

Starters for Sunday

Commonwealth Games First Sunday

6 July 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank David Oakley, CEO and British Director of Ambassadors Football (www.ambassadorsfootball.org/gb) for his thoughts on the first 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.

Thanks also to Cameron Findlay and Peter Neilson for providing the words and music for a song written to support the children’s project for Sport Relief.

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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 first Commonwealth Games Sunday the focus will therefore be “On your marks” ie the idea of being ready and in great shape to compete in a race, match or competition. In particular around this theme the influential role of the coach will be considered and the difference a great coach can make to the performance of a sportsperson on race or game day. The metaphor being drawn out is the greatness of our Heavenly Coach and our response to Him in order to be fruitful and effective in the race of life.

[Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67](#)

The trusted servant of the patriarch Abraham is sent on a mission to find a wife for his master’s son from his master’s family relatives who lived outside of Canaan. Upon arriving at the home of a relative of Abraham called Laban, the servant explains both how the Lord has blessed his master as well as the purpose of his visit to find a wife for Abraham’s son.

In the process of explaining how he ended up at Laban’s house, the servant in verses 42-49 reveals how the Lord had answered his prayer in verse 42 to “grant success to the journey”¹ on which he had come. The signs the servant was looking for were all answered in a ‘divine appointment’ with Rebekah as her kindness, generosity and willingness to serve were

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



demonstrated. Therefore the servant praised the Lord as he believed in asking his heavenly coach for help, his mission of finding a wife for Abraham's son had been successful.

The love story is completed as Rebekah willingly goes back with the servant to marry Abraham's son Isaac and she was not only loved by Isaac but became a source of comfort to him as grieved the death of his mother. Faithful obedience and listening to the Heavenly Coach led to prayers being answered and desires being fulfilled far more than what anyone could have expected.

[Song of Songs 2: 8-13](#)

These verses are part of a love poem composed by Israel's King Solomon to celebrate human love, to illustrate spiritual love, to inspire love for God and to sing love songs to Him. In verse 8, we read of this magnificent athletic image of the lover "*leaping across mountains, bounding over hills*" demonstrating great speed to take the opportunity to reach out and meet with the one he loves. A wonderful picture of how God our Heavenly Coach comes near to us, looking for us to respond to His call as the winter season (v. 11) is past and He is looking for the hidden life potential within us to be seen in the new season.

Twice within these verses (v. 10 & v. 13) there is a call from the Lord to "*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.*" The repetition of the command emphasises both the Lord's view of and the desire for his chosen one. His view is that his chosen one is truly loved and beautiful in eyes. His desire is to be with his chosen one and he wants his chosen one to be proactive by joining him. What an encouragement that our Heavenly Coach loves us, thinks we are beautiful and wants to be with us... now that is a coach worth responding to and joining in the race of life.

[Romans 7: 15-25a](#)

In contrast to the love of God for us and the beauty He sees in us from the Song of Songs, the Apostle Paul shares about the loathing of self over the inner ugliness in people and the battle with the sin nature. Paul in these verses expresses the dilemma of wanting to do that which is good and yet unable to do so with the frustration of human sinful nature pulling down the efforts to do what is right. Thus the apostle presents the ongoing human struggle of the presence of evil within despite aspirations to seek God and to do that which is good.



Tom Wright analyses of the position as “*a battle has been going on*” and that we as human beings find ourselves to be “*prisoners of war*”². Therefore in the midst of this dire situation, Paul cries out for help “*Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” - Paul’s cry is not for a ‘what’ but for a ‘who’ and of course his cry is met in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once again our Heavenly Coach is there for us in providing the solution in Christ in our continual struggle to overcome self in the race of life.

[Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30](#)

Matthew 11 is a chapter of revelation as the greatest of Israel’s prophets John the Baptist had been imprisoned by King Herod and so John’s disciples seek out Jesus as they look for reassurance that he really is the Chosen One of God, the Christ. Jesus points not so much to Himself but rather to the demonstration of the mighty signs, deeds and miracles that have been seen in order to show that He indeed is the Christ. The evidence Jesus presents demands a response from His listeners both then and now.

