

# 1 starters for Sunday

## **Commonwealth Games Second Sunday**

**13 July 2014**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank David Oakley, CEO and British Director of Ambassadors Football ([www.ambassadorsfootball.org/gb](http://www.ambassadorsfootball.org/gb)) for his thoughts on the second of 3 Sundays set aside as part of the united Christian ‘More than Gold’ initiative for the Commonwealth Games being hosted in Scotland in 2014.

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## Quick Guide...

*Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.*

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

### Introduction

Following the example of the Apostle Paul in a number of his epistles in the New Testament of the Bible, the aim of the 3 Commonwealth Games Sundays is to look at the world of sport and use it as a metaphor for drawing out spiritual truth and life lessons. The 3 Sundays will focus on the well-known 3 stage saying that is often used at the beginning of races “On your marks... Get set... Go!”

On this second Commonwealth Games Sunday the theme will therefore be “Get Set” ie the idea of being focused to implement the race, match or competition strategy that has been agreed with the coach. In particular around this theme we will see the different roles, responses and outcomes as a result of focusing on the strategy that needs to be implemented. The metaphor being drawn out is that our Heavenly Coach has a strategy to reach out to this world and our response to this strategy will shape our destiny and effectiveness in the race of life.

### [Genesis 25: 19-34](#)

These verses show the continuation of God’s ‘Get Set’ strategy for the world with the fulfilment of God’s promise to the ‘Father of Faith’ Abraham that his descendants will become numerous and fill the earth. The focus of this promise to be fulfilled now moves onto the second (Isaac) and third generations with the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob. It is evident that carrying out God’s strategy is not easy as we see from verses 21-22 Isaac’s wife suffered with bareness for many years before eventually God brings breakthrough in response to Isaac’s prayers as she becomes pregnant. The pregnancy is also a struggle as the twins within Rebekah’s womb are fighting for position.



The battle for position between the twins continues into adult life as the younger brother Jacob looks to manipulate his older hungry brother Esau into handing over his rights of first born blessing just for a meal. Esau's attitude of casualness towards his position and responsibilities as the elder brother is highlighted in that he will give them all up for something to eat. Sometimes in the sports arena we can also see talent being wasted through such casual and even contemptuous attitudes. The display of contempt by Esau shapes the destiny of these 2 men in the plans of God and the fulfilment of promise.

God of course is not taken by surprise or caught off guard by this event. In fact God had already taken into account in His 'Get Set' strategy for the world this display of contempt by Esau as the Lord had predicted during pregnancy of Rebekah that "*the older will serve the younger*"<sup>1</sup> (v. 23). Whilst there is comfort in seeing we have an all knowing God who is never taken by surprise and therefore His ways and strategy are always the best. We are also challenged to treat His ways and 'Get Set' strategy plans with great care so that we do not miss out on the blessing of walking in His will.

### [Psalm 119: 105-112](#)

In this section of the Psalm, the writer focuses on the way the Lord reveals and communicates His 'Get Set' plan and strategy for people. His Word is the way God reveals and communicates His strategy for life as according to verse 105, the Word gives light, insight and guidance on the way people should go. For the Psalmist, God's Word was the Torah ie the first 5 books of our Bible's today and therefore in the following verses there is an emphasis particularly on God's law being the strategic plan for life.

The Psalmist reflects that in following God's laws and plan it has not necessarily meant an easy life as he has suffered (v. 106) and been under attack (v. 110). Yet despite these difficulties, the writer has not given up on God's guidance for his life as he continues to follow God's right ways (v. 106), he still wants to be taught by God (v. 109), he does not want to forget God's law and he does not want to wander off from God's instruction (v. 110). There is a determination about the

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotes taken from the New International Version (1976) of the Bible unless expressed otherwise.



Psalmist to keep to God's strategy for life as in verse 112 he states *"My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end"*.

As a result of the ongoing decision to follow God's plan as revealed in God's Word there seems to be real benefits for the Psalmist. There is renewal of life (v.107), there is a legacy and a sense of internal joy (v. 111) that comes with keeping God's ways. A game plan for success for an athlete or a team will not necessarily be easy to follow but it will keep them on track for victory. Openness to the game plan and a determination to implement it in the heat of competition will be a key to success in sporting competition. Similarly, if we are to live a victorious life we need a similar openness to God's plan as revealed in His Word and a determination to implement His ways.

### **Romans 8: 1-11**

This passage begins with a 'therefore' and thus we need to ask what has been said before our allocated passage of Scripture so as to gain a true understanding of what is being communicated in chapter 8. The apostle Paul in writing at the end of chapter 7 presents a very negative view of the human condition with statements such as *"What a wretched man I am!"* (Ch. 7 v. 24) and *"I myself in my mind am... in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin"* (Ch. 7 v.25). In contrast to this, there is a dramatic change of tone as the apostle presents a new life of freedom in the Spirit as a result of the acceptance of Christ's sin offering sacrifice for humanity (Ch. 8 vv. 1-4).

