Weekly Devotions

“I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS”
Philippians 3:14
Basketball Devotions

Keep Looking Up!
(John 3:16 & Ephesians 2:8-9)

Find a partner and try to dribble a basketball while facing your partner and asking the following questions:

This can be done with two teams – one team (team with jerseys on) dribbles around and asks the questions and the other team must answer questions. Teams then switch jobs after a few minutes.

1. What is your name?
2. What school do you go to? (If all know each other then skip question 1 & 2.)
3. If you were to die today where would you go and why?

Bring students into big group and discuss question #3. Emphasize that there is only one place to find the answer to that question. Where is it? (Hand out Bibles!)

Read John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8-9

John 3:16  For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Ephesians 2:8-9  For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Good works don’t get us to heaven. God’s word tells us that we are saved by grace (undeserved love) through faith in Jesus as our Savior who died on the cross and rose from the dead for us. He took away all our sins and saved us from the punishment of hell that we deserve. So we can be confident that we are saved through Jesus. Don’t ever doubt, but live for Jesus as thanks for this great gift He has given us!

Prayer
Did you ever know someone who was never happy? You could give them a piece of their favorite pie with a big scoop of whip cream and they would complain the piece wasn’t big enough or that there wasn’t enough whip cream on it. Do you think that person would enjoy the pie?

Sometimes we are tempted to be that person who is not happy. Maybe you are tempted to always want to be first in line and to complain when you do not get your way at home or in school. Maybe when you play basketball you are tempted to complain if you don’t get the ball enough or don’t score any points.

Today we are going to discuss a different type of attitude. It is an attitude that God instructs us to have, so …

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18

“…give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

What does “in all circumstances” mean? (all the time, no matter what is happening)

What does “give thanks” mean? Does it mean to stop in the middle of a basketball game and thank your teammate when he/she didn’t pass the ball to you when you were open? What does it mean? (it mean to give thanks to God by how you act, by your attitude toward all things - do you get mad and quit, do you say mean things about others or pout or do you continue to work hard and encourage others in a positive way.)

This positive attitude has sometimes been called an “ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE”.

Final Question: Why should we have an attitude of gratitude always? If things are going bad in our lives, why should we still have an attitude of gratitude? Hint - look at the end of verse 18. (We should be hard working, positive and encouraging toward others out of thankfulness for what Jesus has done for us – He has suffered and died for us, so it is our way of showing love back to Him for all He has done for us.)

Jesus loves you and promises to always take care of you and to have heaven waiting for you so…Go and live your life with an ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Playing Good Defense

(Galatians 5:16-17)

Have you ever heard the phrase: “Defense Wins Games!” What does this mean? 
(it takes playing good defense to win in basketball, not just shooting well)

A team or an individual who doesn’t play defense will not win many games. It may seem like more fun to just sit around and wait for the ball to come to you so you can shoot, but that is not what wins games. You must work to prevent the other team from scoring. We must fight the urge just be lazy and not play good defense. Often times we want to just reach for the ball instead of moving our feet. Even though we know it is best move our feet and play good defense, we often will not do it in a game.

How do we get better at playing good defense in a game? (get in good shape, practice correct form, watch others model correct form, listen and be encouraged by teammates and especially the coach)

That reminds me of something that also happens to us. It is even worse than not playing defense in a basketball game.

Read Galatians 5:16-17

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

The apostle Paul wrote this by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Galatians and to us. What is he talking about? (our sinful nature goes against the Spirit or God’s way - we know we should follow God’s commandments and do what is God pleasing, but our sinful nature seems to continually lead us to do the opposite)

Playing good defense in a basketball game is important, but it is even more important that we live by the Spirit, or live for God, not live by our sinful nature.

How do we get better at living by the spirit? (prayer, watch other role models, read and learn God’s word, encourage others, listen to our Coach - God,....)

Leave here today encouraged to not only play better defense in basketball games, but more importantly to live by the Spirit – live lives of thankfulness to God for the gift of heaven He has given us through Jesus.

