

To share with the listener how the sport of wrestling is much like our Christian life.

Wrestling prepares a person to compete in the game of life. The wrestler is the one athlete that must meet their opponent and do battle completely on their own. No one can substitute and time-outs are not possible. You have no one to check, screen, and block or assist you in any way; there is no one to pass the ball to and no one to blame for your mistakes. When you win, you must display quiet pride and modesty; when you lose the responsibility is yours.

Wrestling is a special sport. In other sports, when contact is made, they blow the whistle and stop the action; in wrestling when contact is made, we're just getting started.

No sport requires more sacrifice and discipline than wrestling. The individual, through self-denial, offers more of their character, than can ever be explained here. It is something you carry with you throughout your life, and through every trial, test, and tribulation.

Wrestling ... truly teaches life skills and values. And today I want to share with you how the sport of wrestling can be related to a true relationship with Jesus.

We started this season with 19 individuals on the team. And here we are a little past the middle of our season with a total of 8 wrestlers. Sadly, this is how every season is. We can always count on the fact that we will lose a large number of individuals throughout the season. Some, because of having poor grades, some from injuries, but most of them will not remain because of being released or simply quitting.

You see,

I. Wrestling takes Sacrifices and Commitment.

A. Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, given God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true worship.

1. God calls each of us that have joined the so-called "Christian Team" to be living sacrifices. But what does this mean? Many Christians that have given their lives to Him have no idea what the true meaning is to "live as a sacrifice".

2. A successful wrestler lives their lives as a sacrifice to the sport to be the best they can be. Many people that begin the sport of wrestling have no idea about all the sacrifices they must take in the sport.

3. One of the biggest sacrifices they make is to weigh a certain amount. This takes both sacrifice and commitment to achieve a certain weight. Being careful as to what they put into their bodies is a large sacrifice. No more cake, pie, Mountain Dew, or junk food. All these things do is slow the body up and pack on the pounds. It's a huge sacrifice for most.

4. The wrestler sacrifices their bodies to extreme sessions of training in practice and out of practice. Running miles upon miles outside of practice time, avoiding the daily temptations of eating unhealthy, reviewing matches, and keeping regular hours of rest.

5. Likewise for the Christian, we must be very cautious as to what we are placing into our lives if it is healthy or not to live as a living sacrifice to God. Once we joined the Christian team we are held to certain standards that we must meet to truly live as a Christian.

6. The things in the world in which we use to take into our lives are unhealthy for Christian living. It is vitally important for each of us to stay fit and healthy physically but it is also important for us to keep fit spiritually as well.

7. Each Sunday we gather, this is our practice so to speak. We come here and get knowledge and wisdom and encouragement to place into our lives. Our coach, Jesus Christ demands us to work hard, and it was

never said that being a Christian would be easy.

8. If we believe that we can show up to practice each week and go on about our lives not thinking much more about our walk with Jesus and still excel, we're wrong.

9. Our commitment isn't to just show up and go through the motions, it's to live it out and apply it within all we do. The truth is that it is hard and we are to stay determined and committed to not just ourselves but our team as well.

II. Wrestling Takes a Team

A. Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

1. This verse speaks volumes about how we live our lives. Most people believe the sport of wrestling is simply an individual sport but it's much more than that.

2. For me to get the most out of our team it takes each individual. I need each one of the wrestlers at the top of their game at all times. Their motivation and presence are highly important. Have you ever tried wrestling by yourself? It just doesn't work. There are many things for that matter in life that just don't work if you try it alone.

3. Christians need Christians to grow sharper and to excel with our walk with Jesus. I have heard it a billion times and I am sure you have as well, "My relationship with Jesus is personal". Sure it is, just like wrestling is an individual sport but what about those brothers and sisters on your team that can deepen and strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

4. Church, we need each other to help us stay sharp and focused in our Christian walk.

Illustration: I have shared with many of you personally and also publically about the importance of my teammate that keeps me going. I thank God for my wife. She is my sharpening stone and motivator in many areas of my life. She is not only my best friend but she is the one I can count on to always keep me on track.

5. The greatest influence comes from those we call close friends. Little teams of people, who help us try again when we fail, encourage us when we're discouraged, lighten our load when it gets too heavy, and give us strength against the evil forces and temptations we all face.

