

BOYS Weekly Devotions

Devotion Guide for Coaches

OVERVIEW

Everyone loves a good story! Jesus used stories to capture people's imagination. He used everyday situations they were familiar with to teach them about heavenly things they weren't familiar with. His short, simple stories illustrated bigger, complex truths meant to change us from the inside out. This season, players will gather around to hear basketball parables. These stories are based on the parables of Jesus, but use basketball to explain what Jesus meant. Our prayer is that players will have an understanding heart to learn about God's truth, his character, and his heavenly kingdom. We pray players will develop a kingdom perspective that shapes how they view themselves and others. "I will open my mouth and tell stories. I will speak about things that were hidden since the world was made." Matthew 13:35 & Psalm 78:2

SAY • THINK • ACT • PRAY

Engage players with a relatable story or question. Encourage them to ponder the Bible verse* and what it would look like on the court, at home, school, or anywhere in their daily life. Challenge players to take action demonstrating their faith in real ways. Use the prayer suggestion, your own prayer, or ask for a volunteer to pray to close the devotion.

Week 1 – Getting Acquainted

Purpose – Get to know your players, showing them interest and concern.

At the beginning of practice – play **The Name Game**.

1. Have each player give his/hers name and tell you the athlete they would most like to be and why.
2. You, the coach, now try to go around and name each of the players and the athlete he wants to be like – this may be challenging.
3. Have each player go around and try to name all the players with the hero's name.

During a water break, find out from your players:

- Where they go to school
- Whether they have brothers and sisters
- What they like to do in their free time

Tell them a snippet of your story – you will do more of this throughout the season.

This would include:

- Where you grew up
- Where you went to school
- Whether you have brothers and sisters
- What you liked to do in your free time when you were their age

Week 2: The Guard and the Four Receivers

Based on the Parable of the Farmer and the Four Soils – Matthew 13:1-23

Imagine the point guard passes the ball to another guard open on the wing, but he doesn't step to the pass, and the defender is able to steal the ball. Then, a different player receives a pass, but he doesn't survey his options on the floor and shoots a quick shot and the ball bounces off the rim. Later, a player receives a pass, but instead of protecting the ball in triple threat position, allows the defender to crowd and harass him, resulting in a turnover. Finally, the point guard passes the ball to a player whose hands are ready, who steps to the pass, and lands balanced in triple threat position surveying all of his options. Under control, he faces the basket and takes a smart, clean shot and scores. He goes on to score many more points during the game. **Which receivers had a bad result? Which receiver had a good result?**

But you are blessed. You understand the things you see with your eyes.

And you understand the things you hear with your ears.

Matthew 13:16

When Jesus was on earth, he taught people about God through stories called parables. Our story is a basketball parable. It's like a story Jesus told, but uses basketball to explain what Jesus meant. In our story, passing the ball is like telling someone God's truth. Each player receives the ball (God's truth) and has a different result. The first pass is like telling God's truth to someone who doesn't understand it, so our opponent, the devil, steals it away. The second pass is like a person who understands God's truth, but doesn't let it sink down deep enough into his heart. When hard times come, God's truth bounces right off. The third pass is like a person who lets God's truth sink down into his heart, but then he forgets to trust God so his worries and wants crowd God's truth out. The fourth pass is like a person who hears and understands God's truth. He follows Jesus with his whole heart. He goes on to live God's way and shares God's truth with many other people. Those people decide to follow Jesus and live God's way, too. Then they share with more people and so on and so on. **Which person best received God's truth? What kind of result did they have?**

Jesus came into the world to bring God's truth to everyone. *John 18:37* People hear it, but they receive it differently. Some don't understand it or push it away by choosing worry and fear. Some let it sink down deep into their hearts and choose joy and peace. They are the ones who are blessed. **What are some ways to let God's truth sink down deep into your heart?**

PRAY

Week 3: Start Small, End Tall

Based on the Parable of the Mustard Seed– Matthew 13:31-32

A player wanted to improve his basketball shooting skills. His coach told him to start small and end tall. So at the start of his shot, the player made himself small. He bent his legs as if he was sitting. This is where his power came from. Then as he continued through his shooting motion, he sprung up and ended with his body straight and his hand high in the air. He ended tall. The more he practiced starting small and ending tall, the more shots he made into the basket.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...It is the smallest of all seeds.

But when it grows, it is the largest of all garden plants. It becomes a tree.