In verses 16-19, Jesus points out through a children’s chant that God seems to be rejected regardless of approach in His revelation to humanity. John the Baptist’s austere lifestyle is seen as demon possessed and at the opposite end of the spectrum the people focus strategy of Jesus’ people leaves Him with a reputation of a socialite. Yet despite the lack of understanding and the rejection it still does not stop Jesus in making a wonderful offer (vv. 25-30) to His listeners of a partnership for life with Him, the great Heavenly Coach.

Thoughts for Preaching

The suggested main focus for preaching especially around the Matthew 11 verses is ‘*Be close to your Heavenly Coach to run the race of life well*’. We have already seen from the other Scriptures that have been read that our Heavenly Coach can guide us, He loves us, He thinks we are beautiful, He wants to be with us and He helps us with the battle raging within ourselves. The right response to this life coaching offer from Jesus is to be in relationship with, connected and close to Him. We can do this by having the right:

² Paul for Everyone Romans Part 1 Chapters 1-8: Tom Wright, SPCK 2004, p. 132.



- a) **Mentality** (vv. 25-26) - Be coachable through being childlike ie come as one who is unlearned, empty and trusting rather than with pride, arrogance and know all attitude. A right coachable learning attitude means the athlete and sportsperson can improve, get better and fulfil their potential and it is same for the child of God. Such an attitude towards our Heavenly Coach is right because it means God is praised (v. 25a), it is God's chosen path (v. 25b) and it brings pleasure to God (v. 26).
- b) **Model** (v. 27) – God has chosen a process of delegation in order to reveal Himself and what He wants. The process in verse 27 is that the Father has revealed all to His Son Jesus. The Son then chooses to whom He reveals His Father in Heaven. Following on from verses 25-26 and the rest of chapter 11, Jesus chooses those who have the right humble mentality and are coachable. For a sportsperson to succeed, the right coaching model of what, when and how to teach should be followed in order for success. Our Heavenly Coach's model of revelation is right and we should follow it by responding correctly to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ in order to see, know and experience God in the race of life.
- c) **Method** (vv. 28-30) – Shift the excess weight in order to be competitive. This is what good coaching method does for a sportsperson, it gets them in great shape to compete and this is what our Heavenly Coach offers us. His coaching method is for us to:
- i. **Come** (v. 28) – This will lead to moving from restlessness to rest. Sportspeople have to rest well in order to perform at their best and we have to know true rest to compete well in life. This true rest is found in our Heavenly Coach, the Lord Jesus.
 - ii. **Take** (v. 29a) – Share the burden of life with Christ. The picture is of 2 oxen harnessed/yoked together but one oxen is bigger and stronger and bears most of the burden... this is what our Heavenly Coach does for us. His yoke is so much lighter than carrying the burdens of life by ourselves.
 - iii. **Learn** (v. 29b) – Jesus is very gentle with us and humble as a teacher as our Heavenly coach leading to us knowing peace and experiencing a 'lightness' in our lives. A good coach liberates a sportsperson into a freedom of expression and this is what our Heavenly Coach offers us as well because of the peace and lightness He brings through His training methods.



Time with Children

The children could be asked, or a type of quiz devised (possibly using a big screen), of great coaches and the impact they have had on sportspeople eg Ivan Lendl with Andy Murray, Sir Alex Ferguson with Manchester United etc. Ask about the qualities of these coaches that make them so great. Additionally the children could be asked about a sports coach or a teacher in school who inspires them and again ask the children what are the qualities of these coaches. As the qualities are drawn out these can be compared and contrasted to the qualities of our Heavenly Coach.

A fun game (as long as it is safe and appropriate) could be to blindfold someone and see if they can get around a course without any help. Then add someone to take on the coaching role by giving instructions/directions on how the blindfolded person can complete the course more quickly and less painfully. Lastly get someone taking on the coaching role to not only give instructions but to actually come alongside of the blindfolded person to take hold of them and lead them gently through the course. Use this as an illustration of the way our Heavenly Coach leads us.

A helpful video link that could be shown is from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics of the injured athlete Derek Redmond being helped to the finish line by his dad <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxxuATBofZg> (there are a number of versions on YouTube). This can be used as a picture of the father/coach role our God in Heaven plays for us.

