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Don't Waste Your Sports

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MEETING GOD BEFORE THE OPENING TIP

Using sports to glorify someone is not a new idea.

You may already know that the athletic brand Nike is named after the ancient Greek goddess of victory. But perhaps you didn't know that the original Olympic Games—which occurred hundreds of years before Christ was born—was an athletic festival held in honor of the Greek god Zeus. On the central day of the festival, one hundred oxen were sacrificed to him. (This rivals modern Super Bowls for the most absurd halftime show in the history of sports.)

Whether we use sports to glorify a pagan god named Zeus, a gifted professional like LeBron James, or ourselves, we distort and misuse sports.

If we don't know who God really is, we'll

seek our own glory instead of his. We'll give glory to the created instead of the Creator. We'll rob God of the glory that only he deserves. We'll waste our sports.

So we must first get to know the true God of all creation—including sports. Who is he? What do we mean by his “glory”?

Now, if you're wondering what all this has to do with your jump shot, we're getting there soon. Hang with me. It's like with any sport—you've got to know how to run the plays before you go out and run the plays. You've got to understand the West Coast offense before you can run it. You've got to understand the full-court press before you can execute it. In the same way, we've got to study God's character before we move on to the practical stuff. This isn't just for scholars (who normally don't have game). If you're a Christian athlete, you must study theology and not just the playbook.

When we think about who God is, we need help. We have small brains and an infinite God. We're jumping into the deep end of the theological pool. So I've enlisted a smart guy to help

us out, a theologian named J. I. Packer. Here's how he describes the God who gave us sports:

Our personal life is a finite thing: it is limited in every direction, in space, in time, in knowledge, in power. But God is not so limited. He is eternal, infinite and almighty. He has us in his hands; we never have him in ours. Like us, he is personal; but unlike us, he is *great*. . . . The Bible never lets us lose sight of [God's] majesty and his unlimited dominion over all his creatures.²

Let's look at J. I. Packer's statement again in slo-mo:

- **God is eternal:** When it comes to his age, God has no beginning and he has no end. He cannot be outlived (Ps. 90:2; 102:25–27).
- **God is infinite:** When it comes to physical limitations, God has, well, none. He is equally present everywhere. We can never go to a place where he is not (Jer. 23:23–24; Ps. 139:7–12).

²J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 83.

- **God is almighty:** When it comes to his strength, God defeats all obstacles and all enemies. He accomplishes whatever he pleases (Gen. 18:14; Ps. 115:3; Matt. 19:26).

Amazingly, though, God doesn't just list these jaw-dropping stats about himself. He shows us his glory most clearly in the person of his Son. In another letter to the Corinthians, Paul puts it this way:

God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6)

This is incredible. The God who spoke light and time into existence shows us his glory first and foremost in one person: Jesus Christ.

Why? Because in his death on the cross for our sins, Jesus bore the penalty for every time we have exalted ourselves instead of him, every angry word we've muttered at a referee, every complaint when our coach didn't put us in the

game. He is our best glimpse of our eternal, infinite, and almighty God. And he is our only hope for the forgiveness of sins—forgiveness we need so desperately. As sinners, you and I have only one hope: Jesus Christ.

This is the eternal, almighty, infinite, and merciful God whose glory should be our passion and priority every time we step onto the field.

What does this have to do with my jump shot? Good question. We'll look at the answer on the next few pages.

SPORTS ARE A GIFT FROM GOD BUT WE'LL WASTE THIS GIFT IF WE PLAY FOR OUR OWN GLORY.

SO HOW DO WE PLAY FOR GOD'S GLORY AND NOT OUR OWN?

This booklet for athletes, parents, and coaches provides a biblical worldview of sports so that we don't waste this gift. "I had the opportunity to glorify God in my sports," C.J. writes, "and I fumbled it. I wasted my sports. You have the opportunity, by the grace of God, not to waste yours."

C.J. MAHANEY loves sports and is a life-long fan of University of Maryland basketball and the Washington Redskins. He is the president of Sovereign Grace Ministries and the author or editor of several books including *Living the Cross Centered Life*, *Humility*, and *Worldliness*.

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