In verses 5-11, Paul presents a contrast of characteristics to a life lived under the rule of sin versus the Spirit to highlight the difference Christ has made in His sacrifice for people. Those under the rule of sin have sinful desires, a mind of death, hostile to God and displeasing the Lord. In contrast to this, life in the Spirit is of oneness of mind, a sense of belonging with the Spirit leading to life and peace for a person. God's strategy through Christ is to set people free from their sinful nature and then to enjoy life in the Spirit - This is His game plan for us.



## [Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23](#)

It is a mystery why some people believe on the Lord Jesus Christ but a key element seems to be the condition of the heart of people or the 'ground' on which the seed of the Gospel message lands. In Matthew 13, verse 2 we read of large crowds gathering to listen to Jesus and the strategy Jesus employs is to tell parables (ie earthly stories with heavenly meaning) in order to filter out who in the crowd has a heart for the Lord and wants to really understand God. Jesus is not impressed by big crowds but rather His game plan for success is to discover the teachable ones who urgently want to really know about the things of God.

The story in verses 1-9 highlight this filter process through the picture of 4 types of soil with an explanation given in verses 18-23 showing that the soil is actually the human heart and the heart in responding to the message of Jesus can be hard, superficial, distracted or good. Therefore God's strategy is to discover those with potentially fruitful and productive hearts. As a result we are left considering what is our heart like ie is there an urgent productive responsiveness to God or are we hard, superficial or get easily diverted away from the things of God? Additionally are we prepared to follow the strategy of Jesus so rather than be impressed by crowds instead we go in search of teachable ones? Sport is a filter process to discover those who can perform well to be successful and often it comes down to an inner urgent desire to learn, improve and fulfil potential.

### Thoughts for Preaching

Jesus when faced with a big crowd of mixed people with different backgrounds, beliefs and possible responses revealed His strategy to search for teachable people through telling a story. The story told in Matthew 13: 1-9 and the resulting explanation of the story in verses 18-23 highlights three elements that are present with this game plan of finding fruitful people:

- a) **The Seed** (v. 4 & 19) – At the heart of God's strategy is not miracles but a message for people. Success or failure is not dependent on the seed or the seed throwing technique but rather the quality of the soil ie a person's heart and their capacity to receive and respond rightly to God's message. During the Commonwealth Games seed will be distributed by a variety of methods eg holiday Bible clubs, hospitality, Big Screen events,



literature distribution, chaplaincy, community festivals, sports quizzes etc but the key is the receptivity of a hearer's heart.

- b) **The Sadness** (vv. 4-7 & 19-22) – Unfortunately despite the best efforts in seed distribution there will be rejection of the message and three forms of rejection are identified by Jesus:
- i. **Hard Soil** (v. 4 & 19) – People hear God's message but before this Word can take root, the message is snatched away by the Evil One. Perhaps this snatching away may be an intellectual, moral or casual response but either way the message of God is not accepted.
  - ii. **Rocky Soil** (vv. 5-6 & 20-21) – These are your five minute wonders who make an emotional response to the Word but ultimately fall away and reject Christ when trouble comes because of the lack of depth. Therefore there may well have been a decision but not discipleship to really follow Jesus for life because it is too difficult and hard.
  - iii. **Thorny Soil** (v. 7 & 22) – These are people who get distracted over time and eventually go back on their decision to follow Christ. Other things crowd in and take over as Jesus becomes less and less important as the cares or worries of this world prevent spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

Sadness and disappointment are part of the process and a consequence of the strategy as not everyone is teachable or have hearts ready for fruitfulness. It is true in the sports world that people with talent can drop out at any point as they can be too hard to listen, too shallow to battle through the hard times or too easily distracted by other things to fulfil their talent. Similarly like a good coach being rejected whilst reaching out to sporty youngsters, the church's best efforts to reach out will still meet with people who will say 'No', fall away and/or do nothing with the message that has been shared.

- c) **The Success** (vv. 8-9 & 23) – This is our comfort that neither God nor we have got it wrong. The whole point of farming is that there is fruit plus multiplication - God is looking for the same response from people... a fruitful life that multiplies through its impact on others. Similarly a good coach hangs onto to those gems of encouragement as they see a few



sporting protégés fulfil their potential and exceed expectation in the impact they make. Success in God's kingdom is assured with this 'Get Set' strategy of the Lord despite the problems, rejection and sadness spoken about earlier – There will be fruit and there will be a multiplication effect for good from those who bear this fruit.

The 'key' to this success is found in verses 9 and 23 *"He/she who has ears, let him/her hear"*. Responsive hearing will be necessary for any successful team or athlete in the Commonwealth Games. Similarly responsive hearing is necessary for the Lord as it is the reflection of the heart of good soil in a person and it is God's and the church's search for such responsive hearers that is His strategic game plan not only for the world but for us as well.

### **Time with Children**

The children could be asked, or a type of quiz devised (possibly using a big screen), to reflect the tactics, game plans or strategies of athletes or sports teams eg different styles of football teams such as Liverpool & Chelsea, the baseline game of Andy Murray, the long surging sprint from 500m out of Mo Farah in distance running, the sprinting of Sir Chris Hoy in cycling etc. Additionally the children could be asked about selection processes they have seen in sport (eg try outs) or at school (eg tests) in order for the most successful/effective people can be picked to participate. These game plans and selection strategies can be compared and contrasted with the methodology Jesus used in His parable telling.

