

GIVING SOME INSPIRATION

The basketball team I coach has played their first six games of the season. So far, our record is 2 wins and 4 losses. Some people would look at our record and think we are not one of the stronger teams in the league. I do not believe the wins and losses at this point of the season truly tell the story of how well my players have done. In one game we did lose by over 20 points to the opposing team but we only had 6 players and two of them were very close to fouling out so we had to play conservatively. In the other three games however, we only lost by 5 points or less. We played these 3 games at times with just six players due to injury, illness, and vacations. In fact, in our last game in which we lost by 5 points one of my best players became ill during the first quarter and could not play the rest of the game.

While our record is 2 wins and 4 losses, I think we are a far better team than the results show. I could not be prouder of my players and how they have competed and played this year. I am not a coach who gets obsessed about wins and losses, but it is hard not to feel for my players at the end of a game when they have come up on the losing end.

I realized after our last set of games I needed to provide my players with some inspiration as we move forward into the remaining 2-3 months of the season. I am planning to take a few moments at the beginning of our next practice to share with them how I believe our current record does not tell the true story about our team. I want to remind them how close we were to winning three of the games we lost despite the obstacles we were facing. After telling them these things, I am going to write the following word on a whiteboard and hold it up for my players to see:

BELIEVE!

I want them to move forward in this season believing what I believe:

- that we are a good team despite our record,
- that we have overcome a lot of setbacks and adversities and still faired very well,
- that other teams may not have done as well if they had to face some of the same adversities we have,
- that we are very close at this point to start turning losses into wins.

This is what I believe, but the key for me will be getting my players to believe the same as I do.

As I thought about this, I could not help but ponder how Jesus would often try and get His disciples and followers to believe in the same thing He was seeing. A great example of this is found in the story of Lazarus' death in John 13. Lazarus had already been dead for four days when Jesus arrived in Bethany. When Jesus got to the tomb, He asked that the stone in front of the tomb be removed. Lazarus' sister Martha protested when Jesus made this request because of the smell. Jesus wanted Martha to believe what He did at that moment:

**Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?
(John 11:40)**

Martha still did not believe at that moment what Jesus did. It took seeing Lazarus come out of the tomb after Jesus prayed and shouted for him to come out before Martha believed.

As we see in this story and so many more found in the gospels, Jesus wants us to believe like He does that no situation is hopeless or impossible with our Heavenly Father's help. Miracles like this one, or others like feeding the crowd of 5,000 with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, should be proof enough for us to believe without seeing. Too often we are like Martha or like Thomas after Jesus' resurrection insisting that we need to see with our own eyes first before we will believe the same things our Saviour does. It is no wonder Jesus told Thomas and all believers:

**You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe
without seeing me. (John 20:29)**

Both Martha and Thomas experienced losses and setbacks that prevented them from believing until they had seen. Every one of us has had our share of challenging setbacks in life, and some of us may be in the midst of one right now. Jesus wants us to believe that He knows what we are going through and He is already at work to help bring better days ahead for us. If we are not at the point in our spiritual journey of being able to believe this without seeing evidence with our own eyes first, then in this season of Lent, let's start putting some time into reading the powerful stories of Jesus once again like this one from John 13 about raising Lazarus back to life. When we see Jesus' love and

power at work in this story and others, hopefully we will make a shift in our faith journey to begin believing even before we see our Lord turning things around for the better. Nothing would make Jesus happier than for us to begin believing what He does even before we see evidence of it with our eyes.

I pray my players will believe after I give this inspirational speech that we are a better team than what our record shows. If they believe this, they will remain encouraged and optimistic by seeing what a special team they are a part of, and how they are experiencing some wonderful blessings and memories along the way. May these inspirational words I will be sharing with my team, inspire all of us about how important it is to **BELIEVE** even when the bounces do not go our way.

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean