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PATTY GASSO

THE FAITH OF OKLAHOMA'S
HALL OF FAME SOFTBALL COACH

WRECKED AND RESTORED

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OF INDYCAR DRIVER SAGE KARAM

TRANSACTIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIONAL

THE JOURNEY OF SAM HOUSTON STATE
BASEBALL COACH MATT DEGGS

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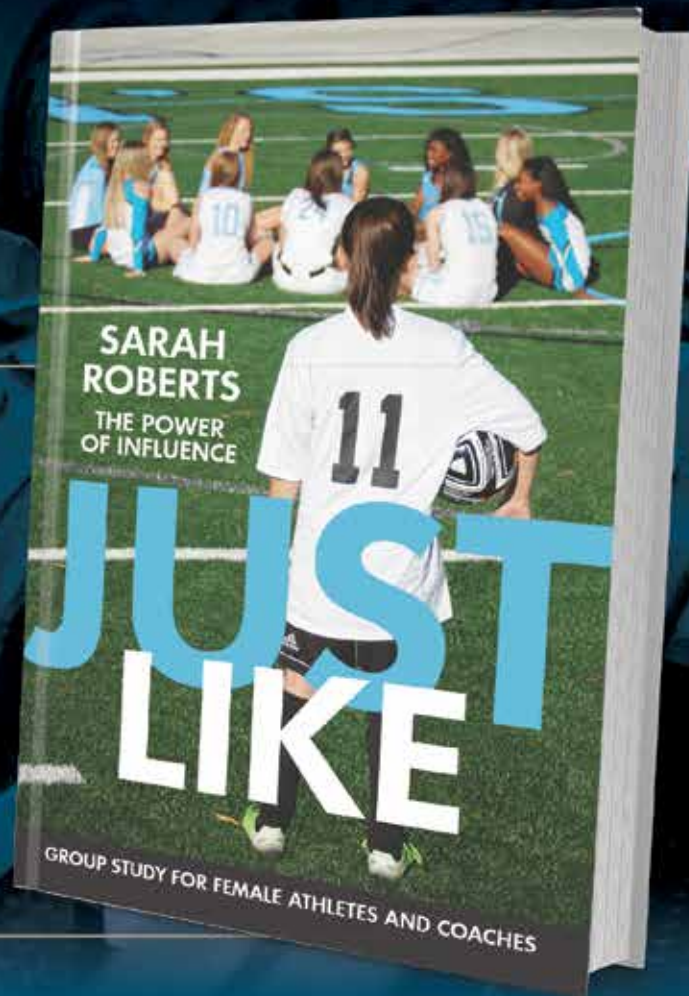
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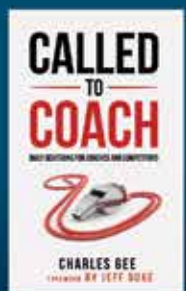
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— Shane Williamson, FCA President

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Regardless of the sport, every coach will find fresh wisdom in this Christ-centered coaches devotional. It's one of the best-written studies for coaches that addresses the third dimension of coaching (heart/spirit) which is why Jeff Duke wrote the Foreword. Charles Gee has served on staff with FCA for the past 13 years and is a 3Dimensional Coaching Regional Certified Presenter.

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PATTY THE MESSENGER

AT OKLAHOMA, SOFTBALL COACH PATTY GASSO HAS ADDED MORE TO GOD'S KINGDOM THAN FOUR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS.

BY NATE TAYLOR

PAGE 8

One of my favorite aspects of reporting for this issue's cover story was asking almost everyone I interviewed the same question: "What's your favorite Patty Gasso story?" The question drew the same reaction—full of excitement. And through it, I learned so much about Gasso.

Falepolima Aviu, a junior first baseman and outfielder, reminisced on Gasso dancing in front of the team to keep everyone loose during a rain delay in the 2015 NCAA Tournament.

Hannah Sparks, a senior catcher, recalled the start of last season when Gasso gave every player a bracelet with the phrase "Championship Mindset" imprinted on it—only to repossess the bracelets in the middle of the season because of the team's inconsistent performance. A few weeks later, after Oklahoma swept Iowa State in late March, Gasso entered the locker room and, with pure joy, returned the bracelets by throwing them in the air to celebrate the Sooners' improvement.

After all the interviews, I understood what made Gasso such a successful leader: how she guides women with integrity by boldly sharing that God created them for more than their athletic gifts.

"I love watching athletes learn, listen, work and get better," Gasso told me. "I love that process."

I loved learning and writing about Gasso's Sooners, a team and a leader who inspire one another to lean into God for success on the field and, more importantly, off it.

Nate Taylor
FCA Magazine Content Writer

ALL ACCESS: **PAGE 6**

- News and notes, including FCA's refined vision and mission statements
- Furman Lacrosse defenseman Myles Cohen steps into the FCA Zone
- LPGA Tour pro Cydney Clanton answers 6 Questions



TRANSACTIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIONAL
Sam Houston State Coach Matt Deggs

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WRECKED AND RESTORED
How Christ changed the career of IndyCar driver Sage Karam.

BY CHAD BONHAM

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FCA Vision: To see the world transformed by Jesus Christ through the influence of coaches and athletes.

FCA Mission: To lead every coach and athlete into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and His church.

FCA Values: Integrity, Serving, Teamwork, Excellence

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WHOLENESS

In my last column, I outlined how servanthood should be an essential aspect of our lives as Christ-followers, saying, “No other action a person can take leaves as profound an impact on another as serving.”

This issue, we shift from the *outward* actions of our faith to how our faith impacts us *internally*. Whether it’s the things you do when no one is watching, or the thoughts and feelings only you know exist in your mind, living a life of integrity is extremely personal, really only known by yourself and God.

The word “integrity” comes from the early 16th-century Latin word “*integritas*,” which means “intact” or “whole.”

Wholeness in our public and private lives is essential as followers of Christ. If the goal is to resemble Christ more every day, the words we say and our actions in public should reflect our thoughts and our actions in private. That wholeness is what the writer of Proverbs 11:3 (NIV) had in mind, writing, “*The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.*”

Going back to the dictionary again, I love one definition of integrity I found that said, “The qualification of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards.”

Living a life of integrity is a personal choice!

Every decision we make—large or small—must run through our own personal integrity filter, examining how it agrees or disagrees with our thoughts and beliefs.

This was modeled in the purest of ways by Tim Renfrow, my high school football coach. He was a living representation of integrity, the first man I knew whose beliefs and behaviors matched up every day. My life was radically changed when it intersected with Renfrow’s.

In much the same way, PGA Tour pro Brian Davis’ act of integrity impacted many lives at a tournament years ago.

Golf is a great sport to examine an athlete’s integrity. After all, it’s the only sport that allows its participants to call penalties on themselves. Players must be well-versed on the extensive rulebook, which outlines when and how infractions occur and how to assess penalty strokes.

In 2010, at the Verizon Heritage event in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, Davis touched a loose reed in a marshy area next to the green on the first playoff hole. He called a two-stroke penalty on himself. That self-imposed infraction effectively gave the tournament title to Jim Furyk, costing Davis millions of dollars and a chance at the victory.

A teacher from Texas saw Davis’ example of integrity and honesty and shared the story in her classroom. She then wrote to Davis. Later in the season, she brought her entire class out to meet him. He may not have won the event, but his example is still being used to impact lives years later.

What does integrity look like in your life? It truly is something that only you have access to and control over. As coach Tony Dungy said, “Others determine your reputation, but only you determine your integrity.”

I pray this encourages you to examine your life for any gaps that exist between your thoughts and actions in private and public. Ask God to fill those spaces with His support to help you to live a whole, complete life in Him.

Shane Williamson
 FCA President/CEO



ALL ACCESS

STRONG 2018 FCA CAMP: REGISTER TODAY!

As a competitor, do you want to grow stronger in your physical and mental approach to your sport? Do you want to mature spiritually, drawing upon God's power that lives in you to glorify Him in competition? If so, then sign up for FCA Camp!

This year's camp theme, "Strong," is based upon 2 Timothy 4:7: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful."* The theme will be the inspiration for campers as they learn

how God calls them to be solid in their faith, to fight the good fight with perseverance, and to surround themselves with a firm support system so they can finish strong.

With more than 500 camps to choose from throughout the world, there's sure to be one near your area. Visit fcacamps.org for all the FCA Camp information you'll need, including promotional videos, resource downloads and camp registration. Additional questions? Email camps@fca.org or call (800) 289-0909.



FCAZONE

"FCA has impacted and changed my life immensely by giving me the opportunity to grow and mature mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It has also allowed me to mentor youth, help them grow in their faith, and support them in every way I can. The relationships I've built through FCA are truly incomparable."

-Myles Cohen
Furman Lacrosse

THANKS FROM FCA MAGAZINE!

Want your own copy of *A Million Lights* by Michael W. Smith? One could be yours by following *FCA Magazine* on Facebook or Twitter during May or June. We will randomly select five people to receive the CD as a thank-you!



FULFILLING THE VISION

Since its inception in 1954, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes has continued to grow while staying committed to founder Don McClanen's vision of *coaches and athletes influencing for Christ*. Through God's grace, the ministry has launched a new initiative, *Fulfilling the Vision*.

