

SHOWING LOVE ON AND OFF THE COURT

I shared with you a few weeks ago in my mid week message how hard it was for me to cut players from the team after basketball tryouts. When I called the tenth and final player I selected for the team, it became clear why God had me choose her over the other player. Her father had died from cancer a year earlier and it was close to the one-year anniversary when I told her the good news that she had made the team.

Last Saturday we had our first practice since tryouts a month earlier. This player wasn't able to be at our tryouts. I went to a basketball clinic she was part of in order to evaluate her skills. This practice was the first time she would meet her teammates. I knew she would be nervous, so I asked my co-captains to introduce her to the other girls. When they took her over to introduce her to the others, one of my returning players made a special effort to make her feel welcomed and included. She not only made this effort with this new player, but also with another player who was new to our team as well. I was so impressed by how natural this player was in reaching out and making these two new teammates feel so welcome.

After the practice, the girls gathered outside for ten minutes to work on their cheer for the new season. As they did this, I took the opportunity to introduce this new girl's mother to the other parents. I knew the mother was just as nervous as the daughter because it was the first time this family had been part of rep basketball. One of the mothers made a big effort to welcome this new mom into the group and did so with a huge smile on her face.

The next day I sent an e-mail to the girl who showed such care and love making the two new players feel so welcome. I wanted her to know how impressed and touched I was to see her do what she did for her new teammates. I have gotten to know this particular player for three years now, and I think being kind, considerate, and thoughtful comes naturally to her. I have seen this gift on display often on her part. I also sent an e-mail to the mother who made such a special effort to welcome the mother of this new player. I thanked her as well for the effort she made. She responded back to me and said, "I just put myself in her shoes, and knew if I was new, I would want somebody to make a special effort toward me." On Saturday I saw kindness and love displayed both on and off the court.

I have now had two days to reflect upon this as I write this message. Sometimes showing love and compassion toward others comes naturally to us just as it seems to for the one girl that I coach. When qualities like this come so naturally to us, it is important for us to be able to recognize it is a

gift that God has blessed us with. When God created each one of us, He also decided which gifts we would be given. Sometimes it is hard for people to know what gifts God has given to them. One way to discover what gifts we have been given by God is to ask others. They might see our gifts where we do not. Another way we can know what our gifts are is to think about what things come so naturally to us. It comes so naturally for me to manage and lead in situations, to do administrative tasks, to bring calmness into situations where there is conflict or despair, and to teach things whether spiritual or on the basketball court. It has taken me a while to come to understand what gifts God has given me, and which He has not. When God gives us these gifts, it is with the intention of us using them as He has planned and desired. Whether this 15-year-old player on my team has come to see her gift of showing love and compassion toward others as coming from God, she is certainly putting it to use for Him as seen last Saturday.

Even if showing love and compassion does not come as naturally to us as it does for my one player, I think we can still do this if we follow the mother's example that I shared with you. When I complimented her, she replied in the e-mail that she just put herself in that mom's shoes and realized that is how she would want to be treated if she was in that situation of being the new person. How often do we take the time to do this? I think it is something we need to do more often in our daily lives. There are a lot of people we come into contact with that are hurting or suffering in some way. We may feel pity or compassion for them, but do we make that effort to reach out to them and show kindness and love in some way? By putting ourselves in that person's shoes for a minute and think about how we would want to be treated, it might give us the impetus to follow that mother's example by showing love and kindness to that person. Showing love and compassion is one of the greatest gifts we can give others out of our love for Christ. Remember what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:13:

Three things will last forever - FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE - and the greatest of these is LOVE.

It was great to see all of the girls together as a team on the court for the first time on Saturday. It was even greater for me to see the *love and kindness* shown last Saturday both on and off the court. Whether it is one of your gifts that comes naturally to you or not, may you take this lesson from last Saturday and show kindness and love to somebody else.

Keep safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean