

Text: Romans 12:4-6

Title: The Team

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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A man was attending his first Super bowl. He paid \$3,000 for his seat. Next to him was a woman who had an empty seat along side of her. So he asked inquisitively, who would miss the Super bowl?! She said it was my husband's seat, but he died so he couldn't be her. The man offered his condolences and then asked couldn't another family member have taken his seat? She said: No, they're all at the funeral.

Technically, as Christians we all should be rooting for the Saints!

In the book, *Becoming Your Favorite Church*, the authors London and Wiseman draw parallels between the church and the NFL so this Super Bowl Sunday I thought we'd high light their insights on how the Church of Jesus Christ is a unique team.

Being a team is our goal. Scripture portrays the church as a body and a family, to show how the church relies on the combined strength of each other. Much like an athletic team, where every player is dependent upon another.

There are 80 million American Christians who have chosen not to participate in Christ's church. People sneer, I don't need to go to church to be a Christian. But Hebrews 10:26 instructs us: do not forsake the gathering. We are not supposed to be lone rangers—a me and God against the world mentality.

Some of the pitfalls of not being connected to the church include: your spiritual priorities never get challenged: 1) you never get examined by the preached word of God. 2) There is no intentional engagement in the work of the Lord, no channeling energy into other believers. 3) The plate is never gets passed before you. Christians who forgo church are basically saying it is all about me. For 2,000 years Christians have been passing the baton to the next generation. Our calling is to continue reinvesting in God's team.

So let's consider some correlations with the NFL

While only the most high level-elite athletes are invited to try out for an NFL, Jesus takes a different approach with His team. Has anyone ever been cut from a team? Or rejected for a job, turned down for a membership, told no thank you from an academic institution? Someone deemed you not worthy enough to be with them. With Jesus' team you don't get cut because He wants you! In fact, He needs you.

This leads us to **The Draft**. Getting players on the team. We get drafted in different rounds in the game of life. But the call always comes—to move off the bleachers and onto the playing field.

Imagine Jesus' challenge of shaping fishermen, tax collectors, revolutionaries into team players. I can hear their excuses—I'm not educated enough, I don't have relational gifts, I still sin too much... sounds like what we would say.

Jesus thinks differently about you because He has included you on His team. Jesus drafted ordinary people and developed them beyond their dreams. Jesus sees the best in you He recognizes your value and potential.

Each member has particular gifts that fit into the various ministries.

With people being so busy in today's society us coaches are reluctant to ask for a commitment. But the question isn't whether or not you are going to be committed... the question is to what are you going to be committed?

People are half committed to so many things that they are not committed to what matters most. We are committed to the wrong things. T.S. Elliot insightfully stated, we have the experience, but are missing the meaning.

This is a trap Christians fall into: we believe in God, but neglect to get involved in Christ's LIFE, which brings deep significance as we live bettering ourselves and others—fighting against evil.

Rosa Parks had a deep time of prayer and Bible study, so when she got on the bus God told her not to give up her seat! & through her devotional life's prompting God put an end to segregation

To accomplish such lofty goals as freeing those in bondage, finding the lost and healing the broken, we get prepared through an intense training program.

Jesus puts His disciples through strenuous, spiritual work outs. Our conditioning takes place in a training camp that incorporates everyday life. Jesus uses the Bible as His play book to get us in shape and drills us on the fundamentals of love, forgiveness, dependence on God and Holy living.

Just like NFL players who watch Film to review their goals and the opponents tactics; Christians use their devotional life, Bible Studies, Spiritual conversations so we are sharp on how to Make Disciples, and also examining Satan's strategy... Ex. Screwtape Letters

When in spiritual training, growth is not automatic just because you joined His team. It requires intentional focus.

Our character is shaped by the habits created from our spiritual disciplines. Dostoevsky said: the 2nd half of a man's life is made up of the habits acquired during the 1st half. In a similar vein, Pascal said: The strength of a man's virtue is measured by his habitual acts.

Therefore the focus we bring to the training will determine the role we play on the team. In Timothy Paul points out that bodily discipline is of little profit, but godly discipline profits for the present life and the life to come.

However, spiritual growth is not merely for personal matters...this is where The Team becomes important. Hebrews 10:24 "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." The American culture has elevated individualism as the pinnacle of identity. I don't need anyone—I am self sufficient.

