



SPORTS & SPECTRUM

10 DAY DEVOTIONAL

KIRK COUSINS | CHASE ANDERSON | JANIE REED | DEMARIO DAVIS
NICK AHMED | TREY BURTON | AUBREY BLEDSOE | JONATHAN ISAAC
JACCOB SLAVIN | ADAM WAINWRIGHT



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FOR HIS GLORY

In college it was my prayer that, through football, God would give me a platform to help make Him famous, pointing people to Him. Fast forward several years now, and I see that while God has answered that prayer by blessing my football career, He hasn't blessed it just so I could feel good about myself. He's blessed it so that I could then steward this platform and point people to Him.

When you look at NFL players from a distance, it's easy to think we have it made, we're living a dream, and everything must be going great. But that's not always the case. So many of us still face daily stresses; we fail time and again on the field as well as off the field. The tough start to our season this year was a great reminder of that, as we went into the bye week at 1-5. Yet, during that bye week, I had some of the best moments with the Lord during my quiet time, better than I have had in a long time. And a large part of it was because I was struggling so much in what I do professionally. I think that drove me closer to the Lord. Not that I wanted to start 1-5, but I know that God can use that to bring me closer to Him and develop things in me that otherwise might not get developed.

I trust that God's not going to waste a hurt or a failure; He's going to use them for my good and His glory. And I believe that's the Christian walk. As you read the teachings of Jesus, He doesn't promise wealth or success in the world's eyes. In fact, He promises suffering. So you understand when you choose to follow Jesus, it also means you take up your cross. He makes it clear that there are sacrifices to be made in following Him.

In that bye-week quiet time, I was seeking to learn more about how God develops the soul. The fruit that comes out of your life is a direct result of the health of your soul. You can look at your behaviors in life as an indicator of what's going on inside you as a person. God wants your heart. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him."

I want God's strong support; I think we all do. But it starts with asking ourselves if our heart is completely His. If it is, He promises support, but our job is to first get our heart right before Him. That's how that bye week was spent — in quiet time asking the Lord to search my heart and help me understand where I am broken, and how I need to mature spiritually.

Keep teaching me, Lord, how You want me to grow as a person.

KIRK COUSINS

MINNESOTA VIKINGS QUARTERBACK



CHASE ANDERSON

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES PITCHER



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TRUE FAITH

After being in baseball for 11 seasons, you realize you have no control over anything. In the big leagues, schedules are always set for you, determining when and where you need to be. When everything, including baseball, was shut down because of COVID-19, I was thrown off. I went home from spring training instead of off to a new city with a team, and I felt like I was in a different life.

We thought we would be back after two weeks, so I decided to take a few weeks off and rest. Then we heard it was going to be a lot longer than that, so I began working out at home and a local gym (wearing a mask while working out in the Texas heat is not fun). Soon, we got a small group of guys together and the 10-15 of us began doing batting practice and tried to create some sense of normalcy in the midst of it all.

It's during times like these when I ask myself, "Is baseball my identity? Am I stuck in it? Or is the Lord teaching me patience right now?" When your whole life is routinely put out before others as you're playing a sport, you're in their hands. They (coaches, executives, fans) are the ones in control of so much. But suddenly, no one was in control except God. He was the only one who knew what was going on and why. That's not an easy thing to handle as a type-A person.

This year, I'm going into the season with a perspective change. I have seen just how fragile we are as humans. Though we are strong in some ways, we, as Christians, realize that we have to cling to the Lord. He's in control of all situations, and even though at times we may be under the illusion that we are, we're not. That is the definition of true faith in Jesus Christ — trusting that He's in control and we're not. Last season helped me see that I can't take one day for granted, not just in my career, but in my health and life.

Many wrestle with questions such as, "What am I living for? Just the now?" If only they knew that there is an eternal being who offers salvation to all of us, who have an expiration date. We can rise and have a perfect life with Jesus. This life here on earth can be scary, but having a relationship with Christ Jesus and knowing that no matter what we are going through, He is with us, that's true faith. The peace of God that He's given us through His Holy Spirit can rule our hearts, and with Him, we can get through anything.

