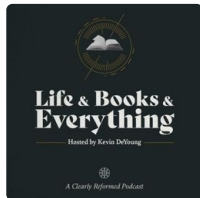


OpenTheo

A Life of Hope and Hurdles with Andre Levrone and Sydney McLaughlin Levrone

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

How can you shine as a Christian in the world of professional sports—when sometimes your dreams come true and often they don't? What does it take to be an elite athlete (and why is it a great profession for sleep enthusiasts)? You'll want to listen to this special episode of LBE as Kevin asks Andre, a former NFL player, and Sydney—an Olympic champion, world champion, and world record holder—about the pressure of being the best and the freedom of being in Christ. And don't miss the bonus questions from a couple DeYoung children.

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Serious Joy Conference

The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work

WTS | Master of Arts in Theological Studies

What Is the Gospel?

What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission

Transcript

As we start a new season of Life and Books and Everything, I am glad to have our familiar sponsors with us and one new one. First, I want to mention Crossway, and grateful for their partnership from the very beginning. I want to mention today the ESV Daily Reading Bible.

This Bible has a one year and two year week day. A reading plan, so it leaves the weekends free for other study or for catching up on this days. Each reading features brief introductions and notes, and you'll be going through two or three chapters of scripture, reflection question, pick up a copy of the ESV Daily Reading Bible, wherever books are sold.

You can sign up for a Crossway Plus account and receive 30% off. So here at the beginning of the year, I encourage everyone to get into some kind of daily reading plan. And this is one option.

Also grateful for Desiring God, the 37th Annual Serious Joy Conference with Desiring God is on the way this February at the Bethlehem College. And seminary I have been to. I don't know how many conferences Bethlehem conferences over the years.

I was a plenary speaker, I think back in 2023. He did a talk there on male and female. He created them.

Encourage you if you're in the area or it's worth making a trip out there. Yes, it is Minnesota in winter, but this is for people who are after serious joy. So join DG teachers, Marshall Seagull,

Greg Moore, Scott Hubbard as they lead breakout track called Spiritual Ministry in a Secular Age.

You can find more at bcsmn.edu. Greetings and salutations. My name is Kevin Deung. I am the senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina.

And today I'm joined by two very special guests. I use the word special very deliberately. I am joined by Andrei Laveroni and his wife, Sidney McLaughlin Laveroni, live as we record this from Southern California.

Is that where you guys are at the moment? Correct. Welcome. Glad to have you here.

Thank you so much for making the time to be here. Got in touch several months ago. Had to get through the season, but really appreciate you making the time to chat for a bit.

Thanks for having us. Thanks for having us, Kevin. We checked the map when we woke up this morning.

My dad actually called us from the east coast and he's like, wait, are you sure you're okay? Because he's looking at the news, but Sidney and I checked the map and Sidney, how far would you say palisades? Yeah, probably like 35 minutes. So we're south of those fires right now. So there's still a bit of distance between us and them, but they definitely are spreading throughout some of those mountain ranges close to Malibu and what.

Not so. Well, anyone listening to this say a prayer for all those affected and that they get those under control sounds like maybe one is, but four or five aren't. I want to start Sidney by asking you a question.

So I assume most people listening to this or watching this know of Sydney's track feats gold in the 2020 and 2024 Olympics. And in the 2022 world championships broke the world record for the 400 hurdles four times in 13 months. The record stands her record at 50.37. I bet almost everybody listening to this, you can't run around half of the track with no hurdles in 50 seconds.

I'd be booking it. Six of the 10 fastest times are hers. World Athletics female athlete of the year, Diamond Link champion, lots of stuff.

I'm going to ask some track questions throughout this along with some faith questions because I love Jesus. I also do love track. So here's the question.

And I know your humble Sydney's are going to you don't you want to answer this in a humble way, but I'm going to put you on the spot. Just what what did it feel like the first time you broke the world record and you realized, and it's true today, I have done something faster and better than any other woman in history. That's pretty amazing.

What was that like? What does that feel like? That you know, there's obviously world championships, Olympic championships and all those things, but then the world record is

always something that every athlete's like, that's the pinnacle that nobody's reached before. And so crossing the line in Eugene in 2021, honestly, I think my face kind of said it all was just like utter shock and disbelief, especially taking it under 52 seconds, you know, just breaking that barrier. And we've continued to push the bounds of what's possible.

Yeah, it's an unreal feeling. I think, you know, childhood Sydney was super excited to experience. Andre, do you how often do you say, Hey, I'll race you to the fridge.

I'll race you around the block. Do you do that? To the fridge and around the block, but in a formal setting, it's funny. Both of us being at high level athletes, we never have officially raced.

You've never raced. And we, it's gotten to a point now where Kevin, I regret that I didn't do it earlier because she's getting faster and I'm getting slower. So it's just, it's not going to happen at this point.

So, so Andre played at UVA, wide receiver, three seasons in the NFL, including with our very own Carolina Panthers here in Charlotte. Did you, did you live in Charlotte? Did you get it? I know it's kind of different when you when you're at different teams, but did you call this home for any time? So for the time I was in Charlotte, I was a practice squad guy for the Panthers that year. And it was, it was only like half a year.

I was kind of there. So I got a little bit of a taste of it, but not fully. I enjoyed the city though.

It's like a suburban city to southern city. I really enjoyed it. It was really nice.

Well, you are most welcome here anytime. In fact, my kids and you were nice enough before we hit record to meet some of them. They're all, you're going on with, with, with Sydney.

So are they, are they staying at our house? Well, not, not, not quite that. But you know, you're, you're, you're very welcome to Charlotte anytime. So I have another special guest, my daughter Mary, who is 13, a runner, and she wants to meet Sydney and ask a question.

Hi, it's really nice to meet you. I'm a big fan. Nice to meet you.

