

Sports and Athletics

MAIN IDEAS:

- > Sports and athletics are to serve us in understanding and growing in the Christian life.
- > Sports and athletics are to be done for the glory of God.
- > We must carefully discern whether or not our participation in sports is serving us or mastering us.

SCRIPTURE:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 | 3. Matthew 6:19-20 | 5. 1 Corinthians 10:31 |
| 2. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | 4. 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20 | |

CURRICULUM RESOURCES:

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|---|--|
| > PowerPoint® Slides for Lesson 26 | > "Fathers and Sons and March Madness" article (one per student) |
| > Letter from the President (one for the class) | |
| > Parent Memo for Lesson 26 (one per student) | |

OTHER VISUALS:

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| > Bible | > Optional Illustration: <i>Facing the Giants</i> DVD movie |
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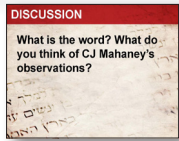
PREPARATION:

If you plan to show the *Facing the Giants* movie clip for the optional illustration, be prepared to bring up the part from 41:23 to 44:27 on your DVD counter during the time indicated in the lesson text.



(DISPLAY LESSON 26.)

Small Group Discussion (6-7 minutes)



(DISPLAY DISCUSSION.)

Explain to the students that you are going to read them an excerpt from a book by pastor and author C. J. Mahaney. However, as you read it you are going to leave out some key words, and use the words "cleaning" or "janitorial" in place of those words. As you read, the students should think about the context, and from it try to guess the words or terms the author actually used. Read it quickly, and without interruption.

Take [cleaning], for example. You should know that I love all things [janitorial]. I myself have been active in strenuous [cleaning] all my life, so it's not like I'm some uncoordinated geek who's now seizing an opportunity to display his inner resentment toward people who are [janitorially] superior. That's not what this is about.

Here's what this is about: Nowhere is the word great mentioned more often in our culture than in the context of [professional cleaning]. If you watch any [janitorial show] this weekend and listen to the announcer's commentary, then like a mantra you'll probably hear the word great repeated throughout—great, great, great. Yet it may well be that nowhere in our culture is the absence of true greatness more evident than in [professional cleaning.] So be careful about cultivating an excessive love for [professional cleaning] in your child.

Ask the students if they have guessed what topic Pastor Mahaney is addressing. Then quickly read it with the missing words added:

Take athletics, for example. You should know that I love all things athletic. I myself have been active in strenuous athletics all my life, so it's not like I'm some uncoordinated geek who's now seizing an opportu-

nity to display his inner resentment toward people who are athletically superior. That's not what this is about.

Here's what this is about: Nowhere is the word great mentioned more often in our culture than in the context of professional sports. If you watch any game this weekend and listen to the announcer's commentary, then like a mantra you'll probably hear the word great repeated throughout—great, great, great. Yet it may well be that nowhere in our culture is the absence of true greatness more evident than in professional sports. So be careful about cultivating an excessive love for professional or collegiate athletics in your child.¹

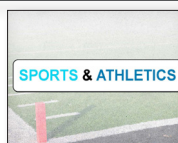
What do you think of his observations? What do you think of his statement: "Nowhere is the word 'great' mentioned more often in our culture than in the context of professional sports." Have you ever observed this? Can you give an example? [e.g., "Wow, what a great catch! We'll be watching replays for a long time. What a great play!"]

Why is the word "great" used so much in sports? We are all looking for something to praise (worship). Sports is held up in our culture as something that portrays achievement—doing some amazing things with your physical body. An Olympic swimmer winning a record eight gold medals, a football team winning the Super Bowl, etc. They are doing things that many people cannot/will not ever do so we consider them "great."

What do you think of his statement: "Yet it may well be that nowhere in our culture is the absence of true greatness more evident than in professional sports." What do you think he means by this? Is his conclusion that sports are wrong or evil? [No.]

1. Mahaney, C. J. *Humility, True Greatness*. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2005), 161-162.

Large Group Lesson

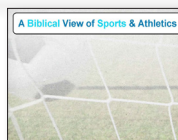


(DISPLAY **SPORTS.**)

How many of you are involved in some kind of organized sport or participate in any type of athletics, whether it be soccer, basketball, swimming, or biking? (Have the students simply raise their hands to indicate this. Do not allow time for discussion.)

Can you list some of the positive aspects of being actively involved in sports and athletics? (Allow the students to give brief responses. Write these positive aspects on a whiteboard, and direct the students to write their own answers in the journal. Answers might include: teamwork, discipline, practice, exercise, fun, learning to win and lose, etc.)

Explain that the Bible also sees some of the positive aspects of sports and athletics.



(DISPLAY **BIBLICAL VIEW.**)

Each statement is taken directly from Scripture:

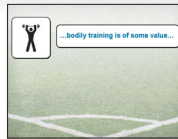
🔓 *Bodily training is of some value (1 Timothy 4:8).*

🔓 *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things...So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body (1 Corinthians 9:24-27a).*

According to these verses, is there value in sports, athletics, and competition? Were any of these noted in our list?

The Bible does see positive aspects of sports and athletics. However, something very important was left out of the above verses, namely the full context.

What is meant by “context”? [e.g., how something appears in relation to the whole; understanding the true meaning based on how it is being used]



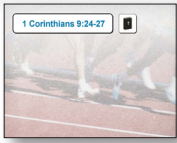
(DISPLAY **TRAINING.**)

Have the students turn to...

🔓 **...1 Timothy 4:7-8** to look at the context, and to the journal for the related question:

1 Timothy 4:7-8—Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

What is the point that Paul was really intending for us to understand from stating that “bodily training is of some value”? [Athletic ability is of some worth.] How is he using an understanding of training for athletics to make a more important point? [Bodily training is good but has limited value in comparison to godliness. As much as you must train for athletics, more so you must train for godliness.]



(DISPLAY **1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27.**)

Have the students turn to the Scripture passage, and also to the journal for the related question.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27—

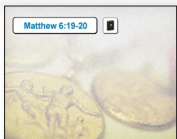
- ☞ *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

What is the true context in which Paul was speaking? [the spiritual life, living the Christian life] How was he using the example of competition, bodily self-control, and discipline? [to help us understand the mind set that we are to have in living out the Christian life] What is the real prize being sought after? [eternal life, heaven]

In New Testament times, the winner of an athletic competition often received a wreath made from leaves, which was placed on his head. But this reward was perishable.

Some athletes train for more than four hours every day. They carefully watch what they eat, and develop a very disciplined training schedule in order to win a medal or title or championship. Paul uses this positive aspect of athletics to encourage Christians to take seriously how we approach the Christian life in which we are striving for a much greater, eternal reward.

Consider how much greater the eternal reward is than the temporary reward! For example, one athlete who won eight gold medals in one Olympics competition stated: “I have accomplished all. I will have these medals forever.”² Will these medals last forever?



(DISPLAY **MATTHEW 6:19-20.**)

Matthew 6:19-20—

- ☞ *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal...*

2. Quote from Olympic Swimmer Michael Phelps after winning his eight gold medal in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, according to <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/summer08/swimming/news/story?id=3538984>.

Which reward is more valuable and important: medals or eternal life? Only the last one truly endures forever!

Think of how your pursuit of the Christian life might change if you approached following Jesus and walking in His truth with the same amount of discipline and determination as an athlete pursuing a gold medal or championship title!

Being involved in sports (and also watching sports) can be great fun. Valuable lessons and skills can be learned, such as the importance of disciplining and training your body to do hard things and be self-controlled. Physical exercise is good for both the health of your body and your mind. Competition encourages you to strive and excel. Looking forward to the “prize winning” can help keep you focused. You can develop endurance, as you learn to press on even when you are tired or discouraged or lose a game.

But according to the Bible, these lessons are meant to serve a greater purpose. And that purpose is the truth—the biblical view—of sports. Sports are meant to serve you in understanding and growing in the Christian life. (Encourage the students to complete this statement in the journal.)



