

In Theaters **AUGUST 22**

WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL

It's not how hard you fall,
it's how you get back up.



STAND TALL STUDENT ACTION KIT

7 Days of Devotion And Action

Created and Developed by **WORLD VISION** and **THE YOUTH CARTEL**



INTRODUCTION

Inspired by the extraordinary true story, **WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL** tells the story of the De La Salle Spartans' unprecedented 151-game winning streak, the longest of any team in American sports history. Yet all along the way—as he builds a seemingly invincible, record-setting national powerhouse—coach Bob Ladouceur emphasizes to his young men the value of purpose and significance over the glory of titles and streaks. But when real-life adversity leaves the team reeling, the Spartans must decide if the sacrifice, commitment, and teamwork they have always trusted in can rebuild what is now disintegrating around them. Helping his players understand it's only a football game, Coach Lad knows his team is at its best only when the game stands tall.

Use this devotional guide as an inspiration for action. The Bible encourages us to not just be hearers of the Word, but doers (James 1:22). Don't just read this devotional and check it off your list—let the truths found in the Bible move you to compassionate action! The “Stand Tall” section at the end of each day offers some practices and action steps to take, so choose one and live it out!

SPOILER ALERT!

This may contain information related to the plot of **WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL** and is for use by group and individuals as a companion to the film after viewing it.

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DAY 1: STAND TALL WITH ENDURANCE

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. (1 Corinthians. 9:24-27a)

Blistering heat. Enormous opponents. Mounting tension and pressure to succeed. Stress, pain, exhaustion. For the De La Salle Spartans, the game against Long Beach Poly must have felt like a journey through the valley of the shadow of death. Imagine looking through sweat-stained eyes, your skin burning from the sun, your mind telling you that you're clearly outmatched; yet the Spartans stayed in the game and kept making plays. Instead of giving up, they persisted and remained in the game.

When God's people arrived at the Promised Land, the current inhabitants were hostile and powerful foes. Like the experience of the De La Salle Spartans, the opposition before them appeared overwhelming. God gave this reminder to Joshua: "This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). The journey before them wasn't easy—there would be battles and wars and exile. But with patience and endurance, the Israelites eventually found themselves living in the fruitful land God had promised them.

Both Psalm 118 and 136 have a refrain that is repeated in nearly every verse: "His faithful love endures forever." God's love always persists and endures. Even when it feels like God may have given up on us, God always comes through. This enduring love empowers God's followers to overcome and patiently endure any opposition before them. This endurance isn't easy, and

salvation doesn't always arrive immediately; but the discipline of endurance is key for a follower of Jesus. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians to "run with purpose in every step." Endure, overcome, and run with purpose today!

QUESTIONS:

- Where do you go to find strength when you are tired and weak? How does God strengthen you in difficult times?
- When the team loses the winning streak in their first game into the season, the players are heartbroken. Put yourself in their shoes—how would you respond to such a loss? What would you tell those players in the locker room after they lost the game?

STAND TALL:

- **Run for Water.** Even if you wouldn't consider yourself an athlete, join Team World Vision and run in a race to bring clean water, sanitation, and hygiene to communities in Africa. Check out team.worldvision.org.
- **Help Others Stay Energized.** Ask a teacher or coach at school for their Starbucks® drink preference. Then get it for them one day this week.

DAY TWO: STAND TALL WITH AUTHENTICITY

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Coach Ladouceur has his Spartans players share their emotions with their teammates before a big game. Team captains open up about their fears, their dreams, their goals. There is a deep sense of camaraderie and trust. At the beginning of the film, when the winning streak is still alive, none of the juniors open up and share. Perhaps they're too prideful or too insecure, but they refuse to trust others with their feelings. It's only the ups and downs of a difficult season that allows them to share openly before the final game of their senior year season.

The apostle Paul uses an image of a human body to describe Christian unity (which we'll explore tomorrow). But notice Paul's instruction about what makes this body grow and mature: speaking the truth in love. Vulnerability and honesty matter. Jesus had plenty of harsh things to say about hypocrisy and performing religious acts out of false motives. We can, and should, be open and honest about both our beauty and brokenness. We shouldn't feel the need to cover up and hide our flaws out of fear or condemnation, because there's no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1).

Yet when we embrace authenticity and honesty without the purpose of building up the body of Christ, we end up simply reveling in our brokenness. True Jesus-y authenticity isn't found in the unedited sharing of my emotions with a this-is-just-who-I-am-so-deal-with-it attitude. Worshiping authenticity

in and of itself doesn't lead closer to Jesus; it just leads to being more real about my inadequacy.

Healthy authenticity always happens in community and is grounded in love. We share the truth in love with others in order to help them be more like Christ. Be real. Be yourself. Share your emotions. Speak the truth in love!

QUESTIONS:

- What obstacles or fears prevent people from opening up with each other?
- How would living authentically change your relationships with your family? Your friends? Your work or school peers?

STAND TALL:

- **Go 30 Hours Without Food.** Use your voice to tell the world that it's not OK that 18,000 children are dying from food related causes each day. Find out how you can make a difference at famineforone.org.
- **Get Real with Others.** We all need a safe place to just be ourselves. If you aren't part of a small group through a church or ministry, find a community group to join this week at your church or parish.

DAY THREE: STAND TALL WITH UNITY

In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:22-27)

In a moment of authenticity with his teammates, one of the Spartans players acknowledges that while he's been on the bench for his varsity years at De La Salle, he doesn't mind; he's just grateful to be part of the team. So it's a significant moment in his football career when he goes into the game against Long Beach Poly. He's in the game for only two plays. In those plays, he makes a tackle and block that gives his team a big advantage, ultimately moving them in a trajectory to win them the game.

Another significant moment for a player's career happens in the final game for Chris Ryan, the football star dealing with pressure from his father to break the state scoring record. In the last game of his high school career, Chris makes a difficult decision about the final play to win the game, and tells his teammates, "It's not about the record. It's about the team."

It's about the team. For the apostle Paul, doing significant things for Jesus was never about individual achievements—it's all about the body of Christ working together in unity, using individual gifts for the greater good. If one

member of the body experiences pain or trials, the others don't ignore their plight. They suffer with that person. If one member is particularly honored and blessed, the others don't become jealous or judgmental. They rejoice and celebrate with thanksgiving.

Begin to see your world through the lens of community. Who is part of your team, your community of Jesus followers? How are you each using your gifts to build each other up? Who do you need to suffer with? Rejoice with?

QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever been a part of a team or a community of people trying to achieve a certain goal? What made that team successful or not?
- How did the Spartans live out 1 Corinthians 12 on the field during the Long Beach Poly game? What would "suffering with one another" look like in your family or small group? What about celebrating when others are honored?

STAND TALL:

- **Build Kits for Others.** Organize a group of people—youth group, small group, sports team, family, etc.—and host a World Vision Kit Assembling event to build small life-changing kits for people in need. Check out kits.worldvision.org.
- **Solidarity with People in Poverty.** Sleep on the floor for a week. Consider how life might have a different focus if this were your weekly routine. Many people around the world don't have the comfort of a bed, let alone running water or a roof over their head.

DAY FOUR: STAND TALL WITH JUSTICE

No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

When football star Terrance Kelly is pointlessly gunned down after winning a street basketball game, his best friend, Cam Colvin, wonders if he has been cursed. Cam's own parents died from disease, leaving him as the caretaker of his younger brother and broken by all the pain and injustice around him. He cries out to God for justice, wondering why God is allowing all this pain to happen around him. Coach Ladouceur comes alongside Cam in his grief without pat answers; he simply offers his presence and comfort.

To act justly—to do what is right—requires presence and action. In fact, there is a direct connection between our worship of God and our pursuit of justice in our world. Mark Labberton writes this:

According to the narrative of Scripture, the very heart of how we show and distinguish true worship from false worship is apparent in how we respond to the poor, the oppressed, the neglected, and the forgotten. As of now, I do not see this theme troubling the waters of worship in the American church. But justice and mercy are not add-ons to worship, nor are they the consequences of worship. Justice and mercy are intrinsic to God and therefore intrinsic to the worship of God. (The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice, emphasis mine)

We are often overwhelmed by the lack of justice in our world to the point of inaction. What difference could I possibly make with so much seemingly random violence and pain? Yet our pursuit of justice is honoring to God. We

pursue justice in our world not out of obligation or religious duty. We pursue justice because people who bear the image of God are not yet experiencing shalom, the heavenly peace of God where all is right and balanced in our world. The victims of injustice are not strangers or statistics. They are our family and God's beloved, and we should be proactive to defend our family when injustice occurs. Stand for justice. You'll be joining in the history of worshipers.

QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever felt like Cam, where a series of terrible circumstances kept coming and piling up on you? How did you cope with it?
- How can acts of justice be worshipful to God? How could some acts of justice not be motivated by worship?

STAND TALL:

- **Be an Advocate.** Anyone can be an advocate. It's as simple as telling your friends about a justice issue that you are passionate about. Or, go a step further and urge your lawmakers to take action. Write them a letter or email about a particular justice issue that needs addressing in your community.
- **End Bullying.** Spread some justice by choosing to stand up for someone who is being made fun of or picked on, and choose not to make fun of anyone this week.

DAY FIVE: STAND TALL WITH HUMILITY

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Philippians 2:1-4)

After his death, James 4:10 is inscribed on Terrance Kelly's tombstone: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor." Later, football star Chris Ryan writes a thesis paper on Matthew 23:12: "But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Both players have been impacted by the humility of Coach Ladouceur, who finds the motivation for humility from his faith in Jesus Christ.

Trying to pursue humility in and of itself simply doesn't work. When we pursue humility, we begin to focus more and more on ourselves, on trying really hard to be humble, or being perceived as humble. This, ironically, only leads to arrogance and pride. Instead, we're to pursue God and the things of God for our lives, and this in turn will transform us into increasingly humble people. We see these instructions in Micah 6:8, that we walk humbly with God, allowing God's story to fully shape our story. When our eyes are more drawn to God and not ourselves, our hearts begin to soften and humility naturally seeps in.

Humility comes from a realistic view of oneself in light of the grace given us in Christ. The word humility originates from the Latin "humus," meaning "earth" or "dirt." Humility is knowing and embracing the reality that we are dust and everything we have is a good gift from God. The winning streak for

the Spartans? A gift. The athletic talents and abilities of the players? Gifts. Opportunities for college scholarships and coaching positions? Gifts. Friends and family who love you? All gifts. Walking humbly views everything around us as a gift, drawing our hearts back to the Giver of those gifts in gratitude and thanks.

QUESTIONS:

- In the film, who were the characters that showed pride? Who were the characters that showed humility? How can you tell the difference?
- Describe the difference between pride and confidence and the difference between insecurity and humility. How can you be confident without being prideful?

STAND TALL:

- **30 Hour Famine.** Imagine the awesome audacity of your youth group going 30 hours without food so that others don't have to! With World Vision's 30 Hour Famine, you will grow closer to Christ while your group learns about global hunger and what you can do to make a difference. Find out more at 30hourfamine.org.
- **Love the Unlovable.** There are certain people who throw others under the bus, seem to be unaware of others' feelings, or simply act like jerks. We all know someone like this who has tested our patience. This week, go out of your way to be a good friend to that person; sit by him at lunch, send her an encouraging text message, or just simply talk to them.
- **Memorize Philippians 2.** Much of this passage is about the posture of humility that Jesus lived perfectly. Commit these verses to heart and allow them to shape your mindset and actions.

DAY SIX: STAND TALL WITH GRACE

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Coach Ladouceur has a repeated motto throughout *When the Game Stands Tall*—he doesn't ask for a perfect performance during a game or practice; but he always asks for perfect effort. He's not a perfectionist, and he allows for mistakes to be made. But he doesn't allow for laziness or lack of discipline; his players must give an effort that can help the team win games. Theologian Dallas Willard says something similar: "Grace is not opposed to effort, it's opposed to earning. Effort is action, earning is attitude. And you can't mix God's action with you with the idea that 'I'm earning this.'" In Christian circles, the idea of making a perfect effort can sound a lot like "works salvation," or doing good things in order to earn God's favor. While we can't earn God's favor—He gives it freely to us through Christ—this doesn't mean we simply sit back and bask in His grace.

Imagine this: you have been paralyzed from the waist down and cannot walk. One day, you hear of a revolutionary treatment, a radical new surgery and medicine that brings dead nerves and limbs back to life. You undergo the surgery, and upon waking from your medicated sleep, you find you have feeling restored in your legs. You can wiggle your toes, you can bend your knees, you can stand up and walk and run and skip and frolic. So, you sit down in a wheelchair in your room and admire your new legs. You smile at them, and thank the doctors who gave you new strength. But you remain sitting. When people happen to come by your room, you're careful to tell

them about how your legs were healed. "Check out my new awesome legs" you say. "They're pretty great." But if you never get out of your chair and use them, if you never run or hike or dance, if you just remain sitting on your behind, then you're missing out on the gift.