So my question is, who is the coolest person you met at the Olympics? Oh my goodness. That is such a tough question. Wow.

Andre, can you even think of where we were? Person that you met at the Olympics. It's interesting. I mean, in the Olympic village, you see some of the people from so many countries.

There's, there were some other Christians who were just breaking out the song that we didn't know and we may not know their name, but that was, that was interesting and fun and cool. But Sydney, is there a person, Sydney, you can think of? I can't think of anyone off the top of my head. We were so focused, Mary.

We weren't even, we weren't even looking around too much. I can tell you the coolest person I

met was Sydney. Oh, did you meet Simone? I don't.

Biles. Yeah, actually, I think I met Simone Biles at the 2016 Olympics. Oh, that's cool.

Yeah. I was in the elevator with a bunch of the gymnasts. I don't know that they remember who I was, but it was really cool to see them.

That's really cool. Well, it's super nice to meet you. You too.

Thank you for asking. You know Anna Cockrell. She has a second in the race.

Anna went to high school at Providence Day, which is just about two miles from where I'm standing right now. Wow. They're in the same conference with our little covenant day Christian school.

We joined this, you know, it, like super kind of national level conference with our little Christian school. That's awesome. Well, it's, yeah, it's sometimes awesome and it's sometimes embarrassing.

But, you know, it was really, it's been really fun for our area, our conference. They had like an anacocral day at Providence Day. How much do you interact with the other athletes? I mean, especially in your discipline, it's not just the Olympics.

You do Diamond League or you do other circuits. Is it pretty much everyone, everyone stays to themselves? Or is there a lot of mixing and getting to know each other? It's a good question. I definitely think at track meets is where people tend to see each other most and get to kind of converse because we are just also spread out over, you know, all the United States.

Whereas other countries, they kind of have big training groups that work together. The United States, everybody is kind of a bit more separated unless you're in a group with a bunch of other athletes. So, yeah, I mean, there is definitely some mixing and mingling, but for the most part, I would say our event, we don't tend to mix and mingle too much because it's so competitive.

But everyone's very cordial, very, you know, very polite, but definitely always game face on when we're around each other. So, with my last name, Dee Young, I'm, you know, my family way back when it was from the Netherlands. So, if the U.S. isn't in it, I do like the Dutch.

And so, I want you to win, but I like femme ke bowl. Yeah, you meet her. She looks tall.

I guess all the Dutch people are. Yeah, honestly, I was a bit shocked the first time I met her. She's taller than I expected her to be.

Because I thought I was pretty tall, I'm 5'9", and she's a bit taller than I am, but she's very sweet, very humble, very nice girl. So, yeah, I completely respect you rooting for her. For the Dutch.

So, for both of you, I'd love to hear, and we'll just start with you, Sydney. So, what's the life like as a professional athlete? And we'll get to the NFL, and Americans know a lot more about the NFL than they do about track. We're going to, you're going to change that, but you know, but it's the case.

They know a lot more about the NFL. And I'm curious how similar or different they are, but just start with you. What's it like? I mean, are you having to obviously be on very disciplined regiment with what you eat, what you sleep? Your workouts, what is it like day in and day out week after week as a professional track athlete? It's definitely a very individualized sport, compared to something like a football or a basketball.

Most of your funding is going to come from your shoe sponsorship. So, for me, that's new balance. And, you know, from there, it really is figuring out what your coaching is, what your therapy is.

And for some people, they're lucky that their coach is on a college campus. So, a lot of those things may be provided. But most of the time, you're kind of figuring those things out for yourself.

And so, definitely very regimented track is not as popular as a football or a basketball. So, the funding is very different. And some of the opportunities are very different.

So, it really is for a lot of people, just the love of the sport, I think, that keeps them doing it. A lot of people see just the Olympics every four years, but we have world championships. We have diamond leagues.

Now we have GST. So, there are other races taking place every single year. And I do think track is on the rise, hopefully, and it will continue to be until the LA Olympics.

So, just excited to be a part of that. That's great. Andre, what's the grind like in football? I mean, all the way from, you know, college is like a full-time job, except you didn't get paid for it back then.

Now they do, into the NFL. And how does it compare? I feel like one untimely born, Kevin. I know exactly.

You're overdue for some NIL. No, I mean, football is obviously, like you mentioned, it's America's game now. And it's a team sport.

So, you have your facility, you have your coaching staff, something, I mean, many times overstaffed, whereas Sydney is running a lean mean machine. Track and field is almost like F1 racing. You got a pit crew, and you got your driver.

And that's her. With us, though, there's just so many bodies. There's a lot more camaraderie, I think you would say.

And there's a rewarding nature with your team when the goal is accomplished together. But it's definitely been interesting for me, having been completed with my career, once Sydney and I began dating and got married, being able to see just the similarities and the differences. And I mean, obviously, I love football.

I played tackle football at the beginning when I was five years old. So, I always saw the NFL as the end game. And then my career may not have been as illustrious as I wanted it to.

It was a blessing to taste it. But honestly, watching Sydney achieve all that she's seen or achieved in track and field has been altering, to my perspective, of like individualistic sports and how much it actually still requires from team and a support system coming around around her and alongside her. Sydney, what's the hardest thing about training that most people wouldn't understand? I mean, they can maybe sort of fathom, oh, you're going to run a lot that hurts.

What is it that regular people don't know that you have to go through to be at the level you are? I think just the degree to which you have to put your body through to be prepared to run faster than no humans ever run before. It's a feeling that it's almost really hard to duplicate. But to be prepared for some of those moments, you have to almost put your body in those vulnerable positions.

And so nobody's better at that. I feel as than the coach that I have right now, Bobby Kersey. And so I would say the hardest part of my job is weathering some of the workouts that his mind comes up with.

Is there a killer workout like you do 2,400s or something that you do frequently? Let's test your fitness level that you dread. You know, there's not a staple. That's the worrisome part Kevin changes every single day.

