

5 Questions About the Possibility of an Openly Gay NFL Player

In case you missed it this past weekend, the big news in sports had nothing to do with the Winter Olympics or with athletic triumphs and defeats. Instead, it was the news that a top college football player, **Michael Sam**, who is expected to be drafted in the NFL, declared that he is gay. It was deemed to be such big news that it was even the lead story on some non-sports news websites.

Here are five questions to help put this event in perspective.

1. What's the big deal? In the overall scheme of things, I'm quite aware of the significance of this announcement. After all, this is the National Football League, the ultimate testosterone-driven men's sport, where gay slurs in the locker room are still common. And if the NFL can accept an openly gay player, then "tolerance" has surely triumphed.

Looked at from another angle, all the hoopla surrounding the announcement is bizarre. After all, what Sam has declared is, "I'm attracted to other men," and for this, he has become a national hero.

What? This is something to be celebrated? Announcing you are same-sex attracted is a major media event?

Sam has basically said, "There is the possibility that I could be physically or romantically attracted to a coach or teammate," and for this, he is the new Jackie Robinson. (No, wait. The new Jackie Robinson was Jason Collins. For more on Collins, see below.)

2. Is it homophobic to be uncomfortable around an openly gay

teammate in the locker room? Certainly, any player who admitted to being uncomfortable in the locker room with Michael Sam would be branded homophobic, but can a male athlete in the prime of his physical life be faulted if he feels uncomfortable walking around naked in the presence of another gay athlete?

I don't doubt the players who say that their focus is on sports, not sex, and I don't doubt that many gay athletes have never given a hint of their sexuality to their heterosexual teammates.

But once they have made their announcement, how can everyone be expected to feel completely comfortable? And with the "bromance" type of close relationships that many players enjoy, would they be as physical and free with a homosexual teammate?

And since NFL players are hardly known for their sexual purity—with many notable exceptions—is it homophobic to think that Sam's hormones might be raging for men the way the other players' hormones rage for women?

3. Was Michael Sam's announcement selfless or selfish? Many have hailed Sam's coming out as courageous, honest and unselfish, apparently meaning that he did this for other young athletes in other sports, even though it put him in the media spotlight.

Looked at from another angle, it was more of a selfish act, and not only in the sense that Sam is suddenly a national celebrity. (As of Feb. 10, a Google search for his name yielded more than 3 million hits. Just one week ago, his numbers would have been a fraction of this.) What I mean is that professional football is all about the team, and the focus must be on making a joint sacrifice in order to win rather than drawing attention to oneself.

But Sam has now put his own desires—wanting to be out and

proud—above the good of the team, saying to everyone else, “Whether you’re uncomfortable or not, and whether this helps the team’s synergy or not, this is who I am.”

4. Has this helped or hurt his chances in the NFL? Some unnamed NFL executives and scouts have confided that Sam’s announcement has hurt his stock since it will bring a media circus that coaches don’t want and since it could affect locker room dynamics. And you can be assured that NFL owners are not likely to waste a top draft pick to prove they are not homophobic.

It’s also interesting that the NBA’s Jason Collins, never an outstanding player and admittedly at the end of his career, was not picked up by any NBA team last year after coming out as gay. (Oh, you didn’t read that in the news? How interesting.)

Does this contradict my answer to question 3? On the one hand, yes, since Sam’s announcement could hurt his level of entry into the league; on the other hand, no, since he has decided that the most important thing is that the world knows that he is attracted to the same sex.

5. Was it really necessary to come out? It has been reported that Sam’s sexuality was an open secret in his hometown, and I do understand the desire for a person to say to the world, “This is who I am.” I also understand his desire to live his life openly rather than secretly. After all, the right to come out of the closet is the most fundamental aspect of gay activism.

But since he is about to be drafted by the NFL, if his sexual and romantic attractions will not be brought into the locker room and will have nothing to do with his football career, why make it an issue now?

Why can’t he just play the game, keep his private life private (as many public figures do), and when his career is over, if

he wants to tell the whole world he's gay, he can do so then?

Instead, he has made his romantic and sexual attractions the dominant sports issue of the day. Is this something to be celebrated?

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Darlene Zschech Finishes First Round of Chemo to Treat Breast Cancer

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2011.

Zschech has been writing about her journey since her announcement at the end of last year. She reported last week that she lost hair, which she says has been “very confronting.”

