

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INSPIRED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY

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# WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL

**"HOOSIERS MEETS  
FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS"**

- Steve Oldfield, FOX-TV



# WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL

## CREW OVERVIEW

Thomas Carter (Director)  
Scott Marshall Smith (Writer: screenplay, story)  
David Zelon (Writer: story) • Neil Hayes (Writer: book)

## CAST OVERVIEW

Jim Caviezel (Bob Ladouceur)	Matthew Daddario (Danny Ladouceur)
Michael Chiklis (Terry Eidson)	Joe Massingill (Beaser)
Alexander Ludwig (Chris Ryan)	Jessie Usher (Tayshon Lanear)
Clancy Brown (Mickey Ryan)	Richard Kohnke (Rick Salinas)
Laura Dern (Bev Ladouceur)	Matthew Frias (Arturo)
Ser'Darius Blain (Cam Colvin)	
Stephan James (Terrance "T.K." Kelly)	

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## USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically based discussion of various themes found in *When the Game Stands Tall*. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or can focus on one or two themes at a time.



## FILM OVERVIEW/NOTE TO GROUP

Inspired by both a true story and the book of the same name by author Neil Hayes, *When the Game Stands Tall* shares the remarkable journey of legendary high school football coach Bob Ladouceur (played by Jim Caviezel), who led the De La Salle Spartans of Concord, California, to 12 undefeated seasons and a 151-game winning streak, the longest in American sports history. The film chronicles the devastating and tumultuous events leading up to the streak's end, and then showcases the perseverance, unity and commitment the team summon to overcome adversity, the focus on character rather than winning, and how they give a "perfect effort" on and off the field.

The beginning of the film highlights the monumental and rare accomplishment that becomes known as "The Streak." On the way to 151 wins, De La Salle surpasses all professional, collegiate and high school sports' winning streak records, culminating in win 151 during the 2003 Northern Conference Sectional Championships. In the team meeting 24 hours before the game, Coaches Ladouceur and Terry Eidson (Michael Chiklis) lead a round of commitment cards – each player lists practice and game goals, stretching themselves to make the

"perfect effort" from snap to whistle – and a time of sharing. The seniors share their emotions freely, but the juniors do not, and the coaches express concern over the lack of vulnerability.

The coaches aren't the only ones who see red flags. Senior Terrance "T.K." Kelly (Stephan James) passes the leadership torch to juniors Chris Ryan (Alexander Ludwig) and Danny Ladouceur (Matthew Daddario) with a word of caution: Lose the ego and work as a team. Chris, in pursuit of the California Career Touchdown record, acknowledges T.K.'s advice, but his job as captain is complicated by a team divided – arrogant Tayshon Lanear (Jessie Usher) wants personal glory; laid-back Rick Salinas (Richard Kohnke) is ready to ride the streak's coattails; and entitled Danny, the coach's son, wrestles under the weight of his father's legacy.

Following De La Salle's exhilarating success with the streak, a series of extraordinarily difficult events push the team and surrounding community to breaking points, and threaten to undermine the values and ideals of Coach Ladouceur's character-driven program. Senior Cam Colvin (Ser'Darius Blain) struggles to understand the principle of Luke 6:38 ("Give, and it will be given to you ...") in light of his father's

death and his mother's debilitating stroke; and T.K., an outstanding young gentleman just days from starting his collegiate career at Oregon, is tragically murdered while waiting for a friend.

Under doctor's orders, Coach Ladouceur steps down pending medical clearance. He spends time with his family, trying – and usually failing – to reconnect with his kids, especially Danny. Meanwhile, the team is slowly self-destructing, bickering during practices, slacking off during training and forfeiting unity in pursuit of individual recognition. When Coach Ladouceur finally returns, the Spartans open their season with a shocking streak-ending loss, and the players are devastated. After another loss the following week, the coaches take the team to a veterans' rehabilitation center, hoping to re-establish the value of working together and serving others. And to show the players that teamwork and dependability are absolutely vital.

Because several teams in De La Salle's conference refuse to play them (citing competitive inequality), Coach Eidson arranges for a match-up with Long Beach Poly, a formidable team whose offensive line averages over 300 pounds. To prepare, the Spartans enter what Coach Ladouceur calls "the most physically demanding moment" of their young lives, and conclude their preparation with a team meeting in which the players finally share their emotions – a breakthrough, to be sure. In what turns out to be the game of the year, the Spartans overcome seemingly insurmountable odds (a smaller roster, sweltering heat and injuries) to claim victory.

The win over Long Beach represents a turning point, but the coaches and staff still face challenges over the course of the season. A new streak legacy rears its unwelcome head; Coach Ladouceur soul-searches and strongly considers a collegiate coaching offer; and Chris' father, Mickey (Clancy Brown), constantly bullies his son into breaking the touchdown record. Despite the circumstances, De La Salle reaches the championship game. During the last drive, with the game all but won, Chris has the perfect opportunity to claim the record. Instead, the players huddle up and decide on victory formation to honor Coach Ladouceur and his tireless work with the young men at De La Salle, and to show that "it's not about the record; it's about the team."



## THEME ONE: TEAMWORK

Guiding Scripture: Proverbs 27:17 (NIV): As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

## SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- Psalm 37:5 (NLT): Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you.
- Proverbs 27:17 (NIV): As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12 (NLT): Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble ... A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NLT): So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
- 1 Corinthians 12:20 (NIV): As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NIV): Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
- Philippians 2:1–4 (NIV): Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- Philippians 3:13–14 (NIV): Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for



which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

- 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV): Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
- 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV): I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
- James 3:14–16 (NIV): But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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## SCENES TO REVIEW

- Commitment Cards (00:02:49–00:09:43, Chapter 1)
- A Word of Advice (00:14:39–00:15:56, Chapter 3)
- A Team Divided (00:36:01–00:37:27, Chapter 8)
- Veterans’ Hospital (00:59:41–01:06:17, Chapter 12)
- Long Beach Poly (01:08:08–01:31:35, Chapter 15)

## THEME INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As you begin this theme discussion, take a moment to reflect on 1 Corinthians 12:20: “As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (NIV). What does this verse suggest about the relational aspect of God? Based on this passage and any others that might come to mind, why is the concept of teamwork fundamental to life and to the Kingdom of God? How do relationships – friends, family, spouses, co-workers, peers, teammates, etc. – offer opportunities for each of us (i.e., the parts) to work toward and accomplish something greater than ourselves (i.e., the body)?

The beginning of the film provides a glimpse of the dedication and vulnerability that are essential to the team mentality at De La Salle. Through the practice of commitment cards, the players hold each other accountable to various and difficult training, practice and game goals that are meant to stretch their abilities, but are doable when making the “perfect effort.” In addition to the cards, the players partake in a time of sharing. The vulnerability emphasizes Coach Ladouceur’s philosophy that the football program is about more than just winning.

## SCENE TO REVIEW

*Commitment Cards (00:02:49–00:09:43, Chapter 1)*

Coach Ladouceur says, “This program is a lot of things. It’s not just a football team or a win streak machine. It’s a family, a brotherhood, which is based in love. Put simply, love means you can count on me in good times and in bad.”

- How would you describe Coach Ladouceur’s coaching philosophy? Why do you think he puts a constant emphasis on values such as commitment, dedication, unity and love?
- What are your thoughts on the Spartans’ tradition of commitment cards? How does this practice promote teamwork? Have you ever done something similar in your

goal setting?

- In your own words, describe “perfect effort.” Why does teamwork stretch us and demand more of us as individuals? How does doing our best individually help the team?
- Mickey Ryan tells the scout that Chris will be “the whole team” next year when the talented seniors are gone. How does this type of mentality undermine teamwork?
- Compare and contrast the attitudes, actions, behaviors and play of the seniors (T.K. and Cam) with the juniors (Chris, Tayshon, Danny). What observations do you make?

Read Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 27:17; and 1 Corinthians 10:31 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do Psalm 37:5 and Proverbs 27:17 say about the importance of values such as teamwork and commitment? Are these verses an encouragement to you? If so, how?
- How does 1 Corinthians 10:31 prompt us to examine our motives? Why is it important to do everything – even simple tasks such as eating and drinking – for “the glory of God”?

