

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

SUMMARY

Bottom line.

We need to guard our hearts and protect them from sin so that we will not be taken out of the game.

Objectives.

For students to:

- Discover the story of Samson and Delilah
- Identify areas in their lives where they need to be “on defense”

Key Passage

Judges 16:4-21

Memory Verse.

Philippians 3:14

Summary.

There's a saying in sports: offense doesn't win championships, defense does. As much as fans love a slam dunk and a clutch three pointer, it's the steals, the stiffs, the blocks, the tenacious defense that wins titles in basketball. Likewise, Christians need to be on the defensive. The story of Samson, who let his guard down and gave away the secret of his strength, reminds us that we need to guard our hearts and protect them from sin so that we will not be taken out of the game.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

SKIT

The Shot Blocker
By John Cospers

Cast breakdown: 2M, 1F
Run time: 5 minutes
Themes: Guarding your heart, resisting temptation

CHARACTERS

Will- A restaurant manager
Marty- A former basketball player
Janine- A customer

A garbage can is at center. Will and Marty enter from stage left in shirts and ties or some other outfit that looks like a restaurant uniform.

WILL: Okay, Marty, we'll start you off out here. You're the dining room attendant, so whatever the customers need, be it refills, napkins, ketchup, whatever, feel free to give them a hand.

MARTY: I think I can manage that.

WILL: We're all excited to have you here. I was a big fan of yours when you were at State College.

MARTY: Oh yeah?

WILL: Big time! How many blocked shots did you average a game? Five or six?

MARTY: Ten or eleven!

WILL: Man, that's awesome!

MARTY: Thanks, boss, but I'm not a ball player any more. I'm here to earn a living and serve your customers.

WILL: Have fun, buddy. I know you will.

Will exits stage left. Marty stands by the garbage can. Janine enters stage right, sipping a coke. She walks up to the garbage.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

SKIT

MARTY: Everything okay today, ma'am?

JANINE: Just fine, thank you.

Janine reaches to throw her cup away. Marty swats the cup away hard. He gets in her face and begins screaming.

MARTY: YEAH! TAKE THAT! WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT? NOT IN MY HOUSE! YEAH! WOOO!

JANINE: What in the world was that?

MARTY: *(suddenly calm again)* I'm sorry, ma'am. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that!

JANINE: I was just trying to throw away my cup!

MARTY: I know, and I'm so sorry. You see, I used to be a basketball player, and when I saw you going for the basket, I thought you were shooting hoops, and I just had to stop you.

JANINE: Whatever, man. Can I just throw my cup away?

MARTY: Yes! Please, by all means.

Janine picks up the cup.

JANINE: Okay then.

MARTY: I'm really sorry about that, I--

Marty blocks her shot again, screaming at her.

MARTY: OH! YEAH! GET THAT THING OUTTA MY YARD! NOT IN MY HOUSE, NOT TODAY, SISTER! WOOOO!

JANINE: Are you insane? You did it again?

MARTY: Oh, man, I am so sorry about that.

JANINE: Do you not want me to throw this cup away?

MARTY: No, ma'am, that's not it. It's just, this is all I know is shot blocking. I'm not used to anything else.

JANINE: Do you do this at home?

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

SKIT

MARTY: No, not always. Sometimes I throw a body.

JANINE: A body?

MARTY: Thanksgiving last year, my Uncle Mort tried to throw away his paper plate and I bumped him across the kitchen table. Broke his hip in three places.

JANINE: That's awful.

MARTY: Tell me about it! I didn't get a birthday card this year.

Janine picks up her cup.

JANINE: Would you rather throw this away for me?

MARTY: No, no, this is my new job. I need to learn to let people do this. Please, be my guest.

JANINE: You sure?

MARTY: The lane is open.

JANINE: Thank you.

Janine tries again. Marty blocks her.

MARTY: OOOOOH! STUFFED AGAIN! YOU CAN'T SCORE ON ME! NOT ON MY HOOP!

JANINE: *(yells)* Is there a manager in here?

Will enters, carrying a cup of coffee.

WILL: Yes, ma'am? Something the matter?

JANINE: I'll say there is! This nut job keeps blocking me every time I try to throw away my trash.

WILL: I'm terribly sorry, ma'am. Can I get you a free milkshake or something?

