

REVIEW PAPER

SPIRITUALITY IN SPORT – A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Holistic models of personal development include spirituality as an important aspect of every individual to be developed (Chandler et al. 1992; Myers et al. 2008), but comprehension of the term is very broad. Christianity is the largest religion in the world according to data gained in social research based on religious self-identification of people (Pew Research Center, 2010). Christianity is based on God's revelation in Biblical texts. Therefore the purpose of our research was to define 'spirituality' considering the Biblical understanding of words 'spirit' and 'spiritual', and to describe real life examples of Christian sportspeople living their spiritual life. A theological interpretive method of the Bible was used in this research to create the definition of spirituality. To describe spiritual experiences of Christian sportspeople we studied testimonies collected in the book "Power to win: riveting stories of struggle and triumph to inspire you" written by A. D. Ribeiro (2016). God is the ultimate reason of human beings and sport. Through our research we have created the definition of 'spirituality' and we introduce a new term: 'pre-spirituality'. Spiritual sportspeople experience God in their sport. They give credit to God for their physical abilities, talents and success and take part in sport to glorify God. Spiritual sportspeople recognize their need for Jesus in order to live a spiritual life and they find their ultimate joy, meaning and purpose in a loving relationship with God and not in their athletic success.

Key words: *spirituality, pre-spirituality, sport, Biblical perspective, God, Jesus, Holy Spirit*

Introduction

Spirituality is an important part of a personality that needs to be developed (Valbis, 2005). A holistic approach to personality and personal development often puts spirituality at the centre of a personality model (Chandler et al. 1992; Myers et al. 2008). Chandler, Holden and Kolander (1992) suggest that spiritual health should be considered as a component part within each of the interrelated and interactive dimensions of wellness (i.e. social, physical, emotional, intellectual and occupational). Preece and Hess (2009), editors of the journal's "Interface" volume that is named "Sport and Spirituality: An Exercise in Everyday Theology", admit that the intersection between sport and spirituality has attracted unprecedented

academic interest in the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, authors operate with quite different definitions of spirituality (p. 6). So the question arises – is it possible to create one definition of spirituality or spirituality in sport for common use among scholars?

By reading the Bible, scientific papers and other literary sources, we have come to the conclusion that people define spirituality according to various worldviews. Therefore it will never be possible to create one universal definition of spirituality that will be acceptable for people who believe in God and for people who don't believe in God; for people who believe that Jesus is Son of God and for people who don't believe in Him; for people who recognize that Holy Spirit is God and for those who don't think that is true etc. In this paper we search a definition of 'spirituality' according to a Biblical perspective and its application in sport which would correspond to the world view of Christianity. Christianity is ranked as the largest religion in the world according to the religious self-identification of people (Pew Research Center, 2010) and it is the worldview of the authors of this paper.

The word 'spirituality' is an important concept that is used today when we think about the holistic development of sportspeople. But in the Bible we only find the words 'spirit' and 'spiritual'. Hence the purpose of this paper is to offer a definition of 'spirituality' according to the Biblical perspective and to unfold the view of Biblical spirituality in sport.

Material and Methods

A theological interpretive method of the Bible was used to create the definition of spirituality. According to this method, the Bible is viewed as a sacred text whose purpose is to reveal God and His activity in human history. The text is viewed as a testimony that communicates God's truth and therefore must be interpreted with an attitude that God speaks in and through all the Biblical texts (Tate, 2012). Theological studies are based on God's self-revelations and are efforts to make definitive statements about God and His teaching. Studies of theology are based in the belief that God exists, is personal, can be known, and has revealed Himself (ESV Study Bible, 2008, p. 2505). While doing theological interpretations of the Biblical texts by using exegesis and hermeneutics we recognize *sensus plenior* and *the Grand Narrative of the Bible* as well. *Sensus plenior* is "a deeper meaning" of Scripture, intended by God but not necessarily by the author. This meaning could be found in the progressive development of the understanding of revelation. *Sensus plenior* does not preclude the literal, historical meaning of Scripture, but makes room for theological interpretation. *The Grand Narrative of the Bible* is an important assumption about the textual unity – that all parts of the Bible exist in such a close relationship that each part must be understood in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of the parts (Tate, 2012).

This study method involved reading and understanding the relevant passages in the Bible on the topics 'spirit' and 'spiritual', and summarizing the teaching to create a definition of the word 'spirituality'. Our study was based on using Bible translations in Latvian (1965 revised translation and 2012 translation) and English

Standard Version (ESV) translation (2001). All quotes represented in results are taken from ESV translation unless indicated King James Version (KJV) or Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). We used the free online reference library "Blue Letter Bible" (www.blueletterbible.org) to study the original meanings of the words and to compare various English translations of the Bible. To understand the context and various interpretations of particular verses we used the English Standard Version Study Bible (2008).

To draw out practical implications of spirituality in sport, we explored the collection of testimonies of sportspeople in the book "Power to win: riveting stories of struggle and triumph to inspire you" written by Alex Dias Ribeiro (2016). We studied the testimonies and described real life examples of spiritual sportspeople living their spiritual life. This book was chosen because of its diversity of real life experiences of Christian athletes in stories that include interviews and contain success, struggles, failures and miracles in their Christian walk and in sport.

Spirituality according to the Biblical perspective

The purpose of our study was to create a definition of 'spirituality' according to the Biblical understanding and to unfold the view of Biblical spirituality in sport. First, we will explore the Biblical revelation of God who is Spirit by His nature and the ultimate reason of humanity and sport. Second, we will describe the nature of spiritual people and life experiences of spiritual sportspeople to offer different expressions of spirituality in sport. Finally, we will give a definition of spirituality according to a Biblical perspective and will introduce a new term 'pre-spirituality' that we have created.

From the Bible it is known that God describes Himself "I am" as it is not possible to describe Him fully or explain Him (Ex 3:14). God is above everything. Biblical texts reveal that God is Spirit (John 4:24), therefore it is clear that it will never be possible to explain or define spirituality completely because God and His work are at the centre of spirituality. God's thoughts are higher than human thoughts (Isa 55:9) and it is beyond human ability to describe or comprehend God's works fully. However, God reveals Himself to some degree and people are able to know Him intimately through Jesus, through the Scriptures, through His creation, through His works and through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-12). Therefore we think that efforts to define spirituality are not in vain if we approach it with fearful and humble hearts in front of the omnipotent and omniscient Creator.

In the very first sentences that we find in the Bible (Gen 1:1-2) we are introduced to three very important things: God existed before anything else existed, God is the Creator, and God has a nature of Spirit. Hebrew words *Elohim* (God) and *Ruach Elohim* (Spirit of God) are the first names of God that are mentioned in the Bible. Avery (2014) writes that there are around five hundred Biblical names and titles to express various aspects of God's being and *Elohim* is among the three primary ones together with *Yahweh* (LORD) and *Adonai* (Lord). He discovered that the names *El*, *Eloah*, and *Elohim* all point to the majestic supremacy of God who created the cosmos and transcends it. Might and strength is the root meaning of *El* and *Eloah*. It is also associated with fear. People used these two words to talk about

someone who is mightier than they are and therefore have fear of it or find refuge from fear in it. *Elohim* is unique and used only in the Hebrew language, while people have adopted *El* and *Eloah* also in other languages to talk about their gods. The word *Elohim* is unusual because it expresses the mysterious and complex nature of God as it is the noun in plural form, but talks about the One God. This may indicate the supremacy of *Elohim* – that He is God of gods, the only true God (the sole divine being in the universe), as well as the fact that Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is one God (Mat 3:16-17, 28:19; 1 John 5:7) – something incomprehensible and mysterious to the human mind. *El ekhad* (One God) is the other specific name of God that expresses compound unity and is used by prophet Malachi (Mal 2:10).

Avery acknowledges that classifying God's names according to Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit would produce tedious repetitions. Through the study of the Bible, we observed that the Spirit is one of those unifying attributes to name the one and only God and we summarized our findings in the Table 1. The original Hebrew and Greek in transliterated form are taken from the Bible study sources (interlinear) in the Blue Letter Bible.

Table 1

Names of God that include the word Spirit

English	Hebrew	Greek	Bible reference
the Spirit of God	ruwach Elohim, ruwach El, ruwach 'elowahh	pneuma theos	Gen 1:2; Job 27:3; Job 33:4; Mat 3:16; Rom 8:9
the Spirit of the LORD	ruwach Yahweh	pneuma kyrios	Isa 11:2, 61:1; Luke 4:18;2 Co 3:17-18
the Spirit	ruwach	pneuma	Mat 4:1, Mark 1:10,12
the Spirit of Father	-	pneuma patēr	Mat 10:20
the Spirit of Son	-	pneuma huios	Gal 4:6
the Spirit of Christ	-	pneuma Christos	Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11
the Holy Spirit	ruwach qodesh	hagios pneuma	Ps 51:11; Isa 63:11; Mat 1:18; Mark 3:29; Act 7:55
the Spirit of glory	-	pneuma doxa	1 Pet 4:14
the Spirit of wisdom	ruwach chokmah	pneuma sophia	Exo 28:3; Isa 11:2; Eph 1:17
the Spirit of truth	-	pneuma alētheia	John 15:26, 16:13;1 John 4:6
the Spirit of revelation	-	pneuma apokalypsis	Eph 1:17

John writes that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24) which shows us that the Spirit is not something that belongs to God (as could be considered through the preposition 'of' being used in the names of God in English), but the Spirit is the nature of God, His essence, that is who He is. Whereas, spirit of man is something that belongs to man and it is given to humans from God who is the Spirit (Ecc 12:7). The Hebrew word *ruwach* used in the Old Testament and the Greek *pneuma* used in the New Testament are never referred to as a depersonalized force although it refers also to movement of air, wind, breath or breeze (Pierce, BLB, 2016). The Spirit is something intangible, immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and yet possible to feel, hear and experience. "The wind (*pneuma*) blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (John 3:8) - this is the

nature of the Spirit of God who has no beginning and no end and who existed before anything else and there won't be anyone after Him (Ps 90:2; Isa 43:10; Rev 22:3). All things were made by Him, and nothing was created except through Him (John 1:1-3). All other spirits in the universe were created or given by the Spirit of God.

We find in the Bible that God has created immaterial spirits or spiritual beings that are named angels (messengers of God) to minister to Him (Heb 1:14). While in Genesis 2:7 it describes that God formed man (Heb: '*adam*') from the dust of the ground (Heb: '*adamah*') and breathed (Heb: '*naphach*') into his nostrils the breath of life (Heb: '*něshamah*'), and so the man became a living being or soul (Heb. '*nephesh*'). Biblical texts reveal that *nephesh* is in the blood (Lev 17:11, 14; Deut 12:23) and this word is often used when authors talk about the living being as a whole. *Nephesh* (soul) is the life that leaves the body when it dies (Gen 35:18, Job 11:20, Jer 15:9), as well as *něshamah/ruwach* (spirit) leaves the body when the living being dies or in other words breathes out one's last (1 Kings 17:17, Ps 146:4, Ecc 12:7, Luke 23:46, Acts 7:59). So we see that God has created spirit, soul (Isa 57:16, Heb 4:12) and physical body of each human. Physical body is created from the dust and is the physical bearer of soul and spirit that is immaterial and eternal (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). On this earth, the Creator provides life to humans through breathing and through the circulation of blood in the body. There are many actions that humans can do with their body voluntary to control and rule over it, but the ultimate control over the blood circulatory system and the respiratory system to make body work and to ensure life is not in the hands of the individual. As we see it, the only reason of the existence of human beings is the will of loving God and therefore it is written that God is not served by human hands as if He needed anything, rather He himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else – for in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:25, 28). God created everything to reveal His glory (Ps 19:1) and humans are the masterpiece of God's creation because they are created in God's image (Gen 1:27). God created humans and gave them His breath of life (spirit), trust and the honour to be His co-workers and care for His creation (Gen 1:26, 28, Ps 8:5-9).

