

Matthews United Methodist Church Youth Basketball Ministry



When the 'Game' is on the line!

2025-26

Coach's Devotional Guide

Time first with God is the most important part of our game.



MATTHEWS UNITED METHODIST

STATEMENT OF MISSION & PURPOSE

To provide a recreational opportunity in a Christian environment with emphasis on affirming, encouraging and nurturing teens in Christ's love.

Thank You Coaches!

Thank you for your commitment of time and energy to this wonderful ministry. **The most important thing you will do this season is to build relationships with youth, one that models the unconditional love of Jesus Christ!** We hope you enjoy your time this season and honor God in the way we all reach out to youth & their families in the name of Christ.

As we all know, our youth today face a much different world than the one in which we grew up; the pressures they experience are tremendous. The positive experiences they may pursue succeeding in school are often overshadowed by threats, violence and uncertainty. Our society seems to promote that whatever it takes to get ahead, even if it means cheating, lying, or hurting others; 'the ends justify the means.'

While many of the teens in our league may regularly attend church, others may attend occasionally or not at all. Matthews United Methodist Youth Ministries still holds fast to faith; we are dedicated to the families, and more specifically, the youth of our community. If we teach with godly words and live by example, the principles outlined in the Bible, we can effectively impact the lives of teens and their families.

You, as the Coach, have an awesome responsibility! Your players will come to trust and rely upon you to show them what is right, not only on the court, but with life in general. Your words and actions are precious to them. God has placed you in this position because He has equipped you for the task. Your knowledge and love of sports is secondary to the real reason you have been chosen - to live and share the love of Jesus Christ with a struggling world. You can do it!

The MUMC Youth Staff is here to assist & support you in any way necessary; do not ever hesitate to ask. If you need help in presenting lessons or encouraging tips, or have any questions as the season progresses, please email us or call / text Connor Johnson (704-651-4144) or Rob Hunter at (704) 618-5880.

Together in His service!



Connor Johnson
United College-Age
& Young Adult Associate



Rob Hunter
Associate Director,
Age Level Ministries



Corey Milliet
Pastor & Director,
Age Level Ministries

Weekly Devotions

The MUMC Youth Basketball Ministry provides this devotional booklet for you to use throughout this season. Coaches are expected to lead one devotion per week as part of your practice time.

We ask that you take 10 minutes each week to sit down with your team and discuss the devotions.

Devotional 1

Dec 1 - 10

Walk In The Light

Code of Conduct

Devotional 2

Jan. 4 – 8

Know the Game

Understanding the Christian Life

Devotional 3

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Practice

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Get Off The Bench

Applying Scripture To Your Life

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Feb. 15 - 20

Season Review

Practicing Hospitality

Walk In The Light

Code of Conduct

Coach's Prep: *The focus this week is to make sure that we all enter the season within the same spirit & focus; more directly, to make sure all players & coaches understand the expectations & rules for our league. Take a few moments to make sure everyone knows one another; tell them a bit about you; and that your plan for the season is to make sure we model a Christian demeanor at all times.*

Prayer: Please open your time together with a prayer, asking for strength & guidance to enable everyone to have a safe, enjoyable & beneficial season together.

Team Questions:

- Who has played in an organized sports league before?
- What are the expectations of each player? the coach? the team?
- Do you know how the expectations are different in this league, or any church league, than any other sports league?
- Should the expectations be different? Why or why not?

Say: So, as we begin this season together, we're going to review the league rules and expectations of each of us – you and me. If you have questions as we go through these, let's discuss:

(Coach's Note: *You can cover as much as you'd like, but please specifically cover these topics):*

pg. 5	PRACTICES (who has right to court) & DEVOTIONS (Devotions)
pg. 5-6	GAMES (All)
pg. 6-8	OFFICIATING & RULES (All)
pg. 8-9	GAME ROSTERS & PLAYER ROTATIONS (All)* * This can be confusing, just make sure they understand rotations are based upon the active number of players on each games' roster; may differ for each team
pg. 9	SUBSTITUTIONS (All)
pg. 9-11	CONDUCT (All - especially Dunking & Hanging on the Rim)

Coach's Note: Once completed, please share, explain & sign the team's 'Code of Conduct' form; please return that signed form when we next see one another.

Close in prayer

Know the Game

Understanding the Christian Life

Coach's Prep: *What does it mean to be a Christian? Does it just mean doing the right thing? Being a good person? Reading the Bible? Today, we are going to look at what it truly means to be a Christian. Begin this week praying that God would open our hearts and minds to the truth about who His son is.*

Team Questions:

- Have you ever played a game without knowing or really understanding the rules? How did it go? Did you know what the coach expected of you?
- So, do you always know what God expects of you? *(Treat everyone with respect & kindness [i.e. 'Love your neighbor'], model the love of Christ)*

Read: Ephesians 4:32

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you."

- Is it sometimes hard to be kind & compassionate to others? Why??
- Are you always the best you can be? And does God forgive you? Love you??

