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## The Experience of Christian Prayer in Coaching: A Qualitative Investigation

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THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN COACHING: A QUALITATIVE  
INVESTIGATION

by

TREVOR J. EGLI

(Under the Direction of Daniel R. Czech)

ABSTRACT

There have been studies, which have examined the lived experience of Christian athletes' use of prayer (Czech et al., 2004); however, no published research has sought to understand how a Christian coach may utilize prayer. The purpose of this study was to gather a narrative of the lived experience of collegiate Division I Christian head coaches' use of prayer within their profession. A Humanistic framework, specifically existential-phenomenology, which was centered on seeing the individual being interviewed as the expert on the matter at hand (Dale, 1996) was used to allow for an information rich and detailed description of the coaches' experience. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: Relying on God's Guidance and Plan, The Roles of Coaching, Prayer Types, and Personal Faith not Forced. Each theme except Personal Faith not Forced was comprised of two or more subthemes. Implications from this study may benefit coaches, athletes, sport psychology consultants, and those who may encounter Christian prayer within sport by providing insight into how coaches may use prayer.

INDEX WORDS: Christian prayer, Prayer in sport, Coaching, God's plan, Personal faith, Sport psychology

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INVESTIGATION

by

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B.A., Franklin & Marshall College, 2008

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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2010

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Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Mom, your life and your being is contagious and beautiful. You are the strongest person I know. Dad, there has never been a moment in my life where I questioned your love for me, through both the good and the bad, and I hope that one day I am able to do the same for my children. Jenna, I have always appreciated your encouraging words and attentive ears whenever they have been needed (although sometimes it is more fun to leave a voicemail!). Johnny, it is amazing to have a brother-in-law I truly respect and admire who loves my sister dearly. Jared, your true spirit of servanthood and selfless attitude are traits in you I can only fathom of having. Jordan, your thoughtfulness and simplicity in all matters make you one of a kind. Also, twins, I am still king of 21 and it is *your* turn to vacuum the pool! You have all made me a better person and I am so thankful to call you my family. I love you.

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:17

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In May of 2000, at the inaugural Laureus World Sports Awards, Nelson Mandela said, “sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, a power to unite people in a way that little else can.” Coakley (2008) states “religion is powerful because it forms a foundation for general systems of meaning related to ultimate issues and questions. These systems of meaning affect the way people think about the world, about social life and social relationships, and even about sports.” Individually, sport and religion are two powerful avenues that many people place significant value and meaning on within their lives; however, when they are combined it may create difficulties for those who attempt to make sense of both.

Sport sociologists have suggested there are several ways in which athletes and coaches use prayer. Coakley (2008) notes eight of these purposes: (1) to cope with uncertainty, (2) to stay out of trouble, (3) to give meaning to sport participation, (4) to put sport into a “balanced perspective,” (5) to establish team solidarity and unity, (6) to reaffirm rules, expectations, and social control on teams, (7) to assert autonomy in the face of power, and (8) to achieve personal and athletic success. Prayer has also been studied in non-sport contexts, in which it established prayer as having both positive physiological and psychological effects. This has been studied in the field of medical science (Bernardi et al., 2001; Leibovici, 2001) and the psychology of religion (Finney & Malony, 1985; McCullough, 1995; Paloma & Pendleton, 1991).

It is estimated that there are more than 240,000 high school coaches and over 49,000 collegiate coaches here in the United States (Athletic Publishing Company, 2008). Although

there are a variety of religious and value-laden belief systems out there, Christianity will be the focus of this particular research. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) conducted in 2001 noted that 76.5% (159 million) identified themselves as Christian. Deford (1979) coined the term “Sportinaity,” which refers to the social movement of coaches and athletes who live their lives as examples for Christ. One such organization is The Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), which is a Christian organization that caters to providing Christian-athletes a resource to connect and meet with others who have similar beliefs and values. There is an estimated 500,000 students who are involved in FCA groups in high schools and colleges around the country, which only accounts for 24% of the schools in America (“Who is FCA?,” 2007). This is only one of many Christian sports organizations. Therefore, this number does not include the Christian-athletes who are not involved in this organization, but may be involved in a different Christian group. Also, there may be some who do not partake in any organization of the like. This number allows one to assume there would be well over 500,000 student-athletes who identify themselves with the religion of Christianity.

Researchers have shown that the Christian athlete can experience a dilemma when applying their faith within sport. Stevenson (1997) interviewed 31 elite Christian athletes and asked them about their experience within the sport culture. More specifically he asked them what dilemmas the Christian participants may run into within sport and how their faith enables them to cope with such circumstances. Five such difficulties were prominent among all of the athletes: (1) importance of winning, (2) importance of social status, (3) relationships with coaches and teammates, (4) relationship with opponents, and (5) expectations others placed upon them within other social settings. The athletes that were

interviewed coped best by “coming back to faith,” which tended to help them within the dominant culture of sport. This is referring to the athletes placing more importance on seeking out the meaning of their faith and how to apply it to their lives, especially sport. The situation faced by these Christian athletes is quite unique because of the pull between the two cultures and how they identify themselves.

Several studies have found that the most prolific response in order to cope with the athletic culture for Christian athletes is prayer (Czech & Bullett, 2007; Watson & Nesti, 2005; Watson & Czech, 2005; Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, & Hayes, 2004; Park, 2000). One such study examined Christian prayer in sport among Division I elite Christian athletes (Czech et al., 2004). Four uses of prayer were revealed: (1) performance prayers, (2) prayer routine, (3) thankfulness, and (4) God’s will. Although we have this knowledge there is still a lack of research, which has explored the phenomenon of prayer in sport and needs further understanding (Watson & Nesti, 2005; Watson & Czech, 2005).

Another population within the Christian community of sport we know even less about are coaches (Czech & Bullett, 2007; Watson & Czech, 2005; Czech et al., 2004). Only one research study has been found, which has tried to understand the lived experience of a Christian coach regarding faith and sport (Bennett, Sagas, Fleming, & Von Roenn, 2005). Similar to Stevenson (1997, 1991), Bennet et al. (2005) demonstrated the dilemma a Christian may face within the dominant culture of sport. Bennett et al.’s (2005) participant, an NCAA Division I baseball coach, struggled with the concepts of winning, social status, and his behavior in and out of the sporting environment. His response to these struggles included three solutions - the first being separating himself from sport and disconnecting his identity as a baseball coach. The second was having a “take it or leave it” mentality as the

coach describes. This entails putting sport into a perspective of seeing it as an experience that he will enjoy when he has it, but he would be able to find joy in life even if it were not there. The final solution was relying on what he saw as God's desires for his life. He saw his life as one that God led and directed, which entailed recognizing he cannot control everything around him, including his coaching.

Bennett et al.'s (2005) research provides perspective on a Christian-coach's struggles, yet there is still a lack of research found which examines a Christian coach's lived experience regarding prayer. Qualitative inquiries such as: "How is prayer used, if at all, by Christian coaches?;" and "What are the lived experiences of Christian coaches who utilize prayer?" are questions that may benefit the field of sport psychology. Obtaining answers to these questions would provide insight into the lived experiences of Christian coaches and prayer, which would be helpful for sport psychology consultants who may encounter a Christian coach who uses prayer. Watson and Nesti (2005) suggest answers to these questions and other questions regarding spirituality and sport would allow sport psychology consultants to have a much more holistic approach.

The humanistic model is the mode to best understand the lived experiences of Christian coaches through a first-person perspective. Researchers who follow this theoretical framework believe that people must be seen and understood within context, as well as holistically, while being cognizant that each individual is unique (Patton, 2002; Hill, 2001). An appropriate research method that is associated with the humanistic framework is existential phenomenology. This methodology entails the meanings and descriptions provided about the experience at hand and employs the one being interviewed as the expert of what is being explored (Nesti, 2006; Dale, 1996).

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research was to examine Christian coaches' experience of prayer in sport. This was the first study to explore the lived experience of prayer by NCAA Division I Christian Coaches using existential phenomenology.

## CHAPTER 2

## METHODS

*Bias Exploration and Bracketing*

When utilizing existential phenomenology it is important to note that the primary tool of data collection is the researcher (Czech et al., 2004; Patton, 2002). Each researcher comes with their own biases, which have the ability to hinder and deter the co-participants' true experiences if these biases are not illuminated prior to investigation. Therefore, the head researcher underwent a bracketing interview that entailed the same question used during the study. This brought awareness to any themes he had regarding his own experiences of prayer as a Christian coach so as not to guide or influence the co-participants.

I am currently a second year master's student at Georgia Southern University (GSU) where I am studying sport psychology. While in this program I have had the opportunity to travel both within and outside of the United States. During the summer of 2009 I spent the month of July in Trinidad and Tobago where I served as a co-director of recreation at Victory Heights Bible camp. Part of my duties entailed serving as a fitness coach to the campers and I used prayer regularly within that setting. Before attending GSU, I played NCAA Division III basketball and found prayer to be an important facet of my life during sport. Because of my experiences it was necessary for me to explore my own biases prior to investigation.

My bracketing interview consisted of four themes. The first theme was prayer used to thank God for opportunity. Being physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy are aspects of my life I am very grateful for and express through prayer. As a fitness coach, I would always mention how thankful I was for my athletes and I to be able to perform. Second was the theme of safety. In a coaching role, I felt responsible for those I would watch over and

expressed this concern to God through prayer. Third, praying to glorify God was a theme that emerged. It was important that wherever I was and whatever I was doing that my actions, words, and effort was pleasing to God. The fourth and final theme of my bracketing interview entailed team and individual prayer. Settings in which I prayed were either with my team aloud or in my own prayer time, as well as praying with and for individual players.

### *Participants*

The co-participants in this study were six NCAA Division I Christian head coaches (3 male, 3 female) from a variety of team sports. Purposeful sampling was used to obtain information-rich cases on Christian coaches' experiences of prayer in sport.

Participants were reached through personal contacts of the head researcher, as well as through contacts made through the research team. Coaches who agreed early on in the process also provided contacts. E-mail, telephone, and personal encounters were methods of meeting the coaches, and those interested and willing to participate were interviewed. They were considered Christian through self-profession and agreeing to the "Vision" and "Mission" of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) (<http://www.fca.org/AboutFCA/>):

The FCA Vision – To see the world impacted for Jesus Christ through the influence of athletes and coaches.

The FCA Mission – To present athletes and coaches and all whom they influence the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.

### *Procedure*

Interviews took place in private, either in the primary investigator's office or an agreed upon location, to allow for confidentiality. Consent forms were signed before each interview was conducted. Those who were interviewed over the telephone agreed to consent through e-mail correspondence. Co-participants were informed that they were able to

withdraw at any time due to the voluntary nature and that there was no monetary reward for their participation. Each co-participant was aware that the sessions were recorded for accuracy. Afterwards, each participant was e-mailed a copy of the transcript to review, and he or she was informed that the lead researcher and the research team would review the transcripts for data analysis. Anonymity of participation and the data was explained to the co-participants. Each co-participant was given a pseudonym when being reviewed by the research team or anyone outside of the main researchers to maintain confidentiality and the research team members who read the transcripts also agreed to confidentiality. These members of the group consisted of fellow graduate students who had knowledge of the phenomenological method through graduate level studies.

#### *Interview Protocol*

The same interview question was asked to each co-participant to gain an understanding of the Christian head coach's experience of prayer in sport. This was in the form of an open-ended question, which was the following:

“When you think about praying as a coach, what comes to mind?”

After the initial question, the researcher used probing questions to allow for elaboration and/or clarification of their experiences. They were based on the co-participant's response and, when possible, were in the form of their vocabulary (Dale, 1996). Example questions could include:

“You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, could you elaborate more on that?”

“What was that experience you described like for you?”

“What did you mean when you said \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Are you able to tell me about another time you experienced prayer in sport?”

### *Data Analysis*

Data for this study was analyzed by adopting a procedure developed by Czech et al. (2004) and Patton (2002), which includes four steps.

1. Approaching the interviews
  - Transcribing the interview*
  - Obtaining a grasp of the interview*
2. Focusing the data
  - Bracketing the data*
3. Phenomenological reduction
  - Eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data*
  - Verifying the elimination of the data*
4. Releasing meanings
  - Forming categories*
  - Identifying the themes*
  - Describing the themes*

The first step is to approach and transcribe the interviews. This entails having the recorded interviews transcribed verbatim by the lead researcher and a professional transcriptionist so they may be thematized. After being transcribed, the head researcher sought a better knowledge and understanding of those interviews by listening and reading the transcripts numerous times to grasp their experience.

Once the data was transcribed, the second step was to focus the data. Bracketing the data allowed for any biases the reader has to be brought to awareness and create a mindset where “all elements and perspectives having equal weight” (Patton, 2002, pg. 286). It is important to control any of the researcher’s presuppositions so as not to skew the data and contaminate the co-participant’s experience. The research group also helped in providing a different perspective and noted any biases that may have gone unnoticed by the lead researcher.

Phenomenological reduction was the third step in the process and consists of eliminating any irrelevant and repetitive data. Examples of meaningless utterances that may be removed were, “um,” and “uh.” It was done in a way so as not to lose the essential meaning of the co-participants’ experiences but to allow for a smaller and more manageable transcript (Czech et al., 2004). Transcripts were then given back to the co-participants to assure no meaning of the phenomena had been lost.

Lastly, the meanings were released by recognizing comprehensible, small segments of text known as meaning units and placing these meaning units into similar clusters (Cote, 1993). These clusters were then placed into themes by the reader, as well as by the research team. The group offered multiple perspectives and conclusions on themes, which were those found to be most common amongst the research team. When describing the themes, one must recognize the large amount of data; therefore, some data was omitted to further focus the experience and allow for a rich description of the lived experiences.

### *Reliability*

Reliability can be understood as the ability to replicate particular methods and attain consistent results across people and time. According to Patton (2002), in order for a qualitative study to be reliable, one must consider the participants trustworthy. During the course of this study, four questions helped guide the reliability throughout the collection of data (Czech et al., 2004; Goodrich, 1988). They are the following: 1) Did the descriptions capture the experience? 2) Did the structure match the co-participant’s experience? 3) Did the structure emerge from the data? 4) Do others see the description? Thus, if the descriptions of the Christian coaches’ experiences of prayer are shown to be true, then the study is considered reliable. This study was considered reliable.

### *Validity*

The degree of a study's validity is based on a reader's ability to experience the descriptions as truthful (Czech et al., 2004). The reader should be able to follow the process that steered him or her to the conclusion of analysis, whether or not he or she agrees with the researcher (Czech et al., 2001; Dale, 1996). If the experience is based on a first-person description, the validity should be disregarded (Dale, 1996).

One method that was utilized in this study to maintain validity was triangulation. Triangulation provides an amalgamation of sources to converge on particular phenomena from which conclusions may then be drawn (Patton, 2002). The present study entailed the following methods of triangulation: member checks, peer reviewer, research team analysis, bracketing interview, and NVivo software analysis. Member checks provide the co-participants the opportunity to maintain the accuracy of their lived experiences, while the peer reviewer is an expert on qualitative methods and is able to challenge and confront the lead researcher. The purpose of the research team allowed for outside perspectives and viewpoints on transcripts, as well as helped the lead researcher maintain an unbiased approach after being made aware of the bracketing interview. Finally, NVivo software acted as a coding aid throughout the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 3

## RESULTS

A description of the co-participants is found in Table 1. All of the co-participants are currently NCAA Division I head coaches. Each of the co-participants considered themselves Christians and agreed with the vision and mission statements stated by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) (<http://www.fca.org/AboutFCA/>).

Table 1

*Description of Co-participants*

#	Coach Gender	Sport Gender	Sport	Race	Athletic Level
1.	Female	Female	Soccer	Caucasian	Division I
2.	Female	Female	Track & Field	African-American	Division I
3.	Male	Female	Basketball	Caucasian	Division I
4.	Male	Female	Basketball	Caucasian	Division I
5.	Male	Female	Swimming	Caucasian	Division I
6.	Female	Female	Soccer	Caucasian	Division I

This exploration sought to create a thematic structure of the experience of prayer by NCAA Division I Christian head coaches. Following analysis of the data, four themes were discovered: (1) relying on God's guidance and plan – prayers seeking wisdom on team issues and belief in God's plan, (2) the roles of coaching – prayers for numerous responsibilities and outlooks as a Christian head coach, (3) prayer types – various settings and meanings of prayer, and (4) personal faith not forced – prayer in recognizing individuality of faith. Each of the four themes created a structure of the experience of prayer for the co-participants.

Subthemes were found for three of the four overall themes. Relying on God's guidance and plan comprised of the following subthemes: (a) wisdom with team issues, (b) trusting God's will, and (c) coping. Subthemes for the roles of coaching consisted of (a) impact beyond sport, (b) attentive to player needs, (c) preparation as coach and leader, (d) being an example, and (e) outcome. The theme of prayer types is made up of two subthemes, which are (a) team prayer, and (b) individual prayer. Personal faith not forced did not show any subthemes.