JANINE: No, that's okay. I think I'll just go to McDonald's next time.

Janine exits.



ICE BREAKER

What's more exciting - a half court basket, a slam dunk, or a nasty blocked shot?

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

OBJECT LESSON

Item needed:

Some plastic electrical outlet safety plugs

Can someone tell me what this is? How many of you still have dozens of these around the house? If you have younger siblings - or a nervous mom - you probably do.

These little plugs don't do anything. They don't conduct electricity. They don't hook up to anything. They have one purpose: to defend little kids from their own curiosity.

Babies and small children are curious. They see an outlet in the wall, they want to know what it's for and what it does. But they don't do the "smart" thing and ask. They'd rather experiment. What's small enough to fit in that tiny hole? A finger? A coin? If you haven't seen the value of these little plugs before, I bet you do now.

Kids don't see the danger in electrical outlets, and that's what makes them so dangerous. Likewise, we don't often recognize the danger in sin. Our pride gets in the way, we let our guard down, and the next thing you know, we're on the bench, defeated by sin.

God wants us to guard our hearts. He wants us to plug the holes that might allow sin to enter in. And he wants us to be vigilant. These little plugs don't do any good if you leave them out of the socket. It's not easy to remember to keep them plugged in, but unless you do, that danger will still exist that someone gets hurt.

You can't go to sleep on defense. Stay alert, guard your heart. Keep your defenses up, and never trust in your own strength. Don't let pride send you down in defeat!

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

LESSON

When you think of exciting plays in basketball, what's the first thing that comes to mind? The dunk! Nothing gets a crowd as excited as a high flying, acrobatic, power-packed slam dunk. When LeBron goes high over a defender, or Superman Dwight Howard throws it down, there's nothing more exciting on the basketball court.

After the dunk comes the three, especially a clutch three that ties a game or puts your team ahead. The longer it is, the less rim it gets, the more exciting it is.

We love scoring. Whatever the sport, we love high scores and high scorers. That's why soccer can't compete well with sports like basketball - who wants to see a 1-0 game when you can see a 100-98 barn burner?

But here's the reality in basketball - scoring doesn't win championships. Defense wins championships. Guys who score 40 points a night but don't bother to defend anyone can't get rings. The teams that win are teams that can score and defend.

Michael Jordan was not only a dominant scorer, he was a relentless defender. Soon as he made a bucket, he was on his man. It was instinct. And Jordan made sure his teammates did the same.

Jordan's teammate Dennis Rodman made a career out of defense. On an average night he would only score two points, but he would pull down up to 20 rebounds a game!

Lebron James is not only his team's number one scorer, he's their number one defender. Lebron wants to guard his opponent's number one player, and he can defend any position. He knows that's what's going to win him more titles.

We don't think about defense a lot. And except for the occasional steal or monster block, we don't often talk about it the next day. But if you want to win an NBA title, you have to play defense.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

LESSON

Defense is critical to the Christian life, too. We have to learn to defend ourselves from temptation. We have an opponent in our walk with Christ who wants to see us stumble. Satan may not be able to take away our salvation, but if he can trap us in sin, he can keep us from serving the Lord.

Today's story is about a great hero who failed to keep his defenses up, and it cost him everything. His name was Samson, and before he was born, God told his mother that he would save Israel from their enemies. Samson was one of the strongest men who ever lived, and he used that strength to make life miserable for the Philistines. But Samson was also very arrogant, and he began to believe more in his own strength than God. His pride made him vulnerable. And that's when Delilah stepped into the story.

Read Judges 16:4-21

Samson was a Nazirite - a special servant of God who had to live by special rules. One of those rules was that he could never cut his hair. But Samson didn't take his vow to God seriously, and when Delilah cut his hair, his strength was gone too.

Samson's story teaches us a lot about defending our faith. First and foremost, Samson shows us that no one is too strong to fall into sin. There is no hero in the Old Testament with the strength and brawn of Samson. He was the greatest hero the nation of Israel ever knew. But Samson let his guard down with Delilah, and it cost him everything.