God has a plan; nothing surprises Him. That gives me the peace to say that I'm going to do the best I can do to be an image bearer of Christ.



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**WHAT NOTHING CAN
SEPARATE**

There's a big difference between maturing in our faith and thinking we've earned our way into a right standing before God. The only way God sees us as righteous is because Jesus places Himself in front of us before Him. Romans 8 does an amazing job of explaining the foundation of the Gospel. We can't do anything to earn salvation; we can never graduate from the Gospel message. Instead, we need to come to the realization that we've been saved, and out of that understanding we can place our trust in Jesus.

I grew up trying to do everything right at all times. But throughout the whole chapter of Romans 8, not one command is given to Christ's followers. The chapter is saturated with the concept of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Then there's the Book of James, which is about faith and works. When we marry this with the Book of Romans, we know that faith and works are inseparable. Our works don't add anything to our faith, they overflow out of our faith. It's our response to God's work.

When I'm in the outfield during a softball game, I have an initial knee-jerk reaction when the batter hits the ball. How fast you react is critically important in this game. We call it "read and react." As I see the batter swing, I can tell where the ball is going to go, and meanwhile, my feet are reacting as I see it. The same concept applies to the batter. You read the pitch and react.

Our response to the Gospel should be to read and react. We read the truth in the Word, we see it lived out in others' lives, and we react in our own lives. We should never read the Word and then keep our feet stuck in the ground. There should be a natural reaction when we read God's truths that causes us to act. However, if we lose a sense of humility, we will stop reacting. If we think we've made it, we'll never grow. Humility results in a life of action.

In the world of sports, performance and achievement are everything. Athletes are geared to this mindset. But the opposite is true of God's Kingdom. God is not waiting for us to climb our way toward Him. He came down and rescued us. As believers, we can look around at how the world works and start to believe God reacts the same way. He doesn't. God is for us. He is with us. He is interceding for us in ways we will never fully understand until we see Him face to face.

Meditate on His truths and know that nothing can separate you from the love He has for you. If we slow down and begin to understand what God is saying to us, we will discover how deep His love for us truly is.

JANIE REED

USA SOFTBALL PLAYER



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A WORLDWIDE VIEW

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." — Matthew 22:36-40

God is increasing my territory and expanding my platform. Throughout my NFL career I've had a heart to share the Gospel, but I know now that God is stretching me to go broader, to go further — not only throughout our country, but into the nations — and it's all on behalf of Him. I want to be able to share the love and message of Jesus Christ with everyone I can.

Just what does love look like around the world? God is a loving God, but He is also a just God. In our world, we often don't see these two going hand in hand, but they do. In fact, justice and love are one and the same; there can't be one without the other. In the same way, sharing the Gospel message and working for social justice is one and the same. You can't say you love God if you don't care about the needs of His people. You can't preach only the just side of God without sharing how incredibly loving He is.

God's greatest commandment to us is for us to love Him and love others. I know God wants to use me in this arena. What that tangibly looks like, I'm not entirely sure, but I know I can share with people who God is and why He came down from Heaven to die on the cross for our sins. I want to help people understand the deeper doctrines and truths of God's Word. It's so important for us to truly grasp who our God is!

We never fully know how God wants to use us or how He's going to do it, but I only know He wants me to be ready and willing, not only on the field, but off of it too. I try to be faithful to wherever He calls me.

I don't know if God will send me overseas or not, but I do know that God is concerned about His name going forth throughout the nations, and therefore, so am I. So as I tune into the heart of God more, and come alongside missionaries and organizations that are reaching the world with the Gospel, I'm grasping a better view of what it looks like to have a heart for the nations. The more I process God's perspective, the more He's cultivating a worldwide view for me as well.

Where is God calling you?

DEMARIO DAVIS

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS LINEBACKER



NICK AHMED

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS SHORTSTOP

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A DIFFERENT RHYTHM

The way Jesus lived His life was drastically different from how many of us do today. The rhythm and pace of His days were intentional and yet interruptible. He was in no hurry and always had time to spend with people. He was the busiest man in the history of the world, and yet He still had time for interruptions. No one was turned away.