And you never know what it's going to be. But his mind works in a fantastic way that just always kept ready. I've always wondered with the 400.

Are you having to put in a lot of miles? I mean, do you have to go and do a 10 mile tempo run or not that long? Is it all kind of sprints? No, we do some mileage and Andre actually he'll run with me, which is I appreciate him for. We do some mileage, but it's definitely not 10 miles. I can promise you.

I promise you that. Good. All right.

Well, I won't I won't race you then, but we do I'm going out farther than 10 miles. You can win that one, Kevin, for sure. Oh, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So let let's get and I want to come back to some of the track stuff because I love track.

I think I explained to Andre and I've said before on this program. I I'm second to none in how

much track we watch in our we watch the Diamond League. We're getting ready for indoor season.

We watch in CAA. We just I I was not a great athlete. I promised my kids I would not regale you with any stories of running D3 track and field.

But my dream as a kid was not the the the grand slam in the World Series or catching a touchdown in the Super Bowl. It was to be Sidney McLaughlin, of course, before before Sidney McLaughlin, but to get the to get the baton in the four by four for team USA. So my dreams are going very unfulfilled, but the Lord's blessed me with a lot of other things and hopefully some other abilities.

So I want to come back to that. But I want to hear how did you two meet? That's got to be a fun story. You got married 2022.

Andre, lead us off. How did you two meet? Yeah, social media. I mean, there are redeeming qualities of Instagram.

Like a DM kind of thing. A DMter. Yes, I did.

During COVID. Now, Sidney, you must have a ton you must have a ton of people who are DMing you, right? There was there was a few and why did you pay attention to this guy? I mean, he's a handsome fellow. I think he is.

Yeah, first. I mean, that's the first thing I saw. But then I was going through his pictures and just, you know, some of his videos and captions of sharing the gospel on his page.

And I think that's definitely what caught my attention more than anything else. And so I was like, Hmm, interesting. I think I'll see where this goes.

And so what about you, Andre? Did you just think we're your friends like, no, just try it. Just try it. Just see what happens.

Or did you have some inkling? Maybe this would get a response. It was a it was a full court shot, you know, I had an actual mutual friend with her that she ran track in high school with Sidney. And then she ran track at UVA and I became friends with her there.

And I learned that she was friends with Sidney. And I was like, Oh, could you put an award for me? But then when I reached out to Sidney, she was like, I've actually never heard of you. I did.

I thought that she was warming the call up, but it was still a cold call. So what happened from there? Because you weren't in the same city. I imagine.

How did you get together in person? This was over COVID 2020. And I was done playing football. So I was working in commercial real estate and that industry kind of shut down that year.

So I did have a reasonable amount of free time. And our social media exchanges were short lived and then we were text messaging and face timing. And Sidney, I mean, what would you say? Like some of those early face times naturally started to center around just biblical conversation.

We started doing Bible studies. I invited you at the time I was a part of a NFL Bible study with some like NFL executives and former players and things of that nature. I invited Sidney and she joined that.

And then me and her started doing our own Bible studies as well, FaceTime. And then I made the trek to Los Angeles where she was living about a month later. We met.

So yeah, Sidney, were you into him from the beginning or you kind of let's just see I've had a lot of suitors knock on my door? Yeah, I definitely, you know, both of us definitely just wanted to become friends first and foremost, more than anything else. And I think the exciting part was that was when I was really starting to dive deeper into my relationship with Christ and I had a lot of questions and was looking for a lot of answers. And that's kind of how our friendship formed was those Bible studies, those talks, those conversations, which excited me about our friendship.

But I also in the back of my mind was like, okay, we'll see where this goes long term, but first and foremost, you know, I'm excited to learn more about Christ and to have a friend now who could I could do that with. That's fantastic. I want to follow up on that about your Christian commitment for both of you.

I have one more to young who's been waiting in the wings patiently. This is my son Benjamin. He is 10.

He's a basketball football guy, but he can run to. All right, Benny, what are you going to ask? I'm a huge fan. I love watching the Olympics, but I just want to ask, what's your favorite past Olympic memory, just any moment? That's a great question.

I think my favorite Olympic memory was after the 400 hurdle race, getting that lap around the track, the victory lap, and being able to see Andre, my parents, my trainers, friends, family. It was just like a full circle moment of all of us getting to celebrate together. Oh, that's all I want to ask.

Nice to meet you. Very kind of you to take some extra questions. We've run out of the youngs for the time being.

They're in various different places. My oldest son, he's had a longtime girlfriend. She's great.

She's at UVA. We become UVA fans. He makes the trek up there often.

Andre, talk about East Coast. Did you grow up in Virginia and how did you become a Christian?

I'm from Maryland. What part? Laurel, Maryland.

I got married in Laurel, Maryland. We got married in Laurel. For real, because nobody gets married in Laurel.

Why did you do that? My wife's dad, he's now with the Lord, but he was a Navy chaplain. They lived in Annapolis. He was working at Bethesda.

They went to a PCA church that met in a school cafeteria, so we didn't want to get married there. We just looked for a church that we got married and Laurel, Maryland, spent our first night of our honeymoon in the Inner Harbor in Baltimore. Give it up for Maryland.

That's amazing. I'm from Laurel, Maryland. Virginia came into my history just through college.

I grew up in a Baptist church. My parents were members there and faithful members. My mom served with the children's ministry there.

My dad was always a part of the security team at our church. I, at a young age, came to a profession of faith. I truly believe it was genuine, around 10 or 11 years old.

It was baptized. I genuinely felt a love for God. If you're for God, my parents always would say, even at 6 or 7 years old, at nighttime before I'd go to sleep, I'd ask questions like, is Jesus coming now? The nature of my anticipation for his appearance in his coming was real before I had any theological understanding at all, but definitely through my teen years came to realize that sanctification is progressive and had many challenges along the way, but always felt God's presence in the conviction of sin and his grace being dispensed to redirect me to his narrow path.