Matthew 13:31-32

What is a kingdom? Who rules over it? God is like a king who rules over his kingdom. God created the universe and everything in it. It's his kingdom and he's in charge of it. God also created each one of us. When we let God be in charge of our lives and live the way he wants us to, we become a part of his kingdom. When more people do that too, God's kingdom grows. Jesus said God's kingdom would grow from something as small as a tiny seed to as tall as a large tree. Good things happen when something starts small and ends tall. The number of people who first followed Jesus was small. But when people saw him die on the cross and come back to life again three days later, they were amazed. More people believed and followed Jesus. Before he went back to heaven, Jesus told his followers to keep telling people about him. To help them do this, he gave them a new friend, the Holy Spirit. They couldn't see the Holy Spirit, but they could feel his power. They started in the place where they lived. Then they spread out across the land. Eventually, people all around the world were hearing the amazing story of Jesus and deciding to let Jesus be in charge of their lives. *Acts 1:8*

How did Jesus come into the world? Jesus was born a small, helpless baby. Jesus started small. One day, Jesus will come back. This time he will return as a mighty warrior leading the armies of Heaven. He will remove evil from the world. There will be no more sadness, crying, or pain. He will make all things new. *Acts 3:19-21, Revelation 19:11-16, 21:4-5* **How did Jesus start small the first time he came into the world? How will he end tall the second time he comes into the world? While we are waiting for Jesus to come again, what does Jesus want us to do?**

PRAY

Week 4: The Willing and Unwilling Players

Based on the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds— Matthew 13:24-29

A basketball coach held tryouts for his team. The coach explained what he was looking for most in his players. He said it was their willingness to follow his leadership and be a team player. If they could do that, they would make the team. All the players agreed they were willing. However, as tryouts progressed, the coach could see by their actions that some players were willing and others were not. The unwilling players seemed to care more about themselves than the team. They wanted to do things their way instead of the coach's way. Some even criticized the players who followed the coach's leadership. The coach watched them carefully, but decided not to do anything yet. He was very patient. He wanted to give them the chance to change their attitude, heart, and mind. While knowing the tryouts would have to end soon, the coach extended them for a while in hopes the unwilling players would come around.

But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost. He wants everyone to change his heart and life.
2 Peter 3:9

The coach is like our Heavenly Father who wants everyone to join his family. The willing players are like his children who believe in Jesus and trust him to be in charge of their lives. They choose to do things God's way. The unwilling players are like those who don't follow Jesus. They do things their own way and sometimes make fun of people who follow Jesus. But God loves us all and wants us to have a wonderful forever life with him. He wants everyone to believe in Jesus, the one who saves us. So our Father in heaven waits very patiently for his children to change their hearts and minds so they can be with him. But the day must come when he can't wait any longer. **How does God's patience show his love for us?**

What should we do for people who don't follow Jesus? The Bible instructs us to *"pray for all people. Ask God to help and bless them. Give thanks for them...This is good, and it pleases God our Savior. He wants all people to be saved. He wants them to come to know the truth."* 1 Timothy 2:1-4 **What are some things we can pray for those who don't follow Jesus?**

PRAY

Week 5: The Most Valued Trophy

Based on the Parable of the Valuable Pearl- Matthew 13:44-46

A young basketball player studied the picture of Michael Jordan in an old magazine. He daydreamed of becoming an NBA player and winning the Larry O'Brien Trophy. "If only that could be me" he thought as he imagined himself in the story. The article read, "Michael Jordan held the 24-inch-high trophy and cried when Chicago won its first NBA title in 1991. He kept the trophy in his Los Angeles hotel room all night. The next morning, still in his uniform, Jordan boarded the team bus for the airport. Cradled in his arms was the 15-pound trophy."

Roessing, Walter, March 1994 "Fit for a Champion" Boy's Life Magazine

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

*When he found one of great value, he went away
and sold everything he had and bought it.*

Matthew 13:45-46

Why did Michael Jordan cry when he won the trophy? Why did he sleep with it in his room and carry it around like a baby? Michael Jordan received something so precious to him that he couldn't let it out of his arms. It was his dream come true. Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven is like that—a dream come true. It is something so precious that we don't want to let it go. Jesus compared it to a special pearl. **What are some other special things people can own?** We can own many special and precious things, but none of them compares to how special and precious it is being a child of God and living in his kingdom. Jesus is the only one who makes it possible to know our Heavenly Father.

Today's verse tells us a man saw a special pearl and wanted it. **What did he do so he could buy it?** (sold everything he had) God wants us to know his kingdom is more special than anything we could own. In our parable, a basketball player saw a trophy and wanted it. **What things could he do to try to win it one day?** He would practice a lot, keep a good attitude, and be a team player. Imagine a person hears about God's Kingdom and wants to live in it. **What would he do so he can be a part of God's kingdom one day?** He would believe that Jesus loves him so much that he died and was raised from the dead to save him and give him new life. He would ask Jesus to be his King and want to do things God's way. **What makes God's kingdom so special?** In God's kingdom we find the most wonderful love, joy, peace, and forgiveness we could ever imagine.

PRAY

Week 6: The Coach Who Didn't Give Up

Based on the Parable of the Persistent Widow – Luke 18:1-8

Two teams competed in a basketball game. One team had a couple of players who were getting away with intentional fouls. The referees either dismissed the actions or called them incorrectly. These were blatant flagrant fouls that should not have been allowed to continue. They could have caused injuries. Each time this happened, the coach of the mistreated team approached the lead official to question the call. But the lead official wouldn't listen and turned away from the coach. The fans booed and heckled. The referees ignored them. The coach didn't give up. He persisted to calmly and respectfully approach the lead official. Finally, the lead official agreed to listen and advised the refs to make fair calls for the rest of the game.

Jesus told his disciples a story. He wanted to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
Luke 18:1

What unfair thing happened in the story? The coach could have gotten sad and given up. Or, he could have gotten mad and yelled. But he didn't. **What did the coach do? Have you ever been treated unfairly or seen someone treated unfairly? When people won't listen or do anything about it, who can you go to?** God wants everyone to be treated fairly. When it isn't happening, we can go to him and tell him about it. He listens much better than a referee because he is our perfect, loving father. **When we go to God, how can we be sure he hears us?** John, who was one of Jesus' best friends, tells us, *"Here is what we can be sure of when we come to God in prayer. If we ask anything in keeping with what he wants, he hears us."* 1 John 5:14 God does not like it when his children are treated unfairly. When we tell him about it, he hears us. Jesus said, *"I tell you, God will see that things are made right for them. He will make sure it happens quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find people on earth who have faith?"* Luke 18:8 **What does Jesus say God will do about it?** One day, God will send his son, Jesus, to earth again. At that time, God will make all things right. **But, when Jesus comes again, will he find people who have given up believing in him? Will they have stopped praying for his help? What does Jesus want us to do?** (always pray and not give up Luke 18:1)

How can we show we believe in Jesus? *"The Lord has told you...what he wants from you: Do what is right to other people. Love being kind to others. And live humbly, trusting your God."* Micah 6:8 God wants us to treat others fairly and kindly. He wants us to be humble, never thinking we are better than others. He wants us to pray and trust him completely.

PRAY

Week 7: The MVP and the Ejected Player

Based on the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector—Luke 18:9-14

At the end of the game, the coach led the team in a closing prayer. Then he gave the players a few minutes to pray silently if they wanted to. One player, who was last year's MVP, sat up front and silently prayed, "God, thank you that I am not like the other players on this team. I did not get any technical fouls and I scored the most points. I am always on time and I do exactly what I am supposed to. I'm so glad I never do anything like my teammate who slammed down the ball and got ejected." His teammate sat in the back. He buried his face in his hands and prayed, "God, I'm sorry I got angry at the referee's call and slammed down the ball. I was wrong. It was right for me sit out the rest of the game. Please forgive me. I disrespected the ref and I dishonored my team. I don't ever want to do that again." Then the coach dismissed the players so they could go home.

*All those who lift themselves up will be made humble.
And those who make themselves humble will be lifted up.*
Luke 18:14b

What is bragging? (talking about how you are better at something than others) **Which player's prayer lifted himself up? Which player's prayer made himself humble?** The bragging player thought he could please God by telling him how well he had played and how he had done everything right. He fooled himself into thinking that he was a better person than the other players. The ejected player was honest and humble when he looked at himself. He made no excuses and felt sorry for what he had done. He knew he needed forgiveness. We all do things that displease God. The Bible calls this sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. *1 John 1:8 ICB* God wants us to feel sorry for our sin, not pretend as if we never sin.

What happens when we lift ourselves up by bragging? When we think of ourselves as better than others and fool ourselves into thinking that we never do anything wrong, eventually we will see how we have displeased God. We will be brought down. **What happens when we humble ourselves by apologizing?** When we admit when we have sinned and say we are sorry, Jesus will lovingly lift us up. His love makes us feel better. **What is the problem with sin?** Sin leads to a death that forever separates us from God. With sin, we aren't able to enter God's wonderful kingdom. **How did Jesus fix the problem of our sin?** He took all of our sin and put it on himself. Then he died on the cross under all our sin. When he was raised to life again, he showed his power is greater than sin's power. Sin could no longer keep us away from God. Because of Jesus, we can be close to God in his forever kingdom.

PRAY

Week 8: Only One Way To Score

Based on the Parable of the Narrow Gate – Matthew 7:13-14

A coach met with a group of little kids learning to play basketball for the first time. The coach explained that the way to win the game is to score more points than the other team. He told them there is only one way to score points. He said, "It's very easy to miss the hoop because it's small and narrow. If the ball touches the rim and bounces off, it doesn't count. Shooting a "toilet bowl" where the ball swirls around inside the rim but bounces out doesn't count. Standing under the basket and throwing the ball up through the hoop doesn't count. The ball must go all the way through the hoop from above. If the ball does not pass completely through the basket, no points are scored."

Enter God's kingdom through the narrow gate. The gate is large and the road is wide that leads to ruin. Many people go that way. But the gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to life. Only a few people find it.
Matthew 7:13-14

What if you didn't know the rules of basketball. You thought all you needed to do in order to score was to hit the ball on the backboard or the rim. You never put the ball through the hoop. At the end of the game, you found out you hadn't scored any points. **How would you feel?** Many people have the wrong idea about God and his kingdom. God's word says, "*Some people think they are doing what's right. But what they are doing will really kill them.*" Proverbs 14:12 God wants us all to understand there is only one person who can lead us into his kingdom. **Who is the person who leads us into God's kingdom?** Jesus said he is the way in. He said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" John 14:6 Jesus also said, "*I'm like a gate. Anyone who enters through me will be saved.*" John 10:9 *When we believe in Jesus, trust him with our life, and follow him, we will enter into God's kingdom.*

If someone needed help learning how to shoot a basketball, what would you tell them? When you want to make a basket, look at the hoop. **If someone needed help learning how to follow Jesus, what would you tell them?** When you want to follow Jesus, look at him. God's word says, "*I keep my eyes always on the Lord. He is at my right hand. So I will always be secure.*" Psalm 16:8

PRAY

Week 9: The Lost NBA Autograph

Based on the Parable of the Lost Sheep – Luke 15:3-7

Trevor pulled the box out from under his bed and opened it. He had just gotten a new binder for his collection of NBA autographs. Trevor's uncle worked at the hotel where visiting NBA teams stayed when they came into town for games. Whenever he was able to get an autograph, he mailed it to his nephew. Trevor's collection had reached 100 autographs. Trevor put each autograph into a separate sleeve in the binder. After he had finished, he counted them. "97,98,99...What? Wait a minute." Trevor counted them again. He only had 99 autographs. One was missing. Trevor looked through all of them and realized his Kobe Bryant autograph was missing. He looked under his bed, around his room, through his desk, and in his closet. "Where is it?" Trevor's mind raced. He asked his brother if he had it. His brother said, "No, is it lost?" "Yes," Trevor replied. His brother concluded, "Well you've got plenty of others. What does it matter?" Trevor's eyes got big. "What does it matter? I can't believe you said that!" Trevor continued, "Kobe Bryant is retired now. There won't be a chance to get another one. It's irreplaceable!" Trevor walked away determined to find the missing autograph. Trevor searched all over the house. He decided to look in his room again. He pulled everything out of his desk drawer and spread it on the floor. His eyes landed on an envelope from his uncle. He opened it up and there inside was the Kobe Bryant autograph. Trevor let out a deep sigh of relief. He was so pleased that he texted his friends to come over so they could all enjoy looking at the autograph collection.

The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them.
Luke 19:10

What was lost? Why did Trevor want to find it? Trevor didn't stop looking for the lost autograph until he found it. It was worth a lot to him and it couldn't be replaced. Each autograph was worth a lot to Trevor. In the same way, each one of us is worth a lot to God. When we choose to do things our way instead of God's way, we can get lost from God. But when a person accepts Jesus' offer to save him, there is great joy in heaven because he is found.

Why did Trevor not give up looking for the autograph? Why does God not give up looking for us? God's heart is kind and forgiving. He doesn't want any of us to lose our way. That's why he doesn't give up looking for us. God loves each one of us and wants us to be back with him. That's why he sent Jesus, the Son of Man, who came to look for the lost and save them. **How can we help other people know Jesus is looking for them, too?**

PRAY

Week 10: Saturday Service Project

Based on the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16

The basketball team decided to do a Saturday service project to beautify the grounds of the community center. Coach asked the team to arrive at 8:00 am and wear work gloves. They planned to prune shrubs, rake leaves, and spread mulch. At the end of the day, Coach promised to buy the entire team all-you-can-eat pizza and ice cream. On Saturday morning at 8:00 a.m. three of the team members showed up. It was cold and windy outside, but they got straight to work. At noon, three more team members showed up. They joined the others who were already working. They helped fill bags with leaves and clippings. At 4:00 p.m. the last three team members showed up. They joined the others in spreading the rest of the mulch. At 5:00 p.m. the job was finished. It was time to go to dinner. Everyone loaded into the van and went to the restaurant. When they got to the pizza buffet, the three team members who had worked all day complained, “Hey Coach, these guys only worked for one hour and they get the same as us? They don’t deserve it!” The coach answered, “You agreed to work for all-you-can-eat pizza and ice cream. I’m giving you what I promised. Go ahead and enjoy your dinner. Are you upset I am showing kindness to the whole team?”