Game Prep: You know, basketball is kind of like life - if we didn't know the rules or what's expected of us, it would be a pretty confusing game. We wouldn't know what to do with the ball, what the lines all over the floor are for, who we should listen to, and most confusingly, what we are supposed to do.

There are many people who say that they are Christian because they were born into a Christian family, because they go to church, or because they read the Bible. Or some people think they're Christian because they do good things. But in reality, many of us are wandering through life – on a confusing basketball court of life – not knowing who we are or what our purpose is.

Ask Someone to Read: Matthew 22:37-39

"Jesus replied: 'Love the lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The good news is that the Bible is very clear. Today's verses tell us that we are saved by grace and it's not because of anything we've done. They also tell us that ultimately our goal is to love God and to love others. Then, the rest of life begins to appear pretty straight forward.

Game Plan: This week, on the court, at home, and in school - our challenge is to explore our faith and to take a serious look at what it means to be a Christian. Be more intentional loving & forgiving others..

Close in prayer -

Listen To Your Coach

Finding Discipleship

Coach's Prep: *This week we're going to focus on the importance of listening to and trusting what the 'coach' has to offer. We'll look at how we can gain wisdom from people who have more life experience than us and why we should all seek to be disciplined by someone who is more mature in their faith.*

Team Questions:

- So, why do we have coaches? Do you really think you need a coach to play this game??
- What do you think coaches hope for as we lead teams?
- Who in your life do you really listen to, look towards for guidance?

Read: John 13:34-35

"As a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

- Did Jesus give us a choice to love others if we truly want to be His disciples?
- So, what are some practical ways others would know whether or not you follow Jesus - when you're on the basketball court?
- What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
(to be a follower, learning & living & modeling according to the leader's teachings)

Game Prep: Each of us has someone we listen to - we listen to our parents, our teachers, our friends, small group leaders, and maybe even our coaches! But why? Why do we listen to them?

Sometimes it's because they hold authority over us, but sometimes it's because we trust their opinions, their guidance. And sometimes we are in desperate need of advice and support.

As Christian, we can't expect to get through life alone. Ever since the beginning of time, people have needed guidance and direction from others. God created us to seek and receive direction and guidance from others in our lives.

Because of this, we have to understand that we all need someone in our lives who will tell us the truth and who will guide us towards God. This is someone who has been working on their relationship with God longer than us and who can help us to see God's truth.

Game Plan: This week, our challenge is for each of us to think about who we have in our lives who can offer us advice and guidance. Thank these people for helping you to find God and ask for their continued help in our spiritual journeys.

Close in prayer -

Practice

Spending Time Building Your Faith

Coach's Prep: *So, why do we practice? This is a question we're going to explore today. Not just about basketball, but our faith as well. Is it really that important to practice? If we know how to play the game, why practice. After all, if our faith is only about trusting God, why do we need to read the Bible, why do we need to do anything else? Should we need to 'practice' our faith?*

Team Questions:

- What is the hardest thing you've ever had to prepare for?
 - How did you prepare for it?
- How do you prepare for a big test?
- So, what happens if you don't work hard at practice?
- What will happen if you don't listen to your coach - follow my instructions?

Read: John 8:31-32

"To the Jews who had believed in Him, Jesus said: 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

- What happens when we don't follow the teachings of Jesus?
- Well, what can happen if we *really* practice our faith every day?
- Does practice mean we'll get it perfect every time? But it never means we should just give up, does it?

Game Prep: Every week our team meets to practice. We run drills, maybe practice free throws, and prepare for the next game. But what would happen if we didn't practice? Would we still be a team? Would we be prepared for every game?

When we get together to practice, we don't meet just to be a team – regardless if we practice or not, we are still a team. But with practice, and sharing of goals, we will become more effective as a team so that we'll win!.

Read: Hebrews 10:25

"...let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching"

Game Plan: So, here's our challenge for the week - just as you're committed to being at basketball practice with your teammates, get together during the week - not just to hang out, study for school or play games - but also to study God's Word and to just model his love and life to others.

Close in prayer -

Respect the Ref

Trusting God's Plan

Coach's Prep: *This week we'll be talking about respecting the referee and the importance of trusting God's plan, even when we might think He's making a bad call. Begin the devotion time with prayer and ask God to help everyone on the team see the importance of faith in times of doubt.*

Team Questions:

- Has anyone ever been playing a game and had a Ref make a bad call?
- Why do you think Refs make 'bad' calls sometimes?
- How do you react when it happens?

Well, that's what we're going to talk about today, how we react when life doesn't go our way -

Read: James 1:2-4 *"Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete".*

- How does this passage say we should feel about times when our faith is challenged?
- Then, why is it so easy for us to not feel that way in the moment?

Game Prep: Well, let's talk basketball - do you think there will be times this season when you'll disagree with a call made by a Ref? But we have to understand that referees have one thing that we don't, that you don't, a different perspective. They are able to see things that we cannot see from a different position you may be in & from their different experiences on the court.