That would be my story. I think the last part of that I would share is in college, I suffered a serious injury, a fractured vertebrae in my back. From football? Yes.

There were some doctors telling me, like, you probably won't play again, and I was a kid devoted to football. That's all I cared about. I knew my whole life.

I'm going to the NFL. My parents always said, had to plan B, and I had maybe a plan D, but plan A, B, and C were all NFL. So that was really disheartening, but God's grace was immense and allowed me to heal.

Many of the doctors said they wouldn't perform a surgery. That would allow me to play again, but there was one who did. Shout out to Dr. Shimer.

Thank you. But when I woke up from my surgery, our team chaplain at UVA was the only one by my bedside, and he was there for a couple of days, and we'd go through the descriptors. He'd come back to my apartment when I was still walking with a walker, and we spent a lot of time together.

He encouraged me to start leading our team's Bible study, and the next year, it went from probably about five frequent comers to 15 to 20 frequent comers. There were a couple guys I was able to have an impact and a discipleing, and then after I left college, one of the young men there saw immense fruit and growth beyond that to where like 30 guys were frequently coming. They were praying full team almost before and after every game.

They were baptizing players on the team. So that was really the full circle of the journey of what God can do. That's great.

And now you're at Master Seminary. Correct. So you're feeling a call to ministry? What are you thinking the Lord knows the steps, but what are your ambitions for ministry moving forward? Absolutely.

Coming to seminary, very ambitious, thinking we want to plan a church back east where our families both are, and we have some friends who've thought about private schooling, Christian schooling as well, so just thinking about all of those things in conjunction. Don't know exactly how they will materialize. We'll still be here in L.A. for a few more years while I'm finishing seminary and Sydney's still competing.

The Olympics are there. I know, right. But long term, our desire still is to move back east along with family and friends there and plant a church back east.

My sister is a member at Mark Dever's church, Capitol Hill Baptist Church. So I know he has a lot of history and experience in helping raise up church planters and being at John MacArthur's seminary with a lot of faithful professors there. I'm looking forward to whatever the Lord has in store and how I'm trained along with my wife.

Those are some really good places to get trained. In fact, I was just texting with Mark this morning. We talk often and I said that we were doing this, so he said, please say hello to them.

Yeah, CHPC. If you're a Baptist, now, you know, you could be a Presbyterian, but that's fine. If you're a Baptist and you want to get trained for ministry, yeah, there's about no better place than you can go for one-on-one mentoring than to go with Mark in D.C. So I know you guys were there visiting a couple of months ago.

That's great. So, Sydney, you're from New Jersey. What was your growing up like and when did you become a Christian or get serious about following Christ? Yeah, growing up, I attended church every Sunday.

Me, I was one of, I'm still one of four kids, but all of my siblings. I'm one of four too, yeah. Oh, nice.

What number are you? Two. Okay, I'm three. All right, good.

Nice. My wife, Tricia, is the third of four, so she'll feel special. I love that.

Yeah, but we attended church every Sunday. That was a part of our life. Midweek services.

Most of, I would say, my relationships for most of my childhood were in the church, but I just think there were pieces of the gospel that weren't just, I think, that were kind of missing for me. I knew God was a judge. I knew that he did not like sin and all of these things, but I think there were certain parts of his grace and mercy of Christ's life and death that were still missing.

And so for me, I kind of lived a lot of my life in just the fear of the Lord. And so I was always afraid of doing things wrong, of not being enough, of not being loved. And so I think that's why my identity was in track for most of my life growing up, because that's the one place I felt I was doing things right.

And I got that value and validation. And it wasn't until COVID actually that I really felt like I was coming to the end of myself and trying to lead my own life. I knew at some point I wanted to give my life to the Lord, but because it felt more of restrictive than freedom in my understanding, I was like, I'm going to wait until, you know, I've lived my life before I do that.

But COVID was really when I came to the end of myself and just being in my thoughts living alone and God was kind to, I think, just remove a bunch of things from my life that were hindering me from coming to him. And so that was the time where I met Andre actually and had other people who were, you know, kind of speaking into my life and showing me the gospel. And yeah, ever since 2020, early, early, almost 2021, the Lord has blessed me.

And it's been honestly the best decision of my life, just being able to walk with him for these past few years and very grateful for how he's transformed my life, both on and off the track. That's fantastic. I know in your book, you talk some about just, I don't know if you use the word anxiety, but just identity and fear.

And, you know, any really high level performer probably has to wrestle with that, but in particular track, I mean, you get out there, there's nowhere to hide. And there you are. And you just, I mean, you don't always know how you're going to feel.

Sometimes you feel great and sometimes you don't. And there it is. And with the, with the Olympics, especially, I mean, there's a ton of other races, but as far as Americans are concerned, it's like, okay, every four years will really pay attention and let's see if your life has been worth it for four years, which is not a healthy way to live.

So just say more about how that transformed. And I mentioned, you got to, without talking bad, if anyone else on the circuit, this has got to be something that you just see a lot of other athletes, Sydney, just wrestle with. What is it a real worth in value? And just talk more about how transformative this has been for you.

Yeah, 100%. I think you, like you said, your moment comes down. I mean, your identity comes down to a moment, right, that you sometimes don't get back.

Once that gun goes off, you know, there's no second chance, like football, you don't get a next play. It's, it's you in that moment and how you perform. And I think that's a lot of weight to carry for anybody, especially when there is a lot riding on that, whether that's sponsorships or future opportunities that may or may not.

That's just a lot, I think, for anybody to handle. And the freedom that's come from knowing Christ is that I'm not defined by those moments. Those moments are an opportunity to glorify the Lord in whatever my performance is.

And I've felt so much joy in being able to step on the line and know, okay, he's prepared me for this moment. He already knows the result of this moment. All I have to do is use the gift he's given me to the best of my ability and conduct myself in a way that honors and glorifies him.

And so there's just so much peace in that. And I think though the nerves will always be there because that's a natural part of being a competitor, I think the anxiety has found a way to cease and diminish because of, you know, the word of God and his promises to me. That's really, really well put.

I'm sure you guys have heard the little Jerry Seinfeld bit about the Olympics, where he talks about you train your whole life. And I didn't have a girlfriend, a boyfriend, I had to eat all of it. And then it comes down to this, this, this, you know, so he says, you know, this place, greatest guy in the world, this, never heard of him, dead last.

He says it humorously, but if that's the life you're living, that's what it can feel like. I mean, you know, tens of hundreds of seconds. What is it? Sydney, I'd love to hear you give us a sense.

What are you feeling like at the last Olympics, you're on the line, cameras are flashing, you're getting ready for the gun. What are you feeling at that moment? And then as you go around for those 50 seconds and we're all, you know, it's going to be under 50 seconds, but for those 50 seconds, you know, halfway through, do you feel like this is going really well or you're just figuring your steps? What are those 50, 51 seconds like? Yeah. It's really just like kind of locked in the zone.

I think for that race, specifically my coach and I, we've practiced, you know, kind of what we're trying to execute before. And he just was like, this is no different than being at UCLA's track on a Tuesday and I'm standing in the middle of the field with my stopwatch, you know, just execute the same way we do. And so that's really all I was focusing on.

I think through most of the race, it's really just positioning. You know, you can tell where people are by who goes over the hurdle first. So I'm really just measuring, you know, how much of a lead or how much behind people are in front of me.

And then waiting for the moment, you know, when I make my moves, you never know what's really going on, you know, until the race is over and you watch it back. So it's hard to say you're super confident at any moment because you never really know, especially when the crowd's

screaming that loud. So I'm sure Andra had a different vantage point than I did at some points, but, you know, it's really just about executing all the way through and making sure you lean at that line because you never know who's next to you.

Yeah. What's it like for you? I mean, it's got to be maybe even more nerve wracking. It's nerve wracking.

That's the word. Especially with hurdles. You're jumping over stuff.

You hit the nail right on the head. It's the hurdle aspect. Like whenever she runs flat or open races, she's fine.

I'm confident she's going to win, but at the same time, there's no barriers, there's no unanticipated circumstances that can really happen. But I think I'm at practice with her quite frequently. I'm conversing with Bobby just as much.

Her coach Bobby just as much, if not more at times, as well as Malachi or performance director. So I'm aware of what's going on in the week and what we're anticipating her performance to be. But still, when you're sitting in the stands, it's a lot different than being either on the field or on the sideline and a team sport like football.

You're just like, what's about to happen? Because like she's already alluded to, it's the most unforgiving sport. If she does anything over 60 seconds, we're in bad shape. I mean, anything she's doing is under a minute's time, and then you got to wait at least another year, another four years, perhaps, to redeem yourself.

What's it like sleeping and eating? I mean, are you, I am not a very, well, I have celiac, so I can't have gluten or joy in my life, but I also am very picky. So that's my fault. And everyone who knows me knows it's kind of a wonder, it's sort of a medical marvel that I'm as healthy as I am because I eat like a bowl of cereal, toastitos chips, cheese.

I'm not ready, a Mountain Dew, I'm not ready to be an elite athlete. Do you have to just eat bowls of, you know, I don't know, couscous or vegetables and sleep. Eleven hours, what's it like for both of you as elite athletes? Well, we're pretty similar, I feel like in our regimen, the great thing about being married to another pro athlete is we're on the same page about a lot of this stuff.

So I think the lifestyle is not hard to maintain because we have each other, but definitely eat pretty healthy. We definitely like some flavor, you know, we don't want to make ourselves miserable in this whole process for sure, but definitely try to stick to eating pretty clean and healthy, making sure you have enough protein, all the vegetables, all those different things. But Andre, Andre, why don't you tell them about my sleep, please? She's a sleep enthusiast.

Oh, very good. My wife will feel very, very supported. Man, and it's very friendly to her occupation, so I think Sydney has definitely helped me with my sleep regulation, and I think I've

had the privilege to help her with her diet, some of her recovery protocol, having been someone who's been injured many times in his career.

But I think for Sydney, she's seen a tremendous jump in her performance when she's had those two things coinciding on a consistent basis. So my wife at times can swing from one side of the pendulum entirely to the other, where it's like we're going to eat, like you said, bowls of couscous and just straight boiled chicken or whatever it is, and that's one stretch, but then on the other side, it's the entire opposite. So finding some balance there, where you're not compromising your mental freedom to feel like I can't eat anything that I want, I can't indulge at all, because that's also not helpful if you're constantly just feeling suppressed in your desire.

So she eats a good snack every now and then, but it's definitely balanced with a lot of protein and healthy carbs and healthy fats. Yeah, it's a whole, it's not just, I'm going to go do a workout for two hours. It's a whole way of life at this level.

Do either of you have, is there a movie, is there a song that gets you up, that inspires you, that you watch before Big Race, or what do you have going on in your headphones as you're getting amped up? Talk about it. You know, sermons, I'm sure, but besides that? Yeah, I would say, I mean, the mornings of, while I'm getting ready, we normally listen to some worship music of some kind, we'll normally read something in the morning before a race. I feel like we tend to lean towards the Psalms.

So those are always wonderful. And then when it comes to the warm up of the race, I need a little something to get me hyped up. So, always good stuff, clean stuff.

But yeah, definitely has a beat that's going to get me hyped up almost like I'm going to war. So, yeah, I always love having something like that to just get me ready for the moment. What was your hype track, Andre? Man, I'm similar to Sydney.

