

Chapter Five

The Call to Greatness

Martyrs/Witnesses

After all that we have looked at and discussed, how would you describe the Call to Greatness to someone else?

How would you describe the measure of greatness?

Does anyone want to share how last week's challenge went?

Let's read a passage from the Bible about love and judgment.

Read Mt. 25:31-46.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was

thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Who are the "least ones" Jesus is talking about in the passage?

Take a moment and think about this next question: why do you think we are judged according to what we do/for how we love others?

Since we are made in God's image, what we do to others we ultimately do to God Himself. Jesus identifies himself with all men, especially the poor and afflicted, and makes it clear that when we serve others, we serve Jesus. 1 John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." How we treat/love others is equivalent to how we treat/love God.

This is easier said than done, and our actions speak louder than our words. We can say we believe in Jesus and are Christians, but when we are put to the test by an opportunity to help a brother or sister in need, (especially if this is a brother or sister we do not particularly like) it can be tough. However, it is by our deeds of mercy, our acts of love, and the way we treat others that we will be judged at the end of our time on earth.

Many people don't know that they are made in God's image, and that they are made for relationship with Him as a son or daughter. They don't know how much God loves them, or of the plan He has for their life. It is our job as Christians to share the "Good News" of Jesus' love for each of us.

Verse of the week: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)*

What does this passage mean to you?

These were Jesus' last words before he left earth. He desires us to be actively participating in spreading this message to everyone. He charged us with continuing his work after He was gone. He gave us a commandment, not a suggestion.

As athletes, your sphere of influence is wide. Because you "are" an athlete, what you say and what you do often holds more weight than the words and actions of the average person. You have a tremendous opportunity to be a witness of God's love for you and for others. Being a witness can mean doing very simple things, but doing them with great love. Mother Teresa once said that *"We cannot do great things on this Earth, only small things with great love."*

1. How can we as athletes share God's love with others and be a witness?

Let's read the story of an Olympic or collegiate athlete who realize the call and challenge to be a witness to God's love.

Story of Rebecca Dussault 2006 U.S. Cross Country Skiing Olympian

As the Olympic Creed states, "It's not to win, but to take part. Not to conquer, but to have fought well." For me this encapsulates the ideal behind my participation in elite athletics. Do I like to win? Sure! It is the best feeling in the world to be the U.S. National Champion, World Champion or any other title which identifies your place atop a podium. But is it all that matters? No. How about, how did I achieve that victory? Was I charitable toward my other competitors? Did I play fair on the field of competition? Did I give proper Glory to God for my achievement? Was I a gracious loser if I did not claim the victory? These are things that impact our overall status as a true champion or not. To complicate things more, most of our time as athletes is spent outside of our actual competitions, i.e. travel time with the team, lodging with teammates, team meals and meetings. Are we heroic champions of the gospel in all of these different arenas both in our words and actions?

It was in instances and circumstances just like the aforementioned that I found my greatest struggle. I figured that without any other Christians, let alone Catholics on my ski team, that I really wasn't being supported in my choices and actions for Christ. I was standing alone clinging to my morals. As a teenager especially, I felt the intense heat of the battle as I explained to teammates and coaches things like why I didn't believe in pre-marital sex, why I would miss the Saturday evening team meal to get to Mass which was at the same time because inevitably I'd have to race on Sunday. I would explain the hope I had in Christ through my sacramentals such as my

chastity ring or my brown scapular when asked about them. I mounted a good defense, but found that I was being pushed under. I asked myself in all honesty, as the scripture says, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul in the process?" For me the best antidote was as St. Francis said, "Live the gospel always, when necessary use words." It wasn't worth the battle in words and so I ended up living my faith as closely as I could in hopes that my joy would be infectious. This however, wasn't enough.

It was then that the Lord convicted me that from the top of my sport in the U.S. I should step down and seek Him and His ways alone, that he had more in store for me outside of the ski world. It was a terribly painful decision, but in the end I had great peace over my retirement at the age of 19. I was by that time already married to my childhood sweetheart, Sharbel and we decided after some months that we should start our family, and so we had our first baby boy. I was content with raising my child and supporting my husband in our family's business, but the Lord apparently had other plans for me. Strangely, after entering a high level race with only a minimal amount of training under my belt, I won beating all of the best collegiate skiers in the nation for that season. The Lord had rewarded me one hundred fold for giving everything to Him and in return he gave me so much more. It was also a hard reality that I would have to return to the ski circuit to compete. The same people which had battered my soul two years earlier. Wow! Was the Lord sure of what he was doing? Finally, I recommitted to make a run for the Olympics, but it would be with my spouse and child in tow. There is nothing, not even the glory of being an international ski racer, which was going to keep me from fulfilling my primary vocations as wife and mother. We traveled together for 3 years to and through the Olympics as a little domestic church, praying together and supporting each other in the mission field of elite athletics.

Since the Olympics, we have had another baby boy and God has continued to sustain this journey giving me opportunities to witness to my faith to people of all ages through talks around the nation. My husband and I also maintain a popular website where we share fully about our faith, family and fitness at www.dussaultskis.com. In the end, God is good and the only thing that matters morning, noon and night is whether or not we are pursuing Christ our lover and if we are allowing him to pursue us. And as Augustine said, "We were made for Thee and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

What do you think of the story?

2. What do you think about Rebecca giving up sports/athletics for a time to pursue God more?

3. What were some of the little ways Rebecca was a witness for her faith?

It is not easy to stand up for our faith in today's world. It may be even harder to do it with our teammates.

4. Do you have a story of a time when you stood up for your faith on your team? What happened?

Do you have a time when you didn't stand up for your faith and wish you would have?

The Gospel on Offense - The Faith of Tim Tebow by Mark Earley

America's largest church has a capacity to hold 16,000. But while Tim Tebow may not be a preacher, when he runs into the University of Florida's football Stadium-affectionately known as "The Swamp" -his congregation numbers just over 90,000. And you can bet they're hearing Tim's message.

It's not just that this University of Florida quarterback wears Bible verses etched into his "eye-black" on game days. Tim Tebow has been making headlines for more than simply his Heisman Trophy win as a sophomore and his two national championships. This summer the New York Times, GQ, and Sports Illustrated, all covered the quarterback's strong Christian faith.

Last year, when the Florida Gators won the national championship, the pre-game show followed Tim into a local Florida prison where he can regularly be found sharing his testimony and preaching the Gospel.

And this top-notch athlete, who spends his spring breaks and summers ministering to orphans in the Philippines has actually helped change the culture of the University of Florida . According to Sports Illustrated, "Since Tebow's arrival on campus, and in large part because of him, the University has launched a series of community-service initiatives." Even coach Urban Meyer has taken his family on a "Tebow-inspired mission trip to the Dominican Republic."

The press seems to be fascinated with outspoken Christian quarterbacks like Tim Tebow; Sam Bradford, the 2008 Heisman winner; and now USC's Matt Barkley. Only a few decades ago, it would have been taken for granted that these would be the kinds of fellows any father would want his daughter to marry. Now they are put under the microscope as some kind of curious anomaly -- well-known athletes who actually exhibit character.

In our doped-up, mug-shot celebrity culture, sadly these young men do look a little out of step. And that's to our culture's shame. Perhaps that is why last year when the press asked Tim Tebow a rather impertinent question-they were more embarrassed by the response than he was. It was at a Southeastern Conference news media event where one reporter asked in front of the crowded room, "Are you a virgin?" Tim answered with an unequivocal yes and had yet another platform to explain how his faith impacts every area of his life.

That platform for sharing the Gospel is exactly what Tim's parents prayed for before he was born. Tim's father, Bob, a missionary in the Philippines, had been weeping over the millions of babies aborted in America. It was then

that he prayed, "God, if you give me a son, if you give me Timmy, I'll raise him to be a preacher." Soon after, when Pam Tebow learned she was expecting, the parents' faith was put to the test. After a series of grave complications, doctors encouraged them to abort the child. They refused. Born small and weak, Timmy struggled from the beginning. But his dad continued to tell him, "God's got a purpose for you, and at some point, He's going to call you to preach."

Dad was right. God's message would come through the roar of the crowd, beamed to millions via satellite. But little did they know, Tim would don a jersey, not robes, and use a stadium for his pulpit. Tim's a great example of an opportunity every believer has to put our faith to work on the field of play where God has gifted us and called us.

What do you think of the story? What do you think about Tim's ability to be a witness to the faith?

What were some little ways Tim Tebow was a witness to his faith?

Revisit verse of the week: **"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."**

5. Think of one way we can share God's love with our teammates, friends, and family members this next week?

ACTION POINT:

Do a kind deed for a teammate, family member, friend, or classmate. Remember the words of Jesus that “whatever we do for the least of his people we do unto Him.” (Mt. 25:40) Thus, when you do a kind action for someone, you are really doing it for Christ and living out your call to greatness.

CLOSING PRAYER

The Love of the Father for us is not meant to be kept only between us, but we are meant to share this love. Think about what happens when you fall in love with someone. Do you ever let others know about the beloved, or do you keep quiet about them? On the contrary, you are constantly talking about them, bringing them into conversation and then telling others how wonderful they are. The same needs to be true about our relationship with Jesus and His love for us. We need to share it with others.

