

Sports Crazy Transcription

If you're a kid who spends almost all of your spare time on sports or if you're a parent who always seems to be driving kids to another practice or game, stay tuned.

This is the back to God hour: the program that looks at life in light of the Bible. Exploring God's answers to our questions. Our host is David Fedders. Our topic for today is "Sports Crazy".

Kelly is thirteen. Her sister Katie is fifteen and both girls play soccer. Their dad drives. He drives them to practice almost every day. He drives them to several games each week. He drives them to other regions of the country for games. And sometimes he even drives them across the Canadian-American border for more soccer. One weekend Kelly played in three games on Saturday and Katie had two games that day and then they had five games on Sunday.

According to a Time magazine cover story, that kind of involvement in sports is becoming typical of more and more families. Whether it's soccer, hockey, baseball, basketball, football, volleyball, tennis, golf, swimming, figure skating or some other sport, kids are getting involved in competitive sports at younger and younger ages. Much of the kids' time outside of school and much of the parents' spare time before and after work is devoted to sports. Weekends, holidays, and summer vacations must be planned around the sports schedule. Parents may spend thousands of dollars each year for equipment, club fees, camps, clinics, and travel. Take Barry, for example. Barry is thirteen and he is part of an elite club track team. Last year his family spent 12,000 dollars on Barry's track activities. Barry gets up at 4am every morning for a thirty minute run. Every afternoon, he has two hours of track practice. Barry has followed that same pattern five days a week ever since he was seven years old. And his work seemed to be paying off. He's already set records for his age group in the long jump and hurdles. He and his family are hoping he'll win a college scholarship and make it to the Olympics.

Other parents have similar hopes. A single mother has a son and two daughters who all play basketball. One daughter is on five different teams. The family usually eats on the fly and has little time for other social activities. In an entire month there were only three days without a practice or a game. The mother says she hopes the kids will get athletic scholarships to cut the costs of university tuition.

Most kids though will never fulfill those dreams. Only a small number, barely one in a hundred, will get an athletic scholarship to attend college or university. If parents want their kids to be able to afford college, 99 percent of them would be better off spending less on sports and investing the extra money in a fund. As for a kid eventually making the olympics or having a professional career, the chances aren't even one in a thousand.

If it were simply a matter of affording and education and getting a career. Most kids would be better off spending less time on sports and more time on study. The vast majority have a better shot at an academic scholarship than an athletic scholarship. Intellectual skills lead to a good working career far more often than athletic skills lead to a professional sports career. Still, that doesn't stop millions of kids and parents from making sports their top priority. Not everyone

goes to quite the extremes of some sports fanatics. Many ordinary people aren't expecting scholarships or pro careers, but they still make sports a huge part of their lives. They burn lots of gas and spend lots of time bustling here and there for various events. And why not? The kids love to play and the parents love to watch. What's the harm? They're having a lot of fun and their involvement in sports can produce other benefits besides fun. Kids are healthier, if they're getting plenty of exercise, than if they're sitting around getting flabby. It's better to be in tip top shape than to be couch potatoes. They're better off spending their spare time on sports than spending it in front of the TV filling their minds with mush. They are better off playing games than hanging out on the street looking for trouble. What's more, involvement in sports can help them develop self discipline. They learn how to manage time. They learn to train and strive and sacrifice to reach a goal. One result is that even with less free time, kids involved in athletics often do better in school than those who don't play any sport. Sports involvement can also strengthen relationships. It can teach teamwork and foster friendships with teammates. It can make kids and parents feel closer to each other. The time they spend together just driving here and there may give them opportunities to talk that they might not get otherwise. The shared experiences, the shared joys of victories and the shared disappointment of defeat can bond parents and kids and make them feel closer. Kids relish their parents' attention and parents love seeing their kids have fun and perform well. Put all of these benefits together and even the grumpiest critic has to admit that involvement in sports isn't all bad. Sports can be good, no doubt about it. But many of us still need to ask whether we've got too much of a good thing. It can be harmful, even deadly to be sports crazy.

