

COACHING FOR CHARACTER: WISDOM THAT WORKS

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To perform appropriately in the moment when you're "on the spot" must be preparing when you're "off spot." We come to understand this principle *most clearly* when we think of great athletes or musicians, but rarely see its application in our own efforts to be a "good Christian." – Dallas Willard¹

Sport provides the opportunity to express a range of technical competencies, emotional agility, athletic distinction, and most especially moral character. But in order for sports to do so, it is necessary to observe both the inherent morality of sports and the moral agency of the coach. This means that the coach, as the primary influence, has moral responsibilities, and such moral responsibilities extend beyond policing disintegrated behavior and implementing fair play conventions, to the development of certain virtues, namely moral character.

In realizing the moral dimension of sport, the coach is likely to encounter three key issues, which can be expressed in terms of three key questions: 1) What is moral character? 2) What is to be the moral character of the coach? 3) How does one coach moral character?

What is Moral Character?

Moral "character" refers to settled dispositions to act in certain ways, given relevant circumstances. There is good moral character as well as bad. Character is mainly expressed in what one does without thinking, as well as to what one does after acting without thinking. The actions which come from character will usually persist when the individual is unobserved, as well as when the consequences of the action are not what he or she would prefer. A person of good moral character is one who, from the deeper and more pervasive dimensions of the self, is intent upon advancing the various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact (etc.), even a great personal cost or self-sacrifice. – Dallas Willard²

Ephesians 4:1 "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

To display a Christ-like life one must develop a Christ-like character. This is what Paul means when he admonishes the believer to "live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." A Christian life is one that is lived in alignment with the character of Christ. It is living and working in a way that corresponds to God's standards. It is the charge of Christ on a life to a life that corresponds to the standards of His character. The word for "worthy" is ἀξίως in Greek and is a value(s) word. It has to do with a life that is lived in alignment with one's value

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), unknown.

² Dallas Willard, "Why It Matters if You are Moral", (remarks made to a student at USC after the student senate had adopted a code of ethics in 2004), 1.

and values. It is *axiomatic*. And if something is axiomatic, then it is self-evident based upon what is true seen in what someone does. In a word, it is character. It focuses on how one responds to the gift of salvation that God has given them, which was received by faith. And this response to the call is a process, for a “worthy” life is learned and developed over time. It is the never-ending process of daily spiritual growth. In a word, it is spiritual formation.

Furthermore, character can be described as “who a person is and/or is becoming” based on the habits that have been and/or are being built into life. Character is the pattern of thinking and acting that is developed as the result of repeated practice. It is “what one does,” that shows “who he/she is.” The word “character” is Greek for “to stamp or engrave.” Over time, through repeated action, the believer engraves certain habits into his/her life. He or she stamps their life with a pattern of attitudes and behaviors. In other words, the Christian develops habits of the heart which become their true character. Or to put it another way, character is the result of the cumulative impact of one’s choices and consistent behaviors.

Character also has to do with what a person believes, how a person behaves and what a person builds (i.e., trust). It includes core values consistent with Scripture, courage to act with strength of heart amid defining moments which challenge and test what one says they believe, and consistency of action over time. It is often doing what is hard but right. Simply put, character is “who a person is” and “who a person appears to be based upon what he/she does.” It is discerning the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.

This means that a Christ-like character doesn’t happen quickly or easily. The person must work at it. It is formed slowly and progressively over time by each decision made. The person has to choose, again and again, the habits of the heart that will shape and form good moral character.

Additionally, moral character is not mystically & magically infused into life. Christian character must be developed through disciplined practice (i.e., sport). Spiritual formation and maturity grow from the habits and virtues one chooses to build into his/her life and from the character that naturally flows from said choices and habits.