“It definitely makes me look sicker than I feel. In saying that, I am finding great freedom through this,” she wrote, adding that her husband and daughters have been a comfort to her.

Though it has been “quite a ride on an emotional roller,” she wrote, “I can say that through it all, I am assured of God’s love for me. Truly this has been one of the sweetest parts of the journey. My beautiful Emmanuel is never far away.”

“Our Friends, family and our beloved church family are amazing every day,” she continued. “I’m ever convinced that life was always designed to be done in true community. Good days and bad days yet always better together.”

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Can You Hear the Sirens? Experiencing the Spirit's Conviction in a Shameless World

I don't know why my wife and I did this.

The first year we owned our home, we made no effort to change the batteries in our smoke alarms. After a few months, the alarm in the kitchen gave off a little chirp, reminding us to change the battery. We spent about a month just ignoring the occasional chirp. But after a while, it started to beep every two minutes.

So I tried everything to get rid of the annoying chirp. I hid the alarm in the basement. That didn't work. I buried the alarm in a box in the garage and covered it with some old guitar magazines. That didn't work either. Finally I came to my senses and just replaced the old battery with a new one (voila!).

In the same way, the role of the Spirit is to dredge up all the sin that we've buried and hidden away. Only when we come to our senses and listen to the alarms of the Spirit's conviction can we experience new life.

Jesus told the disciples that when the Spirit comes, He would convict the world of "righteousness, sin, and judgment" (John 16:8)—righteousness and sin because we can't know we've missed the mark until we know what the mark of righteousness is. Jesus is that mark and nothing else. And the Spirit convicts us of judgment because we must know that without repentance, we are headed for a Christ-less eternity.

But we don't just experience conviction when we come to faith in Jesus. We also experience ongoing conviction of sin as believers (John 1:7-9). The barriers to a life of Spirit

conviction are:

1. Self-Righteousness

This is the universal delusion of humanity. Both religious and nonreligious people are convinced they can just be good enough for God. Like the Pharisee in Jesus's parable (Luke 18:9-14), the super-religious are convinced they are better than the riffraff. Likewise, the unbeliever thinks he is better than all those really bad people like murders and sex-traffickers. But we all have the wrong standard. Jesus saves us from self-right-ness.

2. Blame-Shifting

Once we acknowledge wrongdoing, then someone must take the fall. It is human nature to transfer the blame to everyone around us. Adam said to God, "This woman you put in the garden with me ..." It's everybody else's fault but his. And the woman responded, "This sneaky servant deceived me ..." See the pattern here? It's difficult to hear the Spirit's conviction when we fail to own our stuff. We have an old saying in the South: "When it's everybody else—it's you." We need to resist the temptation to blame-shift to others.

3. Downplaying

Sometimes in ministry, I hear people admit wrongdoing but then they try to soften the ugliness of it. Sure, they blew it, but was it really that bad? We recently had a good friend who was caught in a grave pattern of sin and deception against his leaders. His initial response was to take ownership. But when he realized he needed to confess it to the church, he began to modulate and downplay the gravity of it. Unfortunately, it resulted in some very destructive things in the life of the church. We felt crushed by his betrayal. But we were more hurt by the fact that he blew it off and thought it was "no biggie."

4. False Prophets

In the Old Testament, the prophets constantly warned Israel not to listen to lying prophets. These false prophets had Israel convinced God wasn't going to judge them for their idolatry. But God's true prophets warned that Babylonian exile was coming. Listen, the Holy Spirit can't bless stupid. Let's surround ourselves with wise people who will speak the truth into our lives. If you've got lying well-wishers in your inner circle who keep giving you bad advice, then it's time to get some new prophets.

The Spirit means to bring our sin scratching and yowling into the light of the cross. Only when we embrace His cleansing power can we be saved. And it's only when we demolish those barriers to conviction that we begin to grow in the Christian life. The question is, can you hear the sirens?

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The First NFL Gay Player—Let's Throw a Parade

On Sunday night, news outlets reported that NFL prospect Michael Sam is gay. By all accounts, Sam is a beast on the defensive side of the gridiron. He was the Southeastern Conference defensive player of the year. His talent is undeniable, and on merit he deserves to be drafted.

However, he has done what no NFL player has done

before—declared himself openly gay—and ESPN is falling all over itself to declare him the next Neil Armstrong. I am sure President Obama will give him a call this week.

As I watched his interview Sunday night, I could not help but be moved by this young man's courage. Don't get me wrong, I view homosexuality as a sin—an aberration of healthy human sexuality, just like adultery and pornography.