This initiative clarifies FCA's vision to become a more compelling picture of the ministry's desire to see transformation by Jesus Christ. Through the international platform of sport, coaches and athletes have the power to unite, inspire and change the world.

Fulfilling the Vision also brings clarity to the ministry's mission. FCA seeks to make disciples by engaging, equipping and empowering coaches and athletes to know and grow in Christ, and lead others to do the same through a renewed commitment to its four core values.

VISION:

To see the world transformed by Jesus Christ through the influence of coaches and athletes.

MISSION:

To lead every coach and athlete into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and His church.

VALUES:

Integrity - Serving - Teamwork - Excellence

STAY TUNED!

Changes are coming to *FCA Magazine*. Check out the next issue for more information!





FCA MAGAZINE RECOMMENDS

LITERATURE:

- An autobiographical look at the life and faith journey of Pastor Tom Zobrist, the father of 2016 World Series MVP Ben Zobrist: *The Zobrist Family: Look What God Can Do* by Tom Zobrist with Bill Butterworth
- A collection of more than 100 devotionals written to encourage and motivate coaches to lead God's way through the lens of His Word: *The Coach's Devotional* by Marty Mayer

TUNES:

- An album created, memorably and uniquely, backstage at concerts and in studios around the world: *Miracles* by Hawk Nelson
- An album that spans an almost decade-long career, which features multiple hits and two new songs: *Greatest Hits: The First Ten Years* by Francesca Battistelli
- A soulful telling of a Father's desire for connection with the ones He made, knows and loves: *Reckless Love* by Cory Asbury



FAITH & SPORTS CALENDAR



MAY 2018

- 13 Mother's Day
- 17-28 NCAA Tennis Championship
- 18-23 NCAA Women's Golf Championship
- 25-27 NCAA Women's Lacrosse Final Four
- 25-30 NCAA Men's Golf Championship
- 26-28 NCAA Men's Lacrosse Final Four
- 27 Indianapolis 500
- 27 ATP/WTB French Open begins
- 28 Memorial Day
- 31-June 3 U.S. Women's Open Championship (LPGA)
- 31-June 3 NCAA Women's College World Series

JUNE 2018

- 6-9 NCAA Track & Field Outdoor Championships
- 14-17 U.S. Open (PGA)
- 16-27 NCAA Men's College World Series
- 17 Father's Day
- 21 NBA Draft
- 22-23 NHL Draft
- 28-July 1 KPMG Women's PGA Championship

6 QUESTIONS WITH CYDNEY CLANTON

LPGA TOUR



- 1) The person who has had the greatest spiritual impact on me is my dad, Bobby Clanton. He has shown me what having a relationship with Jesus Christ looks like.
- 2) My favorite golf course I've played is The Ocean Course at the Kiawah Island Golf Resort in South Carolina. It's tough. It's beautiful. And it's always in good shape.
- 3) I intentionally bring Jesus into my golf game by doing my best to hand over control to Him.
- 4) Being a Christ-follower means that you have a personal relationship with Christ. That you are talking to Him, praying to Him, reading the Bible, and growing in your knowledge of Him.
- 5) One piece of *athletic* advice I'd share with kids is do it all! Don't become focused so early. Try all the sports that interest you, and be a kid! You have plenty of time to be an adult.
- 6) One piece of *spiritual* advice I'd share with kids is give up control. You will be able to accomplish more when you allow God to be in control. He will take you places you never thought you would go.

PATTY

THE

MESSENGER

AT OKLAHOMA, SOFTBALL COACH PATTY GASSO HAS ADDED MORE TO GOD'S KINGDOM THAN FOUR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS. BY NATE TAYLOR



FOR A FEW HOURS ON A THURSDAY AFTERNOON IN EARLY MARCH, OKLAHOMA SOFTBALL COACH PATTY GASSO WAS NOT IN HER SIGNATURE ATTIRE—WHITE NIKES, WINDBREAKER PANTS AND JACKET, AND, OF COURSE, A CRIMSON OR WHITE VISOR. ON THIS DAY, SHE OPTED FOR BLACK HEELS, DRESS SLACKS AND A WARM, MULTICOLOR BLOUSE. THE NORMAN ROTARY CLUB HAD ASKED GASSO TO BE ITS GUEST SPEAKER, AND SHE PONDERED ABOUT HER PRESENTATION LATER THAT DAY AS SHE SAT DOWN FOR AN IN-PERSON INTERVIEW WITH FCA MAGAZINE.

Gasso, sitting at a table in the team room, was surrounded by mementos of her program's remarkable success. To her right was a wall full of names, all the Sooners she helped become All-Americans. On another wall were photos of the Sooners celebrating each of their four national championships. A College World Series jersey signed by each member of the memorable 2000 team, the first to win a title, was framed and hanging just outside the room's entrance.

Gasso's top priority that day, though, was a simple request. She didn't want her words—even though she told numerous stories—to be interpreted as though it were about her.

In the demanding grind of a long softball season, Gasso understands what happens inside the team room is just as important as what happens on Marita Hynes Field, Oklahoma's stadium. The team room is where bonding happens. It's where the Sooners watch film, discuss strategy and hold postgame news conferences.

It's also where they hold voluntary prayer services, Bible discussions and chapel services before their Sunday games.

"I feel like I've arrived," said Gasso, the Hall of Fame coach now in her 28th season. "I've figured out what my purpose is here. Many people, probably 99 percent, believe my purpose here is to win. And I get that. But I'm winning in other ways; our team is winning in other ways behind the scenes."

For an hour, Gasso shared stories, victories both athletic and spiritual.

...

Gasso started with a story about a softball game in 1992. She was the coach at Long Beach City College, standing in the third-base coaching box.

"I'll never, ever forget," she said. "I think this was absolutely God's plan."

During the game, Gasso waved her left arm to signal her player to round third base and sprint home. In that moment, she felt and understood the Holy Spirit. Filled with joy from accepting God's grace in that specific time and place, she sprinted home after the game and told her husband, Jim, who helped introduce her to Jesus Christ.

"From that moment on," she said, "my whole world changed."

The moment was the culmination of a spiritual journey that began in 1983. Gasso transferred to Long Beach State that year as a junior shortstop on the softball team. Jim was a senior who finished his football career as a defensive back the prior semester. The couple, both pursuing degrees in





physical education, took some classes together and soon began dating.

Although sports connected them, their exposure to faith during their childhood was different.

Gasso was raised in Torrance, California, and her family attended church only on special occasions. As an adolescent, she kept it hidden from her family that she listened to legendary evangelist Billy Graham.

Jim was raised in the church by his father, Roberto, a minister in Los Angeles. Church was a weekly occurrence in Jim's life, and he made sure to bring Gasso with him.

But, looking back, both agreed he was a little *too* persistent in trying to convince Gasso about God.

"I was trying to do God's work," he said. "That wasn't my job."

After their respective graduations, the couple became coaches—Gasso a softball coach at La Mirada High, and Jim an assistant football and baseball coach at Pasadena City College.

They were married June 21, 1986. Six years into their marriage, following that softball game in 1992, Jim was elated when Gasso began living her faith in full.

"The greatest moment in my life," he said. "This is the person God gave me, and now I get to be in heaven with her forever."

When Gasso began coaching at Long Beach City College, she wanted to do for her student-athletes what her mother, Janet Froehlich, did for her. Gasso learned sports through her mother. Together, they listened to broadcaster Vin Scully call Los Angeles Dodgers games.

Froehlich, a single mother working as a central services technician, raised her three children through hard work and tenacity. Living next to a large park with softball fields, she would come to the park from work in her skirt and heels and teach her children about life through sports.

"It was cool that she was my coach, and I thought it would be really cool if this could be a profession," Gasso said. "I knew there were women coaches out there, but you never really saw them because they weren't on TV."

In the park, Gasso described herself as similar to Benny "The Jet" Rodriguez, the memorable character from *The Sandlot*. On her sandlot, other children looked up to Gasso. She was a leader, the first time in her life she held such a role.

At Long Beach City College, Gasso learned the lasting impact she could have on her student-athletes. She received spiritual guidance from Shelley McCall, her assistant, and career guidance from Mickey Davis, the athletic director. One year, Gasso and Davis attended the College World Series, held annually in Oklahoma City. Gasso was enthralled.

"There were maybe 1,500 people in the stands," she said. "It was unbelievable to see that many people watching a softball game. I sat there and wanted to be there one day."

Davis introduced Gasso to Marita Hynes, the former Oklahoma coach who was an administrator in the athletic department. A few years later, in 1995, Hynes offered Gasso the Sooners job. Despite some doubts, Gasso accepted. She took less money than she was making at Long Beach City College. The Sooners didn't even have their own field, instead playing at Reaves Park on the city's schedule. At the time, no one—including Gasso—was confident she would be a long-term solution.

"Honestly, I did not meditate in prayer over this enough," she said. "I was mad at myself for letting my ego take over for more of what I wanted in my career. I wanted the opportunity so much, but I was scared to death."

Pregnant with her youngest son, D.J., Gasso sat in the living room of her empty house in California, blocks from the beach, and her conflicting emotions overtook her. She wept. Jim told his wife it was time for them to put their faith in Christ.

"I prayed," he said, "and I told Patty, 'I'm behind you.'"

Gasso, during the 1997 season, invited her players to a voluntary weekly Bible discussion. Beth Gagliardi and her husband, Vince, the pastor at Calvary Chapel of Norman at the time, led the gatherings with Gasso. In the beginning, two Sooners attended. But, over time, more and more student-athletes began discussing their faith with their coach. Gasso was encouraged when she began seeing her players share their faith with one another.

Perhaps the most pivotal year in Gasso's career was 2000. Before the season, Gasso felt it would be her last. Jim moved back to California in 1999 to coach soccer at Fullerton Community College. Gasso waned under the demands of a long-distance marriage while raising her two sons, leading the Sooners, and squeezing in time to recruit. Despite her difficulties, the Sooners reached their first-ever College World Series. Fueled by a potent offense, Oklahoma won its final eight games to claim the national championship.

"That's when God really made it clear," Gasso said, *"You need to stay here, and this is where you need to do My work."* I started to understand that my job is more to open the door for Christ to win souls. It's not about me."

After the season, Gasso received a sizable raise, and the school's administration agreed to renovate the softball complex to make it more state-of-the-art. When Jim's contract ended in 2003, he returned to Oklahoma and started IntenCity Sports Training Academy.

"He did a lot for me in the way of surrendering his career to allow me to have mine," Gasso said. "It was probably the biggest decision he made, which really was for me."

By staying, Gasso became involved with Oklahoma's FCA Huddle in 2005. She began talking with Sarah Roberts, FCA's director of women's ministry in Oklahoma at the time. Gasso eventually asked Roberts to be the Sooners' chaplain, a position she held for 12 seasons before moving to Atlanta.

"People would rather follow a leader who's real than one who's always right," Roberts said of Gasso. "There's nobody I've worked with who has used their power of influence for Christ, with the platform God has given them, as much as her."

With each season, Roberts became more of an integral part of the program. She explained to the Sooners what it means for them, as women, to be obedient to Christ. One of Roberts' most memorable moments came in November 2015 when she baptized Leslie Miller, Callie Parsons and Destinee Martinez in front of their teammates in Gasso's backyard pool.

Gasso said encouraging the Sooners to reach out to Roberts for their spiritual inquiries was humbling. She surrendered her program to God and watched

more of her student-athletes grow in their faith. More conversations started to focus on what it takes to be a godly woman rather than hitting, pitching or fielding techniques.

By 2012, Gasso felt she had the best team in the country. The Sooners reached the College World Series final against Alabama. Before the decisive third game, Gasso said she was more worried about whether she would publicly praise God after the game than the game's actual outcome. When the Sooners fell, 5-4, Gasso saw her players cry in the dugout. She found Roberts, who encouraged everyone to give the glory—even in defeat—to God. Then, the Sooners prayed. In her postgame statement, Gasso, with dry tears on her face, echoed Roberts' message: "First, we give the glory to God. Win or lose, we give the glory to God."

Gasso said the heartbreaking defeat that night changed her: "I'm never afraid to say it out loud now."



Patty Gasso was inducted into the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Hall of Fame in 2012.

Falepolima Aviu, a junior first baseman and outfielder from Oceanside, California, chose to play at Oklahoma because of Gasso. Aviu learned of Gasso's faith from watching the College World Series in high school. She felt Gasso was a mother, counselor, mentor and coach in one. Aviu read the Bible growing up, but she was lukewarm in her faith until she arrived in Norman.

"Coach showed me who God is and connected it to softball," Aviu said. "I felt this is where I belong. I grew up in the church, but I really didn't feel God's presence until I got here."

Aviu was a freshman when, inside the team room, Roberts shared the story in Exodus 17:8-16, how Israel—led by Moses—defeated Amalek's army.

During the 2016 College World Series, Paige Parker, Oklahoma's star pitcher, was fatigued from pitching on consecutive days. Roberts explained how Parker was playing the role of Moses, whose arms were fatigued from holding up the staff of God during the battle. Moses received help from Aaron and Hur, who held up his hands, helping lead Joshua to victory. The rest of the Sooners and their fans, Roberts told the team, needed to be like Aaron and Hur in supporting Parker.

middle, ring and pinky—during games. Fans flashed the three fingers back to them. The Sooners won 11 consecutive games to win a second straight championship—Gasso's fourth overall.

Hannah Sparks, a senior catcher from Thomasville, Alabama, joined the Sooners last year after transferring from Northwest Florida State College. Sparks respects Gasso's sincerity and how she teaches through personal relationships with each student-athlete. Earlier this season, Sparks told

Gasso she intends to become a high school teacher and softball coach after she graduates.

"I want to be the kind of coach she is because I want to reach people the way she reaches people," Sparks said. "When she says it's not just about softball and she cares for you on a personal level, she steps out and shows that."



THE GASSO FAMILY:

J.T., D.J., Patty, Joseph, Andrea and Jim.

In the championship series against Auburn, the Sooners frequently lifted their arms up in the air. Whether it was toward Parker after each inning or toward a teammate in the batter's box, the symbolic gesture helped the Sooners encourage each other. Roberts and Jim explained the gesture to fans, and soon a large portion of the more than 8,000 people inside ASA Stadium were also lifting their arms up in support—in front of a national TV audience.

"People, through sports, were going home and reading the Bible to find out what we're doing," Gasso said. "Then, they were crying while they did it in the stands."

In the decisive third game, behind stellar pitching from Parker, the Sooners won their third championship.

"It was a sense of God's power allowing us to play free," Gasso said. "We had no business winning the championship in 2016, and everybody would tell you that."

A few weeks later, Aviu shared the Sooners' story with more than 1,000 high school student-athletes during an FCA Camp at UCLA.

Last year, before the regional round of the postseason, Roberts gave her final message as the team chaplain. Inside the team room, she spoke about David's three mighty men in 2 Samuel 23. Each Sooner, she explained, possessed one of those three men's qualities—leadership, strength and resilience—and could use it to help the team to victory.

Behind Roberts' message, another symbolic gesture was created, this time the Sooners held up three fingers—the

In November, when the Sooners visited the White House to celebrate their championship, Sparks asked President Donald Trump if the team could pray—both with him and for him—during a

break between photos. Trump appreciated and accepted. During Sparks' prayer, Gasso and Jim stood with their heads bowed in awe, grateful of how Christ, through softball, led them to experience such a spiritually powerful moment.

"Once they get into the gospel, God does the rest," Jim said of the Sooners. "(Patty and I) think about it all the time."

A new season presents new challenges. Gasso understands this. She knows she will have to find new ways to motivate her team, perhaps using different stories from the Bible.

Even though the Sooners are no longer the underdogs, Gasso's plan is to surrender her ego. She wants to continue to use her words with Christ as the emphasis.

"I'm about to go speak at this Rotary club and share everything I just shared [here]," Gasso said. "Because it's real. It's a real story. It's who we are. If I don't tell the real story, I'm not being honest."

A few minutes later, she grabbed her black rolling briefcase and began to exit, walking out of the team room and building she helped build.

"I love what I do," she said.

First Christian Church was a 10-minute drive away. The Norman Rotary Club awaited, and Gasso was ready to share her team's story.

FCA

INTEGRITY IS INTEGRAL

BY SARAH RENNICKE

READY:

"The LORD is more pleased when we do what is right and just than when we offer Him sacrifices." – Proverbs 21:3

SET:

What does it take to run a powerhouse like the Oklahoma Sooners softball program?

For Hall of Fame coach Patty Gasso, it could be countless hours of watching film, drill after drill in practice, carrying herself with authority and confidence, or the best recruiting in the country. Sure, Gasso utilizes all of these aspects to her advantage, but the most truthful answer goes deeper.

For her, integrity is integral to her success.

Gasso has engineered four different national championship teams. She's developed numerous All-Americans. Most importantly, she's cultivated hundreds of young women to enter the workforce with confidence and grace after graduation. Gasso understands the key to her leadership lies within her relationship with Christ, allowing Him to do transformative work in her life. When the spotlight turns off, and fewer people are watching, is when she knows she must hold herself as a child of God to develop a humble self-surrender for when the glare of success starts to shine again each season.

Much of this preparation builds behind

the doors of the Sooners' team room, where chemistry is developed, questions are discussed, and voluntary Bible study and prayer take place.

If you ask Gasso how she's settled into life as a Sooner, she'll say it stems from her purpose not just on the diamond, but in caring for her student-athletes on a personal level.

"Many people, probably 99 percent, believe my purpose here is to win," she said, "And I get that. But I'm winning in other ways; our team is winning in other ways behind the scenes."

When we are sincere in our love for Christ and others, it's from a groundwork of interaction with God where we learn to live in ways that are pleasing to Him. Our spiritual base solidifies in integrity's basement, where no one looks and we are accountable for what we think, say and believe.

We are trained in His character. Then, in heartbreaking defeat or sweet victory, how we hold steady says a lot about where we rest our assurance.

When we live for God and no one else, in the dark moments of loss and confusion, we hold to His faithfulness and keep building a life of excellence, dependent solely upon His grace in every aspect of our lives. To give glory to God in good times and bad is a verbal commitment to a deep-rooted way of faith, living a life of integrity dedicated to Him.

**GO:**

- What does integrity to God and to your team mean to you?
- Who can hold you accountable in those moments when no one is watching?
- Make a list of God's faithfulness in your life, and pray your faith will be strengthened.

WORKOUT:

2 Chronicles 29:17
Psalm 18:25
Proverbs 10:9

OVERTIME:

Lord God, You see all things. There is nowhere to hide from You, but there is also nowhere You will not go to show me Your love. Help me live each part of my life with integrity and service to You, so it becomes natural to speak about You and give You glory. Amen.

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DAN CARSON

AIR FORCE
LACROSSE



"If you show them you care, the door is open more often than not to share your faith."

FCA: What drew you to lacrosse?

DC: For me, it's always been such a fun way to compete. There's speed, a lot of scoring, physicality and creativity. The sport is growing in so many areas that the door is open for ministry to step in and be a huge, integral part. That's what I love about FCA Lacrosse; they use the sport as a vehicle to preach the gospel.

FCA: What did you learn about yourself competing in both lacrosse and swimming at Marymount University?

DC: It originally seemed like a daunting task. But, once I was in it, I felt like I had a leadership role in both sports that I couldn't relinquish. I wasn't the best swimmer, but I filled a role on our relay teams. In a couple close meets, I was the guy who stepped in and helped us win. My "off-the-field" presence allowed me to talk to guys about character and faith. In lacrosse, I was one of our top three scorers every year. I was more of a guy people leaned on in terms of on-the-field presence.

FCA: How was your faith shaped during that time?

DC: That's the biggest part of my testimony. When I was senior in 2011, I was the opposite of how you would

"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand." — Isaiah 41:10

The first time Dan Carson integrated his faith into lacrosse came in 2012 at an FCA Camp in Vail, Colorado. Carson served as a Huddle Leader at the invitation of Frank Kelly, an FCA Hall of Champions inductee and former professional player. Since then, Carson has become a coach who lifts the souls of his student-athletes. This summer, he'll share the gospel as part of FCA's service team during the World Lacrosse Games in Israel.

want a Christian to live their life. I was involved a lot on campus and using my influence to feed my ego. I plagiarized someone else's words as my own on an assignment, and I got suspended for the spring semester.

I went through a period of not knowing what I was going to do with my life. Then, through David Webb and his wife, Caroline, I went to Johannesburg, South Africa, for that semester. I worked with Baby Haven (an orphanage) through His People Church and experienced God's love through those children. Men at the church challenged me in my faith to make my relationship with Christ stronger. After those four months, I rededicated my life to Christ and got baptized. Now, I coach college lacrosse because college is where God revealed Himself to me through my mistakes.

FCA: How do you share your faith with your athletes?

DC: It varies depending on the person and the conversation, but you've got to get to know them. Just like knowing who you can put on the field at the end of the game, you have to know how they handle different things. I'll sit down next to a guy at dinner or on the bus and ask them about their family. What values does their family have? Sometimes that leads them to talk about church and faith.

In any college setting, you're going to make mistakes and experience failure. How do you bounce back? I get to connect with them and talk about how my faith, in my own failures, really reshaped me and helped me become the man I am. If you show them you care, the door is open more often than not to share your faith.

FCA

ABOUT THE COACH:

HOMETOWN: Arlington, Virginia

COACHING CAREER:

- Air Force Academy, Assistant (2017-Present)
- Princeton, Assistant (2015-17)
- Richmond, Assistant (2014-15)
- Grove City College, Head Coach (2013-14)

NOTES:

- CCLA Division II Coach of the Year (2014)
- Scored 63 goals at Marymount as four-year starting attackman (2008-10, '12)
- Three-time letterman in swimming at Marymount (2008-10)
- Team captain of both Marymount teams (2008-10)

FCA STAFF QUOTE:

"It has been great to watch Coach Carson help lead and serve at Air Force. He continues to keep his heart, mind and eyes focused on Christ."

-Ryan Horanburg
FCA Lacrosse



SUZANNA STAPLER

BELMONT
TENNIS

HEART OF AN ATHLETE®

"I run in the path of your commandments, for you have set my heart free." — Psalm 119:32 (WEB)

As an 8-year-old, Suzanna Stapler told her father, Dale, her college plans: play tennis and study architecture. Half of those plans came to fruition. As a senior at Belmont University, FCA has provided encouragement to Stapler as she competes and pursues a marketing degree. On the tennis team, Stapler is enjoying her new role as a veteran leader in supporting nine younger teammates to reach their athletic and spiritual potential.



"... your worth to God has little to do with your results on the field, court or anywhere else."

FCA: What drew you to tennis?

SS: I started in gymnastics and soon realized I wasn't a good fit. Then, I did soccer and enjoyed it, but my parents saw some pretty good hand-eye coordination early on. They said, "Let's try her in tennis." It clicked within the first year.

I like that every point is different. There's also a lot of variety of shots. You have to figure your opponent out. It's very mental, which is the worst and best part of it.

FCA: How does tennis relate to your faith?

SS: You get out there, and you're pretty much fighting by yourself. The coach can offer advice, but can't play for you or sub you out. You're just out there, and you really see what you're made of time and time again. I can be running as fast as I can and working really hard, but if my mind isn't there, it's definitely possible to lose a match. You can't just be strong or fast or any one quality. You really have to put it all together.

It's taught me [a lot] about grace, how grace works for us. I have to have grace on myself when I'm working hard and still failing. Just like with my faith, I can't just try to be the best person. That's ultimately not going to draw me close to God. It's all about pursuing what the Lord has and seeing what the results end up being.

FCA: Why is Psalm 119:32 one of your favorite Bible verses?

SS: It's so refreshing to read every time. Whether I'm overthinking things on the court or trying to figure out something with a friendship or in a classroom, it helps me just know God created us for freedom, and that freedom is where the love comes in. Recognizing that freedom He surrounded us with, we're able to run in His commands.

FCA: How has your involvement with FCA impacted your faith?

SS: You look around the room [at FCA] and see a group of people that can immediately relate in such a deep way with the efforts we put into sports. But, at the same time, you think of the verse (1 Timothy 4:8) that talks about physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things.

Surrounding yourself with that kind of community was vital for me to continue to persevere. If you know what you're fighting for—if you know you're out there ultimately to give God glory and to use the gifts He's given you—it doesn't take the pressure off, but it does give you a healthier perspective.

FCA: Why is FCA important?

SS: With athletics, it's so tempting to always want to be strong in front of other people. But FCA draws you to a place where you can be vulnerable. You can be open about what you believe about verses, and I think it helps you realize your worth to God has little to do with your results on the field, court or anywhere else.

FCA

ABOUT THE ATHLETE:

HOMETOWN:

Alpharetta, Georgia

CLASS:

Senior

NOTES:

- Intercollegiate Tennis Association Scholar-Athlete (2015, 2017)
- Ohio Valley Conference Commissioner's Honor Roll (2016, 2017)
- Twice named to the USTA National Zonals Team

FCA STAFF QUOTE:

"Suzanna pursues an authentic, transparent walk with Jesus in such a way that others are loved well and encouraged to follow Him. She is so joyful as she fixes her eyes on Jesus. So many of her classmates, teammates and others have been impacted by her reflection of the heart of Jesus."

-Jennifer Ross
FCA Area Representative

REIGN



**“I want to play
this game with**

PASSION

and be

BOLD

in my witness



for the
LORD.

SAN DIEGO PADRES

CHASE

Courtesy of the San Diego Padres



FELLOWSHIP OF
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TRANS TRANS

THE JOURNEY OF SAM HOUSTON STATE COACH MATT DEGGS

BY DREW VAN ESSELSTYN



EVERY DAY, ON HIS SEVEN-MILE DRIVE TO WORK, A COUPLE OF QUASI-MONUMENTS

CATCH THE EYE OF SAM HOUSTON STATE BASEBALL COACH MATT DEGGS.

One is known locally as the “Walls Unit”, a state penitentiary outlined with two-story red-brick walls that has the most active execution chamber in the United States. The prison serves as a metaphorical marker for Deggs.

“The only thing more agonizing than living in an actual prison where somebody put you,” he said, “is living in an invisible prison where you’ve put yourself.”

The second monument is the ordinary Huntsville Farm Supply a block away. It serves as a more literal landmark for the lowest time in Deggs’ life—when a can’t-miss coaching career and a marriage to his high school sweetheart were both unraveling, seemingly to the point of no return.

“After I was fired (by Texas A&M in 2011), I had to work at a feed mill, loading 18 wheelers with cattle feed, horse feed, deer corn,” Deggs said. “It’s just a stark reminder of how fragile this deal is.”

Those visuals help craft a perspective that allows Deggs to treasure where God has him now: in the middle of a redemption journey that has redefined his identity, redirected a career into a calling, and restored his family.

“He has this charisma that says, ‘I know who I am, and I can help you become who you are,’” said Matt Johnson, Piney Woods West FCA Area Director. “He has a genuine heart.”

For Deggs, that mission is rooted in one of his favorite verses, Isaiah 43:19 (NIV), a refrain for the new life God has given him: “*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*”

...

Deggs grew up in Texas City, a blue-collar town just across from Galveston that largely revolves around the oil refinery industry. He recalls hearing and responding to the gospel as a 10-year-old. Mostly, though, he remembers being a baseball player who embodied much of Texas City’s work ethic, a grinder who scrapped to be seen by coaches.

“My best tool” he said, “was passion.”

Baseball paved the way for Deggs to be the first member of his family to graduate from college. He also went on to play professionally for a few years after that.