When the team reconvenes for spring practice, the friction and tension among the players are palpable. Given the newfound uncertainty surrounding Coach Ladouceur’s medical leave and the self-centered pursuits of players on the squad, the lack of teamwork and dedication is not surprising.





- For the first scene, discuss the changes that occur in the players during the course of their visit at the hospital. How does the experience impact them? Be specific if possible.

One of the veterans tells Tayshon and Arturo (played by Matthew Frias) that he would go back to the warzone if the doctors and nurses could put him back together. When Tayshon, full of skepticism and incredulity, asks why, the veteran answers that the guy next to you matters.

- How does the veteran's compelling narrative of brotherhood, unity and selflessness speak to Tayshon in particular and the team's situation in general?
- The team meeting prior to the Long Beach Poly game is the first time these players share their emotions freely. What does Chris reveal about his father and the touchdown record?
- After Chris dives into the end zone, Coach Ladouceur threatens to bench him and says, "We are not a celebrating team." What do you think he means by this?
- The game against Long Beach Poly proves to be grueling in many ways. How does the Spartans' newfound respect for teamwork sustain them in these difficult conditions?
- How does Tayshon's post-game interview demonstrate the constant temptation to accept personal glory rather than to deflect accolade and promote the team?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- According to Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12, why are two better than one? How have you experienced the truth of this passage in your life?
- How do the attributes of love as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 relate to and support teamwork? Why is love an essential part of building relationships with others?

As you conclude this theme discussion, take some time to look at Philippians 3:13–14; 2 Timothy 2:15; and 2 Timothy 4:7, and revisit the Guiding Scripture of Proverbs 27:17 (see Scriptures Referenced for all verses listed). Based on these verses and any others you might know related to the topic, what does the Bible say about teamwork, commitment, unity and giving the "perfect effort"? What areas of your life would be improved by being open and willing to working with others? Also, consider your role in the body of Christ. What part(s) do you play? How does your role – and the gifts, talents and abilities that the LORD has given you – work with and rely on others' roles to accomplish more than you ever could on your own?



## SCENES TO REVIEW

*A Word of Advice (00:14:39–00:15:56, Chapter 3)*

*A Team Divided (00:36:01–00:37:27, Chapter 8)*

- What do you think of T.K.'s "pep talk"? Do you agree with his assessment – that there are too many "big heads" and people just wanting to wear the jersey? Why or why not?
- In speaking to Chris and Danny, T.K. offers an honest appraisal of the team's issues. Do you have someone in your life who lovingly points you toward accountability?
- In the second scene, how is Tayshon's attitude indicative of the current and pervasive attitude among the players? Why would Tayshon believe that "team means nothing"?
- Articulate the difference between selfish, personal gain (as exhibited by Tayshon) and striving for a perfect effort as an individual that helps the team achieve greatness.

Take time to read Philippians 2:1–4 and James 3:14–16 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- Philippians 2:1–4 tells us to exercise humility in valuing others more than ourselves as well as to look to others' interests. What are some ways to practice this message?
- What does James 3:14–16 say about the root and source of "bitter envy" and "selfish ambition"? How does this verse caution us to be mindful of the heart's intentions?

In an effort to re-establish the importance of teamwork, the coaches arrange for the squad to help at the local veterans' rehabilitation center. The day presents startling and humbling opportunities for the players to better evaluate their dedication to the team and to see each other as brothers rather than competition. With the looming Long Beach Poly game next on the docket, the day's service at the VA hospital comes none too soon for a team that needs to start acting like one.