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Training To Be Fit

(1 Timothy 4:7-8)

Question: How does or should a good player train for the start of a basketball season?
(running, shooting, dribbling, weight training, a lot of practice)

In general how does one stay healthy in life? What things do you need to do?
(eat healthy, exercise, get enough sleep, no smoking or drugs, etc.)

Did you know that God speaks specifically about the importance of physically training in the Bible?
God does say it has value or is important, but what type of training does he tell us is even more important?
(what do you think – army training, or math training, no - let’s find out)

Look up 1 Timothy 4:7-8 “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

Verse 7 talks about having nothing to do with godless myths or wives tales. What are some examples of these?
(Horoscopes, good luck charms, false religions that don’t have Jesus, etc.)

We are told to “train ourselves to be godly”. Does this mean we can make ourselves into a god?
(no)

What does “godly” mean? How can we train ourselves to be godly?
(close to Jesus through faith and living a life for God)
(we train by being in the Word through church, Sunday School, VBS, reading the Bible, etc. and by praying and working to resist the sinful temptations in our lives through the power of God the Holy Spirit)

Why is this more important than physical training?
(godliness has value not only now on earth, but also forever as it leads to heaven by keeping us close to our Savior.)

I hope you will continue to do physical training to keep your bodies in shape, but more important I hope you will never forget to do the most important training – godly training by staying close to Jesus through prayer and study of His Word!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Come Dressed to Play and Win

(Ephesians 6:13)

If you had a basketball game would you show up on the court wearing winter boots, snow pants, winter coat, gloves and a winter hat and expect to go in the game? (no)
What would you wear? Why? (gym shoes, shorts, uniform – so we are prepared for the game)

God gives advise on what to wear in life too…no He doesn’t give us fashion advice, but something much more important to help us win the most important victory ever.

Read Ephesians 6:13: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

What does God tell us to wear? (full armor of God)

What is the “full armor of God”? (Armor of God’s Word: helmet of salvation, belt of truth, Gospel of Peace, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith)

Why is this important? (to help us not to fall into temptation and to help us stay firm in our faith in Jesus – to keep safe from Satan who is always looking to tempt us and take us away from Jesus)

How do we make sure we stay dressed for battle (in the full armor of God) every day? (Be in the Word of God – family devotions, church, Sunday School, devotion books, VBS, Christmas for Kids, PTV Basketball Camps, prayer, …)

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

What Is Your Weakness

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

What is your weakest area in your basketball “game”? Is it dribbling -- maybe your left hand? Maybe it is shooting -- maybe it is your need to get a little stronger to make the longer shots. The point is we all have weakness in our game. What do some people do if they have a weakness? (Complain about it, or just say “I can’t” and don’t even try – like not dribbling with left hand)

Do you know that in life God tells us that we can boast about our weaknesses in life. Can you imagine that, instead of boasting about how good we are at something, God tells us to boast about our weaknesses? In 2 Corinthians the Apostle Paul emphasizes his weaknesses. He had many challenge in his life as he worked to share the good news about Jesus with others. Let’s find out why he tells us to boast about our weaknesses.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9: But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

Why does the Apostle Paul not complain about his weakness, instead he boasts about them? (He knows that when he has weaknesses, he must rely on Jesus even more.)

Jesus is where all of Paul’s and your abilities come from, and with Jesus’ help you can overcome any challenge in life. This does not mean we will win every basketball game, but with his help you can make it through anything in life.

So work hard to overcome your weaknesses in basketball and life, but remember to always look to Jesus for your strength and power. As we are also told in Philippians 4:4-6

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Our weaknesses can lead us closer to our Savior – Praise God!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Are You Blind?!?

(1 Peter 2:13,15,17)

“Are you blind?! Do you need glasses?!”

Have you ever heard this said to a ref after a close call? Sometimes we see things different than a ref. Sometimes the refs are even wrong in their calls. If they are, does that mean we should argue with them and speak to them with disrespect? Do you know that God gives us directions about how we are to handle bad calls in sports? Let’s see what He says.

Read 1 Peter 2:13,15,17: Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Does it say to show respect only to those who make correct calls or decisions? (no, it says to every authority!)