A fun game (as long as it is safe and appropriate) could be musical chairs or squares (where there is always one less chair or square available than the children participating and when the music stops they must get on a chair or square. The one who cannot is eliminated and another chair or square is removed as the music starts again) until you are left with only one winner. Interview this winner about their tactics or game plan to win - Use this as an illustration of God's selection process. Similar games such as penalty shoot outs could be used.

A helpful video link that could be shown is from the Max 7 resources for children that tells the Parable of the Sower story through a cartoon. This three minutes video clip is available on <http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=fb7b129a-5b6e-43b3-af18-485d44e36b3d>.

A good verse that can be explained and the children helped to memorise is Matthew 13: 23.



## Prayers

### Collect

Almighty God,  
you have made us for yourself,  
and our hearts are restless  
till they find their rest in you.  
Give us peace in your service,  
and in the world to come  
the joy of seeing you face to face;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### Confession

#### All

Heavenly Father,  
We recognise that life can be hard and difficult  
Forgive us for our lack of trust and belief in you  
Forgive us for our impatience in difficult times  
We acknowledge we fight and scheme against you  
We are casual and contemptuous about the things of God  
We do not take seriously our responsibilities or call in life  
We fail and we fall  
We get easily distracted and go off on our own way  
Often we give up so easily in following you Jesus  
We let other things crowd you out Lord  
Have mercy on us we pray  
Amen



**Minister**

We thank you that we have a God who answers our prayers  
We have a God who is not taken by surprise  
Either by events here on earth  
Or by our own failures  
We have a God who has good and pleasing plans  
A God who has the capacity and strength to fulfill His promises  
So we give you thanks today O Lord for the forgiveness of sins  
Our Master, Redeemer and Saviour  
Amen.

**Response**

Heavenly Father,  
We acknowledge that your Word is a lamp to our feet  
It is a light for our path  
Therefore we want to walk in the light of your Word  
Your laws are right O Lord  
Therefore we want to give ourselves over to you  
To live by your standards  
We know your Word can preserve our lives  
Therefore we want to praise and adore you O Lord  
We want to learn from you O King  
Help us not to forget you and your ways  
Keep us from straying  
So that we will know true joy in our hearts  
A joy of a life lived with you Jesus  
Holy Spirit, enable us to keep in step with you we pray  
For your sake, glory and honour O Lord,  
Amen



**Adoration**

We praise you Lord because you have set us free in Christ  
There is no condemnation for those in Christ  
Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to liberate us  
We worship you Jesus for going to Calvary in our place  
For dying the death that we deserved  
For taking the punishment that was meant for us  
We adore you for rescuing us O Lord  
We praise you we can now have the mind of you O Holy Spirit  
Through your indwelling life  
We praise you Jesus that you are life  
Life everlasting and life to the full  
You are the Prince of Peace  
We worship you for the indwelling life of Christ in us  
We praise you for your righteousness that meant we can go free  
We praise you for life  
You are the resurrection and the life  
You are the life giving God  
We your new creation praise you now and forever  
Amen

**Dedication and Intercession**

Heavenly Father, we commit to you  
All the outreach that shall take place in Your Name around the Commonwealth Games  
We pray for responsiveness and much fruit from  
The Holiday Bible clubs  
Hospitality shown to visitors, athletes, official and families  
Big Screen events  
Literature distribution  
Chaplaincy  
Community festivals



Sports quizzes

Testimonies shared

Church Services

We pray against the Evil One to stop him snatching your Word away

We pray against shallow responses to the Gospel message

We pray against distraction in order that people will follow you all their lives

We pray for the faithful proclamation of your Word

We pray for the fulfillment of potential

Both on and off the sports fields and arenas around Scotland

For your sake and glory O Lord

Amen

### **Blessing and Benediction**

Go now in the victory that Christ has won

Go now in the comfort of Christ's success

Go now to bear fruit in a hurting world

Go now to win others to Christ

Go now in the assurance that the Lord will fulfill His plans

Let he who has ears, hear the Word of the Lord

And respond rightly to His call

For His sake and glory

Forever and ever

Amen.



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 396	And can it be that I should gain
CH4 466	Before the throne of God above
CH4 483	Father of heaven, whose love profound
CH4 103	Fill your hearts with joy and gladness
CH4 235	God is working his purpose out
CH4 349	In our lives plant seeds of hope
CH4 352	O for a thousand tongues to sing
CH4 512	To God be the glory!
CH4 363	We have a gospel to proclaim
CH4 804	You shall go out with joy (Dauermann)



## Additional Resources

For sports specific ideas for children, youth, mission and community visit the More than Gold 2014 resource page <http://www.morethangold2014.org.uk/resources.html>.



For weekly discussion questions designed to integrate faith themes with current football news stories go to <http://gb.ambassadorsfootball.org/what-we-do/resources/>

## Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

## Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Revealing Love](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#).



## Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

## Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

## Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots i the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

*The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to David Oakley for providing us with this Sunday's material.*

*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*