Our pace and lifestyle should reflect that of Jesus'. The way we live should encourage people to look at Jesus — not just His teaching, but His way of life and His ethics. How He walked on this earth is important. It was for a reason He would get up early and steal away to spend time with the Father. And it was for a reason that He would intentionally spend time in community with people.

As I study God's Word more and more, I'm finding it incredibly important to reorient my life to match that of His Son. This season, while we are forced to take a break from baseball, is a perfect time to do just that. I'm being forced to live an unhurried life.

Most of us have a fear of being unproductive. We may be afraid that if we slow down, we're not going to be successful or that people may judge us for not working hard. We live in a society that tells us we should be independent, hardworking, achieved and successful, but a lot of times we place these goals ahead of the priorities of Jesus. There's nothing wrong with working hard, especially for the Kingdom, but if work is our top priority, we're out of line.

Before I surrendered to Christ, my identity was so wrapped up in my performance, achievement and success. I was constantly on a crazy rollercoaster of highs and lows. I needed God to come in and give me a new identity, which He did. It's not that my priorities became perfectly aligned with His the day I gave my life to Christ, as I still struggle with that today, but I'm working on creating a different way of life, defining myself as God defines me. I don't want to fix my worth on box scores, how many hits I've gotten, or the awards I've received.

Professional baseball is a career where you are praised by fans, teammates, friends and family when you're doing well. But when you're not doing well, many experience the reality of no one being there for you. I see how my teammates who don't know Jesus and their worth in Him suffer. They need Him. We all do.

What are you placing your worth in today? Are you willing to accept the fact that Jesus sees you as you really are — a precious child of God?



TREY BURTON

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS TIGHT END



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IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

It's not about me. I've been reminded again and again about this fact recently. And again as I was listening to a sermon by Francis Chan, who spoke about us being the body of Christ. Our role as Christ's Church is not to ask, "What can I get out of this?" but to instead ask, "How can I bring the best of my part to benefit others?" As a byproduct, we will benefit as well.

As I read and study more of God's Word, my selfish thinking and ways are made more apparent and less desirable to me. Even when I pray, I often get caught in the me-focused prayers, so I have to stop and think about how I can pray for others. It's eye-opening.

As football players, it's super tough because we can easily be idolized, trashed or stepped on. And for all athletes, it's easy to be driven by statistics. You can be super high when you're doing well and super low when you're not. The fluctuation of highs and lows is challenging. What I had to realize is that there will always be critics, but you have to be centered on something to keep you calm.

Outside of the stats, numbers and outcomes, life is so much bigger. God is so much bigger and worth so much more. While the world may focus on these things, as Christians we need to be focused on Him. He then changes our perspectives to care more about our locker rooms, our cities, and the peace of Christ He gives us. Only then can we let others know they can have the same peace.

Anxiety is seen most exaggerated in the young players or those who are on their way out. They feel pressure from everyone to perform or prove themselves. Obviously, we all want to do well, but this can't be our be-all and end-all. When we, as Christ-followers, demonstrate a calm spirit despite the circumstances surrounding us, people will take notice. Suddenly, when the guys you don't usually see at Bible study show up, you know they're struggling with something, grasping for hope or simply a rabbit's foot for luck. Your peace and joy may not be talked about, but it is noticed. Then eventually, they may just come up and ask you about it, which gives you the opportunity to share Christ's saving power with them.

I know that, just because I'm in the NFL, people are watching. I'm watched as a father, a husband, an athlete and a Christian. There are enough people paying attention to make me want to do this right. I want to reflect Christ.

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." — 1 Peter 3:15



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CREATED EQUAL

Having played soccer in Norway, Denmark and now three seasons in Australia, I consider myself somewhat of a veteran overseas player.

I enjoy playing soccer in Australia because the culture isn't too different from the U.S. It doesn't seem like you're too far away, though you really are. The time difference will remind you if you forget. What is difficult for me is knowing that, ultimately, I'll be leaving. I live a life of a lot of goodbyes as each season comes to an end. So how do I invest and make the most of my time here without letting the knowledge that I'm only here for a short time cause me to detach?

