



How to be
**Competitive &
Christlike**

4 Proven Strategies to Compete with Intensity
while Honoring God with Passion

By Bob Upgren

Competition is not against the Will of GOD

Surprised? Most athletes who desire to follow Christ are stunned.

The fact is, it's not only possible to be competitive and Christlike, God may even expect it!

The Bible says, *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are living, breathing representatives for Christ. Called to promote the gospel. Equipped to be the mouthpiece of God, and as athletes and coaches, given the incredible opportunity to use the platform of sports to champion the good news of Christ.

God wants your athletic gifts to be used for His glory.

In recent years, athletes from all levels have become more comfortable with the concept of being an ambassador for Christ in the sports culture. So much, that simple gestures to heaven have become saturated and even mocked at times. I would never condemn the sky pointing, God fearing athletes who "thank God" when competition ends. Only our Father in heaven truly knows the heart and motive of those athletes.

What I do know is this. Glorifying God requires an intentional and biblical approach. Particularly in a sports culture that often encourages us to glorify ourselves.

SO THEN,
HOW DO YOU BE COMPETITIVE AND CHRISTLIKE?

From my experience, there are 4 mindsets the Christian athlete can implement in order to be competitive and Christlike.

1. *The Mindset of* **ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE**
2. *The Mindset to* **ENGAGE**
3. *The Mindset of* **EFFORT**
4. *The Mindset of* **ENJOYMENT**

THIS INTENTIONAL APPROACH WILL ACCOMPLISH TWO THINGS:

1

Provide a framework to assist in honoring their relationship and priority to Christ throughout the sports and competition experience.

2

Equip coaches and athletes with the mindset that God calls them to excellence. God desires them to *“work at their craft with all their heart.”* And yes, ultimately, He commands them to compete in this fashion not for their own glory, but God’s.

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In order to illustrate these strategies, let's take a look at each of the four mindsets from a more faith-first perspective.

ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Your participation in sports is not contrary to God's will.

Think about it. No one pressures artists to stop creating, vocalists to stop singing, or musicians to stop playing. Why should athletes stop competing? These activities are not the issue. The perspective towards the activities is what truly matters. The Bible says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17) Our efforts should unite with our love for Jesus in a way that points to the Father in heaven. This includes your participation in sports.

Remember, God created you. The Bible says, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13) God placed coordination within you and awarded you with speed. It was the same God who poured out oceans and exhaled stars who intentionally fashioned you to be an athlete.

To suggest that followers of Christ must adhere to a fixed set of interests and activities is insulting to the creativity of the creator. Your faith should be in harmony with other followers of Christ, but the manner by which you convey it to the world should look as unique as the priceless masterpiece you are.

If you are an athlete, own it. You don't have to apologize, but do so, with this eternal perspective.

Either your **PASSION** for sports will be focused on bringing glory to yourself, or *bringing glory to the God* who gave you the gift to compete in the first place.

ENGAGE

Once an athlete, coach or parent makes the decision to have an eternal perspective on sports and competition, the next step becomes obvious. Engage in prayer. Involve God in the process.

Many athletes, including those who don't know God, engage in pre-game prayer. The difficulty is determining what and how to pray before competition. Before eating, we pray for the food. Before a surgery, we pray for health and the hands of the surgeon. At bedtime, we pray for the Lord to give us a restful night. These are obvious prayers that have become second nature to many. How then do we pray before competition? Here is a four-tier framework that can help:

Praise - Praise God and thank Him for the opportunity to compete. It was He who gave you the physical gifts needed for you to compete. It was He who gave you the intellectual aptitude to understand the game. It was He who placed you in this very moment.

Protection - Ask God for protection and safety for every participant in the competition, including your opponent. Everyone strives for victory, but no one hopes for injury.

Performance - There is nothing wrong with asking God for your natural gifts to be used to their fullest potential. Especially, if your motive is to glorify God during competition.

Perspective - Pray and seek wisdom for the proper perspective as you compete. During the heat of the battle, it is far too easy to lose sight of the big picture. The bible says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31). God bestowed upon you the athletic talents to discover, develop, and enjoy them. He delights when we receive them as gifts and honor Him when we use them for His glory.

We must **pray** with our *eyes on God*, not on the sport we are about to play.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

EFFORT

Extraordinary effort begins with an intentional choice. Resolving in our minds that we are willing to give whatever it takes physically, emotionally, and yes, spiritually. There is nothing extraordinary about quitting when obstacles present themselves and begin to make things difficult. In fact, one could argue that pressing beyond the barrier of discomfort is where the blessing is found.

It is a good thing for the Christian athlete to question whether or not God is concerned with our extraordinary effort? After all, it seems rather selfish to dedicate so much energy into a sport, doesn't it?

Yet, if we were to consider what the opposite of effort is, our decision becomes more apparent. Words such as idleness, laziness, inactivity, and passiveness all speak to the inverse nature of effort. Does this sound like the heart of God in relation to the gifts He has given you? Is it His will for you to be a "slacker"? The Bible says, "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys." (Proverb 18:9)

God's displeasure with a lackadaisical approach to using our spiritual gifts and natural talents should be more than enough to become sold on the idea of giving extraordinary effort. In Colossians, Paul tells us, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Colossians 3:23-24)

Whatever you do. This includes your **work**, your **school**, your **job**, your **relationships**, and yes, **your sport**.

ENJOY

“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” (Psalm 95:3)

As an athlete, you play for a “great God”. A God whose majesty is unfathomable. Powerful enough to hold the depths of the earth in His hand (Psalm 95:4), yet loving enough to come down in the humble form of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. (Luke 2:12) Ultimately, He exceeds anything you could hope to find on earth. Enjoy the fact that you play for Him!

He is the God of “I will”. Enjoy! His confidence whispers, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Enjoy! His holiness declares, “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10) Enjoy the fact that you play for Him!

When the author of life (Acts 3:15) says something is going to happen, it happens. In due course, for the believer and unbeliever, there is a promise that all will acknowledge His greatness. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” (Romans 14:11) When He says I will be exalted, it’s not lip service. He will be exalted by all. He is the God of “I will”. Enjoy the fact that he is pleased when you use your gifts for His glory.

Consider Jesus, walking the earth and confidently proclaiming to the Jewish leaders, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19) He is the God of “I will” boldly stating the miracle of His resurrection will happen. Confidently establishing the fact that He is in control of all situations, not man. When He says I will, it never means He might. One has to not only love, but enjoy the thought of being associated with such power.

As you compete, understand you play for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

A **God** bold enough to say **“I will”**,
and strong enough to back it up.

YOU CAN DO THIS!

You can do this!

You are totally capable of competing at a high level as an athlete while still honoring God in the process. In fact, your ability to learn how to do this will help you in life. It will help you prioritize God after your days as an athlete are over. Your professional life. Your marriage. Your status and the money you accumulate will all be things that will challenge your loyalty to God.

In the short term, sports is yet another activity that can potentially distract your walk with Christ. But what if you can harness the skill of placing God as the priority. What if everything you did in life filtered through the eye glasses of Jesus and you saw the world the way He did?

Could it be that sports is just one of any number of things that can detour your faith life. If it is, then the issue isn't sports at all. The issue comes in your decision to put God first. First in your mind. First in your thoughts. First in your heart. Once this takes place, then using the gifts that he has given you becomes extremely valuable. In short, you come to a profound realization:

Your gifts used for **His glory** will
expand **His Kingdom.**

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