Biblical spirituality in sport

Now, if we think of sport, we see that God is the ultimate reason of the existence of sport as well. Today, we most often think of sport as physical activity to improve physical and mental well-being, form social relationships or to obtain results in competitions (according to the European Sports Charter, 1992), but in the 14th century, the word 'sport' was introduced as a short version of 'disport', the noun that originally meant 'amusement, recreation'. Only starting from the mid 19th century people use the word 'sport' with the view of 'athletic contests' (Ayto, 2005). The Creator is the Lord of joy (Rom 14:17; Phil 4:4; Gal 5:22). If we are careful observers, we see play everywhere in God's creation – sunshine plays in the water, wind plays with leaves, animals play and humans play. God wants animals and people to play because play brings joy (Ps 104:26; Isa 11:8; Zech 8:5). God has created people in His image (Gen 1:27) and from God's creation, humans have the widest variety of play - music and dance, games (board games, field games and

computer games), theatre etc. We see God's creative character reflected in the diversity of sports that people have invented. God created humans with various body compositions and different talents to move, to play and glorify Him in various ways. Playing activities enhances motor and sensory skills and social behaviours. Play is a learning process for both animals and humans. God's loving character has intended learning processes of humans and animals to be enjoyable.

There is nothing on the Earth apart from the Creator who is awesome and magnificent in His love, creativity, beauty, wisdom, holiness, justice. He is more than words can describe and express. There is no one like Him and there is no God besides Him (2 Sam 7:22; Ps 40:5; Ps 86:8, Isa 46:9). This is the reason why He is the only one who deserves worship through words and deeds from all of His creation (Ex 20:1-6; Ps 19; John 4:23; Luke 4:8; Rom 12:1-2). It means that every word that sportspeople (coaches, athletes, judges etc.) use on and off the court should be pleasant to God and glorify Him (Ps 19:14). Every action on the field or off the field should reflect God, His goodness, love, grace, kindness, creativity etc. because humans were made in God's image. Unfortunately, very often we don't see it. Instead there is anger, injustice, abuse, swearwords, and selfishness.

Through the Grand Narrative of the Bible (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration) we see that in the beginning everything was created good. Spiritual warfare between God and evil began when angels (God's created spiritual beings) and Satan (their leader) rebelled against their Creator (Isa 14:12-15; Eze 28:15, 17; Jude 1:6; 2 Pet 2:4). Human beings got involved in this warfare (Gen 3; Mat 13:38-39; Eph 6:11-12; Rev 12:7-17). Pride, arrogance and selfishness is the root of the disobedience to God and it was planted into the hearts of humans by Satan (Mat 13:24-30). Humans chose disobedience to God and His will (Gen 2:16-17, 3:6) that resulted in broken relationships between God and His people (Gen 23-24) and broken relationships amongst people (Gen 3:12, 4:8 etc). All descendants of Adam and Eve are born with corrupted hearts that are deceitful and desperately wicked (Gen 6:5; Ps 14:1-3, 51:5, 53:1-3; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 3:10-19). Therefore, we can observe evil in sport. Instead of loving and serving each other, people often hate each other. Instead of forgiveness, people keep bitterness in their hearts etc. Since people are born self-centred, most often sport is also self-centred. Sport is used to earn acceptance, self-value, meaning and purpose. People long to be loved, but often confuse love with acknowledgement and appreciation. Despite all the success, athletes can feel void in their hearts. Footballer Cesar Sampaio describes his experience as follows, "While you're playing good football and live up to the expectations, you're well treated. But, when you fail, the thing is different and painful" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 64). There are many ways people strive to be successful and accepted through sport - beautiful appearance and strong body, obeying the coach, wealth etc. Victory in contest and the champion's title is the most common strive for success, and for many, that is what sport is all about. Governments of countries use the medal count to show power over other countries. This often leads to pursuing victory at any cost which results in ongoing doping scandals around

Olympics and other sport events. People try to solve these issues through education but amount of issues shows us that the problem needs a deeper solution.

Biblical texts reveal that only God can provide the ultimate, eternal solution to the problem of a corrupted heart. God gives people the opportunity to receive a new heart and a new spirit. This means they can experience God's unconditional love and inner peace (Rom 5:1-5), and can truly love God and love each other on and off the sport field (Mat 22:37-40), and live a life according to God's will and His laws (Ez 36:26-28, Heb 8:10). Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, the Creator and the Spirit who works to redeem and restore His creation. Christ as Spirit dwells in the human heart through faith (Rom 8:9-10, Eph 3:17) and that is a birth of a new creation (John 3:1-8; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 1:23) who is now called a spiritual person (1 Cor 2:15). Paul writes that the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17). Spiritual people are those who have received God's Spirit, who search the depth of God, who understand and accept the things that are freely given by the Spirit of God and learn the spiritual truths (1 Cor 2:10-15). Spiritual truth is the wisdom of God - the laws and causal links that are formed by the Creator (Rom 7:14). To know spiritual truth is to know will of God and to act according to that (Rom 12:1-2; Col 1:9-10).

The apostle Paul explains that even when Jesus Christ dwells in the human being, the body of the spiritual human is perishable and dies because of sin, but the Spirit gives life to the spiritual person because of righteousness (Rom 8:10). It was God's Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and the same Spirit shall raise the body of the human God's Spirit dwells in (Acts 2:24; Rom 8:11). The natural body (*psychicos*) which is made of dust of the earth is perishable, but the spiritual body (*pneumatikos*) given by God to those who are born from above in Spirit (Jn 3:3,6) will be imperishable (1 Cor 15:53-54). Hence, Paul urges people to train primarily for godliness because godliness holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come whereas the physical body is perishable (1 Tim 4:7-8). However, Paul point out that care of the physical body can also glorify God because it is a temple of Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). Some manuscripts have additions to the verse of 1 Cor 6:20 that express the holistic thought as follows: "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20, KJV, HCSB). People should glorify God with both spirit and body. Exercising the body is good and acceptable thing. The problem starts when physical perfection and success is idolized. People wholeheartedly work towards the perfection of the body and it overtakes their time and effort of exercising for godliness. The other extreme is investing only in the development of the spiritual dimension and denying God's created human body, abusing it in direct way or by not taking care of it.

