

## 8-Week Core Meeting Starter Series (Revised)

The overall goal of this series is to begin to create a Core Team of committed student athletes who understand what Athletes IV is, have begun to meet regularly, and have begun to engage in intentional witness to their teammates.

|    | <b>Core Meeting Topic</b>             | <b>Topic Goal</b>  | <b>Action Steps</b>                       |
|----|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | Our Identity and Purpose              | See AIV as a "mission team" with a primary call to be Jesus' witnesses   | Consider: Do I want to be a part of this? |
| 2. | Our Vision and Mission                | See Jesus' concern for all people and AIV's vision of reaching "every team, every teammate"                          | Invite others to join                     |
| 3. | Our Motivation and Model for Ministry | See Jesus' heart for the "lost" and His intentionality in witness  | Start 2+                                  |
| 4. | Our Need for Perspective              | See how God has been and is at work, and how He wants to use us in that work   | Pray to see things as God sees them       |
| 5. | Our Need for God                      | See there is a work that only God can do in the lives of our teammates, and to see what He needs to do in us as well | Pray for our teammates and ourselves      |
| 6. | Our Need for Team                     | See the need for us to be a "team" in order to carry out our mission   | Core Member Commitment *                  |
| 7. | Our Need to be Ready                  | See 3 essential things needed to be an effective witness for Jesus   | Make plan for personal growth             |
| 8. | Our Need for Understanding            | See our teammates in relationship to where they are at with Jesus  | Learn where teammates are at spiritually  |

\* Core Member Commitment

- to God (to grow in Him and live for Him)
- to AIV "Coach" and Team (with minimum commitment to working with AIV staff and other Core team leaders/members, and making every effort to attend weekly Core Meeting)
- to AIV Mission (with minimum commitment of intentional witness to teammates through "2+")

## Meeting #1: Our Identity and Purpose

**Goal:** To help students understand that the primary purpose of Athletes IV is to be a “mission team”

**Introduction:** From 1959-1967, Vince Lombardi was the head coach of the Green Bay Packers—a professional football team. In the nine years under Coach Lombardi’s leadership, the Green Bay Packers won 5 NFL championships, including the first two Super Bowls ever played. And it is told that this legendary coach began each new NFL season the same. He would gather his players together—both rookies and returning veterans—and deliver these words (while raising a football in his hand):

"Gentlemen, this is a football."

Why did he do this? He did it—at least in part—to remind them of who they were and what this gathering of men was all about. They were a football team, and they had been brought together to play football.

So...What is Athletes IV and what is our primary purpose?

Athletes IV is a ministry of IVCF/USA. And the purpose of IVCF/USA is to “*establish and advance on colleges and universities **witnessing communities** of students and faculty who follow Jesus as Savior and Lord.*” Therefore, the primary purpose of every Athletes IV ministry is to be a “**witnessing community**” as well. But what should this look like? And is there a biblical example of what that looks like? Let’s look!

### **Hear the Word: Read Acts 15:40-16:12**

In small groups or in the large group answer 4 questions and make 4 observations about this passage:

**What is the team like?**

Paul

A Jew

A Roman citizen (Acts 16:37)

An apostle

A missionary/church planter

A bold preacher/evangelist

Timothy

Son of a mixed marriage

- Mother was a Jew

- Father was a Greek

A young Christian/a recent convert

A timid teacher/preacher

Silas

A Jew

A Roman citizen (Acts 16:37)

Not an apostle

A church leader (Acts 15:15-22)

A prophet (Acts 15:3)

Luke [Note pronoun “we” in vs. 10]

A Gentile believer

A behind the scenes team member

An author (of Luke and Acts)

A historian

A doctor (Col 4:14)

**Observation #1: This is a diverse team** (ethnicity, Christian maturity, giftedness, personality, etc.)

**Where do we find this diverse team at the end of the passage?**

Philippi

- A Roman colony
- The leading city of that district of Macedonia
- At the terminus of the Egnatius Way, a road built by the military that joined Rome to the East
- A “hub” of travel and communication and influence!

Observation #2: This diverse team is in an important place.

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How did this diverse team get to this this important place?

God sovereignly brought these individuals together as a “team”

- Paul → persecuting the Church (Acts 8) → converted (9:1) → to Tarsus (9:30) → to Antioch (11:25) → 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey (13:1) → back to Antioch (14:26)
- Silas → leader in Jerusalem church (Acts 15) → to Antioch and back (15:30-34) → back to Antioch (15:40)
- Timothy ? (possibly became a Christian when Paul first visited Lystra, Acts 14:6)
- Luke ?

