



Summer 2004 *Go! Online* Bible Study

## Playing To Win . . . People to Christ

### Materials:

- *Go! Online* Download Video: “Major League Christian”
- Computer, monitor, or video projector to display video
- Copies of *Go! Online* Group Activity for “Playing To Win . . . People to Christ” (one per student)
- Copies of Summer 2004 *Go!* magazine for each student (unless they’ve already been distributed)

### Video Introduction:

Before playing the video clip, ask your group to think about this question: “What’s most important when pointing the people in our everyday lives to Jesus—how we live or what we say about Jesus?”

Then introduce the video by saying something like this:

**Atlanta Braves pitcher John Smoltz is one of the best in professional baseball. He wins a lot more than he loses. He makes millions of dollars. And the people in his everyday life—his teammates and others he works with—know that he’s a believer in Jesus Christ. Let’s listen to what he has to say about living as a Christian in front of his everyday friends and co-workers.**

Now play the *Go! Online* download video for this study. It’s called “Major League Christian.” It’s 1 minute, 37 seconds long, and it features a brief locker-room interview with John Smoltz at the Braves spring training camp. You’ll hear him talk about what it means for him to live as a Christian in front of his teammates.

### Transition:

Explain the following in your own words:

**John Smoltz obviously plays the game of baseball to win. He’s a warrior on the field and takes his job very seriously. But in his everyday life, he also plays to win others to Jesus Christ by the way he lives and the choices he makes. John Smoltz is not perfect and he makes mistakes, but he’s trying to let others see the difference Christ has made in his life.**

**Today, we’re going to dig into a passage in the Bible that talks about how we can lead others to Jesus just by living like Jesus in front of them. The Bible tells us that Peter really struggled sometimes to make the right choices. Today, we’ll study 1 Peter 3:8-16 to see what he wrote about playing the game of life to win others to Jesus.**

## 1. How do you treat people?

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8, NIV).

Does Christianity really work? Does our belief in what the Bible teaches actually change anything about the way we live? That’s the question the unbelievers in our lives are asking. Our words, attitudes, and choices will say more about the reality of Jesus than a hundred sermons.

Of course, Christians are not perfect. We still make mistakes and struggle to do the right thing. But those who know us best will see how we behave most of the time. And the first thing they’ll notice is how we treat other people—other Christians, unbelievers, and strangers.

### *Live in Harmony with One Another*

How do you get along with people, especially other Christians? Are you able to keep the peace in most of your relationships or does it seem like you’re always battling with someone? Do you look for reasons to be offended by what people say—or are you willing to let things go in order to maintain harmony?

Paul wrote that we should do our best to be at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18).

Here’s a good question: Are you most committed to making sure people respect you or making sure people feel respected? Your answer to that question will have a lot to do with how you get along with others.

### *Be Sympathetic and Compassionate*

Are you known as someone who listens, who tries to understand, who hurts with those in pain? Or do people know you as someone too hard (or afraid) to pay attention when someone is feeling bad?

Let’s make it harder: How are you at expressing compassion for those who disagree with you—or even those who disagree with God? Can you feel for both your Christian brothers and sisters who are struggling as well as people who might be pro-choice, pro-gay, or otherwise committed to things you believe are wrong?

Jesus wept both for the grief of his close friends (John 11:35) and for the people who were about to reject Him and His love for them (Luke 19:41).

### *Love as Brothers*

Do the people in your life—believers and non-Christians alike—know that you would go the extra mile to help them—like a brother would? Do they know that you’re honestly concerned about them?

Let's get practical: What would it take for your friends and family to see you as a loving brother in their lives? Are there things you could say or do to show your brotherly love for them—to show that you care about more than just getting through the day?

### *Be Humble*

During His life on earth, Jesus was 100 percent right all the time, wasn't He? So, of course, He treated everyone who disagreed with Him like tiny bugs and mocked their false ideas about life and the world. And He totally flamed anyone living in a sinful lifestyle, right?

Nope. According to Philippians 2:8, Jesus humbled Himself. The only perfect human to ever live humbled Himself by becoming a man and humbled Himself even further by dying for humans who hated Him. That humility also showed up in how He communicated with people. He spent time with sinners. He listened to and answered questions from people who disagreed with Him. He was patient.

How humble are we in our conversations with each other and with unbelievers? How much of our pride and self-righteousness pokes through in sports, at work or in Internet message boards and chat rooms? Are we known as proud . . . or humble?

**Reflection:** Ask your students to take a minute to think of some of the Christians they know well. Tell them not to say or write down any names, but suggest that they think of someone who really treats other people as Jesus did—with harmony, compassion, brotherly love and humility. Then give them a second to think about a Christian who does just the opposite, a person who is often in conflict, ignores the pain of others, doesn't express concern or kindness and seems self-righteous or proud.

What is the difference in the impact these two people have on the unbelievers and other Christians in their lives?

## **2. How do you treat people who hurt you?**

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9, NIV).

This is one area where Christians should stand way out from the crowd. Why? Because the person whose path we're following was treated with true evil. He was insulted horribly. He deserved none of it—and He did nothing to get even.

Instead, on the cross, He asked God to forgive His torturers because they didn't understand what they were doing.

He lived what He taught: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43-45, NIV).

There's nothing more Christlike than forgiving, loving, and praying for those who hurt us.

But refusing to get even when people hurt us doesn't come naturally, does it? We want to get even. That's why it gets noticed by those closest to us when we do just the opposite.

### **3. What comes out of your mouth?**

“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Peter 3:10, NIV)

Another thing that sets apart believers who are living to win others to Jesus from those who aren't is the content of their words. The Bible admits that the tongue is the hardest part of our bodies to control (James 3:1-12). Still, people who are following Jesus in front of their friends and family are told to control it.

The commands are simple: Don't say unkind things, and don't lie. Period. Ever. That's the standard. Will we fail sometimes? Yeah. But those close to us should see that our goal is to tell the truth and say only good things.

One side note: What's wrong with cheating? It's a lie, isn't it? It's pretending to have come up with an answer or a paper or an assignment on our own, even though we really didn't. Cheating is lying. Want to really stand out as a Christian in your school (even your Christian high school)? Refuse to cheat—even when “nobody will find out” and you “won't get caught” and the “teacher doesn't care.” Just because it's wrong and you're choosing to live like Jesus really matters in your life.

### **4. How do you respond to hard times?**

“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord” (1 Peter 3:13-15, NIV).

The Bible is honest: Life on earth is hard. Everyone suffers. Everyone goes through hard times. Peter was talking here about persecution for following Jesus. But people will notice our response to hard times, no matter why they come our way.

What are some of the ways human beings can respond to suffering and hard times? We can get angry. We can say, “This isn't fair,” and let ourselves become bitter about life and resentful toward God or those who treat us badly.

Or we can feel sorry for ourselves. We can decide that we're worse off than most people and choose to hold on to sadness and depression for years. We can use our hard circumstances as an excuse to live only for ourselves.

Another option is denial and escapism. We can pretend that everything is fine and then try to numb the pain by distracting ourselves with sports or alcohol or TV or video games or sex or drugs or any other things that make us forget for a while.

How does the Bible tell Christians to respond to hard times? The Bible is clear; we have to make some hard choices. Both James (James 1) and Paul (Romans 5) wrote that we must choose to see hard circumstances as a chance to trust God to provide for us. And in this section's passage, Peter wrote that we must reject fear about the bad things that can happen.

Does that mean we just walk around pretending not to be in pain and saying, "I'm trusting God; leave me alone!" No. Instead, we have to be honest with ourselves and God, as David was in the Psalms. We have to tell Him, "This hurts; I don't like it. I want things to change. But now I'm going to make a choice to trust You to take care of me."