You have been saved by grace because you believe. You did not save yourselves. It was a gift from God. You cannot brag that you are saved by the work you have done.

Ephesians 2:8-9

In this parable the team members all received the same reward, even though some of them worked much longer than the others. **Do you think this was fair? Why or why not? Why did the coach give them all the same reward?** The coach cared for all the players the same. He wanted to give them all the same reward. **What reward does our Heavenly Father give to all those who believe and follow his son, Jesus?** (forever life in heaven)

Jesus wants us to know that some people will believe and follow Jesus early in life; while others will believe later in life. But the reward will be the same: to spend forever with Jesus. It is not how long we’ve believed in Jesus or the amount of work that we’ve done for him that gets us into heaven. None of us deserves heaven. But because of God’s grace, he gives us more kindness than we deserve. **Can you think of a time when someone showed you more kindness than you deserved? How did that make you feel?** Because God gives us more kindness than we deserve, we should give others more kindness than they deserve. *Romans 15:7* **How can you show someone more kindness than they deserve?**

PRAY

Week 11: RSVP

Based on the Parable of the Wedding Feast – Matthew 22:1-14

The coach and basketball team received an invitation from a community leader inviting them to watch an NBA game from his luxury box seats in the uptown sports arena. The leader had only one son who was about the same age as the team members. He wanted to do something nice for his son and the basketball team. He decided to provide a fancy dinner for his son and guests. On the invitation he wrote RSVP which means please respond. The coach asked the players if they would like to go to the game with him. They looked around at each other unsure of what to say. "I don't know, I might have something that night," one player spoke up. On the day of the NBA game, the coach again asked who was going with him. One player spoke for the group, "Well, we don't really know them and we've got a lot of homework to do, so probably not." When the community leader heard that none of the team members were coming, he was very disappointed. He had gone to a lot of trouble to make it special. So he sent his assistants outside the arena to find people who didn't have tickets to the game. The assistants brought back many people. The leader was glad his luxury suite was full. He gave them all new NBA jerseys and hats to wear while they ate and watched the game together.

I tell you that the "right time" is now. The "day of salvation" is now.

James 5:19-20

In our basketball parable, the community leader is like God. His son is like Jesus. People are like the players on the team. **What excuses did the team give for not accepting the invitation? How did it make the community leader feel? Why did the community leader invite people outside the arena without tickets to come to his party?**

This story is really about God's kingdom which is even more wonderful than a luxury suite at an NBA game. God invites everyone into his kingdom, but not everyone will accept his invitation. The people who accept his invitation will be glad they did. **Do you know people who have refused God's invitation to believe in Jesus and live in his kingdom? How do you think it makes God feel?** God loves to give wonderful gifts to those who accept his invitation. **How do we accept God's invitation?** We admit to God that we have done things our way instead of his way. We ask him to forgive us. We say that we believe in Jesus and want him to be in charge of our life. We believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. *Romans 10:9* God will be happy to forgive us and make us right with him, just as if we never did anything wrong. Jesus will give us his godliness to wear like new clothes. *Isaiah 61:10* We will wear God's team colors. **How do we share God's invitation with others?**

PRAY

Week 12

This season we have been talking about our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. I want each and every person here to know that Jesus loves you, wants to personally know you and have a relationship with you. God created us in his image so and he put the knowledge about him in our hearts according to Romans 1. Are we going to pursue the God that loves us or are we going to suppress the truth about him? God gave us that choice.

Psalms 14:1- The fool says in his heart, "There's no God." They are corrupt; they do vile deeds. There is no one who does good.

God gave us a book of principals to live by. God created us, so he knows how we should live. When we step outside of his principals and direction, we are sinning. God says in Romans that we have all sinned and fallen short of his glory and the wages or payment of sin is death. So since each of us have made the choice to sin, we all must pay the payment for our decisions. However, there is another way that this payment can be made for our sin and the answer is... BUT GOD!

Lets read Ephesians 2:4-9 4

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast.

God sent his son to die on the cross and be raised from the grave that we might be saved and receive his mercy and grace. Are you going to place your faith in a God that loves you and wants a relationship with you? Pray