



Spiritual Discipline

Featuring Stephen Barrett

NCAA Champion

Wrestlers are very focused and disciplined individuals who understand the importance of key elements such as training, conditioning and diet. Former NCAA champion Stephen Barrett can relate. He pushed his body to the limit in pursuit of agility, endurance and quickness so he could accomplish his goals and achieve greatness.

But after winning the 1977 NCAA individual title in the 142-pound weight class at Oklahoma State, Barrett realized there was something missing in his life. That revelation led him into a relationship with Christ and a commitment to full-time sports ministry. The self-control that Barrett once exercised to discipline his body eventually became the driving force in his spiritual growth.

“If you want to be a great wrestler, you’re not going to do it by sitting on the couch, eating chips and watching TV during practice times,” Barrett says. “It’s the same thing with spiritual discipline. It’s not something that’s easy. It’s intentional. You’ve got to be thinking about it every day.”

Now living in Mongolia, Barrett works with athletes who are willing to go to great extremes in order to reach elite levels of competition. His challenge is to make them understand how much more important it is to have that same focus and determination when it comes to being a champion of the faith.

In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul explains it this way: **“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:8/NIV)**

For the follower of Christ, spiritual discipline is required to have the kind of abundant life described in John 10:10. This is particularly true when it comes to daily Bible devotion and prayer time. Paul encourages us to **“pray continually,”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17/NIV) or in other words, follow the Holy Spirit and daily live in an attitude of communication with God. David gives another great piece of advice when he proclaims, **“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11/NIV)**

In both instances, the spirit of prayer and a consistent commitment to Bible study, spiritual discipline requires the same kind of daily dedication that winning wrestlers give to their sport. Like Barrett has discovered years after his championship run in Stillwater, Oklahoma, the rewards that come from living for God are far greater than any medal or trophy can offer.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things you do on a daily basis to stay in competitive shape and to give yourself the best chance to succeed on the mat?
2. What areas of your physical training do you find the most difficult to maintain? Explain.
3. Go back and read 1 Timothy 4:8. What are some benefits of physical training? What do you think Paul means when he says, “godliness has value for all things?”
4. How would you describe your current commitment to spiritual discipline? All in? Inconsistent? On hold? What are some things that are keeping you from consistent prayer and daily Bible devotion?
5. What do you need to today that will get your spiritual discipline back into shape? How do you think your daily life will be impacted when you make that commitment?

Closing Prayer