There were some Christian rap songs. The football locker room is a little different though, because I don't always have control of the audio. So, a little different, a little different environment.

Two other sponsors. I want to welcome a new sponsor to the podcast, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Just a couple hours down the road from where I am here in Charlotte.

They are gearing up for the confessional conference. The pastor has called character and work in Greenville March 11 through 13 this year. Conference is designed to help men in the ministry have a more biblical confessional understanding of the role.

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lineup.

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Bring biblical truth to challenging conversations and lead it to a deeper understanding in your own life. Learn more about the M.A.T.S. program at wts.edu. So, what has it been like, especially since 2020, and it's amazing as you got to tell your story, COVID was horrible for the whole world. And the Lord used it in some really powerful ways.

You two met in that time and the Lord really helped you grow in your faith in that time. Now that people know you're a Christian, Sidney. And even before that, I think people just see you carry yourself with humility, with respect, with a modesty, just with a way of honoring others.

So, it wasn't a surprise when people started, you know, my friend said, did you see? Was she quoting the Westminster Shorter Catechism right there? What's going on here? What's it like? Are most of the people that you interact with either in your sport or just you've been on, you know, national, international shows, and do people think, oh, okay, yeah, be in a Christian school, or are people kind of standoffish about it? What sort of responses have you gotten? I think you get a little mix of everything. There's always going to be people who don't like your message, don't like what you stand for. And, you know, they kind of make it clear.

But we always try to be respectful and polite and loving to those people anyways. It's been actually surprising just to see, even within the sport, you know, other athletes who, you know, and Andre can attest to just want to have conversations about their faith, about the Lord, about where they're walking, and having questions which has been really encouraging, even at-track meets, you know, or before races or after races, wanting to connect on that level and, you know, maybe struggling with some of the same things that we talked about earlier with the fear and identity and all those different things. So it's been really encouraging within the sport to just see a bit more outspokenness and curiosity from people in that regard.

And then I think, you know, when it comes to media and some of the opportunities we're, you know, faced with, there's times where we have to say no, just based upon, you know, what we believe and who it is we represent. And I think we try to carry ourselves in a way that's humble, honest, truthful to the Word of God, but at the same time, we understand what people, you

know, may be thinking in certain moments, and we try to share through our testimonies in the Lord in a way that, you know, people can see that we've been where they are, we've been in their shoes, we understand, but at the same time, this is what we believe and we're holding firm to that and we pray they can come to see the same thing, but at the same time, we're not going to compromise what it is we believe. Yeah, that's wonderful.

And a lot of us are praying for you to keep doing that. It's been so encouraging. I wonder, Andrea, what's it like, you know, what has been like being a Christian, the football world? In one sense, football can look like a super Christian in, or just, you know, in the South, there's a lot of Christian overlay to it, and yet I'm just guessing you get, you know, 50 plus testosterone-laden macho guys in a locker room.

It's not always like Sunday school appropriate. Yeah. What has it been like? Yeah.

There's the stencil of Christianity, but the lines are not filled in at all, a lot of times. And in reality, some of those men are safe. You know, some people have a very simple understanding of the gospel, but I mean, if you believe in your heart and you confess with your mouth, it's the simplicity of the gospel that is the wonder of the gospel.

And we hold hope and faith for those individuals, and we try not to be cynical in our belief for those individuals in their confession. At the same time, there are individuals whose lifestyles drastically contradict that which they profess. And that's disheartening.

You know, when you're that close to those individuals as teammates, I think football locker rooms are amazing places, especially in this Western world that's so divisive to see people come together for a common goal. I think it also allows opportunities to have very transparent conversations because you have a certain camaraderie around the different common goal. So I had a lot of opportunities, as I even mentioned at University of Virginia, and then even as an undrafted guy in the NFL, through the way that I work heartily for the Lord, people seeing that he's a hard worker, stars who are making \$20, \$30 million a year willing to listen to me, you know, about other matters.

So I think for somebody who might be in a common workplace or in an athletic environment as a teenager or in ministry, regardless of what it is, how you conduct yourself, the integrity you walk with, working hard actually does make a difference optically and how you represent Christ and whether your words will be heard and received. So that's something I would say while I was playing football, contrary to Sydney's experience at the mountaintop and as the preeminent figure in her sport, I was the opposite in the professional world of football, but seeing how the gospel can go forth all the same with great fruitfulness if you trust in what the word says. That's right.

You know, Titus 2 talks about good works adorning the doctrine of our faith, adorning the gospel. So we don't add anything. The gospel doesn't need our help.

And yet we can live our lives and our good works are not the gospel. The gospel needs to be shared verbally. That good news that Jesus died for our sins, rose again.

And yet we can make it look attractive. We can make it or we can make it look ugly and hypocritical. And that's so, I imagine, especially powerful when you guys have a platform and a role like both of you do.

I'm curious about the nature-nurture question. Both of you come from really good athletic pedigrees. You know, how far could a normal 25-year-old with the best diet and sleep and Bobby Kirsey coaching and how much is just, you know, you just don't have it for both of you? We'll start with you, Sydney.

Oh, I mean, that's a wonderful question. We talk about this. I feel like quite a bit, especially when you look at some of these youth sports now and some of the levels to which parents and coaches are pushing kids to be elite athletes at seven years old.

I think there's a healthy level of letting yourself develop naturally, right? Letting your body grow into itself and seeing what your natural strengths are. Obviously, there's certain ways to nurture that along the way. I think from a very early age, my parents had us eating pretty healthy.

So that's something you can always do. And then just some of the basics when it comes to running form, learning what it means to have core strength, hip flexor, mobility, stretching, warm-ups, cool, like things like that, I think are natural, you know, in being an athlete that you can help develop along the way. But I do think when you start getting into the realm of professional sports, there are a lot of athletes who are really hard workers.

