that fantasy clutch moment in our minds. Rehearsing the final countdown of the clock 3 2 1 as we release the ball watching it float in the air anticipating the buzzer beater celebration.

Athletes and coaches need steely nerves to make split-second decisions in the bottom of the last inning, in the last 20 seconds of a match, or in the last two minutes of a game.

When everyone is watching and the team is depending on him or her for victory, participants need to perform at the critical time.

In the moment of truth, men and women rise to the occasion. Sometimes we win and sometimes we lose in a valiant effort to the very end. We do our best for our team and fans, and don't worry about rest and recovery until everything is done.

Clutch players are defined by consistently performing well when there's a lot on the line. They thrive in situations where the pressure is high and the consequences of their performance are great.

In life, we find ourselves in unexpected situations where we need to make quick decisions that affect many people. Gods Word lays out the attributes of how we can be clutch not just in athletics but in life.

Character

Romans 5:3-4 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.

Loyalty

Proverbs 20:28 Loyalty and faithfulness deliver a king; through loyalty he maintains his throne.

Unselfish

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves

Trusting

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Calm

Philippians 4:6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Hope

Psalm 56:11 In God have I put my hope, I will have no fear of what man may do to me.



Motivational Thoughts: Sometimes in life God is building us up when it seems like life is holding us up.

In our commitment-phobic society, too many people would rather throw in the towel than stay in the game. They'd rather bail out than break through. But the reality is that the biggest breakthroughs in life happen in those times that we refuse to quit. It's when we live a life of commitment that God reveals the power of His plan in our lives. Sometimes we wonder what the hold up is on our blessing or breakthrough.

1. **Commitment Is About Trusting God's Process and Timing**
2. **Commitment Is About Being Faithful During The Lows So God Can Take Us To The Highs**
3. **Commitment Is About Being Built Up Not Just Being Held Up**

The medal stand. The winner's circle. The trophy presentation ceremony, followed at noon the next day by an open-convertible parade down Main Street. The sports world knows how to tell who's been successful at accomplishing what they set out to do. You can spot the champion by the title he holds.

But God doesn't work that way. Titles, ranking, and position are not his barometers of success for us, nor should they be of ours. Just because a man seems to be winning doesn't mean he's done the best job or is the most deserving of praise. Just because a man appears to be losing doesn't mean he's failed at a critical moment or has choked under pressure. God has his own reasons for letting some taste the rewards of success and letting others continue to battle from beneath the pile.

Sometimes we want a Bail-Out when God wants to show us a Break-Through

"It is God who judges: he brings one down, he exalts another" (Psalm 75:7). He may allow a man to earn a promotion, not because he's by far the most qualified, but because this person has a weakness for power that needs exposing and correcting. God may allow a man to be overlooked at work, not because this guy doesn't possess what it takes to advance, but to make him better prepared for a greater opportunity down the line.

With God, the possibilities are always endless. Don't make him have to play our game in order to win your trust.



Motivational Thoughts: We are not relevant when we mirror culture. We are relevant when we are what they long to be.

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

We all have areas of brokenness or deficiencies like pride, fear, anger, jealousy, lust, greed, anxiety etc.

What is your brokenness_____?

Romans 8:31,32 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Jesus (God Is For Us) = He Saves

The word **SAVE** in the Bible means to take what is broken and to make it **WHOLE**

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the fact that God wasn't **PASSIVE** about our broken world.

We all love a customized pair of sneakers!

Jesus came to **CUSTOMIZE** our **BROKENNESS** into something **BRILLIANT**

He uses the raw materials of our broken and imperfect lives to CO-LAB with his creative power to transform us from **ORDINARY** to the **EXTRAORDINARY**

World wants to **normalize** your brokenness
Religion wants to **moralize** your brokenness
Devil wants to **scandalize** your brokenness
Shame wants to **scrutinize** your brokenness
Pride wants to **sanitize** your brokenness
Fear wants to **terrorize** your brokenness
Regret wants to **penalize** your brokenness

Jesus wants to **CUSTOMIZE** your brokenness!

Jesus came to meet us WHERE WE ARE and to take us WHERE HE IS
To turn our BROKENNESS into his BRILLIANCE!



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Motivational Thoughts: The devil knows that if he can capture our mind, he holds our future.

"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts" (Proverbs 4:23 GNT).

It's Time to Eliminate Negative Self-Talk

Long before psychology came around, God said your thoughts determine your feelings and your feelings determine your actions.

Our minds are really an amazing creation. It would take a computer the size of the Pentagon just to carry out the basic functions of your brain. Your brain contains over 100 billion nerve cells. Each individual cell is connected with 10,000 other neurons.

You are constantly talking to yourself — all the time. You're talking to yourself right now! Research indicates that most people speak at a rate of 150 to 200 words per minute, but the internal dialogue that you carry on with yourself (self-talk) is more like 1,300 words per minute.

The problem is that in all our self-talk, a lot of people are like Job. In Job 9:20b, he says, "Everything I say seems to condemn me" (GNT). If you're typical, you are your own worst critic. Right? You're always putting yourself down. You could walk into a room smiling, but inside you're saying, "I'm fat. I'm not smart enough. I'm ugly. And I'm always late." Most of this dialogue is unconscious.

God wants you to stop putting yourself down.

When you put yourself down, who are you really putting down? You're really pointing to the Creator who made you. When you say, "God, I'm worthless; I'm no good; I can't do anything," you're actually saying, "God, you blew it with me." That's why God says it's wrong to put yourself down.

How do you eliminate negative self-talk so you can become a more confident person? It's the principle of replacement: "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right . . . Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about it" (Philippians 4:8b TLB).

Focus on what you want to be, on what God wants to do in your life. I don't know any better antidote to low self-esteem than to read God's Word every day. Study it, memorize it, meditate on it, and apply it in your life. I can't tell you a better thing to help you raise your confidence level than to get in the Bible and start believing what God says about you.

"I do the very best I can to look upon life with optimism and hope and looking forward to a better day."

-Rosa Parks



Motivational Thoughts: We live in a risk averse culture. Everything we do is to mitigate risk or eliminate as much risk as possible.

"For we live by faith, not by sight." — 2 Corinthians 5:7

Risk and faith go hand in hand. In a pursuit of living a risk free life we can often make safety an idol. We expect God to give us a faith that involves little or no risk. We want a faith that will cost us nothing. Sometimes what looks like wisdom is actually camouflage for fear of taking a risk.

Faith Involves Risk

February 4, 2018, will forever be remembered in the city of Philadelphia as the day the Eagles won their first Super Bowl. Conquering the New England Patriots and the iconic Brady-Belichick dynasty, 41-33.

However, what non-Eagle fans will recall about that day is the name of a gadget play known simply as "Philly Special."

The Philly Special was a trick play the Eagles used on fourth down toward the end of the first half . It had the Patriots defenders, and the entire NFL, shaking their heads in disbelief. Who goes for it on fourth down in that situation? Who runs a trick play on the goal line? Who even dares to out-think the greatest coach in NFL history?

Well, Doug Pederson and Nick Foles, that's who!

The truth is, while the play worked and is now firmly cemented as one of the most iconic plays in Super Bowl history, it involved tremendous risk. What if it didn't work? The Eagles would have forfeited points at the end of the half, and most certainly would have given the Patriots momentum to start the second half. Yet, the risk was outweighed by the reward.

This is what walking by faith is like. Faith always contains an element of risk to it. For faith to exist, so must something unseen or unrealized. If it makes perfect sense or is logical, then there is no need for faith. While some may say that walking by faith is irrational, Scripture declares that it is reasonable. While "armchair" believers cry out in doubt and skepticism, those who know the heart of Jesus are aware that the will of His Father and our Father is to trust Him, living by faith and not by sight.

Practice the 80/20 principle

If you'll do the 80 percent of God's will that's clear in the Bible, he'll show you the 20 percent that's not clear. In other words, love your neighbor. Spend time in God's Word. Talk to God in prayer. Spend time with God's people. Love your family. Love your kids. Protect the way that you speak to people. Be kind in your relationships. Be patient. Do the 80 percent that's clear, and God will show you the rest.

So take the risk. Trust God with everything you have. Do what God has told you to do in His Word. Then, when God challenges you with a risk of faith, you'll be more confident to do what God tells you to do.

Walking by faith isn't easy. It most certainly requires some risk-taking. Yet, the reward of pleasing God and following His Word is worth the risk.



Motivational Thoughts: God's past faithfulness fuels our faith for the future

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." — Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust God with All Your Heart

MLB pitcher Blake Treinen, fresh off a 2020 World Series championship with the Los Angeles Dodgers, recently re-signed with the club to help defend the title in 2021. Yet, his entry into pro baseball wasn't as smooth as last year's championship.

After being drafted by the Marlins in the 2010 draft, a routine physical revealed shoulder inflammation in Treinen's throwing arm, leading the Marlins to let him go. Devastated that his major-league dream was over before it even started, Treinen reached out to his summer baseball chaplain as he waited to board the plane to fly home to Kansas from Miami. The chaplain shared Proverbs 3:5-6 with Treinen.

Later that night as the dejected Treinen was picked up at the airport and driven home by his parents, a car passed the Treinens' with a personalized license plate. Blake noticed it immediately. What did it say? "Prov356," a reference to the same passage his chaplain had shared with him earlier in the day.

For Treinen, it was a moment of great encouragement as he realized God wasn't done with his story. God had him on a path — one that 10 years later would lead to a World Series ring.

As athletes, there is a standard of strength, courage, and confidence that is required to reach our goals, perform well, win, and experience victory. Athletes are generally expected to have strength and courage to go out and give it their all, all of the time. There are times in life when we are expected to have trust, strength, confidence, and courage. But in reality, we truly feel that we are not strong, we are weak or lack trust in our circumstances. We can get into slumps when we lack confidence in who God made us to be, and we have a deep fear of the unknown future. Though we may feel weak and small, none of this is true.

We are not lacking in strength and we are not alone.

When we are feeling this way, this is also the time to trust in the promises of God and not lean towards our own understanding or doubts. God's Word tells us that we can go out and have strength and courage in everything we do because where we lack in strength and courage is filled in with the perfect strength and courage of our Heavenly Father.

Not every path ends up with a trophy, but how can you trust God today with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding? What do you need to do today to submit to God and trust that He will make your paths straight?

"The more you believe and trust God, the more limitless your possibilities become for your family, your career - for your life!" -Rick Warren



Motivational Thoughts: GOD PREPARES US FOR WHAT HE HAS PREPARED FOR US

God has a destiny for us to Discover!

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Have you ever had a goal and outlined a plan to achieve it?

God wants us to go after our big dreams and follow the Holy Spirit's inspiration. To make our visions become realities, we have to take risks and perform the necessary steps to reach our goals.
But things don't always go according to plan.

We can feel discouraged when we are off-track or when the circumstances seem to work against us.

Maybe you felt you should've made the varsity squad and didn't. Or maybe you plan to be a business major but struggle in economics class.

How do we stay encouraged and motivated when the plan falls apart?

Proverbs 19:21 instructs us that though we may have personal plans, the Lord's purpose in our lives will win the day. Submitting control of our lives to God is no easy feat, but He is bigger than our circumstances and outmatches our problems by a long shot. We need to have faith that He handles things according to His plan.

Does this mean we shouldn't have goals?

No, we need to continue to dream big and live big in our athletic, spiritual, and personal lives. We need to trust that God is in control despite our circumstances — whether we lose the game we should've won, whether that relationship ends, or whether we don't do as well on a test as we had hoped.

God has a mission field for you, and He is teaching you exactly what you need to learn at exactly the right time. He provides guidance and instruction to mold you into the person He calls you to be.

In advance before he even created the world He had you in mind with a purpose and life is about Him preparing us for the things He has prepared for us.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

If discouragement overwhelms you, go to God in prayer, and ask Him for help and strength during the difficult times. Be confident that God is faithful and has your back. His plan will prevail through any and all difficulties you face today.



Motivational Thoughts: Tomorrow's freedom is today's surrender.

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” — Matthew 10:39

Surrender is a prerequisite for victory not defeat

Jesus makes an important and paradoxical statement!

What does it look like to lose your life for His sake? How is it possible to find life as the result of losing it? You and I are only truly living to the degree that we’ve surrendered our lives to Jesus. True life is eternal, Jesus centered and fueled by the love of God. Life apart from God is fleeting and meaningless.

It’s for this reason Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1:14 says, “I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.”

We have opportunity every day to lay our lives down at the feet of Jesus in response to His great love that we might experience the deeper life only He can give. Surrender positions our hearts to receive the incredible reward of being fully God’s.

God won’t force His blessings on us

He won’t force His presence or His love. He patiently draws us near, hoping that in response to His overwhelming affections we will lay down our lives that we might experience all the wonders He has in store for us.
Humbling ourselves before God as our King, Creator and Sustainer is absolutely vital in going deeper. Pride so often stands in the way of God’s conditional promises. Scripture is clear in James 4:6 “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Promises like “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” found in Matthew 6:33 require a level of humility and surrender most aren’t willing to give.

We often associate humility with weakness

When in reality declaring our weakness before an Almighty God is the only posture of strength we can take. It’s for this reason that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:30 “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” When we humble ourselves before God and surrender, we position ourselves to receive all the abundance of help, power, guidance and love we could ever need.

God is an endless ocean of love, help, healing and power. The Holy Spirit who dwells within you longs to empower you with everything you need to truly live in the fullness of life available to you. If you will choose to lay down your life in surrender to God’s plans, purposes, truth and perfect will, you will experience a life unlike anything you’ve known. Take time today to lose your life that you may find it in God. Cast aside all pride and selfish ambition that you might pursue the wonderful, abundant life of one submitted to an almighty, omnipotent, omnipresent and fully loving Father.

True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less



Motivational Thoughts: God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly surrendered to Him.

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." Matthew 6:33 (NLT)

Who Controls Your Life?

If you want your life to turn from emptiness to overflowing, then give Jesus complete control of your life, including your career.

An example of this is when Simon Peter let Jesus get into his boat so he could teach some people standing on the shore. The Bible says, "When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon [Peter], 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets'" (Luke 5:4-5 NIV).

Then the Bible says, "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink" (Luke 5:6-7 NIV).

If you want your life to turn from emptiness to overflowing, you've got to get Jesus in your boat.

What's your boat? It's how you make a living. Simon's business was his boat because he was a fisherman. The boat represents your career, your profession, your job, just like it represented Simon Peter's entire livelihood.

What does it mean to have Jesus in your boat?

It means you dedicate your career to God. I'm not talking about salvation here. You may have Jesus in your life, but have you given him control of your career? You've trusted him for salvation and serve faithfully in your church. But when you go back to work during the week, is Jesus who you trust in your job? Or do you put Jesus on the shelf? When Simon Peter gave his job to Jesus, he was blessed with incredible results. But don't miss the sequence.

We sometimes think, "God, make me really successful in business, and then I'll serve you with the success." Wrong! It's the exact opposite. Peter first gave Jesus control of his job. Then Jesus blessed Peter's job with enormous success. That's the order. The Bible says in Matthew 6:33, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (NLT).

When you want God to bless something, put him first in that area. You want God to bless your time? You give him the first part of every day. You want God to bless your money? You give him the first 10 percent of your income, no matter how small it is. You want God to bless your job? Give him control, no matter how successful you are.
Get Jesus in your boat, and you'll see your life turn from empty to overflowing.

"Your life has been intentionally designed by God to have a uniquely significant and eternal impact on the world around you." -Tony Dungy



Motivational Thoughts: Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.

"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." - Proverbs 20:25

Let's say I presented you with a shovel, a huge pile of sand, some burlap sacks and told you to start shoveling the sand into the sacks. "It might take all day and night, but I need you to fill hundreds of bags up with the sand. In the end, you will thank me," I say. Now let's say I give you the same shovel, sand, and sacks and told you a flood will be here in less than 6 hours. There is no escaping the water and the currents are strong enough to wash away your home, your community, drowning you and everyone you love. Now, start shoveling.

True power is in purpose.

Athletes rigorously devote themselves to working out, practice, film, and even harsh dietary restrictions while in season. Why? When you hoist a championship trophy above your head, slide that championship ring on your finger, or watch the banner unfurl from the rafters, purpose is easy to appreciate. What about before and throughout a long season? In life, most ignore or give up on the search for purpose for the day-to-day grind. The truly successful and content discover their purpose and encourage others to do the same.

God didn't create anything without a purpose.

If you're breathing, you have a purpose. In Christ, you have something to offer the world.

When God made you, he wired you in a certain way and uniquely shaped you for a contribution. Nobody has been you in the past or will be you in the future. God doesn't create clones or copies. Even identical twins are different in thousands of ways.

Your thumbprint, voice, footprint, heartbeat, and eyes are unique. You're not one in a million. You're one in trillions. God custom-made you. And he wants you to be you. You may have heard all your life, "Why can't you be more like so and so?" But if God hadn't wanted you to be you, then you wouldn't exist. And, yet, you may spend your life trying to be somebody you're not. When you do that, you miss your whole purpose. God did not make you and put you here on this planet just to breathe air, take up space, and die. If you're here, there's a contribution that only you can make.

Make no mistake, finding your purpose can be challenging and pursuing it equally challenging - however, no truly great journey begins without a destination in mind. Winning a championship is an easy destination to identify in sports, but what about in life? What about in your life? What is your purpose? What are you doing to discover and pursue your purpose?

- **Values** tell us what's good – they're the things we strive for, desire and seek to protect.
- **Principles** tell us what's right – outlining how we may or may not achieve our values.
- **Purpose** is our reason for being – it gives life to our values and principles.



Motivational Thoughts: To be empowered by purpose, you must become a means to an end that's not you.

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

George Washington Carver was born enslaved and went on to become one of the most prominent scientists and inventors of his time.

"As I worked on projects which fulfilled a real human need forces were working through me which amazed me. I would often go to sleep with an apparently insoluble problem. When I woke the answer was there. Why, then, should we who believe in Christ be so surprised at what God can do with a willing man in a laboratory? Some things must be baffling to the critic who has never been born again." -George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was a man of vision and purpose.

Vision translates into purpose. Purpose carriers with it the momentum to move you through the barriers that would otherwise slow you down.

Purpose is a means to an end. If you're the end, you can't be the means. You cannot have purpose. Purpose is a path to meaning.

Rather than asking yourself, "What is my purpose?" ask yourself, "Who is my purpose?"

To be empowered by purpose, you must become a means to an end that's not you. Those who devote themselves to themselves will ultimately have nothing but themselves to show for themselves. But if you devote yourself to more than yourself, you will ultimately have more than yourself to show for yourself.

Three ideas to help you become a means to an end:

1. Begin looking at everything you're doing through the lens of means. Since purpose is a means to an end, any time you make an end a means, you embrace purpose.
2. Pay attention to what stirs your heart. Purpose is often found at the intersection of a broken heart, opportunity, and skill.
3. Surround yourself with on-purpose people. Your friends determine the direction and quality of your life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION:

1. How can you begin to shift the focus from of discovering your purpose to discovering a means in which you will find purpose?
2. In what ways can you begin today to serve others?

Purpose is always found just across the border of what's in it for me



Motivational Thoughts: Your Mind Is Your Most Spiritually Vulnerable Organ

"Fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable" (Philippians 4:8 GNT).

Temptation begins by capturing your attention. What gets your attention arouses your emotions. Then your emotions activate your behavior, and you act on what you feel. The more you focus on "I don't want to do this," the stronger it draws you in.

Ignoring a temptation is far more effective than fighting it. Once your mind is on something else, the temptation loses its power. So when temptation calls you on the phone, don't argue with it — just hang up!

Your Thoughts Control Your Life

"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts" (Proverbs 4:23 GNT).

We want God to take away all of the problems, pain, sorrow, suffering, sickness, and sadness. But God wants to work on you first, because transformation won't happen in your life until you renew your mind, until your thoughts begin to change.

Why is it so important that you learn how to manage your mind? Let me give you three reasons.

1. Manage your mind because your thoughts control your life.

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts" (GNT). Your thoughts have tremendous ability to shape your life for good or for bad. For example, maybe you accept a thought someone told you when you were growing up: "You're worthless. You don't matter." If you accepted that thought, even though it was wrong, it has shaped your life. You must choose what thoughts you will let affect you for good or for bad.

2. Manage your mind because the mind is the battleground for sin.

All temptation happens in the mind. Paul says in Romans 7:22-23, "I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant, but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin" (TLB).

One reason you get mentally fatigued is because there's a battle in your brain 24 hours a day. It's debilitating because it's intense, and it's intense because your mind is your greatest asset. Satan wants your greatest asset!

3. Manage your mind because it's the key to peace and happiness.

An unmanaged mind leads to tension. A managed mind leads to tranquility. An unmanaged mind leads to conflict. A managed mind leads to confidence. When you don't try to control your mind and the way you direct your thoughts, you will experience an enormous amount of stress in your life. But a managed mind leads to strength and security and serenity.

"Letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace" (Romans 8:6 NLT).

God is far more interested in changing your mind then changing your circumstances



Motivational Thoughts: Do My Emotions Manipulate The Motion Of My Momentum?

"From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires" (1 Peter 4:2 GNT).

What are human desires?

They're your emotions and your affections. Once you become a Christ-follower, your life should be controlled by God's will, not by how you feel.

Let me give you three questions to ask about your emotions when you're trying to figure out how to deal with how you feel. When you're angry or upset or frustrated—whatever you're feeling—consider these three questions:

- **"What's the real reason I'm feeling this?"** Maybe the answer is fear or worry. Maybe it relates to something your dad said to you years ago. Someone else says something similar, and even though it's been years, that person becomes the target of all your pent up anger.
- **"Is it true?"** Is what you're feeling at that moment true? There's a point in the Bible where Elijah got so discouraged that he went to God and complained, "God, I'm the only one in the entire nation of Israel left serving you." And God challenged him, saying, "Are you kidding me? I've got all these people who are still serving me! You're acting like you're the only one trying to do the right thing in the whole world! No. That's not true."
- **"Is what I'm feeling helping me or hurting me?"** Will you get what you want by continuing to feel this way? A lot of feelings we have seem natural, but they're actually self-defeating.

Let's say you go to a restaurant, and the service is extremely slow. You wait a long time to be served, and then a couple comes in 15 minutes after you and gets their meals before you do. You become increasingly irritated until you feel something welling up inside you.

What's the real reason you're feeling that way? You're hungry!

Is it true? Yes. You're frustrated because the service is slow. But consider if your emotion is helping or hurting? Do you get better service by getting angry with the server? Absolutely not.
Does nagging work? Has it ever worked? When somebody tells you all the things you're doing wrong, does it make you want to change? No! All it does is make you defensive.

When you ask yourself these three questions, you get a better grip on why you feel the way you do and what you need to do to help the situation. That's called managing your emotions.

Reflection Questions:

- Why is it hard to sometimes admit when our emotions make us believe something that isn't actually true?
- Think of a recent experience where you felt angry or frustrated with someone. How do you think asking these three questions would have changed the outcome of the incident?
- What do you think it means to be controlled by God's will?



Motivational Thoughts: REACTIONS often lead to REGRETS

How are your spiritual instincts?

in·stinct: an innate, pattern of behavior in response to certain stimuli

Instincts help animals cope with certain environments.

Consider the toad and the elephant in Indonesia. 24hours before a deadly earthquake and tsunami both had the instincts to anticipate what was coming and moved to higher ground.

SPIRITUAL INSTINCTS give us situational awareness to read a situation and respond the best way.

What drives you to certain behavior? Are you a person that **"REACTS" OR "RESPONDS"**?

So often people react instead of respond to a situation.

These **REACTIONARY** behaviors cab be driven more by negative emotions like fear, anger, pride, envy etc.

A **RESPONDING** leader still has quick reflexes to a situation but is led by sharpened instincts rather than negative emotions.

Instincts also help anticipate a negative situation and prepares us for the right RESPONSE

Some athletes have sharper instincts. Like an athlete who has court awareness and can read the floor anticipating rather than having tunnel vision.

The Bible uses contrasting language to highlight these two competing instincts.

Natural Instincts (Reactive) vs Spiritual Instincts (Responsive)

Sin often influences our Natural Instincts (Reactive)

Spirit influences our Spiritual Instincts (Responsive)

Jude 1:10 But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction.

Jude 1:18 They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. 19 These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.

When life is hard what instincts do you follow?

3 Ways to Sharpen Spiritual Instincts (Responsive)

1. **Daily meditate and feed your mind in Gods Word**
2. **Daily remind yourself that God can be trusted and reflect with gratitude**
3. **Daily pray and ask God's Spirit to lead and override your natural instincts**



Motivational Thoughts: "Worry pretends to be necessary but serves no useful purpose" — Eckhart Tolle

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25 NIV)

Worry is essentially a control issue. It's trying to control the uncontrollable. We can't control the economy, so we worry about the economy. We can't control our children, so we worry about our children. We can't control the future, so we worry about the future.

But worry never solves anything! It's stewing without doing.

Jesus gives four reasons why you don't need to worry in his Sermon on the Mount.

Worry is unreasonable. Matthew 6:25 says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" (NIV) Jesus is saying, if it's not going to last, don't worry about it. To worry about something you can change is stupid. To worry about something you can't change is useless. Either way, it's unreasonable to worry.

Worry is unnatural. Jesus gives us an illustration from nature in Matthew 6:26: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" There's only one thing in all of God's creation that worries: human beings. We're the only things God has created that don't trust him, and God says this is unnatural.

Worry is unhelpful. It doesn't change anything. Matthew 6:27 says, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" When you worry about a problem, it doesn't bring you one inch closer to the solution. It's like sitting in a rocking chair — a lot of activity, energy, and motion, but no progress. Worry doesn't change anything except you. It makes you miserable!

Worry is unnecessary. Matthew 6:30 says, "If God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you, O men of little faith?" (TLB) If you trust in God, you don't need to worry. Why? Because he has promised to take care of all your needs: "God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 NIV). Does that include bills? Yes. Does that include relational conflicts? Yes. Does that include your dreams and goals and ambitions? Yes. Does that include the health issues you don't know what to do with? Yes. God will meet all your needs in Christ. Don't worry about it!

"God is the source. Everything else is a resource."
-Tony Evans



Motivational Thoughts: If you don't live by the praise of men you won't die by their criticism.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." — 1 Peter 3:15

Defense For The Hope

Have you ever heard the statement, "The best defense is a good offense"? It's an old adage that has been applied to war and sports. It suggests that the best way to defend against your opponent is to provide a strong, proactive offense versus a more passive response. In most sports, teams need to have a balanced approach with their offense and defense, but the fans love to see a strong offense. Whether it's runaway dunks, touchdowns or home runs, people love to see a good offense.

The Christian life does not parallel the way of the world. I've met many proclaiming Christians that have chosen the route of consistently being on the offensive in their approach to living life and at times they become offensive. I believe we need to be initiators like Jesus was with others, but do so as 1 Peter 3:15 states: "with gentleness and respect."

When we allow Jesus to be the Lord of our hearts, we will make ourselves ready to provide a great defense for the hope that is within us. We will look for opportunities to love others so that we can point them to Jesus. The Lord will provide points of connection so they can see Jesus in us.

Love Is Our Offense

What is Love?

The Great Commandment is to love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40), but what we often fail to do is define love. What is love? The Greek word for love here is "agape." It is a selfless, sacrificial, unconditional choice to seek God's best for the object of that love.

Since God is love (1 John 4:8), we see love personified in Jesus. Our greatest need was to be forgiven for our sin and reconciled to God. And 1 John 3:16 tells us that Jesus saw our need and laid down His life so that our greatest need could be met. That is love.

Jesus commands us in Matthew 22:39 to love your neighbor as yourself. So here is a good barometer for loving our neighbors: Whatever you'd want someone else to do for you, do that for your neighbor. Selflessly and sacrificially do it for someone else (1 John 3:17-18)



Motivational Thoughts: It's easy to get discouraged and begin to feel down on your luck.

"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." — Zechariah 4:10

The 2020 U.S. Open tennis tournament witnessed one of the most inspired and incredible comebacks in sports. Croatian player Borna Coric was taking on top-10 player Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece. Tsitsipas was up two sets and serving for the match at 5-1 in the third. Coric's chances looked highly unlikely as Tsitsipas's service game began.

Incredibly, Coric began to string some points together and proceeded to break Tsitsipas's serve. Pretty soon, it was 5-3 after Coric secured the break. Again, Tsitsipas went to serve for the match a second time. Again, Coric broke him. Before long, the match was back on serve at 5-5 in the third. Coric went on to win the set. Then the fourth set. And then the fifth set. Game. Set. Match.

Those watching could hardly believe it: Coric had been completely dead to rights in the third set and was just a handful of points away from losing, but somehow he'd been able to turn it around and go on to win the match.

It was an improbable comeback to say the least.

For three straight sets, Coric had played inspired tennis, pulling off a stunning upset nobody saw coming just a short time before.

And how did he do it? By playing literally one ball, one shot, one point at a time.
That's all he could do.

Climbing out of such a deep hole seemed impossible, but the impossible soon became possible because he focused on what he could control, which was simply winning the next point. And the next. And the next.

We all find ourselves in similar situations, be they in competition or in life. We either put ourselves in, or life puts us into, deeply discouraging and impossible circumstances where a hopeful, winning outcome appears unlikely. We stare at the situations and wonder how we'll ever mount a comeback and get out of them.

The same is true for us, too. Great turnarounds in life are begun by simple, faithful steps.

Comebacks always start by a personal choice to believe and then play the next point. Take the next step. Do the next right thing.

Zechariah 4:10 (NLT) says, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin…"

God is delighted and pleased when you hang in there with His plan for your life and don't give up even when things look bleak.

Take a lesson from Coric when you're tempted to be discouraged and give up hope: You're never out of the fight in life unless you take yourself out, so stay with it.



Motivational Thoughts: Gods Faithfulness Turns Our Mess Into His Message

"The Lord's loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22-23 (NASB)

The power of God's faithfulness is that no sin of ours has ever made Him unfaithful.

Athletes live in a unique environment where they experience conditional support from coaches and fans every day and every game. Whoever does well gets the playing time, rewards and recognition.

It is a performance based system. As every kicker in history has said, "You are only as good as your last kick."

"Here I am, a baseball superstar, falling into the pits, having everybody write you off, and then having God say, 'I'm going to use your mess for a message.' How beautiful is that?"

-Darryl Strawberry

Many people live with a similar spiritual default in their minds. When there is disruption in their world, their first thought is that they must have done something wrong. God must have stepped back from them. If we do better, God will reward us.

Today's passage provides a different perspective. The prophet Jeremiah wrote to a group of people who lived through a very disruptive time. It was a time that caused many to wonder if God had forsaken them. God reminded them that nothing had changed in His character. He still loved and cared for His people.

The word "loving-kindness" is used 240 times in the Old Testament. It is a word that means much more than simply love; it conveys God's unchanging love, grace, mercy and loyalty to His people. Great is His faithfulness; it appears every morning. God's lovingkindness is not a reward, it flows from His character.

God demonstrated His love by the cross, long before we responded.

We need a reminder every morning of God's faithful commitment to us, especially in the midst of major disruption.



Motivational Thoughts: "Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow."

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

Some of us are more prone to anxiety than others. Gradually, we began to entertain unrelenting "what ifs" until we are steeped in full-blown anxiety.

What if things don't work out?
What if the worst happens?
What if the situation never changes?

We want to give every difficult circumstance a happy ending, but the problems are often out of our control. We agonize and our imaginations wanders into worst case outcomes.

In the Greek, the word for "anxious" translates to "distracted," further illustrating the power of anxious thoughts. Anxiety magnifies our problems and minimizes our view of God. It prevents us from seeing God's power and purpose in the midst of our circumstances.

In this passage of the Bible St. Paul, who had many things to be anxious about, was essentially waving a caution flag because he knew anxiety could take us down a dangerous path leading to fear, doubt and despair.

When we are anxious, our minds are monopolized with worry instead of consumed with God and what He is able to do. Paul tells us the way to combat anxiety is to first make a conscious choice not to be anxious. This is easier said than done.

It requires us to face every uncontrollable circumstance and possible outcome with confidence that God knows what He's doing. Here we are forced not to just read Scripture but anchor ourselves in it. This means I have a choice to believe God is in control and always has a plan, even if the outcome is not what I desire.

The next thing Paul says to do is pray, petition and thank God for the things we are anxious about.

Although we do resort to prayer, our prayers are sometimes just reworded worries. After I presented my request to God in prayer, my fears continued to weigh on my heart and mind. The type of praying, petitioning and thanking Paul refers to involves relinquishing our will for God's.