God sends His Holy Spirit into every human's heart that truly trusts Jesus (John 7:39, 15:26, 16:7, Gal 4:6) which enables human beings to live according to God's will. Yet human beings every day have to make choices to submit to God's Spirit and His guidance (Rom 8:14, Eph 5:18, James 4:6-17). The surrender to Christ and His Spirit transforms a person's heart, life and behaviour (2 Co 5:17, Gal 5:22, Col 1:9-14) – that is a process of restoration. Although true trust in Jesus is

held in the heart, it is visible in the words and deeds (Isa 28:16, Rom 10:9-11, Mat 7:21, Luke 6:46-49) of a person. Jesus said, "For the tree is known by its fruit" (Mat 12:33). Footballer Zé Sérgio testifies that when he was born from the Spirit, he realized that his time on Earth is passing towards eternity with God and what happens here is so transitory. He became less vulnerable to the unfavourable circumstances in his career, "I used to be a short-tempered player. Everybody knew I could go mad for nothing. Today, as I am growing in the faith, I am becoming less short-tempered." (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 37). The surfer Bitá describes changes after his encounter with Jesus as follows, "As if by magic, Jesus set me free from drugs and got right my messy life, giving me so much joy that today, nearly twelve years on, I live only to follow, love and worship this Jesus. I went on surfing even better. My surfboards bearing the lettering *Jesus Saves*." (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 52).

As we observe, spiritual people naturally and freely give credit to God for their success instead of boasting and emphasizing how good they are. In the Biblical texts, we see that God's people rejoiced in their Creator and admitted that physical abilities or skills that they had came from the Lord (Hab 3:19, Ps 144:1). King David gave credit to God for his victories since his young age (1 Sam 17:34-37, 46-47). David inquired about God and asked Him for wisdom and guidance in his battles (1 Sam 23:1-13). We find that athletes who follow Jesus also give credit to God for their success. Footballer Cesar Sampaio says, "I invited Christ into my life, accepting Him as my Savior. The transformation happened right away, and God honored my decision in a practical form: in the next match, I was chosen as the best player on the pitch, won many prizes and I was sure that He had given me all that" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 65). Karateka Ciça Maia confirms this with "In 1992, I went to the World Championship certain that talent and glory are not ours, but God's. I changed my attitude and started fighting for God. [...] I became a lot more competent and courageous as an athlete." (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 47). Basketball player Luiz Felipe recalls, "Into the court I went full of the Holy Spirit, and played superb basketball. We won the game. I scored more than anyone else and left the court with a medal on my chest. Above all, I left convinced that the medal was on Jesus' chest [...]" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 42-43). This doesn't mean that spiritual athletes are not training hard. Two-Time Brazilian surfing champion Jojó de Olivença says "God bless, but He doesn't surf. If I don't work, it won't be easy to be a champion at all. So I spend time training hard. My surfing exists because of my spiritual life" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 30).

The Biblical texts are clear on the fact that a relationship and fellowship with God can be renewed only by trusting in Jesus as only His blood cleanses humans from their disobedience and tears down the barriers to open free access to God for everyone who trusts in Him (John 6:47-64, Heb 7:25, 9:22, 10:19-23; 1 John 1:7). Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). People who trust in Jesus and accept God's forgiveness and love are free from all condemnation (John 15:5-6, Rom 8:1-2, Heb 10:29-31). This is called spiritual or Christ-centred life.

Sport as a mirror of the spiritual battle

Through Paul's letters to the people in Corinth, Rome and Galatia, we learned that there are three types of people – natural, spiritual and carnal. Bill Bright has created a helpful visual illustration to see the difference between these three (Fig. 1).

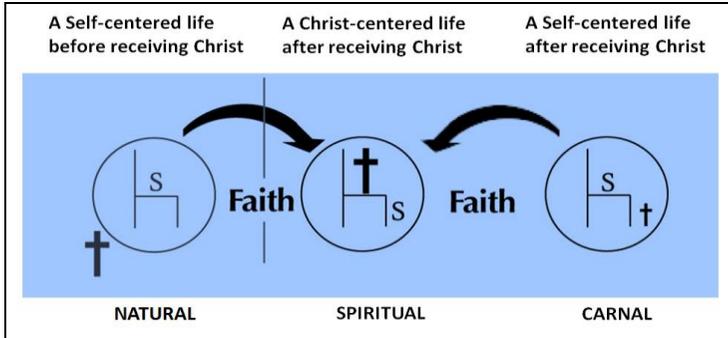


Figure 1. Three types of people – three kinds of lifestyles (Bright, 2001)

Paul distinguishes between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. He says that to be carnally minded (to live according to the flesh) is death because the carnal mind is at enmity against God, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom 8:5-6). Internal, constant joy and peace characterize a life in the Spirit that reflects the life in the Kingdom of God (Rom 14:17).

Bible commentators explain that God and believers each have a role in sanctification: by the power of Spirit, believers must take an active role in battling sinful habits. (ESV Study Bible, 2008, p. 2170). By reading Paul's letter to Romans, we become aware of the constant battle between the sinful nature ("deeds of the body" in Greek) and the Spirit of God (Rom 7:15, 24), and we see that Jesus Christ ensures victory in this battle. Jesus Christ has delivered believers once for all (Rom 4:2-25; 5:2, 9) and He is the one who will deliver them (Rom 7:24-25) day by day (ESV Study Bible, 2008, p. 2169).

