

Dwight Howard Offers Straight Talk About Being Christian in the NBA

Over the past 12 NBA seasons, few players have been more dominant inside the paint than the Houston Rockets' Dwight Howard. The eight-time All-Star entered the league as the first overall pick in the 2004 NBA Draft fresh out of high school.

"Coming into the league you had a mission," says *CBN Sports'* Shawn Brown. "What was the mission?"

"My mission was to preach God's Word, you know, in the NBA," says Dwight. "Use the NBA as a platform for God. And when I'm on the floor, you know, let people see, you know, the God in me."

But for a 19-year-old entering the NBA, Dwight says it was a daily struggle to stay focused on God.

"There (were) times where it was very overwhelming. Where it's like, man, this is so much. Everything is at my disposal, you know, all I got to do is just go reach and it's mine."

In nine seasons with the Magic, Dwight became a three-time defensive player of the year. He made six All-Star game appearances, and became the franchises all-time leading scorer, but with success came temptation. In 2007, Dwight became a father and wasn't married. He took a lot of heat because of it.

"When you come out and told the world you're a Christian for some reason people think that means you can't make mistakes," says Shawn.

"Yes, that is correct," says Dwight. "I am a man of faith. I

believe in God. And I will always believe in Him. And, you know, the minute I messed up, the minute I sinned, everybody took a shot at me. 'Hey, you're supposed to be a Christian,' but God died on—Jesus died on a cross for our sins, you know. So if He's willing to forgive us, why can't we forgive each other?"

Dwight made things right with God. Toward the end of the 2012 season, rumors of friction between Dwight, his coach and teammates began to brew.

"When I was in Orlando and a lot of this stuff went down in Orlando, everybody made me look like the worst guy in the world. A coach killer, a guy who hates his teammates, a cancer, all this stuff that I'm not," says Dwight.

In August, Dwight was traded to the Lakers. In Los Angeles it was difficult for him to play at a high level because he still needed time to heal from surgery.

"I come back, I go to the Lakers," Dwight says. "I'm trying to play. But I'm still not 100 percent, and I was getting demolished for that. 'Ahhh, he's not playing hard enough. He can't dunk anymore. He can't do this.' And I'm like, 'God, why do I have to go through this?' But He said just keep going. Just stay strong."

When the season concluded, Dwight was a free agent and decided to leave Los Angeles and sign with the Rockets. That didn't go over well with Laker fans.

"And now everybody hates me again," says Dwight. "I'm like oh my God, like God, like please, just do something. And He said, 'Listen, if the whole world hates you, I love you. Always remember that.' So I just tried to put away all the hate and everything like that and just focus on my relationship with Him."

Now in his third season with Houston, Dwight wants to win.

He's just working hard to remember his true calling.

"When you look at that guy in the newspaper clip from Draft Day, how's he different from the guy sitting across from me now," asks Shawn.

"Well, I would say this guy in the newspaper, is full of life. No care in the world, no worry. It's a young kid who didn't know anything about the world. And the guy that's in front of you is a guy who's seen, heard, been around, and been through, a lot of different situations. And if I was to go back and tell the guy in this picture right here some things, I would say never let nothing steal your joy. Because you're going to go through hell."

That's a lesson Dwight had to learn the hard way. Today, his mission is still the same.

"When I'm on the floor, you know, let people see, you know, the God in me, says Dwight. Whether that be me having fun, blocking a shot and smiling dunking and smiling, whatever it may be. But just having fun playing with peace and joy."

"What has Jesus Christ meant to you?" asks Shawn.

"Just like my rock, you know what I'm saying, my foundation," says Dwight. "When things are going wrong, when, I'm at a bad place, when I sin, I feel like He's there. He's my foundation. Like He hurts when I sin. But instead of Him turning His back on me, He's like, 'Hey, come back. I still love you. I'm not going to leave. I'm here for you. We connected forever.' So that's what He is."