

## **How to Use the Wellspring of Life Program**

As you set out to integrate this material into your coaching practices and other facets of your athletic program, you'll need to know a few things about how we've organized and intended the material.

First, you'll need to understand the format of this booklet. We used 1 Timothy 4:12 to give structure to each discipline in the program. ("Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.") Each discipline is divided into five sections, which you can think about as "stages" of developing the discipline. Those sections, or stages, are:

### ***In Faith*** — (Focus: Define and Accept)

This section of the program contains Scripture, definitions, and explanations which you should use to introduce the concept of each discipline to your athletes. The goal is to help your athletes to understand how Scripture defines the discipline, and to accept the importance of the discipline (because God desires it).

Through this stage, your athletes will develop the ability to *define the discipline*.

### ***In Purity*** — (Focus: Challenge and Internalize)

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2) - This section of the program contains challenges and discussion questions for your athletes. This is the stage where an inner impact (change) happens in an athlete's heart, so be aware that this stage will take time and prayer. Your desire for your athletes to internalize (claim) the importance of the discipline in their own lives is not going to be immediate, and it will not be produced by you or by them. Trust God, pray consistently, and give Him time to do what he intends.

You should set aside a certain time in your practices when you can ask and discuss these questions — when your athletes don't feel hurried or rushed. (After your warm-up, while your athletes are stretching, is a great time...or you may want to close practice each day with this time.) If you're going to be intentional about making their athletic experience something that encourages spiritual growth, you need to build this into your daily practices.

Some of the questions are really *sets* of many questions. Don't feel the need to get through an entire section of questions during one practice, and don't allow yourself to think, "I don't have time for this." Work through them over time; do what is manageable; don't ignore this important time of challenge.

Through this stage, your athletes will develop the *desire for discipline*.

### ***In Speech*** — (Focus: Verbalize and Commit)

This section of the program contains longer Scripture passages for your team to memorize and recite together. A common commitment to studying and understanding Scripture together is a great source of beneficial unity for a team. You could use these passages to choose a "team verse" for your season, and as a way to continually draw your athletes back to the concept of the discipline that is your focus for the season. Reciting Scripture as a team generates a lot of spirit, and it provides an activity in which every member of the team can participate and contribute enthusiastically. If having all team members memorize a lengthy passage proves too ambitious, assign one verse or bit of the passage per player, and you'll be able to recite the entire passage *as a team*.

This stage in a person's development is when he begins to desire to verbalize his commitment to his team — "raising the bar" for his expectations for himself, and giving permission for others to hold him accountable to his commitments. The words of Scripture provide the "fuel" for this commitment, so it's important to expose your athletes to those words. In addition, be sure that your athletes know there's a time available for them to address the team (before, during, or after practices and games), so that they can

verbally share confessions, challenges, and other thoughts.

Each athlete will enter this stage at a different time, because the accomplishment of the previous stage in each athlete's life will be unique, according to God's desire and timing. Thus, don't pressure an athlete to make a public, verbal confession and/or commitment to discipline before he is ready.

Please don't confuse a public, verbal commitment to discipline with a team commitment to a coach's expectations, though. You should require each of your athletes to agree to and uphold the basic expectations that you have of each team member (treating teammates well, listening to the coach, giving their full effort, etc), whether or not they are ready to submit themselves to a more disciplined walk with Christ.

One other great opportunity to challenge your students in this stage is to develop a "core covenant" together. Refer to Bruce Brown's booklet on Core Covenants (which you received along with the Wellspring materials) for more information and examples of this excellent team commitment activity.

Through this stage, your athletes will make a *commitment to discipline*.

### ***In Life*** — (Focus: Train and Grow)

This section of the program contains "sport applications" to help you and your athletes understand how each discipline can be exemplified in the arena of athletics. These applications provide your athletes with a "picture" of what each discipline means in the life of an athlete — habits and challenges that can be incorporated into each athlete's daily routine.

This stage is marked by an athlete's bringing his daily habits into line with his profession of faith. A repentant person understands discipline as a continuing process, a daily "turning from" and "turning toward", and his actions display a true intentionality in submitting to and obeying Christ. An athlete at this stage has done more than just commit to the discipline; he has *submitted his life* to the discipline, and is practicing it.

Each "In Life" section is sub-divided into three sections — to provide "sport applications" of each discipline for athletes at different levels of maturity or development. The first level is the Disciple Athlete; he needs to be taught the fundamentals, and his development requires a lot of oversight. Repetition of basic habits is critical at this stage; this athlete's focus is on *training*. The second level is the Apprentice Athlete; he is committed to and actively working on improving. His faithfulness to the task can be trusted, so he needs less oversight; this athlete's focus is on *practice*. The third level is the Servant-Leader Athlete; his habits and example have elevated him to a leadership position, and he understands that leadership is defined by a responsibility to serve others. He does things with care, and he gives oversight to others. He sees the "big picture" of team and is motivated by helping others to learn and grow; this athlete's focus is on *maintaining* the health and success of the team.