Figure 1 and Table 2 present a model of the themes and subthemes and how their interrelationships developed from the lived experiences of the co-participants. The model of prayer experience made up of relying on God's guidance and plan, roles of coaching, prayer types, and personal faith not forced portrays how they interrelate and oftentimes amalgamate with one another. Each theme was found in each of the six co-participants' interviews, while the subthemes were found in a minimum of five of the interviews.

Table 2

*Description of Themes and Subthemes*

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Relying on God's Guidance and Plan	Wisdom with team issues Trusting God's Will Coping
The Roles of Coaching	Impact Beyond Sport Attentive to Player Needs Preparation as coach and leader Being an Example Outcome
Prayer Types	Team Prayer Individual Prayer

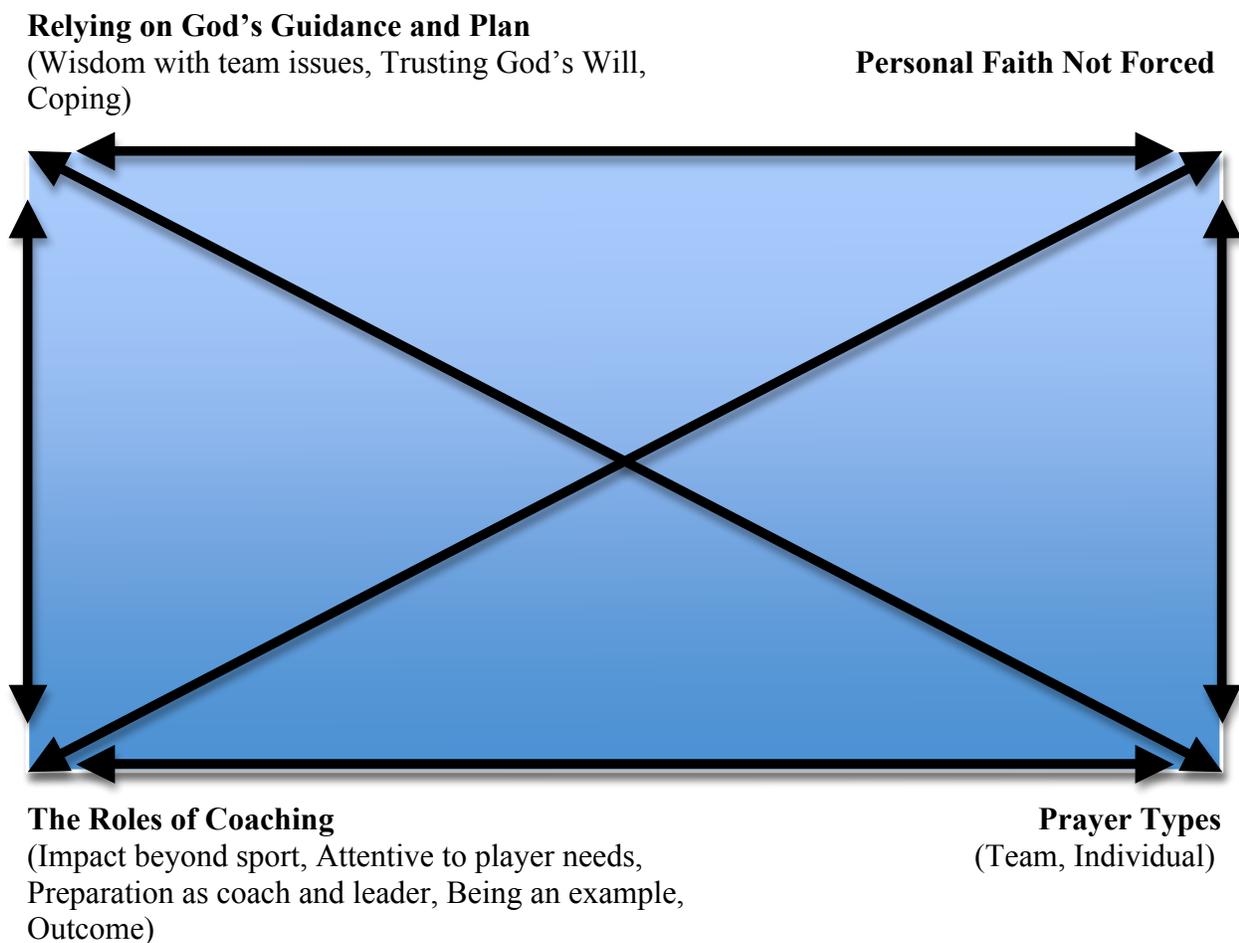
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Personal Faith not Forced

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*Theme #1: Relying on God's Guidance and Plan*

The first theme from the data involved seeking God's guidance and wisdom regarding various team issues, whether related to sport or outside of sport. The co-participants also believed God had a plan for their lives and situations they found themselves in and trusted in God's will. The coaches in this study found this theme to be vital in their prayer experiences.



*Figure 1.* Themes Describing Coaches' Experience of Praying in Sport

Wisdom with team issues. The coaches realized that they are often faced with many difficult decisions regarding the players on their teams. It was noticed that the coaches understood the magnitude and impact their decisions may have on their players and believed it important to pray about these instances when encountered. These circumstances entailed addressing life issues, such as academics and relationships, the responsibilities of their player development, and disciplinary matters. One co-participant found it important to address seeking wisdom through prayer with team issues:

“I really try to pray and ask for wisdom, ask for guidance in issues with young people.” (Co-participant #4)

“I think the biggest thing specifically to my job is that different issues specially that may come up within a team, dealing with a young person with their struggle with academics, or their struggle maybe they had some bad luck and not performing well and their confidence is down. Maybe they are having some issues at home with parents with boyfriends with relationships. Those all come up through the course of the season, and the way that I coach our team and the way we interact I am aware of these things and those are the kinds of things they’ll tell me about and they choose to share with me about it at times.” (Co-participant #4)

Other co-participants mentioned the magnitude of their responsibilities to the players they coach and a need to ask for guidance. This coach shared his experience on why he must give his responsibilities to God in prayer:

“And when you look a lot of times at an individual, they look like a great person, but then you find out maybe they don’t work hard, they don’t, they’re lazy, they don’t...all those different things. But I got to take a 17 year old kid, ‘cause I’m going to have them four, maybe five years, and they’re going to leave here adults. I’m going see them an entirely different way than their mom and dad did ‘cause they diapered them. They brought them into this world the first 17 years and they’re going to treat them like kids. I have to treat them like maturing adults because that’s the way they’re going to leave here. So the lessons that I have to teach them are incredible, they’re staggering and I don’t feel as a human being, as a man, as person...that responsibility of that’s absolutely incredible. I don’t think I can do that. I gotta say, Lord, these are your people. What do you want me to do with them?” (Co-participant #3)

“So my foundation has to be very, very strong in what we’re trying to do with these kids and all and I gotta believe in that. I know what God’s plan is for me. I don’t know what it is for each one of these other girls. So I’ve gotta trust God and say, okay Lord, show me through whether it be [chaplain], or [wife], or my pastor, or You, whoever. Show me what I’m supposed to help develop in this young lady today. You know, where do You want her going so I can help her in that direction. And I can’t do that by myself. You know, I’ve got to just say, no, alright Lord, where do you, what do you want me to do in this situation?” (Co-participant #3)

Wisdom was also sought out when enforcing team rules and policies. The following co-participant recalled a time when she asked for wisdom when she had to suspend some of her best players:

“So I think that Saturday night was just spent, God I really need direction and wisdom on how to lead this team. And I think that Sunday morning that I was there early and was one of the first times that I’ve really probably prayed over our field and sat and really prayed and sought his wisdom and guidance...and it was a time where we did end up...I did end up suspending the players...and we played with players we had never played with before and it was the only game we had ever won.” (Co-participant #1)

In summary, the co-participants asked for wisdom or guidance on a variety of team issues.

Trusting God’s Will. This subtheme emerged as the coaches accepted situations and job positions to be within God’s Will or plan. They described God as sovereign or all-knowing and placed their trust in God’s hands on issues that are not within their control.

This co-participant found it important to realize she could not do anything for a friend in the hospital:

“I know that she’s seeking after You and I think just, I think understanding from him that his ways are perfect that you know it may not make sense to us and I think just really praying, alright God, she’s in your hands and I know you can handle it and I think just having that peace and knowing he’s sovereign, he’s all knowing, he’s got a plan, his ways are perfect and just saying, okay I’m giving it over to you and I trust your will be done.” (Co-participant #1)

Co-participants even found prayer to be an act of God's Will. Here a coach describes how her prayer for her program coincides with God's Will:

“I don't think that anything can be done outside of prayer that...nothing can be done that isn't the will of God, or within God's will without inviting God into whatever you're doing. I do have...prayer is the way that we invite God into all that we're doing because that is a conversation I have with the Lord and that He has with me. So if I want to create a program, a soccer program that is excellent and that with...to glorify God in all they do and then also seeks to share Him with everyone around them then everything that I do from recruiting to training to our devotionals, any aspect of the program should be something that I seek to invite God into at all times...so that it's His program and not mine.” (Co-participant #6)

Lastly, co-participants described their coaching jobs as God's plan for their lives.

This particular coach describes his desire to be a coach as within God's Will:

“I'm one of those that honestly believe that we've all got a purpose in life and that God places us where He wants us as long as we're open to following his will. And for me, I thought ever since high school, as an athlete, that I never doubted what I was going to do in life. I knew, or felt like this what God's wanted me all along.” (Co-participant #3)

In summary, the co-participants felt like prayer was important in understanding God's Will for their lives. This was seen in both their programs and their understanding of where God has placed them professionally.

Coping. When being exposed to the different emotions and feelings that come along with sport, many of the coaches found prayer to be a way to cope with the situation. In particular, co-participants found prayer to reduce stress in their coaching lives:

“I mean honestly prayer keeps your sanity. Because let's be real here, you're responsible for a group of people from all different walks of life. And then with me, being who I am in God, there's a responsibility that I have no matter who I'm around.” (Co-participants #2)

“If I didn't have a release or a stress release area...again it goes back when I said, started this whole thing off by these kids all...I'm responsible for in these four or five years they we're here. I'm responsible for these parent's most prized possession – their children. I'm going to lose no matter what because they have a biased slant.” (Co-participant #3)

Coaches also found prayer to reduce stress when faced with potential job loss:

“I think naturally I am a stressed out person. Not stressed out...but I worry...is probably something I struggle with. And I think in a normal situation I would have come and would have been extremely worried, probably been on the verge of tears. Instead I got to work early and I did pray before I went up there God, you know, I know... help me be strong, not make a fool of myself and cry or... just take whatever I have because I appreciate the opportunity you have given me.” (Co-participant #1)

In summary, coaches sought out prayer to cope with various stresses presented to them due to the nature of their profession. This allowed them to feel stress free and feel confident in God’s provisions.

### *Theme #2: The Roles of Coaching*

The original question presented to the co-participants, “When you think about praying as a coach, what comes to mind?” created a plethora of responses regarding their outlooks concerning their professional responsibilities. However, when considering their experience of prayer the co-participants seemed to have a much bigger picture of their role as a coach from what many called the “Xs and Os” of the sport. Subthemes that emerged include the following: impact beyond sport, attentive to player needs, preparation as coach and leader, being an example, and outcome.

Impact beyond sport. Many of the coaches believed their job was to impact the lives of their players in much more than just their particular sport. Therefore, prayer was used to gain perspective because they felt their role extended far beyond their time spent with their players during their collegiate athletic career. Certain co-participants noted the opportunity they have been given as a coach to have an impact on their players within sport to affect their lives outside of sport:

“I think for me this past season it’s been really praying, I think, over our team. I think and over our, like the field of competition and over our locker room that that

His presence would really be there and that my motives would be correct and that it's not always the outward success that He's looking for that it's normally the, you know, impacting lives and that he's helping me walk in confidence in the role that he's given me. So when I step out to practice, that I've prepared myself to coach this team, to give them the instruction that they need, that I'm there to listen to them too, not just as a coach, to make them perform for me so we have the wins, but that we are really building into their lives." (Co-participant #1)

"And since I'm a coach I...God's put me in a position to impact a lot of kids lives for His kingdom, which is cool." ( Co-participant #6)

Other co-participants saw their roles as a coach as an obligation to develop young people. The coaches put this idea into perspective regarding their prayers:

"Well I started off this by saying, [investigator], that I don't know, I know what's God's plans are for me. I firmly believe that and that's to coach and try to help young people. That's why I'm in this business. 100%. Because it certainly isn't the money because of the pressures I'm under every day and the baggage that I have to take home." (Co-participant #3)

"More so, my direction as it relates to my job and my career and my dealing with young people, I pray for vision in terms of leadership. I think that is such a big part of it. Not necessarily specifically how the team is doing and that we are successful. But as someone who has a responsibility and has an obligation to young people." (Co-participant #4)

Attentive to player needs. Coaches spoke about how they viewed their words to their players as very important. They realized it was necessary for them not only to present well thought out responses, but also to have the ability to hear what their players had to say so they might best respond appropriately. Co-participants portrayed how prayer was used when giving advice to players outside of sport:

"So if I know I'm fixin' to talk to a senior that's got some major struggles, I'll spend a little time in prayer before I'll talk with that girl. Just to see if there's something there that I can at least be sensitive. And probably the biggest thing is, [investigator}, is it gives me a sense of calmness. If I'm in a bad state of mind, it'll help calm me down before I talk to that young lady and it will help me to listen instead of talk. And I think that is one of the biggest issues today is that we talk too much, as adults and coaches and we don't listen enough to what they're trying to tell us. So I think it breaks down the walls of communication or it helps builds walls of communication. And so if I'm smart enough to do a little prayer before, I can have the time to speak

with one of those girls when there's an issue, then it helps me be more focused on what they're saying and get into them and hear what they're saying and not what I perceive or hear what they're thinking." (Co-participant #3)

"We need to be very careful not just to tell kids stuff, there needs to be thought going into it. Always pray and ask God for the right things to say because I don't have all the answers. And I make sure our team, and especially they ask and they seek some advice on things not necessarily related to basketball, they seek that and it's your responsibility that what you say to them the advice you give you put some thought into it, you put some prayer into it and ask God for some wisdom and I think those kinds of things are very important." (Co-participant #4)

Other coaches believed there was a responsibility behind their words when interacting with their team. This included their own prayers and the prayers with their team:

"So I think if I come in and I've prayed, really prayed, then it makes me a little more attentive to the needs of my team and how to relate in what we're trying to accomplish that day." (Co-participant #1)

"You've got 30 girls, you know, and you're the head coach...holy smokes. I mean, that's an awesome responsibility and you've got to be on your A-game every single time you open your mouth. You know, you've got to make sure that what's coming out of there is wholesome, and what's coming out of there is well thought out, well spoken because it's...you're directly influencing the eyes of 30 young people. That is an awesome, awesome responsibility. So when you're praying, you can't go through the motions." (Co-participant #5)

In summary, praying for wisdom to have the appropriate words and response was important in order to be attentive to the needs of players. This was highlighted by recognizing the importance of their roles and the impact their words and mindsets had on their players.

Preparation as coach and leader. The co-participants prayed for leadership. They desired to be a leader to the best of their abilities for their team:

"I pray for vision in terms of leadership." (Co-participant #4)

"For me, I think, I can tell a difference in the times I pray before practice of, God help this be organized and help this to be...help me to lead in the way that I need to lead, as opposed to the ones where I'm rushed in and you're running in late and it's a quiet, murmured prayer of, God let me lead here or I don't even pray at all and I think that's

something I'm trying to grow in as a coach... is to make sure that that's something I give to God consistently." (Co-participant #1)

Many of the coaches saw that in order to be a good leader, one must serve. The following coaches experiences of prayer involved being a servant:

"As a coach...I think about being similar to a shepard. As a coach, I see myself as a leader so in my prayers it's not isolated to what I need, it's more of looking over a flock or being that overseer. So when I pray, I pray the needs of the flock and not necessarily my own." (Co-participant #2)

"I think in order to be a leader, you must be willing to serve. I think you've got to be able to meet and help people and talk to people and do the things for them that you maybe are responsible for in terms of...and in terms of Christian faith there was nobody that was a better servant than Jesus. I think that's the example in daily life we should follow; he was willing to wash people's feet, he was willing to mingle with amongst even people that the higher scholars and religious people thought you shouldn't mingle with and I think that is very important. I think people are not, in order to be a good leader they need follow you and I think there's... I mean I think you have to serve." (Co-participant #4)

In summary, the co-participants thought leadership to be a crucial part of being a coach, which included serving those around them.

Being an example. These coaches understood their role as a coach entailed being an example to their team. This includes being a role model:

"Again it's an awesome responsibility and that kinda goes with being in the public eye. You're a mentor whether you like it or not. You're a role model whether you like it or not. You're a coach. I mean a lot of pro athletes, they don't want to be role models and they want to do their own thing and they want to...but hey, you're in the public eye so whether you like it or not. You're a role model so you better understand that. You better understand the consequences." (Co-participant #5)

Co-participants also took the idea of being an example to others to reflect the example of their Christian faith and relationship with Jesus Christ:

"I think through course of being in this program they are going to be exposed to Christian values and see hopefully faith in work. And ones that are Christian it can strengthen it, and ones that are not, they might see hey they got something...inner peace, inner strength I'd like to know more about. So that's my philosophy as a Christian coach, if that makes sense, I want them to know that they are cared about in

a relationship are the most important and obviously the most important relationship is the one they choose to have with Jesus.” (Co-participant #4)

“It looks like that in all things that my heart is to make God look like the most valuable thing in my life and not me. So and that’s taking the spotlight off of me, my achievement, my desire, my want, my paycheck and putting the spotlight on God who’s the most important thing in my life. So if I want to...whatever the spotlight shines on would be the thing that I’m glorifying in my life so if I want the spotlight to be on God then I gotta take the spotlight off of me.” (Co-participant #6)

In summary, in order to be an effective coach, co-participants utilized prayer as a reminder of accepting the responsibility of being a mentor to their players and to live a life, which demonstrates their own personal relationship with Jesus.

Outcome. As mentioned earlier when discussing the overall theme, which includes outcome, winning has been a dilemma for Christian coaches at the Division I level (Bennet et al., 2005). This particular co-participant described a similar mindset:

“I think with prayer, I think for me as coaches sometimes we get so caught up in the end product. And this is just a personal thing, it’s like you want to win the game and that’s what you are judged on, whether Christian coach or non-Christian coach, Christian school or non-Christian school, you are judged on wins and losses. That’s the bottom line and how you conduct your program. But the bottom line you’ve gotta have some success to keep your job and be an influence. That’s just the nature of the sport.” (Co-participant #4)

There were also co-participants who believed success was not always discussed in terms of a dilemma because winning is not always success to them:

“It kinda felt like, ok God’s called me to be at [school] to coach this team so it’s gotta be that we... I’m going to come in and it’s going to be successful. And I think that...slowly I think I’ve learned that as, you know that His...success in his eyes is not the same as success in the world’s eyes. Wins and losses are not how he values me as a coach or me as a person so instead just learning to say, alright I stepped out and gave it my best.” (Co-participant #1)

“For the team itself, but I guess, [investigator], the biggest thing that I have to look at is what is...what determines success? When I say success or failure? Sometimes winning is not necessarily success to me because I think sometimes you can win and get by and not play your best game, but winning to me doesn’t mean the X’s and O’s on the court.” (Co-participant #3)

“No, [investigator], I say just prayer, to me, I’m a firm believer in it because I think it works, but the answers that I hope for sometimes may not be the ones that I was expecting. They come in a whole different package, on other words. I don’t think God gives a flip whether we win or lose because that coach I’m coaching against may be a Christian and may be praying even more than I am. I mean, He’s not going to, okay I like you today and don’t like you tomorrow. I don’t believe that’s the way it works. I think He’s got a long range plan out there and I think everything works for the good of that and that’s what I meant about the external thing. It’s not about the X’s and O’s all the time.” (Co-participant #3)

In summary, success is an idea coaches addressed in their own terms. They recognized that one cannot coach without realizing the outcomes that come with the job, but many used prayer to see that winning did not define success for them as a coach.

### *Theme #3: Prayer Types*

This theme emerged from the descriptions of examples and situations where the co-participants utilized prayer. Prayer was most often used with an entire team in competition and with individuals outside of competition. The coaches themselves also found prayer to be an integral part of their everyday lives outside of sport. Subthemes that emerged included team prayer and individual prayer.

Team prayer. This subtheme describes how the coaches experienced prayer with their team both collectively and also as individual team members. When praying as a group within competition, whether before or after, it was a tool to bring team members together and unite them. Both memory prayers, such as the Lord’s prayer, as well as conversation prayer was used before competition:

“Most...and I’ve been around a lot of sports in my life...most of us all do that because it’s common ground. It’s common ground. You don’t put anybody in the position to feel uncomfortable. Most everyone, even those that are, do not profess the faith, even those people. They’ve heard it. They’ve seen it. It’s been in somebody’s house before so it allows them to connect even in a way that they don’t...they may not even fully understand it, but for me to be able to speak this with you...wow...we have something in common and when you’re dealing with a college team you’re

dealing with people from different states, different backgrounds, different cultures so that's...that ground is so common that it gives them even peace in that that I know at least three other people here understand where I am." (Co-participant #2)

"Well we do the Lord's Prayer, as a group together. You know, [chaplain] will do just a quick little prayer, herself, for the team. The girls hold hands in a circle, in the dressing room before we come out on the floor, right before we come out to play and she'll do a quick little prayer and then we all end holding hands, or arms doing the Lord's Prayer." (Co-participant #3)

An example of a conversation prayer is described by this co-participant:

"Normally it's just, you know, we thank you God for...just thanking him for his goodness and for the abilities he's given each one of our players and that...pray that we step out and play together as a team and use the abilities that You've given us to glorify you and keep us safe and enjoy each other as we're out there...kind of a gist." (Co-participant #1)

Co-participants mentioned what bringing a team together in prayer means to them:

"And it reminds me a little bit of pro football, when there's an injury, you know, a lot of the guys from both teams will kneel and pray. You know, and that's awesome because it transcends jersey color and it gets to the heart of the matter and that's Jesus Christ as Savior, as Lord." (Co-participant #5)

"So the power of the Holy Spirit... for His love to unite us, for all the things that He does that can overwhelm, you know, basically, you know overwhelm and change our hearts, you know, forever. And that's something that unites us, makes us stronger, builds us up and then we get to share that to others every time that we pray." (Co-participant #6)

Team prayer also involves situations where coaches prayed for athletes on their

teams:

"And then praying for the players on my team, specifically." (Co-participant #1)

"There was one particular girl, regularly we would have, I would have a prayer with her sometimes with team issues, things that were going on with the team and she would come to me and say, coach can we sit down and have prayer a few minutes? And we would do that coming back from a road game, there would be a problem or two developing that she'd see on the inner part of the team that I don't get to see, that I'm not privy to and she would see it coming and she would want to bait in prayer and we would do that. So I would certainly do that with her." (Co-participant #3)

“Again, those head coaches meetings we’ll open up in prayer and before that, we’ll say, ok, what’s on your hearts? What’s heavy? Any prayer requests? Any praises? And then that’s when that stuff will come out and you know we’ll jot it down on a piece of paper and then we’ll go through it. And we’ll pray by name for these people that need help.” (Co-participant #5)

In summary, prayer was used in different ways by Christian coaches with the team as a group and as individuals. Prayer as a team was used as a tool to unite a group in both a physical sense and also a mindset.

Individual prayer. Co-participants listed numerous accounts of their own personal experiences of prayer. This includes not only within sport, but also is understood as a part of their being. Many of the coaches found prayer gives them life:

“And then, as far as my prayer life, I’m definitely a morning, noon, and night girl. Like I rise early to seek the face of God. To me, it’s my lifeline. Like if you know, somebody’s in the hospital, whatever, and they’re on that breathing machine...prayer is that for me.” (Co-participant #2)

“That it’s just a way of life for us and they constantly surround me in prayer, in this program, always have wherever I’ve been so not just me, but my support people, but I think it’s pretty much the lifeblood of why I’m here because I feel like I’m in the coaching business because it’s where the good Lord wants me to be.” (Co-participant #3)

Prayer also entailed to their purposes and identities as a Christian:

“Well I think first of all that it is very important to remember that is not a separate deal as a Christian or a coach, your prayer life should be consistent regardless of your occupation. I don’t see it as praying as a coach, I see it as praying daily and spending time in scripture, prayer and meditation for my life as a husband as a father of two, that is what I pray for as much as anything.” (Co-participant #4)

“And the second thing I think about immediately is that it’s a necessity because I don’t think that anything can be accomplished or done without being soaked and drenched in prayer. So I personally want God to be the reason of everything I do and at the center of everything that I do and the purpose of everything I do so to be in prayer is the first part...the first part, the last part and everything I do throughout the day.” (Co-participant #6)

“It’s just a...part of what we do and that’s part of being a Christian, just talking to God, you know?” (Co-participant #5)

In summary, Christian coaches see prayer as not only an action to take place within and for their profession, but also in every other aspect of life.