6. Our teammates either help us become and stay sharp or they facilitate our becoming and remaining dull.

7. If one of my wrestlers is only wrestling at 25 or 50 percent while the other one is pushing at 100 percent, nothing is accomplished. No one is learning anything and they both become dull and will never reach their highest potential.

I know life is a tough match. I know this because I am living it with you. many times in my life I feel like just pinning myself and walking off the mat because it gets hard and I get worn down.

I tell myself that I have taken enough of a beat down and I can't take anymore.

Let me close this morning with a clip from the movie Rocky Balboa. In this scene, he is speaking with his son and he tells him something that is probably the best advice I have ever heard outside of the Bible.

- It's not how hard you can hit, it's how are you can get hit and keep going!

I believe God has this same desire for us. He has and always has had high hopes for each of us. He desires to see each one of us reach our full potential. How many of us have reached it today? How many

of us are ready to give it our 110% and get motivated within our own lives and to motivate those around us for Jesus?

Let me share my last point this morning. And it is that,

III. Wrestling takes Endurance.

A. James 1:2-3 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Illustration: THE WRESTLER WHO NEVER GAVE UP. One of my favorite stories is about a scrawny kid from West Texas who attended a small high school. They didn't have a wrestling program, but he read a book on wrestling and asked one of the assistant football coaches if he would enter him in some of the wrestling matches in that region.

The coach agreed to help the kid. This little guy was neither strong nor skillful, but he had one enduring quality--he refused to give up. He won every single wrestling match because he tenaciously held on to his opponents and wore them down.

By the end of the season, he was undefeated and made it to the state finals for his weight classification. The kid's opponent was a two-time state champ and a bona fide college prospect. As the scrawny kid faced the state champion, the guy made a couple of quick moves, and soon had the West Texas kid on his back and about to get pinned.

The coach knew his athlete was about to lose, and he couldn't bear to watch it, so he turned his head away. Suddenly, the coach heard the roar of the crowd and when he turned around, his kid was on top of the state champ, pinning him. He had won the match!

The little guy bounced across the mat and hugged the coach and said, "Coach, I won! I won!"

The coach said, "Sure, son. But I missed it. I turned away just before you were about to lose. What happened?"

The kid said, "Coach, that guy was good. He had me twisted like a pretzel on that mat. But you know me, coach. I NEVER quit. I refused to give up! So I opened my eyes, and there in front of my face was a big toe. I don't even know if it's against the rules or not, but I bit into that big toe with all my strength...and coach, it's amazing what you can do when you bite your toe!"

1. That is a picture of endurance - the ability to hang on when it would have been easier to let go. Many people are blessed with certain attributes, but endurance jumps to the forefront for success in any endeavor. Endurance is the key that keeps us from giving up and letting go.

2. Endurance "the power of going on despite difficulties" "Keep on keeping on." "Hang in there." "Don't quit." Its synonyms are determination, perseverance, tenacity, plodding, stamina, and backbone. When endurance is used in the Bible it means "to abide under," "to bear up courageously," and "to tarry or wait."

Conclusion: Are you close to quitting? Please don't do it. Are you tired of trying to live for Christ? Hang in there.

Do you feel like giving up on the Christian life? Roll up your sleeves and get back in there. Can't resist temptation? Accept God's forgiveness and keep on living rightly.

Do you feel that sorrow and disappointment greet you every morning? Hold on. Help is just around the corner. Remember you are not a failure until you give up. You are not pinned until you quit.

So don't quit. Never give up. Keep going. Hold on. God's rewards await us in the distant future, not near the beginning; and we don't know how many steps it will take to reach the prize. No breaks or time-outs exist; we must work every day of our life. It has been said, "Life is like reading a book. It begins to make sense when we near the end." Endurance maintains the stamina needed to see the end and embrace the prize. So wrestle another round, rise another time, and, above all, like that scrawny kid from West Texas, don't let go.

*And always remember this in Life: "Tough Matches are Temporary, but Tough Wrestlers are forever"
Friends, life is tough, being a Christian is tough, but being a Christian and enduring it all will give you an everlasting life forever in Heaven.*