God sovereignly led this “team” to Philippi

- God’s Holy Spirit “closing doors” (Acts 16:6-8)
- God giving a vision (Acts 16:9-10) → “God had called us” to go over to Macedonia

Observation #3: God sovereignly led this diverse team to this important place

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For what purpose were they there?

- To preach the gospel to the people of Philippi (and beyond!) (16:10)

Observation #4: God sovereignly led this diverse team to this important place to be Christ’s witnesses to the people in that place (and beyond).

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In summary (putting together what we’ve seen), we see in this passage:

“A diverse ‘team’ of God’s people, who He has sovereignly led and brought together to an important place, and to whom He has given a corporate and primary calling to be Christ’s witnesses to the people in that place.”

This is what every Athletes IV ministry should be! A “witnessing community”; i.e. a “mission team”

What this typically looks like is...

- Student-led, team-based outreach ministries committed to reach “every team and every teammate” (which includes Team Outreach Bible Studies, personal witness, 2+, etc.)
- Core gatherings, committed to give team members what they need to do their team/personal ministries well, and to live/grow as a Christian in the environment they are in and amidst the pressures they face.

So...Are you “IN”?

### Apply the Word

1. Reflect upon what has been presented.
2. Talk to your staff about this, especially if you have questions or concerns.
3. Pray and consider: Are you “IN”?

Close in prayer

## Acts 15:40-16:12 Bible Study– A Biblical Example of a “Witnessing Community”

### Background Information

Paul and Barnabas had finished their first missionary journey and had returned to Antioch, their home base (Acts 13:1-14:28). Sometime later, as we see in Acts 15:36-40, Paul gets the urge to go back to the places he and Barnabas had visited to see how they were doing, and asks Barnabas to go with him. Barnabas is all in, but they have a disagreement about whether they should take John Mark with them (Barnabas wanting to, but Paul not thinking it wise since John Mark, who had been with them for some of their first missionary journey, had deserted them). This caused them to part company—Barnabas taking John Mark with him and Paul choosing Silas to go with him. We pick up the story in Acts 15:40...

### Scripture Passage

<sup>40</sup> ... Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

<sup>41</sup> [And they] went through Syria and Cilicia [where Paul and Barnabas had planted churches on their first missionary journey], strengthening the churches

<sup>1</sup> They came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

<sup>4</sup> As they traveled from town to town they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions [seeking to go to places where the gospel had not yet been preached] traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

<sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

<sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

## Acts 15:40-16:12

What is the team like?

Observation #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Where do we find them?

Observation #2 \_\_\_\_\_

How did they get there?

Observation #3 \_\_\_\_\_

For what purpose were they there?

Observation #4 \_\_\_\_\_

## Meeting #2: Our Vision and Mission

### Goals

- Understand and embrace Athletes IV's vision—and Jesus' desire for us—to reach “every team and every teammate”
- Identify other Christian athletes (on our teams and on other teams) who might be interested in joining us in this vision
- Make a plan to invite these athletes to our next Core Meeting

**Introduction:** The account that we will be looking at tells of a very full day of ministry for Jesus in one of the early days of His public ministry. It also reveals something important about how Jesus viewed the ministry that He had been sent to do—something that ought to affect how we view and carry out our own ministry as well.

### **Hear the Word: Luke 4:31-44**

In small groups, read each of the passage and take time to answer the questions.

In large group, have students share their answers with the group. Add any additional thoughts to their answers and summarize at the end.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. In this busy day on ministry in Capernaum, what kinds of things did Jesus do?  
*Teaching, healing, casting out demons*
2. How did the people of Capernaum respond to Him and the things He did?  
*They were amazed.*
3. Why did the people try to keep Him from leaving them (v.42)?  
*They were benefiting from what He was doing.*  
[Mark 1:36-37 tells us that even Jesus' disciples seemed to think that it was a good idea for Him to stay.]
4. What “good” might have happened if Jesus would have decided to stay?  
*He could have done much more in Capernaum.*  
  
What “good” might not have happened?  
*Doing these same things in other places/with other people.*  
*Carrying out God's purpose for sending Him into the world.*
5. What is Jesus' response to their desire/request? Why?  
*He says He “must” go to other places.*  
*Because that is why He was sent (v.43).*
6. What does His response reveal about His heart and His understanding of the purpose/calling for His ministry?  
*He had a heart for ALL people, and He had been sent to ALL people.*  
[Note: Jesus showed His love for the people of Capernaum by later returning to that city to minister to the people there (e.g. Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:1-10, etc.)]