One problem occurs when pushy parents pressure kids to perform. Many kids, especially younger ones, would rather just play and have fun than try to meet the adult expectations of parents and coaches. Playing sports ought to be a relaxing diversion, but it can become a stressful obsession. As Time Magazine puts it, "throughout the Cold War, we watched with disdain as promising youngsters behind the iron curtain, were plucked from home and hearth and sent to spend their childhood in athletic camps where they would be ruthlessly forged into international competitors, exemplars of the totalitarian ideal. But that was years ago. Watching the crazy culture of kids sports in North America today, a cynic might marvel at how the world has changed. The good news" says time, "is that the Cold war is over. The bad news is that the East Germans won." That might be overstating the case, but there is little doubt that some sports crazy parents are robbing kids of their childhood. It's bad enough when parents howl at referees and umpires over a judgement call, or heckle a coach for not giving their kids enough playing time. But it's even worse when parents scold kids for having a bad game, or push them to practice harder and harder, as though the future of the world depends on the outcome of a kids game. What happens when a kid feels too much pressure in sports? Many quit playing all together. Seventy-three percent quit their childhood sport by the age thirteen, mostly because they're not having fun. Meanwhile, many who keep playing end up absorbing the harsh "sports is everything, win at any cost" mindset, instilled by parents and coaches. Even if they become great at games, they may turn out to be rotten at relationships and lousy at life.

But even if sports crazy kids grow up to be successful, well adjusted, good natured adults, another danger is lurking - the danger of missing what matters most in life. Let's just suppose

that everything goes right. Suppose you're good at a certain sport. Your parents are supportive, but not pushy or overbearing. You get so good at your sport that you receive a full athletic scholarship to the university of your choice. You win championship trophies in highschool and university and you even go on to win an Olympic gold medal and a professional career in which you win the world championship. Suppose that in all this, you grow up to be a decent, likeable person. Even so, even if everything went right, something would be horribly wrong if sports crowded God out of your life. Sports involvement may be most dangerous, not when it's bad, but when it's good. Good enough to crowd out what's best. The most common danger in sports isn't the emotional damage of pressuring kids too hard or the fact that some athletes resort to cheating and taking steroids and other illegal drugs to boost their performance. Or the corrupt players and dirty agents who care only about money. Or the gambling scandals where athletes are bribed to change the outcome of games. These things have been covered in the media, and they're bad. But the most widespread problem with sports, a problem the media doesn't deal with at all, is that a sport can seem so exciting, so wholesome, so fun, so satisfying, so glorious, that it becomes the center of your life that it matters more to you than God himself. Sports can wreck your relationship with God just as surely as crime or booze or pornography or some other vice. Believe it or not something good can make you godless just as surely as something bad. Some parents are so busy racing from game to game with their kids, even on Sundays, that they don't worship God in church. More and more teams schedule practices and games on Sunday and they even schedule them right during the worship hour. Does anyone object? Even families that might otherwise attend church may rearrange their Sunday to fit the sports schedule. Games matter more than God. Sports is supreme, church is optional. And this doesn't just affect Sundays. Throughout the week, more families are spending all their spare time on sports. They seldom share a meal together as a family and they never have time for family prayer and bible readings. The deadliest part is that it all seems so wholesome, and healthy, and normal. Even as I talked about these things, some listeners are probably thinking "what's wrong with this guy? Why is he so worried about sports?" Questioning sports is a bit like questioning motherhood or apple pie. What's wrong with playing a few games? If kids are into drugs and gangs, there's a problem. But if kids are into sports instead of drugs, if they're wearing a sharp looking uniform instead of dressing as a gang member, how can anyone object? But strange as it may sound, sports can destroy you. Anytime you put something other than God at the center of your life, you're playing with fire. If sports is what matters most to you, you're falling for Satan's scheme. You're in danger of leaving God behind forever and finding yourself in Hell. You see Satan has just one main goal for you, to lead you further and further from God. If Satan can do that through making you a drunkard or a vicious criminal, he's happy to do so. But Satan is just as happy if he can lure you away from God by making you so sports crazy that you don't pay attention to God or cultivate a relationship with Jesus or think about your eternal destiny. Satan is no happier if you worship a pagan idol than if you worship a sport. Satan is no happier if parents drive their kids crazy through abuse than if parents make their kids sports crazy. Satan is no happier if senior citizens get drunk all day Sunday than if they play golf all day Sunday. Satan's only goal is to keep you away from God, and whatever it takes to do that is ok with him. In fact, making people sports crazy may be more effective than some of Satan's filthier methods. After all, people who fall into sleazy behavior might sense something is wrong and feel unhappy and perhaps even pray for God's help. But if you're sports crazy, you