These different levels are often closely associated with age. You might identify freshmen as Disciples, sophomores and juniors as Apprentices, and seniors as Servant-Leaders — and that's an alright starting point for applying the different levels. However, keep in mind that you will have older athletes who are less mature (and not ready to lead), and you will have younger athletes who are more mature (and capable of more demanding challenges). Treat each athlete as an individual; don't assume that an athlete of a certain age should be "lumped in" with others his age, when using these challenges to guide him in his submission to discipline.

One great use of this section is to photocopy the list of applications and challenges for the discipline that you've chosen as a focus — and to distribute it to your athletes. You can give each athlete a certain list (based on your expectations of him), or you can give all three lists to every athlete (and have each athlete evaluate himself). Give careful consideration to what will best encourage your athletes to more fully submit themselves to Christ in discipline, and challenge them firmly and lovingly to that end.

Through this stage, your athletes choose to *submit to discipline*.

## *In Love* — (Focus: Serve and Extend)

This section includes basic challenges to help your athletes evaluate their application of these disciplines in their relationship with others. This level of challenge is applicable for all athletes, but will likely only be “taken to heart” by athletes who have already shown a commitment to the previous stage.

Athletes who have learned and excelled in the fundamentals of their sport are then called to a higher level of excellence; they are required to “know the game” , to master the intricacies and “intangibles” that go beyond basic skills. We regard athletes as “great” because they have more than skill and athleticism; they have a wisdom about the game and an ability to “make their teammates better” and achieve a level of success that other athletes do not achieve.

Likewise, athletes who have shown an ability to successfully submit themselves to discipline are called to a higher level of maturity. (“You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.” - Matthew 25:21) They are required to “know others” , to apply themselves to the “intangibles” that demonstrate a selfless priority. These athletes are concerned about their impact on others — teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, fans and spectators, classmates, teachers, parents, siblings, church, community, and others. The actions of athletes at this level are intentional, selfless, forgiving, and abundant.

Do not allow your players’ commitment to discipline to be “words only”; insist that actions accompany their words. As a team, decide upon ways that you will “live out” the implications of Scripture through loving and serving others. Design team commitments, projects, and activities to give players opportunity to extend their discipline beyond the bounds of athletics. When appropriate and possible, invite the players’ families or the student body to participate.

The questions included in the “In Love” sections are not complex, but the answers and implications are. A coach who is serious about helping athletes into this level of discipline and maturity must give careful consideration to the questions before he discusses them with this athletes, and he must pray faithfully for the hearts of his players. Remember also that these are *relationship* issues; thus, a coach who has not built a good relationship with his players may not be able to deal with these issues. If that’s true of you as a coach, your first step needs to be to improve your relationship with your players; they must trust you and know that you care about them before they’ll allow you into this part of their lives.

Through this stage, your athletes will *apply the discipline* they have learned.

Keep in mind that each of your athletes will not likely pass through each of these stages in a single year. Younger (or less mature) athletes need to be encouraged in the initial stages, and older (or more mature) athletes may experience growth in the later stages. Don’t expect every athlete to respond in the same ways, and do not belittle your athletes for their difficulties at any stage (especially when they are sincere in their efforts and struggles). Do challenge them, help them to see their struggles as profitable, pray with them, encourage them, and always keep them grounded in and accountable to Scripture.

Following are a few additional suggestions to help you as you integrate the *Wellspring* material into your daily routines.

- When you make your practice plans for each day, be intentional about *making time* for discipline training. All coaches are busy; don’t allow your busy-ness to be an excuse for failing to discipline your players. All coaches see practice time as a priority; don’t allow your priorities to lead to neglect. If you define your sport as having value only in itself (if you fail to discipline your players for Godliness), your players will define their value and success only through their athletic accomplishments.
- When you make your practice plans for each day, be intentional about *making specific plans* for discipline training. For each drill that you plan, list the disciplines that you hope to reinforce through that drill. If a drill doesn’t teach any disciplines, eliminate it or restructure it (to teach something of value). *Plan* to use words and phrases that encourage and reinforce the discipline that you’re seeking to teach.

- In the midst of practice, be intentional about following your discipline training plans for the day. Refer often to your plans throughout practice, and be sure that your words and reactions are communicating what you intended. If time runs short and you have to eliminate certain drills or activities, consider your discipline training; don't easily sacrifice a drill or activity that is critical to what you intended to teach.
- After practices and games, consult with your assistant coaches; ask them to evaluate how consistently you integrated discipline training, and evaluate together the athletes' response to that training. This will help you to adjust your teaching strategies to a more effective method of impacting your athletes.
- Develop pre-game, in-game, halftime, and post-game rituals that continue your discipline training. Allow your Servant-Leaders to participate in designing and leading these activities. Use these habits as helpful reminders for your players; don't allow the hype and focus of "game day" to allow a neglect for your focus on discipline.
- Take time to pray together as a team, and encourage players to pray with and for one another. The posture of humility that enables your athletes to submit and grow in discipline is practiced through prayer, and staying grounded in desiring God's will (not our own) is critical to our ability to see discipline as profitable. Only God will make your efforts successful, so be certain to pray consistently for His favor.
- Reconsider the ways in which your coaching staff and team gives recognition to your athletes. Are you recognizing and praising athletes for their character, or just for their athletic achievements? How are you recognizing athletes that submit themselves to discipline?