What does that choice look like? For David, it started with giving praise and thanks to God for all the good things He has done for us. Peter reminds us to keep following Jesus as Lord; don't use hard times as an excuse to disobey and walk away from God. And in Romans 8, Paul reminded us to keep our focus on heaven and the fact that all the suffering will be over when we get there.

That's how believers can stand out in the world when they go through bad moments or days or weeks. They're honest with God, themselves, and others about their pain. Then they make a choice to focus on giving thanks to God, rejecting fear and anger, and living in the hope of heaven.

**Reflection:** Ask your students to think of a believer they know who has suffered a lot, either with illness or family problems or other issues. Did that person's response to their suffering point others to Jesus? Why or why not?

## 5. How do you tell people about Jesus?

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

This is one payoff for living like Jesus in front of our friends and family and co-workers. Peter writes that they *will* notice. If someone is really treating people like Jesus did and responding to people who hurt him like Jesus did and using his words like Jesus did and responding to hard times like Jesus did—that person is not going to "blend." He's going to stick out.

Eventually, someone will ask you, "How do you live like that? Where do you get that kind of hope?" As John Smoltz said in that video clip, they're going to get curious about the source of your strange and hopeful life.

Living like Jesus sometimes earns us the right to tell others more openly about Him. Then the question is: What will you say to them?

### *Be Ready*

Peter's first instruction is to be ready to talk about the reason for your hope. Can you lay it out there in a way that's easy to understand? What do you really believe and how does it change you? We all need to work on being able to communicate those ideas.

### *Be Gentle and Respectful*

We've probably all seen Christians who talk about what they believe while being very harsh and disrespectful about what others believe. Sometimes, those people seem to think they're taking a strong stand for Christ when they're really just pushing people away from Him.

Someone who is gentle in approach doesn't yell or get angry or attack. Someone who is respectful doesn't mock another's beliefs or lifestyle or words. Respect means working just as hard to understand another's ideas as you want them to work to understand yours. You don't have to agree, but there's no room for ridicule.

### *Keep a Clear Conscience*

Christians will be mocked and persecuted for believing in and following Jesus. He said it would happen. We can't help that. However, too many times, we also earn a little mocking by how we treat the people in our lives.

The recent movie *Saved!* basically mocks Christian teenagers who take Jesus seriously. It does so by making fun of both what we really believe, as well as some of the disrespectful and silly things some Christians do. Here's the question: Will the unbelievers in your life who happen to see that movie reject its slander because they know you, as a Christian, are not like that—or will they think it's an accurate picture of you and other Christians?

Your life is the true test of whether Jesus works or not. Are you playing to win people to Him by the way you live your life? Or do your choices and attitudes contradict what you believe to be true?

### **Group Activity**

[Hand out the copies you made of the *Go! Online* group activity for this study. You should have one for each student. Explain the following:]

You don't need to write anything on this paper or answer any of these questions out loud. We're just going to use this as a tool for reflection about how effectively our lives are pointing others to Jesus.

Using baseball as an analogy, do we most often get a hit or strike out when given the chance to reflect Jesus in our choices and actions?

[Walk through the activity sheet with your group, taking time to talk briefly about each of the response options.]

## Conclusion

[Close the session by saying something like this:]

**God understands that we're all human. Even when we want to live like Jesus we fail. We can be honest about that with each other and even with our unsaved friends and family members. Even letting them see the fact that we feel badly when we handle something wrong will help them see that we take our relationship with God seriously.**

Then close in prayer by asking God to help you and your group to let everyone in your lives see Jesus at work in you—even when you fail. Ask Him to help all of you to treat others as Jesus did, to respond to unkindness as He did, to use your words as He did, and to respond to hard times as He did.

Finally, ask Him to draw unsaved people in your lives to Himself through the hopefulness they see in your lives.

Remind your group to read the summer issue of *Go!* magazine, especially the profile on John Smoltz called “Smoltz Knows Saves.”

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