God has lavished grace upon you in Christ. When we are saved by grace, we are not simply saved so that we can sit around and attend church services until we die and go to heaven. Jesus saved us so we can do the good things He planned for us. Let's make the effort to run and skip and jump with Jesus in our world.

QUESTIONS:

- How do you think Coach Ladouceur would define success for himself? For his team? How would you define success for your own life? What are your own goals for the next month? The next year?
- What is the difference between earning something for God, and making an effort to follow God?

STAND TALL:

- **Give a Gift.** Instead of receiving gifts for your birthday, consider World Vision's Gift Catalog, inviting friends and family to give their gifts to children in need all over the world. Go to mygiftcatalog.worldvision.org.
- **Radical Forgiveness.** Think: Is there someone who hurt me that I've never forgiven? Maybe they hurt you a week, a month, or years ago. This week, pray for that person and ask God for the strength to forgive them.

DAY SEVEN: STAND TALL WITH LOVE

This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. (1 John 4:10-11)

At the beginning of the film, the pressure to keep the winning streak alive is on everyone’s mind. The press is asking questions, the players are excited about their decade-plus of championships, and the community loves the team. But Coach Ladouceur says, “It’s not about the streak. It’s about being a family, about love.” He goes on, “Family isn’t just blood relatives. It’s anyone who loves you unconditionally.” For the coach, love is the ultimate success. It didn’t matter if the players on the team won or lost. What mattered was their love for themselves and one another.

Sometimes in Christianity we can mistake “love” for “being nice.” The word nice is defined as being polite, pleasant, or agreeable. Being nice means smiling at the grocery store checkout clerk. It means saying “please” and “thank you.” It means “not being a jerk.” That’s what Christians are supposed to do, right? But on a deeper level, “being nice” is more concerned with appearance and conforming than genuine heart change. You can be nice to people on the outside, but never really care about them.

Fact: The Bible never mentions the word nice. Not once (well, some translations use it once or twice in the Old Testament, but never in a positive way). Jesus never gives a commandment to be nice. But He does command us to love. Being nice only goes so far. It looks good on the outside, but it doesn’t necessarily affect our hearts. We’re often nice to others merely to prevent being awkward, getting in trouble, or making someone else feel bad.

God’s definition for love is through the sacrificial action of Jesus Christ on the cross. More than an emotion or a sense of “doing the right thing,” true love is sacrificial action for the sake of others. What sacrificial action can you take for others this week? Stand Tall in love!

QUESTIONS:

- Why do we tend to put successful people on pedestals? Have you ever felt the desire to be famous or successful, like the team with the winning streak?
- What is the difference between unconditional and conditional love—how can you tell the difference?

STAND TALL:

- **Childhood Lost.** Learn the truth about child labor and slavery. When you sign up your group for World Vision’s Childhood Lost, you will make a real impact in the lives of kids in Bangladesh. World Vision provides the resources needed to make this a transformative event happen. Check out Childhoodlost.org.
- **Serve Your Family.** If you have siblings, do their chores for them this week without complaining or wanting anything in return. If you don’t have siblings, ask your parents what extra chores you could do around the house to help take a load off them.
- **Love With Words.** Handwrite a letter of encouragement to someone in your life who is struggling with a hopeless or depressing situation. Don’t text or email—write it down on paper and give it to them.



 THE YOUTH CARTEL

JIM CAVIEZEL

MICHAEL CHIKLIS

ALEXANDER LUDWIG

AND LAURA DERN

TRISTAR PICTURES PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH AFFIRM FILMS A MANDALAY SPORTS MEDIA PRODUCTION A THOMAS CARTER FILM "WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL"
JIM CAVIEZEL MICHAEL CHIKLIS ALEXANDER LUDWIG CLANCY BROWN AND LAURA DERN MUSIC BY JOHN PAESANO PRODUCERS CATHY SCHULMAN DAVID TICE THOMAS CARTER
PRODUCED BY DAVID ZELON BASED ON THE BOOK BY NEIL HAYES STORY BY SCOTT MARSHALL SMITH AND DAVID ZELON SCREENPLAY BY SCOTT MARSHALL SMITH DIRECTED BY THOMAS CARTER

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Special advance shows Thursday, August 21 in select locations.