

THE CALL TO GREATNESS

STUDY GUIDE



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Varsity Catholic:

Our staff serves in the development of the complete athlete helping them put Christ first in their lives, practice and competition. Through personal investment, we seek to develop the athletes in their character and faith, strengthen their knowledge and participation in their spiritual growth, and equip them with the tools needed to be effective leaders on their team and in their community.

Varsity Catholic is a division of FOCUS
(Fellowship of Catholic University Students)



FOCUS Vision Statement:

FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a national collegiate outreach that meets college students where they are and invites them to examine the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Through large group outreach, Bible studies and one on one mentoring, FOCUS missionaries are equipped to introduce college students to the Person of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, empowering them to share His love with the world.

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Varsity Catholic would like to acknowledge Tanya Cenac and all the Varsity Catholic missionaries that have contributed to the composition of this material.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: The Call to Greatness	1
Chapter One: Extra Material	9
Chapter Two: Made for More	11
Chapter Three: Integrated Life	21
Chapter Four: The Greatest Role Model	29
Leader's Guide	35



WELCOME

This Bible study is intended for athletes seeking to integrate their faith and their sport. It is meant to challenge athletes to be excellent in all areas of their lives, especially with their faith.

We hope it serves you well as an athlete and helps inspire you to compete for God's glory.

Visit or contact us at any time at www.varsitycatholic.org.

You can also visit our blog for posts relevant to faith and athletics at www.varsitycatholic.sportsblog.com.

May God bless you in life and competition.



CHAPTER ONE THE CALL TO GREATNESS

VERSE OF THE WEEK «*Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ*» (Col. 3:23).

As athletes, working «heartily» is usually something we do. In the off-season, weight room, practice field - we need to work hard to win. What we need to do as athletes is work hard for the right reason. The desire to become the best version of ourselves, to live for something more than ourselves, is the purpose for which we were created, and when we tap into that desire, life is good.

1. What motivates you to work hard? In sports, in school, in work, etc?

2. Go back to the intro verse. What is St. Paul communicating when he says, «Work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men» ?

3. Why is doing this all the time so difficult?

Let's read the following line from Pope Benedict XVI: **«The ways of the Lord are not comfortable, but we weren't created for comfort, we were made for greatness.»**

Let's look at the life of an athlete:

4. Is it a life of comfort? Why or Why not?

5. What would it take to be the best athlete in your sport?

6. Knowing that the life of an athlete is not a life of comfort, have you ever cut corners during practice? Why?

Think about this example Matthew Kelly gives in his book *Rediscovering Catholicism*:

«We sit in a chair, one cheek falls asleep and so we shift; our eyes get dry, we blink; we cross/uncross our legs as we please, if we're thirsty, we get a drink; we are afraid of pain, of being just slightly challenged or the least bit uncomfortable.»

Agree? What are some other examples that show we are wired for comfort?

Our body sometimes calls out to us to not work as hard. Some of us hear it, some ignore it. When it comes to our faith, there are a number of voices that call out to us to not work hard.

7. What are some ways the world tells us to settle for mediocrity in our faith?

«The ways of the Lord are not comfortable.»

8. What does this quote mean to you? .

Let's compare the Christian life to the life of an athlete. We already discussed that the life of an athlete is not a life of comfort.

9. Would you say there are parallels between an athlete and a Christian? What are some parallels?

The call to greatness is a call to personal excellence in all areas of our lives. It means working hard in our faith and doing all we can to allow the gift of grace to take us to the next level.

10. In what ways have you been «uncomfortable» in following the ways of the Lord? Be specific.

Jesus said in the Gospels **«If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.»** Just as in the athletic life there is a degree of self-sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of becoming a better athlete, there is also a degree of self-denial and sacrifice in the Christian life.

Let's compare the Lord to a coach.

11. What type of coach would you have if he always made practice easy?

Would you be increasing your endurance level if you never perspired or if your coach never pushed you? Would you have the feeling that you have accomplished something at the end of the workout? Would you be the best athlete you could be? Just as being a stellar athlete is not easy, neither is being a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Read G.K. Chesterton Quote:

«The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.»

