

# BIG-TIME SPORTS

## IDOLATRY (WHAT IS THE PLACE OF SPORT IN MY LIFE?)

### THE HURDLE

*I don't suppose there's hardly anything in my life that gets more of my time and attention than sports. It's been that way as long as I can remember and I don't apologize for it. I love to compete, to challenge myself against the best, and if I'm honest, I think I even love the practice it takes to get there! I've heard athletes say after winning championships that they wonder if there's more to life, but I'm pretty convinced if I won the ultimate prize in my sport, that would be enough for me.*

Do you ever wonder if sport is worth the time and attention you give it? Why or why not?

Do you think it is possible to be fully committed to God and fully committed to your sport at the same time? Explain.

Would a championship be your ultimate satisfaction? Explain.

Put the Emerson quote in your own words. What do you think about his idea?

---

***The gods we worship write their names on our faces ... a man will worship something ... (so we should) be careful what we worship.***

Ralph Waldo Emerson  
American Poet/Essayist, 1803-1882

---

### I HEAR YA

There are people in the Bible who struggled between worshipping God or something made from man.

**God requires exclusive allegiance:** "I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:1)

**Elijah draws a line:** "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." (1Kings 18:21)

**The people of Israel served self-made images:** "They served idols...they did not listen but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God." (2 Kings 17:12, 14)

**Disciples are called to seek God first:** "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to you ... " (Matthew 6:33)

## LISTEN UP!

Idolatry is *an excessive or blind adoration, reverence, or devotion to people, things, or ideas*. While it may seem harmless to offer complete devotion to people or things alongside God, doing so will eventually catch up with you. In Romans 1:18-20, Paul argues that all humans are born with an intuitive sense that God exists, but instead of worshipping Him, they bow down to created “things,” devoting themselves to systems of their own making. In the rest of the passage He explains the unavoidable consequences when we make this “divine exchange.”

Read Romans 1:18-25

1. Verses 23 and 25 show us this “divine exchange” which amounts to idolatry. How do the people in these verses demonstrate idolatry?
2. Idolatry involves exchanging the truth for a lie: worshipping a “false idol” that promises to give you something if you serve it. What does sport as an idol promise to give you in return for your devotion/allegiance (worship)?

How does this differ from what God promises through the “good news” of Jesus?

3. Verses 21 and 22 reveal that when the created order gets reversed (serving sport instead of serving God), the consequences lead to dishonoring God, ingratitude, futile thinking, a darkened heart, and foolishness. Even though we see the negative results and the reality of what any idol delivers, why is sport still such a seductive idol?
4. If God promises to deliver what the idol won't or can't, what might keep you from trusting and serving Him above all else?

### For THE Record

*God makes it clear that He is jealous for His own place in our lives. He won't share the podium with anyone or anything else. All other idols are imposters; they promise glory for us but deliver death in the end. God promises Life in exchange for our devotion and allegiance. The irony: when we surrender our man-made gods and allow Him to have first place in our hearts and minds, we receive the benefits other gods promise but only One can provide: inner peace, personal security, real love, lasting purpose, future hope, forgiveness, and more. God deserves our worship whether we benefit or not, but in His love for us, giving Him the glory due His name gives us access to life as it is meant to be lived on earth as it is in heaven.*

## YOUR MOVE

1. C.S. Lewis says, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." Sport takes the place of an idol in our lives when the natural desires of satisfaction, accomplishment and glory turn into self-serving pursuits. If you are honest, what do you sometimes want more than God? After this study, in what ways might this pursuit have become idolatrous in your life?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8,9. Faith becomes evident in your life when you **repent** or turn away from idols and **replace** them with the person of Christ. What do you need to repent of now? What do you need specifically from Jesus to fill the void?
3. What is Lewis trying to communicate in the quote to the right? If what he suggests is true, then how might it change the way you approach personal idols in the future?

"God, I give You \_\_\_\_\_ in my life. I confess that I trust in this more than You sometimes. I believe by faith that You will give me exactly what I need and I will seek to honor You above all else. Thank You for being a God who is worthy of my trust."

***Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.***

- CS Lewis  
Author / Professor

Visit **The Training Room** to continue to learn how to worship and serve God above all else.

**THE TRAINING ROOM**  
[OVER] 



# THE TRAINING ROOM

## AS YOU ENTER

**"YOU TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS TO SERVE A LIVING AND TRUE GOD." (1 THESSALONIANS 1:9B)**

### Idolatry Examined

Read the following verses below and begin to reflect on what God might be teaching you. Record your thoughts following each verse.

- Acts 3:19
- Acts 14:11-18
- Romans 12:1-2
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- Ephesians 5:6-11

### Who Gets the Glory?

Many Christian athletes *say* that they want to bring glory to God but instead primarily serve their own egos, reputations, and thirst for affirmation. God wants first place in your life! That means all desires, pursuits and choices are submissive to His leadership in your life. Identify a few areas that you are seeking your will and desires above God's will, confess it as idolatrous, and then offer yourself again as a "living and holy sacrifice to God." (Romans 12:1,2)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

### Idolatry in Sport

Using the chart below, identify what it might look like when a positive, natural desire gets misdirected away from God. Recognize and repent of your participation in idolatry and replace it with Jesus Christ.

Statement	Positive Natural Desires	Misdirected
Only winning can make me feel important and worth something.	Brings value, accomplishment	I will win ... I have to!
I am regularly jealous of other's successes.	High standards are good	Beating others is better than improving
Sport rescues me from my life's circumstances.	Hope for the future	Success covers my personal pain
I do whatever it takes to win, even if I compromise my character.	Determination and drive	Scoreboard or honor?
I experience tremendous frustration when my goals are blocked.	Goals are motivating	Anger helps me compete better
I desperately want to please my coach and/or parents.	Love for others	I am happy when they are happy

## AS YOU LEAVE

- MEMORIZE ROMANS 12:1-2 AND COMMIT YOURSELF TO GOD DAILY.
- ENJOY SPORT INSTEAD OF NEED IT FOR YOUR OWN SIGNIFICANCE.
- RECOGNIZE WHEN THE "DIVINE ORDER" IS UPSIDE DOWN AND KEEP GOD FIRST IN EVERYTHING.

