

Faith in the Midst of Pressure

Billions of people watch the World Cup every four years. Unlike the Olympic Games, which feature a multitude of sports, the World Cup centers around just one sport. Soccer is undoubtedly the most popular game on the planet. Attention in our country is at a peak this year because the United States is one of three host countries (along with Mexico and Canada). The US national team won their group and is moving on in the tournament, while many other countries are heading home. To put it in perspective, we are already “home,” and we’re still playing. Best of both worlds.



There is unbelievable pressure on the athletes to perform at a high level. National pride is at stake in the world's most important sporting event.

Even under immense pressure and expectations, some athletes put their lives into perspective and express appreciation for a higher power.

- Lionel Messi, the all-time leading men's goal scorer in World Cup history, said after his record-setting game, "I can't ask for more than what I received. As I've said many times, I thank God that he has given me so much, and everything that comes now is a blessing."
- The US national team gathered on the field for prayer after their opening 4-1 victory over Paraguay, with the prayer led by US defender Mark McKenzie. Instead of celebrating their victory, they acknowledged God before a global audience.



- Leading into the tournament, several of the U.S. players were vocal about their faith. Star winger Christian Pulisic is known for leading several of his teammates in a Bible study he calls "Bible Time" and has discussed the important role that reading Scripture plays in his daily life.
- US Goalkeeper, Matt Freeze, said, "God has given me so many opportunities within this game and within my career. I still have a role to play in that. I still have to do my part and take that opportunity and do something with it," Freeze said.
- Ahead of Croatia's match against England, two members of the team took part in a press conference where they discussed the role their Catholic faith plays in their lives and for their team. Igor Matanović said, "I think faith is very important in my life. When you pray to God, it's like a feeling that someone is listening to you, and that gives me a lot of strength." Kristijan Jakić added: "We are a country in which we are Catholics and in which faith means the path in our lives. I think faith represents the entire national team. Faith simply means everything in our lives."

The above examples weren't done in a showy way, but each expresses the importance of a player's relationship with the Heavenly Father and the importance of faith to an entire team.

We, too, have pressure to perform in our lives. While we are not living our lives on international television, that isn't important. What is important is our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Our relationship with God guides our path in life and is central to who we are.

The Bible says:

- *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*
- *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 3:5-6)*