Most international players will stick to themselves and can often be found in their rooms or on FaceTime with their family and friends back home, but I really try to make the most of my time overseas. I try to go out and enjoy the present, making my time here count.

It's easy in this day and age to surround yourself with people who are similar to you. As a professional soccer player, I'm typically around young, athletic women. Through my experience traveling, I've met a lot of people who are very different from me. Church in Australia is different from church in the States. Everywhere I go is a unique environment. Learning about other cultures makes me realize there really isn't one right way of doing things most of the time. Just because we drive on one side of the road in the States doesn't make it wrong to drive on the other. It may be uncomfortable for us, but it's not wrong.

In the same way, we are called to love everyone regardless of what they look like or where they come from. I'm thankful I've been able to make friends and get to know Christ-followers from other countries. I'm able to learn from them — how they were raised in the faith and how they experience God. These experiences give me more dimension for my own faith.

God came down to earth to meet everyone, not just the people who are like you. He gives everyone a call to make disciples of all nations. In Jesus' ministry, He embraced the lowest of the lows and the highest of the highs. He ate meals with everyone in between. Similarly, we are called to love and spend time with people who are different from us — whomever God puts in our path.

We're all created equal; we all need Jesus.

AUBREY BLED SOE

NWSL'S WASHINGTON SPIRIT GOALKEEPER

A full-page photograph of Jonathan Isaac, a professional basketball player, in action. He is wearing a blue Orlando Magic jersey with white pinstripes and the number 7. He is dribbling a basketball with his right hand and looking intently towards the basket. The background shows a blurred crowd of spectators in a basketball arena.

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REBORN

We were in church every Sunday growing up. My siblings and I would sing in front of the church every once in a while, and we spent a lot of time memorizing verses together. But with family complications, independence and basketball taking the lead of my life, my faith increasingly became less important. It ended up just being something I referred to every now and then when life got hard and things weren't going so well on the court.

Last year, I had a moment when all of that changed for me. I attended an optional chapel service held before every game. I still had faith, and in a way going to chapel was my way of confirming that to myself. That day the chaplain started with the verse Luke 6:46, in which Jesus says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Those words really shocked me! I didn't even know that was in the Bible, and I couldn't picture Jesus being so stern. "Grace" is what I'd cling to in times of disobedience, so learning about Jesus saying that really made me think. "Wow, He's talking to me! I say, 'Lord, Lord,' but in certain areas of my life I couldn't care less about what Jesus had to say." Suddenly, I found myself at a fork in the road. I couldn't live with being an imposter; I was either going to be a Christian or not.

I went through a time of just seeking the Lord, and in seeking Him (long story short) I found Him. I have seen God keep His promises.

While I was asking God to show me if this was real, He kept bringing a pastor into my life. In developing a relationship with this pastor — going to church and really growing my hunger for God, and knowing this desire wasn't a coincidence but exactly what God wanted from me — I dove in. I became all about His Word, all about His people.

Soon, I felt like I came to an understanding of what I believed to be a key principle of faith in Jesus. So one morning, all fired up, I asked the pastor if I could preach at his church — and he said, "Why not?" He didn't even ask what I wanted to speak about!

It's been encouraging to see myself step out and speak, because I've always battled with anxiety. If you would have asked anybody from my earlier years if I could get up and speak in front of anybody, the answer would be no. To me, the fact that I was able to do this confirms God's power — simply because I know it was not by my own ability.

As we continue to grow in our faith and understanding of God, keeping our eyes on Jesus and growing closer to Him and what He has to say, the better followers of His we become.

JONATHAN ISAAC

ORLANDO MAGIC FORWARD



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HE'S EVERYTHING I NEED

My parents got me out on the ice at a really young age. At 18 months, they laced me up in my first pair of skates, and at the age of 2 I was on my first hockey team. When my parents would put M&M's on the ice, I would skate to pick one up and eat it, fall down, get up, and then skate to the next one to do the same thing. That's how I learned how to skate.

Hockey runs in my family; each one of my siblings competes on the ice as well. As important as hockey is to my family, our faith in Christ is even more significant.

Growing up in a Christian home, I was always surrounded by faith, but my faith in Jesus really became my own when I moved away from home. I was in Chicago playing juniors and was put up with a family that was also full of very strong believers. I remember that year being in my assistant coach's office, and he asked me what sort of faith I had. A little uncertain myself, I hesitantly responded, "I'm a Christian?"

That year began a journey for me to really establish and strengthen my faith. We had a chaplain in Chicago who challenged and encouraged me, helping me grow closer to God. At 17 years old, it was a big step to be on my own, but I think it was God's plan for me to really seek Him for myself.

But like anyone else, it can be easy for me to become content in my faith. There are so many things to distract me from God, whether that be laziness, practice, falling into materialism, or spending too much time on my phone. Instead of falling prey to these temptations, I try to stay grounded in my faith, realizing that everything I have is from God and for His glory.

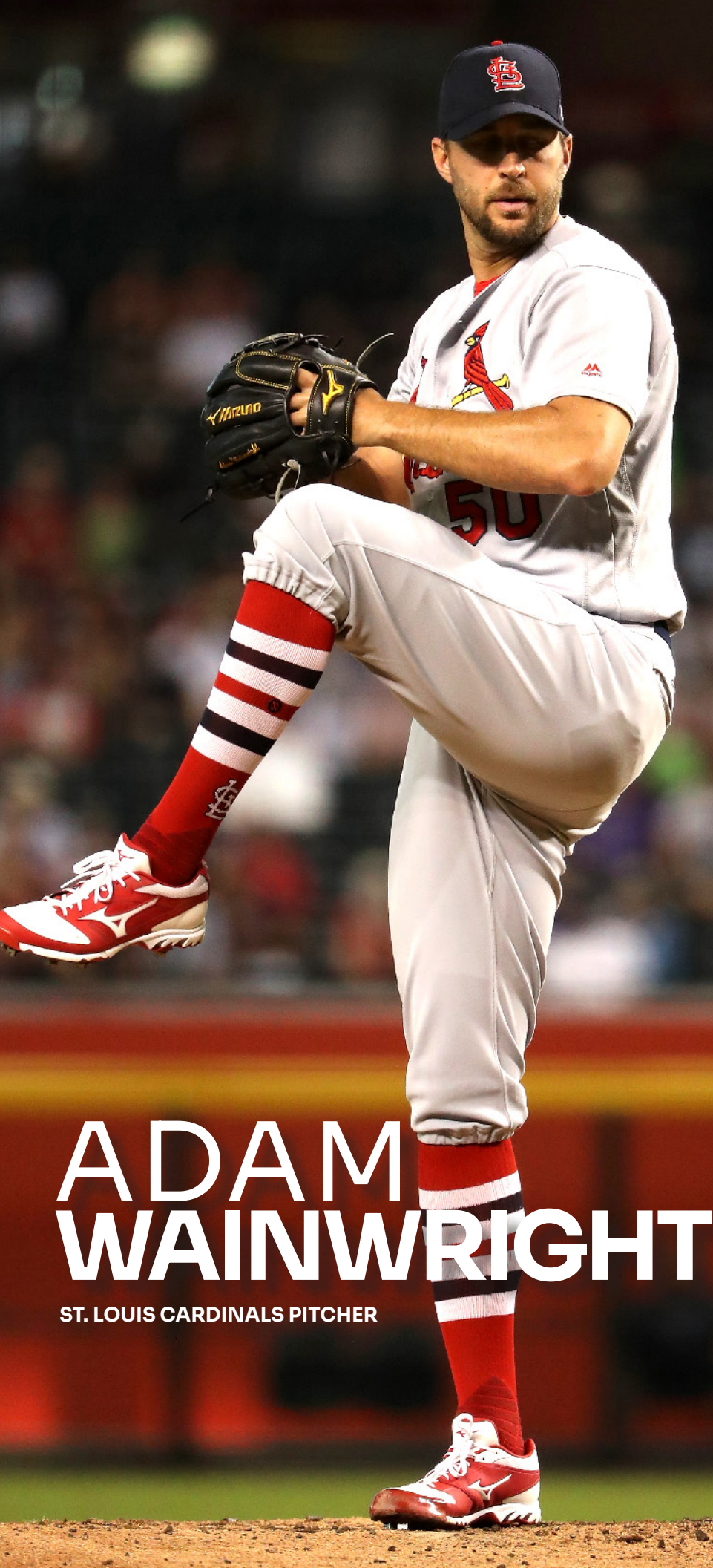
"I will praise You, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples. For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth." — Psalm 57:9-11