The question remains, but how do moral character and sport relate? Paul says, “Train yourself unto/with godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4.7-8). The word for “train” is γύμναζε in Greek, and carries with the realm within which character is built, that is, the gym (i.e., sports) and the reality that sports are character building in nature, *the result* being, godliness and the guarantee of eternal life. Paul understands that and therefore tells Timothy, to “train himself unto godliness. The word for godliness is εὐσέβειαν, which literally means “good character.” For Paul, sports are in and of themselves profitable, but it is when one acquires transcendent skills toward godliness within sports, that sports become redemptive. Note also, that Paul did not say, “Allow yourself to be trained.” Rather, he said “Train yourself.” Character development is not just something you receive; it is something you do (it is both passive and active). It is said, “practice makes perfect,” but as it relates to sport and ultimately the Christian life, “practice makes a person perfect” (telos).

In confirming this reality, Paul goes onto say, “It is a trustworthy statement *worthy* ἄξιως of full acceptance. Character then is all about the “worthy walk.” It is aligning what you do with who you are and what you believe. And this is built through and often best seen through sport.

What is to be the Character of the Coach?

“Jesus, does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in him.”
— Dallas Willard³

Ephesians 4:2–3 “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Paul now describes virtues & character traits of the life to which God calls a person and by extension a coach. He begins with humility, which is the foundation for all the virtues that follow, and ends with what the coach should be pursuing, namely, peace. According to Paul, the admonition to live worthily or with moral character is clearly defined as being a life characterized by the graces of humble meekness (dynamism), persevering love (deep love), and unifying visibility (demonstration).

The first trait is humble meekness. Humility is the make-up of the character. It is a right understanding of oneself in relationship to God and other people. It does not mean abandoning one’s role of authority (i.e., the coach) in order to be “humble.” That would be false humility. It is not humility for the surgeon to ask the scrub nurse to perform the surgery. It is not humility for the pilot to give control of the airplane to a passenger. It is not humility for a leader to abdicate key decisions to employees. However, contrary to all of these, in all these scenarios humility does mean thinking of the needs of others and acting in their best interest. But, what does humble meekness mean? Meekness could be defined as power under control. When one puts humility and meekness together, he or she has a virtue that is dynamic and very inspiring. In conclusion then, this is seeing things rightly and then doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons.

Paul goes on to say, “love each other.” Love in this instance is the motive and the method. For Paul, and thus, for the coach, this is faithful forbearance with others to the end, where forgiveness is granted, and fulfillment is garnered. This kind of behavior can spring only from God’s love. That is to say, they match what they have given with what they give. As believers persevere in love for one another, especially in the midst of tensions and conflicts, they show a lifestyle of character consistent with their identity in Christ.

Finally, Paul says “be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This means for the Christian that method and means of maintaining and demonstrating the unity of the Spirit toward peace is *visibility* (i.e., demonstration). This makes plain that the unity of the Spirit is a reality that is to be demonstrated visibly. Living in this fashion binds people together and thereby maintains the unity of the Spirit. This is adding life and breath to what one believes. This kind of morality must be transparently evident, and the coach has a responsibility before God to make sure that this is so. Significantly then, modeling the way, as it is energetically worked out, is the bond that brings a team under the belief in/of a coach.

These examples are just a minute sample of, biblically, what the character of the coach is to be about. And each of these elements of moral character come with many applications.

³Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 52.

Therefore, what follows is an attempt to tease out the above-mentioned character traits, the significance they have, as well as, the force they carry.

The Coach's Character is to be Full of Dynamism (Competence/Expertise)

Practically speaking, this is the "it factor." This type of character generates confidence in people in one's knowledge and ability. A moral coach if he/she is to coach for character must be a continuous learner and constantly improving. IN developing dynamism, a dynamic coach is to be focused on being effective not right. He or she uses his or her knowledge and experience to help his or her athletes fulfill their goals and flourish in their roles. They are able to tap into and leverage the knowledge and experience of their student-athletes, to the end that they might use their platform to share Christ. They think strategically about how to integrate truths and skills that transcend sports and are masters at explaining "the why." They consistently solve problems, serve people, and step up to situations with competence.

The Coach's Character is to be Full of Deep Love (Connection/Empathy)

Practically, coaching for character involves connection. This writer contends that a key coaching quality should involve the capacity to listen to and engage with an athlete's personal attempt at self-construction and representation. A virtue-based approach to coaching involves finding out who the unique individual behind the athlete is, and what makes him or her tick. Such a view prioritizes persons as ends in themselves and not just as a means to an end. Along that line, a coach should use situational leadership undergirded with sacrificial love. He or she should know thoroughly the ability and motivational levels of each person and respond accordingly. If connection is missing or neglected, the student-athlete will feel unloved and not cared for, and thus will be reluctant to respond to coaching. Therefore, a coach must be there for his or her team. He/she must have an abiding ministry of presence. Part of connecting with players is just being available. Coaches will also need to be a continual source of positive energy and encourage the heart. Simply put, a coach should be a catalyst to help people achieve what they otherwise couldn't achieve on their own. He or she should also let their players know that he or she believes in them. Love is the secret sauce that breeds success and ultimately significance.

The Coach's Character is to be Full of Demonstration (Character/Ethics)

Realistically, a coach in executing his or her professional role cannot be separated from the character of the person in that role. In other words, a virtue approach to coaching is inherent to coaching itself. A virtuous approach to coaching suggests that those who coach are individuals who, at their core, conduct their lives consciously as moral agents. Broadly, a coach must strive for good and consistent exemplification of conduct consistent with Christian virtues, institutional ethics, and team values. More specifically, a coach must be transparent and/or clear in what he/she sees as true and what he or she stands for. This will be evident in his or her, attitude, action, and words. Furthermore, coaches should be intentional about how they think through, talk about, and ultimately live out what they believe. This means practically, that the coach must be intentional about recording his or her commitments and then following through every time.

He/she must consistently respond with courage and not compromise. Also, by implication, a coach should have someone who holds him or her accountable, telling him/her the truth in love, never holding back. A character-based coaching approach should include demonstrating what it looks like to follow the leader. He/she must own the message for himself/herself rather than be the person who says, “They told me to tell you.” Also, virtue conscientious coaches are humble. That is to say they possess a functional humility (verses fake humility) that acknowledges what they don’t know and defers to someone else. They allow their team, a subordinate, or another leader to determine the direction or course of action, because they don’t have the best answer. It has been said, “fake it until you make it,” but functional humility says, “defer/delegate it, so that you can make it. Finally, coaches desiring to form godly character in their athletes must lead by example. This is an artful matching of one’s values with one’s behaviors to the end that others are impacted for Christ.

At this point, the reader may ask methodological questions on how to coach for character; or to put it another way, how to connect the character of the coach with the character of the player, and thus, the team. The following discussion will flesh this out.

How does One Coach Character?

Fostering such virtue is by no means a simple task, though this writer would suggest that a good starting place for resolving such difficulties should be that the focus of ethical reflection and evaluation of athletes is to develop character. First, what is needed is morally ethical coaches, who know what is right, and do what is good. They must demonstrate the character they want to see, care for their athletes deeply, and be dynamic. Great power requires great character. But how does one coach for character? This writer proposes three ways to build character through coaching: 1) demonstrable character built upon servant leadership; 2) a discipleship culture built around sacrificial love; and 3) disciplined choices built for a successful life.

Train Demonstrable Character through “Servant Leadership”

People are constantly looking for methods. God is looking for *men and women*. Methods are often temporary, but what God is looking for is a life. God is far less interested in your results than the person you are becoming. Many people in our life have tried to substitute results for what they lacked: joy, relationship, character. – Dallas Willard⁴

Ephesians 4:11-16 "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together

⁴Dallas Willard, “Becoming the Kind of Leaders Who Can Do the Job” (published in *Cutting Edge Magazine*, Summer 1999, Vineyard USA. Also, currently available as chapter 38 of *Renewing the Christian Mind: Essays, Interviews, and Talks by Dallas Willard*; edited by Gary Black, Jr. HaperOne Publishers, 1999.), 1.

by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

According to Paul, servant leadership involves three realities: weighty responsibility, working towards results, and "the worthy" reward. Paul in saying, "for the work of the ministry," means that the servant leader's responsibility is first and foremost to serve. The is in *διακονίας* in Greek and is analogous to the role of deacon within the church. Deacons in the church function as leaders whose primary role is to serve. Along those lines, in addition to service, the responsibility of the servant leader is be a source of safety and security. In this writer's opinion, the coach is the closest approximation to a deacon, for when one thinks of the definition of what it means to be a coach, the clearest analogy is an actual protected stagecoach. Here, the coach takes its passengers (players) on a journey and serves as a guide, offering protection along the way.

The result and/or destination for the servant leader is also clear in the analogy, as well as, in this passage. The destination for the passenger is determined by his/her desires but is directed toward the destination by the coach. For Paul the destination is three-fold: faith and knowledge in the Son of God, maturity, and being equipped for life. This type of leadership provides what is necessary for the well-being of another. That is what makes it "servant leadership." The phrase "which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." *ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν* in Greek is best rendered "choreographed with energy" and adds color to how the leader is to fulfill his/her responsibility to make everyone around him/her better, set up and sustained by the coach.

The reward for the leader is also three-fold: *Satisfaction*, *Oneness* and/or unity, and the joy of knowing that the greatest *Needs* are being met. In a word the reward for the servant leader is the SON. Satisfaction and significance are enjoyed when the servant leader guides his/her teammate into a genuine experience with Christ "the knowledge of the Son of God." The word for knowledge here is *ἐπιγνώσεως* and is limited to transcendent and moral matters. It has the idea of knowing someone so well and the impact of the person known felt so deeply that, it is then, reflected in the life of the person who has been influenced. This is a legacy word. Leadership is not about what one person can do; it is about what the leader can get other people to do.

A further reward that comes about as a result of servant leadership is oneness. This oneness creates higher levels of engagement, alignment, and ultimately, better execution. This unity is a status word. That is to say, that this is unity which acknowledges a particular set of beliefs and/or values, that result in unified behavior, the status being unity. The final reward listed here is the pleasure in knowing that the major need is being met, namely, redemption. This redemption is both qualitative and quantitative in that it is to be enjoyed here and now but experienced fully in the future.

Practically speaking, presently, Leadership in sports has changed. It has gone from power based upon a position, to influence based upon integrity. If understood this way, leadership becomes an invaluable tool to teach and train student-athletes in character. Leadership can be developed in two ways: 1) through building into the young men and women *responsibility*, and 2) through building out *results*. Leadership is not about what a person can do, but rather what one person can get other people to do. This is best done in community (see section on culture), and the best formation of leadership is done collectively. That is to say, the sum is greater than its parts. This fosters humility and indisputable role understanding.

In building into the athlete, a real sense of responsibility, the coach would need to teach him or her those skills that transcend sport but prove valuable as long as he/she is competing. These include: character, connection/chemistry, competence, clarity/communication, care, and compliance. Practically, this is best done if one has a simple but proven system to work through the above-mentioned elements of leadership responsibility. For example, potential captains, and at the very least leaders of each unit, should be educated on how each discipline works and be given ample opportunity to develop (i.e., experience) each in preparation for their season. Even better is to have members of differing teams on campus go through a leadership academy, designed to enhance strong leadership across the board on athletic teams.

Further, practically, the focus of the leadership academy and/or whatever measures one takes to build responsibility into the pledge is to reverse the trend towards the older one is or the more influence one has, the more rights him/her to be served,” to “the older one is or the more influence one has, the more responsibility they have to serve.” This is creating an earn everything mentality and make-up instead of cultivating an ethic and pathos of entitlement. This is developing a leadership style that is built around the premise of “it is better to give than to receive.”

