

PRAYERS TO PREPARE: BEFORE COMPETITION

Short prayers before competition

God help me today to honor you and all I do and say in this arena of sports (insert: field, court, mat, pool etc). May my love and worship of You supersede all things in my heart today whether we win, lose or draw.

God let the practice of my craft be expressed fully in the game today when I have the opportunity. I've put in the work. Let my mind be clear and focused so I can execute to the best of my abilities.

Lord, let all glory today be yours and yours alone and let me score, win, lose, etc., in humility and giving all praise to you.

God, your Word says that whatever we do to do with all our hearts as unto you. Let me play today in that light as a servant of Christ.

Father, remind me that I'm accepted by you fully in Jesus Christ as a daughter or son by faith. Whatever happens today does not change that and I will come off the field as your child. Let this free me from anxiety and fear of failure.

Lord, let me hold no grudges against coaches, officials or my competitors today. No matter what they do, no matter how wicked, please allow me to forgive. Let no root of bitterness get stuck in my soul today because of a game.

Lord, let me give everything I have today and let me play really well and find joy in you doing something you've made me to do!!!

Father in Heaven, we ask your blessing on the game we are about to play. Give each one of us the courage to play this game in a manner which by our words and our actions is pleasing to you. Let us enter into this competition in a spirit of sportsmanship and with respect for the members of the opposing team. We ask You, Father to bless each one of us, especially the coaches, officials, parents and players. Keep us under the protection of your son, Jesus Christ, and help us be aware of his presence with us in this game, Amen.

Almighty God, We praise your name, we lift you high with every move we make and with the celebration of every point we score. Please bless our team with passion for this wonderful sport, with unity of heart and mind and with a vision to try our hardest. May we be focused on carrying the legacy of your great love in our lives as we play today, Amen.

PRAYERS TO COMPETE: DURING COMPETITION

There's a great theological truth you need to know: *When you step on the playing field, God is with you.*

There are so many scriptures about God being our present help in a time of trouble (Psalm 46:1), our strength and our shield (Psalm 28:7), our comforter (Isaiah 40:1, Matthew 5:4, Romans 15:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17), the one who prepares our hand for battle (Psalm 144) and the one who will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5,6).

As God goes with us, so we go with God into the athletic arena. You'll have to take the principle shared now and apply it to your own sports' unique circumstances and game structures but it is applicable across all sports.

Reset the heart in the pauses

Every game has planned breaks in the action—halftime, quarters, time between periods, races, etc. Many times in these gaps the team talks to one another and receives instruction from the coaching staff.

These pauses also contain moments where the Christian athlete can talk to the King.

“Lord help me work through this frustration”

“God help me relax and shut out distractions”

“Lord help me calm my butt down”

“Lord give more strength and endurance than I think I have”

“God help me raise my intensity”

“Lord forgive me for that flagrant file or stupid penalty where I lost my head”

Pray for the people around you

Many times during games we can forget that God is at work in the lives of many people. During the gaps in the games, what if you prayed for a struggling friend or someone whose anger is hindering them from their best play?

What if we could move away from simply selfish prayers during a game and learned to love God by thinking about other people in the middle of the games? That would be radical, but it would also be retraining our hearts to properly worship in the midst of competition.

PRAYERS TO COMPETE: AFTER COMPETITION

Practice gratitude

Once the game clock goes to zero, it's a great time for *gratitude*.

The 1 Thessalonians 5 passage tells us to *give thanks in all things*. As a follower of Jesus, an attitude of gratitude is the right rhythm of heart after games.

We need to develop the life habit of thanking God for everything that He allows into our life and story. This includes the wins as well as the losses.

It includes the touchdown you scored and the time you got burned for a touchdown.

It includes that slower time in the race that devastates you after training so hard for better results.

It includes gratitude for gold medals and if you gave up the winning goal. A few post-game ideas as we close.

Thank God for at least one specific blessing that took place in the competition. If you can think of more than one, recount them all!

Thank God for at least one difficult thing in the game that you really didn't like and that was really hard for you—as an act of faith. Thank God that even these things are ordered for your growth and good.

Apologize to refs/officials, coaches, teammates or competitors if you were a jerk and lost your head in the game. Christian athletes are not perfect but we should practice repentance and own where we screw up.

If you did well, give glory to Jesus. If you did terribly, give your pain to him as well in prayer. Crying out to God and lamenting in these moments is legitimate prayer. Being disappointed and hurting because of the loss is not ungodly—it is quite human.

How we process the post-game is important.

We don't want to stoop down into the mud of blaming God for defeats or just praising him for victories. The Sovereign Lord is high and holy and can handle your disappointment for sure.

Always remember he's a good father who loves his kids and is making you into a person that reflects His character.

Athletic competition is a very human endeavor. There is training, striving and becoming—both on the field and off. For the Christian athlete prayer is a practice of the presence of God in relationship in the midst of all things.

I pray that you may find him and be found in him before, during, and after you enter your athletic arena. And in all things may Christ be praised!