During that time, he dated Kathy Saldia. Their families knew each other, and Deggs’ interest in Kathy outpaced hers in him for a while.

“Baseball was always a part of him,” Kathy said. “I didn’t exactly know what that would entail.”

For most of the nine years they dated, Deggs was chasing the dream of playing. In 1996, he took a job as a graduate assistant coach at Northwestern State University, serving on staff with soon-to-be coaching stars Dave Van Horn and Rob Childress.

Deggs and Kathy were married June 28, 1997, and she left her teaching job in Texas to join her husband in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Just two weeks after the newlyweds unpacked, Deggs took the head coaching job at Texarkana Junior College. They were on the move again.

“I’ll just say I had no idea what being married to a coach would be like,” Kathy said.

...

ACTIONAL TO FORMATIONAL

Five highly successful springs at Texarkana boosted Deggs' profile and created a chance to reunite with Van Horn, who had taken over at Arkansas.

There, he met Josh Foliart, who had played football at Arkansas and was working with a ministry called Arkansas Athletes Outreach. Foliart, who was assigned the baseball team, connected with Deggs on campus.

"He was hungry for something more," Foliart said, "and we just tried to fall in love with Jesus together."

Deggs rededicated himself to Christ in 2004, but life was far from perfect—in his soul or at home. The balance between professional and personal success was off-kilter.

On the field, Deggs was outstanding, one of the nation's up-and-coming hitting coaches and recruiting coordinators. As busy as he was during the season turning Arkansas into one of the best offenses in the Southeastern Conference, his schedule was unpredictable during the offseason, and "he was married to baseball," as Kathy put it.

Away from the field, Deggs had a weakness for alcohol. His addiction was masked to many but was eroding his relationship with Kathy and Christ.

"I've known the Lord since I was 10 years old, but what was lacking was intent," Deggs said. "What I lost in all of this was the condition of my heart. And that's why I say I was living as an enemy

of the cross even though I knew Christ during all that time."

Internally, he was in the middle of a deep descent. On the outside, however, very little was slowing Deggs' climb in the coaching ranks.

...

Childress arrived at Texas A&M in 2006 and was charged with breathing new life into the program. Deggs was one of Childress' first hires. The Deggs family (son Kyler was born in 1999, daughter Klaire in 2003, and Kathy was eight months pregnant with Khloe when they left for College Station) was headed back to Texas.

The Aggies underwhelmed in the 2006 season. Deggs hit the road recruiting that summer and was questioning his coaching—perhaps for the first time.

"I was super transactional as a coach, and I always had been talented coaching-wise and baseball-wise," he said. "But I'd never defined how I coach—what you do, how you do it and what your end result is going to be."

He was watching TV one night when he found a documentary on wolves.

"In a real pack, their survival depends on each other," Deggs said, "and every wolf in the pack has a job."

He translated that to baseball, and the "Pack Mentality" was born. Players who fit into four categories—

runners, hitters, bombers and ball players—became attractive to Texas A&M. Coupled with the right attitude, approach, intensity and toughness, the Aggies took off.

From 2007 through 2009, Deggs oversaw a lineup that batted .309 with 232 home runs, more than 2,000 hits, almost 1,300 RBI and 300-plus stolen bases.

The baseball part of life was exceptionally good, but that had never been the problem for Deggs. He was still drinking, and family life was decidedly less fruitful. Kathy began resenting baseball.

"I never stopped loving Matt, but there were times when I hated who he was and how he was treating me and our family," Kathy said. "I just always had this hope that he'd stop. I kept thinking, 'This is the final straw,' and, 'This will be the bottom.' And then it wouldn't be.

"It just completely spun out of our control."

Just before the start of the 2011 season, Deggs was out at Texas A&M. A news release indicated he resigned to "focus on personal health and family matters," but he and Kathy knew all that lay beneath that statement. Deggs said Childress didn't fire him; he fired himself.

"I was a mess, and my life was in the gutter," Deggs said. "I was a drunk, and I couldn't put the beer bottle down.

The saddest part is that I proved I couldn't quit drinking for God. I couldn't quit drinking for my family. I couldn't quit drinking for me."

Stripped of his marquee job and reputation in college baseball, Deggs tried to start over. He applied for a few baseball jobs, but nothing worked.

Deggs eventually got in touch with a man from his kids' school who owned a feed mill. He started work there on his 40th birthday, making a fraction of what he had at Texas A&M. Kathy began working at a local preschool, and they tried to patch together enough of an income to cover their bills.

The environment at the preschool also ministered to Kathy.

"I wasn't feeling the love I needed from my husband," she said, "so God was giving it to me through the women and children there."

The feed mill gave way to pharmaceutical sales, thanks to a connection through Jeremy Talbot, who had been on Texas A&M's staff with Deggs. Sales brought in a little more money, but that time saw very little change between Deggs and Kathy, despite a few attempts at counseling.

"I told him I wanted a divorce," she said. "I said, 'I don't know who you are. I don't know what happened to you, but we can't go on like this anymore."

"Of course, Matt just didn't give up, and he slowly started to come around."

So did baseball.

...

Talbot learned that Louisiana-Lafayette's hitting coach and recruiting coordinator was leaving, so he again called Deggs and encouraged him to reach out before the job was advertised. That led to a meeting with Louisiana-Lafayette coach Tony Robichaux, whose demeanor and approach extended grace to Deggs.

Robichaux said he didn't need all the details about Deggs past, but he did want to know what Deggs hoped for in the future. Robichaux offered Deggs the

job because he said Deggs was broken and needed healing for himself as well as for his wife and family.

Deggs went to Lafayette while Kathy and the kids finished the school year in College Station. After 430 days outside of college baseball, Deggs was back on the field.

More important, God's grace—first through Robichaux, but then in Deggs' own heart—started to take hold during his time at Louisiana-Lafayette.

Near the start of his second season, Feb. 28, 2013, Deggs left alcohol behind—for good.

Deggs and Kathy grew spiritually as they relied on God even more in their marriage.

"She is so steadfast," Deggs said, "and that whole sequence really started a snowball effect of healing and coming together."

...

Texas has always been home for Deggs and Kathy. They were in Louisiana for the second time and had been in Arkansas once, but they always felt God would bring them back to Texas.



Following his first season at Sam Houston State in 2015, Deggs led the Bearkats to consecutive 40-plus win seasons and Southland Conference Tournament titles in 2016-17.

"Unless we totally decide to surrender and just hold His hand and go where He leads us, then everything else is impossible," he said. "It wasn't until I forgave myself for a lot of things and started living a life of faith and sacrifice and obedience that I started to see good fruit—maybe for the first time in years—in my marriage, my family and my professional life."

The three seasons in Lafayette also served as a reminder that Deggs was a top-flight coach. The Ragin' Cajuns were one of the best offenses in the country and were just one win from the College World Series in 2013.

Out of their native Texas once again,

In 2015, a call came from Huntsville. The Sam Houston State job was open. Deggs still remembers Kathy's devotion from the morning he was hired. It was built around Genesis 28:15 (NIV): "*I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land...*"

While not a major conference powerhouse such as Texas or Texas A&M, Sam Houston State boasts a decorated athletic department and a commitment to its baseball program. Huntsville is about two hours from Texas City and the Deggs family. There was a lot to like about taking the helm of the Bearkats, and the early returns on

“People are thirsty for something bigger than themselves, and that something is Jesus Christ.”
— Matt Deggs



several fronts have proved Deggs was the right hire.

Culture has been among the highest priorities.

With Deggs' blessing and encouragement, FCA has flourished in the Bearkats' clubhouse. This past fall, the team did a nine-week study on the idol of sports. Few seats are open at the weekly Bible study, and some of the players are starting their own small groups.

“They’re natural leaders,” Johnson said, “and they’re becoming even better leaders. And now that they know that sports is a platform for them, they’re using that influence for Jesus.”

Foliart also has been an adviser, and he has been duly impressed.

“I’ve been around a lot of athletic cultures,” Foliart said, “and I’ve not found one like the one (at Sam Houston State). He’s been so transparent about his own story and so willing to just live it out in front of them—good, bad, ugly—so they feel free.

“They’re going to remember Matt Deggs for the rest of their lives.”

...

The on-field product, of course, has thrived. Sam Houston State has won more than 40 games and the Southland Conference Tournament the past two years. The Bearkats took out national seed Texas Tech in the Lubbock Regional last June before falling to Florida State in the Super Regional.

Yet, it was in that loss in Tallahassee, Florida, that Deggs became a celebrity, and the light of Jesus shined brightly. His team suffered a season-ending 19-0 loss to Florida State. In the hours and days after the game, though, the sports world buzzed because of what Deggs and his players said during their postgame news conference.

Sam Houston State's values and culture—rooted in the gospel—were on full display.

Deggs spoke about sacrifice, that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for another (John 15:13).

He reiterated that his focus as a coach and leader is not on reaching the College World Series, but “building and saving lives.”

His players hailed Deggs' humility. One proclaimed him the best college baseball coach in the country, “because (Deggs) would never say that about himself.”

Video of that news conference has been viewed more than 40 million times since, including pro players and famous athletes who shared it on social media. The outpouring of support and response prompted Deggs to write his autobiography, *15 to 28: A Story of God's Love, Power and Redemption*.