If responsibility is the foundation for building servant leaders, then the results should be the focus. Practically, there are two time frames for building servant leadership toward results, off-season and in-season. It is this writer’s opinion that the best way to learn how to lead is in a real environment, therefore, preference is given to in-season. Leadership development in-season is about getting players leadership reps, which allow for two things: 1) for them to take responsibility for more than themselves, and 2) to experience directly whether or not he or she succeeded or failed.

So how does one give players who he/she desires to see develop their leadership opportunities to do so? This takes deliberate practice, where the coach creates critical situations for leadership training. Specifically, for example, in groups of threes’ the coach could make players responsible for the success and/or failure for a drill. Another way this could work is when one has a team function scheduled, make three players responsible for the entire team knowing what time the event is going to be at, what each team member needs to bring, and that every player is in attendance. Keep in mind, the coach wants players to feel real weight on their shoulders, real responsibility. Importantly, this must be met with immediate feedback, and should focus on the why. There should also be a system of accountability. Furthermore, taking into account that leadership is communicative, one might give opportunities to aspiring leaders to lead the pre/post practice theme of the day, talking points, and takeaways. Spiritually speaking, one could give developing leaders opportunities to pray for their teammates, though it should be noted, that this works best when the coach is praying with the leaders and having them pray for certain teammates prior to the public leadership window. All things considered, one way to ensure one is coaching for character is to develop servant leadership within the team.

Transform a Discipleship Culture by “Sacrificial Love”

“The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”

– Dallas Willard⁵

Ephesians 4:30-32 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

If culture is how people interact with one another, then Paul is right on the mark when he says, “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as Christ forgave you.” This is a standard of behavior/moral character that catalyzes a culture and produces superior results. For Paul culture is built by what one proclaims, practices, promotes, permits, and produces. Proclaiming the culture is about what is written about what one wants the culture to be and should help to bring clarity to where the business, team, etc. is going. To practice the culture, means to lead by example and apply oneself to the culture. Promoting a culture is the communicative aspect, whereby one defines for the people what their roles will be within the culture. Next, permission is all about what your culture allows. Finally, culture is about how people treat each other and the end result produces an experience for those inside and outside of said culture; and perception is reality. The question becomes: is one operating within a destructive culture, a default culture, or a culture by design?

Paul in formulating the virtues that are to replace the vices, in an attempt to construct harmonious relationships, fleshes out *three* one another’s: kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Kindness is being sympathetic to other’s needs. In a word, it’s hospitality. It is a quality which God Himself demonstrates concretely, to all men and women. And as a response to His merciful kindness, those who have put on the new man are to be kind to others within the Christian community. Compassion or “tender-heartedness” is about heart-felt empathy and speaks for itself. It is sharing in the highs and the lows of your culture and with the people that make up your culture, such that, one feels with them and for them. Finally, forgiveness, *χαριζόμενοι*, which when pronounced sounds like “charity” and it is precisely that, charity. This charity is to be worked out within the ongoing relationships that make up a culture. This is what it means to be grace-filled and as a result gracious to others.

This culture as it grows/goes, takes place in love. Only when sacrificial love is central, is there the right elements for transforming a culture. To put it another way, for Paul, love is the indispensable means of building up the body (i.e., culture). Furthermore, love is not only the means, it is also the measurement, for when love is lacking the demonstration of the gifts have no spiritual value. Love then, describes the sphere of the Christian life and spells out the manner in which the ministry of all is to occur. But what does this look like practically?

⁵Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HaperCollins Publishers, 2014), 42.

Practically, the coach needs to construct a context where moral character training (also known as, spiritual formation) can happen. This culture needs to be an environment where learning takes place and where there are opportunities for coaches and players alike to live out, in Christ, what they are learning. In shaping the culture, as the coach seeks to instill character in his or her players within the program, the above-mentioned leaders should become the drivers and the enhancers, maybe even, the architects of the culture. As the coach seeks to build alignment, he or she must be sure to apply himself/herself to the culture, acting the part; and his/her leaders should follow suit as they seek to achieve results in a way that reinforces the desired culture.

