

It's Great to See the NFL So Spiritual, but ...

Read Time: 4 minutes 12 seconds

It is wonderful to see so many NFL players and coaches and sports commentators praying openly and unashamedly. And in the aftermath of the events of the Buffalo Bills game on Sunday, a game devoted to their own Damar Hamlin (the subject of all the aforementioned prayers) and a game marked by two kickoff return touchdowns, some spoke openly about divine intervention.

With reference to the first touchdown return, which was the very first play of the game following a tribute to Hamlin, Bills quarterback Josh Allen said, "It was just spiritual. I was going around and—I was just going around to my teammates saying, 'God's real.' Like, you can't, you can't draw that one up, write that one up any better."

Allen added (while wearing a cap with Hamlin's jersey number, 3), "I was just told by [Bills communications director] Kevin Kearns, it's been three years and three months—since the last kickoff [Bills'] return, so, it's pretty cool."

I even saw a TV clip where one of the commentators attributed the two touchdown returns to divine intervention, with the other commentators expressing their agreement.

As for Hamlin, who continues to make a remarkable (and even miraculous?) recovery, he tweeted the following:

GameDay.. Nothing I Want More Than To Be Running Out That Tunnel With My Brothers. God Using Me In A Different Way Today. Tell Someone You Love Them Today! 3👀 let's go @BuffaloBills 🙏

– (@HamlinIsland) January 8, 2023

As for the striking fact that it was three months and three days since the last kickoff return for a touchdown, he tweeted, “God Behind All This No Coincidence,” followed by his number 3.

It really does seem that God is using Hamlin’s brush with death, which took place on live TV and captivated the nation, to remind us of the power of prayer, of the frailty of life and of the reality of God. I wrote about this in my article, “In Times of Crisis Americans Pray.”

And Hamlin, true to his character, is doing his best to spread a message of love, tweeting out:

Headed home to Buffalo today with a lot of love on my heart.

Watching the world come together around me on Sunday was truly an amazing feeling.

The same love you all have shown me is the same love that I plan to put back into the world n more.

Bigger than football!

– (@HamlinIsland) January 9, 2023

He’s taking practical steps to spread this love as well, raising funds for first responders, the very people who saved his life.

All this is good and positive, and in many ways, this could be just the beginning of a beautiful redemptive story.

But there are certainly more things we should be praying for when it comes to Hamlin and the NFL, specifically, the spiritual condition of the men and women who are praying and talking about faith.

Do they all know the Lord personally and intimately? Have they been transformed by His love and grace? Are they followers of Jesus or simply people who recognize that, in times of crisis, we need to look to God?

To be clear, I do *not* ask these questions in a critical or condemning way. That's the last thought on my mind.

I was just reminded of these realities when I saw the tweet that Hamlin sent out after the opening kickoff return.

Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but to my knowledge, the letters in his tweet probably do not stand for, "Oh my, Father God!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (At present, the tweet has 23.1 million views and 400k likes.)

Perhaps some of those who are openly praying and even pointing to divine intervention could use a deeper understanding of who God is? Perhaps recognizing His existence and power and reality and care is just the first step on the spiritual journey? Perhaps there also needs to be a recognition of our own sin, an understanding of why Jesus died for us and the full surrender of our lives to Him?

That's why it was wonderful to see former NFL star (and unashamed Christian) Ben Watson tell CNN's Anderson Cooper the whole story.

He said, "These times bring us face to face with our own mortality. We all have a day to be born, and we all have a day to die."

Yes, "On the flip side with such a tragic event, there is tremendous opportunity."

And so, he concluded, "Part of my prayers right now, Anderson, is for the players in both of those locker rooms, for the chaplains who I know very well—who are right now counseling and comforting players who saw a brother in a near-death experience and who is still fighting for his life—because the questions about what happens after this life, where will you

spend eternity ... are coming up for all of us, not just for the football players.

“But thank God that He provides an answer through his Son, Jesus Christ.”

May the open show of spirituality that has suddenly emerged across the country, receiving widespread praise rather than criticism, continue to grow until millions have come to know Jesus for themselves. {eo}

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Dr. Michael Brown () *is the host of the nationally syndicated Line of Fire radio program. His latest book is “The Political Seduction of the Church: How Millions of American Christians Have Confused Politics with the Gospel.” Connect with him on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.*