The book has given readers an insight into the full picture of Deggs' victories and struggles. It has dredged up some painful memories and produced a lot of heart-to-heart talks as Deggs and Kathy continue to heal. Their daughter, Klaire, read the book in two days.

In all areas, the book has revealed Deggs to be a transformed leader, now fearless in his vulnerability.

“When leaders give a window into their soul, it provides a mirror for those who are listening and those who are following,” Foliart said. “His transparency says, ‘Hey, I can be broken and still be bold in my faith. I can be broken and still be a successful husband and father and coach, or whatever it is they’re going to do. They want to know that in their brokenness they can still be something significant.’”

Sam Houston State has seen the best of Deggs. Fortunately, so have Kathy and their kids.

“He became a rock,” Kathy said. “Of course, we know we’re in God’s hands, but he has become the husband I needed and the father my kids needed. It brings peace and comfort.”

That change, Deggs said, has very little to do with him—but, rather, everything to do with his Lord and Savior.

“People are thirsty for something bigger than themselves, and that something is Jesus Christ,” he said. “Jesus was very transformational. He was never transactional. He was a living, breathing picture of what we were created to be.”

FCA



SAGE KARAM, AT THE END OF HIS FIRST INDYCAR SEASON IN 2015, WAS ENJOYING THE RIDE OF HIS LIFE.

REMARKABLY, THE 20-YEAR-OLD PHENOM WAS LEADING THE POCONO 500 WITH LESS THAN 30 LAPS LEFT. BUT THOSE FINAL LAPS WOULD BE DIFFICULT AND RISKY, CONSIDERING HE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH FUEL TO FINISH. HE AND HIS CREW CHIEF DISCUSSED THEIR OPTIONS OVER THE TEAM'S RADIO.

"We decided I was just going to push like crazy," Karam said. "Open up a big lead and hope for the best. Maybe a yellow [flag] would come out, and we might be able to make it on fuel."

"It was going to be a stretch, so I put my head down and put the pedal to the floor."

Karam pushed. For seven more laps. Then, as fate would have it, the yellow flag did appear.

The only problem? Karam was the reason for the caution.

Karam, to this day, still doesn't know what happened on lap 179. Entering Turn 1 at 220 miles per hour, his car suddenly got loose and snapped up the high bank, crashing

violently into the wall. Debris from the high-speed impact ricocheted in several directions, spraying all over the track and forcing other drivers to dodge it as they zoomed by.

Karam was shaken. Considering the impact, though, he was surprisingly in OK shape. His thoughts immediately went to his friends, family and top sponsors in attendance, since Pocono is about 30 minutes from his hometown of Nazareth, Pennsylvania. The safety crew arrived on the scene in less than a minute, removing Karam from the car and assisting him towards the infield care center, where he found his mother, Karen. The two rode to Lehigh Valley Hospital in nearby Allentown for X-rays and further diagnosis. All appeared to be fine, but Karam could tell by his mother's somber look that something wasn't right. Then, he received the devastating news.

Justin Wilson, one of the drivers behind Karam, had been struck in the head by the nose-cone that had flown off of Karam's car.

"I stayed at the hospital with a few other drivers, and it wasn't looking good," Karam said. "I still had on my race suit. I didn't have any other clothes with me."

"After awhile, we knew he probably wasn't going to make it. I went home and couldn't go to sleep. I sat there with my mom and dad and my manager and just talked about everything."

The sad news emerged the following morning: Wilson died at the age of 37.

Too numb to completely absorb the shock, Karam felt responsible for the tragedy.

"My parents were trying to tell me it wasn't my fault," he said, "but when you're 20 years old and something happens like that, all you do is blame yourself."

SPEEDING UP

Karam was only a year removed from his teens at the time, but he was already a veteran driver. He started racing when he was seven years old and amassed 36 national karting championships, including the 2010 US F2000 national title, five Star Mazda crowns, and the 2013 Indy Lights championship.

At 14, at the request of his father, Jody, he started a mentoring relationship with sports psychologist Dr. Jarrod Spencer.

WRECKED AND RESTORED

WHEN TRAGEDY STRUCK INDYCAR DRIVER SAGE KARAM'S CAREER, AN FCA HUDDLE HELPED LEAD HIM BACK INTO A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST AND TAUGHT HIM HOW TO HEAL AND FORGIVE. BY CHAD BONHAM

"Sage is very special," said Spencer, who was coached by Jody in wrestling in high school. "You could see that early on as his racing career developed. So, like any father, Jody wanted to do whatever he could to help his son. It was great to teach Sage about the emotional side of sports."

In 2014, Karam made his IndyCar debut at the 99th running of the Indianapolis 500. Starting from the last row, he worked his way up from 31st to a ninth-place finish.

That was his only race of the year. In 2015, Karam landed a dream spot with Chip Ganassi Racing—one of the premier teams in motorsports—which signed him to a contract to compete in 12 of the season's 16 races.

After his second appearance in the Indy 500, Karam continued to show flashes of greatness. He finished 12th in Detroit, 12th in Texas, and then raced to impressive fifth- and third-place efforts at Fontana and Iowa, respectively.

Then came the crash at Pocono.

At that point in his career, Karam admitted he was going through the motions spiritually. He wasn't attending church like he did when he was younger. His prayer and devotional life was also on the backburner.

The crashed changed everything. "I had to get some help," he said.

SLOWING DOWN

Wilson's death brought out misguided race fans from the Internet and social media. The most vocal among them held Karam responsible, even suggesting he no longer belonged in the sport.

"The wrong driver died," one person wrote.

The vitriol made it harder for Karam to deal with his internal struggles. Eventually, Jody advised him to stay off the Internet for a while. During that time, Chip Ganassi Racing dropped him from the team.

Karam's future in racing was in doubt.

His next steps were critical. He went home to Nazareth and spent a few months coming to terms with the aftermath of Pocono. Listening to his family's advice, that meant doing something race car drivers loathe: slowing down.

First, he focused on getting himself emotionally stabilized. To do that, Karam visited Spencer twice a week for counseling. Spencer, a Christian, implemented Scripture-based teaching into his techniques.

"Very few times in sports or in life does an individual experience such a wide spectrum of emotions in such a short amount of time," Spencer said. "It's very rare and very difficult. And that's exactly what Sage and the people around him had to go through."

Spencer's influence didn't end there. He was an FCA Huddle leader, so he invited Karam to attend Sunday night meetings with other athletes. Every week, for several months, the group gathered in Spencer's living room and studied a different Bible verse. Then, they would split into smaller groups and share about the issues they were facing and how they related to that verse.

One of the verses, Psalm 27:1 (NIV), was especially impactful: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?"*

Reflecting on the verse, Karam said, "If I have God with me, that's all I really need to get through bad times. He's always going to have my back, no matter what."

As time passed, Karam grew more connected to God than ever before. He consistently attended church and found himself praying and reading

the Bible more. FCA did for Karam what it has done for thousands all over the world.

"Many young people have questions about God," Spencer said. "So where can you go and ask those questions openly and honestly and talk about it with your peers and some mentors? You want to seek those answers in a loving, learning environment.

"That's what the FCA Huddle did for the young men and women who came to it, and particularly for Sage, at a time in his life when he had a lot of significant questions about God and about how his faith in God could help him through this tragedy."

On May 3, 2016, less than a month before the Indy 500, former FCA President/CEO Les Steckel attended one of the gatherings at Spencer's home. Steckel, who grew up 10 miles from Nazareth in Lehigh Valley, was aware of Karam's backstory, connected with the young driver, and spoke into his life. That led to a

"I've had a lot of success in racing. I credit all of it to [God]."
— Sage Karam

moment where everyone gathered around Karam for a powerful prayer.

"That moment was so significant," Spencer said. "It was incredible to see Sage bow his head and open his heart and just receive blessings as people laid their hands on him and prayed for him, one after another. It was a wonderful example of how the power of Christ, the power of prayer, and the power of Christian community can help an individual get through a tough time."

After some time, Karam reached out to Wilson's family. He wanted to get in touch with Wilson's younger brother, Stefan, who is also a race car driver. The two were able to talk about the tragedy, which helped continue the healing process.

"It still stings every now and then," Karam said. "You'll come across some things that you don't want to see—a photo of Justin that brings back memories and feelings. It took me awhile to come to terms with what happened, but I had to forgive myself and tell myself there's nothing I could have done."

MOVING ON

Almost nine months after the crash, the time had come for Karam to get back into an IndyCar. Sitting behind the wheel of the No. 24 DRR/Kingdom Racing Gas Monkey Garage car at Indianapolis Motor Speedway was the last courageous step in putting the past behind him.

prime opportunity for Karam's story to reach others.

"Sometimes God will turn our mess into a mission," Spencer said. "If you look at Sage's social media, for example, you'll see him put messages out there about his love for God, his faith in God, his reliance on God. When athletes put out messages about God, it gets a lot of attention.

"When people lay their hands on you like that, and you experience the power of prayer in an FCA Huddle, it definitely makes you want to pray more. Prayer is part of his life now more than it was before the tragedy."

Karam is also using the platform he received from Kingdom Racing, a Christian-based team that has sponsored four of his five Indy 500



"I knew I had to do it," Karam said. "I knew I had to prove that I still had it. It helped me come to terms with what happened at Pocono, and made me realize this is what I want to do with my life. I know it's a dangerous sport. Obviously, I still think about Pocono from time to time, but I'm a professional driver, and you've got to do your best to put the bad thoughts behind you and move forward."

Spencer proudly watched Karam mature as a young man and, more importantly, as a Christian. He sees a

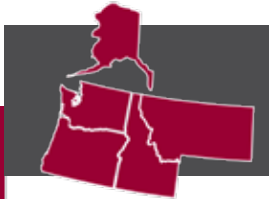
rides. Karam's story is featured in *God Speed*, Kingdom Racing's 2018 book, which has provided yet another opportunity to share his testimony of grace and redemption.

"I've had a lot of success in racing," Karam said. "I credit all of it to Him. He's been with me through the good, and He's been through the lowest of lows. I'm doing my absolute best to move on and be the best person I can be and the best race car driver I can be. I give God all the glory."

FCA



MINISTRY MOMENTS & PRAYER REQUESTS FROM THE FIELD



PACIFIC NORTHWEST

FIELD VP: **RON FRANK**
PNWFCA.ORG

Ministering to and through the coach is being integrated more into the Pacific Northwest Region FCA culture. We have seen amazing things happen through our Coaches' Couples Getaways and an increased ministry presence at coaches' clinics and conventions. Also, coaches' Huddles/breakfasts are growing in impact and numbers, and doors continue to open for 3D Coaching Training opportunities.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. That God will provide the right leaders to fill the Seattle Metro Director and Northwest Washington Area Director positions.
2. For our staff, as they prepare for and host camps, including new leadership, football, volleyball and wrestling camps and Coaches Couples Getaways.
3. Our region's word for the year is Focus (Phil. 3:13-14). Pray that our staff, boards and volunteers will focus on one thing: Jesus!



EUROPE

REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR: **JEFF SUTHERLAND**

FCA's ability to provide training, resources and programs for local leaders has allowed the ministry to develop new partnerships in Croatia, Norway, Macedonia, Kosovo, and other countries in the European region. On a vision trip to Norway, we met with the Norwegian ministry KRIK, which serves thousands of young athletes. Those meetings led to the planning of 3D Coaching Trainings in Norway in the near future!



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. That God will continue to open doors for FCA to partner with local leaders throughout Europe.
2. For ministry partners in Macedonia and Kosovo, who serve where evangelical believers make up less than three percent of the population.
3. The leaders of KRIK serving in Sweden and Finland, as they look to grow their ministry throughout Scandinavia.



NORTHLAND

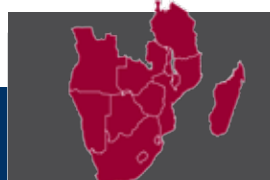
FIELD VP: **JEFF JUNI**
JJUNI@FCA.ORG

In February, Minnesota FCA held "Minnesota Made—Stories of Faith," an outreach event featuring actor Kevin Sorbo and others sharing their faith. One of the most impactful speakers was Jummy Barless, who shared her journey from being raised Muslim to becoming a high school and collegiate track star and now a Christ-centered high school track and field coach.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. For board chairs to continue becoming more engaged and intentional in helping grow the local ministry.
2. For staff who will lead major market initiatives in Minneapolis/St. Paul and Milwaukee.
3. For the multimillion dollar fieldhouse and hockey rink being built by ministry partners in Alexandria, Minnesota, that will house our FCA Hockey ministry in the Northland. Scheduled to open this fall, it will provide tremendous opportunities for ministry.



SOUTHERN AFRICA

REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR: **MARK HULL**

Simon and Franklyn, our partners in ministry from Southern Africa, did a "reverse" trip last summer, and spent several weeks learning about FCA Camps and served at the FCA Sports Camp at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. For Mark Hull's transition as the International Coordinator for 3D Coaching, and for God to provide wisdom as we identify a new Regional International Coordinator (RIC) for the Northland Region.
2. For our trip to Zambia this summer where we'll help train coaches while also learning from one another as our partnership grows.
3. For favor and discernment, as we seek to strengthen our relationships with our Global Region partners and for doors to open to new relationships.

Summer 2018

College Guide

bit.ly/FCAMagCollegeGuide

For many students, the quest to find the right college is a stressful process. Why not let FCA help you?

These two pages feature a collection of Christian colleges that want to enhance your faith and strengthen your mind. If you find something you like, simply fill out the response card and drop it in the mail, or visit bit.ly/FCAMagCollegeGuide to request more information.

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"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out." – Proverbs 10:9 (NIV)

My life coach shared something with me that he believed could alter my future. "You can't get where you want to go," he said, "until you stop lying about where you're at." It wasn't just *what* he said, but the *way* he said it. It jolted me. After some time I realized, "Hey, wait a minute—did he just call me a liar?"

I know he used that specific language to make sure I was paying attention. It worked. I haven't been able to shake it since.

He, in essence, was questioning my *integrity*.

Having integrity means being willing to back up what you say with action. Good intentions on their own don't produce integrity. My coach saw gaps between my desire and my discipline. He saw gaps between my words and my actions. Then, in a loving way, he began to expose the excuses I had grown used to disguising as reasons for why I fell short.

The Bible is full of passages about living with integrity. But Proverbs 10:9 (NIV) has always stuck out to me: *"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely."*

When we're exhibiting integrity, we never have to worry that someone will catch us living in a way that is inconsistent with what we say we believe. On the other hand, when we lack integrity, we're always looking over our shoulder to make sure no one finds out we're doing the wrong thing. The truth always has a way of revealing itself, doesn't it?

Coaches have a way of asking questions that expose some of the lies we've been telling ourselves. They can help us determine if we're living with integrity. Here are three questions that act as a mirror for me as I strive to experience transformation and reach certain goals:

- **What obstacles are in my way?**
- **What's keeping me from becoming who I am made to be?**
- **What's preventing me from reaching my goals?**

Pay attention to how you think about those questions, because your answers might say a lot about you. If your answers are consistently pointing the finger at outside sources, you might be an excuse-maker. Maybe a lot of the reasons you aren't making progress are really just excuses, which exposes a deeper issue of integrity.

I'll put it this way: If I know what I need to do to accomplish a goal, and I simply don't do it or I make up excuses along the way, then I've exposed a gap that only I can close.

You can have reasons or results. Not both. And, if you're anything like me, you just want *results*.

The older I get, the less time I have for excuses. So, as we pursue optimal health, let's be true all the way through.

Here are two simple ways we can display integrity with our health.

Have integrity with your fitness. We have to keep our commitments to exercise. If you commit to "sweating every day," you need to do it! Or, if it's four times per week, put it on your calendar and don't let how you feel stop you. There are plenty of days where I have to talk myself into getting to the gym or exercising while I'm traveling. But having integrity means keeping my commitments to exercise, showing up and putting in the work to reach my goals.

Have integrity with your food. This is the one where I have a tendency to compromise—especially if it's a craving. By now, many of us know which foods are good for us and which foods aren't. Whole foods—the ones that haven't been processed and still *maintain the integrity* of how they were grown—are the best. Highly processed foods—the ones that *lack integrity* because they've been modified from their original design—are the most harmful. It's not that complicated, but it takes a concerted effort to make the smart choice whenever your stomach tells you it needs some food.

Want to know the most beautiful part of those two pieces of advice? Both go hand-in-hand! When you make wise, whole foods choices, you naturally have more energy and *want* to be active. And after you finish a great workout, you don't want to ruin it with an awful food choice. Energy begets more energy, and the momentum becomes real!

I know living with integrity can be hard. It's not easy to do what we say we'll do and constantly line up our actions with our words, values and beliefs. But that is what we are called to do, and that's why people with integrity stand out from others. They live in such a way that God is glorified and that's what we all want. Let's pursue God together, and I'm certain we will find the life and freedom found through the path of integrity.

FCA

INTENTIONALITY WITH INTEGRITY:

- 1. In what areas do you lack integrity with your fitness?**
What commitment will you make to get back on track?
Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.
- 2. In what ways do you lack integrity with food?**
What commitment will you make to get back on track?
Read Daniel 1:11-17.

about the author: JIMMY PAGE

Jimmy Page serves as the Executive Director of Field Ministry-West Division for FCA. As a 20-year medical fitness leader and former National Director of FCA Health and Fitness, he models and promotes principles that lead to abundant health and life. Jimmy is an author of *True Competitor*, *One Word*, *Wisdom Walks*, *Life Word*, and *Called to Greatness*. He and his wife, Ivelisse, started a cancer foundation called *believebig.org* following her victory over cancer. They live with their children in Fort Collins, Colorado. You can email Jimmy at jpage@fca.org.



BOLD
WITNESSBY CHASE HEADLEY
SAN DIEGO PADRES*"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."
- 2 Timothy 1:7*

Like every little leaguer, I had dreams of playing in the big leagues. And, just like every other kid, I also dreamed of going pro in every sport and competition imaginable. Whether it was baseball, football, basketball, soccer, skiing, hunting or fishing, my older brother and I were doing it and competing to be the best while growing up in Fountain, Colorado.

Aside from family church attendance on Christmas and Easter, Christianity wasn't really part of my childhood. During my freshman year of high school, one of my best friends invited me to an FCA meeting. God had a plan for me to be there that night. He worked on my heart during the message about salvation, and it was there, at FCA, that I prayed to accept Christ into my life and begin a relationship with Him.

