

Don't Let Down Your Guard

One of the great basketball players of our time, Chris Paul, is known as a charitable individual and all-around good guy. He is a celebrity spokesperson for State Farm Insurance because of his positive image. On the court, Chris is a fiery competitor, a good shooter and a sensational passer. He set freshman Wake Forest records for 3-point shooting, free throw percentage, assists and steals. Professionally he became a 5-time NBA all-star and member of two gold medal US Olympic basketball teams. Chris Paul's unselfish play made every team he played on a better team. In his sophomore season he led the Wake Forest basketball to a #1 ranking nationally late in the season. All was going well for Paul and Wake Forest University.



Olympic Champion Chris Paul

In the final game of regular season his sophomore year his stellar reputation took a setback. During pre-game warm-ups he was egged on by an opposing NC State player. The NC State player was saying some inappropriate things about Chris Paul's family, taunting him about the murder of Paul's grandfather, Nathaniel Jones. The grandfather was a particularly important person to Chris Paul, teaching him many of life's lessons. When Paul was a high school senior Jones was murdered by 5 teenagers in a home robbery. The teenagers were about the same age as Chris Paul. The murder was particularly gruesome. The grandfather's hands were bound in duct tape and he was viciously beaten to death.

Paul's adrenalin was flowing. On the day of his grandfather's funeral Chris Paul scored 61 points for West Forsyth High School, one point for each year of his grandfather's life. After scoring the 61st point Paul intentionally missed a free throw and then collapsed in tears, into the arms of his dad. It was clearly an emotional time for Chris Paul.

Paul had a great passion and loyalty for his family. Throughout his college years he held a laminated obituary of his grandfather over his heart during the national anthem, as he was playing to honor his grandfather. Amazingly, in spite of his grief, Paul has forgiven the teens who killed his beloved grandfather. Our hearts break for what Chris Paul experienced and for the forgiveness he has shown toward the murderers.

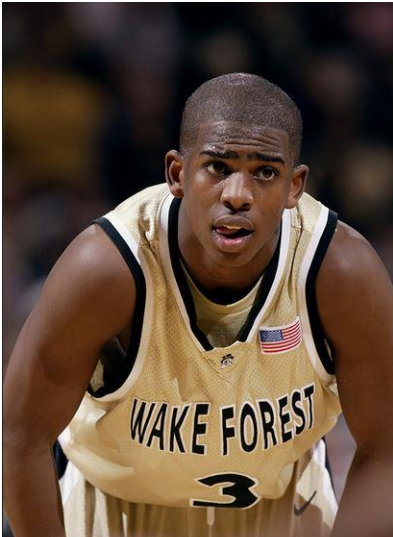
In the warmup to the NC State game Julius Hodge started his barrage of personal insults. They were aimed "below the belt." The "bad blood" between the two spilled over into the game. With 12:48 left to go in the first half, while jostling for position in the post, Paul punched Hodge below the waist. Game officials didn't see it so no foul was called, but television replays captured the incident for all to see. Wake Forest suspended Paul for the first game of the ACC tournament, which Wake Forest lost. At the time of the suspension Paul apologized to Hodge, NC State and Wake Forest fans and his teammates for the heat of the moment reaction. Paul said, "I let my emotions get the best of me. However, that is no excuse for my actions and I fully accept and agree with my suspension."

This became an important life lesson for Chris Paul. Will Rogers said, "It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation, but you can lose it in a minute." Thankfully, people have forgiven Chris Paul, but the massive good in his life is somewhat obscured by the split-second decision to retaliate.

No one is perfect, and under pressure, we can act out of character. To resist the temptation for a poor decision, make a concerted effort to ask God to bring you through situations that challenge you. By trusting God for guidance we can model Christ-like behavior. *"In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men (Acts 24:16).* Don't let your guard down.

There are many lessons we can derive from this true story. For me the focus is to not let down our guard under any circumstance. It is possible that Chris Paul's reaction to Julius Hodge was an instinct, and not a conscious decision. In any event, it affected people's perceptions of him. In spite of Chris Paul's excellent reputation as a person, it gave people a reason to doubt him. In the highly competitive sports world opponents are looking for a way to find

fault or gain an edge over others. Trash talking and physical abuse are part of the sports culture. Outside of sports it is also a dog-eat-dog world. People especially targeted are those with good reputations, Christians and notable people. Challenges are a test of our strength of faith. Always put your best foot forward and act in a way that God would approve. When under pressure be conscious of the consequences of your actions. Don't let temptation get the best of you.



Chris Paul is one of the best Wake Forest basketball players ever

Even if the other person is in the wrong, don't let it cause you to act out of character. In the end let God be the judge of a person's character.

Chris Paul has done some very charitable things since letting an opponent bait him into doing something he would come to regret. One of the best guards of all time let down his guard. Keep yours up.

Question: How do you react when someone is baiting you to react out of character of your beliefs? What are some of the ways you can avoid an un-Christ-like response?

Action Steps:

1. **Always take the high road and don't take the bait.** *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense (Proverbs 19:11).*
2. **When you are wrong, admit it and move on.** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*
3. **Forgive the other person and let God be the Judge.** *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19).*
4. **Always act in a way you think God would approve.** *When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).*

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12: 21).

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father. Life is full of situations when people seek to get our goat, bringing us down to their level. Give us the wisdom to recognize these situations and act in a way pleasing to you. Amen.