What do you think about this quote? Is it true for your life?

Although it will be difficult at times, if we follow the ways of the Lord we will become better people with an increased joy and sense of meaning. The same is true for an athlete who follows the ways of his/her coach; they will become better athletes.

The call to greatness calls us to fight against mediocrity, against the world that tells us living a mediocre life is okay, and most of all to fight against that comfortable urge that seems to always pop up inside us. It is what we do when no one else is looking.

«The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion, when no one else is watching.»

- Anson Dorrance (*Head Women's Soccer coach at University of North Carolina. His teams have an all-time record of 673-33-21 (.940). Under Dorrance, UNC has won 20 national championships, including 19 NCAA crowns and one AIAW title, 19 regular-season ACC titles and 19 ACC Tournament championships. He was inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame on August 2, 2008.*)

Why is this a good quote?

What is something keeping you back from being a champion in your faith?

Revisit verse of the week: **«Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ» (Col. 3:23).**

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE:

How can you overcome that one thing that is truly keeping you back from Jesus?
How can you let His grace change you more deeply?

Close by reading Philippians 2:14-16

«Do everything without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world, as you hold on to the word of life, so that my boast for the day of Christ may be that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.»

Closing Prayer



CHAPTER ONE EXTRA MATERIAL IF TIME ALLOWS

What is the difference between pursuing personal excellence and perfection?

Read passage from Theodore Roosevelt's *Man in the Arena*:

«It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.»

What do you think is Roosevelt's point?

Do you think this is true for an athlete? How can we apply this to the life of an athlete?

Read 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

«But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.»

In the midst of our weaknesses and failures, God always supplies strength for us. We are never left alone to fight our battles. We can call on Jesus to help us fight and to help us get back up again.

Our call to greatness does imply living out excellence in every way, but not in being perfect, because we will fall short. It is only when we get back up and try again that we truly are living out the call to greatness.

Remember Michael Jordan's quote:

«I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.»

Perfection and excellence are not the same thing.

1. What are some ways in which perfectionism can hinder us on/off the field?

Revisit verse of the week: **«My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness» 2 Cor. 12:9.**

Think of some things in your life that you are approaching with the attitude of being perfect rather than being excellent.

2. What are some things you can do to switch that mentality and to work on it?



CHAPTER TWO MADE FOR MORE

In a world where honor and fame are given for accomplishments and talent, individuals often find their value in high achievement or conversely their lack of value in failure.

VERSE OF THE WEEK *«In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9).*

How do you feel after a big win or a successful endeavor in athletics?

Do you ever feel like you have a higher worth or value when you achieve success, either on the field or in the classroom? Why or why not?

What happens when you are not succeeding?

How do you feel after a fail?

Revisit verse of the week. It doesn't say "He loved us and sent His Son as expiation for our sins when we were winning," does it?

Why is it hard to be separated from how we see ourselves and our success?

«It was a black and white world in which you lived. At the end of the game or the race, you always knew where you stood. One NFL player, when asked what he missed the most, replied, 'The scoreboard. I miss the scoreboard.' What he missed was the clarity of it all. He could look up at the scoreboard and it would tell him all that he needed to know.»

- Scott Tinley, Racing the Sunset (Scott Tinley is a former professional triathlete. He won the Hawaii Ironman competition twice, and of the over 400 competitions he has competed in, has won close to 100 of them)

In what ways might this type of "clarity" influence us in forming how we view ourselves?

«Detachment is a key – being able to see your own football career from the outside, rather than being totally caught up in it. Football can be a seductive siren whispering in players' ears the words that can drag them to their doom. 'You're special,' it breathes. 'You're a hero; the world admires you and wants to take care of you. Don't worry about anything; sign autographs and let people buy you drinks. You can play forever.'»

- From The End of Autumn, by former NFL player Michael Oriard

Do you think athletes get consumed in their success and failures?

Have you ever thought about what will happen when competitive sports are over for you? How will you still get that same feeling of satisfaction or value?

Let's read a story about a modern day athlete and her struggle with identifying herself with her sport.