In the same way, we have to understand – and accept – that there will be times in our lives where we disagree with what God is doing in our lives. There are lots of times when we think we could do things better than God! We think that we know what is best for us and all would love the chance to answer our prayers as we see fit. The truth is, however, that God has a completely different perspective than us. He can see things we don't see and He knows things we do not.

Read: Romans 8:28 *"And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."*

- Do we truly believe this?
- How would our lives look differently if we fully understood & accepted this?

Game Plan: This week, our challenge is to understand that the refs may not always make perfect calls, but we have to place our faith that they are doing their best from their perspective. Unlike the refs, God's plan and vision is perfect. He knows what is best for us and always for our good – be thankful in that!

Close in prayer -

Respect Your Opponent

Loving Your Enemy

Coach's Prep: *Today we're going to talk about the importance of playing the game respectfully. In the same light, we will talk about how we should not only just love our friends and teammates, but love the people who are hard to care about – our enemies. Begin today's devotional time in prayer, asking God to help everyone to see the people in their lives who they should be loving more.*

Team Questions:

- What happens when you don't respect your opponent?
- What about when you underestimate them because you don't respect their abilities?
- When have you ever had to 'turn the other cheek' when playing a game?

Read: Matthew 5:38-39 *"You've heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."*

- Do you believe this passage is saying that we should open ourselves for abuse from others?
(No, but Jesus is telling us not to be taunted or pulled into conflict with someone else. If we allow that to happen, we are allowing that person – or that evil – to control us.)
- So, how does this apply to how we should play our game?

Game Prep: There will undoubtedly be a time this season when you will be upset by something an opponent does. They may foul you, knock you down, or get away with something the ref doesn't see. How will you respond in these situations? Fight back? Walk away? Apologize for getting in their way? Or do you look for a way to serve them?

The last choice may seem totally crazy – there's no way you'd let someone take advantage of you, mistreat you, disrespect you – and expect to be prepared to 'serve' that person. But that's exactly what Jesus expects us to do. He challenges us to love others in a way that may be absurd to the rest of the world. But He calls on us to love not only the people who love us, but also those who hate us.

What does God expect of us? How can we do that, be that?! God knows that we 'serve' our 'enemies' when we model Christian character before them. When we do not take personal the taunts or the fouls, but show that we are composed, we are comfortable with who we are – this changes people.

Game Plan: So, this week's challenge may push you out of your comfort zone – but right now let's spend a few minutes discussing how we can serve the players on the team we'll be playing this week. Maybe we bring them a snack or drink, we individually wish for them a good game, but we do something to model Christian character. Suggestions??

Close in prayer -

Get Off The Bench

Applying Scripture To Your Life

Coach's Prep: *Sometimes coaches have to bench players for all kinds of reasons. Injuries, attitudes, fatigue, or sometimes to simply provide equitable playing time. In our lives as Christians, though, there's no excuse for not being in the game. The Bible is clear – it tells us we should apply scripture to our lives and become people who truly follow Christ. Open today's devotional time by praying that God would help everyone on the team see the calling on their lives and to read the Bible in a way that actually changes their lives.*

Team Questions:

- Have you ever had to sit out of a game for any reason?
- Did you like it?
- What's the difference between someone being 'on the bench' and someone 'in the game'?

Read: James 1:22-23 *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like."*

- Why is it so hard for us to *actively* practice our faith? (*urge conversation here*)
- Why is it easier for us to just *go along*, act like others around us, not challenge others when we see them moving in a dangerous direction?

Game Prep: There are dozens of reasons for a player to get benched in a game. However, in our lives as Christians there are no excuses for sitting on the sidelines. As we read in today's scripture, it is not enough to just believe in God. Even non-Christians know who God is; even demons know who God is.

We all have to understand that our salvation comes through personally inviting Christ into our lives. When this happens, our lives will be changed. It's not enough to just sit by and watch the world fall apart as we sit and thankfully think 'I'm glad I'm not like that!' Our goal as Christians, our commitment to Christ, is to make Christ known in this world through applying scripture to our lives and going out and making a difference!

Read: James 2:14-17 *"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

Game Plan: This week's challenge is to find a Scripture in the Bible, at random or one that is special to you; then ask yourself – *"What can I do TODAY to directly apply this in my life?"*

Close in prayer -

Season Review

Coach's Note: *Have players answer the following questions. Do not be afraid of some silence at first!*

Q: What have you learned about yourself this season?

Q: What was most encouraging to you?

Q: What was most frustrating for you?

Q: What are some things our team was good at?

Q: What were we bad at?

READ: ***Romans 12:9-13***

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

Q: Ask someone to summarize this verse.

Q: In what ways did our team embody this verse?

Q: In what ways could we have done better?

Q: How can we live this out in our everyday lives?

Close in prayer