### **Summary**

In what turned out to be a very full day of ministry in Capernaum, Jesus took time to show compassion and to demonstrate His power in meeting the needs of many people in that city. However, because of His heart for all people and His understanding of what He was sent into the world to do, He didn't stay in Capernaum—even though the people wanted Him to and even though there was probably a lot more ministry He could have done in that place.

### **Application**

We, too, have been sent into the world for the purpose of ministry (John 17:18, 20:21). Therefore, as we follow Jesus in ministry into the places that He has sent us (e.g. our teams, the athletic community of our school, etc.), how ought Jesus' example in this passage influence what we do and who we should seek to minister to?

### **Action Response**

Take time to make a list of all of the Christian athletes we know (on our teams and on other teams) who might be interested in joining us in reaching "every team and every teammate." Make a plan to invite these fellow athletes to our next Core Meeting.

## Luke 4:31-44

<sup>31</sup> Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. <sup>32</sup> They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

<sup>33</sup> In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, <sup>34</sup> "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" <sup>35</sup> "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. <sup>36</sup> All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!" <sup>37</sup> And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

<sup>38</sup> Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

<sup>40</sup> At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. <sup>41</sup> Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

<sup>42</sup> At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup> But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." <sup>44</sup> And he kept on preaching in the synagogues throughout Galilee.

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### Discussion Questions

1. In this busy day on ministry in Capernaum, what kinds of things did Jesus do?
2. How did the people of Capernaum respond to Him and the things He did?
3. Why did the people try to keep Him from leaving them (v.42)?
4. What "good" might have happened if Jesus would have decided to stay? What "good" might not have happened?
5. What is Jesus' response to their desire/request? Why?
6. What does His response reveal about His heart and His understanding of the purpose/calling for His ministry?



## Meeting #3: Our Motivation and Model for Ministry

**Goals:** Help people to:

- See Jesus's heart for "sinners" and "the lost"
- See how Jesus took initiative in encountering and spending time with these kinds of people
- See how Jesus was intentional about seeking a life-changing response from those He encountered

Take steps to become more like Him in these ways to "sinners" and "the lost" on their teams.

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### **Hear the Word: Luke 5:27-32; Luke 19:1-10**

Break people into smaller groups of 3-4. Have them read through the two passages on the handout, then note and discuss the similarities and differences between these two stories. Encourage them to write down any questions that they may have about the stories as well.

### **Observations/Questions**

#### **Similarities**

- Jesus encounters a "tax collector" in each story
- Jesus takes initiative to meet each of these men ("went out and saw" and "reached the spot and looked up")
- Jesus takes initiative to speak to each of these men—and in each case, to give them a command ("Follow me" and "come down immediately" "I must stay at your house")
- Each man responds to Jesus and does what He commands ("got up...and followed him" and "came down at once and welcomed him gladly")
- Jesus ends up in each of their houses
- People react negatively to this because Jesus was in the company of/was spending time with/and was even "eating and drinking" with "sinners")
- Jesus explains why by making clear His mission ("I have...come to call...sinners to repentance" and "came to seek and to save the lost")
- Each man makes a life-changing decision of action ("left everything" and promised to "give half of his possessions" and to "pay back four times the amount" cheated from others)

#### **Differences**

- Levi was a "tax collector"; Zacchaeus was a "chief tax collector" and "wealthy" (although Levi might have been wealthy, too, since he held a "great banquet" for a "large crowd")
- Levi was "sitting at his (tax) booth"; Zacchaeus "wanted to see who Jesus was" and made effort to do so
- "Pharisees and the teachers of the law...complained" about what Jesus was doing with Levi and other "sinners"; "all the people began to mutter" about what Jesus was doing with Zacchaeus
- Levi responded immediately to Jesus with his possessions and "left everything"; Zacchaeus responded to Jesus later and promises to only give half of his possessions to the poor" and to "pay back four times the amount" that he had cheated others
- In His encounter with Levi, Jesus explains His mission was to come "to call...sinners to repentance"; in His encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus explains His mission as coming "to seek and to save the lost"

### **Summary**

There are many questions left unanswered in these stories about these men and what happened...

- What did Levi know about Jesus before this "encounter" with Him?
- Why was Levi willing to leave everything to follow Jesus?
- Was there more to the encounter than just Jesus's command to "Follow me"?

- How long did Jesus “stay” in Zacchaeus’s house, and what all was said and discussed?
- Why/When did Zacchaeus decide to do what he did with his possessions and money?
- How/When did Zacchaeus become a “son of Abraham”?

...so much so, that it seems that the main truth of these stories doesn’t lie in the example of these two men

### Main Truth

Why did Luke include these “encounters” in his gospel, and what does he want his readers to understand?

It seems that Luke is less interested in us learning from the example of these two men and their responses to Jesus (Note: the New Testament narratives are “descriptive” and not always “prescriptive”), and more interested in us learning from Jesus’ example of involvement with them.

(3) things about Jesus (that He wants us to be like as well)

- Jesus was on a mission to people who were “sinners” and “lost” (He had heart)
- Jesus purposely “encountered” these kinds of people and spent time with them (He took initiative)
- Jesus sought a life-changing response from those He encountered, calling them to repent, to have faith, and to commit to follow Him (He was intentional)

### Apply the Word

Discuss together the following questions:

1. How can we grow to have a heart like Jesus for “sinners” and “the lost”—especially those on our teams?
2. How can we, like Jesus, take initiative and purposefully move toward the “sinners” and the lost” on our teams, and grow in deeper relationship with them?
3. How can we, like Jesus, be more intentional in addressing the spiritual needs of the “sinners” and the lost” on our teams, and in calling them to repent, to have faith, and to commit to follow Him?

### Plan of Action

Introduce people to “2+.”

Have them choose two teammates who are “not-yet” or “not-now” followers of Jesus, who they will commit to:

- Pray daily for them
- Spend time with them every week and to grow as friends with them
- Look for opportunities to witness to them through actions and words

Have them choose a partner to share with and pray with regularly about these things.

Close in prayer

## Luke 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup> After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup> and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

## Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

<sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

<sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

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### Similarities

### Differences

## Meeting #4: Our Need for Perspective

### Goals

- To encourage student athletes that God has brought them to the places they are in, that He has been at work ahead of them, that He is with them now, and that He wants to use them to reach their teammates (and other student athletes at their school)
- To spend some time “seeing” their teammates as God sees them and considering what their response to that should be
- To spend some time praying for themselves as they seek to engage in witness to them

**Introduction:** Athletes IV exists on campuses around the country for the primary purpose of mission. And our mission is to see “every team and every teammate” come to know, love and follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. We believe that God cares for the spiritual condition of “lost” student athletes around the country, that He is already at work in the lives of student athletes at your schools (including your teammates!), that He has sovereignly led you to the places and teams that you are in, that He is with you and that He wants to use you in witness to Him.

In this study, we want to help you gain that same perspective and conviction. And to help us do that, we are going to look at 3 different stories and/or situations recorded in the Bible.

### Hear the Word

In small groups, read the three passages and take time to answer the questions at the end of each.

In large group, have students share their answers with the group. Add any additional thoughts to their answers and make clear the take-away from each passage.

#### 2 Kings 6:8-17

- What did the servant “see”?  
*He saw a difficult and overwhelming situation that caused him to fear.*
- What did God cause him to “see”? Why?  
*God had already been at work, and He was there with them to work on their behalf.*

**Takeaway:** God is at work, even if we don’t see it, and He wants us to know that He is with us and for us — therefore we need not fear.

#### John 4:5-35

- What did the disciples “see”?  
*They saw Jesus having contact with someone who was “unclean” both as a woman and a Samaritan. They also were focused on what was going on physically (e.g. Jesus hadn’t eaten; he needed food).*
- What did Jesus want them to “see”? Why?  
*Jesus wanted them to see the more important spiritual needs (and opportunities) around them. He wanted them to see that there was spiritual work that He had prepared them to do.*

**Takeaway:** Jesus wants us to have “spiritual eyes” to see the spiritual needs (and opportunities) around us and to see how He has been at work ahead of us to prepare people for us to help to become His followers.

Matt 9:35-38, 28:19

- What did Jesus "see"?  
*He saw the true spiritual condition of the people.*
- What did Jesus "do"?  
*He told His disciples to pray for more workers AND He sent them out to do the work.*

Take-away: Jesus cares about the spiritual needs of our teammates and others around us in our athletic communities, and He wants to use us (and others) in helping others come to know, love, and follow Him.

**Active Response**

In small groups have people discuss the following questions:

- How does God "see" our teammates who are not followers of Jesus?
- How is that different from how we typically see them?
- What does He want us to "see" (and know)?
- What does He want us to "do"?

Pray for ourselves that God would help us the "see" our teammates as He sees them and that we would "do" what He desires as we seek to engage in witness to them.

**Closing Remarks and Prayer**

## 2 Kings 6:8-17

<sup>8</sup> Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

<sup>9</sup> The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." <sup>10</sup> So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

<sup>11</sup> This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

<sup>12</sup> "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

<sup>13</sup> "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." <sup>14</sup> Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

<sup>15</sup> When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

<sup>16</sup> "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

<sup>17</sup> And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

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1. What did the servant "see"?

2. What did God cause him to "see"? Why?

## John 4:5-35

<sup>5</sup> Jesus and His disciples came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans).

[Jesus then goes on to have a significant spiritual conversation with the woman vv.10-26]

<sup>27</sup> ...then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman.

[The woman went back to her town, shared about what Jesus said to her and urged the people to come and meet Him vv.28-30]

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." <sup>33</sup> Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" <sup>34</sup> "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." <sup>35</sup> "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."

[And many Samaritans from that town became believers vv.39-42]

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1. What did the disciples "see"?
  2. What did Jesus want them to "see"? Why?

## Matt 9:35-38

<sup>35</sup> Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

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1. What did Jesus "see"?
  2. What did Jesus "do"?

## Meeting #5: Our Need for God

### Goals

- Understand why we need to pray for our teammates and ourselves (i.e. there is a work that only God can do)
- Learn how to pray “missionally” for both our teammates and ourselves

**Introduction:** This study has a selection of texts that highlight the crucial role that God plays in opening doors for us to share about Him, as well the role He plays in doing a work that we cannot do in drawing our teammates into relationship with Him.

### Hear the Word

In small groups, read each of the passages on the handout and answer the questions at the end.

In large group, have students share their answers with the group. Add any additional thoughts to their answers and summarize at the end.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) What does 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 4:17-18 tell us about the spiritual reality of unbelievers—including our unbelieving teammates? Why is this important to know?  
*Blinded/darkened in their minds/understanding*  
*Hardened in their hearts*
- 2) What do the verses from John tell us about God the Father’s role in non-Christians becoming Christians? How does this shape our view of evangelism?  
*God needs to enable and draw people to Himself.*
- 3) In the Acts and Colossians passages, what sticks out to you about Paul’s prayers and prayer requests? What does Paul understand about God and what we need Him to do in/for us if we are to be effective in our witness?  
*We need God to open doors and to give us boldness.*

### Summary

There is an enemy in this world who has blinded the minds and hardened the hearts of unbelievers so that they cannot see God. Jesus tells us that the only way for our teammates to know Him is if God enables them to do so. We must ask God to draw our teammates to Himself and also to open doors and embolden us to speak the truth clearly and with power.

### Application

Reflect on your current habits of prayer for unbelievers in your life. How do the passages you read today challenge you? What are some regular practices you could set up for yourself to make praying “missionally” a priority?

### Action Response

Pray in two areas for:

- Your teammates’ openness to God and the “light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ”
- Your personal boldness and open doors for more spiritual conversations

Have each person choose an accountability partner to be praying with regularly about these things.



## 2 Corinthians 4:4

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

## Ephesians 4:17-18

<sup>17</sup> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

## John 6:44, 65

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day....He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

## Acts 4:29-30

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

## Colossians 4:3-4

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

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### Discussion Questions

1. What does 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 4:17-18 tell us about the spiritual reality of unbelievers—including our unbelieving teammates? Why is this important to know?
2. What do the verses from John tell us about God the Father's role in non-Christians becoming Christians? How does this shape our view of evangelism?
3. In the Acts and Colossians passages, what sticks out to you about Paul's prayers and prayer requests? What does Paul understand about God and what we need Him to do in/for us if we are to be effective in our witness?

## Meeting #6: Our Need for Team

### Goals

- Make clear the calling of the Athletes IV to be a mission “team”
- Help student athletes understand what this kind of team looks like (and needs to be)
- Call student athletes to join our mission “team”

### Hear the Word: Acts 4:23-31

Give background info for the passage and then read the passage.

In small groups, answer the four discussion questions: In large group, share small group answers to the discussion questions and teach as needed.