Jesus' command to us was to go and make disciples. So not only do I want to grow close to God myself, I want to lead others to draw close to Him as well. We need to ask ourselves: What are we doing with the lives God's given us — lives that truly matter? What are we doing to make disciples? Every decision we make each day should center around this calling.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." — Matthew 28:19-20

JACCOB SLAVIN

CAROLINA HURRICANES DEFENSEMAN



ADAM WAINWRIGHT

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS PITCHER



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HE MADE ME LIE DOWN

Heading into the 2011 season, I felt like everything was finally coming together for me. The fastball, the curve, the off-speed stuff — all of it was now in my wheelhouse. And the mental toughness I had developed over the years was beginning to pay big dividends for me and my team. The next season was going to be my best.

But after a fateful pitch in spring training, I knew something wasn't right. I tried to shake it off, but my right elbow wouldn't cooperate. I didn't know it at the time, but my season was about to end. ESPN, MLB Network and a host of other press outlets would gather at a news conference where St. Louis manager Tony La Russa would deliver the bad news to the masses.

But in the middle of all that, God was about to do something in my life I never saw coming, something I couldn't have scripted if I tried.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." — Psalm 23

I know we've all read or heard that psalm before, probably more than once. It's the most popular psalm ever, and for good reason. The words that begin the second verse jump off the page, as if God is reminding me of something extremely important — something that could easily become a theme for certain seasons of our lives.

"He makes me lie down."

We skip over that line because we prefer the "green pastures" part. We skip over the first part, until it happens to us. It's not what any of us want to hear, but it describes the reality of a loving God putting His hand on our shoulders, and pressing down until we're lying on the ground, unable to get up and resume our normal activities. And for the 2011 season, make no mistake about it, I was on the ground.

And it was the best year of my career. I mean it. I was forced to the ground by the hand of a loving God, and it was the best year of my career. I've told the rest of my story over at TheIncrease.com. There, you'll discover how and why it was the best year of my life. It was truly my season of surrender, and it was amazing to see what God gave me in return.

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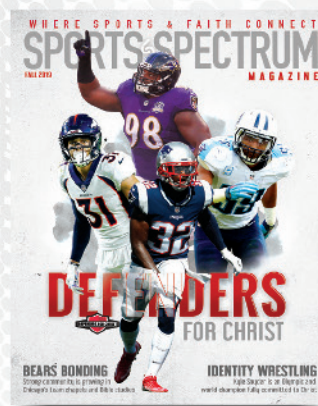
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Hosted by former ESPN senior producer Jason Romano, Sports Spectrum is an interview-driven podcast that features stories on the intersection of faith and sports.



→ Hosted by Leslee Holliday and her husband, former MLB All-Star Matt Holliday, Table Forty is a show that brings organic conversations about Jesus and life.

re/calibrated

ROMANS TWELVE: TWO

→ Hosted by Mallory Brown, wife to former NFL running back Donald Brown and women's ministry leader at Pro Athletes Outreach, "Recalibrated" features the untold stories from pro athletes, their wives and other anointed leaders in and around the local church.



→ Hosted by former major league pitcher Scott Linebrink, who now works for Water Mission, "Get in the Game" focuses on serving others as God has called us to serve. People from inside and outside the pro sports arena share their unique insight on what faith in action, service and giving back look like.