(DISPLAY **PURPOSE.**)

It is very important to understand the true role of sports. However, Satan does not want you to see sports in that way. So he twists God’s good intention, and the sinful heart would rather believe his lies. And just as our beginning article pointed out, when this happens, sports no longer serves this role in someone’s life or in our culture, but may have the exact opposite effect.

What is the opposite of something serving you? [Allow the students to respond.]

Hand the **Letter from the President** to a student (preferably a boy) to read to the class. Before he reads, explain that this is a portion of a letter that President Theodore Roosevelt wrote to his son, Ted, while Ted was away at school.

White House, Oct. 4, 1903

Dear Ted,

... I am delighted to have you play football. I believe in rough, manly sports. But I do not believe in them if they degenerate into the sole end of anyone’s existence. I don’t want you to sacrifice standing well in your studies to any over-athleticism; and I need not tell you that character counts for a great deal more than either intellect or body in winning success in life. Athletic proficiency [ability] is a mighty good servant, and like so many other good servants, a mighty bad master.²

Was the president against his son playing sports? [No.]

However, what was the president concerned about? [that sports would have the wrong priority in his life]

What did the president regard of much greater importance than either intelligence or athletic ability? [character]

What did he mean when he said:

☞ “Athletic [ability] is a mighty good servant...[but] a mighty bad master”?

The opposite...

☞ ...of sports serving you, is that it masters you. How could sports become your master? (Direct the students to complete this statement in the journal.)

What might this look like? [e.g., your life begins to revolve around your sports activities; you spend more time watching sports than studying; you have greater joy in playing sports than in obeying God or serving others; you think more about sports than about spiritual things; playing in the game is more important than going to church; you become powerfully addicted to watching and following certain teams and players; you are too tired after practice to do important things such as praying or reading your Bible, etc.]

Note: This may be a good time to give the students a brief, personal illustration. Share with the students a time in which a sports activity began to “master” your time and energy.



(DISPLAY **1 CORINTHIANS 6:12.**)

Direct the students to the related questions in the journal for this section of the lesson.

1 Corinthians 6:12—

☞ “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be enslaved by anything...

Is it lawful to play soccer? Is it lawful for you to play basketball? Is it lawful for you to watch the Super Bowl? Yes, all of those things may be lawful. But the more important question is not are these things lawful, but are they helpful? Are they serving to help you understand and grow in the Christian life? And, are you becoming enslaved by them?

Why should you care about this? Aren't sports something separate from “church stuff and God stuff”? Verses 19 and 20 go on to say:

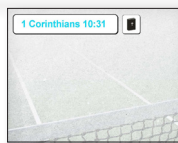
1 Corinthians 6:19-20—

☞ *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

2. Phillips, Doug, editor. *The Letters & Lessons of Theodore Roosevelt for His Sons.* (San Antonio, Texas: The Vision Forum, Inc, 2003), 35.

Does it matter what you are doing with your physical body? Yes! If you are a Christian, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and you belong to God—heart, mind, and body. And you are commanded to glorify God in what you do with your body.

(Quickly display **1 CORINTHIANS 10:31**.)



1 Corinthians 10:31—

☞ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*



(DISPLAY **BIBLICAL VIEW 2**.)

- ☞ Sports and athletics have many positive aspects that are helpful to the body and mind.
- ☞ Sports and athletics are meant to serve a greater goal: helping us in understanding and growing in the Christian life.
- ☞ Sports and athletics are to be done for the glory of God, displaying His greatness and worth.

Illustration (optional):

Play the clip from the *Facing the Giants* movie.

Is that how most of the world views sports? In your beginning small group discussion time, what danger did Pastor Mahaney observe regarding sports in our culture? [It tends to glorify man instead of God.] What evidence can you point to that would justify this observation? [e.g., the number of people who fanatically follow sports teams and figures, but show little interest in spiritual things; the way sports figures boast about their accomplishments, taking the credit themselves for their abilities; etc.]