I believe God wants us to ask for what we desire while trusting He ultimately knows best. When we choose to do this, we can experience the peace Paul describes in Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (NIV).

This peace allows us to focus on God rather than worry about the future. By choosing not to be anxious, we discover peace that is not dependent on controlled outcomes but comes from the God who controls all things.

"My anxiety doesn't come from thinking about the future but from wanting to control it."—Hugh Prather



Motivational Thoughts: “Find the good. It’s all around you. Find it, showcase it and you’ll start believing it.” – Jesse Owens

Romans 12:9-12 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

My all-time favorite athlete is Jesse Owens. As a young kid I heard about one man who stood against all odds of hatred and bigotry and defied the greatest hate power on earth, the evil army of Nazi Germany.

Owens single-handedly destroyed Adolf Hitler’s myth that his Aryan athletes were superior to black competitors.

In 1921, Charles William Paddock was widely acclaimed as the “fastest human being” in the world. In the 1920 Olympic Games in Belgium, Paddock captured the gold medal in the 100-meter dash and won a silver medal in the 200-meter dash.

One day, Paddock visited a school in Cleveland, Ohio and spoke to the student body. A young black child listened intently as this famous athlete talked. “What do you want to be,” Paddock asked? You name it and then believe that God will help and you will become just that,” he said.

That young man although materially poor was spiritually rich; he decided that he too wanted to be the fastest human being on earth.

The odds were against this young man. He was poor, marginalized and received no scholarship to college. He worked his way through school, training in the early morning hours because he had to work in the evenings. When traveling with his team he slept and ate in “black only” hotels and restaurants. He won a record eight individual NCAA championships at Ohio State University and was affectionately known as the Buckeye Bullet but he was not allowed to live on the college campus.

In spite of cruel racial prejudice and abundant adversity, he persisted. In 1936 at the Berlin Olympics, he won four gold medals. Influenced by parents who were strong believers in Jesus, track star Jesse Owens lived as a courageous man of faith.

in the presence of hate-filled Nazis and their leader, Hitler. He also befriended fellow athlete Luz Long, a German. Surrounded by Nazi propaganda, Owens’s simple act of living out his faith impacted Luz’s life. Later, Long wrote to Owens: **“That hour in Berlin when I first spoke to you, when you had your knee upon the ground, I knew you were in prayer . . . . I think I might believe in God.”**

Owens demonstrated how believers can answer the apostle Paul’s charge to “hate what is evil” and be “devoted to one another in love”. Though he could have responded to the evil around him with hate, Owens chose to live by faith and show love to a man who would later become his friend and eventually consider belief in God.



Motivational Thoughts: Impress at a distance; impact up close.

1Thessalonians 5:23 May the God of peace set you apart for Himself. May every part of you be set apart for God. May your spirit and your soul and your body be kept complete.

Our greatest desire is to be known...our greatest fear is to be known and then rejected.

Fans are fickle and who we truly are is not contingent on the approval of fans but in the security of Gods approval of us.

Competing is all about performing. We prepare hard to perform well, and we quickly learn there are two outcomes: perform or perish! As competitors, we step onto the arena of competition, set everything aside, and perform our best. As athletes and coaches, we have a built-in platform. We put on the jersey, look our best, and play our best—regardless of what is going on beneath the jersey. We train ourselves to not let the inside stuff affect the outside stuff since we're still expected to compete at a high level.

Performance-based competition and performance-based living will kill you from the inside out. It will rob and steal your joy for competing and living.

The front-stage (what we present to others but not the real you) is the enemy of the soul. We want others to see us better than who we really are. The front-stage (known as our outside self) of our lives contradicts the backstage (known as our inside self). This battle rages within us daily, which creates an enormous amount of unhealthy inner-tension. A foundational principle of the front-stage is to impress at a distance but never up close.

The lie that drives us is: the better the performance, the more they like us—and the less likely others will discover the backstage. Along the way, we pray that nobody will ever discover the backstage. The pain, insecurities, weaknesses, wounds and sins in our lives are off limits. No one is allowed behind the curtain. We hide it, bury it, and keep it in the dark where it belongs, and for sure, it must not make it to the front-stage.

The backstage and front-stage must be replaced by Christ's stage. No more shows. No more pretending. Sacrifice your image and restore your heart. Stop the show and get real. God does not need our performances for His approval and love.

But He does need our hearts. He wants us to pursue one stage—Christ's stage. Ignoring the backstage is the enemy of our soul, but Christ is the lover of our soul. And He loves us just the way we are. But He loves us too much to let us stay the way we are!



Motivational Thoughts: **"The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to...failure." — John Maxwell, Failing Forward**

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2)

Overcoming Slumps

Slumps happen to every athlete. So it's important to keep a long-term perspective and realize that life won't always be easy. Roses have thorns, gardens have weeds and roads have potholes. Nevertheless, God knows how to get us through the hard times. When in a slump go back to the basics

Today, however, I want to look at three fundamentals of shooting and how they can be applied in the life of a Christ-follower.

Square Up

Yes, game highlights on TV often focus on a player hitting a flashy fade-away shot or a runner in the lane, but a much higher-percentage shot requires that you square your body to the basket. Shooting a basketball accurately starts with setting your feet properly—so that all ten toes point toward the basket—and aligning your hip, shoulder, and elbow so that the ball flies straight and true when you release it.

In our spiritual walk, we need to be just as deliberate, aligning our hearts and mind with God's will and approaching the throne of grace with confidence. Don't be simultaneously running away from God (the fade-away) or rushing too fast towards Him without a healthy fear of His holiness (the runner). Think fundamentals.

Focus on the Goal

After squaring your body with the basket, you need to focus your eyes on the goal. Where do you want the ball to go? Where are you aiming? Some say to look at the front of the rim; others say the back. Either way, you need to be focused on the objective in order to put the ball through the hoop.

As Christ-followers, we need to do the same. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Paul says that as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). In other words, the more you focus on Jesus, the more you will become like Him, which is the goal.

Follow Through

So now you've squared up your body and your focus is on the goal. There is one more important step in shooting a basketball: the follow-through. As you take the shot, let your arm continue its motion as far as possible, even after the ball has left your hand. A good follow-through will help you get the ball traveling in the direction you intended. If you snap your arm back too quickly, your odds of making the shot are greatly diminished.

Similarly, after we've approach the throne of grace (square up) and fixed our eyes on Jesus (focus on the goal), we need to follow through and continue walking by faith daily. Don't be like the seed planted in thorny soil (Luke 8:14) and start your walk with passion only to quickly fall away after being choked by the lusts, worries, and temptations of this world. Persevere, stay disciplined, remain humble, and walk in grace.



Motivational Thoughts: They key of persistence opens all door closed by resistance

“One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. ‘There was a judge in a certain city,’ he said, ‘who neither feared God nor cared about people.’ A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”
"Then the Lord said, ‘Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?’” – Luke 18:1-8

The Persistent Competitor

What is the worst thing that can happen to an athlete? The one thing that can bring tears to even the hardiest competitor is INJURY! A sports injury can end a sporting career. It can set athletes back for months. It can take away the chance to compete in the sporting event you have been training for years!

The most challenging part of an injury is the rehabilitation process. To have a complete recovery, strengthening exercise programs must be adhered to strictly. Rehabilitation is a stage that requires a lot of PERSISTENCE.

For athletes to return from an injury, persistence is vital. We persist because we want to return to competitive sport. We persist because we know that these mundane exercises will allow us to regain mobility, range of motion, coordination, and technical movements. We persist because we know that is the only way back.

In the parable of the persistent widow, she knew that the only way to get justice was to go back to the judge repeatedly. Her persistence gets her justice from a judge that does not fear God nor cares about people. Our God, who is just and cares about us, will surely grant us justice.

Persistence is contagious

Jesus told the disciples this story to show that they should always pray and never give up. How many will He find on the earth who have faith? When we encounter trials in life, do we believe that God wants the best for us and will give us whatever is good for us? Do we turn to God in prayer to deliver us from our struggles? Do we persist in prayer because we know that God’s way is the best way for us?

Our loving Father wants to give us His best, but He also wants us to have total dependence on Him. Let us P.U.S.H. (Pray Until Something Happens) on in prayer in full persistence, knowing that He is the One that can deliver us from all trials in life!