And they have to do everything under the sun to make sure that they're staying in their top peak. So I think, you know, there is a healthy level of mentality and mindset to work your way to the top 100%. And then I do think there's also a category of just naturally gifted human beings that God has made.

And when you get those human beings in the right environment for their training, they tend to excel. And so I think both can be successful. Both have just very different ways of doing it.

And it really just depends on the person. And, you know, sometimes you're very, very talented and sometimes the opportunities just don't arise or injuries incur, you know, as Andre has seen in his life. So it really just depends.

God has a story for everybody and they're all kind of written differently. So, yeah, what did you think when you were growing up with your hopes and dreams, Andre? I think what Sydney said is very well founded. I think track and field definitely has a little bit more of a natural selection component to it.

I mean, you're talking about tens of seconds, thousands of seconds that separate a vast

majority of people. I think football, even basketball, some of these more skilled-based sports, you have tremendous athletes who transcend the nature of the sport. I hear stories from some former teammates of mine who played with Adrian Peterson a while ago with like the Minnesota Vikings.

And even at that level at times the quarterback would have to whisper like what his job was, but he was just that gifted or it's like put in the field and they'll figure it out. But those individuals are far and few between. So I think there's a lot more athletes in a lot of the high-level sports, football, basketball, baseball, whatever it may be who just put their entire life behind training and the discipline of diet and sleep.

All of these other factors and components. Think of the Kobe Bryant story who would say he'd wake up at 4 a.m. And by the time it was noon, he'd got two or three workouts in, whereas somebody else already had one. It's tough to compete with a guy or a girl who's putting that much more work in and the compounding interest just starts to show.

So I mean, anyone who's listening, who has a child, have them work hard, build out the framework, do your best to do your best to surround them with wise minds and experienced minds. And the old adage of let go and let God is one thing, but I like to think of it more as trust God and get to work, trust that God has gifted you with a certain skill set, and it's now time for you to get to work and see what comes of it. Yeah, and you know, we like sports in our family.

I think sports can do a lot of good for people. And I love what you said there, both of you. I mean, sports is that they're getting started younger and younger.

Specialization is younger and younger kids. If you're really into it, you're hardly letting your kids be kids anymore. Even Christians make the mistake of giving up.

They'll give up almost every weekend to do travel ball, travel sports. And it's a fine line between wanting to tell your kids, I love it, be passionate, be the best you can be. And there's also the reality hardly any of our kids or any of the people are going to have the natural God-given ability to play, you know, at a D1 level, let alone professional, let alone Olympics, let alone the best there ever was.

Kevin, quick testimony to what you just said in my youth. I played baseball as well, and there was a year that I made the travel team, and the previous year I hadn't made it, and my dad and I were so excited. And we came home and got the travel schedule, and I remember distinctly my mom saying, what's this, all these tournaments on Sundays? And there was a familial decision, and that's the beauty of the household.

Even in my dad's faithfulness, he was excited for something his son had accomplished, and my mom had to kind of bring to our attention just the detriment it would have to the family unit if on Sundays we couldn't be together for that stretch of time. I mean, if there's a Sunday here there, that may be one thing, but for that stretch of time specifically, and it redirected me, but I

was still successful in another path. So just follow God's course there.

You still see fruit in another way. Sidney, I know you might not want to answer this because you want to be humble, but I'm going to ask you, when did you know I'm not just good? I may be amazing. Because there's good, I see athletes like they're winning stuff, they're good.

They might win their school. They might win their, and then there's, did somebody say, you could be the best there ever was? I would probably say high school. I remember even just my freshman year getting into some of these races against seniors and being absolutely terrified and just seeing some of the results.

I would say my high school coach was one of the first people, besides my parents, to just kind of pull me aside and say, I think you could be the best ever in the 400 hurdles and possibly the 400. And I remember being like, yeah, right, okay, sounds good. And it was that actually that year that I made the Olympic team at 16.

Youngest to make the Olympic track team since 1980. There you go. You know the stats.

I'll do my research here. So keep going. Yeah, you're thinking.

Yeah. And so did that motivate you or did it just make you feel, well, that's really cool. And that's a lot of pressure.

Honestly, when I made the team, I was absolutely terrified. As a competitor, I was going to run the race to the best of my ability at trials, of course, and always compete to win. But I think once it really hit me that I had made the team, I was like, oh, gosh, what have I done? You know, like this, I'm not ready for this moment.

I'm not prepared for this. And I remember being one of like five or six high schoolers that was trying to make the team in different events. And I was the only one of us who made it.

And I think it just was a clarifying moment of, okay, I guess you are, you know, where you're supposed to be. You may not be as prepared as you want to be for it, but God clearly has you here for a reason. And yeah, I think ever since then, I know I've been professional with New Balance now for about six years, but I would say as a pro on this level of running, it's been since the 2016 Olympics.

I think I mentioned this to Andrew when we were emailing, maybe even since this picture. I don't know if you can see this. Yes, he showed me.

Yeah. So I took my that was that was not the finals. That was because you were in lane eight.

That was the first round. That was the first round. Yep.

And we were in the first front row. It was my oldest sons. It was kind of his graduation present.

He was really into track and so was my next son. So he graduated from high school. So we went out to Eugene just it was so fun.

And what I tell people is, I'd never been to Oregon and Eugene. It really is, especially if you love track, it was just great. And what was so different about it is we'd get up.

We stayed at a hotel right there next to the, what's the famous pizza place that has like pre and all of the faces on the track town pizza. Uh huh. Yeah, really, really good.

Even had good gluten free. So we'd get up in the morning and we'd go run. It's like you're just, I don't think we saw you, but we're just seeing people out in the trails from other teams.

I tell people it's like, if you went to the NBA All-Star game and you went to the park in LeBron, it was just warming up there in the park with everyone. So it's a little, it's a little different with track. Not everyone has an entourage.