### Discussion Questions

1. Who were the people that Peter and John went to and what was their relationship to them?  
*These were their people (“their own people” v.23); their “team—people committed to Jesus, to one another and to their shared call to “mission.”*
2. What was characteristic of this team? (see also Acts 2:42-47 and Act 4:32-35)  
*The “team” was committed to meeting together, learning together, growing together, sharing together, worshipping together, praying together and doing “mission” together.*
3. Of what value was their team to them AND to the accomplishment of their shared “mission”?  
*The “team” gave them support, encouragement, help and strength to stay connected to Jesus AND to carry out the “mission” that He gave them.*
4. What were the results of their teamwork?  
*God was present with them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were bold in witness “...more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” Act 5:14.*

### Summary

Peter and John’s team was needed/important to them—and Peter and John were important to them—because together they helped each other stay connected to Jesus AND accomplish their shared mission.

### Application Question

What ought to be characteristic of our Athletes IV “team” if we are to most effectively stay connected to Jesus AND carry out our shared calling to mission?

### Action Step

Provide an opportunity for student athletes to say “yes” to being a part of the Athletes IV “team.”

Close in Prayer

## Acts 4:23-31

<sup>23</sup> On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.<sup>24</sup> When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. <sup>25</sup> You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.<sup>30</sup> Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

<sup>31</sup> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

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### Discussion Questions

1. Who were the people that Peter and John went to and what was their relationship to them?
2. What was characteristic of this team? (see also Acts 2:42-47 and Act 4:32-35)
3. Of what value was their team to them AND to the accomplishment of their shared "mission"?
4. What were the results of their teamwork?

## Meeting #7: Our Need to be Ready

### Goals

- Identify three basic elements needed in our lives in order to be an effective witness for Jesus
- Help people do a self-evaluation of how well they are doing in each of these
- Help people to realize in what elements they need to grow
- Help people to make a plan to grow in at least one

### Introduction

Athletes IV exists for the purpose of being a “witnessing community” or “mission team” which seeks to witness to Jesus to those in the athletic community of our school—starting first with our own teammates. Therefore, for those of us who agree with this and want to be a part of this mission, we need to learn and grow into being the most effective witnesses we can.

In his book, Speaking of Jesus, author Mack Stiles identifies three important elements needed for being an effective witness to Jesus. All of them are equally important, he says, like each of the legs on a three-legged stool. Without all three, our witness is weak and ineffective, just like the stool without one (or more) of its legs.

What are these 3 things that we need in order to be an effective witness for Jesus?

We need to be:

1. Motivated (i.e. have a heart to do personal witness)
2. Available (i.e. have opportunity for personal witness)
3. Equipped (i.e. have the tools needed for personal witness)

### Hear the Word

#### Motivated (Heart) – Read: 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, 14-16a

In your SG, talk about what a “motivated” witness might look like on a team. (5 min)

Share together in the LG. Record the collective answers. (5 min)

Here are some things that should be included in the list (add if necessary):

- **Shares God’s heart** for the spiritual condition (“lostness”) of their teammates
- **Has the desire/feels a burden** to see their teammates become true Christians
- **Has a sense of urgency** to help their teammates to become true Christians
- **Wants to have spiritual conversations/talk about Jesus/share the gospel** with their teammates
- **Is willing to take risks** in order to help their teammates to become true Christians

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#### Available (Opportunity) – Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:5b, 2:8

In your SG, talk about what an “available” witness might look like on a team. (5 min)

Share together in the LG. Record the collective answers. (5 min)

Here are some things that should be included in the list (add if necessary):

- **Has solid relationships with/Is a real friend** to their teammates

- **Really cares** for their teammates
  - **Is involved in the lives** of their teammates
  - **Is trusted and respected** by their teammates
  - **Spends non-required time together** with their teammates, even on their turf
- 

### Equipped (Tools) – Read: 2 Timothy 2:15; Col 4:3-6; 1 Peter 3:15

In your SG, talk about what an “equipped” witness might look like on a team. (5 min)

Share together in the LG. Record the collective answers. (5 min)

Here are some things that should be included in the list (add if necessary):

- **Knows how to discern** where their teammates are at in relationship with Jesus
- **Knows how to initiate spiritual conversations** with their teammates
- **Knows the gospel and how to share it effectively** with their teammates
- **Knows how to share their personal testimony** with their teammates
- **Knows how to answer difficult questions** that their teammates might have

### Apply the Word

*How effective are we in our witness? What do we need to grow in?*

In each of our sports, there are certain things that we need to be able to do if we are to be effective, i.e. basketball (shoot, dribble/handle the ball and defend) or baseball / softball (throw, catch and hit).

If one or more of these basic things are weak, our whole performance is effected (just like the quality of the three-legged stool is affected by one or more weak legs).