The devil's happy when the critics run you off



Motivational Thoughts: DON'T PLAY TO "NOT LOSE", PLAY TO "WIN"

A March Madness Message

If you are playing to win, you do whatever is necessary to move things forward. You aggressively try to put points on the board. You're not reckless, but you're certainly not passive. When you play to win, you make the call that you fear. You have the difficult conversation. You deal with the tricky issues that may put your outcomes at risk if things go south on you.

Every team that enters the NCAA Tournament plays to win!

If you are playing to 'not lose,' you're cautious. Probably overly-cautious. You want to avoid mistakes, so you hold back. Instead of doing what you know you need to do.

While basketball fans across the United States make travel arrangements and prepare to cheer on their favorite teams in the Big Dance, the coaches and teams fortunate enough to make it into the tourney are also in full-out preparation mode. You can bet that as soon as those teams found out who their opponents would be in the first round, they had their players in the practice rooms watching game film. Why?

So they can see the other team's weaknesses, strengths, go-to plays, as well as individual player's strengths, weaknesses and patterns. The coach studies the other team's game footage to notice the screens, the cuts, the movement before the shot, as well as how the team gets its best players into position to make the best plays.

Great players are students of the game. They watch film. They study opponents.

In other words, a coach and his players watch the opposing team's game film in order to gain an advantage in the upcoming faceoff. If you know what to expect out of your opponent, you'll be better prepared to outmaneuver him and come away with a win.

That same principle is true when dealing with the enemy in our spiritual lives. It's good to know details about our enemy–the devil–so that we can be aware of his tricks and trademark moves. We know from the Word of God that Satan is the father of all lies. Knowing that, when he comes to you and whispers in your ear, "You're not worthy; You'll never succeed in life; God doesn't care about you;" you can say, "Those things aren't true because they are coming from the father of all lies. In fact, if Satan is telling me those things, the exact opposite must be true: I am worthy! I will succeed in life! God does care about me!"

Conversely, you better be aware that the devil is also studying you and watching your "game film." He sees what play worked on you in the past, and he will run it over and over again in order to try and trip you up and stop your victory. If he knows you're a worrier, he will give you lots of things to worry about until you take the bait. So, don't fall for his tricks.

Here's the best news. Though these basketball teams heading into the NCAA tourney have no idea if they will win that next game, we have a different situation. See, no matter how much they prepare and practice, somebody still has to lose. There can only be one national champion. But, as Christians, we are guaranteed a win in the game of life. First Corinthians 15:57 says, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That doesn't mean our opponent is going to throw in the towel and give up. He will still try to aggravate us every chance he gets, but we will still win! You're a winner, so live with victory in your heart and mind today!



Motivational Thoughts: Success is remaining faithful to the process God has laid out for you.

"Do not waste time…Instead, train yourself to be godly." -- 1 Timothy 4:7

PREPARE OR PRETEND

Everyone knows a poser looks the part but lacks the skills! Posers don't put in the hard work, sweat and dedication training themselves to compete.

None of us wants a POSER faith!

Over the past decade, the Navy SEALS rose to fame in the public eye thanks to major motion pictures that detailed their epic heroism. Yet, it wasn't the impressive action scenes that allured most—it was the revelation of their preparation intensity. These elite warriors hold fast to an original saying: "When under pressure, you don't rise to the occasion, you sink to the level of your training." As competitors, the same is true. When the referee blows the opening whistle – and the pressure of competition is on—we sink to the level of our athletic training. Sure, we'd like to believe that we can "flip the switch" and perform better when the bright lights turn on, yet any serious competitor knows that isn't true. We default to the degree of our preparation.

Jesus provides a scouting report for our time here on earth: "You will face many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33). You know it's true. Disappointment is all-around – death, divorce, division, and discouragement. When setbacks become reality—and the pressure of life is on—we sink to the level of our spiritual training. The same is true when confronted with temptation. We wish to believe that instantaneous strength will be mustered when tempted, yet experience shows that if we don't prepare, we just pretend to be ready.

The second part of Jesus' scouting report provides life: "But take heart, because I have overcome the world." Today, Jesus offers to prepare you for whatever you face, whenever you may face it. He can strengthen your heart and heal your wounds. He can solidify your trust and embolden your convictions. It's your invitation to accept. That way, when you're under pressure and sink to the level of your spiritual training, you can be confident that you can navigate whatever you face because God, the Wonderful Counselor, trained you and He is beside you.
Are you preparing or pretending?

- **Are you seeking the Lord every day, allowing normal circumstances to serve as the training ground for strengthening your faith?**
- **How serious are you when you train?**

"Lord, train me. Use the everyday, normal circumstances to prepare me for trials. Remind me of Your presence today. Amen."

"Everything now will prepare you for the next step. Don't run from adversity; lean into it with all your heart and God will make you a leader worth following." -Andy Stanley



Motivational Thoughts: Relentless leaders don't cover ground; they take ground.

"But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and obtain life." - Hebrews 10:39

The Relentless Competitor

Competitors love to have goals, and they pursue them with everything they have. Nothing will get in their way! They will give their all—all the time. They will not give up or give in. And they will not give out. They are relentless.

Relentless is everywhere these days. There is a Relentless energy drink, Relentless Nike running shoe, *Relentless* movie, "Relentless" country album, and even a Relentless steak and lobster restaurant.

As we unpack this concept of relentless competitor, there are several good one-word definitions of relentless:

- **Unyielding**
- **Unbending**
- **Determined**
- **Never-ceasing**
- **Persistent**

However, the opposite of relentless is to relent.

- **Abandon**
- **Soften**
- **Relax**
- **Bend**
- **Weaken**

You could probably rephrase the verse to read, "But we are not those who RELENT, but those who are RELENTLESS." God want us to move forward, be strong and not give up. As followers of Christ, we need to have relentless love, pursue relentless devotion and be on a relentless purpose.

We also need to be a relentless competitor. A relentless competitor is one that has some grit and guts. He or she doesn't buckle or fade. Or rust out or burn out. He or she has tenacity and fortitude.

Relentless competitors are able to absorb the inevitable criticism, obstacles, challenges, and setbacks and keep advancing. They keep their eyes on completing the mission and are willing to find creative solutions when things don't go as planned.

Busy leaders cover ground.

We need to advance and be driven to take ground every single day. Most leaders just cover ground but don't take ground. One is a matter of staying busy, and the other is a matter of being strategic. Busy leaders are distracted by the tyranny of the urgent; they are often reactive and responding to the needs of the moment. They are frequently playing defense. Busy leaders maintain and manage, but rarely advance. Simply stated, they cover ground.

Relentless leaders take ground.

Relentless, strategic leaders remain focused on the finish line; they are proactive and align their time, energy and activity around the most important priorities. They are frequently on offense. They remove distractions and avoid interruptions. Relentless leaders move forward and take ground. God is calling us to take ground. So the next time someone asks you how you're doing, let the answer be "I am strategic and taking ground."



Motivational Thoughts: "How you REST determines you at your BEST"

I have a love-hate relationship with my iPhone. Love the photo and video quality. Love a few of the apps. Hate the fact that I feel tied to it as do most people in the world today. The expectation are that we should respond within moments.

Most folks don't even know that down time is a thing. We are constantly "on." So hard on the heart and soul, not to mention the body.

The iPhone is a clever device; among its many features it has one called "Low Power Mode." If I've run down the battery shooting videos or watching the recap of the semifinals, or more likely I've simply forgotten to charge it, the phone asks me if I want to go into Low Power Mode. In which case it operates on a subsistence diet, trying to conserve the last remaining power.

According to Apple support, "Low Power Mode reduces the amount of power that your iPhone uses when the battery gets low…When Low Power Mode is on, your iPhone will last longer before you need to charge it, but some features might take longer to update or complete."

You'll notice that human beings have a certain amount of capacity; we all have a "battery," and it is limited. Not unlimited, as we would like, but extremely limited. You have to sleep, every night. You have to literally shut down your systems for six to eight hours every single day of your life.

We need to go into Low Power Mode on a regular basis.

You can't just live "on" all the time. When is your Low Power Mode time?
When we live at such a fast pace, we forget what to do with that time we free up when we slow down.