## SCENES TO REVIEW

*Veterans' Hospital (00:59:41–01:06:17, Chapter 12)*

*Long Beach Poly (01:08:08–01:31:35, Chapter 15)*

## THEME TWO: ADVERSITY

Guiding Scripture: John 16:33 (NLT): "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

### SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV): Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
- Proverbs 31:10–12 (NIV): A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.
- Luke 6:38 (NIV): "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
- John 14:27 (NIV): "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
- John 16:33 (NLT): "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."
- Romans 5:3–5 (NLT): We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
- Romans 8:18 (NLT): Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.
- Romans 12:15 (NIV): Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

- 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 (NIV): We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT): Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.
- Ephesians 4:32 (NIV): Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- Philippians 4:12–13 (NIV): I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.
- 1 Peter 5:10 (NLT): In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.
- James 1:2–4 (NIV): Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
- 1 John 4:19 (NIV): We love because he first loved us.

### SCENES TO REVIEW

- Luke 6:38 (00:17:52–00:22:37, Chapter 4)
- Heart Attack (00:22:58–00:27:23, Chapter 5)
- Sacrificial Love (00:45:20–00:47:11, Chapter 10)
- Tragedy (00:37:29–00:45:19, Chapter 8)

### THEME INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Following their unparalleled success with the streak, the Spartans face a season of adversity that shakes the program, school and surrounding community to the core. Cam continues to wrestle with despair and loneliness due to the death of his father and his mother's rapidly declining health, Coach Ladouceur suffers a near-fatal heart attack and the beloved T.K. is murdered.

Life has no pain-free guarantee. In fact, according to the Guiding Scripture for this theme discussion, Jesus Himself tells us, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NLT). Life is hard. Adversity threatens, often barging in unannounced and unwelcome. Pain and tragedy regularly take up residence in our lives. And, try as we might, there is no way to sugarcoat the reality of grief and suffering. There is, however, an abiding and eternal promise in Christ, and He vows to grant us peace in the midst of devastating storms.



## SCENE TO REVIEW

*Luke 6:38 (00:17:52–00:22:37, Chapter 4)*

- What do you think of the young men’s interpretations of Luke 6:38 (see Scriptures Referenced) in the classroom discussion? What are your thoughts on this Bible verse?
- Cam clings to the truth of Scripture to find meaning and comfort in his suffering, but he struggles with doubt and frustration. How does Coach Ladouceur support him?
- Because of a series of distressing events, Cam questions God’s love for him. Have you ever been in the throes of despair and wrestled with the same questions? What happened?
- If you know someone who is currently suffering or facing adversity, what are some ways that you can show God’s love and compassion to him and meet him in his grief?

Read Proverbs 3:5–6; Romans 8:18; 12:15; and 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does Proverbs 3:5–6 relate to Cam’s situation? How does this passage encourage us to look to the LORD in all things, including (and especially) the difficult seasons of life?
- Romans 12:15 gives a straightforward guide for meeting people in their need. Why do we often feel compelled to fix a situation rather than enter into someone else’s grief?
- What do Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 tell us about adversity? What benefit does adversity have in our lives? How have you personally grown from facing challenges?

During the off-season, Coach Ladouceur suffers a heart attack due to the stress and schedule of his job; the relentless pressure of the streak; and a previously undisclosed smoking habit. Understandably, the experience sends him into a bout of soul-searching, and he feels like a hypocrite, recognizing that he has not embodied integrity and commitment – the very traits he tries to instill in his players. In this case, adversity helps usher in long-awaited and necessary change.

## SCENES TO REVIEW

*Heart Attack (00:22:58–00:27:23, Chapter 5)*

*Sacrificial Love (00:45:20–00:47:11, Chapter 10)*

- How does each of the Ladouceur family members respond to the heart attack? What do you think prompts the various responses based on the scene and what you know of the story?
- What does the coach realize about himself and how does it impact him? What does he tell Bev? How does she help him to see the situation as a blessing and an opportunity?
- Bev faces her own form of adversity in her marriage to Coach Ladouceur. How would you describe Bev’s adversity based on the second scene (Sacrificial Love)?
- In both scenes, Bev tells her husband that people – like his father and Danny – want to know him. Why does Coach Ladouceur come across as unknowable and distant?
- What has Bev sacrificed to support her husband in his coaching (which is also his ministry)? How do we determine which sacrifices are valid and which are not?

