



LIVIN' LARGER

SOCIAL JUSTICE [AM I MADE FOR MORE THAN SPORT?]

THE HURDLE

At every level of competition, I've always thought of my participation in sports as fun for me and entertainment for others. But after recently hearing a sermon on social justice, I wonder: As a Christian athlete, should I be concerned with using my sport and the influence it provides to somehow lessen other peoples' suffering? I suppose that seems pretty dramatic, but now I can't get the question out of my head: What does being a Christian athlete have to do with caring for marginalized or hurting people? I've been focusing on being a good person myself by working hard, not cheating, respecting competitors, having a positive attitude, but now I'm wondering if that's enough.

My Christian friends seem to be at one extreme or another when it comes to this issue. One says we should work on separating ourselves from the "world" and its cares, emphasizing only the spiritual dimension. Another friend involves herself with lots of community service but never seems to speak directly about Christ with anyone.

Why is it difficult to think of the words "sport" and "compassion" in the same sentence?

Can you think of a situation recently where your heart was moved to compassion for others?

Can you relate to either of the scenarios described in the second paragraph above? How?

“

Science may have found a cure for most evils, but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all—the apathy of human beings.

Helen Keller
Blind and Deaf Educator

”

I HEAR YA

The Bible is full of people who struggled to understand the harmony between being good and doing good, between loving God and loving their neighbor.

Jesus questions the religious: “If you love those who love you, what reward have you?...and if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?” (Matthew 5:46,47)

Moses challenges those who are blessed: “If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother. Rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs.” (Deuteronomy 15:7,8)

John explains real love for God: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (I John 4:20)

James encourages a faith in action: “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:15,16)

LISTEN UP

A religious man in Jesus' time tried to prove he was righteous without being caring or compassionate. Jesus uses a story to illustrate that "true righteousness" is evidenced by how well we love and care for others, especially those who cannot care for themselves. He challenges the man to rethink what it means for God's love to be demonstrated in the world through His people.

Read Luke 10:25-37

1. Describe what happened to this 'No Name' man going to Jericho.
2. When you read about these types of situations in the news, how do you tend to respond initially? Do you lean toward compassion or toward judgment? Why?
3. Identify the three people who saw this hurting man and their initial response to the situation.

	Person	Response	Possible Reason
a.			
b.			
c.			

Luke mentions that each person "saw" this man in the same situation. What might they have "seen" from their perspective and why do they observe it so differently?

4. Describe in detail what the Samaritan did for this man.
What were the possible risks involved personally, socially, and economically?
5. Which person in the story can you most identify with and why?

FOR THE RECORD

True religion demands seeing the world as God sees it, broken beyond human repair and in need of both spiritual and physical transformation. While the "kingdom of God" will not be fully experienced until Christ returns, His followers bring a taste of heaven to earth every time they act contrary to its brokenness in His name. God's spiritual renewal in our lives is not solely for our benefit, but so He can live through us: healing broken hearts, restoring damaged

relationships, redeeming material creation. A personal ethical cleansing is only part of our commission—touching the world around us with the compassion of Christ fills it out. Jesus uses the unique shape of our lives—personality, talents, experiences, spiritual gifts, even athletic influence—to bless the dark corners of the world with life-giving involvement. Ministering to those in need around us is not a community-service box to check; it IS the Christ-following life lived out.



YOUR MOVE

1. Describe when you have “been on a journey” and passed by someone hurting in need of help, either on your team or elsewhere. How did you feel and what are possible reasons you passed by?

- You were in too big of a hurry
- You didn't really know how to help
- You didn't really want to be inconvenienced
- You already have enough concerns of your own
- Your help really is nothing compared to the needs in the world

2. After learning about the Samaritan's response in this study, does your view of what it means to live out the gospel of Jesus need to change? Would you do anything different above?

3. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is trying to bridge the gap between loving God and loving neighbor, between an individual spirituality (vertical) and a social concern for others (horizontal). American churches historically tend to organize themselves around one of these two extremes below. Which side do you tend toward?

Individual Spirituality

Word oriented
Tract evangelism
Spiritual need focused
Separate from the culture
Systematic theology
Conservative politics

Social Concern

Action oriented
Feed the poor
Physical need focused
Engage and restore the culture
Practical theology
Liberal politics

4. If the gospel of Jesus demands caring for both the spiritual and physical conditions of people, how might leaning too hard on one column or another hinder you from living out the entirety of the gospel? If you see yourself solely in one of these camps, what adjustments in your perspective need to be made?
5. Write the names of two people on your team or in your work setting that you avoid simply because they are *insignificant or different* (racially, socially, economically, physically, etc.)? In what ways (if any) are these people viewed differently by those who have money, power and influence? What steps could you take now toward being a Good Samaritan to them?



Those whose names are written in gold letters in the honour roll of humanity are not those who looked at their fellow-men with a conscious and a contemptuous superiority, nor are they those who regarded the struggles of mankind with a cool detachment; they are those who cared so much, and who sorrowed so much, that the sorrow of their hearts drove them to spend their lives in the service of mankind.

William Barclay,
German Theologian, 1907-1978



For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more exercises to challenge your heart and increase your capacity to care for others.

AS YOU ENTER

“WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?” (MICAH 6:8)

Are You Prejudice?

Being prejudice means that you ‘prejudge’ or are impartial to someone for particular reasons: social or economic status, religious background, color of skin, popularity, etc. Most people would not admit to being prejudice but everyone is to some degree for we cannot escape our own worldview shaped by our culture, family background, and experiences. Reflect on the passages below to see what God might be saying to you about your own prejudices.

James 2:1-13 Are there certain types of people you applaud or honor?

Isaiah 58:1-12 Does your ‘religion’ embrace social needs?

Matthew 25:31-46 Do you care for the hurting or marginalized?

Community Service or Relief Work

While seeing and meeting needs as you journey is ideal, it may help your heart and confidence to get involved with community service or relief work in your town. Not only will it help others, but will also unify your team around a higher purpose for existing together.

Here are some ideas:

- Organize prison sporting events or visitation (Angel Tree)
- Serve in soup kitchens or clothes closets (Social Service or churches)
- Help to repair homes (Habitat for Humanity or churches)
- After school programs or tutoring
- Big Brother Big Sister Program

Sports and Social Justice

Sports, like music, plays a powerful role in culture, transcending language, social and economic barriers. Can you imagine what could happen if there was racial unity and generosity embraced and modeled in sports? If athletes and coaches were willing to stand up and lock arms for social justice, the world might take notice that people who are often considered in a high position can go low enough to be kind and compassionate toward those who are hurting. Reflect on the book of Esther in the Old Testament, especially chapters 1-4, and make observations about Esther.

Heritage and family background: 2:1-7

Character and courage: 4:1-17

Esther realized that an opportunity was knocking for her to stand up for the marginalized even though it might cost her. Esther 4:14b could read “who knows whether you have not attained ‘this position’ for such a time as this?” **If not now, then when? If not you, then who?**

AS YOU LEAVE

- » MEDITATE ON JAMES 2 AND ASK THE LORD TO GIVE YOU COMPASSION TO SEE OTHERS AS HE DOES.
- » WAKE UP EACH DAY INTENDING TO SERVE OTHERS NO MATTER THEIR SOCIAL STATUS OR COLOR OF SKIN.
- » PRAY FOR COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES.