

# Matthews United Methodist Church Youth Basketball Ministry



## - Spiritual Readiness for the Game -

2023-2024

### Coaches 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.

# Welcome to the 2023/24 Basketball Season!

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!** Our staff will be here to support you in any way needed. Enjoy your time and let's honor God in the way we reach out to youth in the name of Christ.

The MUMC Youth Basketball Ministry is providing 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 the first 10 minutes of every practice to sit down with your team and discuss the devotions.** Please follow through the devotions in order (they are dated) as each team in the league will be doing the same one each week and we will briefly discuss before each game.

***"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."* 1 Timothy 4:12**

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' philosophy. Teens & young adults need sound spiritual, moral, and ethical leadership. They must have a clear understanding of honesty, respect, obedience, love, and other foundational truths that will help them stand strong in a world which more and more often is choosing wrong over right and evil over good.

Many of the kids in our league regularly attend church, while 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. It's time to stand up for what we believe, to revive character and honor, in order to foster a group of young people who will be respectful, obedient, courageous, and well meaning. Being a Christian is the greatest life there is a life of integrity, honesty, commitment, forgiveness, grace and love. If we teach with words, and live by example, the principles outlined in the Bible, we can effectively impact the lives of children and their families, starting with our own. The Word of God has much to say about the principles, traits, and characteristics previously mentioned.

You, as the Coach, have an awesome responsibility! Your players 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. You are called to live and share the love and message of our Lord Jesus Christ with a lost and dying world. Take this responsibility seriously and rise to the calling. You can do it!

Please Note: The MUMC Youth Staff is here to assist you in any way necessary; do not hesitate to ask. If you need help in presenting lessons or encouraging tips, or have any questions as the season progresses, please call Rob Hunter at (704) 618-5880, text a message, or send an email to Rob@matthewsumc.org.

In His service!



Rob Hunter

Assoc. Director Age Level Ministries  
MUMC Youth Basketball League Commissioner



Rev. Corey Milliet  
Director of Age Level Ministries

# **Weekly Devotions**

## **Devotional 1**

Prior to Dec. 2

## **Walk In The Light**

*Code of Conduct*

## **Devotional 2**

Dec. 3 – Dec. 7

## **Respect the Ref**

*Trusting God's Plan*

## **Devotional 3**

Dec. 10 – Dec. 14

## **Know the Game**

*Understanding the Christian Life*

## **Devotional 4**

Prior to Jan. 5

## **Practice**

*Spending Time Building Your Faith*

## **Devotional 5**

Jan. 7 - Jan. 11

## **Listen To Your Coach**

*Finding Discipleship*

## **Devotional 6**

Jan. 14 – Jan. 19

## **Wear Your Uniform**

*Putting On The Armor Of God*

## **Devotional 7**

Jan. 21 – Jan. 25

## **Score An Assist**

*Serving Your Teammate*

## **Devotional 8**

Jan. 28 – Feb. 1

## **Get Off The Bench**

*Applying Scripture To Your Life*

## **Devotional 9**

Feb. 4 – Feb. 8

## **Respect Your Opponent**

*Loving Your Enemy*

## **Devotional 10**

Feb. 11 – Feb. 15

## **Season Review**

*Practicing Hospitality*

# Walk In The Light

## Code of Conduct

**Coach's Prep:** *The focus prior to the start of games 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 yourself and inform them that your plan for the team is to make sure we model a Christian demeanor at all times.*

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**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?
- How are the expectations different in this league, or any church league, than any other sports league?

**Say:** Tonight, as we begin this season together, we're going to first review the league rules and expectations – expectations of how we're to conduct ourselves in this league - you and me. So, let's review the 'Operational Guidelines':

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

pg. 5	PRACTICES & DEVOTIONS: Devotions
pg. 5-6	GAMES: All
pg. 7-8	OFFICIATING & RULES: All
pg. 8	SUBSTITUTIONS: All
pg. 8-9	ROSTERS & PLAYER ROTATIONS: All*
Pg. 10-12	CONDUCT: All

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

# Respect the Ref

## Trusting God's Plan

**Coach's Prep:** *This week we're talking about respecting the referee and the importance of trusting God's plan, even when it might seem like 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.*

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### Team Questions:

- Has anyone ever been playing a game and had a ref make a bad call?
- Why did you think it was a bad call?
- How did it make you feel, how did you react?

### Read: 1 Peter 1:6-7

*"So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."*

- What does this passage say about times when our faith is challenged?
- How do you typically respond when things don't go 'your way'?

**Game Prep:** There will be, without a doubt, a time 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.

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.

**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 -**

# 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.*

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### Team Questions:

- Have you ever tried to play a game without knowing the rules? What happened?
- So, what does it mean to be a Christian?

Do you always know what God expects of you?

### Read: Titus 3:4-5

*"But When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, **He** saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit"*

- Have you ever felt that you have to do good things to be a Christian?
- What does this passage say about why we are saved?

**Game Prep:** If you just walked onto the court for the first time, and a game was just starting, and you knew nothing about basketball, would it be pretty confusing, intimidating. You wouldn't know the plays, what the lines all over the floor were for, and most confusingly, what is expected of you.

Interestingly, living a Christian life is very similar. There are many people who say that they are Christian because they were born into a Christian family, or because they go to church, or because they read the Bible. Or some people say they are Christian because they do good things.

If you were to ask a group of 10 people: 'What is the goal of a Christian life?', how many different answers do you think you'd get? Unfortunately, that means there's a lot of people who are wandering around – on that confusing basketball court of life – not knowing who they are or what their purpose is.

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. The Christian life is actually pretty straight forward.

**Game Plan:** This week, our challenge is to explore our faith and to take a serious look at what it means to be a Christian. We all have to understand that the goal of the Christian life is to know & love God and to love others.

**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 only in regard to 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?*

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### **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 at school?
- So, what happens when we don't work hard at practice?

**Game Prep:** Every week our team meets to practice. We run drills, play practice games, 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 of 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: 1 Peter 3:15-16**

*"... you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ."*

**Game Plan:** This week, our challenge is for each of us to spend at least 10 minutes a day reading from the Bible. You can choose your favorite stories or even read the same thing every day if you like. But take time to listen to what God may be saying *to you* and consider how prepared you may be to respond to those who question your hope or your faith.

**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.*

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### Team Questions:

- So, what purpose do coaches serve?
- Who in your life do you really listen to, follow, look towards for guidance?
- What does it mean to be a disciple? (*to be a dedicated follower*)

### 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."*

- What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
- In this command from Jesus, does He give us a choice of whether we love others - if we truly want to be His disciples?
- What are some practical ways others would know whether or not we follow Jesus?

**Game Prep:** Every one of us has someone we listen to. We listen to our parents, our teachers, maybe our coaches or small group leaders. 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. Since the beginning of time, people have needed guidance and direction from others. This isn't because of our sin, but because we are human. We were created to seek and receive direction and guidance from God and 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 -**



# Wear Your Uniform

## Putting On The Armor Of God

**Coach's Prep:** *Today we're talking about the importance of a uniform. Not only does our spiritual uniform identify us as followers of Christ, but it also protects us from the enemy's attacks. Begin today's devotional time by praying that God protects the team from spiritual attacks and that you would all have the boldness to stand and defend what you believe in.*

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### Team Questions:

- How seriously do you take getting ready for a basketball game?
- What would happen if no one brought shoes, their jerseys - and Rob didn't have any loaners for us? (*we'd have to give up, lose the game*)

### Read: Ephesians 6:13-17

*"Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."*

- Why is it important that we put on the full armor of God?
- What are some ways God's armor can protect and help us?

**Game Prep:** Why are uniforms so important? What do they do for us? These questions are important not only for you as basketball players, but to Christian as well. Today's passage tells us about the uniform that God gives us as believers.

The cool thing is that this uniform serve two purposes – first it identifies us as followers of Christ. Our uniform is important because it allows others to see the love and forgiveness we have found in Christ. Think about that – people can learn about Christ simply by the way we act when we're wearing God's uniform!

Secondly, our uniform protects us! Have you ever felt ill-equipped to tell others about God? Sometimes we think we're not strong enough or smart enough to do what God is calling us to do. We become afraid and we doubt ourselves. Our reading today tells us, though, that God gives us everything we need to go into battle! Notice that the only *offensive* tool the passage tells us about is God's word. Truth, faith, righteousness and salvation are everything we need to protect ourselves.

**Game Plan:** This week, our challenge is for each of us to share their faith with someone who isn't or may not be a Christian. Remember, it's never been our job to bring others to faith, but simply to tell others about Jesus – He'll take care of the rest!

**Close in prayer -**

# Score An Assist

## Serving Your Teammates

**Coach's Prep:** *Do players on your team have a problem passing the ball? Sometimes, we find ourselves in positions where we want to take the glory for ourselves – we crave the spotlight. Whether on the court or in other areas of our lives, we love for people to acknowledge our achievements. Today, we'll discuss how we can put ourselves second to others. Begin today's devotional time by praying for clarity and humility for everyone on the team.*

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### Team Questions:

- Why is it important to pass the ball in basketball?
- What happens when a player just doesn't like passing?

### Read: Philippians 2:1-4

*"Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."*

- What should our attitudes be – on the court & off the court?

**Game Prep:** So, how often do you call for a pass and not get the ball? You may be wide open, ready for a shot, but your teammate just ignores you; or maybe just doesn't see you. A lot of times, when we get the ball, we get tunnel-vision; it may not be that you're being ignored or devalued, but that the player with the ball is just not focused on the team in that moment.

This happens in more places than just on a basketball court. Because we are sinful – most likely not on purpose – we tend to put ourselves first in our lives. Today's passage, though, speaks against this type of attitude. In verse 3, Paul writes *Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.* This is one of the most difficult challenges we all face in our lives.

We have to understand & accept that the assist is better than a dunk. Actually, a dunk is not allowed in this league – maybe that's a sign to us that our attitude should be the same as Christ, in that His very nature was to be a servant.

**Game Plan:** This week, our challenge is for everyone on the team to find a way that he/she can serve someone else on the team. Right now – look at your teammates; choose one of them & serve them in some way this week. And think about how we can live every day of our lives with this kind of attitude.

**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.*

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### Team Questions:

- Have you ever had to sit on the bench during 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

*"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror."*

- 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. 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! Listen to these words from the brother of Jesus:

### Read: James 2:14-17

*"What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, 'Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well'—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?"*

**Game Plan:** This week's challenge is to find a Scripture in the Bible, a 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 -

# 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.*

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### 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 -**

# Season Review

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

**Say:** So, here we are, this is the final weekend of regular season games, now we prepare for the final games of the tournament. Let's take a couple of minutes to look back at our season. I have some tough questions I'd like to throw at you.

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?

**Say:** Listen to these words from the book of Romans:

*"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality."*

Q: 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**