STORY OF KATHY ORMSBY

Kathy was a pre-med honor student and a track star at North Carolina State University. She also happened to be the collegiate record holder in the women's ten-thousand meter run. People who knew her describe her as nice, shy, overly serious about running, and dedicated almost to a fault. They say she is a stoic who demands perfection from herself and puts pressure on herself. Her high school history teacher and volleyball coach said "I know that she's always driven herself very, very hard. She's not the type of person who can accept second best for herself. If there's any pressure, Kathy was putting it on herself. She's always been very much of a perfectionist."

In 1986 in Indianapolis, Indiana at the site of the NCAA track and field Championships something very startling happened. Kathy was one of the favorites in Wednesday night's 10,000-meter run for women in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's outdoor track and field championships. Two-thirds of the way through the race, she was fourth, and not able to catch the leader. Instead of continuing the race, she ran off the track, climbed a low fence out of the building, and ran to a nearby bridge where she apparently tried to commit suicide and jumped off the bridge. She fell 30 or 40 feet to a dirt area covered with weeds. The forty-foot fall permanently paralyzed her from the waist down.

When asked later about what happened that day, Kathy only responded stating that "something snapped." All the pressure and expectation of succeeding finally had taken its toll on Kathy. As one of her teammates said, "No one has come up to me and asked why. They've just come up and said we're sorry and we're praying for her. Athletes don't need to know why. They know why. We're all in the same boat. We all have the same pressures."

What are your thoughts about the story? Do you think Kathy identified her value/worth with success in her sport?

What do you do when the pressure surmounts in your sport? Do you have an appropriate outlet?

Sports are a great parable for life. People connect with sports because it makes sense to our everyday lives. Sports have goals, foster hard work, discipline and sacrifice, and help athletes learn about success and failure. Sadly, Kathy let her sport define her to the point that apart from success in it, she did not know who she was. Kathy's story demonstrates that in the end sports aren't everything. In the Bible, God tells a story of our creation that points out what He made us for.

Let's look at Genesis 1:26.

Story of Creation

Read Genesis 1:26-27

«Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.»

1. What do you think it means to be created in the image and likeness of God?

Adam and Eve walked in the garden with God and had an intimate personal relationship with Him. They were a son and a daughter of God.

However, because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, sin entered the world and we humans lost the likeness to God, lost our status as sons and daughters of God.

Read Romans 3:23; 6:23

«All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.» (3:23) «For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.» (6:23)

Sin separates us from God, but God loved us so much that He didn't want us to be separated from Him. He paid the ultimate price for our sin by sending His Son to die for us so that we could have a relationship of love with Him, regardless of our success or lack of success on the field.

Read Romans 5:8

«But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.»

God has saved us from the punishment of sin which is eternal death and separation from Him and gave us a new status as sons and daughters of God.

Read Galatians 4:4-7

«But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.»

This is where our ultimate value/worth should come from, that we are made for relationship with God as our Father and we are His beloved, precious children. This is our measure of greatness.

How might being a son/daughter of God change the way you look at your sport?

2. What makes it hard to find life in Christ alone? (temptations of glory, fame, etc.)**Read John 15:15-17.**

«I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.»

Jesus is speaking to His apostles and calls them friends. Just as He chose them, so too does He choose each of us. He stands at the door of our heart and knocks, seeking us out as friends. Jesus brings us into an intimate relationship with God; this is a great message of hope.

How many of you want to have a deep and intimate friendship/relationship with Jesus? What is one way you can deepen that friendship?

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that you are a son/daughter of God, especially at practice or while competing?

Revisit verse of the week: **«In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins» (1 John 4:9).**

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE:

Challenge yourself in one of the ways mentioned and remind yourself that you are a son/daughter of God throughout the week.

Closing Prayer



CHAPTER THREE INTEGRATED LIFE

How was your experience of last week's challenge?

VERSE OF THE WEEK «No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.» (Jn. 15:13)

Why is this spectacular?

Read Matthew 5:48

«So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.»

1. So what does our Lord ask of us here? Perfectionism?

He call us to be perfect in love. Why?

What does this look like?

Read Matthew 5:3-10

*«Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.»*

“The Beatitudes display the mystery of Christ himself. They are directions for discipleship.”¹ Every Christian is called to imitate Christ. The Beatitudes describe aspects of Christ that we should embrace with our entire heart.

Do they sound like a description of the ideal athlete?

2. How does this translate to the athlete?

¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Doubleday: New York, 2007), 74.

What do the Beatitudes have to do with our call to love perfectly?

We want to be able to control the emotions and passions that flood us during times of competition and moments in life that become more intense than we expect.

«We all have self-defeating thoughts and behaviors that undermine performance. I call them gremlins, the little invisible creatures that prevent athletes from performing at their best. Here’s my gremlin checklist: fear, anger, anxiety, self-consciousness, perfectionism, stubbornness, lack of motivation, competitiveness, distractions, and persistence.» (Gary Mack, *Mind Gym*, page 42)

Let’s go back to Matthew 5:48 - The call to perfection for an athlete, and in fact for everyone, is the call to love as Christ loves. As our love grows, it becomes the motivation for everything we do. When it becomes our motivation in competition, it focuses our minds and gives us a greater mental advantage.

Love is the strongest force in the world. It is the greatest of all motivations. When we are strongly motivated in a task, our focus increases greatly. **Think of Christ on the cross, and the motivation He had to persevere -- it was the love he had for each of us!**

What are some other forces or motivations for people?

What are some of your motivators on the field (practice or competition) and life?

STORY OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

Raymond Kolbe was born on January, 1894, the second son of a poor weaver at Zdunska Wola near Lodz in Poland.

In 1910 he became a Franciscan, taking the name Maximilian. He studied at Rome and was ordained in 1919. He returned to Poland and taught Church history in a seminary. He built a friary just west of Warsaw, which eventually housed 762 Franciscans and printed eleven periodicals -- one with a circulation of over a million -- including a daily newspaper.

Inevitably, the community came under suspicion by the rising Communist party and was watched closely. In May 1941, the friary was closed down and Maximilian and four of his companions were taken to the death camp Auschwitz, where they were put to work with the other prisoners.

Prisoners at Auschwitz were slowly and systematically starved, and their pitiful rations were barely enough to sustain a child: one cup of imitation coffee in the morning, and weak soup and half a loaf of bread after work. When the food was brought, everyone struggled to get his place and be sure of a portion. Father Maximilian Kolbe however, frequently stood aside in spite of the ravages of starvation, and often there would be nothing left for him. At other times, he shared his meager ration of soup or bread with others.

In the harsh environment of Auschwitz, Father Kolbe maintained the gentleness of Christ. At night he seldom would lie down to rest. Instead, he would move from bunk to bunk speaking with other prisoners, saying: "I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?"

A prisoner later recalled how he and several others often crawled across the floor at night to be near the bed of Father Kolbe, to make their confessions and ask for consolation. Father Kolbe pleaded with his fellow prisoners to forgive their persecutors and to overcome evil with good. When he was beaten by the guards, he never cried out. Instead, he prayed for his tormentors.

A Protestant doctor who treated the patients in Block 12 later recalled how Father Kolbe waited until all the others had been treated before asking for help. He constantly sacrificed himself for the others.

In order to discourage escapes, Auschwitz had a rule that if a man escaped, ten men would be killed in retaliation. In July 1941 a man from Kolbe's bunker escaped. The dreadful irony of the story is that the escaped prisoner was later found drowned in a camp latrine, so the terrible reprisals had been exercised without cause. Nonetheless, the remaining men of his bunker were led out to face their terrible punishment.

'The fugitive has not been found!' the commandant Karl Fritsch screamed. 'You will all pay for this. Ten of you will be locked in the starvation bunker without food or water until you die.' The prisoners trembled in terror. They knew that after few days in this bunker without food and water, a man's intestines dried up and his brain turned to fire.

The ten were selected, including Franciszek Gajowniczek, who had been imprisoned for helping the Polish Resistance. He couldn't stifle a cry of anguish. 'My poor wife!' he sobbed. 'My poor children! What will they do?' When he uttered this cry of dismay, Maximilian stepped silently forward, took off his cap, and stood before the commandant and said, 'I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children.'