Practically speaking, this is done when the coach creates a culture that is in alignment himself and/or herself (i.e., self-belief), his/her strategy, and the mission of the school and/or community. The first reference point is what one believes, or self-belief. These are the personal beliefs that drive humans to do what they do. One way to do this would be to, in preparation for the upcoming season, take some time, do a stream of consciousness, and list out personal beliefs (i.e., those characteristics that are clearly seen and are crystallizing). The next step would be to organize the list of beliefs into supporting beliefs and driving beliefs. Driving beliefs are values that direct and drive all the others. Supporting beliefs enhance and accelerate the driving beliefs. Please note, that this self-belief is only effective in so far as it becomes a shared belief among the team, therefore, the broader the better!

Next, significantly, the coach must be mindful that culture doesn't exist apart from strategy in sports. This is how the coach wants the team to play the game, compete, and interact, based upon the strategy chosen. This is about execution. For example, the way the coach's players do what they do is the embodiment of their culture, therefore, the coach has to be very strategic in how each member of the team performs. This happens when the player understands the strategic value of culture. This is about how one does every single task, responsibility, and assignment that he/she has on the team. In other words, given the coaches architecting, articulation, alignment of the culture, the player is asking, "what does this task, responsibility, and assignment have to do with whatever core beliefs have been established within the program. This is looking at what one wants each player to do and how he or she wants their players to perform. All of this is based upon the values and beliefs established for the program. Upon establishing said self-beliefs, the coach could then run through each assignment for each player and determine how each element might inform them on how what they are doing aligns with what you/they believe. Ultimately this should be phrased, positioned, and promoted in such a way that what is believed would actually inform how the athlete behaves. In teaching and training an athlete in/on how to do an assignment better in alignment with the culture, for the cause of Christ, the coach gives them skills that transcend sport and forms character for life.

Third, a discipleship-based culture, by design is an interdependent community and should be promoted as such and permeated with love. This is intentionally engaging those external to one's program, who serve as major stakeholders within your school community, in a way that they align with the culture, and ultimately desire to partner with you in co-capturing hearts for Christ. This is also figuring out what a community needs and finding creative ways to serve the community. Practically, the coach would have the team play, embody values and act in ways that the major stakeholders within the community would appreciate and attach to as something they like to see in their community's team. This is done through ensuring that the team knows that they are representatives of something larger, namely the community at large and ultimately the Christian faith, and that embodying said values exemplified through their character endears their

community to the cause of Christ. This is creating hooks for the community to grab ahold of such that they feel like they are an extension of your culture.

Now, what's love got to do with it? If culture is about growth, then in order for there to be development there needs to be an environment (i.e., culture), along with the necessary elements conducive to growth. This growth is cultivated by truth and *love*. The key element in creating a discipleship culture toward transformation is love, particularly, sacrificial love. Love isn't something you feel, it's something one does based upon what one knows to be true of the one who gave Himself up for the world (the person). This kind of love transcends emotion and transforms a culture. Therefore, love is the nutrients in the soil that fosters growth. The more things that are rooted in sacrificial love, the faster it will grow, and the longer it will last. This is foregoing pleasure and instead be willing to experience pain in order to serve and help someone else. This is self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, and the axis of this love is forgiveness. This kind of love motivates, inspires, and energizes the culture, and therefore, must be a part of what a coach instills in each one of his or her athletes. It creates a bond that is unbreakable.

Practically, this is intentionally setting aside a time or times throughout the season where the team in its units (or it could be done as a team) goes and serves someone else, preferably someone less fortunate. This rewires the mind and creates a life-giving culture where the approach in all things is that it is "better to give, than it is to receive." Note, while love is easy to say, it is extremely hard to execute, but when it is embodied, it becomes the driving force for a discipleship culture, and builds a skill that transcends their short time at a particular school as a student-athlete. From a performance standpoint, when things aren't working within competition, especially when adversity hits, normally it is a chemistry issue, not a competence issue, and this is built prior to the moment. A culture if it is to be transforming toward Christlikeness must be centered around love.

Teach Decision-Making Competence for a "Successful/Significant Life"

In us some small part of the potential power in our body stands at the disposal of our conscious through, intention, and choice. In essence, an individual's character is nothing but the pattern of habitual ways in which that person comports his or her body—whether conforming to the conscious intentions of the individual or not. Dallas Willard⁶

Ephesians 4:17–29 “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 53.

rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Paul teases out three things that the Christian responses are to be all about: 1) his/her head/headspace (i.e., mindset), 2) his/her heart (“putting off” and “putting on”), and 3) his/her hands (“doing good”). To put it another way, disciplined behavior is all about awareness and/or attention, attitude, and action. Instead of navigating away from right choices, Paul is calling the believer to a disciplined behavior that is intentional, purposeful, and skillful. The consistent application of these disciplines, not the circumstances one faces, determines the quality of the result one produces, or success in life.

In Ephesians 4:17–29, when Paul deals with behavior and/or moral character, he sees it as starting in the mind and he speaks of the mind in three ways, two are negative and the last one is positive: 1) “futile,” 2) “darkened,” 3) “renewed.” One whose mind is futile is one who’s thinking is without aim, without reason. Paul then is calling the believer to be purposeful in how he thinks about what he/she is called into/to do. Herein lies the motivation to make decisions with purpose, choosing what is best according to the need of the moment. Additionally, this purpose of mind, prioritizes values/beliefs and determines what one will give their attention to, which in the end drives behavior. In a word, this is focus. When Paul speaks of “the darkened mind,” what he desires for the disciple is instead “clarity of mind.” Clarity of mind drives the quality of the response. Instead of being mindless, the Christian is called to be mindful in making decisions. This is responding to the events of life with intention, also known as, conscious competence. As clarity increases so too does ownership and/or control. This mindset filters out those thoughts that detract from taking every thought captive (to Christ), in order to respond with discipline. Lastly, Paul in describing the proper mindset, says, “be renewed in the Spirit of your mind.” To let yourself be renewed means to be full of hope and opportunity, to see things as they really are. It is the skill of getting into a productive emotional state. The word ἀνανεοῦσθαι carries with it the idea of becoming young again, and brings to mind images of the joy-filled, imaginative, and creative child in the arms of his/her Father. This leads to acting, responding, and behaving with skill.

The next step in behaving with discipline, according to Paul, is engaging the heart and then executing from the heart. Paul uses the “put on, put off” language often in his letters to refer to the attitude that is required for right action. It is emotional agility. The Christian is to lay aside the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life, and instead lay hold of the new man/women that he/her is becoming. The word ἐνδύσασθαι is onomatopoeic, and means to endow or be endowed with something. Paul then is saying in essence, “embrace the change.” This is the image of someone changing his/her clothes in light of being given new ones. This change results in how one talks to himself/herself. In a word, it is self-talk. It is the emotional ability to “be angry and not sin.” That is to say, one knows how to get out of a negative emotional state into a positive one. It is the positive energy needed to act with purpose, intention, and skill. It is the agility to be able to recognize a situation and produce the energy required to execute within it.

The final step in managing one’s responses with purpose, intention, and skill is “doing good.” Paul says, “performing with his own hands what is good.” It is all about the hands. For Paul, doing good is to be found in one’s speech, how one treats his/her neighbor, and ultimately

in how one responds in the moment. In a few words, Paul spells out what it means to step up and take the action one needs for the outcome they want. It is the by product of having formed the discipline needed to build the life one wants. According to Paul, this type of response is most important when the event is most challenging, contrary to the contemporary culture, and distinct from the old way of life. This type of a response creates an experience for others and when it is enacted with purpose, intention, and skill impacts others for Christ. This is acting with discipline and is moral character lived out.