Second, the greatest threat to our defenses is our pride. Every year in the NCAA tournament, there are upsets, lower seeded teams that defeat stronger, faster teams and send them home early. Those stronger teams lose for the same reason Samson went down in defeat. They become prideful. They trust in their talents and underestimate their opponent. The weaker, more motivated team takes the stronger one by surprise, sending the strong team home and busting your bracket.

Samson trusted in his own strength more than God. His pride led him to reveal his secret to Delilah, and Israel's great hero went down.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

LESSON

That's the third lesson we take from Samson - when let sin defeat us, we're not the only ones who lose. Israel lost its hero. The one man who kept the Philistines at bay was no longer leading Israel. He became a slave, a prisoner, a joke. When Samson lost, Israel lost. When we give in to sin, the whole team loses.

But there's one more important lesson to take from Samson - we can be forgiven, and we can rise to play another day. Samson's story doesn't end in a prison cell. It ends with him repenting of his sin. Samson prays for God to give him his strength one last time. God gives it to him, and Samson destroys a whole building full of Philistines, killing everyone including himself.

Samson failed to defend himself, but in the end, he died a hero. If we repent of our sins, God will forgive us and put us back in the game. He did it with Samson. He did it with the Apostle Peter. He is still doing it today.

Sin can take us out of the game. It only takes one moment of weakness to bring defeat crashing down on us. But if we keep our eyes on God and surrender our pride, we can defend our hearts. There will be times when our defenses are weak and we may stumble, but God is quick to forgive and eager to put us back in the game.

Offense doesn't win championships. Defense does. Make a commitment to defend your heart, and don't let sin take you out of the game!

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

DISCUSSION

Break the ice.

1. What's the most exciting play you've ever seen in a game?
2. How many of you pay attention to defense in any sport?
3. Have you ever seen an exciting stop, stuff, or play on defense in a game?

SAY: Defensive players take great pride in what they do. Defensive players can make great plays - a steal and dunk in basketball, an interception in football, or a diving catch in baseball. By and large, the offensive players steal the spotlight from the defensive highlights, but it's the defensive stops that help a team go from contenders to champions.

Study the story.

4. Who was Samson?
5. Why did Samson have long hair?

Samson was a Nazirite, a special person set aside to serve the Lord. His long hair was a sign of his status as a Nazirite.

6. Why did the Philistines want to stop Samson?
7. Who was Delilah?
8. How did Delilah get Samson to reveal the secret to his strength?
9. Why do you think Samson gave into Delilah?

SAY: Samson was full of pride. His pride and his ego led him to trust in his own strength

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

DISCUSSION

rather than God. But when Samson let his hair be cut - breaking his Nazirite vow - God took away his strength.

10. What happened to Samson after he lost his strength?

11. Is there anyone strong enough not to have to worry about guarding their hearts from sin?

Live it out.

12. How can staying focused on God help us to guard our hearts?

13. How does giving in to sin affect the people around us?

14. Does God offer forgiveness for those who give in to sin?

15. How can we prepare ourselves today to defend our hearts this coming week?

Hint - the number one strategy is the next part of this discussion time.

Dear God,

Thank you for the story of Samson. Teach us how to guard our hearts. Help us to lay our pride and our feet and keep our eyes focused on you.

*In Jesus's name,
Amen*

A graphic featuring the word "SPORTS" in large, red, italicized letters. The letters are set against a blue circular background that resembles a basketball. The background of the entire graphic is dark blue with a pattern of white stars, similar to the American flag. Below the word "SPORTS" is a dark blue banner with two white stars on either side.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

MEMORY VERSE

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

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BASKETBALL

GAME

Prep.

Item needed

A beach ball

Two volunteers, one a little gullible

A tape measure (optional)

Play.

Choose four contestants for this game. The contestants will be competing in a shot-blocking contest. Have your gullible volunteer stand on stage with their arms extended out to make a hoop. The kids will each take a turn standing in front of the “hoop” attempting to block a shot from the other volunteer.

The volunteer will take the beach ball. They will lob a shot at the hoop. The kids have to jump up and block the shot.

The Game.

Two ways to judge this contest: either have a panel of judges score the blocks on a scale of one to ten, or measure each rejection for distance. Whomever gets the highest score or hits the ball the farthest wins.

Take it to the next level.

For older kids, have the volunteer with the ball try to fake them out and get the shot off clean. Younger kids, lob it up so it's easy for them to block.