It's like, oh, I can just walk through and see all these, these track people. But it was, it was so fun. Was that? I mean, do you, do you love Eugene? Is that one of, what's been one of your favorite places? Where do you love to race? I mean, I, the track at Eugene is absolutely beautiful.

One of the most beautiful tracks they've made in all of the world. I think we go to Eugene so often now. We got used to it.

We know everything about it. But I think one of my favorite places that we have been to race, oh my goodness. I think the Tokyo Stadium is unreal.

That's where World Championships is this year. Oh, you're finally getting somebody to be in it. Exactly.

Hopefully, hopefully, Andre is in the stands. You know what I mean? So excited for that. But it's a beautiful stadium.

Everything in Tokyo, they just do so pristine, so clean, so well done. And yeah, I would say that I was sad in 2020 when nobody could be there. So I'm excited to get a chance to redeem that this year.

That's great. I know you guys got a hard cut off in just a few minutes. Just a couple more questions.

Maybe you want to, maybe it's all secretive, so not asking you to break breaking news here. But what are your plans? What are you hoping to run in the outdoor season and getting ready for world championships in hopefully L.A.? Yeah. I think we're going to, you know, we like to do a little bit of everything.

I think over the past few years, one thing that I've really started to love is showing my range

from the 400 hurdles to the 400 to the 200 to the 100 hurdles. I really love showing the diversity of what we're capable of doing. And I think, you know, we'll have some opportunities to continue that this year.

I don't know that I can fully divulge what we're going to focus on for the championships. Keep it a secret. That, and also things change with us so frequently.

I think people learn by now that with Bobby Chrissy, anything is possible. So, you know, we like to just take it one moment at a time and see kind of where the season leads us. Yeah.

If you line up for the 100 hurdles though, that's going to give your poor husband a real attitude. Oh, yeah. Doesn't that make you more nervous? Huh? Does the 100 hurdles make you more nervous than the 400 hurdles? The hurdles just makes me a bit nervous.

Why not go out and do the steeple chase? Just lengthen it out a little bit. You know, I do one lap. Multiple sounds kind of crazy.

Yeah. Once or did they do the 800? You want to do the 800? I've always heard this, or at least it sounds reasonable to me. I did almost every event in track, which is not because I was good.

It's because everyone was like, well, that wasn't so good. Why don't you try this next one? So I've done almost everything. I think the 400 hurdles in the 800 are the hardest.

What would you say? I've never competitively ran an 800 to give you a definitive answer. I would almost say that probably the 800 only because the hurdles do kind of give you some sort of a distraction from the fact that you're running. And because you're on a certain stride pattern, you kind of know what you're getting yourself different.

Yes. And just everyone's got a great kick and you're just sort of gutting it out. All right.

Last question for each of you, Andre. If somebody's listening to this, they've heard of you guys. And so they tuned in and maybe they're just young Christians, or maybe they're just thinking about Jesus for the first time.

You know, great advice is to find a really good church that preaches the Bible, read the Bible. Any books that you'd recommend a young Christian out there that really been formative for you or even a great text that you got in seminary that you tell people. Yeah.

Go check that out. That's really going to help you in your faith. Yeah.

Those who are Christ curious who perhaps are listening in. I think what is the Gospel by Greg Gilbert? It's a phenomenal clarifying book. Very good.

And not to just endorse Kevin's book here, but what is the church or excuse me, the mission of the church is a phenomenal book as well, clarifying just what our mission is collectively as faithful church men and women as it relates in comparison to some of the social demands

being placed on Christians so that we understand from a positive view what we can do as opposed to a legalistic binding nature of what we ought to do at times. So I think those are two great books. What is the Gospel and the mission of the church? Yeah.

Has there been just a really fun, you know, nerdy seminary text that you've gotten that you go over to Sydney and you've got to read this big old book that you've gotten into? I think some of just the reformers' books, I mean, we think about some works of Calvin or Luther, even some of the Jonathan Edwards texts. All of those, I think for her when she sees some of the old English is a bit daunting, but even for myself at times, because that's just not the framework within which we speak these days, but when you find certain kernels of truth there that you can expound upon, they are rich and it's a reminder that truth that's rooted in Christ is everlasting. It's nothing new and it's eternal more than it is just old.

Yeah, amen. Last question, Sydney, and thank you so much. Both of you for being on this has been really, really fun.

Sydney, so, you know, you're known all over the world and men and women in particular, and you've got a little feel for this just with my kids here, but, you know, there are millions of young women, young girls in particular who really look up to you, and you can probably understand the sort of things that a 13-year-old, 17-year-old, 25-year-old woman wrestles with, struggles with, what's a Christian message that you want to leave with a whole lot of women out there that look up to you? I think one of the best things that scriptures taught me is to take my eyes off of myself in a culture that constantly wants you to look at yourself or look at others and compare yourself, seeking Christ who is above and fixing your eyes on him and, you know, trying to model your life after what he represents and not what the world will tell you is, you know, valuable or honorable or admirable these days is, I think, helpful for any young woman, especially in an age of social media that is so comparative to one another, to beauty standards which are always changing or what they say is, you know, valuable in a young woman to have, true beauty and value is found in God's Word and what he calls us to be as Christian women, and so I would say, fix your eyes on Christ. That's great, that's great. So thankful for Andre and Sydney being here.

This has been inspiring. The sun is out. I'm going to go put some shorts on and go out on a run.

I'm going to do a long run so I can feel good about myself because I don't run fast. Thank you so much for being here to all of our LBE listeners keep praying for Andre and Sydney, and we're praying that you guys stay. Let's see if I can get happy, humble, holy, healthy.

We'll give you those four H's. That would be great. You got lots of fans out there and we're wishing you all the best and praying for you as you keep walking with Christ.

Thank you so much. Thank you. Thanks a lot for having us, Kevin.

Yeah, great. Thank you for listening to life and books and everything in ministry of clearly

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