Practically, the coach should utilize a tool for helping his or her athletes think strategically in response to situations they experience. In other words, coaches should provide mechanisms for disciplined decision-making. This is a system for being intentional about the way one thinks, makes decisions, and acts. This is a transcendent skill that will be needed far beyond the call of duty. Moral character when taught effectively and trained consistently will act as a self-evaluative tool also important for life inside and outside of the game. This can also be used as a filtering mechanism at the intersection of what matters and what he or she can influence. It will help them to prioritize well and focus their attention and pour their energy into what matters. Building disciplined character also gives the player control and teaches them that they have ownership over their attitude and their actions. Learning a decision-making process that is workable will include skills for adapting and adjusting in response to change. This system of teaching and training toward moral behavior should enable resilience, eliminate resistance, and equip them to resolve conflict. All that to say, one needs a system that is broad enough to include numerous applications, which speaks again to coaching character that transcends the sport.

Practically, the coach should focus on developing the speed, the skill, and the stacking of the good responses of the student-athlete. This will strengthen response elasticity, emotional agility and produce a real endurance needed for life. This is also known as response quality. This is teaching the athlete to engage in the best response in the best way possible. The coach has to be intentional about setting up high pressure moments that closely approximates the pressure, emotion, and intensity under which those decisions will have to be made in life when it matters. It's teaching them to be able to identify what the right thing to do is and giving them the emotional agility and experiential acuity to respond with speed. The speed of the response is developed when the coach makes things really simple (i.e., his/her standards, rules, principles) and creates a system for fleshing out said standards with speed, this system needs to be one that is simple enough that whatever the decision is that has to be made it can be executed quickly and with quality. Additionally, as the coach is developing within the player a quickening mechanism for making good decisions, he/she must also build into the athlete adept self-awareness, situational awareness, and an awareness of their response affect.

Moreover, in teaching disciplined behavior, the coach will develop within the player, on the operational level, an intuitive ability within themselves to think through and ultimately work through three crucial questions: 1) What is one doing (clarity)? 2) Why is one doing it (conviction)? 3) How is one doing it (competence)? This is best built on the battleground of adverse situations. This is teaching them to repeatedly overcome adversity and ultimately have success by getting them to focus on how to deal with it and what needs to be done in order to deal with it, instead of focusing on what's happening to him/her. Practically, this is getting them to ask and answer the question, "What's one adversity your facing or that you know is coming that you need to work through how you are going to deal with it? This would be followed by

role-playing prior to the actual moment, where the players have opportunities to work through it for themselves.

Finally, growing purpose-driven behavior must include teaching *real* wisdom, which is the ability to see the end result within present actions. It is taking the black and white of Scripture (i.e., the words) and applying it to the gray of life. It is *clearly* knowing what to do, knowing why one is doing it (because of his or her *convictions*), and how they are going to do it (with *competence*). Disciplined behavior, then, is the byproduct of this process. It is an outward expression of an inward reality, knowing what is true and doing what is good. A part of developing wisdom-filled responses, one must build into the mind and make-up of the character of the person certain restraints. When one has a vision for his/her life that is clear, based upon hope, and is workable, then he/she can act with restraint. This is rewards-based wisdom not rules-based wisdom and has a more positive influence in determining the quality of the outcomes one produces.

This study attempts to vindicate the virtue of sports and cast a vision for the coach that in vigorously pursuing Christ-like character, he/she can be the vehicle God can use to transform lives for Christ. When the coach is dynamic in his leadership, full of deep love, for his/her players and his community, and is demonstrably pursuing Christ, he/she has a power that wins hearts for God. That is to say, his/her good work builds a platform of good will, from which to proclaim the good news.

In conclusion then, while people still may question whether or not modern-day sport carries with itself a redemptive quality worth pursuing, this study argues that they inherently do, and when filtered through the eyes of the coach whose focus is on character formation, both within himself/herself and within the athlete, one finds that “He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that one could ask or think, according to power that works within him/her, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations *of sport* forever and ever. Amen” (cf. Eph 3:20).