may not see anything wrong. You think it's clean and wholesome to have sports at the center of your life and you feel no great need to put Christ at the center. However, trying to find ultimate satisfaction in sports is like chasing the wind. Living without Jesus at the center of your life may seem fun and fulfilling for a while, but at some point, you come up empty. Athletic achievements don't last, and when they're gone, what will you have left?

Let's think about that as we listen to music from Steve Green.

A Chasing of the Wind

“ Every heart is filled with longing
To be free from all life's pain
Yet the search through earthly pleasures
Always ends in vain
Only God who made the heavens
Can satisfy our souls

Apart from Him and all His meaning
All things fail as they begin
And hearts deceived can only know
A chasing of the wind

All achievements, all possessions
All with time return to dust
Only God can be our reason
For deep and quiet trust
He will guard us from the dangers
That gladly make men fools

Apart from Him and all His meaning
All things fail as they begin
And hearts deceived can only know
A chasing of the wind
A chasing of the wind

Why do we live without Jesus?
Why do we waste another day?
He is the life that sustains us
The only hope for us today
So tell me, why do we live
Why do we live without Him?”

David Feddes here again, and we're discussing the dangers of being “sports crazy”. I remember my own devotion to basketball as a kid. My family wasn't as sports crazy as some families today

are. My parents never put me on elite traveling teams or paid thousands of dollars for camps and clinics, but still basketball was a big deal in my school and it became extremely important to me. Already in elementary school, I spent long hours dribbling and shooting baskets on my own and I also joined any playground game I could. I wanted to be great and be admired by others. In high school, I was on the junior varsity and then the varsity team. We practiced at least two hours every night, Monday through Thursday, with games each Friday and Saturday night. Eventually, it all came to an end. In my final high school game, I played my best - 23 points, 15 rebounds, 5 blocked shots - but we lost. We were out of the tournament. As I walked off the floor, I felt empty, not just because we lost, but because basketball suddenly meant nothing to me. My high school career was finished and I knew I wasn't strong enough or quick enough to excel on the college level. I had geared much of my life towards the glory of basketball and then, just like that, it was over. Basketball was not going to be a big part of my future, so what did all those hours of practice and playing really amount to? I felt hollow and even disgusted. For the next two years, I hardly touched a ball. After that, I started playing again and began to enjoy it, but sports never again had such a big place in my life. It was just a minor pleasure, not a major goal. These days, I enjoy playing in a recreational league. I play hard and try to help my team win, but if we lose, I don't get too upset. Within a few days, we'll hardly remember who won anyway. Even in the recreational league though, I'm amazed how deadly serious some of the players are. These guys are past their primes, with no crowds to impress, with games that count for almost nothing, but some still lose their temper. If things don't go their way, they swear, they snarl at the referees, they scold their teammates, they get nasty toward the other team, as though the fate of the world hung in the balance. Apparently, old habits die hard. Once you've become sports crazy, it might not leave your system, even when your glory days are behind you. If you care more about sports than anything else, you need to change. If you're a kid, dreaming of becoming a star, start dreaming of something greater. If you're a mom or dad trying to live out your dreams through your kid's athletic achievements, set higher goals for yourself and your family. If you're a middle aged person who spends countless hours trying to improve your golf swing, work on something more worthwhile. If you're a fanatical follower of some college or pro team and you go wild when your favorite team wins and gets gloomy when your favorite team loses, find something more important to get excited about. If you're a sports junky, who stays glued to a TV sports channel, watching game after game after game, even when you hardly know who's playing, get a life. I mean that literally. Get a life. Get a life that is joyful even when you can't run fast or jump high. Get a life that enriches your family, even when your kids aren't star athletes. Get a life that nothing can spoil or snuff out. Get eternal life, in relationship to Jesus Christ. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord.