More often than not, the following is expressed in sports and athletics:



(DISPLAY **LIES**.)

Sports and athletics...

- ☞ Are only a means of harmless fun and entertainment
- ☞ Are simply for keeping in good physical condition
- ☞ Are a means to personal greatness
- ☞ Provide us with heroes to admire and praise

Sometimes, it is very easy to spot these lies as we see a sports figure flagrantly boast about something he has done, or as we watch people do outrageous things in order to

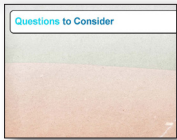
follow and cheer for their team. However, as with other lies of Satan, sometimes these lies are masked or disguised as seemingly good things.

How can you recognize these lies for what they truly are? How do you know if you are believing these lies? One way is to ask yourself the following kinds of questions, whether you are actually participating in a certain sport or athletic activity, or simply spending time watching a sport:



(DISPLAY **QUESTIONS.**)

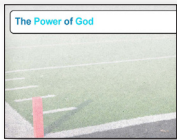
- ☞ *Is my participation in sports keeping me from things that are more important?*
- ☞ *Do I skip church for practices and competitions?*
- ☞ *What motivates my desire to play and compete in this sport?*
- ☞ *Do I get angry when my family interrupts my sports schedule?*
- ☞ *Do I give the credit for my ability to God? Do I turn the focus off myself and to God?*



(DISPLAY **QUESTIONS 2.**)

- ☞ *Do I encourage other players? Do I help them to be successful, even if I must be less successful?*
- ☞ *Is my participation serving to build my character in terms of godliness?*

Sports-related activities are a wonderful gift from God. God delights in His people using our wonderfully designed bodies in ways that show the greatness and wisdom of our Creator. There are valuable lessons that can be learned as you train and practice and compete. However, God wants you to see and understand the biblical worldview of sports—what the truth is. Sports are to serve you in understanding and growing in your knowledge, trust, love, and obedience to Jesus. And the goal of sports is that you do it for the glory of God—using sports as a means to show His greatness and worth.



Optional End for Lesson

(DISPLAY **POWER.**)

Read the following comments from former professional football player Art Monk when he was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in August 2008:

- ☞ *But I understand and I know that I'm here not by, in, and of my own strength—but it's by the grace and the power of God upon my life, who I know gave me favor along the way, and who provided opportunity and room for me to use my gifts.*

So I am very grateful to receive this honor, and I can stand here before you and say, "Hey, look at me, look at what I did." But if I'm going to boast, I'm going to boast today in the Lord, for it's because of him that I'm here and I give him thanks and glory and honor for all that he has done for me.³

Small Group Application

The following examples are possible discussions for the Small Group Application time. Select the topics that are most applicable to your group. (See Introduction for more information.)

- **Truth Statement:** Sports and athletics can serve us in understanding and growing in the Christian life.

Think About It: *Have the students complete the "Sports and Athletics Inventory" in the journal. Have they thought about why they participate and enjoy a certain type of sport or athletic activity? What positive effect has it had in their lives? Have they ever thought about how these positive aspects may be applied to the Christian life? Can they give an example of this? (You may want to be prepared to share a few examples and any applicable Scripture. For example, the importance of teamwork points to **1 Corinthians 12:14, 25-26**.)*

*Would it be right for you to have a disdain for sports and athletics? [No! Of course not.] Do you look down on these activities? If so, why? Is it because you have a right attitude towards the wrong things you see expressed in many sports, or is it because you feel jealous or inferior, or are lazy and do not desire the physical and mental discipline required? What should **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** remind you of?*

Examine Your Heart: *Have you ever examined your motives for why you do or do not participate in a certain sport or other athletic activities (even exercise)? Do you look at your participation or viewing of sporting events as simply something fun to do with your time? Is that fun wrong? No, but should fun be the only and most important goal? How could **Romans 12:1-2** challenge you to view sports and athletics in a new and more important way? Will this outlook put you "in-step" with the culture?*

Live It: Challenge the students to make a conscious effort this week to discern how their participation or viewing of a particular sport can serve them in better understanding important aspects of the Christian life. Tell them to be prepared to share these in the next week.