*Theme #4: Personal Faith Not Forced*

It was prevalent for each of the co-participants to have a desire for others around them to experience their own way of life; however, they acknowledge the fact that others, specifically their team, may not have the same worldview or beliefs. Coaching at the NCAA Division I level did not always provide the appropriate setting for faith to be dialogued and many times this desire took the form of prayer:

“If you’re dealing with a team that I coach, because I recruit those young ladies, because I get to know them, in some form or fashion, you’re going to begin to reflect your coach. That’s scary. Why is it scary? Because you don’t ever want it to seem like you’re pressing what you believe on them because that’s not what I’m here to do.” (Co-participant #2)

“We’re not going to push it on anybody. Where you’re at spiritually is up to you. Each one of us, we’re all at different levels where we want to be. Some don’t want to be anywhere. So we’re not going to say, you’ve got to do this...purely voluntary. We don’t bring it up all the time. It’s just kinda known if the kids need to talk they know they can come talk to me or the staff. We’re just not going to force it down their throat so if you’re going to play for me, if you’re going to play, it’s going to be this, this, this, and this...that’s not how we do it. It’s just kinda here if you need it. If it’s never brought up, it’s never brought up. You kinda take what you can get, or what you want.” (Co-participant #3)

“It’s not something that is bombarded, that’s not my approach with this. It is subtly, behind the scenes a lot of ways, but it has led to more discussion with players who have issues or problems. I can say well as a Christian or one of the things that gives me strength is blah blah blah. I’m not saying this is what you need to do, but this is what helps me get through this.” (Co-participant #4)

“Everybody was free to worship whoever they wanted to, but as a swimming team member, as a coach at [previous school] you wanted to kinda leave it open ended. You didn’t really want to say, hey, we are a Christian team or we are a team of believers and you wanted to leave it open. You know, we had two Muslims who swam at [previous school], you know great kids, awesome kids. But again at that level, you just want kids to swim fast and you’re not really worried about them spiritually. You don’t want to deter kids from coming to your program, I mean if

they're Muslim or Hindu or whatever it might be so it's just really not a focus at [previous school], the spiritual side of things." (Co-participant #5)

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

*Relying on God's guidance and plan, the roles of coaching, prayer types, and personal faith not forced* were the four themes found through data analysis with all themes, excluding *personal faith not forced* comprising of two or more subthemes. The results of the study will be examined with previous research revolving around spirituality in sport, more specifically the Christian faith. This section also includes implications, limitations, and conclusions based on the findings.

#### *Theme #1: Relying on God's Guidance and Plan*

The co-participants in the study articulated seeking God's wisdom through prayer and accepting His decision as part of His plan for their lives. Such thoughts were expressed by each of the coaches when thinking of their experiences of prayer as a Division I coach.

Wisdom with team issues. The co-participants in this sought wisdom and guidance from God through prayer when facing team issues. This group of Christian coaches found that their position as a head coach meant facing and making executive decisions over issues outside of their expert knowledge of their sport. Before making these decisions and oftentimes recognizing they are unavoidable because of the nature of their position, they believed that in seeking advice from God they would be answered. This is understood when looking into the Christian faith and such verses as the following: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5, New International Version [NIV]), and "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV). The co-participants' responses

demonstrate a readiness to make decisions or have conversations over tough issues because it is expected of them. However, they credit their ability to do so from wisdom God has given them.

Coach's sought wisdom in carrying out the policies and rules, which were expected to be followed by the team. When considering sport and religion, Coakley (2008) describes the idea of respecting authority and expectations by athletes for the rules as an act of obedience and correlated with success. Enforcing such policies when broken, whether consciously or unconsciously, may cause seeking wisdom in prayer because they are not only making a coaching decision, but also a possible moral decision in lieu of their Christian faith.

The Christian coach's experience from Bennet et al.'s (2005) article was said to rely on God's guidance through faith, but never mentioned how this was accomplished. Stevenson (1997) also mentioned that when faced with a conflict between faith and sport, Christian athletes would question the meaning of sport and "come back to faith", yet how this happened was not discussed. Co-participants in this present study found prayer an important step for them when relying on God's guidance within team matters that may be easy or difficult.

Trusting God's will. The coaches in this study found any situation they were given had a purpose and served a greater plan, which they accredited to being within God's will. Prayer was used as an act of acceptance or understanding of His will. This concept may best be seen in the twelfth chapter of the book of Romans in verse two, which says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and

perfect will” (NIV). Co-participants found God’s will to be “good, pleasing, and perfect” in any circumstance they could encounter.

Similar to Christian athletes’ experiences with prayer (Czech et al., 2004), Christian coaches attributed their circumstances and outcomes to God’s will. Both athletes and coaches of the Christian faith found prayer to be a way to understand the dominant nature of sport in which they are consumed and the dilemmas and victories or sport as part of God’s greater plan. Essentially, being a coach was meant to happen through God’s design, which they chose to accept. Although it was not expressed through prayer, it was mentioned that a Christian coach resolved success and the supply of job positions as part of God’s plan for their life (Bennet et al., 2005).

Coping. Many of the Christian coaches found prayer to be a stress release when considering the demands and responsibilities of their profession. As mentioned earlier, they often understood each placement and scenario of their lives as God’s will; however, prayer was an act of coping when the burden was heavy and caused stress. Anxious thoughts are often worries that Christians are led to give to God in prayer. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 6-7, NIV). In a sense, Christians may find the greatest tranquility that is incomprehensible to the human mind offered by God if one is willing to do so. This may be an important reason why prayer is used within their role as a coach.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping “as a process of constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands or

conflicts appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources" (p. 141). Weinberg and Gould (2003) state problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping are the two widely accepted categories of coping. Problem-focused coping entails employing behavior change tactics and actions to change or come to terms with the stressor, such as goal setting or problem solving. An emotion-focused coping focuses on the emotional responses caused by stress and is often managed through behaviors, such as relaxation and meditation. Because the co-participants discuss their stress from their responsibilities of their coaching profession, of which the situation is unlikely to change, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) would categorize their prayer for coping as emotion-focused.

Not only within this study, but also in various other studies prayer was found to be utilized within athletics as a coping mechanism (Vernacchi, McGuire, Reardon, & Templeton, 2000; Park, 2000; Czech et al., 2004; Watson & Nesti, 2005). This is also consistent with Coakley (2008) who suggests that coaches use prayer to cope with uncertainty. Similar to Czech et al. (2004), co-participants used prayer to cope when those uncertainties cause anxiety and stress with all of the different expectations, responsibilities, and consequences others and themselves place on their performance.

### *Theme #2: The Roles of Coaching*

For the co-participants in the study as part of their roles as a coach they mentioned their tactical responsibilities, but typically levitated towards their relational duties to their players. This took the form in a variety of avenues both within and outside of competition, in which they utilized prayer. The subthemes will be discussed individually and then collectively at the end where they will be understood through the coach-athlete relationship.

Impact beyond sport. Co-participants used words such as “help,” “impact,” and “build” which led to the creation of this subtheme. Overall, they reflected the coaches’ belief that as a coach they are expected to have influence in the lives of the athletes they coached and took this responsibility to heart. “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48b, NIV). These words were spoken by Jesus about a recognition of responsibility one has in being faithful to God. These coaches spoke of their responsibility as an “obligation to young people.”

Coakley (2008) suggests prayer is used by coaches and athletes to give new meaning to sport. Coakley (2008) states sport is typically a “self-indulgent” and “self-centered” activity, but when faith is brought into this world it may disrupt or cause a conflict for this type of thinking. Coaches in this study used prayer to achieve a greater meaning within their coaching role, and they found purpose in their relationships with their players. This belief in the importance of their relationship with athletes was never expressed as a dilemma, which is different from what Christian athletes may experience within the sport culture. Stevenson (1997) noted these athletes struggled to discern how their faith influences their relationship with both coaches and teammates.

Attentive to player needs. It was prevalent for the co-participants that players often sought advice from them. Before addressing them individually or as a group, coaches found prayer to offer a sound mind when speaking and/or praying, as well as when listening. A well-known passage in the Bible regarding the power of words is found in the third chapter of the book of James. “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark” (James 3:5). This

teaching speaks to the power words can have on others. As a coach, many of the co-participants believed it important to not only to be careful of their words, but also hear the words of their players.

