

MEMORY VERSES

Week 1 – December 4, 2021

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). – John 1:41

Week 2 – December 11, 2021

*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
–Matthew 6:6*

Week 3 – December 18, 2021

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. – 2 Timothy 2:15

Week 4 – January 8, 2022

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective – James 5:16

Week 5 – January 15, 2022

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – Ephesians 2:4-5

Week 6 – January 22, 2022

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. – 1 Corinthians 12:4

Week 7 – January 29, 2022

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. – Philippians 3:7

Week 8 – February 5, 2022

In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:3-4

Week 9 – February 12, 2022

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. – James 1:19-20

Week 1 GAME PLAN: TELL A TEAMMATE

Mark Price was one of the best free-throw shooters in NBA history. When he finished his career in 1997, he retired with a career percentage of .904. This meant that for every 100 free throws he took in a game, he made 90 of them. But that wasn't the greatest thing he did as a player in the NBA. No, the best thing he ever did was to live such an impressive life that one of his teammates became a Christian because of it. While a member of the Cleveland Cavaliers, Price had a teammate named Craig Ehlo. Ehlo and Price became friends. The more Craig watched Mark, the more he noticed that there was something different about him. Finally, Mark and his wife, Laura, asked Craig and his wife, Jani, to visit their house. They had a good conversation about why Mark and his wife were different, which was their relationship with Jesus. Eventually, Craig and his wife became Christians. Do you think your example can make a difference to others? Our friends who don't know Jesus like you do watch to see what kind of person you are? Think about all the things you do with your friends throughout the day. You sit in class with them. You play ball with them. You talk on the phone with them. You hang out at each other's houses. You ride bikes together. How many times during all of those hours together do you think about whether or not you are being a good example? It's not an easy thing to do. That's why you have to ask God to help you be a good example. Not someone who tells everyone how righteous he or she is. Not a person who goes around telling everyone how bad they are. Just a dependable friend who keeps doing what is right. Like Mark Price, be a good example. That's more effective than a 90-percent shooting average. In the Bible, there is a guy by the name of Andrew. The first thing he did when he learned about Jesus was tell his brother Simon, who we better know as Peter (John 1:41). Peter got to do some incredible things including walking on water. Don't forget to tell others about Christ but not only with your words, but by the way you live.

MEMORY VERSE FOR DECEMBER 4: *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). -John 1:41*

Week 2 GAME PLAN: A PLACE TO PRAY

If your church looked like a shower room, would you go? For many professional athletes, that's exactly where they go to pray. Most pro basketball, baseball, and football teams have a chaplain who meets with the players at least once a week, usually on Sunday, to pray and study the Bible. They meet wherever they can find a quiet space away from the noise of a team preparing for a game. And sometimes, the best place to meet is in the shower room. Nobody goes in there before the game. As the season wears on, the players look forward to getting together for chapel, because they know they will have a special place to pray. No matter whether it's a training room, a coach's office, or the shower room, this prayer sanctuary helps the players stay in touch with God. Do you have a special place in your house where you can pray? Imagine how nice it would be to have a place where you go every day to meet with God. Maybe there's a spare room in the basement where people seldom go. Or perhaps your dad's workbench in the garage. Or it could be your own bedroom. Make it someplace where there is no tv, no radio, no magazines. Put a Bible there and a pad of paper on which you can write down prayer requests. When Jesus wanted some special time alone with God, He sometimes went into nearby hills near Jerusalem. That was His refuge where He could have heart-to-heart talks with the Father. You may not be able to have a place as majestic as a mountain, but that's okay. Jesus suggested that you "go into your room, close the door and pray" (Matthew 6:6) Developing a prayer place could make a big difference in your relationship with God. You'll find yourself looking forward to getting together with Him. It may not be a shower room or a mountain but think about finding a place to pray. Mark 1:35

MEMORY VERSE FOR DECEMBER 11: *"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen."* Matthew 6:6

Week 3 GAME PLAN: GOD, YOUR COACH, WANTS WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU

Coaches come in all shapes, sizes, and styles.