Astounded, the icy-faced Nazi commandant asked, 'What does this Polish pig want?'

Father Kolbe pointed with his hand to the condemned Franciszek Gajowniczek and repeated 'I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.'

Observers believed in horror that the commandant would be angered and would refuse the request, or would order the death of both men. The commandant remained silent for a moment. What his thoughts were on being confronted by this brave priest we have no idea. Amazingly, however, he acceded to the request. Apparently the Nazis had more use for a young worker than for an old one, and were content to make the exchange.

Franciszek Gajowniczek was returned to the ranks, and the priest took his place.

Gajowniczek later recalled:

'I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me - a stranger. Is this some dream?

I was put back into my place without having had time to say anything to Maximilian Kolbe. I was saved. And I owe to him the fact that I could tell you all this. The news quickly spread all round the camp. It was the first and the last time that such an incident happened in the whole history of Auschwitz.

For a long time I felt remorse when I thought of Maximilian. By allowing myself to be saved, I had signed his death warrant. But now, on reflection, I understood that a man like him could not have done otherwise. Perhaps he thought that as a priest his place was beside the condemned men to help them keep hope. In fact he was with them to the last.'

Father Kolbe was thrown down the stairs of Building 13 along with the other victims and simply left there to starve. Hunger and thirst soon gnawed at the men. Some drank their own urine, others licked moisture on the dank walls. Maximilian Kolbe encouraged the others with prayers, psalms, and meditations on the Passion of Christ. After two weeks, only four were alive. The cell was needed for more victims, and the camp executioner, a common criminal called Bock, came in and injected a lethal dose of carbolic acid into the left arm of each of the four dying men. Kolbe was the only one still fully conscious and with a prayer on his lips, the last prisoner raised his arm for the executioner. His wait was over.

So it was that Father Maximilian Kolbe was executed on 14 August, 1941 at the age of forty-seven years, a martyr of charity.

The heroism of Father Kolbe went echoing through Auschwitz. In that desert of hatred he had sown love.

The cell where Father Kolbe died is now a shrine. Maximilian Kolbe was beatified as Confessor by Paul VI in 1970, and canonized as Martyr by Pope John Paul II in 1981.

What are your initial thoughts about the story? Do you think you would have done the same?

Although we may not be called to give of our lives the way St. Maximilian did, what are some practical ways we can lay down our lives for others?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

«Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.»

Summarize: How will love and living the Beatitudes help us live a fully integrated life?

How can we increase our love?

1. By decreasing everything that is contrary to it - by growing in virtue.
2. We increase our intimacy with God through prayer, Scripture reading, participation in the sacraments and fellowship so that He ultimately increases our love.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE:

Pray over 1 Cor. 13:4-7 each night and ask God to increase your love and have it become a greater motivator in your life.

CLOSING PRAYER



CHAPTER FOUR THE GREATEST ROLE MODEL

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.»

Summarize this passage.

Why do you think we are judged according to what we do/for how we love others?

How we treat/love others is equivalent to how we treat/love God.

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.

The greatest act of love is to introduce someone to Jesus Christ.

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 for you?

Does this make any of you feel uncomfortable?

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.

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

Being part of a team is both intimidating and a natural environment when it comes to talking about Jesus. Agree?

How is introducing someone to Jesus Christ the ultimate form of living greatness?

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.»**

2. Can you think of one way we can share God's love with our teammates, friends, and family members this next week?

Can you think of 5 teammates or friends you can begin to introduce to Jesus Christ and His Church?

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE:

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.



LEADER'S GUIDE GENERAL SUGGESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This section of the study contains the answers to the objective questions and additional background information to supplement the study. Answers to the numbered questions throughout the chapters are found in this "Leader's Guide" section. You may feel free to include or exclude any questions or information as you progress through the study.

AS THE LEADER

Each meeting time should begin and end in prayer. You may have members share personal prayer requests or commit to praying for one another throughout the week.

Your job is to facilitate and move the discussion along, correct misunderstandings, and answer questions. You will want to prepare for the study by doing the chapters and preparing extra questions beforehand. You may suggest that the members read or complete the assigned chapter before they arrive as well.

