

Mission Moment

by Brian Firle, Athletes in Action



## Sport: A Cultural Liturgy

This year, I have been talking frequently to athletes about the idea of **sport as liturgy**. Liturgy is a churchy-word that describes action or behaviors that shape what we **love or worship**. A liturgy can be a discipline, a focus, a mantra, an organized behavior; something that grows your love of an object. All of life contains liturgies (or practices) that not only focus our attention on the things that we love but also create love for the outcome of those actions.

An example would be my morning liturgy: making coffee. The first thing I do when I wake up is spend 10 minutes making a single cup of (very pretentious) coffee. I set the kettle on. I hand grind the beans. I wet the filters. I set the timer on my phone: 30 seconds for bloom, 2 minutes for brewing. At the end, I enjoy a lovely, full bodied cup of locally roasted beans. That practice is a liturgy, a ritual...it's something I **do** because I **love** the outcome, and at the same time this liturgy **creates** love for the outcome. If I give more time to making the coffee, with more attention, I will likely love and enjoy the outcome more!

What athletes (and all of us) don't realize at times is that participation in sport is a liturgy that is **forming what we love**. It is a practice that shapes what we care about. And when athletes spend thousands of hours focused on diet, sleeping, recovering, training, race profiles, speed, power, goals, winning...**might that shape our love of sport? Of success? Of winning?**

**If sport is shaping and forming a love for winning or success, how do we undo that formation to love and worship God?** If all of our life is a liturgy to "being the best," how will we accept being 'last' in the Kingdom of Jesus? How will we be ok with the interruptions of the Jesus life? How will we focus on what God focuses on, as imagers of his goodness? This poses significant questions for how we participate in sport.

James K. A. Smith says it this way:

"Liturgies, whether sacred or secular, shape and constitute our identities by **forming our most fundamental desires** and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we **love**."

This idea has saturated many of the conversations I am having with athletes this year, most recently on a ride with a U23 national team member last week. As we take a step back and look at what sport really accomplishes within us, we can ask:

- How is sport **shaping** what I love?
- How is where I spend my time **forming** what I worship?
- Are these practiced rituals focused on validation of self and earthly success?
- How am I worshipping and loving God **through** sport, rather than through the guise of God, worshipping and loving Sport?

This is a question for us all, in any profession.

**Read on** for our next project, 9 days of daring challenges:

**What are the cultural liturgies that are shaping what you love?**



## The Colorado Trail

by Brian Firle

One of the things we have been working hard at is figuring out ways to do ministry, in person, in new ways. One opportunity has come my way that I am extremely excited about, both personally and for ministry. One of the athletes that I have poured into for the last 5 years got a wild idea to ride the whole Colorado Trail with a small group of current and retired professional athletes. The Colorado Trail is a hiking/biking trail that begins in Denver and ends in Durango, making a 550 mile trek across the Rocky Mountains, with the majority of the trail at or above 9,000 feet elevation. There are sections of the trail that are over 13,000 feet as well. Additionally, the Colorado Trail climbs a collective elevation of 90,000 feet over the 500+ miles- think going up and down Mt. Everest 3 times. Our goal is to complete the trail in 9 days, on mountain bikes, with a friend driving our camping gear from one site to another.

Why am I telling you this? Because I will spend 9 days straight with 6-8 athletes whom I have

poured into or have tried to guide to Jesus for years. That week will give me endless hours for myself and a few of the guys to love and serve the others. Our witness and love will be raw, authentic, and strong. My hope is that the whole trip is used as platform for the gospel and also a catalyst for new relationships. Most of these athletes are strongly followed on social media as well, which makes our impact even larger. The cycling world is a tight-knit community, so trips like this get talked about 'ad nauseam'.

We hit the trail September 11th and plan on being done by the 19th. You can be praying for our safety, witness, and fun during that week! Feel free to follow along on some content I create on my instagram [HERE](#).

