



All For God

Featuring John Peterson
Olympic gold medalist

As athletes, we have a lot of reasons for doing what we do.

There are the physical benefits we gain from training and staying in shape. Then, there are the emotional benefits that inherently come from athletic activity such as confidence and self-esteem. And of course, there are the material benefits that often motivate us such as trophies, championships and notoriety.

There's one common thread that runs through all of those things: at the end of the day, they all point back to you.

During his collegiate career, John Peterson came to that hard realization. Despite the fact that he had given his heart to Christ when he was 12 years old, he found himself making wrestling more of a god in his life.

"I was gaining my significance and my sense of who I was more from wrestling than I was from Christ," Peterson admits.

The emptiness Peterson was feeling led him to take another look at the sermon that led to his salvation as a pre-teen. It was based on one of Jesus' more challenging teachings:

"Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33/NLT)

Then, Peterson looked at the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Colossae: **"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." (Colossians 3:23/HCSB)**

So what did Peterson do next? He started pursuing his sport in a way that honored God. Peterson, along with his brother Ben, decided to use wrestling as a platform to tell others about Jesus. He did so while competing in two Olympic Games and two World Championships, and has continued to work "for the Lord" as a coach.

"God created us for His glory, not for our own," Peterson says. "When we seek to get the pats on the back from what we accomplish, we put undue pressure on ourselves. God didn't create us to have that kind of pressure. He created us to honor Him. So when I pursued pleasure in Him, it took the pressure off. I could enjoy wrestling in a whole different way."

And that brings us back to original point. How is it possible to glorify God in a world where individual and team success is intrinsically built into the very fiber of what we do as athletes and coaches? How can we do everything for Him while receiving the personal benefits that can come from competition?

Doing it all for God goes against human nature. We are all born into this world with pride and selfishness. That's why living out Colossians 3:23 is all about surrender. It's about understanding why we're really here. It's about seeing the big picture and recognizing that anything we might gain from our athletic pursuits is temporary and will be long gone when this life on earth is over.

The greatest rewards are found in a relationship with God and are gained when we honor Him in everything we do—and that ultimately means wrestling for Him too.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the reasons why you wrestle?
2. What are some other benefits that might come from participating in the sport? How many of those are personal benefits and how many are beneficial to others?
3. From your experience, how can human nature dictate our motivations to compete and be successful? Are those areas with which you've personally struggled? Explain.
4. Go back and read Colossians 3:23. How do you think that scripture might apply to your wrestling career? How might it apply to other areas of your life?
5. What are some things that you can do today that will help you pursue your wrestling career with an "All For God" attitude?

Closing Prayer