

# Olympic volleyball player seeks God amid trials

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RIO DE JANEIRO (BP)—Micah Christenson spent the past year playing professional volleyball in Italy. He thought it would be fun, until he got there.



Micah Christenson is representing the United States at the Rio Olympics, but he is most concerned about representing Jesus Christ on a daily basis. (Photo courtesy of FIVB) He couldn't speak the language and was living alone for the first time in a foreign country. He didn't have any friends on the team. And then he got sick the first week.

“I’m throwing up, and I’m sitting in my apartment alone,” he said. “I’m like, man, this is a lot harder than I thought. I can’t talk to anybody, because there’s a language barrier. I can’t ask somebody where the eggs are in the grocery store.”

### **Learning to depend on God**

But during that time, Christenson said, he learned what it meant to depend on God.

“It really allowed me to really just surrender to God and to give everything to him, because I really had no control over what things were happening there,” he said. “I was just begging God to take everything, just trying my best to trust in everything that he had for me there.”

### **‘Gift from heaven’**

A member of the U.S. men’s volleyball team competing in the Olympics and native of Hawaii, Christenson has Christian parents to thank for giving him a foundation of faith at an early age. His full name is Micah Makanamaikalani Christenson, and his middle name means “gift from heaven.” His mother needed surgery while she was pregnant with him, and his survival was questionable.

He attended church and Sunday school regularly, learning about the Bible and the gospel. When he left the island to attend the University of Southern California, however, he realized the time had arrived for him to make his own decisions about what he believed. He no longer could just go along with what his parents had taught him.

### **Involved in sports ministry**

He got involved early in Athletes in Action, a campus-based sports ministry, eventually becoming a student leader.

“I’m so grateful that I chose God, because that choice has really sparked something inside of me, and I feel the Holy Spirit working inside of me all of the time,” Christenson said.



Micah Christenson As for volleyball, Christenson comes by it naturally. The sport is huge in Hawaii, and his mother played in college. He started playing young, participated in youth and junior national teams for the United States and played at the University of Southern California before turning professional and moving to Italy.

### **Count it all joy**

The challenges he faced there gave him the opportunity to spend more time reading the Bible, and he began to understand the words in James 1:3, “Consider it pure joy when you face trials of any kind.”

His situation gradually improved, helped in part by a group of friends from the national team with whom Christenson would participate in a weekly Bible study over Skype. And about halfway through the year, his U.S. teammate and fellow believer Reid Priddy joined him in Italy, giving him even more opportunity for Christian fellowship.

This year in Rio marks Christenson's first Olympics experience. Regardless of the outcome, Christianson insisted, he wants to shine God's light around him by being steady and faithful in all that he does. When it comes to relying on God and living for him, Christianson said, "That's enough."