



July 1, 2018

Dear Ministry Partners,

Warm greetings to you! It's summer! I trust that you'll be able to enjoy some family time and make many meaningful memories.

May it also be a summer of fruit—the “John 15:16” kind of fruit—the *fruit that remains!*

Yes, it's summer . . . yet as you read these words, many people are already thinking of fall, and Christmas! In sweltering heat football teams are hard at work focusing their energies on their objective—preparing to go out and “do battle.” They are already attacking tackling machines and muscling up—because (as we hear again and again in interviews) “there is a lot at stake next season!”

Their Christmas dream is to still be playing—because by that time, if they're still playing, it means they've made the playoffs!

It's amazing, though—as much as some professional athletes are being paid—that what they're actually doing in practice this summer is a lot of simply “playing catch,” practicing *just the most basic plays*. They know far more complex maneuvers, of course—but they're essentially *starting over*.

This is how the football legend Vince Lombardi coached his teams. David Maraniss, in his Lombardi biography, explains what happened when the coach walked into training camp in the summer of 1961 after his Green Bay Packers had suffered an emotional defeat in the previous year's championship game:

He took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before. . . . He began with the most elemental statement of all. “Gentlemen,” he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, “this is a football.”

Author James Clear observes:



Lombardi was coaching a group of three dozen professional athletes who, just months prior, had come within minutes of winning the biggest prize their sport could offer. And yet, he started from the very beginning.

Lombardi's methodical coverage of the fundamentals continued throughout training camp. Each player reviewed how to block and tackle. They opened up the playbook and started from page one. At some point Max McGee, the Packers' Pro Bowl wide receiver, joked, "Uh, Coach, could you slow down a little? You're going too fast for us."

Lombardi reportedly cracked a smile, but continued his obsession with the basics all the same. His team would become the best in the league at the tasks everyone else took for granted.

Six months later, the Green Bay Packers beat the New York Giants 37-0 to win the NFL Championship.

History records the 1961 training camp as the beginning of Lombardi's astonishing reign over the football world. *He never lost in the playoffs again.*

Other coaches—like UCLA's basketball great John Wooden—have shared the same focus on the fundamentals—and the same results.

Without a clear focus on basic ideas at the core of our tasks, the other details become like a false currency . . . with no gold support behind it. For details to really add up, they have to be predicated on the fundamentals.

Which is likewise true in our lives as God's children. . . .

What are our fundamentals? Well, **Christianity 101 is about a rescue operation.** God in Christ reconciled us and now He has committed to us the work of reconciliation. A "cruise ship" mentality would simply have us along for an enjoyable ride. But God has a different idea. No, there's nothing wrong with joy. In fact, the Bible prescribes it: "The joy of the Lord is our strength." "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!"

But we're called to more. We're called to *work*. While many settle for "downtime" in the summer season, the behemoths of the sports world are engaged in struggle, in toil; they're racing for the prize. Countries are competing for the world cup in soccer, and American football is warming up for the campaign of the fall. Baseball is in literal full swing!



They see summertime through the filter of the Harvest! So should we. If we experience joy, it needs to be predicated on a foundation where the fundamentals are at the core of our lives.

Sure, summertime is vacation time. But it's also time to engage in the Harvest. Proverbs 10:5 isn't just true during the three other seasons of the year: "A wise son gathers in summer," it declares, "but he who sleeps in the summer brings shame."

To forego the fundamentals *now* would deprive us of the victory later . . . just as it did for Lombardi—and for so many others down through history.

James Clear calls them "simple ideas, deeply understood."

"Nearly every area of life," he writes, "can be boiled down to some core task, some essential component that must be mastered if you truly want to be good at it."

This is brilliant advice for you and me! *God wants us to be good at being Christians.* He wants us to focus on His fundamentals. Basketball coach John Wooden was so focused on fundamentals that he even wanted his UCLA Bruins to put on their socks and tie their shoes in a certain way!

God calls us to wear *armor*. We are to engage in a spiritual fight. God's Word is full of instructions about putting things on and putting things off!

In Colossians 3, for example: ". . . ***Put on*** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things ***put on*** love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

God's Word also tells us what to ***put off***: anger, wrath, malice, abusive speech. . . .

Bottom line: We've been given a pretty complete code to master and to live by as we go into Harvest season!

The coaches and players are right: There's a lot at stake next season. For you and me, there's A LOT MORE AT STAKE than a sports season! Eternity hangs in the balance for multitudes of people!



My friend, this is not a spectator sport. God calls us all to serve on the team. You don't need the skill of the best player in football (or baseball, or soccer, or basketball, or hockey—or forgive me if I didn't mention your favorite!). You don't need the powers of a superhero. **You only need the will to obey.** We are simply called to do conscientiously that which we are enabled to do. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be involved to complete the work!

We don't have to be strong of limb and fleet of foot. We don't even have to be young. This is a spiritual engagement! The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. It's not by might nor by power but by His Spirit. So everyone qualifies; whosoever **WILL** may come.

So today my question is a simple one: *Can I count on you as God counts on you?* This is a team effort, and God is leading the effort. He is reconciling people through us all. *This contest is happening both "at home" and "away" . . . in your heart and life, and in the mission fields where God is at work through you.*

Many do back down . . . get tired . . . give up. A friend of mine recently looked at the challenges ahead and basically sounded retreat. "All I know," he shrugged, "is that Jesus has done all that needed to be done for me." This is true of salvation—it's "not of ourselves," Ephesians 2 says. We're saved through faith, a gift of God, "not by works lest any man should boast"—but *this passage of Scripture doesn't end there.*

"We are his workmanship," it continues, "created in Christ Jesus unto **good works** which He prepared beforehand **that we might walk in them.**"

We have work to do! And **THE BASICS must be at the core!** 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 spells it out for us:

- We have been reconciled, and we are now intended to engage in the ministry of reconciliation.
- Christ took our place at the cross, and we are now intended to take His place as His ambassadors.
- He died for us, so we are now intended to live for Him!
- God made Christ to be sin for us, so now we are intended to be the righteousness of God in Christ.

So my friend, who is counting on the work of Christ, can't be excused. He, along with every other Christian, is being summoned to bear fruit. We are the branches as Christ is the Vine. He has appointed us to bear fruit—and much fruit remains.



By His grace, we can do it—as a team (Ephesians 4:16). Will you do your part again today? God has arranged for each of us to do just one part . . . so a dear little girl seeking to be obedient to Jesus can shine! A widow and her mite can grab the headlines! Another widow can give a little oil and flour to make a cake for a prophet. And someday in heaven, we'll meet a little boy who gave up his lunch of two fish and five loaves.

God has used many mini-mighty deeds of faith to build and expand His Kingdom, and He continues to do so. It's not a matter of the small thing or the big thing; it is a matter of doing a heartfelt sacrificial deed of faith. Beyond the deed, God will do the supernatural. He wants us to engage in a relationship with Him that is carried out heart-to-heart, mind-to-mind, will-to-will. This is what He's had in mind since before He created the human race.

His heart will be satisfied when He sees the reward of His sufferings. His heart is drawn to all those who have yet to be reconciled. Will you join Him in the ministry of reconciliation?

As I write this, I'm on the road en route to preach in another state and to visit partners. By the time you get this letter, I'll be preaching the Gospel in the Basque country in northern Spain. I hope to receive word of your response before I get home!

So please let me hear from you as soon as possible. Thank you! We're in the midst of the Summer Soul Harvest!

Your brother in the Harvest,

Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Sticking to the basics will lead to VICTORY! *Let's make this summer count for eternity!* I hope you'll feel led to be extra-generous for the sake of the harvest today. Thank you again!