

Glorifying God in Sport from A to Z by Brian Smith

[For Athletes](https://www.thechristianathlete.com/blog/glorifying-god-from-a-to-z) (<https://www.thechristianathlete.com/blog/glorifying-god-from-a-to-z>)

One of my passions in life is helping athletes and coaches dream up different ways to glorify God in sports beyond the usual “try your best” and “give God the credit.” To be clear, I believe both of those are absolutely worth pursuing and celebrating. But our playbook for glorifying God as athletes and coaches should encompass more than a few practical tips and suggestions.

With each of these, I want to start with what the Bible says is true about God and how we should respond in light of that truth. After that, I will take some creative liberty to try and contextualize how we live out that truth within the world of sports. The process for me is pretty simple:

1. What does the Bible say (in context)?
2. How can we apply this creatively to sport?

How can we glorify God through sport from A to Z? Let's start with A!

Attitude

“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” - Proverbs 17:22

Having an attitude marked by joy is a choice that we can make regardless of the circumstances brought on by sport. This means choosing to let your relationship with God drive your joy. This brings glory to God by showing him—and others—that your attitude is grounded in something beyond the outcome of a game. Choosing a joyful attitude helps your mental health, keeps you focused on the goodness of God, and gives you opportunities with teammates who see something different in you.

Baptized

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” - Acts 2:41

The Bible is pretty clear that baptism doesn't save you. But for those of us who have surrendered our lives to God through Christ, baptism is a command. Not only does it symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus (we go down into the water and come up out of the water), but it also serves as a public confession of faith to our local community. In the same way that a wedding ring doesn't make someone married but serves as evidence of that marriage, baptism is a public proclamation of our faith. We don't have to get cute with this for Christian athletes. If you are a Christian, God is glorified through you taking the next step and being baptized. Most athletes want (and for good reason!) to experience success and make a public statement of faith to a watching world. But baptism is a way we can go public with our faith right now. What's stopping you from doing it?

Character

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” - Galatians 5:22-23

Most Christian athletes can list their team and individual goals for each season. The goals are measurable and most of the time involve things that can be measured on a scoreboard. Wins. Personal bests. Championships.

Awards. None of those goals are necessarily bad. It's the fruit of sport culture. God desires a better result (fruit) for us. He lays it out through the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. The Spirit works to grow these character traits in our lives. When he does, God is glorified. What does that mean for Christian athletes? We need to pursue character development at the same level, if not more, than we pursue our earthly athletic goals. When we grow in patience, love, and kindness, God is glorified.

Discipline

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." - 2 Timothy 1:7

The Spirit of God actively works to grow fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) in our lives, but he also gives us power, love, and self-discipline. That means when we do something that involves discipline, we honor the God who gave us that skill. Waking up early in the morning for a workout requires discipline—and the act of dying to self is glorifying to God. Eating healthy food requires discipline. You get the point. The athletic life is one of disciplined living. The Christian athlete acknowledges that the skill of self-discipline is a gift from the Lord and he is glorified when that discipline is leveraged to bring strength, endurance, and health to the body and mind.

Excellence

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." - Colossians 3:23

As Christian athletes, we should strive for excellence, understanding that using our talents to the best of our abilities can be a form of worship. There need to be some boundaries in place in this discussion. Striving for excellence in our athletic performance does not mean taking illegal supplements or starving ourselves of food to achieve the lightest possible weight. While we may see results on the playing field, it's hard to condone something as "working for the Lord" if it involves cheating or harming our body (which is God's temple) in the process. Christian athletes glorify God in sports when they appropriately and healthily pursue excellence.

Faithfulness

"Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you." - 1 Samuel 12:24

God is glorified through our faithfulness. When we respond in obedience to what God is calling us to do (through his Word or our conviction about what his Spirit is telling us), he is honored. This can take on many forms and vary according to how God is leading different people. God could be asking for faithfulness in sharing about Jesus with a teammate, apologizing to a ref or an opponent after a game, showing respect to a coach and not talking behind their back with other teammates, or praying before a game and asking to experience God's presence.

Gratitude

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Gratitude is like a muscle—it gets stronger if we consistently give it attention and push it beyond its level of comfort. Conversely, if we fail to exercise it consistently, our ability to be thankful atrophies. It needs to become a habit. In his book, [Your Future Self Will Thank You](#), Drew Dyck talks about the importance of habits: "The key to living a holy life isn't simply to out-battle temptation at every turn. It's to build righteous patterns

in your life. It's achieved through habits." [The Christian athlete glorifies God by intentionally building habits in their life that grow the muscle of gratitude.](#)

Humility

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" - Philippians 2:5-8

Maybe we need to get the WWJD bracelets back out for this. What would Jesus do? Jesus would choose to be humble. Even the Son of God and creator and sustainer of everything in this world chooses the path of humility, we would be wise to follow his lead. What does this look like practically for Christian athletes? For starters, we could look at Proverbs 27:2: "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips." There are endless opportunities in sport to be prideful—in word or spirit. Christian athletes can glorify God by refusing to talk about how awesome they are. Just last week I had this conversation about humility with my son. As a young basketball player, it's commonplace for the players on the team to talk about all of their "great" plays and accomplishments at school the next day. I had my son look at Proverbs 27:2 and encouraged him to choose the path of humility by letting others share about his highlights.