Five more ways that God wants to give you rest

1. **Rest from Work:** God wants to give you refreshment."Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed." Exodus 23:12, NIV

2. **Rest from Troubles:** God wants you to enjoy the gift of stillness. "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him …" Psalm 37:7, NIV

3. **Rest from Anxiety:** God wants to bring you peace. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil 4:6-7, NIV

4. **Rest from Busyness:** God wants you give you time to recharge. "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Mark 6:31, NIV

5. **Rest from Stress:** God wants to take away your burdens. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11:28-29, NIV



Motivational Thoughts: The greater the obstacle, the more glory in overcoming it.

Second-Half Strong

"Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.' This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." -John 2: 9b-11 (NIV)

One of the worst feelings in sports is losing after having a big lead.

Most of us have been a part of a game in which we got ahead early and then watched a victory slip away. We never see it coming because we become so comfortable with the position we've gained that we assume we're not vulnerable and we slack off. Maybe we play around with the ball in the backfield, or we slow our pace. We might even quit completely or forget some of the fundamentals of the game because of how blind we've become.

Many of us know about the first of Jesus' miracles: turning water into wine. Not only was it the custom in the day to have wine at a wedding, it was a social obligation. So when the wine ran out, it was much more than a minor social embarrassment. Jesus saved the occasion by turning the water into wine. The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine and made the comment in the verses above. He noted how the best wine was brought out in the latter half of the party.

After hearing of Jesus' many miracles during his life, this one can often be viewed as simple and insignificant. However, I think it's worth noting that Jesus saved the best for last. All too often we can treat our faith like the wine at parties. We've done a lot in our youth, and we don't wind up finishing strong. We convince ourselves that because we have already brought our finest out before, we can "rest" and "do less." We become first-half Christians.

Most teams don't consider themselves a "second-half team" until they are losing at halftime. But if we enter the locker rooms of our lives and are winning, how do we maintain the lead? How do we keep the mindset of a second-half player while we're already ahead? Paul tells the Thessalonians to never tire of "doing what is right." We need to continue to work on our fundamentals, no matter what we've already accomplished whether that means spending more time in the Word, praying continually or focusing on helping others.

We can't let the world deceive us into complacency.

After all, how often do we let our fans call the plays? In the same fashion, we can't let the world tell us to "take it easy" or "slow down." As Paul says in Philippians, we cannot consider ourselves to have taken hold of the prize that Christ has given us. We need to forget what is behind, and strain towards what is ahead (Philippians 3:12).

Be challenged today to bring out your best self for the second half. Don't give up and don't let down, but be encouraged by the strength and endurance received through Christ. Press on and finish strong!

1. Are there any areas of your life where you might have "taken it easy"?
2. What can you do in order to pick up the pace in the second half?
3. How can you help someone else who may be slacking off?
4. How can you apply God's Word to the second-half of your game?



Motivational Thoughts: Developing Your Spiritual Handles Will Help You Break Down The Opposition

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Spiritual Crossover

You are finally making progress and moving forward in your walk with God. You have experienced true spiritual victory in areas that normally cause you to stumble.

Then out of nowhere, as if the enemy has put on a full-court press, your spiritual life is now a series of double dribbles, missed free throws and technical fouls.

What just happened? How did victory turn into defeat so quickly?

In basketball, when the defensive player is guarding you so tight that you can barely breathe, you have to learn to create space. Every player knows the crossover dribble is one of the most effective ways to alleviate heavy defensive pressure.

Crafty players are masters of the crossover “break your ankles” dribble. If executed correctly, the defensive player will go in the opposite direction and it will result in a wide-open jump shot or an uncontested layup.

Have you developed a spiritual crossover dribble? The Bible is clear that if we resist the devil, he will go in the opposite direction and flee. God has promised to always provide a way of escape; that is, He shows us a clear path to safety.

It is time to start practicing the necessary spiritual footwork and Biblical life skills so we can execute a spiritual crossover when the enemy intensifies his attacks. Loving God and applying His Word will teach you how to recognize the path of escape in times of temptation.

God’s given us everything we need to resist and defeat the enemy’s plots and schemes. The Bible never instructs us to fight the devil in our own strength, or to be afraid of him and his attacks. But it does tell us how to live strong and alert, knowing that God is the One who holds us secure.

Ways to Develop A Spiritual Crossover

1. **Trust God’s Power and Protection…God is bigger than your circumstances**
2. **Make the Enemy Flee through the Power of Praise**
3. **Express gratitude every day…count your blessings**
4. **Strengthen your mind by meditating and reflecting on Gods Word**
5. **Be humble and don’t get tripped up over pride…footwork of humility**
6. **Pray and seek God wisdom and help**



Motivational Thoughts: Real value isn't in what you own, drive, wear or live. The greater value is found in love and life, health and strength, friends and family! -TD JAKES

"For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world [with all its pleasures], and forfeit his soul?" Mark 8:36

At the start of each NFL season, most teams have their sights set on winning the Super Bowl. Coaches motivate their players to work hard so they can accomplish the major feat of hoisting the Lombardi Trophy.

Players are judged differently after they win a ring, and there is an immense value placed on championships. Plenty of players preparing to step on the field Super Bowl Sunday have yet to experience the excitement of winning on the largest stage. These guys have been dreaming about this moment since playing Pop Warner as kids.

When listening to them talk about the Super Bowl, they want to win badly. They realize the monumental impact it would have on their lives and are consumed with doing what it takes to become Super Bowl champions.

The sports world, and even society, has elevated the Super Bowl to unbelievable heights. The standard of success in winning the Lombardi Trophy is so important that it has become an idol for those involved. It's worshipped in a way that requires a full commitment from those in pursuit.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, we can also get wrapped up in our desire for "shiny objects." If we aren't careful, we can fall into the trap of idolizing anything from a brand new car to a bigger home to the perfect dream job.

Just like the Super Bowl, these things aren't necessarily bad, but when we're chasing satisfaction in something else, it replaces God as our greatest love and devotion.

If we're consumed by acquiring that "one thing," or excessively driven to making something happen in our lives, we can end up devaluing our relationship with God. Our own "Super Bowl win" becomes the ultimate prize, while our worship and commitment to God get pushed aside.

The Bible celebrates that we can both love God, follow Jesus, and still "win Super Bowls," but we must constantly check our hearts to determine our motivation and what we consider most important.

When we're satisfied in Christ and pursuing His will, we may get the "Super Bowl ring" along the journey. However, if we don't, we'll be okay because we have Him and the assurance found in Mark 8:36: "For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world [with all its pleasures], and forfeit his soul?"

Reflect:

1. What are you pursuing in life that threatens to become more important than your devotion to Jesus?
2. What is something you chased after in the past and realized wasn't as satisfying as you thought it would be?



Motivational Thoughts: Who you trust determines if you thrive.

“For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does.” Psalm 33:4 (NLT)

One of the great questions of life is, “Who are you going to trust?”

The way you answer this question will determine whether you’re happy or miserable, whether you succeed or fail, whether you make something of your life or waste your life.

To determine who you should trust, ask yourself questions like these: Who always has your best interest in mind? Who will help you make important decisions? Who wants to see you succeed?

Should you trust popular opinion? That may not be a good idea since it constantly changes. Should you trust celebrities who set the latest trends? Trends change, and fads fade. Should you make critical life decisions based on what you read on social media? Just because it’s online doesn’t mean it’s truly trustworthy or reliable.

What about trusting yourself?

The truth is, your emotions can lie to you. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV). When you live by your emotions, you can be easily manipulated by other people and by your changing moods.

If you’re going to entrust your life and your future to someone or something, you better choose someone who has your best interest at heart, knows everything, is perfect, and will never lie to you. That kind of limits your options—to God. No one else is ever going to always tell you the truth. They’re going to shade it. They’re going to filter it. They’re going to make it sound nice. They may not tell you what you need to hear. But what you need to hear is the truth—because it is the truth that sets you free. Lies about yourself, others, the world, and how life really is will only keep you in bondage.

And even though the truth will set you free, it may make you miserable at first. That’s why people don’t like the truth and often avoid it. You don’t want to hear that most of your problems were brought on by poor decisions. You don’t want to hear that your own stubbornness, ego, and insecurity cause the stress in your life, but it’s true.

Psalm 33:4 says, “For the word of the Lord holds true, and we can trust everything he does” (NLT).
God said it, and that settles it—whether or not you believe it. God isn’t waiting on your opinion to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong. If God says it, it’s true.

Each day voices all around you are trying to get you to trust them. But there’s only one voice you can trust that will always have your best in mind. Trust God for your present and your future. He will never let you down.