Read Proverbs 31:10–12; 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Ephesians 4:32 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In what ways does Bev embody the characteristics of the wife described in Proverbs 31:10–12? How does her sacrificial love and support enable the coach to do his work?
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us that Jesus’ grace is sufficient. What does this mean to you? Have you experienced His grace in your life? If so, what were the circumstances?
- How does Ephesians 4:32 offer a guideline for living in relationship with one another? In times of adversity, how is the message of this verse particularly relevant?

One of the hardest – if not the hardest – moments in the film is T.K.’s death. To lose such a vibrant, honorable and faithful young man, especially to such a senseless act, is beyond heartbreaking. T.K.’s death rocks his family, friends, teammates, his school, his future school and more. His absence is substantial. As Coach Ladouceur points out during the eulogy at T.K.’s funeral, what we know for sure is that T.K. was a wonderful young man of faith and that his family did an amazing job.

## SCENE TO REVIEW

*Tragedy (00:37:29–00:45:19, Chapter 8)*

- How would you describe T.K.’s character and personality? What is T.K. doing when he is murdered? How does that speak to his commitment to live beyond himself?
- What do you think of Coach Ladouceur’s eulogy? How do his direct, yet kind and compassionate, words help bring comfort to an overwhelmingly distressing situation?
- Coach Ladouceur says that we shouldn’t question God’s sovereignty, yet he admits to being lost. Can we be honest with God about confusion and doubt? Why or why not?



- In this type of senseless violence, destruction and loss, how can believers find peace and take steps toward healing? Who or what helps us to be conquerors and overcomers?

Read John 14:27; Philippians 4:12–13; and 1 Peter 5:10 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- John 14:27 captures the very words of Jesus. What does He tell us about peace? How is His peace (divine, all-sufficient, all-surpassing) better than any other kind?
- The last part of the Philippians passage reads, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Why is this reminder particularly important when facing adversity?
- What promises are found in 1 Peter 5:10? How do these promises offer encouragement during a season of suffering or pain?

Before concluding this theme discussion, read Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4; and 1 John 4:19 (see Scriptures Referenced). Spend time delving into the heart of the first two passages – Romans and James – and be open to what the Holy Spirit wants to teach you about adversity and suffering. This is not an easy theme, to be sure, but it is an important one, and, as Coach Ladouceur puts it, the most impressionable life lessons are produced by difficulty and challenges. What kind of adversity are you facing? Armed with the Word of God, what steps will you take to be an overcomer? And remember that you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength!

- Jeremiah 9:23 (NIV): This is what the LORD says: “Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches.”
- Matthew 23:12 (NLT): But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.
- John 3:30 (NIV): “He must become greater; I must become less.”
- Romans 12:2 (NIV): Do not conform 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.
- Romans 12:10 (NIV): Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.
- Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV): But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- Colossians 3:12 (NLT): Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
- 1 Peter 5:6 (NLT): So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.
- James 4:6 (NLT): And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

## THEME THREE: HUMILITY

Guiding Scripture: Matthew 23:12 (NLT): But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

### SCENES TO REVIEW

- Brothers for Life (00:27:24–00:31:50, Chapter 6)
- Season Opener (00:47:11–00:56:33, Chapter 10)
- A Lack of Humility (01:33:24–01:35:51, Chapter 19)
- Victory Formation (01:42:59–01:49:23, Chapter 21)

### SCRIPTURES REFERENCED

- 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV): But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”
- Psalm 147:6 (NLT): The LORD supports the humble, but he brings the wicked down into the dust.
- Proverbs 4:23 (NIV): Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
- Proverbs 18:12 (NIV): Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

## THEME INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Throughout the film, Coach Ladouceur maintains that winning is doable, but teaching his players to become dependable men of character is the real challenge. In Matthew 23:12, which is the Guiding Scripture for this theme discussion, Jesus says, “But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (NLT). Spend some time thinking about Jesus’ words and how they influence the way Coach Ladouceur instructs his team. Consider, too, the implications







that Jesus' message of character and humility has for your life.

T.K. and Cam share a deep friendship. But, just as T.K.'s future is coming together, Cam feels stuck with hardship upon hardship and debilitating setbacks. Instead of letting Cam suffer alone, T.K. pursues his longtime friend. In loving Cam so unconditionally, T.K. demonstrates true character, exemplifying what it means to choose humility and to support a friend in a truly difficult season.

## SCENE TO REVIEW

*Brothers for Life (00:27:24–00:31:50, Chapter 6)*

- What does this scene say about T.K.'s character that he would suspend the celebration of his full-ride athletic scholarship to follow up with a friend who is struggling?
- T.K. tells Cam that the jersey is a dream come true and an answer to prayer. How does T.K.'s optimism reflect the joy that accompanies and informs his faith and life?
- Can you relate to either T.K.'s or Cam's experience? Have you ever pursued a friend despite being pushed away? Have you ever been on the receiving end of compassion?
- Using your own words, define humility. What traits are common among people who exhibit humility? Who would you consider to be a role model in terms of humility?

Take a moment to look over Jeremiah 9:23 and Romans 12:10 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What is the message of Jeremiah 9:23? How does the verse correspond to this scene and the way that T.K. looks beyond his talents and "riches" to see a need and meet it?

- What does it mean to "be devoted to one another in love" and to honor others above ourselves (Romans 12:10)? Can humility exist without love? Why or why not?

During the team's preparation for the season opener against Bellevue, it becomes apparent that frustration, ego and tragedy (Coach Ladouceur's heart attack and cautious recovery; T.K.'s death) continue to stifle personal motivation and performance as well as the team's ability to work together. The squad lost some excellent talent with the graduating seniors' departures, and the team bears the significant burden of continuing the winning streak. Under the weight of so much pressure and unwillingness to look to each other for support, the players are in for a shock.

## SCENE TO REVIEW

*Season Opener (00:47:11–00:56:33, Chapter 10)*

- What do you notice about the team's physical preparation? Are they completing drills? Stretching their abilities? Making a perfect effort? Why or why not?
- How does the team's lack of humility contribute to its overall failure of a performance during the game? How is the on-field bickering representative of the greater issue?

In the locker room after the loss, Coach Eidson tells the inconsolable players: "Don't let a game define who you are. Let the way you live your lives do that."

- How does his comment encourage the players to examine their motives as well as the way their perspectives are shaped off the field? What else is Coach Eidson saying?

Coach Ladouceur adds, "I truly believe that life's most impressionable lessons are ones where something bad happens to you or something challenging confronts you ... After today, you're all going to find out a lot about

yourselves. You know something? We're all going to find out what this team is made of."

- Why are challenging or difficult situations the most impressionable, as Coach Ladouceur says? How do these kinds of hard lessons contribute to the development of humility?
- Can you point to a time in your life in which failure gave you the opportunity to grow and learn? Why are these kinds of experiences important to our spiritual humility as well?

Read Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 18:12 and James 4:6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do Proverbs 4:23 and 18:12 have to say about the heart? About humility? Why should we guard our hearts and why is a haughty spirit harmful?
- James 4:6 tells us, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." How does this verse encourage us to pursue righteousness and humility?
- How has God modeled humility for us through Jesus Christ?

Through the course of the film, Mickey maintains a controlling, combative and dominant posture toward his talented son, Chris, especially where the California Career Touchdown record is concerned. Mickey's attitude reeks of self-centered gain and celebrity, while Chris and his teammates, after a tumultuous season, have finally established a sense of unity and a greater understanding of humility. When the two worldviews collide, Mickey may not like the results.

## SCENES TO REVIEW

*A Lack of Humility (01:33:24–01:35:51, Chapter 19)*

*Victory Formation (01:42:59–01:49:23, Chapter 21)*

- Why does Coach Ladouceur encourage Mickey to read Chris' thesis on Matthew 23:12 (see Scriptures Referenced)? List any reason that comes to mind.
- What is Mickey's definition of success? Of being exalted? How has Mickey's obsession with the record affected Chris' attitude toward it throughout the film?
- In the second scene, how would you explain the disparity between Mickey's self-centered approach to the game and the team's demonstration of humility in victory formation?
- What does it mean to "stand tall"? How do the Spartans stand tall at the end of the game? In this particular case, how is humility essential to the act of standing tall?

Read Galatians 5:22–23; Colossians 3:12; and 1 Peter 5:6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- List all of the character traits found in Galatians 5:22–23 and Colossians 3:12. What do you notice about these particular traits? Are they present and thriving in your life?
- According to 1 Peter 5:6, what happens when we humble ourselves "under the mighty power of God"? Why is humility such a venerated trait?

In concluding this theme discussion, read 1 Samuel



16:7; Psalm 147:6; John 3:30 and Romans 12:2 (see Scriptures Referenced), and consider what these verses have to say about the condition of the heart as well as the practice of humility. Is there an area of your life that could use a dose of humility? Or perhaps you're facing a challenging situation in which you need to humbly, but boldly, assert yourself in order to stand for what is right. Take some time to reflect on true humility as found in the LORD Jesus Christ. With Jesus as our guide and example, we can be confident that we will grow in character and humility as we walk with and pursue Him.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

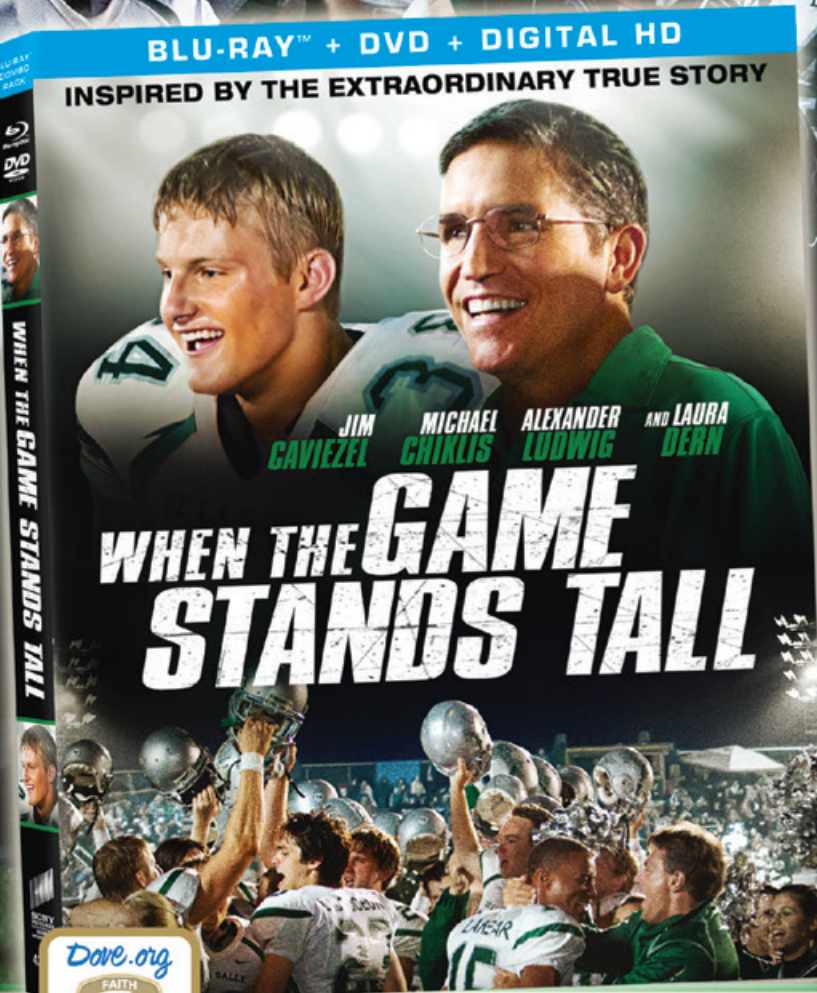
- Why are sports such excellent vehicles for teaching life values? What kinds of values have you learned through a sports experience?
- Even though this film features a football team, how do the underlying principles apply to any group or team that works together toward a common goal?
- What do you think of the connection between Coach Ladouceur and his son, Danny? Does having two different relationships (father-son and coach-player) complicate things?
- What scene or line of dialogue most stands out to you? Why?
- With which character do you most identify? Why?

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