Who has given a ref authority? (God, because he/she is an adult who is in charge)

If you submit to authority or demonstrate respect, what impact might it have on others? (it will silence the foolish talk of others and lead others toward God’s will)

Does this passage apply only toward refs in sports? (no)
How does it apply to other areas of our lives? (teachers, parents, police, president, coaches, etc.)

Many times in life we will be tempted to be disrespectful when we do not “get our way” or when we think “something is unfair.” We need to remember how unfair it was for Jesus to suffer for us and yet He did it without complaint. Jesus’ love is what motivates us to want to follow God’s command to be respectful to those He has placed in authority over us.

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Imagine Greatness

What if you start losing a close game and you begin thinking “no one could win with this team?” What if there is a questionable call by the ref and the rest of the game you blame that one call for why your team is losing?

I think you all know that thinking like this will never help you win a game. So the question is, what does God say about how we should think in a game?

Look up Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

According to this passage (God’s Word) what should we be thinking about during a game? (pure, positive thoughts about the game, our teammates and even the refs, thoughts that will lead us closer to God and others - Basically imagining greatness or thinking godly, not focusing on sinful or bad things)

How does this passage apply to our thinking at school? (not complaining, not gossiping, - instead focusing on learning, using your talents, and helping others)

How does this passage apply to our thinking at home? (focusing on honoring our parents, showing kindness and love to brothers/sisters, seeing positive in all situations as we know God is in control and works for our good)

How does this passage apply to our lives with friends/movies/music? (think pure thoughts and talking clean language, watching movies that are godly and listening to god pleasing music)

What we put in our brain is what we will think about, so let’s fill it with God’s Word!

Imagine greatness as you let God’s love for you through Jesus always be your main focus in life!!!

Prayer
Why Do You Play Basketball?

(Colossians 3:23)

As I have watched you play basketball over the last 9 practices I have seen all of you work so hard at the drills and games we have played. Why do you play basketball? (fun, friends, get better for future teams, get in shape, improve skills for other sports, …) These are all good reasons, but I want to show you a video clip from a movie about football that emphasizes a different reason for playing sports.

Watch clip from “Facing the Giants”.

According to this movie clip what is the reason the players should work hard in football? (to serve God) Does this same reason apply to you playing basketball?

How do we check and see if this is true. Movies can sometimes lead us in the wrong direction, but where can we go to check to see if this information is correct? (God’s Word)

Look up Colossians 3:23: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

According to this verse, what should be the reason we play basketball or anything in life? (to serve God) Why? (to thank Him for all He has done for us on the cross!)

As Brock in the movie was told to use his talents to God’s glory, may we also use our talents in everything (school, sports, music, etc.) to Jesus glory.

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Zeal It Up!

(Romans 12:11-12)

It’s a close game and your team is down by 3 with 40 seconds left. Your coach calls a time-out to talk about it and someone on your team says “it’s over, we lost, the refs cost us the game!”
Is this okay? (of course not, the player has given up and is thinking negative...)

Do you know that God gives us advice on how to think and what type of attitude to have in tough basketball games?

Let’s read Romans 12:11-12 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Does God say to give up, complain about the refs, come up with excuses or blame others? (no)

What advice does He give? (never give up or quit being enthusiastic, always serve the Lord and have hope – no matter what the situation, and finally take it to God in prayer)

How does this verse apply to your life at school?
How does this verse apply to your life with friends (who are not always nice)?
How does this verse apply to your life at home (with brothers, sisters and parents)?
How does this verse apply to your life when bad things happen?

When we stay focused on our blessings in life, especially what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we will be able to stay positive and make it through anything!

Always live your spiritual zeal!
Through Christ you can do all things!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

What Are You Playing For?
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

How many of you plan to play on the basketball team at your school?

Why do you want to play on the team?

If you play on the team you will become a “Panther”, a member of the “Peace Panther Basketball Team”. That is an honor and privilege. Why? (big responsibility...)

Who do you represent? (yourself, your reputation, your school, your church, your parents, your family, and God)

God offers instructions about how to play on a basketball team in His Word. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31

What directions does God give us? (play to the glory of God)

How can we do that? (with God’s help: by how we act, sportsmanship, etc.)

Remember this verse says whatever you do, not just basketball!

Prayer

Passing To Teammates
(Galatians 6:9-10)

Why do we need to practice passing and always look to pass to teammates during a game? (to improve team, allow team to score and win, to get better at the game of basketball, etc.)

God tells us of something that we need to practice and always look to do in life, especially to “teammates.”
Read Galatians 6:9-10

What is that something? (good works)

Why should we be looking to do good works? (to thank God for what he has done for us through Jesus, to be a light to the world, to show love to others, to build people up and help them look to God, to help God’s team)

Who are our true teammates? (All believers – we are all on God’s winning team through Jesus)

Remember it is important to look to pass in basketball games, but it is even more important in life to always look to do “good works” (help others and serve God) as that is what we were created to do!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Keep Your Eye On The Ball

(Hebrews 12:2)

Why should you keep your eye on the ball (or at least be aware of where it is) during the game?
(to be ready to catch it, steal it, stop other team from scoring, not get hit in the head, etc.)

God’s word tells us to keep our eyes on something else at all times in life.
Read Hebrews 12:2

Why do you think it is important to fix our eyes on Jesus?
(stay close to our Savior, remember we need Him, not lose focus on what’s really important – our author and perfecter of our faith)

What things will help us “fix our eyes on Jesus”? 
(praying, studying God’s Word, church, Sunday School, family devotions, etc.)

Just as it is important in basketball to keep our eyes on the ball, it is even more important to keep our eyes focused on JESUS in all of life!

Prayer

Making The Sacrifice To Win

(Romans 12:1)

Have you ever heard the phrase that many coaches say: “It takes sacrifice for a team to win!”

What are some sacrifices a player may have to make in order to be successful in basketball or to win?
(practice a lot, work really hard at practice and on own, take a hard charge, dive for loose ball, work hard on defense even when really tired, sit the bench during some games, missing other fun things to go to practice or games, etc.)

God talks about sacrifices in His Word, so look up Romans 12:1 and let’s see why He tells us to sacrifice.

God tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. What does this mean?
(treat our bodies as temple of the Lord by how we live, do everything to God’s glory not our own, follow His rules not what seems fun to us, listen to parents and teachers, etc.)

In basketball we sacrifice to improve our skills and win games, but what is the reason we should be living sacrifices to God? (to worship Him and thank and love Him for the mercy/forgiveness and love He has shown us through Jesus)

In basketball our sacrifice could win the game for us, but can our living sacrifice ever earn us the prize of heaven? (no, only Jesus can win heaven for us!)

Let’s remember that it does take sacrifice to win in basketball, but in life Jesus’ sacrifice is what causes us to want to live for Him!

Prayer
How do you get stronger physically? 
(*working out, it takes physical work to break down muscles so they grow back stronger...*)

There is a passage we are going to look up today that talks about strength.

Read Philippians 4:13

Who is the “Him” in this verse that gives us strength? 
(*Jesus*)

Does this mean that we don’t need to work-out to get physically stronger because Jesus will just make us wake up one day with big muscles? (*no*)

What does this passage mean? (*that Jesus helps us do things that we could not do without Him, especially forgiving our sins and giving us eternal life in heaven*) (*He also helps us through everything in life on earth – He is always there for us and answers every prayer, - With Him we really can do everything!*)

Remember to really grow stronger in faith and in life we need to look to Jesus!

Prayer

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**Being A Good Teammate**

(*Ephesians 4:32*)

What are qualities of a good teammate? (*humble, willing to sacrifice, willing to share and pass, listens and communicates, builds others up, kind, compassionate, forgiving, etc.*)

God emphasizes important qualities of being a good teammate on His team (*His team of believers*). Read Ephesians 4:32

What is the reason we should be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to others? (*Jesus forgave us!*)

Remember we are all on God’s team and need to be “good teammates” on the court and in life. We do this out of thanks for what Jesus has done in winning the victory of heaven for us!

Prayer
Basketball Devotions

Be A Leader On The Court
(Matthew 5:16)

What are the qualities of a good leader on the basketball court?
(positive, encouraging, knows the game, confident but humble, hard working, etc.)

