

The DIAZ Dispatch

March 2016



CRAFTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Several weeks ago, seven-year-old Anna showed up at our house. She was planning to hang out with me (her ‘Maury’) while her Mom ran errands and carted her two brothers all over town.

The only thing Anna seems to enjoy more than doing gymnastics or collecting Beanie Boos is “crafting.” She loves to design and cut and paste and create beautiful treasures using any medium available.

So the second she arrived at our house, Anna started jumping up and down and begging me to get out the craft box. It is a big plastic bin that we store under our bed, and it is stuffed with all kinds of bedazzling delights. There are beads and bangles and stickers and ribbons and . . . well, you name it. If it can be made into a craft, it’s probably in that box.

But there was a problem that day. Anna’s ‘Pap’ (Ed) was taking an afternoon nap, so the craft box was inaccessible!

Anna was very disappointed and asked if there was anything else she could use. She insisted that she wanted to make something very special that she had been planning for a long time. She wouldn’t tell me what the “something very special” was, but she knew that I would love it.

All I could come up with was a large piece of black poster board, a white sheet of computer paper, a pair of scissors and some tape. Evidently it was enough for Anna’s project, because she shut herself in my office and began crafting.

When I knocked on the door and asked her if she wanted a snack, the answer was “No.” She was too busy. A drink? “No.” She didn’t want anything that might spill and ruin her work of art.

Meanwhile, since I had been asked to be a guest teacher at a women’s Bible study group, I spent the time trying get a handle on the two verses they had asked me to explain. I love this group of young moms and enjoy helping them dig into the Scriptures for answers to difficult questions they come across in their studies.

The question this time was, “What does it really mean to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind?” And how are we supposed to “Love our neighbors as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37-40)?

- I had already discovered the Old Testament origins of both laws (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18).
- I had found a biblical example of someone who was commended by God for his diligent adherence to these commands (King Josiah).
- I had dug into the Pharisaical controversy that led to the deceitful question that prompted this amazing response from Jesus.
- I even had Ed look up some of the Hebrew and Greek words to discover their meanings.
- And I had begun to think through some of our own cultural implications.

But, I was lacking a concrete, tangible way to fully explain the concept. Maybe a visual would help. But what?

As I was wracking my brain, Leslee arrived to pick up Anna – who had not once emerged from her crafty cocoon. But time was up, and sure enough, she had completed her project. Out she came with a huge poster. She handed to me and said, “I wanted you to know how much I love you.”

Anna had just presented me with the perfect visual. By using everything that was available to her, including her thoughts, her time, her efforts, her emotions, and her skills – as well as a few supplies – my granddaughter offered me a beautiful expression of her love.

I can’t tell you how touched I was! My eyes were brimming as I knelt down to hug her.

After sharing it with the girls at the Bible study, that poster now hangs on the wall in my study. It reminds me to love God the way Anna loves me.

PLAY BALL

America loves sports! From the pee-wee's to the pros. America has an unbridled passion for sports. And this passion is not just as spectators, but as participants. Consider the following:

- Millions of kids are involved in organized sports from the inner city to the rural community.
- Sporting equipment companies are producing new and better equipment at an unprecedented rate.
- The physical fitness industry has experienced an explosive growth in the last decade.
- Television channels such as ESPN and The Golf Channel are solely dedicated to twenty-four hour sports programming.
- National championships at the high school, collegiate, and professional level are followed with intense fervor.
- More athletes and coaches, especially at the collegiate and professional level, are publicly declaring their faith in Jesus Christ.
- Many local churches have developed strategic sports ministries, including full-time sports pastors as a means of community impact.

What does all this mean? Very simply, sports provide a great opportunity for building common ground relationships. In I Corinthians 9:22-23, Paul declares this common ground strategy. "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." In other words, Paul sought to find common ground with people to build relationships that would provide opportunities to share Christ.

The Apostle Paul, who loved to use sports analogies to convey spiritual truth, would say sports is one of the all "possible means" for taking the message of the gospel to the unbelieving world.



Using Sports to Build Common Ground

So we thought we'd dedicate this issue of The DIAZ Dispatch to sports. The following ideas are designed to help you in the process of building redemptive relationships through sports.

SPORTS READING:

These are excellent tools to give to seeking friends who have interest in various sports.

The Links Players - includes a Daily Devotional and a forward by PGA Tour Winner Ben Crane. The Devotional digs into matters of walking with Jesus each day, drawing from specific biblical passages and employing illustrations that make sense to golfers. They provide these devotions by email Monday through Friday, 51 weeks per year. Each Friday's devotion includes an accompanying pdf Bible study.

SPORTS MINISTRIES:

- Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Athletes in Action are two excellent organizations specially tailored to minister to young athletes. Call FCA at 1-800-289-0909 or AIA at 1-888-278-7233.
- Sports Outreach America. This organization serves as a major clearinghouse for sports ministries in America. If you need information on how to put together a sports ministry or have other questions, call SOA at 1-434-582-4707.

CHURCH SPORTS MINISTRIES:

- If your church has a sports facility you have a wonderful opportunity for evangelistic outreach. Activities can range from young people to adults. The key is to have a vision to use it to impact your community.
- If your church doesn't have a sports facility you still can have a great impact. Many churches participate in various sports leagues. Why not put together a team and join a community league. Or put together a team with a mix of Christians and seekers.

DOING SPORTS THE DIAZ WAY:

The following exercise is designed to help you establish a simple plan for reaching out to others through sports. Prayerfully fill it out and refer back to it for regular accountability.

1. List the names of 3-4 people with whom you have a sports connection – but no spiritual connection. Write these names down and keep them in a prominent place so that you can begin to pray for them often.
2. What common ground sports activity would each of these folks be open to? A Spring Training game? A hockey game? A basketball game? This is a terrific time of year for people who love all kinds of sports.
3. Buy good tickets and plan a date with your friends. Pray that God would use this time effectively. Most of all ENJOY the process!