

5 Gold-Medal Olympians Use Colossians 3:23-24 to Achieve Glory

Following Part One, here are the next five of 10 young American Christian Olympic athletes competing in the 2016 Olympics.

They are remarkable as athletes alone. But it's their faith that makes them stand out even more—beyond the world recognition for record-breaking accomplishments.

Allyson Felix, 30, Team USA Track and Field

Allyson Felix is already an accomplished Olympic Gold medalist. She told Beyond the Ultimate, an organization dedicated to sharing Christian athletes' testimonies, that she accepted Jesus Christ into her life at a young age, but "is still a work in progress." She says:

"I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior at a very young age. Ever since then, I have continually been striving to grow in my relationship with God. I was nowhere close to the perfect child. I had my share of difficult times along with some disappointing choices that I made, but thankfully God never stops loving me."

If she's not running on the track, she says:

"My goal is to be more Christlike each and every day and that is not an easy task. I know that I'm trying to be something different from [other Olympic runners] and after I run I hope that people can distinguish [Christlike] character in the way I present myself."

Missy Franklin, 21, Team USA Swimming

Missy Franklin qualified for the 2008 Olympic trials at the age of 13.

Then, when she tried out for the 2012 Olympic games, Franklin became the first woman in history to qualify for seven Olympic events.

Franklin told *Charisma* magazine that “God is present at the Olympic games.” She explains:

“Once every four years, athletes, families, friends and fans come together from all over the world. I know God will be there and I hope many of the people there will also feel His presence. He will offer us the opportunity to appreciate and love our similarities and differences.”

Tobin Heath, 28, Team USA Soccer

The leader of the U.S. Women’s Soccer team is a rock star. Two-time gold medalist Tobin Heath is a midfielder who loves playing soccer. But she loves something else even more—expressing the love of Jesus Christ to others. She told Beliefnet:

“If you see being a role model as a platform where you can pour into others for Jesus with love, that’s where I want to be. Becoming known or noticed in my sport isn’t what’s drives me to work hard and want to be the best I can be. It’s Jesus. That’s why I play. I play to glorify Him.”

Heath adds that her faith helps her stay motivated both on and off the field. She says:

“I try to keep that as my motivation when I step out on the field every day whether it’s practice or a game. It’s to work as hard as I can in thankfulness for what He’s given me and

hopefully some of that can come back to Him.”

Michael Phelps, 31, Team USA Swimming

No one needs an introduction to Michael Phelps who has broken every world record and Olympic record in swimming, even his own. He is the most decorated Olympian in the history of the games. What many people may not know is that Michael Phelps is a Christian who credits God with saving him from committing suicide.

After achieving international fame that comes with winning more gold medals than anyone else in history, Phelps struggled with substance abuse. He also struggled with the emotional fallout of family issues in 2014. All of the pressure and success and personal struggle avalanched to a point where he thought dying would be better than living.

But God had other plans. Phelps’ Christian friend and athlete Ray Lewis gave him Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*. He expressed his gratitude in an ESPN broadcast for his newfound faith. He says:

“It’s turned me into believing that there is a power greater than myself and there is a purpose for me on this planet ... I think it helped me when I was in a place that I needed the most help.”

Bubba Watson, 37, Team USA Golf

Bubba Watson’s Twitter bio simply states: “Christian. Husband. Daddy. Pro Golfer.”

This is putting it modestly. Watson is the only pro-golfer to have won two Masters Tournaments in three years, “becoming the fastest golfer in history to win his second green jacket. He bested Horton Smith, who won his second Masters on his third attempt in 1936, and Jimmy Demaret (1947) and Arnold Palmer

(1960), each of whom needed six starts.”

Despite this, however, Watson says, golf comes after his Christian faith.

According to The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, since getting baptized in 2004, Watson is “getting more in the Word and realizing that golf is just an avenue for Jesus to use me to reach as many people as I can.”

Becoming a Christian has helped him curb his temper and to be a stronger witness for Christ. Citing Christian rapper Lecrae, Watson says:

“Lecrae said it the best. He doesn’t want to be a celebrity. He doesn’t want to be a superstar. He just wants to be the middle man for you to see God through him.”