- **Truth Statement:** Sports and athletics are to be done for the glory of God.

Think About It: Review **1 Corinthians 10:31**. Ask the students if they can think of ways in which playing or participating in an athletic activity would change with this desire and attitude. Talk about specific evidences that demonstrate that this is not the case, for

3. This quote was originally cited on Pastor C.J. Mahaney's blog at www.sovereigngraceministries.org/Blog/post/Art-Monk.aspx

the most part, in our culture. [e.g., boasting, selfishness, poor sportsmanship, idolizing sports figures, time devoted to sports viewing versus more important activities, etc.] Can the students think of examples in which sports figures have glorified or were able to glorify God in their sport?

Examine Your Heart: *Do you approach sports as a means of self-accomplishment, boasting, and popularity? Have you considered texts such as **1 Corinthians 4:7**? How do you think that playing and viewing sports for the glory of God would change how you play or view an event?*

Live It: Challenge the students to look for evidences of God-glorifying moments in sports in others, and encourage them to think of how they can be intentional this week in bringing glory to God in their own sports participation.

- **Truth Statement:** We must carefully discern whether or not our participation in sports is serving us or mastering us.

Think About It: Have you ever wondered if sports and athletics are serving you or mastering you? What might each look like in your life? Is the time and energy you devote to sports, greater or less than the time and energy you devote to training your heart and mind for godliness? Have you ever asked your parents to evaluate this from their perspective? Read and discuss one of the following: **Psalm 145:3-7**, **Isaiah 42:8**, or **Jeremiah 9:23-24**.

Examine Your Heart: *Do the following “heart check” with your students by reading and talking about pastor C.J. Mahaney’s sampling of biblical priorities and practices he reviews with his son prior to each practice and game:*

Do you...

- Humbly receive correction from your coach and ask your coach how you can grow in character as well as athletic skill?
- Thank your coaches for the way they have served you. And thank the referees after each game?
- Encourage your teammates for their display of godly character and athletic skill--in that order of priority?
- Encourage your opponents during and after the game. If you knock someone over, extend your hand to help them up?
- Play the game passionately and unselfishly? Serve your team by playing aggressive defense...and passing the ball on offense...?
- Humbly respond when the referee calls a foul on you? Do not complain or disagree in word or by facial expression...?
- No inappropriate celebrating after you score; instead, recognize that others played a role...?

- Thank the team manager for the way he served and recognize the humility and servanthood he is displaying each game? True greatness is sitting on the end of the bench...?

Live it: Challenge each student to identify an area in which he needs to grow in having sports or athletics serve him instead of mastering him. Encourage the students to include their parents' counsel in identifying these areas. Then, make a plan of some practical steps that can be taken to grow in this area. One or more of the suggestions from Pastor Mahaney's list could be used.

- **Truth Statement:** We need to choose carefully who we look to for examples of greatness.

Think About It: Are you looking to sports for examples of true greatness? Will this serve you well? What types of "heroes" do you have? Do you typically admire godliness in a person even more than great athletic capability? Why is godliness to be admired over athletic capability? Read **1 Corinthians 11:1**. Why did he want the Corinthians to imitate him? Why do we tend to become like those we admire? Why should this tendency make us very careful in what it is about certain sports figures that we admire?

Examine Your Heart: *Have your sports "heroes" ever let you down in their conduct on or off the field? Does the world (popular culture) tend to separate ability and personal conduct when praising certain players and teams?*

Live It: Think of others who might be looking up to you: friends, brothers and sisters, classmates at school. Are you a godly example to these people? In what ways could you be a better example of godliness to these people this week?

Encourage students to apply one thing from the discussion to their lives this week. Try to follow up with them next week.

Send Home

Parent Memo for Lesson 26

"Fathers and Sons and March Madness" article