

# Why I'm Praying for First Openly Gay NBA Player

And it finally happened.

*Sports Illustrated* ran a story Monday morning with a headline that reads: "Why NBA center Jason Collins is coming out now." Collins has officially made sports history by becoming the first professional American player to announce his homosexuality to the world. Here's an excerpt from the *Sports Illustrated* article:

*"I'm a 34-year-old NBA center. I'm black. And I'm gay.*

*"I didn't set out to be the first openly gay athlete playing in a major American team sport. But since I am, I'm happy to start the conversation. I wish I wasn't the kid in the classroom raising his hand and saying, 'I'm different.' If I had my way, someone else would have already done this. Nobody has, which is why I'm raising my hand.*

*"My journey of self-discovery and self-acknowledgement began in my hometown of Los Angeles and has taken me through two state high school championships, the NCAA Final Four and the Elite Eight, and nine playoffs in 12 NBA seasons.*

*"I've played for six pro teams and have appeared in two NBA Finals. Ever heard of a parlor game called Three Degrees of Jason Collins? If you're in the league, and I haven't been your teammate, I surely have been one of your teammates' teammates. Or one of your teammates' teammates' teammates.*

*"Now I'm a free agent, literally and figuratively. I've reached that enviable state in life in which I can do pretty much what I want. And what I want is to continue to play basketball. I still love the game, and I still have something to offer. My coaches and teammates recognize that. At the same*

*time, I want to be genuine and authentic and truthful.*

*"Why am I coming out now? Well, I started thinking about this in 2011 during the NBA player lockout. I'm a creature of routine. When the regular season ends I immediately dedicate myself to getting game ready for the opener of the next campaign in the fall. But the lockout wreaked havoc on my habits and forced me to confront who I really am and what I really want. With the season delayed, I trained and worked out. But I lacked the distraction that basketball had always provided."*

I am a huge basketball fan, and I admire Collins' on-the-court skills. Throughout his career, the seven-footer has been a difference-maker for his teams, averaging nearly 4 rebounds per game and adding a few points for good measure. He can take a charge with the best of them and has been dubbed "the pro's pro." Indeed, he's made a much-appreciated contribution to the game of basketball.

Yet as I read Collins' 33-year struggle over his sexuality, my heart breaks for this basketball giant. In the *Sports Illustrated* article, Collins admits to wrestling with envy and fear. He talks about not sleeping well. He shares about his years of misery and what it was like to "live a lie." He even opens up about the battle with "insane logic" in the context of suicide.

As I read his article, I found a sincerity in his words, but I was also disturbed. Collins says he feels free now that he's come out. He says he feels blessed. He says his parents instilled Christian values in him. He says he enjoyed lending a hand when they taught Sunday school. He says he takes the teachings of Jesus seriously.

It's heartbreaking. Collins, bless his soul, has not made himself free by coming out. Not truly. He just feels relieved because he doesn't have to wear the "mask" he referenced in

his article anymore. But he's not free at all. He's in bondage to a sin that doesn't line up with the Christian values or the Sunday school teachings he heard as a child. Collins may feel free because he confessed, but he won't truly be free until he repents. I pray that Christian NBA players—and fans—will reach out to him in love and pray for him.

Collins says he wants to keep his personal life private, but he just opened himself up to all manner of attention for his lifestyle. Some will celebrate his decision. Others will follow him out of the closet. Still others will be confused or hurt. Collins says he doesn't mind if fans heckle him. I hope they don't. Heckling anyone isn't appropriate, much less someone who has struggled his whole life and continues to struggle—very publicly. Collins says he's walked a tough, lonely road. And he will continue walking a tough and lonely road without Jesus, who is the only one who can truly set anyone free from envy, fear, misery, living a lie, suicidal thoughts, homosexuality—or any other sin.

God bless you, Jason. I admire your courage. I know how hard it must have been to take this step. Keep banging the boards! Keep setting those hard picks. Keep being the pro's pro. But, please, consider that acting on gay tendencies is a choice, and repent before it's too late. The freedom you would feel from confessing Jesus as Savior and declaring war on homosexual tendencies is far greater than the freedom you say you feel from coming out as gay to the sports-loving masses.

**Jennifer LeClaire** is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *Did the Spirit of God Say That?* You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website [here](#). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.