Some coaches think the best way to get their point across is to YELL AT YOU REALLY LOUD SO YOU DON'T MISS WHAT THEY ARE SAYING!!!! Others might not be quite so loud, yet they can throw some zingers your way that make your ears burn. The next time you watch the NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, notice the coaches. There are the Bob Knight-type coaches who look like they are about to explode. There are the Pat Summitt-type coaches who are intense and serious but under control. Back in the 1970s, there was a coach who some say was the greatest coach of the twentieth century. His name was John Wooden. He would sit calmly on the bench with a rolled-up program in his hands. He never yelled or screamed. He simply talked to his players, guiding them quietly through their game plan. His method worked. His team, UCLA, won 10 NCAA titles. No matter what style your coach displays, there will come times when he or she will have to point out some things to you that you are doing wrong or that you could do better. Your response will go a long way toward telling what kind of athlete you will be. If you listen and learn, you'll get better. If you pout and refuse to learn, you'll never improve. This old saying has helped a lot of young athletes: "The player who is never criticized is the one who should worry." In other words, if your coach never yells at you, it may be because he or she doesn't consider you a key part of the team. Coaches tend to spend the most time on players who will help the team. Let's look at this idea in relation to your faith. God, like a coach, may find it necessary to discipline you. Where He does, listen and learn. He knows what's ahead, and He knows just what you need.

MEMORY VERSE FOR DECEMBER 18: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. -2 Timothy 2:15*

WEEK 4 GAME PLAN: YOU FIGURE IT OUT

Here's a mystery. Read it and try to figure out what happens. A college basketball coach by the name of Jane Albright was attending her team's spring banquet. It was at the University of Wisconsin, where Jane coaches and her players were there to receive their awards for another successful season. Jane was waiting for her turn to speak when she began to have a really, really, bad headache. Not just one of those headaches that a little nap and a couple of Tylenol fixes. This was a major headache. It got so bad that Jane had to be rushed to the hospital. As she lay on the hospital bed, she began to hear people talking about doing brain surgery - ON HER! The doctors had discovered that she was bleeding in her brain, and they were going to go in there and fix it. When she heard that, Jane began to pray. At the same time, the word was spreading to everyone who knew her or knew about her: "Jane is in bad shape. Pray for her." As Jane lay there in that hospital room, she felt absolutely terrible. She began to realize that she might die. Instead of giving a speech at a basketball banquet, she could soon be having speeches made about her at her funeral. While doctors whispered all around her, she made a decision. In her pain, she prayed and told God that if He wanted to take her, He could take her. (Of course, He knew that already.) She was a Christian, and she told God she was ready to die. A feeling of peace swept over her. Soon the doctors took some more tests to make sure they knew what to fix when they opened up Jane's skull. To their surprise, their tests revealed that everything was okay. The doctors were puzzled. All that blood from the bleeding was gone. They didn't know what had happened. That's the mystery. What happened to Jane? A bunch of well-trained, intelligent, hardworking doctors couldn't figure out what had happened to her. Why did she get better without surgery? How did she remain alive? You know the answer, don't you? Jane does, "I really felt the power of prayer," she says as she recalls that surprising situation. Prayer is the most amazing thing you'll ever see. Why not make it a habit to talk to God during the day? It's not really a mystery, is it?

MEMORY VERSE FOR JANUARY 8: *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* James 5:16

WEEK 5 GAME PLAN: THE MOST EXCITING THING

Look at this list: Three NBA championship rings, Tens of millions of dollars, Record for the most consecutive games ever played by an NBA player, A published book about your life and your principles, and your own foundation that helps kids. What would you think of a person who has accomplished all those things if he said that none of them is the most exciting thing that ever happened to him? You'd probably think he's a pretty outstanding person. And you'd be right. As hard as it is to believe, none of those is the top event in A.C. Green's life. The list above tells about five of the things that happened to Green during his distinguished career in the NBA. While playing for the Los Angeles Lakers, he won the rings. Later, he also played for the Phoenix Suns and the Dallas Mavericks before rejoining the Lakers in 1999. Yet A.C. claims that the most exciting thing that ever happened to him was something that took place when he was 17 years old. And it had nothing to do with basketball. The summer after A.C. graduated from high school, he and a bunch of friends went to a church service. While they were there, the preacher asked his listeners to come to the front of the church if they wanted to trust Jesus as their Savior. Surrounded by nine friends, A.C. felt that he should go forward, and he did. That day, he became a Christian. "It was August 2, 1981. And it's the most exciting thing that has taken place in my life," A.C. says. Think about that. If you are any kind of sports fan or player (if you weren't, you wouldn't be reading this), then you probably have dreams of accomplishing just one little, tiny portion of what A.C. has done in sports. It's been a dream career for him, and it's easy to be jealous. It all looks so exciting. but think about this. The many things we can't do that he did don't really matter. Yet the one thing we can do that he did is the most important. We can be made alive spiritually. We can be brought back from spiritual death! Now, that's exciting. Learn from the NBA's Ironman what is life's highlight. And make sure you've done what A.C. did.

MEMORY VERSE FOR JANUARY 15: *"God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"* Ephesians 2:4-5

WEEK 6 GAME PLAN: HOOPS ROOTS

Do you know a lot about basketball? Players' names? Teams? Stats? Even some strategy? That's good. But do you know anything about the game's history? Yes, history. Before you stop reading this because this isn't history class, let me tell you something about basketball that might really surprise you. The sport was invented as a way to get the gospel of Jesus Christ to new people. Yes, according to sports historian Dr. Tony Ladd of Wheaton College in Illinois, the inventor of basketball, Dr. James Naismith, wanted the game to be used in missions work. Look at what Dr. Ladd said of Naismith: "Perhaps he could reach people with a new game. As a committed Christian, he wanted to invent a game that would provide a means for him and others to lead other young men to a personal relationship with Christ." That game was basketball. Imagine that! And think of this: The NBA. Michael Jordan's skills. Your high school's team. Your basket in your driveway. These all exist because one man was looking for a way to spread the gospel. Of course, it didn't turn out exactly as Dr. Naismith had planned, but there are still plenty of people who use basketball as a way to reach people and tell them about Jesus. But there's something else we can learn. This can help us see that everything can be used for God. If a sport like basketball can be invented as a way to help people know about God, then think about how some other things you have or do can be used that way. Paul set the example when he talked about doing whatever it takes to reach people for Jesus. If basketball can be used for Jesus, there shouldn't be anything stopping us from using our interests for Him.

MEMORY VERSE FOR JANUARY 22: *"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them."*

- 1 Corinthians 12:4

WEEK 7 GAME PLAN: THE \$126,000,000 MAN

Back in the late 1990s, the Minnesota Timberwolves of the NBA signed Kevin Garnett to a contract that promised to pay him \$126 million. Do you know how much that is? For one thing, if you had that much money, you could spend a thousand dollars a day and you wouldn't run out of cash for 345 years. You could buy 2,500 Corvettes, loaded. If you gave ten percent to your church, the board would have more than \$12 million to do some good things with (maybe they'd build a gym). But did you know that Kevin Garnett is not worth any more than you are? Even with his \$126 million, you and Kevin have the exact same value. The value of a person is not found in how much money he or she has, but in how much God cherishes that person. And when you think about it, you'll realize that you and Kevin share this: You are both so valuable to God that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son, Jesus, for you. Rich people, poor people, or in-between people. None of that makes a person more valuable than another. Jesus Christ "gave Himself as a ransom [a payment] for all (1 Timothy 2:6). He died for all people the same. So what does that mean to you? Do you ever have times when you are sitting in your bedroom wondering about life? Do you ever think that you make too many mistakes to be worth much to anybody? Or that you can't really do all the neat stuff your older brother or sister does? Or that everybody seems to be on your case all the time? When you begin to feel that way, it's easy to think you're not worth much. But remember this: When Jesus died on the cross, He was saying that you were worth dying for. Jesus would have died for you if you were the only person on earth. God was willing to exchange His Son for you. Whoa! That shows how much value He places on you. So whether you make \$126 million playing basketball or \$8.98 a week on a paper route, you are special to God. Don't let anyone tell you differently.