What happens if a player is always negative and complains and doesn’t try?
(brings others down, people don’t want to be around him, hurts ability to work as team, doesn’t improve or win)

A player like this would not be very pleasing to God, in fact in God’s Word we find some advice for on the
court and off the court as well. Read Matthew 5:16

What does God say we should do?  (let “light” shine so others see your good deeds)

What does this mean?  (show our faith by what we do and how we treat others, and our attitudes)

It is not always easy to let our light shine, but why should we do it?
(to show our love and thanks to God for what he has done for us, to help others to see God’s love for them through you)

Remember to be a leader on the court and off by letting “your light shine”!

Prayer

Humility Leads to Greatness
(Philippians 2:3-8)

Would you like to play on a team with a really good player?  (probably)

What if that good player thought he was so good that he was the only one who should have the ball and shoot
the ball?  What if that player always reminded you that “he” was better than you and that “he” was great?  (not
much fun to play on his/her team, team will not function well together, etc.)

There was someone in real life that was greater than any other person.  Let’s read a passage and see how this
person acted.  Read Philippians 2:3-8

That great person is Jesus, who is not only a great man - He is God.  Did Jesus come down to earth and say “I
am great, why should I bother with any of you sinful people.”  (No)

What did Jesus do instead?  (humbled himself by: suffering even though He was innocent, dying on the cross for us)

What would an “attitude that is the same as Jesus” look like in our lives?  (putting teammates/classmates first, helping
others at school and home, always kind to others, not be selfish, not feeling sorry for ourselves if we don’t get our way, etc.)

Humility really does lead to greatness – especially as we focus on living our lives with “an attitude that is the
same as Jesus!”

Prayer
Be Confident – Not Nervous

*(Philippians 4:6)*

Many players get nervous when it comes to playing in actual games, especially if there are a lot of fans watching. Usually this nervousness is caused by worry.

What do you think this nervousness does to their ability to play well in the game? *(not do as well...)*

Is there really a reason to be nervous or worry about playing in a game? *(no, in fact it hurts your playing ability)*

God offers some good advice for basketball games and for life in general.

Read Philippians 4:6

What does God say we should be anxious (or worry) about? *(Nothing!)*

What should we do instead? *(with prayer and thanks ask God - He will provide!)*

As verse 4 says we can “Rejoice” always because we know we are on our way to heaven through our Savior Jesus.

Don’t Worry, He is always Near!

Prayer

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Play Hard and Pray Hard

*(Luke 18:1)*

If you were playing in a game against a really tough team and you were down by 4 points with only 30 seconds left, what would you do? Would you give up? *(hopefully not)* Would you walk off the court? *(hopefully not)*

What would you do?

*(hopefully you would work hard and not give up, believe your team could still win, work together with your teammates – not try to win all on your own, call time-out and ask your coach for advice/help and then listen to him/her)*

God gives us similar advice to how to deal with the tough times in the game of life (such as divorce, sickness, death of loved ones, others being mean, etc.).

Read Luke 18:1

What does God tell us we should do when things get tough? *(always pray and never give up)*

God answers prayer – especially of those who continue to ask and don’t give up *(just like parable of widow and unjust judge).*

In basketball we need to call timeout and talk to our coach. In life we will never run out of timeouts, Jesus is always there to listen and answer our prayer. God always knows what is best for you and His team (all believers). He can do anything. Nothing is too big or too small for Him to handle so never give up, but continue to pray to Him and believe that He will always answer your prayer.

Prayer
Preparing For The Game
(1 Peter 3:15)

What things should you do to prepare for a game?
(get enough sleep, stay hydrated, eat healthy meal, know rules, know plays, proper warm-up and stretching, mentally ready, wear correct uniform and gym shoes)

Being prepared for the game is very important, but God tells us to be prepared for something more important. Read 1 Peter 3:15

What does God say to be prepared to do?
(tell others about Jesus and what He has done for you)

How do we get prepared?
(study God’s Word, pray, talk about Jesus more, trust God to guide you)

What advice does God give about how to give an answer?
(do it with gentleness and respect)

Always remember to be prepared for the game, but even more important, be prepared to tell others about Jesus!

Prayer