



Total Commitment

Featuring Casey Cunningham

NCAA Champion; Pan American Silver Medalist

The sports world has no shortage of clichés attached to the concept of effort. This is certainly no different within the wrestling community where phrases like, “All In,” “Give 110%” and “Embrace The Grind,” are often used to challenge athletes to make a total commitment.

It’s true. For an athlete to get the most out of his or her talents and abilities, a total commitment is required to disciplined training, focused practice, and competitive excellence.

Throughout his wrestling career, Casey Cunningham was the epitome of a totally committed athlete. At Central Michigan University, he worked tirelessly en route to an NCAA championship and All-American honors.

But before he achieved those incredible accolades, Cunningham first had to answer some nagging questions about the purpose of his commitment. Ultimately, it was an ACL injury right before the conference tournament during his redshirt sophomore year that forced him to dig deep into his heart. In the process, Cunningham discovered that he had allowed his athletic career to take the place of something much more important.

“Wrestling was my god,” he explains. “When that was taken away from me, it made me step back and reassess my life.”

His epiphany (realization) led to a conversation about faith with a former coach who had stepped away from wrestling to focus on his spiritual life. That night, Cunningham accepted Christ and everything changed. He felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. As he began reading God’s Word, the scriptures started to connect with his heart.

Cunningham rearranged his priorities and put God at the top of the list. He remained intensely committed to wrestling but now had divine motivation and a divine source of strength to help him follow through.

Now an assistant coach at Penn State, Cunningham has that same level of commitment, only this time, his new purpose is to have a positive impact on the lives of his athletes.

“You need to understand that God has a plan for you as an athlete or as a coach,” he says. “This is where He wants you right now and you need to be committed to give your best no matter where that might be.”

Being totally committed can be tough, but it doesn’t have to be a burden. In the Old Testament, men and women of God were often asked to walk difficult paths, but they were never asked to walk alone. **“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him...” (2 Chronicles 16:9/NLT)**

Staying committed is all about our obedience. God is looking for men and women who will be totally committed to following Him. Doing what God asks may not always match up perfectly with our desires at the moment, but if we trust God, He will give us what we need to take the next step forward. Just as an athlete must discipline himself to eat right, train hard, get rest, and listen to his coaches, a follower of Christ must discipline himself to read the Word of God on a daily basis, pray, worship the Lord, and listen to Godly people in his life.

The Apostle Paul wrote: **“Now everyone who competes, exercises self-control in all things. However, they do it to receive a perishable crown (a reward that will not last forever); but we do it to receive an imperishable one (an eternal reward)” (I Cor. 9: 25).**

Paul was saying that following Christ takes the same kind of commitment and sacrifice that it takes to be a great athlete. Being committed and faithful to God is an important part of building your relationship with Him. God knows our hearts. He knows if our motivations are pure or impure. When we do it His way, He will reward our commitment with the strength we need to complete the task at hand. Following the Lord is not always easy, but nothing good in life comes easy.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that challenge your daily focus and your dedication? What do you do to try to combat those things?
2. What is your number one motivation for being committed to your athletic pursuits? Have you ever questioned your motivation? Explain.
3. Go back and read the first part of 2 Chronicles 16:9. Imagine God searching the earth. What do you think He sees when His eyes look at you and your commitment to your sport and to your faith?
4. How often do you ask for God’s strength as an athlete, as a student, and as a follower of Christ? Does your prayer make a difference? Explain
5. How can you get to know God better? (Suggestions: By spending time with Him, reading His Word, talking to Him in prayer, gathering with other believers to worship God and grow in your faith at a solid church, and sharing your faith with others.)
6. What are some areas in your life where you need to be more committed to God? In what ways do you think that commitment will help you fulfill the purposes for which you have been called?

Closing Prayer