The Bible never says it's bad to play games or be involved in sports, but the Bible does say it's bad to put anything ahead of God. Sports may be worth something, but it's not worth everything. Athletics may have value, but the value is limited. Training and workouts may improve your physical fitness, which is good, but physical fitness isn't as important as spiritual fitness. The Bible says, "train yourselves to be godly, for physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise both for the present life and the life to come." A healthy body is good, but it's not nearly as important as a healthy relationship to God. As for the thrill of competing and winning, it may be fun while it lasts, but it doesn't last forever. Eventually, your

playing days come to an end. Any games you won become faded memories. Any ribbons, trophies, medals, or championship rings you collected become junk on a shelf, they have no lasting value. As the Bible puts it, "athletic champions get a crown that will not last, but those who pursue eternal life get a crown that lasts forever." If you're sports crazy, your main problem isn't that you're too excited about sports, but that you're not excited enough about God. It's not that you care too much about games, but that you care too little about glory. The reason that you're cramming every spare moment with sports is that you haven't found anything better to fill your emptiness. The reason winning is your ultimate goal is that you haven't found a higher goal. Satan would like to keep it that way. Satan wants you to fill your time with anything but God and have you seek any goal except becoming godly and spending eternity with God in Heaven.

But now you know better. You've heard how Satan can twist sports from an innocent past time into something that can draw you away from God and destroy your soul in Hell. To defeat Satan's scheme, don't just admit that you've been too crazy about sports, confess that you've cared too little about God. If you want eternal life, believe in Jesus Christ as God's greatest gift and prize Jesus more than you prize anything else. Trust His blood to pay for all the ways you've offended God by placing other things, including sports, at the center of your life. Count on Christ's perfection credited to you as the only way you can be worthy of a crown in Heaven. Rely on God's Holy Spirit to live in you and to keep you in touch with the Lord. Then energized by God's spirit, go after godliness and eternal life with even more desire and determination than an athlete seeking a championship. The Bible sometimes compares the Christian life to a race and urges us to make Christ our goal and to press forward to know Him better. This involved effort and training. Once you've been born again through faith in Jesus, His spirit moves you to get involved in the kind of training that will make you a strong spiritual athlete. Just as athletes need good nutrition, you need the nourishment of Bible readings, prayer, church involvement and regular participation in the Lord's supper. Just as athletes give up things that interfere with their goals, you must give up sins and even cut back on some good things that may be keeping you from the best things. Just as athletes need to practice over and over to get something right, so you need to practice obeying God and helping others until holiness becomes a habit. "Train yourselves to be godly", says the bible. Athletes go into training to get a crown that will not last, but followers of Jesus do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Thank you heavenly Father for the bodies you give us and for the fun and excitement of athletics. Help us to take good care of our bodies and to enjoy sports in a healthy way. Forgive the ways we've fallen for Satan's schemes in our sports crazy society. Open our eyes to the thrill of knowing you and enjoying eternal life in Jesus. By your spirit, train us in godliness and make us more like our hero Jesus, until we cross the finish line and receive the reward you have promised. Amen.