But life experience supports Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up...a cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

Or to put it into NFL terms if the quarterback doesn't have the Offensive line blocking and the Fullback deflecting penetration he will not be successful. It is the nobody's on the line that determine the victory. There's a verse in 1 Corinthians 12: the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary and receive abundant honor. The behind the scenes people set the stage for the rest of us to experience God.

1 John 1:7 tell us that the proof that we are walking in the light is that we have fellowship with one another. It takes interdependence to get in spiritual shape.

We know we are in spiritual shape when characteristics like: faith, Grace, forgiveness, compassion define our personalities.

Mother Theresa pointed out, "We must be loved by God First and then we can love one another." Many never come to the realization that you are loved and accepted by God flaws and all. Receive this...

Christ's favorite offensive play is (not the Hail Mary) service. Jesus washed the disciple's feet which tells us that serving stands at the top of the Lord's priority list. So when we see a need we should grab a towel and get to work. Our goal is to become a grace filled representative of the living Christ.

Jesus' goal was more significant than winning an athletic contest like the Super Bowl. Dion Sanders the night after winning the Super bowl wanted to commit suicide. Apparently, winning the Championship was not as gratifying as one would think.

No, Jesus goal for us is to transform the world. This lofty goal requires that our souls be in tip top shape. This might be where I lose some of you..."ah pastor if you knew the mess in my life you'd know God could never use me."

But Jesus never gives up on His team, even when we fumble the ball, miss the tackle, squander an opportunity... you can deny Him, abandon Him in His time of need, doubt Him... but He will keep investing in you.

The challenge is to decide are we going to be spectators or players/servants. Are you involved in life in a meaningful way? If not, then you have to leave the sidelines and move onto the playing field so that Christ can use you to impact our world.

Every team has **an Owner** someone who has paid a hefty sum for the franchise. God owns the church—the price He paid was the life of His son. The owner has the right to have the last word on the decisions made. The team's highest goal is to bring the owner abundant returns on their investment.

**The Coach** is the pastor. Nancy and I are the coaching staff. What a humbling realization that God has appointed us to be your spiritual coach. & that we are responsible to the owner...You think you've got pressure at work from your boss! The coach has the job of reading the play book, preparing the players, overseeing the overall direction of the team. For us that entails studying the Bible so that we will receive divine guidance to lead this team to the goal. It encompasses interceding on behalf of the team. Ephesians 4:12 the pastor equips the "Saints."

The game plan includes various responsibilities, some set up chairs or fold bulletins or pray for others. Greeters and sound people, child workers...altogether they make the team happen.

So what's the game plan when on God's team? 1) Working on our relationship with God. Prayer & reading His Word. 2) Working on our relationship with His team...getting involved in Small Groups or

other ministries so that we are connected. 3) Working on our relationship with the world...sharing our faith through our resources and conversations.

Do you know how much God's team can accomplish if His people moved out of the bleachers and off the fringe into a commitment to see God's team win?

I came across a statistic that revealed, if every Christian tithed 10% there would be no world hunger or government agencies. That is powerful! Yet each Sunday churches are filled with Christians who are doing nothing but keeping the faith.

Back in 1873 the first single woman was commissioned by the Southern Baptist Convention to serve as a Missionary to China, Lottie Moon. Since that time, the Baptist have collected a Christmas offering that has raised over 1.5 Billion dollars for missions. Interestingly as China grows into a world power that will no doubt have the ability to take over the world...the Church of Jesus Christ is growing there at a rate the has never been seen before in the history of Christianity. God is rising up His own influence in that Atheist environment!

Talent that sits on the shelf will rot from lack of use. Just as muscles atrophy from lack of exercise. Every Christian is called to do ministry. We are saved from sin so that we will change the purpose and direction of our lives to get involved with God's agenda.

But where should I serve? Your personality and inclinations will guide you to what position you play on the team. Sometimes we are called out of our areas of preference.

Remember our victories are not determined by you, The battle is the Lord's. Zachariah Not by might not by power but by My Spirit says the Lord.

We can be reckless with confidence in our approach to the world because we know God is working through us. His supernatural power waiting to be activated when we step out in His name.

Yeah but... the world is turning against Christianity...Islam is advancing and secularism is silencing the church???

Rufus Jones tells the story of a little boy playing on the deck of a ship that is plowing through rough seas pitching up and down. A passenger asked the boy if he was afraid. The boy replied No, my father is the captain of the ship. Your Father is the captain and will navigate us through the difficult waters of this world.

So are you on God's team? It is time to get off the bleachers and experience the thrill of the Lord using us to score points that count.