

Olympic gold medalist finds source of happiness in God's gifts

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RIO DE JANEIRO (BP)—Take a close look at Caeleb Dressel during some of his swimming competitions, and you may notice a Scripture reference written across his face.

The Bible verse changes with each event, but a favorite one for the 19-year-old is Isaiah 40:31: “But those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles.”

That verse served as the inspiration for the large eagle tattoo on Dressel's left shoulder, and the Scripture references he wears are not just for him.



Caeleb Dressel won a gold medal as part of the U.S. men's 4×100-meter freestyle relay team. "It's the reason I'm in the sport—not just to go fast times, but to inspire people and show them where I find my happiness with what God's given me," Dressel said in an interview last year after U.S. Nationals.

Dressel made a big splash in his Olympic debut Aug. 7, winning a gold medal as part of the U.S. men's 4×100-meter freestyle relay team. Swimming the first leg ahead of teammate Michael Phelps, Dressel turned in a personal-best time of 48.10, just .02 seconds behind the leader to keep the U.S. team close. Phelps then pulled the U.S. team ahead for good.

Not bad for a guy who gave up the sport for nearly six months his senior year of high school because he simply wasn't enjoying it.

"Coming out of that, I started swimming again and really just put all my trust in God and knowing that he's going to take care of everything for me,

good or bad,” Dressel said. “I really learned a lot, and I really learned to see the light at the end of the tunnel and trust what God is doing, whether it be a rough point in your life or a top pinnacle in your life. You’ve just got to take pauses and really trust what he’s doing.”

Dressel was brought up in a Christian home, but since moving away from Green Cove Springs, Fla., and attending the University of Florida, his faith has become more personal, because he knows his beliefs are solely his and not just his parents’. He worships at Campus Church of Christ in Gainesville.

His absence from swimming in high school was a difficult time for him, and Dressel admits he wrestled with some “mental demons” during that period and struggled in his walk with God. But eventually, he returned, both to the pool and to his commitment to Christ.

“It’s what I’m meant to do,” Dressel said about swimming. “I found my passion for the sport. I really love the sport. You get to meet a whole bunch of new people. You get to create new relationships. You get to share some of the best memories of your life with these people that I’m with.

“Swimming is my life, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. This is what I’m supposed to be doing, and God gave me the talent, and I’m going to do that for him, myself and my family and all my friends.”

With that newfound passion, Dressel excelled as a swimmer. He earned consecutive NCAA national championships in 2015 and 2016 in the 50-yard freestyle, and added another NCAA title in 2016 in the 100-yard freestyle. He earned his spot on the Olympic team by placing second in the 100-meter freestyle at the 2016 Olympic trials.

In addition to wearing Scripture references on his face, he often posts verses and references on Twitter. One tweet from several months ago seems especially relevant to the challenges and successes Dressel has

faced: “When you avail yourself of God’s grace and power, your comeback is always greater than your setback.”