But still, knowing what I have suffered as a Jewish believer in Jesus—being ostracized by friends, family and my community (I must say that on all accounts, things are much better today than 30 years ago)—I know it took courage for him to do this. But not nearly as much courage as it would have taken in the past.

While Sam will suffer from some segments of society, he will be hailed a hero from many more segments. The upside is endless. He will be compared to Jackie Robinson. Just wait.

ESPN is celebrating this like he is the new Martin Luther King Jr. Hollywood and the left have conditioned us over the last decade to believe that gay is not just OK, it's cool. Shows like *Modern Family* portray just enough gayness to not turn people off. (There is a very good reason they never show Mitch and Cam half-naked, in bed or passionately kissing!) They go through everything a traditional couple goes through. And just about every movie these days has the "cool gay guy."

Former NFL star Jeff Saturday wasted no time in throwing out—I am sure, fully convinced of its truth—the debunked Alfred Kinsey lie that 10 percent of all humans are gay. That would mean every NFL team already has five gay men—in the closet, of course—and that one of every two families of five has at least one who is gay.

This is ridiculous. The Family Research Council states that 2-3 percent of men have same-sex attraction, as do 2 percent of women. This seems closer to reality.

But getting back to Michael Sam: Should he be drafted? Of course he deserves a job. In my 48 years, I have worked with gays and lesbians. I have befriended them. And some I have seen leave the lifestyle. You will never reach people with whom you are unwilling to associate.

I have never believed that someone from a sexual orientation that I strongly disagree with doesn't deserve a job. And yet, in employing them, I would never compromise my stance against such behavior.

But we hire other sinners, don't we? We hire people who are living together outside of marriage, those addicted to pornography and adulterers. A friend of mine recently shared with me a report that 50 percent of born-again men *regularly* look at pornography. Yes, that is half of you who are reading! (Well, the males.) But you still have jobs despite your struggle.

To be clear, I didn't write that to shame you. Pornography is a horrible addiction, and we must pray for each other to stand strong in this area. I wrote it to say that sin comes in many forms (like jealousy, bitterness, unforgiveness) that we ourselves struggle with, and these sins do not disqualify us from employment.

However, Sam is not applying to be a mailman, an accountant, a waiter or an investment banker. He is seeking to be in the NFL. And in the NFL, men get naked in front of each other several days a week. And ESPN, *that* is the main issue, not whether or not he should have a job.

Let me just be honest. If I had a job whereby I had to undress and shower several times a week with a roomful of very fit, attractive females—well, let's just say I would struggle. And that clearly is the concern of heterosexual football players. It is a legitimate issue.

I am not an expert, but if someone says to me that they are

attracted to men and then are going to see them undressed on an almost daily basis, it is going to make for an uncomfortable situation. Right?

But don't say it out loud—not unless you are willing to be skewered by the media elites. Oh, wait, too late. Jonathan Vilma of the New Orleans Saints already stated the obvious.

“I think that he would not be accepted as much as we think he would be accepted,” Vilma said. “I don't want people to just naturally assume, like, ‘Oh, we're all homophobic.’ That's really not the case. Imagine if he's the guy next to me and, you know, I get dressed, [bare], taking a shower, the whole nine, and it just so happens he looks at me. How am I supposed to respond?”

Vilma made those completely honest and valid comments a few days ago—before Sam came out. For sure, he will be vilified and called immature. But come on, let's be honest: No one expects adult men and women to take mass showers together on the job—for the *obvious reasons*. But Vilma is juvenile and uneducated for not wanting to shower next to an openly gay man?

I wonder if more NFL players will have the courage to speak up. How ironic—in the past it was the homosexual who was afraid to come out. Now it'll be the guy who doesn't want to take a shower next to the homosexual who will be shunned and shamed—and he will be told to keep his mouth shut.

Ron Cantor is the director of *Messiah's Mandate International* in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of *Tiferet Yeshua*, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, *Identity Theft*, was released April 16. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

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Mission at Nuremberg

Tim Townsend (HarperCollins)

Mission at Nuremberg tells the gripping true-life story of St. Louis Lutheran minister Henry Gerecke. In 1943 and at the age of 50, Gerecke told his wife he was enlisting as a U.S. Army chaplain. As two of his three sons faced danger and death on the battlefield during the height of World War II, Gerecke tended to 2,000 battered bodies and souls of wounded and dying GIs each month in the war hospitals just outside London.