**Self-evaluation:** Take a personal look at each of the three elements (Motivated, Available and Equipped), and all that we came up with in regards to health for each one. Give yourself and overall evaluation for each element (+ or -), and identify key things in all of the elements that you need to grow in.

In your SG, talk about your findings and assessments. Be slow to give advice but do seek to help each other to identify some ways to grow in the things that you’ve identified as “weak.”

**Personal planning:** Take some time personally to make a plan to do something this week to grow in one area of need. Write it out.

Share this plan with those in your SG and pray for each other.

## What do we need to be an effective witness for Jesus?

### Motivated (Heart)

2 Corinthians 5:10-11, 14-16

<sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

<sup>11</sup>Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.

<sup>14</sup>For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup>So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

**What would be characteristic of a "motivated witness" on a team?**

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### Available (Opportunity)

1 Thessalonians 1:5b; 2:7b-8

<sup>5</sup>You know how we lived among you for your sake.

<sup>7</sup>Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup>so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

**What would be characteristic of an "available witness" on a team?**

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### Equipped (Tools)

2 Timothy 2:15

<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Colossians 4:3-6

<sup>3</sup>And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup>Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup>Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup>Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

1 Peter 3:15

<sup>15</sup>Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

**What would be characteristic of an "equipped witness" on a team?**

## Meeting #8: Our Need for Understanding

### Goals

- Understand that each of our teammates is in a different place in their relationship with Jesus
- Begin to identify where each teammate is at in their relationship with Jesus
- Begin having spiritual conversations with our teammates to aid in the discernment process

**Introduction:** The account that we will be looking at takes place in Jerusalem during the Festival of Tabernacles. Jesus has been doing ministry publicly for some time up to this point, and as we will see in this account, there were a number of ways that people were responding to Him and His teaching.

### Hear the Word: Read John 7:1-44

#### Discussion questions

1. The passage ends with the statement that “the people were divided because of Jesus.” Go back through the passage and make a list of all the people mentioned, making note of their various responses to Jesus.

- v.2      “The Jews” \_\_\_\_\_ “waiting to take His life”  
v.3      “Jesus’ brothers” \_\_\_\_\_ “did not believe in Him”  
v.12     “some (in the crowd)” \_\_\_\_\_ “He is a good man”  
v.12     “others (in the crowd)” \_\_\_\_\_ “He deceives people”  
v.15     “The Jews” \_\_\_\_\_ “were amazed (at His teaching)”  
v.20     “the crowd” \_\_\_\_\_ (confused: “Who is trying to kill you?”)  
v.25     “some of the people of Jerusalem” \_\_\_\_\_ (doubt: “Isn’t this the man...?”)  
v.30     “they” (most likely “the Jews”) \_\_\_\_\_ “tried to seize Him”  
v.31     “many in the crowd” \_\_\_\_\_ “put their faith in Him”  
v.32     “the chief priests and Pharisees” \_\_\_\_\_ “sent guards to arrest Him”  
v.35     “The Jews” \_\_\_\_\_ (confused: “What did he mean...?”)  
v.40     “some of the people” \_\_\_\_\_ “surely this man is the Prophet” (see Duet 18:15-18)  
v.41     “others” \_\_\_\_\_ “He is the Christ”  
v.41     “still others” \_\_\_\_\_ (doubt: “Does not the Scripture say...?”)  
v.44     “some” (most likely “the Jews”) \_\_\_\_\_ “wanted to seize Him”

[Note: All of the people mentioned in this passage were part of three major groups: 1) “The Jews”—who often in John’s gospel referred to the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus (which included the chief priests and the Pharisees); 2) “the people of Jerusalem”—who were the residents of the city; and 3) “the crowd”/ “the people”—who were primarily the Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from around the world to attend the Feast (but also could have included some of the Jewish leaders and Jerusalem residents, as well.)]

2. How would you categorize the various responses to Jesus by the people in this passage? (e.g. Positive? Negative? Neutral? Surprising? Determined? Uncertain? Confused?)

### Summary

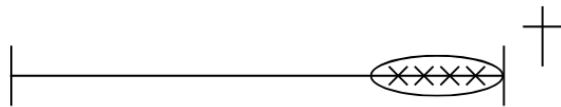
While Jesus was on the earth, people responded to Jesus in a variety of ways (as we see clearly in this passage). The same is true today. Despite this, Jesus wants people to know, love and follow Him for who He is. And that includes your teammates!