“Of course people will try to take a bite out of you when you dare to do something great--for many of them it will be the only taste of greatness they will ever have!” -Levi Lusko



Motivational Thoughts: "You need to work as hard to be a great teammate as you want to be a great player" - Jon Gordon

Ecclesiastes 4:12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

One of the most important things this passage of Scripture wants you to know is that we all need each other. After God created Adam, he said words that were true then and remain true to this day.

"The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." – Genesis 2:18

Many times, this gets applied in a marital sense, but this is true whether you are married or not. It is not good for you to be alone. The idea of a lone wolf or a person who thinks they don't need anyone is not only bad for the individual, it is foreign to God's design for humanity. We all need each other. I need you just as much as you need me. We were created for fellowship. This includes fellowship with God and with others.

When I think of this passage it reminds me of the power of a unified sports team. As athletes we understand the power of teammates having one another's backs. In fact the very idea of "Competition" expresses this principle.

"THOSE WHO SEEK TO WIN FOR THE TEAM ARE TRULY COMPETING… THOSE WHO SEEK TO WIN FOR THEMSELVES ARE ONLY PERFORMING"

COMPETE: From the Latin Competere

(Com) Together (Petere) Strive. Compete = To Strive Together

3 Strand's of a Competitor

1. **SACRIFICE** For The Greater Good
   Attitude: "I make Contributions"

2. **STRIVE** For The Greater Good
   Attitude: "I never Quit"

3. **SOLVE** For The Greater Good
   Attitude: "I help Find Solutions"

When you consider the impact of this type of three-strand cord in your life I think that two things happen. You can do more and you can be more. Whether is a friendship, spouse or teammate, consider Ecclesiastes 4:9 "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts."



Motivational Thoughts: The ultimate mystery of our lives may be God's unconditional love for us

Ambiguity Abounds "Shades of Love"

Love. We toss around that term as if we're stuck in Communication 101. Does our language lack suitable alternatives to convey our warm sentiments or do we have an emotional addiction to the word love?

We all do it. I love my cat. I love to play the drums. I love sunny days. I love my new phone. I love your outfit. I love pizza. I love my sneakers. I love my neighborhood. I love my job!

Webster's Take

The Merriam-Webster dictionary lists five primary definitions for the verb love: To hold dear, To feel a lover's passion, devotion or tenderness, To like or desire actively, To thrive in, To feel affection or experience desire

As you can see, love is a versatile word. We may understand its meaning when we know its context. However, as emotional beings, we can't always be objective. Sometimes, we'll misunderstand.

God's love is bigger than all the love of men combined. A man can leave anytime when he feels tired, but God never gets tired of loving us.

Sometimes, we use the word love as an overstatement. Verbs such as respect, like, admire, think the world of, delight in, relish, care about, savor and enjoy may act as more precise replacements.

If we use up our love on objects, activities or other people, what's left for the people who are closest to us? With a newly expanded vocabulary and greater sensitivity to our tone of voice, perhaps people will better understand our true feelings. I know we're supposed to love our spouse, but do we really love our favorite latte?

The Ultimate Definition

Human attempts at love, in all permutations, seem superficial compared to God's love. The Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8b ESV). Jesus Himself put love into perspective: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13 ESV).

God brought love alive for us. He put it into action – in the form of sacrifice. The Bible puts it this way:
"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8 ESV).

With the various meanings we have for the nebulous word love, it's no wonder people have a hard time grasping the Bible's version. Our use of the term usually expresses an emotion. God's love, however, is unconditional. It doesn't fluctuate as human love does. We can do nothing to make God love us any more or less than He already does. His love defies comprehension!



Motivational Thoughts: You will never take **POSSESSION** of the promises when fear has taken **POSSESSION** of you

There is a difference between SURVIVING and THRIVING

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the LORD and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand.

Psalm 144:1 Praise the Lord, who is my rock. He trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle.

"I am still fighting behind enemy lines. I have known all the enemies of the human spirit. I have known fear and doubt; I have known bitterness and anger; I have known jealousy and greed…I have come to know this one truth most certainly: the world within you will create the world around you." -Erwin McManus The Way of the Warrior

Warrior Mindset #1 Warriors Lean more than Lunge

Exodus 15:3 The Lord is his name, and he is a warrior!
Jeremiah 20:11 But the Lord stands beside me like a great warrior

Warrior Mindset #2 Battles without Faith are battles that Fail

1 John 5:5 And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Warrior Mindset #3 Weakness is a prerequisite for Greatness

Greatness never belongs to the one who carries it; it belongs to the world that needs it.

Judges 6:12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

Judges 6:15 "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

Average is always a safe choice, and it is the most dangerous choice you can make.

"The warrior is indifferent to fame while at the same time is relentlessly pursuing greatness. They see fame as what you do for yourself and greatness what you do for others." -Erwin McManus



Motivational Thoughts: Imagine what God would trust you with tomorrow if you trusted Him more today

They didn't know that Friday's tragedy would be Sunday's triumph.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. –1 Peter 3:18 NIV

On Good Friday we relive the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior. He was betrayed, mocked, and physically beaten. He conquered death so that we would know unmistakably that our hope is in Him.

Hope is always rooted in trust…Who do you trust?

One of the great questions of life is, "Who are you going to trust?" The way you answer this question will determine whether you're happy or miserable, whether you succeed or fail, whether you make something of your life or waste your life.

To determine who you should trust, ask yourself questions like these: Who always has your best interest in mind? Who will help you make important decisions? Who wants to see you succeed?

Should you trust popular opinion? That may not be a good idea since it constantly changes. Should you trust celebrities who set the latest trends? Trends change, and fads fade. Should you make critical life decisions based on what you read on social media? Just because it's online doesn't mean it's truly trustworthy or reliable.

What about trusting yourself? The truth is, your emotions can lie to you. The Bible says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV). When you live by your emotions, you can be easily manipulated by other people and by your changing moods.

If you're going to entrust your life and your future to someone or something, you better choose someone who has your best interest at heart, knows everything, is perfect, and will never lie to you. That kind of limits your options—to God. No one else is ever going to always tell you the truth. They're going to shade it. They're going to filter it. They're going to make it sound nice. They may not tell you what you need to hear. But what you need to hear is the truth—because it is the truth that sets you free.

Psalm 33:4 says, "For the word of the Lord holds true, and we can trust everything he does" (NLT).

Each day voices all around you are trying to get you to trust them. If Im going to trust anyone, Im going to trust the one who made the ultimate sacrifice for me. Jesus has earned our trust. There's only one voice you can trust that will always have your best in mind. Trust God for your present and your future.
He will never let you down.



Motivational Thoughts: Are you running out the clock, or are you making the time count?

"Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." — Ephesians 5:15-16

In sports such as football or basketball where the clock is a crucial aspect of the game, coaches and teams are often praised or criticized for their use of it: how they managed their timeouts and if they left too much time for the opposing team to get the ball back.

Outcomes are often decided based on how well or poorly a team worked the clock, especially if it was in the lead. In all my years of watching sports, I've seen many times where a team mishandled its use of the clock and ultimately lost the game because of it.

This principle of how you work the clock has a lot of parallels to life — because, after all, we're all in a game with a certain limited amount of time on this earth during which we can live, love, learn and make a difference. Nobody has an infinite lifespan and, therefore, how we use the time we're given is of utmost importance.

Each of us is presented with really two options as to how we'll manage the time our Creator has handed to us:

1. **We can either run out the clock and simply try to stay out of trouble**
2. **Or we can redeem the time and use it wisely, making every single second count.**

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Other Bible versions phrase it as "making the best use of…" or "taking advantage of every opportunity."

Tomorrow isn't promised. You're not guaranteed an infinite amount of time to use however you want. God is the only One who knows the number of our days, and our attitude ought to be as is that of the writer of Psalm 90, who wrote, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." In short, help us to make our time count.

In so many ways, it's easy to just let the moments skip past us — to waste minutes that turn into hours over the course of a life, and simply try to run out the clock and make sure we come out of this life on the winning side.

For the believer, life must be lived with intentionality and urgency. Life shouldn't be lived as an emergency — part of "redeeming the time" is appreciating the time — but we shouldn't waste away our precious heartbeats on things that don't matter in the end.

Don't be among those who one day look back and regret that they blew the time they had. Instead, ask yourself this: Are you running out the clock, or are you making the time count?