MEMORY VERSE FOR JANUARY 29: *"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."*
Philippians 3:7

WEEK 8 GAME PLAN: MORE THAN A SYMBOL

On the verge of making team history, University of Iowa basketball star Jordan Bohannon intentionally missed the free throw that would have broken a twenty-five-year-old school record. Why? In 1993, days after Iowa's Chris Street had made thirty-four free throws in a row, he lost his life in a car crash. Bohannon chose to honor Street's memory by not breaking his record. Bohannon showed a keen awareness of things more important than his own advancement. We see similar values in the life of the young warrior David. Hiding in a cave with his ragtag army, David longed for a drink from the well in his hometown of Bethlehem, but the dreaded Philistines occupied the area (2 Samuel 23:14–15). In a stunning act of bravery, three of David's warriors "broke through the Philistine lines," got the water, and brought it to David. But David couldn't bring himself to drink it. Instead, he "poured it out before the Lord," saying, "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" (vs. 16–17). In a world that often rewards those who seize whatever they can grasp, how powerful acts of love and sacrifice can be! Such deeds are much more than mere symbols.

MEMORY VERSE FOR FEBRUARY 5: *In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* -Philippians 2:3-4

WEEK 9 GAME PLAN: TRASH TALK

“My baby nephew dribbles better than you do!” “Nice shirt. Didn’t they have it in your size?” “Is that your jump shot or are you having an attack?” Trash talk. It gets a lot worse than that, but it’s all over the place in sports. Even in leagues for kids your age. Even when you’re just playing soccer in the backyard. For some reason, a growing number of athletes can’t be happy competing just by using their sports skills. They think they have to compete with their tongue. One place this is really big is in the NBA, where there’s a lot of talking that goes on anyway. And these people are not sharing recipes. Not everyone is involved in trash talk, you know. Brent Price, who played guard for Washington, Houston, and Vancouver, said, “I don’t particularly like it. I don’t try to partake in that. I was always taught that you go out, play hard, and keep your mouth shut. If you’re going to do any damage, do it on the court, not with your mouth.” Probably one of the reasons Brent feels this way is that he is a Christian who knows that God has a lot of things to say about how we use our tongues. God is pretty clear that what we say without mouths shows what is inside our hearts. If there’s a lot of trash rattling around in the heart, it’ll make its way up to our mouths. Then we cause some real damage. Look at what God says about trash talk, just in the book of Proverbs:

- The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin. (10:8)
- The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. (10:19)
- He who holds his tongue is wise. (10:19)
- A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. (11:12)
- An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk. (12:13)
- Reckless words pierce like a sword. (12:18)
- The mouth of the fool gushes folly. (15:2)

Do you know why the Bible says so much about our tongues and about how we should talk? It’s because God, who made us, knows that controlling what we say is so very, very hard. And that, as James makes clear, we can do a lot of damage with it. Think of all the time your parents have spent speaking to you about how you talk. For most of us, it’s not a matter of saying, “Oh, now I get it. I won’t say any mean things anymore.” It’s a struggle that we must face every day. And the only way to control what we say is by making sure our heart is right with God. So, before we talk to anyone each day, we need to talk with Him and ask Him to keep our tongue under control. Let God help us take the trash out of our talk.

MEMORY VERSE FOR FEBRUARY 12: *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* -James 1:19-20