## Application

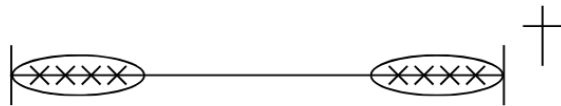
If we are to help our teammates to know, love and follow Jesus, we need to consider the various possibilities of where they may be at in relationship with Him. (Walk through the diagram, making clear the 4 main categories and the differences between them)



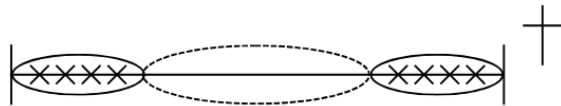
We start with this spectrum which represents where our teammates are at in relationship with Jesus.



Some (like you!) love Jesus, have committed their lives to Him and are intentionally seeking to follow Him. They aren't perfect, but they are taking seriously that Jesus is Lord of their lives.



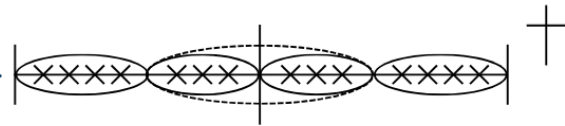
Other—on the other end of the spectrum—don't identify themselves as Christians, and therefore don't seek to live like one; i.e. they aren't following Jesus. Those in this group may range from being antagonistic toward Jesus, to simply being disinterested.



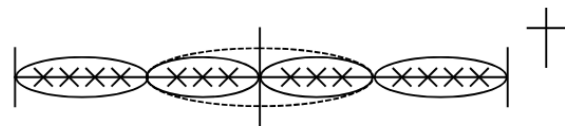
And then there are those in the middle. These are our teammates who identify themselves as Christians, but who aren't following Jesus right now. This middle group may or may not make up a large number of our teammates, but most likely there are some.



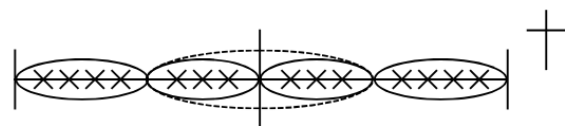
We may not know exactly where these teammates in the middle section are at in relationship with Jesus, but He does. From His perspective (as the Bible teaches us and not the line in the center shows), people are either true Christians or they're not. That means there are actually two groups in this middle section.



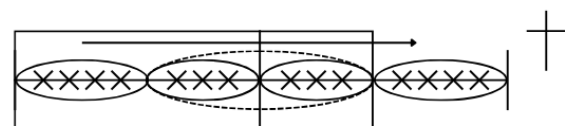
On the right are those who are the not-now followers of Jesus. These teammates really are Christians (i.e. at some point in their lives they had committed their lives to Jesus and followed Him), but at this time in their lives (for whatever reasons), they aren't following Him.



On the left are those who are the not-yet followers of Jesus. These are teammates who identify themselves as Christians (for whatever reasons), but they really aren't. They may "do" or "say" certain "Christian" things, but they have never committed their lives to Jesus—and therefore aren't truly following after Him.



We may never really know exactly where each of our teammates are at in relationship with Jesus, but we can learn and know more by asking them non-threatening, open-ended questions like, "I'd love to hear about your spiritual journey. Do you mind sharing that with me?"



The strategy of Athletes IV is to partner with those in the far right group (those who are followers of Jesus), and give them what they need to be engaged in intentional outreach ministry to those in the other 3 groups (those who aren't following Jesus) in order to help all of these teammates come to know, love, and follow Jesus as Lord.



### **Action Response**

List out questions/discussion topics that you can use to gain understanding of where your teammates are at in their relationship with Jesus and about their spiritual openness.

Examples:

- "Tell me about your spiritual journey..."
- "Did you grow up going to church?"

Identify 2 teammates from the exercise above with whom you will take a risk this week and ask them one of these spiritual questions.

## John 7:11-20, 25-43

<sup>11</sup> Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?" <sup>12</sup> Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." <sup>13</sup> But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders. <sup>14</sup> Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. <sup>15</sup> The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

<sup>16</sup> Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. <sup>17</sup> Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. <sup>18</sup> Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. <sup>19</sup> Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

<sup>20</sup> "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" .....

<sup>25</sup> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"

<sup>26</sup> Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? <sup>27</sup> But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, <sup>29</sup> but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." <sup>30</sup> At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup> Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

<sup>32</sup> The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. <sup>33</sup> Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. <sup>34</sup> You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." <sup>35</sup> The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup> What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

<sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." <sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

<sup>40</sup> On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." <sup>41</sup> Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? <sup>42</sup> Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" <sup>43</sup> Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.