

Ole Miss FCA Weekly Devotional: 11/16/09

The Power and Passion of the Master Coach, Elliot Johnson



Thought of the Week:

God is Love

Verse of the Week:

God is love. I John 4:16

Some people feel that showing love and playing sports do not mix. They find it hard to believe one can be hard-nosed and still love others. These folks do not understand love. They don't know how to love in a practical way. In John 13:34-35, Christ said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In John 15:9, He said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." Love is not only a command, but it is also a way of life on and off the field of competition. A Christian athlete not only can love, but he must love while participating in athletics.

All love comes from God (1 John 4:7). Because God first loved us, we are able to love others (1 John 4:19)! But most of us don't even know what love is! Maybe if we understand what love really is, we will understand more about who God is!

Let us examine a common fallacy about love. Many men identify love as being feminine or weak. Their concept of love is associated with being passive or timid. But, love is action. Love is committed to excellence. People who really love Jesus will be motivated to excellence. The thought that all things are possible in Christ motivates us to excellence. Love is playing with intensity for the glory of Jesus Christ. Love is playing honorably with the intent to win. We praise the Lord for the motivation to perform out of love for Him and for opponents!

Many pro athletes and coaches have found love in Jesus Christ. Before he died, Walter Payton, said, "God has a purpose for me in all of it (the events of his life). I can enjoy it and use it for Him." Coach Tom Landry also boldly stood for Christ in the world of pro football. Tony Dungy and Joe Gibbs continue to honor the Lord Jesus and love players today. These men speak loudly of God's love to a skeptical world.

Jesus Christ spoke with authority when He said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Love involves discipline. Hebrews 12:6 tells us that the Lord disciplines those He loves. Love must get tough when people err from the truth, as Paul demonstrated by rebuking Peter for compromising his beliefs. Love strives to bring out the best in others. Love gives responsibility to others, as Jesus did when He said to Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Love demands accountability for all the authority it bestows. Coaches or other leaders who only show kindness or who only yell and scream to motivate will not remain leaders. A good leader has a mixture of these qualities. People will follow a leader if they know he acts for their own good. Vince Lombardi was hard-nosed, but players knew he loved them. Lombardi's love was manifested by teaching players to achieve more than they thought they could achieve.

First Corinthians 13 could be titled "God's check list on love." Joe Greene, the great defensive tackle of the Pittsburgh Steelers, sums up verses 1-3 by saying, "I had one (Superbowl ring) for every finger on one hand and was getting ready to go for one for the thumb. Then I realized that something was missing. It was then that I turned to Christ and asked Him to come into my life

and I experienced Him in a new and deeper way." Joe had everything the world had to offer. He had accomplished much, but he was empty. He did not know the love of God. A man can have everything in the world, but if he does not know God's love, he has nothing. Love is the basis of life.

God's love is based upon an intense desire to relate to those He has created. His choice to unconditionally love us comes from His heart! God told Israel He did not love them for their size or strength, but because He chose to love them. God's love is not based on the lovability of the person. Romans 5:8 reads, "For God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When we were in our most rebellious and sinful state, God sent His Son to earth to die so we could have forgiveness and redemption! He did not love us because we were pretty or handsome or because we appealed to Him physically or intellectually. He loved us while we were at our ugliest and our worst. He chose to love us. He willed to love us. It is this love that God puts into the heart of a believer. Because He loved us, we can love someone who is unlovable.

Verses 4-7 of 1 Corinthians 13 continue the description of love. First, "Love is patient." Love bears trials without murmuring. As Jesus hung on the cross, Roman soldiers made a mockery of Him by gambling for His garments. Jesus looked down and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). It was in the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. Yet, Christ washed his feet during the Last Supper. Jesus loved him to the end.

We think if we could get rid of someone on our team things would go more smoothly. Usually we would eliminate the one who is hardest to like and who causes the most trouble. But Christ was patient to the point of death. Getting rid of someone isn't always the answer. Being patient and using Biblical principles to reach them pleases God. Jesus said that even sinners love sinners. In other words, it is easy to love your own kind, but the real test is to love your enemy. Loving enemies does wonders for team unity!

"Love is kind." Love looks for the good in others and seeks ways of doing good to others. Love says something good about the person with whom you are battling for a place on the team. Love spends time helping a teammate improve his skills.

"Love is not envious." It does not begrudge another's good fortune. Envy has split more friendships than any other sin. Envy devises ways to bring one down from his lofty position. Envy destroys teams and relationships. Envy says, "I want to be the only one at the top." Envy cringes when someone in our own field is being praised. How envious were Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37! Because of their envy, they plotted to kill Joseph. Are you envious of someone? If so, pray that God would change your heart. There is no room for envy in the kingdom of God. Every man is responsible for what he is given and will be judged by that standard and not by how he compares with others.

