

Daniel Murphy Experiences God's Grace Through Highs and Lows of Baseball

Over their professional careers, many athletes experience the extreme highs and sometimes-crushing lows of sports.

That's certainly true for Washington Nationals second baseman Daniel Murphy, who recently told his faith story to *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* (FCA,) *Magazine* and is featured on the cover of the July/August 2017 issue, released today on the FCA website.

With the Nats being one of the hottest teams in baseball this summer—and at the top of the National League East division—Murphy is at a high point, batting an impressive .340 with an on-base percentage of .392. This week, he leads All-Star voting—nearly 1.5 million votes ahead of the next second-baseman on the list—and will likely see his first All-Star start on July 11 in Miami. Voting ends today at midnight ET, and the 2017 All-Star team will be announced Sunday.

"The Fellowship of Christian Athletes is excited to share Daniel Murphy's story in the newest edition of *FCA Magazine*," said Clay Meyer, editor of *FCA Magazine*. "It's awesome when we can talk about the faith journey of an athlete on one of the world's biggest sports stages and show that they are just like everyone else when it comes to faith struggles, trusting God in all things and keeping the focus on Jesus. We hope that Daniel's story will impact fans of all ages and demonstrate how the Lord uses everyone's gifts for His plan."

Two short seasons ago, when Murphy was with the New York Mets, he experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows—all in one playoff run. Murphy batted a ridiculous .556 in the NL Division Series and Championship Series, hitting home runs in

six consecutive playoff games against the Los Angeles Dodgers and then the Chicago Cubs.

“The more notoriety I got, I tried to push in closer to Jesus,” Murphy told FCA. “I didn’t want to take that glory for myself. It was a really, really sweet time in our lives.”

But what followed was the complete opposite. Once the Mets made it to the 2015 World Series, Murphy went hitless in three of the five games, batting 3 for 20 overall as the Mets fell to the Kansas City Royals. He drove in zero runs. He struck out seven times. And he made two costly errors in the field.

“Being on top of the mountain and then being at the bottom of the barrel ... just felt like a perfect picture of God’s grace and love in our lives,” Murphy said. “Jesus didn’t love me any less when I made those errors in the World Series than He did when I was hitting those home runs in the NLCS. If anything, He loved me more. He’s like, ‘I think you can handle this; and on My strength, we’re going to grow from this, we’re going to be stronger, and I’m going to refine your heart.’ I’ve been able to use that three-week period as a testimony.”

Murphy grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, with brother Jonathan and sister Tricia, and “would swing the bat all day long” if he could, his dad, Tom, said. Daniel and Jonathan have led an FCA hitting camp for the past few winters in the Jacksonville area, where Daniel shares his testimony with the young players. The brothers also use a host of FCA resources to hand out to the campers.

“We grew up going to church,” Daniel Murphy said. “At a very young age and even through middle school, high school and college, I knew the head answers of what Jesus had done for me personally. At the same time, I thought full surrender to Jesus meant giving up things in my life that I didn’t want to give up. I just didn’t want to give up control of my life.”

Murphy excelled on the Jacksonville University team, and the

Mets took note and drafted him in the 13th round in 2006. He rose quickly through the Mets' farm system and first reached the majors in 2008. He's found a home there since 2009 and experienced a few setbacks due to injury, missing out on the entire 2010 season.

He also went through a breakup with his girlfriend, Tori, which made him look at his own life from a deeper level.

"Sometimes we have a tendency to forget His grace and His love and His mercy," Murphy says. "I had not focused on that in a long time. I got on my knees and, by the grace of God, surrendered my life to Him. 'I don't know where You want to take me,' I said, 'but I know that Your ways for me have to be better than the choices I've made in my own life that have gotten me in this situation.'"

While Murphy went through spiritual growth, Tori was experiencing a spiritual breakthrough as well. The couple reunited, were engaged by January 2012 and married later that year. Today, they are the parents of son, Noah, daughter, Quinn, and have another baby on the way.

"If I were to write out the perfect plan, it never would have worked out like this—ever," Daniel says. "God put things in my life with my family that just tried to strip away the massive idol that is baseball, as I mold, hopefully, into a gracious and serving husband and father."

Back on the baseball diamond, some wrote off Murphy's 2015 incredible postseason as a fluke. Perhaps the Mets were thinking the same thing, as they offered him a generous contract, but only for one year. Meanwhile, Dusty Baker—a former manager turned TV analyst turned back to manager—apparently believed Murphy's newfound power could be sustained. Baker was hired to manage the Washington Nationals in November 2015, and a month later Murphy inked a three-year, \$37.5 million deal.

Baker's confidence in Murphy was rewarded. Last season, Murphy shattered career highs with a .347 batting average, 47 doubles, 25 home runs and 104 RBIs, and finished second in National League MVP voting. And he's on par for another stellar season. Within the Nats community, Daniel and Tori also help lead a Bible study for the team's couples, which is rooted in a profound lesson that Daniel learned from Mets chaplain Cali Magallenes.

"He told me, 'There will be two people waiting for you when you get done with the game of baseball,'" Murphy said. "'One of them I know will be there, and that'll be Jesus. And the other one will be your wife. The relationship you have with her will be a direct result of the investment you've made in her over the course of these years.'

"This is a season that Christ has us in, and I want to build relationships and hopefully show people that I'm far from perfect," Murphy added, "but I know where there's hope and where there's joy and where there's peace. Because I've tasted it, and I want to point them in that direction." {eoa}