

Fort Worth's Sarah Scherer draws strength from faith

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LONDON (BP)—American Sarah Scherer of Fort Worth sat in the crowd during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, cheering on her brother Stephen in the air rifle competition. She was thrilled to see him reap the fruits of countless hours of training and practice.



Olympian Sarah Scherer found the strength to continue to pursue her dreams after her brother's death, thanks in large part to the ministry and support of Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth. BP PHOTO/USA Shooting

Shooting had been a bonding activity for the Scherer siblings for eight years at that point. When Stephen Scherer picked up the sport, his 9-year-old sister wanted to join him. They practically were inseparable—both inside and outside the shooting range—as they grew up in a single-parent home, with their mother, Sue, doing her best to provide for the family.

This year, 21-year-old Sarah Scherer from Texas Christian University was the one grabbing the air rifle to compete in London, donning the heavy leather outfit that helps support her physically as she aims and fires at 40 quarter-sized targets from 10 meters away.

But her brother was noticeably absent. Two years after his 2008 Olympic competition, he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

When her brother died, Sarah Scherer contemplated giving up shooting entirely—too many haunting reminders. But through God’s grace and the love and support of family and friends, she found the strength to continue her own shooting career. She does it with a heart full of hope and confidence she and her brother one day will be reunited.

“Knowing that my brother had a faith in Christ and lived for him, that’s the biggest thing for me,” Scherer said. “Because of that decision and that choice my brother made, and that trust that I have, I’m 100 percent sure of where my brother is. I know that he’s in a much better place and that I’ll see him again in heaven. That’s the No. 1 comfort that I’ve really experienced coming from my brother’s faith.”

In the months that followed her brother’s death, Scherer found encouragement from Scripture. Her church family at Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth surrounded her and her mother with prayers. Sarah’s collegiate small group especially was helpful as she grieved her brother’s loss and wrestled with difficult questions, asking why God allowed the tragedy.

“Sarah’s small group was kind of an anchor that continually brought her back to what she knew to be true from God’s word, even when she was at her lowest points,” said Spencer Plumlee, one of Southcliff’s pastors who was college minister at the time.

Friends emailed or texted her with encouragement, often at just the time

she needed it the most. Her small group leader talked with her and listened to her questions. Through all these things, Sarah saw the hand of God upholding her. She sensed the voice of God telling her: "I'm here for you. Yes, this is a tough time. But I have a plan, and I'm in control."

"Leaning on Christ through this time has been the only way that I've gotten through it," she said.

Scherer continued to practice and develop her shooting skills on the TCU shooting team. The times she felt like quitting, she got confirmation from God he still had work for her to do among that community.

So she kept at it, and her diligence paid off. Scherer knew the Olympics could resurrect painful memories of her brother. This was their dream, not just hers, and now he's no longer there to share it with her.

But she's also fully aware of the work God has done in her life, bringing her through trials and tragedy and preparing her for the biggest athletic event of her life.

Scherer finished seventh in the women's 10-meter air rifle qualification round out of a field of more than 50 shooters, falling short of a medal. Even so, Scherer continues to cling to God.

"My performance in the athletic world doesn't define who I am," she said. "My definition is from Christ."