

NBA Champ Billy Thompson Ministers to the Masses

Billy Thompson knows all about being a champion. He won titles at nearly every level in which he played basketball, including two NBA World Championships with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Thompson is a proven winner, and now, as senior pastor of Jesus People Proclaim International Ministries Church in Boca Raton, Fla., he is winning souls for the **kingdom of God**. As the Lord continues to bless his life and ministry, his capacity in that role keeps growing.

Not only is Thompson feeding his church with the **Word**, he does the same for private corporations and youth basketball camps as an inspirational speaker. However, one of the biggest tasks he has been charged by God with, one that is near and dear to his heart, is to influence and guide troubled youth from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds through his "Heart of a Champion" program.

"From this program, the goal for us is to impart to young people the realization that God loves them and desires for them to become the champions that He created them to be," Thompson said. "We want to build faith, integrity, self-confidence and perseverance in these kids. With God's help, we expect nothing less than radical change from mediocre to excellence.

"Using basketball, God has opened a lot of doors for me to work with men and women and kids. He has raised me up to be the head, and I hope that others can see the heart of God through me. It's a God thing, for sure."

Thompson said God saved him at a time when his life could have taken a drastic turn.

As a junior at the University of Louisville in 1985, Thompson said he lived the “typical life” of a college student. He partied, indulged in drugs and alcohol, and lived the high life as a celebrity in Louisville as a college basketball star.

One night at around 2 a.m., Thompson received a sobering message from the Lord.

“I heard Him say, ‘You are going to die if you don’t give your life over to Me,’” Thompson said. “I literally had a vision that I was on a gurney and in the back of an ambulance. And then, the headlines read, ‘Billy Thompson, Basketball Star, Dead of Drug Overdose.’ What a wake-up call.

“And then, as if to confirm it, my friend and fellow player Len Bias did die from a drug-related incident. I roomed with Len during our times in the high school all-star games. I knew him. I broke down crying, knowing that could have been me. It’s because of His grace that I’m even still here.”

Thompson went on to win a national championship at Louisville in 1986, and then NBA titles with the Lakers in ’87 and ’88. After three years with the Miami Heat and a year playing in Turkey, the Lord led Thompson to Israel, where he played four seasons for Hapoel Jerusalem.

The Israelis knew of his prowess as a basketball player because of his days in the NBA, but they also knew of his Christianity, and he wasn’t exactly welcomed by many.

“God called me out of basketball and into ministry, and then He called me back into basketball,” Thompson said. “He told me that He wanted me there so that I could be a great witness for Him there. They knew of ‘the God of Billy Thompson,’ and there were Orthodox Jews who literally wanted to throw me out of the country.

“But again, by the grace of God, I was able to stay. I loved

it there, loved the land. It's really amazing how God works."

Upon his return to the United States, Thompson began laying the foundation for his ministry. He served as an assistant pastor at Jesus People Proclaim International Ministries Church and was then named senior pastor there in 2001. He and his wife, Cynthia, co-pastor the church.

Thompson also landed a position as an associate chaplain for the **Miami Heat**, where he now serves as chaplain. The Heat won an NBA championship in 2006, and again in 2012, giving him four NBA championship rings.

Besides his Heart of a Champion program, Thompson is trying to create awareness and raise funds for many other projects, including the construction of an International Champions Center in Boca Raton and the Curnell and Hazel Thompson Wellness Center that will serve the growing population affected by Alzheimer's. Hazel Thompson passed away of Alzheimer's.

The Great Commission, however, remains Thompson's main focus.

"I believe God has some things planned for me to take this gospel throughout the United States," he said. "He has me working out of the local church, using me in a great way in that avenue. But, I believe He also wants me to go beyond that. He will continue to direct and guide me in every way to help make champions for God out of others. He's an amazing God."

To book Billy Thompson for a personal appearance or speaking engagement, please contact Daniel Herd at 561-398-0723.