Integrity

"To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice." - Proverbs 21:3

What does integrity look like in the context of sports? Simply put, we follow the rules of the game. We compete by the rules all the time because they express what is orderly, fair, and just. When we choose to operate with integrity in every way possible, we mirror the image and character of our Creator. This means we place a higher premium on being obedient to God than being successful at the expense of our integrity. It almost sounds too simple: Play your sport within the set of rules prescribed, and you will bring glory to God. When faced with an opportunity to bend the rules, you have two options:

1. Bend the rules to bring glory to yourself.
2. Obey the rules to bring glory to God.

By choosing integrity in sports, a Christian athlete can set themselves apart from the rest of the world. It's one of the reasons why being obedient to God in all circumstances within our sport can be so impactful. When we act in counter-cultural ways, God is glorified and people take notice—and our influence often grows as a result of our obedience.

Justice and Kindness

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" - Micah 6:8

How can we glorify God in sport through categories like justice and kindness? At a minimum, this means a commitment to making sure all the members of your team are treated with the kindness, respect, and dignity that they deserve. And when they aren't, whether to their face or behind their back, you stand up for them. This ethic should also extend beyond your team to your rivals as well. Why do any of this? Why should

Christian athletes think deeply about what is right and wrong in the world around them? Because all of us are equal in God's eyes. All of us are uniquely created in his image. All of us deserve to be treated with kindness and justice. And when one of us isn't, it's the calling of God on our lives as his image bearers to stand in the gap for the oppressed. When we do that with our teammates, our coaches, and our opponents, we glorify God within the context of sports.

Love

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Christian athletes glorify God when they show love in their actions—on and off the field. What is biblical love? Paul Tripp defines it like this: "Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving." It's easy for our love to be conditional. It's easy for us to expect something in return. It's easy for us to want something in return for an act of love toward someone else. But biblical love drops conditions and fairness and reciprocation. What does this look like in sports? On our teams, it means sacrificing your time and energy to help a teammate. It means going out of your way to speak a word of encouragement to someone, even if you don't get along with them, and not expecting anything in return. Whenever we practice a 1 Corinthians 13 type of love within the context of sport, we are glorifying God.

Missional

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." - 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

John Piper once said regarding the great commission, that Christians have three options: "Go, send, or disobey." Ignoring the mission to make disciples is not a Christian option. For Christian athletes, it's worth remembering that God placed you where you are for a purpose. It is not by chance that the people who line up next to you are your teammates. [Your team is one of the primary places where you live out your calling from God to be missional.](#) Now, your teammates are not boxes to check or projects to pursue, but image bearers of God who desperately need to know that God desires to be in a relationship with them. Sport gifts (no, I didn't mean to type "gives") you the opportunity to daily rub shoulders with the very people God wants you to influence. Take advantage of it!

No

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." - Romans 12:2

Christian athletes need to learn how to flex "no" muscles. Sport culture often demands that we act in ways contrary to scripture. When that happens we have a choice to make. We can conform to what everyone else is doing or we can say no and find a better path forward.

Others-focused

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.” - Mark 12:30-31

Loving our neighbors starts with noticing them. We need God to give us eyes to see the overlooked people around us every day. Not just the marginalized or poor, but the unbeautiful, the unfamous, the uncool. One practical step is to ask God for help noticing the people who play the background track to your daily life. After all, they are considered unnoticed because, well, we neglect to even see them. What should you do as God begins to open your eyes and your heart to those around you? Ask for their name. Find out if they have a family. Inquire how long they have been a maintenance worker or a trainer or a fan. Just be a kind, inquisitive human. As Ted Lasso says, “Be curious.” That first step might lead to a new friendship or an opportunity to serve them and make a difference in their life. At the very least, by giving dignity to another human you will be glorifying God.

Prayer

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” - Ephesians 6:18

This is perhaps the most obvious way to bring glory to God...just talk to him and with him. But how many of us get so caught up in the urgency and demands of the day that we neglect the opportunity to engage relationally with God? Christian athletes would do well to remember that God probably prefers you talking with him in prayer than you just playing for him through sport. That’s not to say the latter is bad, but it should not be prioritized above prayer. Find time to talk to God before, during, and after the competition.

Quiet Reflection

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” - Psalm 46:10

There is great wisdom in slowing down and making space to be with God and to listen to him. Christian athletes should have a growing awareness of the areas of their lives that need to be addressed. Especially in the arena of sport. This means doing the hard (yes, hard) work of self-examination and reflection on questions like: What does it look like to honor God in victory? How can I make him look supreme even in defeat? How can I show God’s love to my teammates—and my competitors? Can God be glorified through an injury? How? It’s okay not to have all the answers to questions like these. But Christian athletes should possess a deep desire to honor God in every area of their sport and thus, do the hard work of making space to reflect on tough questions.

Repent

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” - Matthew 3:2

The mark of a maturing Christian athlete is that when sin is uncovered, the athlete runs to God rather than hiding from him. This is challenging for anyone, let alone an athlete. No one likes to admit they screwed up, fell short, knowingly or unknowingly disobeyed. But the quickest way to move forward is to look back on the work of Christ at the cross and understand that God’s grace covers whatever shortcomings they may have.

Serve

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” - Mark 10:45

Jesus truly is the ultimate example of what it looks like to serve. He is God in the flesh, creator, and sustainer of the entire universe. He is King. And yet he chose to serve at great cost to himself for a great benefit to us. Growing in faith means growing more into the likeness of Christ. So we serve. Most teams have opportunities to serve together. For some teams, there are a required number of community service hours you must meet. But serving when the cameras aren't rolling and when it isn't something you have to do is the mark of a maturing Christian athlete. Teammates might be the easiest outlet to serve. You can serve in the form of a word of encouragement—in person or text. You can serve by taking a younger teammate out for coffee to learn more about their backstory. You can serve by carrying equipment or cleaning up the locker room.

Tithe

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.” - Proverbs 3:9

Let's talk about money! Yes, blessing others with part of what God has blessed you with is a way to glorify him.

“I'll tithe once I am older and I start making money.”

“I don't make any money. How am I supposed to tithe?”

Here's the thing, God is pretty clear that sacrificial giving is not dependent on how much money we make. Tithe from road trip per diem. [Tithe from NIL deals](#). Whatever you decide, starting the habit of tithing back to God (it's all his to begin with) is an act of faith that honors God as our provider and sustainer.

Unity

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” - 1 Corinthians 1:10

Unity is different from uniformity. Paul is not saying that we should all be the same. Rather, he is encouraging us to stay away from divisions within the body of Christ. While he is writing this to fellow believers, the ethic of pursuing unity probably extends to everyone. As a Christian athlete, one of your roles on your team is to be a bridge builder that unites people. When divisions exist, instead of just minding your own business, you help work towards harmony in a way that avoids gossip and instead models what it looks like to speak well of another when they are not in your presence.

Versatility

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” - 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

Christian athletes need to be versatile in their athletic skill set, but also in their missional mindset. This means adapting to different situations with a spirit of flexibility and openness—not to fit in for the sake of being popular but for Kingdom opportunities. This is what Paul is referring to in the verses above. He wasn't trying to be a chameleon just to be cool. He knew that his best shot at reaching people with the Gospel was to meet them where they were. And oftentimes, that required him to fit in with them so he could connect with them. What does this look like for athletes? It may mean showing up at parties that you normally would not attend (use wisdom with that advice). It may mean showing up in the training room even if you aren't injured and sitting in an ice bath with a teammate. You don't have to be injured to hang with injured teammates. You don't need to be a drunkard to show up at a party with others who are drinking too much. Find ways to connect!

Worship

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." - Romans 12:1

Notice what we are supposed to offer: our bodies as a living sacrifice. This means the totality of who we are is intended to be offered in service to God. Our mind. Our physical bodies. Our athletic gifts. Our platforms. Our seasons—good or bad. Our performances. Our practices. Our eating and sleeping habits. Our relationships with teammates and coaches. Everything is on the table. A pleasing sacrifice (which is also an act of worship) is an open-handed posture toward God that says "I value you above all else and I want to use my life to bring you glory, on your terms, not mine."

X

If you clicked on this just to see what I came up with for the letter X...sorry. I got nothing.

Yield

"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

Athletes don't yield or give up. They push forward. They grind. They fight. If there is anything foreign to an athletic mindset it is surrender. And yet, yielding is a celebrated action that brings glory to God. How can athletes yield within the context of sports? It doesn't mean slowing down at the end of a race so an opponent can win. Nor does it mean allowing yourself to be tackled at the one-yard line instead of scoring. Biblical yielding living out Proverbs 3:56. It's trusting God with all your heart. It's leaning on him. And it's submitting to him in everything. It's a heart posture that consistently says to God "I give you my life and my sport. Use it in a way that brings you glory." It's worth noting that this doesn't mean we stop telling God what we want. It just means we lay everything, including our wants, at his feet and trust him with it all.

Zeal

"But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you." - Galatians 4:18

Biblical zeal is defined by J.C. Ryle as "[a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way.](#)" This is a good way to end this list because it shows the need and role that desire plays in glorifying God. God doesn't just want us to glorify him through sport. He wants us to want to glorify him. For athletes, this means constantly checking our hearts and making sure our zeal for sport does not surpass our zeal for God his glory. And when it does, we repent and ask God to change our hearts and minds.



Brian Smith

Brian Smith is the author of several books including his latest [Away Game: A Christian Parent's Guide to Navigating Youth Sports](#) and [The Christian Athlete: Glorifying God in Sports](#). He has been on staff with Athletes in Action since 2008. A graduate of Wake Forest University, Brian has a master's degree in Theology and Sports Studies through Baylor University. He lives in Lowell, Michigan, with his wife and three kids.