Spend some time each week praying for the success of the study and the members in your group.

MEMORY VERSE

Each week the leader may bring an index card with the memory verse written on it for each student in their study. The leader can encourage the athletes to keep the card in their locker, on their mirror, or wherever they choose in order to remember the lesson of the week. The leader may also choose to not pass out the memory verse and just meditate on the verse for themselves while prepping for the study in order to get more insights when sharing the verse.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CALL TO GREATNESS

1. Results, Recognition, Parents, etc.
2. To work for God's glory and pleasure first and primarily.
3. We can desire recognition and glory is attractive.
4. No, have a lot of sacrifices to make, have to get up early, work hard, miss some of the social scene
5. Dedication, hard work, over and above typical.
6. Avoiding discomfort and pain and living a comfortable life sneaks into all areas of our life. It seems that everything we do involves trying to be comfortable -- we are wired for comfort!
7. Don't profess your faith publically, etc.
8. Hard to follow Christ, hard to be a Christian in the world and on the team
9. Both lives involve sacrifice and hard work. Both lives are hard to live. Both are not easy lives to live.
10. Some examples: hard to go to mass every Sunday, struggles with purity
11. Lazy, not a good coach, doesn't care

CHAPTER ONE: EXTRA MATERIAL

1. Worrying about appearance of performance, getting bogged down by little mistakes, playing out of fear of making mistakes, anger, anxiety, stubbornness, lack of motivation, distractions, self-consciousness, see Gary Mack, Mind Gym, pg. 42-46
2. - Set intermittent goals that are aimed at reasonable improvement, not perfection.
- Tell yourself every day, "it is okay to fail if I am trying my best" -- fear of failure increases our chances of failure.
- Train your mind to dismiss negative/critical thoughts that might affect your performance in a negative way. In this way, hopefully you will increase your positive thoughts and their affect on you.

Leader's Note: Magnanimity vs. Pusillanimity. Leader does not need to bring these terms up in the study unless they see that it would add to the study and discussion. This section is more for the leader's knowledge in helping understand more what we truly mean by the Call to Greatness)

Magnanimity: greatness in all things.

- o Magnanimity gives us the courage to enlarge our heart and undertake a great work with confidence in God. Doing something because it is great and the better thing to do without seeking awards or accolades.

-- Examples: athlete fighting though the pain of their 15th set of bleachers, and finishes hard; a soldier who runs through enemy lines to save a fallen fellow soldier, Mother Teresa's work with the poorest of the poor in India.

-- Emphasize the difference between doing great things because they are great and worthy of doing and doing things because of the acclaim.

Pusillanimity: weakness of soul. A disposition that leads us to underestimate our own power by which we are paralyzed. It involves having the necessary gifts but lacking the courage to act because of fear or vanity. It is a spiritual sloth that fears one's own capacity for greatness.

- o causes: 1. Fear of failure; 2. Laziness

CHAPTER TWO: MADE FOR MORE

1. Sometimes to understand a word in Scripture we have to see where else it is used in Scripture. **Read Gen. 5:3**

"Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he begot a son in his likeness, after his image; and he named him Seth."

Being made in the image and likeness of God implies sonship

2. Temptations of glory, fame, etc.

CHAPTER THREE: INTEGRATED LIFE

1. From the Navarre Bible Commentary on Matthew: "Certainly, the perfection that we should imitate does not refer to the power and wisdom of God, which are totally beyond our scope; here the context seems to refer primarily to love and mercy."
2. - Let's demonstrate (tennis ball drill or snapping exercise).
 - Our attitude and mind affect our performance. When our mind is sharp, we are more focused, and able to reach a greater potential in our physical performance because we are putting more of our energy and concentration into that action. When we become frustrated, arrogant, glory seeking, selfish, etc., we decrease our focus and our ability to perform the task at hand, whether that be shooting a free throw or executing a move.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GREATEST ROLE MODEL

1. Pray before/after competitions, positive and encouraging attitude towards teammates, etc.
2. Have them share if they are comfortable. This will be good to share ideas.