Burton and Raedeke (2008) state effective communication may be the best predictor of success for a coach. This includes being able to both send messages and listen effectively to players. It is possible to improve sending message through the use of reinforcement on behaviors and actions, providing feedback, and enhancing a player's ability to receive feedback. Becoming a better listener as a coach may be done through empathetic listening and developing active listening skills, such as learning to use paraphrasing and using non-verbals. These are valuable facets for coaches who are interested in developing their players.

Preparation as coach and leader. The coaches in this study saw themselves as leaders over their team and voiced their aspirations to become the best fit for their athletes. Co-participants understood leadership through the eyes of Jesus Christ and his life as a servant. They expressed this attitude and way of life could be strengthened in their own lives through prayer. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2: 5-7, NIV). Being a leader to their athletes meant to serve in this way.

Many coaches spoke of prayer within their coaching philosophy and this leadership idea, which may speak to their awareness of recognizing the benefit of having the "proper fit," in terms of leadership style for their athletes. Leadership for their players and program may have been important to them because they understand that intercollegiate student-athletes have various expectations and preferences when it comes to their coaches. Gender

type, autocratic versus democratic behaviors, team sports versus independent sports, anxiety levels, and self-confidence of athletes are a few examples of factors that influence leadership preferences in Division I student-athletes can affect the coach-athlete relationship (Loughead & Hardy, 2005; Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Kenow & Williams, 1999).

One may also look to the study of servant leadership in Christian leadership to explain such an approach to coaching. Wong and Page (2003) discuss the servant leadership style and its two basic components – servanthood and leadership. They say in servanthood “the leader develops the people, who help build the organization” (p. 5) and encompasses the following characteristics: honesty and authenticity. In relation to leadership, “the leader builds the organization by effectively using people as resources” (p. 5) and encompasses the following characteristics: vision, responsibility, and courage. Although one may desire such qualities in one’s leadership, the authors believe authoritarian hierarchy and egotistic pride present barriers to true servant leadership. They offer up the Opponent-Process Model, which is servant leadership with the absence of the two barriers previously mentioned.

Being an example. This subtheme was understood through the co-participants’ prayers of knowing their lives reflected what was meaningful to them – their relationship with Jesus Christ. Being a Division I coach they described this situation as not only being noticed by their players, but also the public. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13: 14-15, NIV). Jesus, himself, found it necessary to demonstrate and live a certain way to those closest to him, which was an idea many of the coaches emulated.

Being an example was recognized as an opportunity to reflect Jesus Christ for the co-participants, as well as in the study conducted by Bennet et al. (2005). Participants in both studies recognized that serving as a role model and being in the public limelight meant their actions were held to a higher accountability than if they were in a different profession. Bennet et al. (2005) spoke about this opportunity as a struggle and a difficult task to handle, whereas co-participants within this study acknowledged the magnitude of such a responsibility, they seemed to find solitude in reminding themselves of power of whom they desire to replicate, Jesus Christ.

Outcome. It was prevalent for the Christian coaches to discuss the idea of success in light of their faith. Prayer was used to comprehend the meaning of success because they were aware of the sport culture and the importance it places on winning; however, the co-participants did not always see winning as success in their own eyes or in the eyes of God.

Coakley (2008) suggests that within sports one inevitably will experience loss. Through the use of one's religious beliefs, in this case Christian prayer, one is able to put sport into perspective and not solely define oneself in light of sport. Czech et al. (2004) found that Christian athletes were able to attribute outcomes of their sport performance to God's will, which allowed them to put sport into perspective for them. Placing a high priority and enjoyment on winning is a dilemma that has created conflict within a Division I Christian coach's life (Bennet et al., 2005).

Summary of Theme #2 subthemes. Jowett, Paull, Pensgaard, Hoegmo, and Riise, (2005) suggests there are three primary factors that contribute to the complex phenomenon known as the coach-athlete relationship: (a) individual difference characteristics of the coaches' and athletes' (e.g., gender, race, age, experience); (b) athletic environment where

the relationships are rooted (e.g., level of sport); and (c) cultural environment (e.g., values, philosophies, norms, beliefs). The co-participants within this study demonstrated an awareness of each facet, which ultimately led to belief that the coach-athlete relationship is able to affect both performances in sport and as human beings, which is supported by previous case studies (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000a). For each subtheme – impact beyond sport, attentive to player needs, preparation as coach and leader, being an example, and outcome – the co-participants utilized prayer.

### *Theme #3: Prayer Types*

The following theme demonstrated the different situations of where and how prayer was utilized seen through the experiences of the coaches. Prayer is done inside and outside of competition with and for their athletes. Utilizing prayer was demonstrated not only to occur in the work place, but was a part of their being.

Team prayer. Co-participants spoke of many instances where prayer was utilized within competition as a way to create unity among their teams by performing this action aloud. Coaches also found it important to pray with and for individual athletes when given the opportunity. As a Christian, one is lead to be “one in spirit and purpose” with other Christians (Philippians 2:2), which is oftentimes demonstrated through the use of prayer. Christian coaches within this study often spoke on their understanding of the power of prayer and its ability to bring people together despite individual differences. For example, one coach mentioned how each girl on her relay team may have a different mindset going into a race, but prayer before the race created “common ground.” It may have a completely different meaning to the athletes; however, coaches see it as a time to connect.

Coaches have used Christian beliefs and prayers as powerful mediums in sport, which many find are able to create bonds between athletes and bring them together (Coakley, 2008). Although co-participants within this study found prayer to be used in this way, a study on Christian athletes' experiences of prayer themed this idea as more ritualistic (Czech et al., 2004). Christian coaches' experience of prayer within competition did not support this idea.

Individual prayer. Praying as a Christian was passionately described as a way of life for the co-participants. Prayer was understood as a phenomenon that was meant for much more than just their identity and life as a coach, but as a person and as a Christian. In the book of first Thessalonians Christians are encouraged to "pray continually" (v. 17), and Jesus claims in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." The co-participants not only strive for prayer to be a part of their lives, but also experience it to be rewarding and source of life for their overall well-being.

#### *Theme #4: Personal Faith Not Forced*

Each co-participant in this investigation found prayer to be important in recognizing that faith is very individualistic to each person. Their hearts were for their players to know of Jesus Christ, but it was never their approach to force their beliefs on those they interacted with as a coach. They were very adamant about their philosophies on such matters. Summarizing their work, Bennet et al. (2005) concluded the Division I Christian coach in their study "did not seek to inculcate every individual that came into his path with the essential Christian message of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but was more than willing to discuss issues of faith with any and all who would listen" (p. 288-289).

These findings suggest that Division I Christian coaches recognize the independence of the spiritual or religious practices of their athletes on their team. This is parallel to what is recommended to sport psychology consultants when confronting the idea of spirituality within sport with athletes (Watson and Nesti, 2005). Due to the fact Christian coaches address the issue of spirituality within themselves, taking their athletes' development into consideration those in the medical field may find them to be "healthy coaches" (Bell, 1997). These coaches are understood as using an overall holistic approach to the growth and development of an athlete, including the spiritual awareness (Bell, 1997).

### *Implications*

The findings of the present research add the knowledge of how Christian coaches utilize prayer; however, there is still a vast array of areas yet to be explored. Future research might want to address other Christian head coaches at levels of competition other than Division I because the nature of Division I athletics may differ from lower levels of sport. For example, Division III athletics does not allow athletic scholarships and are not as well funded as Division I programs and may provide coaches with different roles or stressors. It may also be appropriate to distinguish between coaching gender and the experience of prayer, individual versus team sports uses of prayer, and compare Christian head coaches and assistant coaches. All co-participants were involved in women's sports so it may be beneficial to examine prayer within men's sport. Not only in the use of prayer in coaching neglected in research, but the overall use of prayer within sport is neglected (Watson & Nesti, 2005).

Another avenue worthy of venturing would be within sport psychology consulting. Knowledge of how Christian coaches and athletes utilize prayer within sport may allow

consultants to provide more appropriate or holistic services (Watson & Nesti, 2005). As stated by Watson and Czech (2005), it is also necessary to examine the idea of how prayer may be used as a tool for performance enhancement, as well as understanding educational models of sport psychology to address various spiritual and educational issues.