Paul describes that the deeds of the flesh are: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. He warns that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21). We can see these things mirrored in the world of sport. For example, there is much false spirituality and sorcery provided by Satan and evil spirits to ensure success. Football player Mauro Madureira tells, "While training, I broke my arm. I was told that someone out of envy was doing a 'work' against me, and I should protect myself as soon as possible, and I head for a spiritualist centre [...]. As experienced and famous players used to do the same thing, I followed suit. At first, the accuracy of prophecies, the protection and the promises of much success fascinated me. [...] I started going to different spiritualist centers. [...] My fear of displeasing bad spirits and guides

reached a point in which my posture on the pitch didn't depend on my talent and effort anymore, but the guides' actions and reactions" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 76). In some ways, sport is a world of body cult and therefore to fall into sexual immorality, impurity and sensuality is a likely risk. Football player Márcio Araújo in the interview that was published in Placar Magazine in 1985 shared, "Today sexual relationships are messed up. Women are losing their modesty, in just half an hour after getting to know a man; they have sex with him without knowing his name and forget all that the next day. I am against abortion, divorce, and I think the structure of society is the family. Just follow what is in the Bible" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 99). Players who are left sitting on the bench has to deal with disappointment and not to be jealous to their teammates. Silas Pereira, former professional Brazilian football player in the interview in 1990 said, "When coach Telê put me on the bench and Careca on the pitch, the press lashed out at me saying "and now, Silas, what will you do?" My answer was that I wanted to be there to serve God, at the National Squad on the pitch, on the bench and wherever" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 24).

Paul encourages the followers of Jesus: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galat 5:16). Walking by the Spirit is a daily journey of total surrender to God and His love. James gives a clue to the victory over flesh and temptations of the devil with the following advice: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded!" (James 4:8). Ezekiel writes that the renewed heart is one heart (Heb. *leb echad*) - it is heart that is undivided and fully devoted to God (Eze 11:19). Indifference is disgusting to God (Rev 3:16,19). Spiritual life requires total surrender to God and therefore there are only two options for humans: submit to the living God and to be obedient to him by the power of Spirit or not, there is no middle way. Speaking in sport terms – there are no other teams than God's team and Satan's team. If we are not with God, we are against Him (1 John 3:8-10). If we are in God's team, He becomes our coach and we choose to submit to His game plan every day and every moment of our lives. God loves people and He constantly calls them to repent and turn from all their transgressions (Eze 14:6, 18:30; Hos 14:1-2; Mat 4:17; Mar 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; Act 2:38, 3:19, Rev 2:5, 16, 3:3). Jesus says: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat 5:48, HCSB). Peter reminds the words of God cited from Lev 11:44-45: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16, HCSB).

A life in the Spirit is based on love

Personal consecration is a response of love to God's gracious and loving initiative. Since fellowship with God is based on love, God gives people freedom to choose Him or not, to remain with Him in constant and continuous love relationship or not (John 14:21, 15:10; Rom 5:8, 8:35-39; 1 Cor 13; Eph 3:14-19, 4:15-16; 1 John 2:5, 4:7-19, 5:1; Rev 2:4-5).

Daniel Dias, the Brazilian Paralympic swimmer, says that after the 2008 Games in Beijing where he experienced great success he had turned away from God for some time. "I was thinking that I was making all this happen by my own merits and I forgot also that without God, none of this would have happened. I was

gradually moving away from intimacy with Him," says Dias. He admits that while medals and fame continued to come, his spirit dried up in the midst of an existential desert and he had no joy in his life. He took a Bible in his bag, but God's words were far from his heart because he didn't read it anymore. He chose to repent, to come back to God and receive His forgiveness between 2010 and 2011 because he understood the love of God. He says, "My luck is that, although I was far from God because I wanted to, he never ceased to be by my side." (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 166-167).

"Already" and "not yet" aspects of spirituality

God is above any time limitations but his spiritual people live in the tension between "already" and "not yet" aspects. "Already" means that Jesus Christ has paid the full price of sins and humans are saved by faith in God's grace with nothing to add to the sacrifice of Jesus (John 19:30; Heb 7:27). The ultimate victory over the sin and death already belongs to Jesus because the Son of God is the only human who has lived entire life in absolute obedience to God, including His death on the cross and resurrection (John 8:28-29, Phil 2:8). Through His righteousness and obedience, humans are made righteous and get life (Rom 5:18-19). The "not yet" aspect uncovers the reality that spiritual people live in a carnal body in a world (1 John 2:15-17) that is ruled by devil (John 14:30). Hence, they are subjected to internal and external temptations daily (Rom 6:12; James 1:13-15; Luke 22:31-32; 1 Pet 5:8-9). Each spiritual person must be watchful to keep the faith and not to fall by turning away from the ways of Christ (Mat 24:42-51, 26:41; Mark 14:38; 1 Cor 10:12; Gal 6:1; 1 Pet 5:8).

Chilean goalkeeper Rojas took part in a scam during the 1990 World Cup qualifying match in Brazil. Rojas had hidden in his gloves a scalpel blade and injured himself with hope that match will be called off. When sports authorities discovered the sham, Chile was banned for two World Cups and Rojas was banned from football forever. Even when punished, Rojas went on denying the sham and his guilt until he broke under the burden of it. Rojas acknowledges, "I lived hell on earth up to the day I resolved not to cover my sin, and confessed to God, to my family, and to the whole world my dishonesty. I was forgiven by God and by my family [...]." After Rojas had confessed and experienced forgiveness by God who took burden off his back, he still has been dealing with consequences of his sin. The wife of Roja says, "Roberto really didn't think about the consequences at all. Ever since he was on the reserve bench in São Paulo, he got restless. He forgot that God is in control and knows everything and wanted to do in His own way" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 60-61).

The sinful nature of people tends to make scenarios and plans for one's life forgetting about God. James writes that instead of boasting in our plans we should say "if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:13-15). Athletes often have their hopes, dreams and plans for their career. When things don't come out as planned or expected the natural answer of the sinful nature is disappointment and anger, the spiritual answer that is based on God's word (Isa 55:9; Rom 8:28), is surrender to God and trust in Him at all times – even when bad things happen. Alex Dias Ribeiro, former racing driver, shares his own experiences and emotions after

the fail of his Formula 1 dream, "... getting out of the car that morning, I was stepping into a very different reality from what I had desired for my life and my career. I wanted to be world champion, but I was abandoning my world, not as a champion, but as a loser [..]." He says that only the immense strength of God whom he always trusted held together his emotional wreck in the darkest moment of his life (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 89-90). Stories of other athletes involve unfulfilled hopes such as being called up for the National Squad or a certain team, the rejection or bad attitude from a coach or teammates, lashing out by press or fans. Dealing with injuries and learning to trust God in the circumstances of obscurity is the common topic of several stories. Footballer Bismarck shares that after a serious leg injury, he questioned God, "Why?", but he admits that during nine months of recovery he learned that the love and friendship of Jesus was not only something written on paper, but very real (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 108 - 109). Thirty year old football player Leba lost his leg after his motorcycle was hit by a drunk driver. Finding himself in the situation with one leg, no money, unable to exercise his profession, and a wife and three children to sustain, he was confident in God, "The strength that comes from God gives me the certainty that He is in absolute control of the situation. My spirituality became stronger from this accident because I realized that my destiny is in His hands" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 119 - 120).

Spirituality as an endurance race of life

Biblical texts use athletic metaphors of running to depict the truth that eternal victory requires sacrifices and perseverance (1 Cor 9:24-25; Heb 12:1-2). Jesus admits that following Him, obedience to God and His laws requires certain sacrifices (Matt 10:17-38, Matt 19:21, Luke 14:26-33, John 15:20). Therefore there are people who don't follow to the end (John 6:66, Rev. 2:4-5). Only those are victorious, who stay in His love, overcome struggles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13) and do His will unto death (Matt. 10:22; Rev. 2:10). They will be rewarded (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17; 2:26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). However, it may be easy to misinterpret these metaphors, thinking that it is a human's effort which wins the victory in spiritual race and not God's grace and love. Therefore we would like to give a helpful illustration that the race of faith is like the race of the team Hoyt. Dick Hoyt runs together with his son Rick in competitions by pushing him in the wheelchair as Rick was born a spastic quadriplegic. Dick also bikes and swims together with Rick in triathlon competitions. They cross the finish line together. Dick is devoted to take his son to these competitions because he loves his child. If Rick didn't want to sit in the chair or the boat or to be carried on father's hands, if he didn't want to endure the hot sun or the rain, to experience the painful bumps on the road, he wouldn't gain the victory together with his dad. Likewise eternal victory to receive the crown of life requires sacrifice and effort from both - God and people. Jesus experienced abjection, scorn, pain and death on the cross in order to give eternal life to humans. Humans, who have chosen to follow Jesus and obey the will of God, experience abjection and scorn from those who don't have the Spirit, who don't want to live according to the laws of the Creator (Jude 1:18-19). Footballers Silas and Jorginho share how their teammates have made fun of them because of

their belief in Jesus (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 24, 33). An objection from the world is a kind of test of true spirituality that Jesus confirms with words, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19). Apostle Peter encourages: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14).

And yet the toughest struggles to live a spiritual life are not caused by other humans but by one's own sinful nature and passions that hinders from doing God's will (1 Peter 4:1-2). Growing in trust in Christ is a process and we see parallels that may be drawn to compare it with muscle training. Giving up one's ego and one's own will to God may be very painful because it requires overcoming self-resistance to God. However, the more a person trains the easier it becomes. In the beginning of the spiritual journey, people learn to submit their will and plans to God after disappointments in life, after failures of their own plans and dreams because there is hope in God. The closer people come to God, the more they trust Him and ask to show His will before any plans are made so that they may follow Him (John 10:3).

Authors of Biblical texts talk about people who are young in their faith, like infants in Christ, and about those who are more experienced or mature in their walk with Christ (1 Cor 3:1; Heb 5:12-14). It shows that God doesn't expect a life in faith without any mistakes. When a spiritual toddler falls down, God helps him to get up and learning to walk in Spirit continues. However, proper spiritual growth should reach maturity in the course of time by constant practice (Heb 5:14). In the physical world we see that adults fall, especially under difficult circumstances (fatigue, slippery surface, tripping etc.) and it is the same in spiritual world. Paul urges no one to be arrogant, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). Getting up after each fall and continuing to exercise in the race of faith is essential. The parables in Luke 15 reflect the heart of Heavenly Father – He is the one who reaches out and helps to stand up after the fall. A.D. Ribeiro explains that Ayrton Senna was a spiritual new born when the press, opponents, officials, fans, Christians, atheists and agnostics began to require from him the lifestyle of a saint. "Startled, he flinched, but never failed to give the message about the things of God," says Ribeiro. He admits that without good Scriptural guidance and support of brothers of strong faith, Ayrton Senna lived a self-centred and not God focused Christian life (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 133).

In order to live spiritual life, to win and not to fall, Paul gives instructions to take up the whole armour of God to resist the schemes of the devil (Eph 6:10-20). Paul encourages to pray to God at all times in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). It means seeking an intimate presence with God to live according to His will in all areas of life (relationships, athletic career, health, finances, future etc.) at all times. Praying to God in the Spirit is a way of surrender. Spiritual people pray to God truly with their heart and mind willing, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10; Luke 22:42). Testimonies of athletes in the book "Power to Win" (Ribeiro, 2016) reveal prayer as an important part of the life of a spiritual sportsperson. Athletes have prayed to confess and to give their life to Christ. They

have prayed to win spiritual battles and attacks from the devil. They have prayed prayers of renunciation of occult forces. They have prayed for team unity and integration. They have interceded for coaches. They have prayed for those who get injured and for those who seek God. They have prayed God for good skill in sport and wisdom on the field to give God honour. They have prayed to win if it was His will and they have prayed that whoever wins would glorify God. They have kneeled down to give thanks to God. They have prayed to get a place in a team and they have prayed during times of pressure. In dangerous situations they have prayed to God to save their life. Sportspeople have also experienced the power of prayer when other people intercede.

Paul suggests to use the word of God because it is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). God's word is living because God's Spirit talks through His words (John 6:63). Bible commentators explain that the flesh (i.e. human nature including emotions, will, and intellect) is completely incapable to produce genuine spiritual life for this can only be done by the Spirit. The words that Jesus speaks are spirit and life and they do their work in the unseen spiritual realm and awaken a genuine spiritual life (ESV Study Bible, 2008, p. 2036). Jesus Himself is the living word (John 1:1-14), therefore trusting in God's Word is trusting Jesus. Ribeiro says that F1 racer Ayrton Senna came across the verse, "And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth" (Jer 1:9, KJV) and he started to feel uncontrollable urge to talk with others openly about his spiritual experience with God (p. 133). Athletes have experienced the active work of the God's Word in the process of redemption. For example, the surfer Bitá says that he read in the New Testament "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3) and he couldn't stop thinking of it. Later on, when he was on a beach, God spoke straight to his heart and showed that to be born again is to die to a sinful life and restart everything again (p. 52). Football player Batista tells that in one of the daily meetings with other players he shared about Noah's Ark, Sodom and Gomorrah and about the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Two players asked him to talk more about it. One of them was Romário, who went to bed that night thinking about the subject and on the next day said, "That's it. A Boat is about to depart, and I have to be on it." He had understood that only Jesus guarantees the salvation (p. 57). We see that spiritual athletes practically receive strength, guidance and encouragement from God's word. Several athletes have shared how God, through His word from Joshua 1:8-9, encouraged them and gave strength on the sports field when they felt weak or discouraged or unsure of their abilities (p. 48, 56, 72). Football player Jorginho says that the Brazilian team had many defeats during the Pre-Olympic tournament in Bolivia in 1987 and pressure on the team was mounting. As he felt weak, he asked for a word from God. Then he came across the passage of David and Goliath in the Bible, something that he had never read before. He was encouraged and shared the story with other teammates. After the match the coach of the team quoted a text in which Paul says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong!" and finished saying, "I am sure God has something good for us!" The team became champions of the Pre-Olympic Football Tournament and qualified for 1988

Olympics. They aimed for gold in Olympics, but got silver. Jorginho says that God's word about the incorruptible crown from 1 Corinthians 9:24 was comforting indeed during the difficult moments after they had lost the final match (p. 33-34).

The closer people come to the Holy God, the brighter they realize how narrow the road to enter the Kingdom of God is (Matt 7:14). The goalkeeper João Leite reflects on his own life, "Sometimes, I look at who I am, and don't recognize myself! I was insecure, suspicious, superstitious, vulnerable, fearful and a liar. In spite of seeming to be a good person before the eyes of society, I was so far from God's standards" (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 73). Spiritual people desire to live according to God's will, but one of the challenges of spiritual athletes is to understand the boundaries of a devoted game and aggression in sport as the boundaries are not very clearly defined. Defender Jatobá says that he is still competitive on the football field, but without malice in his heart. Footballer Silas admits that some coaches used to say that he was a bit too "friendly" and didn't play hard with the opponents (Ribeiro, 2016, p. 24, 96).

Summary

Summing up the results we would like to propose our definition for the word 'spirituality' and introduce with the new term 'pre-spirituality'. Our purpose of this study was to define 'spirituality', but during the process of research we realized that there is a need for a word to describe presence of God's spirit (the breath of life) in each human. We decided to call this state 'pre-spirituality'.

Linguistically the noun 'spirituality' is formed from the adjective 'spiritual' which in Biblical sense basically means 'God centred' or 'God focused' referring to the root 'Spirit' that is God's nature and one of His names. Whatever noun would follow, the word 'spiritual' would determine whether this thing/person/event comes from the Spirit of God or is oriented towards Spirit of God. Any way, it is all about God because He is the beginning and the end of everything (Rev 21:6). For example, if we think of a spiritual song – it comes from God because it is inspired by God's Spirit and it goes to God because its purpose is to worship Him. If we think of spiritual people – they come from God because they are created by Him, they are born from the Spirit and they are oriented towards Him to live life with Him. 'Spirituality' means a state or condition of being spiritual. State is 'way of standing, condition, position' and condition is 'situation, mode of being' (Ayto, 2005). So we could say that spirituality is a mode of life that is God centred. To live a God centred life means to put Him in front of anything else – myself, others, circumstances etc. – He, His will and His plans are at the centre of everything.

However, we would like to suggest a more specific definition of spirituality that could be beneficial for practical application and would emphasize the essential role of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the result and process of spirituality. To sum up the results of the Bible study, we drew a visual picture in a form of stylized orienteering map where you can see the definition of spirituality written (Figure 2). The Kingdom of God is represented on the right side as buildings on an impassable cliff. Originally, people were created very good to be representatives of God's Kingdom, but humans chose to turn away from God. Hence, the sole access to God

Discussion

In our study, we have explored Biblical texts to offer a definition of 'spirituality'. We have also come up with a new term 'pre-spirituality' that we offer to point out the presence of God's breath (spirit) in the human body that gives each human a deep inner knowledge of the Creator and a desire after Him. Although the idea that spirituality exists (at least potentially) in all persons is found (Ronkainen et al. 2013), we haven't encountered the term 'pre-spirituality' in other studies. Hence, to the knowledge of the authors this is the first time the term 'pre-spirituality' is being used.

Our study gives support to the study of McClendon (2012) who suggests drawing lines between three degrees of spirituality – general spirituality, Christian spirituality and Biblical spirituality. According to his study, Biblical spirituality – the narrowest use of spirituality – gives the clearest understanding of the word to guide people back to the original meaning of the word "spirituality" (Spirit – filled life). He recounts that the earliest record of the Latin word *spiritualite* was dated AD 410 and it was used by an anonymous author urging his audience to live in greater conformity to the Spirit. McClendon admits that in the course of history, due to various reasons, the word started to lose its distinction. The definition of spirituality that we propose through our research extends the definition of Kleinig (2008) "Christian spirituality is following Jesus" and is created to be more specific than such definitions as "living life under the impulse of the Spirit" or "living life in collaboration with Spirit" (Fee, 2010). Benner (2015), just like we do, expresses the idea of spirituality as a process of transformation. According to Benner, the fact that spiritual people are already in God means that the nature of the spiritual journey becomes more of awakening than accomplishment, and more of spiritual awareness than spiritual achievement. He emphasizes the importance of love in Christian spirituality, pointing out that Christian spirituality starts with God's love and God's love is the source of transformational process where humans become fully and deeply human by learning to surrender to God in love.

We agree to the words formulated by L. S. Cunningham (2010), "There is something almost intractable about pinning down exactly what the word spirituality means". Therefore the authors of this study don't claim to have the only correct definition of spirituality. We think that the truth about God and spirituality can be expressed in different ways and words. However, we are convinced that definitions of spirituality which exclude God or reference to His work in formation of spirituality don't reveal the essence and fullness of the word, but only some degree of it. We think that the comprehension of spirituality and the willingness to include God in the definition of spirituality or not will always depend on the heart attitude – whether the heart is seeking to honour the Creator or not.

Hess (2009) has observed that there is a distinct genre of relevant writing on sport and spirituality that lies largely outside the theological discourse, focusing on the socio-cultural dimensions of sport (p. 16). We see our research as a valuable attempt to contribute to the discussion concerning the existing gap. Although some might argue that too much of the content in this study has been devoted to study the

Biblical view on spirituality in general, we have seen it as a very important prerequisite to explore the specific expressions of spirituality in sport. We think it is similar to the situation in sport ethics, where there are no specific ethical values that are characteristic to the field of sport only. Sport ethics is formed of the universal and everlasting human values that are adapted to fit the characteristic situations of the sports world (Kuzņecova, 2003, p. 61). Carmody (1983) writes that holistic spirituality is "connective" and extends the ties from the love of God "to all the significant dimensions of our lives", and we see that this includes the dimension of sport life as well. Conn (1993) speaks of spirituality as an experience that includes all the complexity and richness of each person's historical and cultural location as well as the particularities of gender, race, class, psychological development and the unique operation of divine grace within human personality. In our study we have seen that each human has a personal, individual experience with God in his or her unique life situation. However it was possible to draw out some common trends that reflect spirituality of sportspeople.

We think that the experiences of Christian athletes described in the book of A.D. Ribeiro (2016) were appropriate for initial research of spirituality in sport. However, there are also limitations – all testimonies in the book are from Brazilian athletes or athletes who had athletic career in Brazil. Therefore further work is planned to expand the study and explore spiritual experiences of Christian athletes from a diversity of countries.

Future work should focus on creating theological views on competitiveness in sport and exploring Biblical aspects on the boundaries of a devoted game of spiritual athletes and aggression in sport. Although some studies on the theology of competition exist already, we agree to Smith, Johnson and Hiller (2004) that the topic of studying God's view on competition is far too complicated for human mind and it is not possible to make authoritative statements. Hence, we see that human discussion on the spiritual foundation of competition helps to reveal its multifaceted nature.

Conclusion

According to a Biblical perspective, spirituality cannot be separated from the triune God (*Elohim – Father, Son and Holy Spirit*) who is the Creator of everything and whose Spirit is His nature. God has created immaterial spiritual beings that are named angels and He has created humans with their physical body from dust. Humans are created in the image of God and God's spirit or 'the breath of life' within humans makes them alive.

God is the ultimate reason of sport because He has created human beings with playful nature. Play is intended to bring joy and a joyful learning experience whilst also giving glory to God. God's creative character is reflected in the diversity of human body compositions, body movements and diversity of sports that people have invented.

In the beginning, everything was created good, but spiritual warfare between God and evil began when angels rebelled against their Creator. Satan involved

human beings in this warfare as they also chose to be disobedient to their Creator. Sin (human disobedience to God) has broken the fellowship between God and humanity. Therefore each human's heart is corrupt. Evil in sport reflects the evil that is in human hearts.

God is giving the opportunity to each human to receive a new heart and new spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. Spiritual people are those who have received Holy Spirit in their hearts. Natural people are those who refuse to trust Jesus and therefore don't have Holy Spirit. Carnal people are those who have trusted Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit, but who don't surrender to the Spirit of Christ on a day to day basis. Spiritual people are able to truly experience God's unconditional love and deep inner peace that comes from intimate relationship with Him. Only people with Holy Spirit within can truly love God and love each other on and off the sport field. Spiritual people live according to God's will and His laws.

Spirituality according to a Biblical perspective is trusting in Jesus Christ and following Him in love by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pre-spirituality is a spirited condition of each living human being that is provided by the presence of God's breath (spirit) in the body and gives deep inner knowledge of the Creator and craving after Him. All people are born in a stage of pre-spirituality.

Regarding sport, the Bible as a historical document shows that people have found the unique language of athletics useful and relevant to communicate spiritual truths with those who may be concerned (1 Cor 9:24-27; Phil 3:12-14; 1 Tim 4:7-8; 2 Tim 2:5; Heb 12:1-2).

By exploring testimonies of Christian sportspersons we have found that spiritual sportspersons:

- recognize their need for Jesus to live a spiritual life
- give credit to God for their physical abilities, talents and success
- practice sport to glorify God
- find their ultimate joy, meaning and purpose in a loving relationship with God and not in their athletic success
- have trusted their lives to Jesus, but admit that they continue to grow in their faith
- experience that God has been positively changing their character and life which is reflected on the sports field and their athletic career
- communicate to others that salvation is in Jesus
- experience tension to surrender to God's Spirit and sometimes are disobedient to God in their decisions or actions and begin to live a carnal life
- deal with consequences of their sin
- feel and experience God's presence on the sports field
- surrender to God's love also in difficult circumstances (e.g., injury, disappointment)
- are not jealous for their teammates for taking their place in the game and leaving them on the bench
- have experienced miraculous deliverance from addictions

- experience that God's Word is living and personal in their lives on and off the field
- pray to God and experience the power of prayer on and off the field
- are still competitive in their sports, but do compete without malice in their heart
- experience that other people make fun of them because they believe in Jesus.

We see spirituality as a result and a continuous process simultaneously ("already" and "not yet") because Jesus has made his followers righteous in the eyes of God, but on a daily basis they are subjected to internal and external temptations to be disobedient to God on and off the sport field. "Not yet" aspect causes spiritual people to become carnal people and it gives opportunity for carnal people to become spiritual again. For sporting celebrities walk with Christ can be more challenging than it is for other sportspeople because of constant pressure that is created by other people.

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Submitted: December 01, 2016

Accepted: December 27, 2016