



Redemption

Featuring Jose Campo

National Wrestling Hall of Fame Coach

Redemption. ... That word has strong connotations within the realm of competitive athletics. It's usually something we find ourselves seeking after a tough loss or when we fall short of our goals. But when it comes to sports, redemption is only as important as we allow it to be in our hearts and in our minds.

In life, redemption can be much more serious. The need for making things right can often be tied to a significant mistake that we have made or the desire to repair a damaged reputation.

For Jose Campo, his deep longing for redemption was connected to both. Campo grew up following the footsteps of his Hall of Fame wrestling coach father Jose Campo Sr. He started wrestling when he was three years old and dreamed of winning a high school state title. But Campo failed to follow the example of his father's great pupils.

"I started looking for shortcuts when I was in ninth grade," he recalls. "I used diuretics and I was bulimic. The lifestyle choices I was making hindered my success. I spent more time on the wrestling mats than anyone, but I was never a champion."

After high school, Campo went to West Point where his brother was the captain of the wrestling team. His career was cut short, however, due to three major surgeries. That wasn't the worst of it. Campo was also involved in the largest cheating scandal in West Point history and was expelled. Rejected and ashamed, he left New York for California and spent eight years as an unemployed drug addict.

"I had no self-esteem," Campo says. "I was the worst sinner of all. How could I be the son of the greatest wrestling coach in New York history?"

During those dark times, Bobby Antonacci, one of his father's great wrestlers, visited Campo in California and brought with him a powerful message:

"There's a God in Heaven who will not only forgive you, but He will use the mistakes that you've made so you can help turn around other people's lives."

Campo took Antonacci's words to heart and gave his life to Christ. He cleaned up and worked his way back into the sport. After stops at Yale and Southern Connecticut, Campo became a high school coach including 17 years at Mt. Carmel High School in San Diego. In 1993, he was named California Wrestling Coach of the Year and more recently was named to the National Wrestling Hall of Fame making him and his father the first father and son to be inducted.

There's a story in the New Testament to which Campo can wholeheartedly relate. Found in Acts 9, we read about a man named Saul who was persecuting the early Christians. While traveling one day, a great light from Heaven blinded him and brought him to his knees. After hearing from Jesus, Saul repented and went on to become one of the greatest evangelists in church history.

Saul later became known as the apostle Paul and wrote a significant portion of the New Testament. His letter to a young man he was mentoring has provided great hope for people like Campo and anyone who is in need of redemption.

“This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15-16/NLT)

There are some things we can do to attain redemption with our fellow man. We can change our ways and work to make things right. But ultimately, redemption is all about what Jesus did on the cross. The word “redeem” in the Bible literally means to “buy out of slavery”. Jesus’ death on the Cross paid the price of God’s wrath against sin. The blood of Christ was the price God paid for our “redemption”, which bought us out of slavery to sin and its eternal consequences. It is only through God’s saving grace that we can truly be free of our sinful past and experience the fullness of life that God offers to us.

And that’s incredible news for every single one of us.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you describe a moment in your athletic career where you felt like you needed to redeem yourself?
2. Have you ever felt like you messed up really bad? How important was it for you to make things right and/or repair your reputation?
3. Who are some other people you can think of who have messed up, but were able to find redemption in man’s eyes through their actions?
4. Go back and read 1 Timothy 1:15-16. How might embracing Paul’s message help you deal with a past mistake you’ve made or a mistake you might make in the future?
5. Is there something for which you currently need to ask forgiveness from God and/or someone else? How do you think being redeemed through His saving grace might help you experience the fullness of life and become the person that He created you to be?
6. Would you join me in prayer today, and seize this moment to ask God’s forgiveness, and to surrender your heart and life to Christ? Let’s pray. Repeat silently after me as I pray out loud:

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord, I recognize that I have rebelled against you many times in my life, and have sinned against you. I acknowledge that You are holy and I need Your forgiveness. Jesus, thank you for dying on the Cross, to pay the penalty for my sin. I now ask You Lord, to forgive me, and to come into my heart. Help me become the kind of person that you want me to be. Thank you for coming into my life. In Your Name, Amen.