Then, at the war’s end, when other soldiers were going home,

Gerecke was recruited for the most difficult job of his life: ministering to 21 Nazi leaders awaiting trial at Nuremburg.

Author Tim Townsend's book charts the complex relationships Gerecke developed with prominent Nazi leaders, including Hermann Goering, a leading member of the Nazi Party; Albert Speer, minister of armaments and war production for the Third Reich; Wilhelm Keitel, a general field marshal, second only to Adolf Hitler in Germany's military hierarchy; and Joachim von Ribbentrop, Nazi Germany's foreign minister. Townsend shares the stunning conversations and confessions shared among the former elite of the Third Reich as they neared the court's judgment and their executions.

Crafted from meticulous research and firsthand interviews with key individuals who were present at the trials, the book is a thought-provoking look at one of the most horrifying times in human history. Approaching the trial from a complex angle, Townsend probes difficult spiritual and ethical issues that continue to hold meaning and compels readers to rethink what they know about the power of forgiveness.

Townsend, a former religion reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and three-time winner of the Reporter of the Year award by the Religion Newswriters Association, reveals that Nuremberg chaplains like Gerecke "were not judging the members of their flocks, nor were they forgiving their crimes against humanity. Instead, they were trying to lead those Nazis who were willing to follow toward a deeper insight into what they had done."

God's Not Dead

Pure Flix

When a college student is tasked with scientifically proving the existence of God to his professor and classmates, he's forced to examine his beliefs. If his argument fails to convince, he fails the class. Now a movie, *God's Not Dead* weaves stories from multiple characters with perspectives on faith, doubt and disbelief and culminates in a dramatic call to action: If you believe God's not dead, prove it.

Based on the book of the same name by Rice Brooks, co-founder of the Every Nation family of churches, *God's Not Dead* explores the historical, scientific and theological evidence that God is anything but dead.

"I think so many people know God is real, but they haven't ever been challenged to show it," Brooks says. "And I think a lot of people know God is real but want to know if you can give them a way to describe it to a person that doesn't believe."

The film is an avenue for a wide variety of people to hear the message.

"These brilliant folks from Pure Flix have come along and put together this movie that can bring [the concept of *God's Not Dead*] in the form of story to go places that the book and music will never go," Brooks says.

The movie highlights a star-studded cast, including Kevin Sorbo (*Soul Surfer*), Shane Harper (*High School Musical 2*), David A.R. White (*Six: The Mark Unleashed*) and Dean Cain (*Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*), with special appearances by the Newsboys and Willie and Korie Robertson of the popular reality TV series *Duck Dynasty*.

God's Not Dead will release on more than 600 screens nationally this month. The film is rated PG. —*Felicia Abraham*

National Abortion Restrictions on the Rise

Though it seems the United States has enacted more and more liberal laws regarding abortion, a recent study from the Guttmacher Institute says otherwise. More abortion restrictions have been enacted in the last three years than have been implemented in the previous 10 years combined. The restrictions fall into four categories: targeted restrictions on abortion providers, limitations on late-term abortions, abortion insurance coverage and limitations on medication abortion.

Why I'm Praying for Openly Gay NFL Prospect Michael Sam

NBA center Jason Collins and University of Missouri defensive lineman Michael Sam aren't drinking buddies, but they may soon have more in common than a love for the sports at which they excel.

If reports from the *New York Times* and ESPN are accurate, Sam, who came out gay to his teammates during college, is poised to repeat Collins' professional basketball revelation in the

football arena. Like Collins did in the NBA, Sam is set to become the first openly gay player in the NFL.

Like Collins, Sam has skills that are taking him to the upper echelon of the sports world. The first-team all-American was named the Associated Press defensive player of the year in the Southeast Conference—and his teammates named him Missouri's MVP. With such a positive experience in college, he has decided to brave the tougher NFL waters. The *New York Times* is suggesting the young star could become a symbol for the country's gay rights movement or a flash point in a football culture war—or both.

But I wonder: Is that what this talented 24-year-old really wants to be known for? Will his openly gay status be a distraction to the team that drafts him, considering the celebrations among gay rights advocates and the disgust of football-loving homophobes? (For clarification, a homophobe is not a Christian who opposes homosexuality. A homophobe has an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals, according to Merriam-Webster. The term has been wrongly applied to Christians who reject homosexuality as acceptable in God's eyes.) Can Sam maintain his stellar performance amid the cruel backlash he's unfortunately likely to receive? Will his teammates really accept him, or will unspoken resentment impact team camaraderie? Oh, and should Sunday afternoon football really be the platform for the culture wars?