"Love is not conceited or boastful." There is nothing worse than an athlete who is stuck on himself or herself. A prideful heart does not please God. Proverbs 18:12 says, "Before his downfall, a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor." Self-centeredness is not the basis for friendships or for team unity. The opposite of pride is humility. Humility is saying thank you for a compliment, while giving the glory to God. It is realizing that talent, knowledge, and opportunity have been given by God. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" The next time your pride gets inflated, remember who created and blessed you!

"Love is not arrogant." Love does not walk around with its nose stuck in the air. Galatians 6:3 says, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Arrogance

comes when one compares himself with others instead of with his own potential. If we evaluate ourselves as God sees us, we will have no problem with arrogance. Augustine said, "Be always displeased with what you are if you desire to attain what you are not; for when you have pleased yourself, there you abide. . . . Always add, always walk, always proceed, neither stand still, nor go back, nor deviate." If that is our perspective, we will keep ourselves from being prideful and we will be committed to excellence.

"Love does not behave improperly." It is courteous. Love respects the intentions of others. It gives others the right-of-way. It means sharing what we have with teammates.

"Love is not selfish." Canter said, "The manner of giving shows the character of the giver more than the gift itself." People love to be with someone who is generous. When we are selfish, we show a lack of concern for others. As Christians, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

"Love is not easily angered." It is even-tempered and tolerant. Many athletes have blown their cool and the game at the same time. In order to compete, one needs a clear mind and an even temperament. An opposing team will attack the person who easily loses his composure, for when that happens, the athlete does not think rationally. Proverbs 14:29 says, "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly."

"Love does not keep a record of wrongs." It does not bring up past mistakes of others. For many years, Jackie Smith was a great receiver with the St. Louis Cardinals. Then he was traded to Dallas. Unfortunately, Jackie Smith is remembered for a pass he dropped in the end zone during a Superbowl against the Pittsburgh Steelers. A person will never be able to function properly if people keep reminding him of his mistakes. We are always to edify and encourage. Remember, we have all made mistakes.

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." Love does not rejoice when someone stumbles or falls, but it rejoices in the success of others. Romans 12:15-16 tells us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another." Have you ever found it hard to rejoice for others' success? There is something inside us that desires all the attention. If we are walking in love, we will rejoice when others succeed in legitimate endeavors. Certainly, God's love does not rejoice when someone succeeds via evil means. For example, we cannot rejoice when athletes make money promoting alcohol. Real love does not lead people astray! But love does rejoice when others succeed in righteous endeavors and just causes.

"Love bears all things." Love "puts up with" or it "covers over with silence." Jesus could take the offense of others, because He knew their offense against Him was coming from a sinful heart. We will never win others to Jesus if we retaliate or seek revenge. God says, "Revenge is mine." The Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Blessing others is a real test in the life of a Christian athlete.

We must share the gospel of Christ with others. Athletics provides a means of accomplishing that goal. When games become more important than sharing Christ, we need to reevaluate our priorities. If you slide into second base and the second baseman intentionally slaps the glove in your face while making the tag, what do you do? First, you must realize he did this with a heart that is not right with God. If his heart were right with God, he would not have slapped your face. Secondly, you must remember your mission in life. If the person who slapped you is an unbeliever in Jesus, your reaction of love may be the reflection of Christ that results in his conversion. If the person who slapped you is a Christian, you must help restore him to a right relationship with God. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." You can approach the second baseman after the game in a spirit of gentleness, realizing that the emotion of competition overcame his good judgment. Some

people will want you to fight back. They may make snide comments about your “manhood.” Maybe that’s the price you pay to live for Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-11, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”

“Love believes all things.” It trusts God for all things. Love trusts in God’s divine protection and direction. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Do you believe that this promise means all things—even injuries and losses on the scoreboard?

“Love always hopes.” To hope means to have “a desire combined with expectation,” or “a desire with the belief of possibly attaining.” Love has the positive outlook of attaining the goals God wants us to reach. Our God is a God of hope. Psalm 62:5 says, “Find rest, Oh my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him.” What comforting words! We can rest and hope in a loving God!

“Love always perseveres.” Love endures. It stands firm. Love grinds it out to the end. Love stands firm in its convictions. Love endures until it reaches its goal. Love never quits—no matter what the odds.

The Apostle Paul saved the best for last. Here it is: “Love never fails.” If we want to be winners, we will walk in love. We will walk in the power of a God who is love.

Even with the competition involved in sports, if we understood how much God loves us, we would compete in a manner pleasing to Him.

Time Out:

- 1) What is the difference in God’s love and man’s love?
- 2) How can you manifest God’s love for others in athletics? In your dating relationships? In school? In your home? In your job?
- 3) When have you found it necessary to demonstrate “tough love?” How has God honored this effort?