That decision forever changed my life. I continued to attend FCA meetings, and the relationships I formed with people—both friends and teachers who were believers—poured into my faith and were big contributors to my spiritual growth.

At the same time, I was excelling on the baseball field so much that I had the chance to play in college. I moved west to California for my first

season at Pacific before transferring to Tennessee my sophomore year.

I endured a couple of injuries during my college career, which proved to be spiritual gut-checks for me because I'd never had baseball taken away from me. I really struggled with it, realizing that my identity was completely wrapped up in athletics. God used my injuries to shape me and teach me that there are a lot of things in life that are more important than what happens on the baseball

***"God is the only
reason I am where
I am today."***

field—first and foremost, developing my relationship with Him.

My injuries healed, and I was blessed to be selected in the second round of the 2005 MLB Draft by the San Diego Padres. I was so close to realizing my childhood dream of playing in the big leagues, but I first had to endure the grind of the minor leagues. Those years were tough—not making much money and long bus trips at night. I relied heavily on my faith and commitment to the Lord to help me make good decisions and be a light for Him to my teammates during my time in the minors.

All the hard work was worth it, though, when I made my Major

League debut June 15, 2007. My first stint with the Padres lasted just several days, but it made me even more driven to get back. After starting in the minors in 2008, I was called up several months into the season and have been playing in the big leagues—both with the Padres and New York Yankees—ever since.

In 2012, I had the best season of my career and was humbled and blessed to be able to win both a Gold Glove and Silver Slugger award. I felt God's favor upon me during the season, keeping me healthy and productive for the team.

Looking back on my life and career, I know that God is the only reason I am where I am today. He has chosen to put me here to share His love with others. I understand I have a huge platform as a professional athlete, so I try to use it to share my faith through my actions, how I handle adversity on the field, and in the words I speak to the media and fans.

I have also come to understand how important it is to be surrounded by men who can be trusted to hold one another accountable and be there for one another through the difficult times that will inevitably occur. We enjoy being able to gather together and challenge one another in God's Word at Sunday chapels and Bible studies both at home and on the road.

I'm blessed to be able to play this game. I enjoy every moment I'm on the field because I know it won't last forever. When the day comes that I have to step away from the game, I hope people say I made an impact for the Lord by playing the game with passion, and that I was bold in my witness for Him.

FCA

about the author: CHASE HEADLEY

BORN: May 9, 1984

HOMETOWN: Fountain, Colorado

COLLEGES: Pacific, Tennessee

NOTES:

- 2012 National League Silver Slugger
- 2012 Gold Glove Award (Third Base)
- Led the National League with 115 RBI in 2012



WANT TO APPEAR in the next TeamFCA profiles? Contact your local FCA staff member or email us at mag@fca.org!

 <p>SHALONDA SMITH</p> <p>Campus Representative Oxford, MS</p> <p>FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Esther because it reminds me that regardless of my painful start in life, when I am serving God, He will give me favor. He has greater [things] in store for my future so I can be a blessing to others.”</p> <p>BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “It has allowed me to see my husband, Sammie, grow in his faith and in his relationship with God, and it has given me the opportunity to minister alongside him, which is an answer to our prayers.”</p> <p>I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “His love changed my life and gave me hope, and that same hope I can share with others (John 10:10).”</p> <p>FAVES</p> <p>Isaiah 43:1-2, cheerleading, waffles, walking, card games, spring</p>	 <p>RODNEY DROUD</p> <p>Huddle Coach Lincoln, NE</p> <p>FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3. I love that it shows the power of the Spirit to immediately transform Nebuchadnezzar’s hard heart.”</p> <p>BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “It has blessed my entire family. It has made my faith stronger and more focused in the many roles I play as a husband, father, and track and field coach.”</p> <p>I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “He lived that perfect life, went to the cross for a sinner like me, and defeated death by rising from the grave. Why would anyone not want to follow Him?”</p> <p>FAVES</p> <p>Ephesians 3:20-21, auto racing, pancakes and eggs, watching grandkids, spring</p>	 <p>CARA CUNNINGHAM</p> <p>Huddle Leader Warrenton, VA</p> <p>FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Jesus blessing the children in Mark 10. This story reminds me that in a world of such brokenness and chaos, I can sit at His feet in complete awe and trust as a treasured child of God.”</p> <p>BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “At a pivotal time in my life, I found the FCA Huddle at my school. It set my heart ablaze as I learned of the incredible privilege of inviting Jesus into athletics, surrendering to Him, and playing for Him. I grew in my faith as I grew in the Huddle, as He guided my way to the leadership team.”</p> <p>I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “He is my Savior! He sustains me and rescues me. He is my best friend.”</p> <p>FAVES</p> <p>2 Corinthians 12:9, volleyball, Notre Dame, hiking with family, spring</p>	 <p>JOSH EGBO</p> <p>Outreach Leader Missoula, MT</p> <p>FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Joseph in Genesis 37 because it shows that all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord.”</p> <p>BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “It has helped me break through my spiritual shell and stretch myself into the lives of others. Through it, I have created lifelong bonds with people I may have never met otherwise.”</p> <p>CHRIST-LIKE QUALITY WORTH EMULATING: “Kindness. I try to show this by doing little things like having good manners, showing respect, and seeing the good in all people.”</p> <p>I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “He will never fail me, even when all else seems to fail.”</p> <p>FAVES</p> <p>Joshua 1:9, football, Snickers, breakfast, swimming, winter</p>
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LIFE LESSONS FROM COACH D

Throughout my coaching career, I've always admired and tried to learn from a coach who passed away many years ago.

After I became a Christian, I began to examine the life of Coach D very carefully. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was being introduced to the idea of integrity through this coach. He's probably one of the greatest coaches of all time, but I'm not sure many know of him anymore.

To fully understand the word "integrity," which is used quite often, I like to dive into its root word, "integer," a word you might not have thought about much since high school math class. An integer is a whole number, not a fraction. A fraction is divided; a whole number is complete, undivided, consistent. A fraction is part of something. It doesn't reveal the whole picture; there's something missing that is vital for completion or maturity.

In non-mathematical terms, I associate fractions with the word "compromise," a mutual agreement where the bar is lowered somewhere closer to the middle. As they ask at Starbucks, "Do you want to leave room at the top for cream?"

Coach D was very gifted, but when it came to following the Lord, he left no room at the top for cream! He did not negotiate with sin, nor did he come to a mutual compromise with the devil as to how fervently he would follow the Lord. Integrity was non-negotiable for Coach D. What a winning quality!

The Lord blessed Coach D favorably. He continued growing in integrity through strong convictions to studying the Word and his prayer life. His *intimacy* with the Lord fueled the integrity of his faith. And, finally,

he was offered a prestigious head coaching job.

However, around the same time, the nation began to forbid public Bible reading and prayer. Coach D faced a dilemma, because his private worship of the Lord overflowed publicly. He believed that integrity meant as you *believe*, so you *think*, so you *speak*, so you *do*. Many fellow believers around Coach D at the time urged him to just comply with the new rules. They didn't want to risk losing him as head coach. After all, they reasoned, he could still worship and pray in silence without

"We have the freedom to express our faith; we just have to be aware that we might get in trouble for it!"

anyone noticing and not have to commit "professional suicide."

But Coach D thought staying silent about God just because the world told him to tone it down would be a lack of integrity. Let me ask you: What would you have told Coach D?

Who exactly is this Coach D? It's Daniel, from the Bible.

When I was reading through Daniel's story as a younger Christian, I was astonished at his predicament, and then amazed at his decision, which you can read in Daniel 6.

These days, too often it seems many of us are advising fellow Christians who are climbing up in status to play it safe. When the world says "back off," we, as Christians, automatically just do what they say. Daniel dealt with similar appeals, but he saw his situation

as an integrity issue because his intimacy with God would have been compromised. In my life, too many times to count, I know I've broken integrity with Jesus. But through the painful repentance process I have learned a couple things.

First, I've learned my broken integrity always accompanied my fractured intimacy with Jesus. Second, it was *my* sinful choice. No one other than me could make me lose my integrity in a situation.

What would you tell a Christian coach who's just landed a "dream job" but was also told to not pray or share Scripture with their team? How would you advise an FCA Huddle that meets at the local school and is told certain thoughts and beliefs must not be called "sinful" or even addressed? What would you say to a ministry that was told it couldn't present the gospel?

Well, here's the lesson Daniel gives us in Daniel 6:10: *"But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual, in his upstairs room, with its window toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God."*

We have the freedom to express our faith; we just have to be aware that we might get in trouble for it! The lions didn't like the integrity-driven choices of an Old Testament coach named Daniel, who simply let God be God with the rewards and/or consequences of that integrity. Through his intimacy with God flowed tremendous integrity, and intimidation could not conquer it.

What would you tell the many Christian coaches, athletes, leaders, pastors, parents and kids facing similar challenges today?

FCA

about the author: RON BROWN

A member of the FCA Hall of Champions and former Nebraska FCA State Director, Ron Brown is the associate head coach and running backs coach at Liberty University. You can find his teaching videos and Bible studies online at calledtocompete.com, sportsparables.com and rightnowmedia.org. He and his wife, Molvina, have two daughters: Sojourner and Bronwyn.





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