### *Limitations*

All of the participants were NCAA Division I Christian head coaches so one must be careful not to make generalizations from the results of the present study. Qualitative researchers are not as concerned with the number of participants and the sample size for this study was small. Findings do not reflect collegiate coaches who compete at other levels (i.e., Division II, III), head coaches with other value-laden belief systems, or for NCAA Division I coaches, whether head coaches or assistant coaches. The primary researcher in the study is a professed Christian who utilized prayer in sport, and was aware that his own biases could affect the data; however, measures were taken to eliminate such happenings.

### *Conclusions*

Findings from the present study may allow for the following conclusions to be drawn:

- Christian coaches in the present study use prayer to seek wisdom with team issues.
- Christian coaches in the present study find acceptance in God's will through prayer.
- Christian coaches in the present study utilize prayer to relieve stress and anxiety.
- Christian coaches in the present study use prayer to help develop and lead the players on their team.
- Christian coaches in the present study use prayer to become a Christ-like example.
- Christian coaches in the present study prayed for success through God's eyes and not for wins in competition.

- Christian coaches in the present study use prayer to unite the team.
- Christian coaches in the present study find prayer to be a necessity in every aspect of their lives.
- Christian coaches in the present study use prayer in recognizing that faith is personal and individualistic.

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APPENDIX A  
RESEARCH QUESTION, DELIMITATIONS, LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS,  
AND DEFINITIONS

*Research Question*

The primary research questions for this study is:

1. What is the lived experience of prayer by NCAA Division I Christian Coaches?

*Delimitations*

1. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants.
2. The study included NCAA Division I Christian head coaches, and the co-participants may not be a representative sample to generalize to all head coaches.
3. The sample size may appear to be small but will be adequate for phenomenological inquiry.

*Limitations*

1. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants, mostly through personal contacts and contacts made through the research team.
2. Co-participants in this study only represent NCAA Division I collegiate sports and cannot be considered an appropriate account for all levels of collegiate sport competition.
3. Co-participants in this study only represent NCAA Division I collegiate Christian head coaches and cannot be considered an appropriate account for all NCAA Division I collegiate head coaches.
4. Co-participants in this study only represent NCAA Division I collegiate Christian head coaches and cannot be considered an appropriate account for all NCAA Division I collegiate head coaches who may or may not practice other value-laden belief systems.
5. The primary researcher in the study is a professed Christian who utilized prayer in sport, and is aware that his own biases could affect the data; however, measures were be taken to eliminate such happenings.

*Assumptions*

1. Participants honestly and truthfully described their experiences in their own words during interviews.
2. The experience of prayer by NCAA Division I Christian collegiate head coaches gave a better understanding of how prayer might be used for someone of the Christian faith within the dominant culture of sport.
3. Due to the nature of the humanistic approach, the subjects in this research were able to openly and honestly convey their own accounts, thoughts, and feelings of their experiences as NCAA Division I Christian collegiate head coaches.

*Definition of Key Terms*

1. Triangulation – Strategies for reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis (Patton, 2002).
2. Research Team – Primary advisor and fellow graduate students, all with experience and knowledge of phenomenological research and data analysis procedures.
3. Christian – Follower of Jesus Christ (Elwell, 1984; Acts 11:26). Agree with Fellowship of Christian Athletes “Vision” – to see the world impacted for Jesus Christ through the influence of athletes and coaches, and their “Mission” – to present athletes and coaches and all whom they influence the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the church (<http://www.fca.org/AboutFCA/>).
4. Christian Prayer – “Biblical religion prayer is understood as both a gift and a task. God takes the initiative (cf. Ezek. 2:1-2; Ps. 50:3-4), but man must respond. This kind of prayer is personalistic and dialogic. It entails revealing our innermost selves to God but also God’s revelation of his desires to us (cf. Prov. 1:23)” (Elwell, 1984, p. 867).
5. Existential Phenomenology – An amalgamation of two philosophical perspectives - existentialism and phenomenology – that seek a rigorous description of human experience (Dale, 1996).
6. Humanistic Framework – An emphasis on describing the perspective of an individual and how they experience the world in which they live (Hill, 2001).
7. Qualitative Data – Direct quotations capturing people’s perspectives and experiences. They capture and communicate someone else’s experience of the world in his or her own words (Patton, 2002).

8. NCAA Division I – Division I member institutions have to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender. Each playing season has to be represented by each gender as well. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria. Division I schools must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletic program, and there are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division I school cannot exceed (Stephens, 2008, ¶ 1).

APPENDIX B  
EXTENDED REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Religion in Sport*

Stevenson (1991) examined the different roles Christian athletes may undergo when combined with sport. Participants were categorized into one of three groups: segregated, selective, and committed. The author used both an interactionist and a developmental approach to explain the role-identities faced by the Christian athletes. He concludes that it depends on the individual and their “level of faith” that may best determine how one might identify with Christianity, if at all.

Stevenson (1997) conducted a study, which consisted of interviewing 31 elite Christian athletes and exploring their experience of the sport culture. More specifically, what dilemmas they may run into within sport and how their faith enables them to cope with such experiences. Five such difficulties were noted: (1) importance of winning, (2) importance of social status, (3) relationships with coaches and teammates, (4) relationship with opponents, and (5) expectations others placed upon them within other social settings. The athletes that were interviewed coped best by “coming back to faith,” which tended to help them within the dominant culture of sport. Another coping mechanism, which is also part of coming back to faith includes the use of prayer.

Watson and Nesti (2005) completed a study, which consisted of an extensive review of literature regarding spirituality in sport. The authors acknowledge the lack of literature within sport psychology and note the need for further research. Four sections were created to provide better understanding: spirituality in the athlete-centered model, spirituality and religious observances in mental skills training, spirituality in flow and peak experience research in sport, and spirituality in sport psychology counseling. They provide a framework

a Sport Psychology Consultant might use in order to incorporate the spiritual aspect within consulting.

### *Prayer in Sport*

Watson and Czech (2005) conducted an extensive review of literature regarding the use of prayer in sport. Many studies were cited both within and outside of sport in order to provide a better understanding of how prayer might be used and studied in the future, specifically for sport psychology consultants. Athletes were found to use prayer for three main reasons: (1) coping with uncertainties and concomitant anxieties, (2) putting life and sport into perspective, and (3) providing meaning to sports participation and competition.

Park (2000) interviewed 148 Korean National athletes and noted one strategy for coping with stress was prayer. This included 22.2 percent of the group, which ranged from ages 14-58 across a variety of sports. The experience of prayer in sport was only a small part of their research.

Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, and Hayes (2004) interviewed nine former Division I collegiate Christian athletes in order to examine the experience of Christian prayer in sport qualitatively. Four themes were revealed: (1) performance prayers, (2) prayer routine, (3) thankfulness, and (4) God's will. This supports the notion of prayer as a powerful influence for an athlete in many scenarios, which is seen by the different types of prayer used. The study concludes it would be important to conduct similar research among Christian coaches.

Czech and Bullett (2007) studied how athletes perceived prayer using multiple methods. This included using different scales, observation, and qualitative interviews. Results provided support for the importance of prayer before and after competition; however,

athletes seemed to pray much more before competition than after. Athletes used prayer mainly for two reasons: to cope with uncertainties, and to put sport into perspective, which supports previous literature on prayer. Also, mentioned within the article were the implications for coaches.

### *Prayer in Coaching*

Bennet, Sagas, Fleming, and Von Roenn (2005), using qualitative methodology, sought to understand the involvement of an elite Christian baseball coach at a Division I baseball program designed to describe one's experiences of faith within sport. The article discussed contradictions and solutions of such an experience. Questions of contradiction were raised on the following ideas: (1) winning, (2) social status, and (3) on and off the field behavior. His resolutions to these contradictions were the following: (1) disconnection from sport, (2) having a take it or leave it mentality, and (3) holding onto God's desires. These were researched using qualitative methods.

### *Qualitative Methods in Sport*

Dale (1996) explores the paradigm of existential phenomenology and how it might be beneficial within sport psychology research. It provides the reader with an understanding behind the philosophical foundations, as well as going into greater depth on the phenomenological interview method. When working with an athlete, this open-ended format might provide for opportunities that might be missed in a more structured setting. It encourages sport psychology researchers to recognize that the personal experiences of athletes should be given more attention.

Cotê (1993) discusses how one might organize and interpret unstructured qualitative data. This article suggests two processes that allow for a scientific approach from a heuristic

paradigm. Examining qualitative articles within sport, the first commonality in analyzing the data was to divide it into meaningful units, and the second, to categorize those meaningful units based on an organized system. This is discussed in greater detail within the article by providing steps in data analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

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