

Voices: Is football good?

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A question has been nagging at me for the last few years. It is not a popular question, it is not an easy question, and it's a question for which I don't have a full answer. The question is: is the game of football itself good? Is it beneficial for our culture, our world? Should we, as Christians, support the game of football?

This is not a question raised because of the controversy over the national anthem.

This is not even a question raised because of the way football is our nation's foremost religion, even though the question of football and idolatry probably should be asked.

The problem of concussions in football

This question is raised in my mind because of the evidence we have seen the last few years of the damage football does to the bodies and, specifically, the brains of those who play. As we continue to get more information about CTE and the effects of multiple brain injuries, the evidence seems to be mounting that football is extremely detrimental to the health of those who play.

Brain damage has been front and center in much of our cultural discussion of football the last few years. From the 2015 movie *Concussion* to the high-profile cases of Junior Seau and Aaron Hernandez and the results of the autopsies on their brains, the issue of CTE and what football does to the human body have been getting much clearer.

My personal struggle with football

For me, Malcolm Gladwell's [podcast](#) on concussions in football put a voice to a lot of my uneasiness over this issue.

Also unsettling to me was a Monday night football game last fall between the Green Bay Packers and the Chicago Bears in which Davante Adams was left unconscious and unmoving on the field only to return a few weeks later.

Having a son in December and thinking about him playing football made this issue personal.

Like so many males in Texas, I grew up loving football. I watched football every Saturday and Sunday and have given my time, money and resources to supporting my teams. Football is as much a part of the culture I grew up in as anything else.

It is central to much of our identity—for better and for worse. But maybe this isn't a good thing. Maybe this just keeps us from asking these tough questions.

We believe every life is valuable because all are made in the image of God. We believe our bodies are important because they are created by God and will be restored by God.

When we fill stadiums and cheer as people's bodies are being destroyed and lives are being altered in front of us, are we honoring the image of God in those on the field?

Is celebrating the violence on the field and honoring the hurting of others right?

When we allow our sons to be tackled and ram their heads into one another

at young ages, are we being good stewards of God's image in them?

I don't have the ultimate answer to this, but I think these are questions we should ask.

The value of the game

I understand that even raising this issue can be controversial. I hear the rebuttals now.

Football teaches boys how to be men. Football teaches perseverance and hard work. Football teaches us to sacrifice for the good of the whole. Football brings people together across every cultural barrier that separates.

The professional and even the collegiate players know the risk and have chosen to play, and it is their freedom to do so. The doctors have more information, and teams are taking precautions to protect their players.

There is great value and validity to each of these points.

I haven't worked this out for myself completely yet. I haven't boycotted football. I love to attend our high school games and be a part of the community supporting our young men. I know many coaches who care for the young men they lead and who show them the love of Jesus.

I don't think we have to ban the game. I still watch some football on television, but the uneasiness about what I am watching has grown year after year.

Are we willing to ask the question?

I'm not asking you to quit watching. I'm not asking you not to let your sons

play football. You are free to do what your conscience allows you to do.

I am simply saying we should be willing to ask the question.

As the evidence mounts about the harm this game does to so many who play it, is the game worth it? Is football something to celebrate and promote? Is football good?

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