Clearly, NFL players aren't all in on openly gay players. Do you remember San Francisco 49er Chris Culliver's anti-gay remarks during Super Bowl media day last year? What about Katie Couric flat-out asking San Diego Chargers' Manti Te'o if he's gay? Let's not forget then-Baltimore Ravens linebacker Brendon Ayanbadejo and former Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe's off-the-field political move, filing an amicus brief that asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reject California's ban on same-sex marriage. Not last and not least, Kluwe said

coaches pushed him out of a job and subjected him to homophobic language for his support of same-sex marriage laws.

Some—probably many NFL players—no doubt feel like New Orleans Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma, who told the NFL Network he doesn't want a gay teammate. "I think he would not be accepted as much as we think he would be accepted," Vilma said.

Vilma is probably right, but so far the NFL is playing to political correctness. "We admire Michael Sam's honesty and courage. Michael is a football player," the league said in a statement Sunday night. "Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014."

By his own testimony, Sam's life has been filled with pain. He told ESPN, "I endured so much in my past: seeing my older brother killed from a gunshot wound, not knowing that my oldest sister died when she was a baby and I never got the chance to meet her. My second oldest brother went missing in 1998, and me and my little sister were the last ones to see him. ... My other two brothers have been in and out of jail since 8th grade, currently both in jail. Telling the world I'm gay is nothing compared to that."

Indeed, Sam is likely to meet with much more persecution than he realizes. He believes he is mentally prepared, telling ESPN, "There will be negativity, negative reactions. I expect that. ... Everyone can say hurtful things and hateful things; I don't let stuff like that distract me. But there are going to be positives. The positives will outweigh the negative."

I'm not so sure the positives will outweigh the negatives or that he's ready for the backlash—or that he's considering how all the hoopla will serve as a distraction from what's really supposed to matter on the football field—football. There have been many professional sports players who were gay and didn't go to great lengths to hide it—but didn't feel the need to sit

with major media and discuss it, either. Let me be clear: I stand against homosexuality. It is a sin and there's no getting around that. But shouldn't we, then, be praying for a guy who the radical gay agenda will use as its poster child? Shouldn't we be praying that he comes to Christ?

When Jason Collins came out as gay, I prayed for him. Likewise, I pray for the best for young Sam, which would be salvation, but I disagree that coming out as gay is his best professional move—or the best move for whatever team he lands on. I disagree with his lifestyle, and I am joining many others in praying that he comes to the knowledge of the saving grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Again, is being the first openly gay NFL player really what this talented 24-year-old really wants to be known for? Maybe now, but perhaps not in history. Will his sexual orientation be a distraction to the team that drafts him, considering the celebrations among gay rights advocates and the disgust of football-loving homophobes? It surely will, at least for a period of time.

Can Sam maintain his stellar performance amid the cruel backlash he's unfortunately likely to receive? I hope so. Unlike the Tim Tebow haters, I would not celebrate his demise. Will his teammates really accept him, or will unspoken resentment impact team camaraderie? I think Vilma's answer was spot on. Oh, and should Sunday afternoon football really be the platform for the culture wars? Absolutely not.

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All the Many Graces

The grace of God includes forgiveness, but it's far more than just that:

- God's **electing grace** chose to save us (2 Tim. 1:8-9).
- God's **saving grace** was preached to us through the gospel (Col. 1:5-6).
- God's **regenerating grace** made us born again through the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:3).
- God's **converting grace** grants us repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8).
- God's **justifying grace** declared us righteous in His sight (Rom. 3:23-24).
- God's **adopting grace** made us members of His family with an eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:4-6).
- God's **ministering grace** gifts us to serve others in ministry (1 Pet. 4:10).
- God's **sanctifying grace** keeps changing us to be more like Jesus by the Spirit's power (Rom. 6:14).
- God's **provisional grace** sustains the practical needs of our life (James 1:17).
- God's **financial grace** allows us to pay our bills and be generous toward God and others (2 Cor. 8-9).
- God's **miraculous grace** allows us to experience the power of God in a variety of ways (Acts 6:8).
- God's **persevering grace** enables us to endure tough times (Phil. 1:6-7).
- God's **glorifying grace** will permit us to worship Him for all eternity in joy (Rom. 8:30-32).