A good verse that can be explained and the children helped to memorise is Matthew 11: 28.

Prayers

The suggested prayers very much follow the Scripture readings.

Collect

Almighty God,
 your Son Jesus Christ has taught us
 that what we do
 for the least of your children
 we do also for him.



Give us the will to serve others
as he was the servant of all,
who gave up his life and died for us,
but lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Adoration

Heavenly Father,
You are the Sovereign Lord,
You are the One that has a perfect and pleasing plan for each of us,
You are the God who goes before His servants
You are the God who leads and directs your people
You do not leave us or forsake us
You are the Immanuel God who does not leave His people alone
You are the God who orders circumstances to fulfill your will
We praise you Lord God that you do answer the prayers of His people
You answer our prayers even before we finish praying
You are the God who provides
You are the God who provides favour to those who follow Him
You are the God who brings breakthrough to those who obey Him
And we worship you for all your goodness to us.

Response

We your people are waiting for you Lord
We your people are watching out for you Lord
We your people long to see you move in might and power Lord God
Give us ears to hear your calling
Give us hearts that respond rightly to your call O Lord
Let us arise as your people
We want to walk with you Holy Spirit



Release the potential that is in us O Lord
Bring forth new life after the winter season
Let there be much fruit in our walk with you Lord
Have your way with us Master
For your sake and glory we pray,
Amen

Confession

All

Father we confess that we are unspiritual people
We recognise that we are sold as slaves to sin
We acknowledge that we do not understand what we do
For the good we want to do... we do not do
For the bad we do not want to do... we do
There is nothing good in us and we are ruled by our sinful nature
We confess we continue to do that which is wrong and evil
We are truly wretched people and we need a Saviour
Who will rescue us from our body of death?

Minister

Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ our Saviour
Thanks be to God for rescuing us from our sins
Thanks be to God for bringing us life instead of death
Praise the Lord
Amen.

Dedication and Intercession

Father we come to you as your children
We come to you with a childlike heart
We come as those who are unlearned and empty
We trust you Lord and want to be filled by you
We ask that you would reveal yourself to us today



We ask that you would be pleased to show yourself to those who are hurting
Ease the load on those who are burdened
Bring peace to those who are troubled
Grant your rest to those that are tired and weary
You are the gentle, humble teacher
We are your children and we want to learn from you this day.
Amen

Blessing and Benediction

Go now in the rest and peace of God
Go now with a lightness of spirit
Go now in the assurance of the forgiveness of sins
Go now in the freedom only Christ can bring
May the blessing of God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you
Now and always
Amen.



Musical Suggestions

CH4 445	Alleluia, sing to Jesus
CH4 555	Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
CH4 465	Be thou my vision Lord, be my vision
CH4 259	Beauty for brokenness
CH4 489	Come down, O Love Divine
CH4 759	Come to me, come to me
CH4 361	Forgiveness is your gift
CH4 529	Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go
CH4 180	Give thanks with a grateful heart
CH4 640	Holy Spirit, come confirm us
CH4 461	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
CH4 404	I danced in the morning
CH4 540	I heard the voice of Jesus say
CH4 490	Jesu, lover of my soul
CH4 360	Jesus Christ is waiting
CH4 553	Just as I am, without one plea
CH4 356	Meekness and majesty
CH4 157	Sing of the Lord's goodness

There is a song on the following page written to support the children's project for Sport Relief.



Run with patience the race God has called us to run
 with Jesus before us, and crowds cheering on.
 When legs become weary and ready to fall
 "Keep going, keep going", we hear Jesus call.

We will wrestle and fight till God's justice has come
 ensuring God's love is for all, not just some;
 We'll pray and we'll work and we'll speak out the truth
 God's people in action is faith's living proof.

Jesus' team was just small, but they gossiped his word
 Together they travelled and transformed their world;
 As athletes for Jesus, child, woman and man,
 We'll take up the challenge, by faith "Yes, we can!"

Music by Cameron Findlay

Words by Peter Neilson

Written to support the children's project for Sport Relief

C. Findlay

Piano

Pno.



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.

