

21-Year-Old NBA Player: 'I gave up basketball to follow Jesus'

God almost certainly uses stories to give us hope amid the world's creeping darkness.

In a video posted to YouTube on Sept. 29, former NBA first-round pick AJ Griffin, who turned 21 last month, explained why he has chosen to walk away from a lucrative career in professional sports and pursue a new calling as a full-time Christian minister.

"I gave up basketball to follow Jesus," Griffin said.

The decision, it seems, came on gradually.

In fact, only as a teenager living through the worst year in recent memory did Griffin fully embrace the relinquishing of self-will that Christianity requires.

"This really has to start off with me giving my life to Christ in 2020," he said. "I truly accepted Him back then. He found me."

At that point, the now-former basketball star emphasized something that many Christians experience.

"I know we say we find God, but He finds us," Griffin added.

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When God found Griffin, basketball suddenly seemed less important.

"My values started to change. My heart started to change. I think before, basketball was my everything," he said.

Accepting Christ, however, convinced Griffin that “we’re all made to glorify God. We’re all made with a purpose.”

Later in the video, he explained that purpose.

“I just want to continue to keep sharing the good news of the gospel to as many people as I can,” Griffin says.

A first-round pick of the Atlanta Hawks in 2022, Griffin enjoyed a very respectable rookie season, averaging nearly nine points-per-game as a 19-year-old.

In 2023-24, however, his playing time and production dropped off significantly.

Thus, on June 27, the Houston Rockets acquired Griffin from Atlanta as part of a three-team trade.

Along with other young players competing for 2024-25 roster spots, Griffin then played in the NBA Summer League. He averaged 11.6 points-per-game on a team that included other young players and first-round draft picks like him.

In other words, Griffin might have played well enough to earn a spot on the Rockets’ training camp roster.

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Instead, however, according to “The Athletic,” Griffin decided to retire from the NBA for what the outlet called “undisclosed personal and family-related reasons.”

The Rockets, therefore, did not waive Griffin for poor performance. The player made the choice to retire.

Moreover, according to the sports-salary-tracker Spotrac, the 21-year-old former first-round pick had a total guaranteed contract worth more than \$17 million. He walked away from some

of that.

Athletes, of course, can compete in the sports they love while still following Jesus.

In the NBA, for instance, no one has better exemplified the Christ-centered playing career than Orlando Magic forward Jonathan Isaac.

Likewise, reigning NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year C.J. Stroud, quarterback of the Houston Texans, has proclaimed his Christian faith. So, too, have star football players at Stroud's alma mater, The Ohio State University.

Nonetheless, one cannot maintain both a full-time playing career and a full-time ministry.

Griffin, therefore, deserves credit for giving up the former and finding his new purpose in the latter.

Of course, for blessing us with timely and uplifting stories in which He finds His followers and touches their hearts with a desire to abandon worldly pursuits, all glory belongs to God.

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