

The beauty of bodies

By [David Henson](#)

January 20, 2015

It's true. God doesn't have anything to do with winning a football game.

On Sunday, Russell Wilson, quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks, became the latest professional athlete to draw the ire of progressive Christians for expressing gratitude to God for winning a football game.

Look, I get that to imply God had something to do with a sporting victory implies that God favors winners, cares about the final score of American football, and many other dicey theological propositions is deeply problematic and naive.

And I once was the first to lampoon such facile theologies of famous athletes.

But I'm not going to fault people anymore for expressing—however inelegantly—gratitude during moments of personal elation. I don't have the energy to hammer someone for their feelings of gratitude anymore. I'm content to let people be thankful when they feel thankful.

In high school and college, I was a fairly successful hurdler. I did well in high school track and later in my small college's conference. I won some races and some awards. I frequently prayed prior to my races. I frequently found strength in those prayers before pushing my body to its limits. And I frequently thanked God when a race finished, a long meet was over or a season ended.

I didn't really think that God chose me to win or caused me to cross the finish line before other people. But I did think that God was with me whenever I ran. I felt God's presence when I pushed my body to its physical limits. I might explain it differently today, of course, but it was how I experienced running and athletics at the time.

Now, I never had cameras trained on me to express my gratefulness to God, but still, for years afterwards, this posture of gratitude became a great theological embarrassment to me, as if God cared about my running hurdles. It seemed juvenile and plain inaccurate. I mean, early Christians were the victims of mass sporting

events and coliseums, right? Was God really in the business of rigging sporting events in order to get some camera time like some narcissistic gambler?

But I lately I've been reconsidering some of this with a little more nuance. When is it not okay to express gratitude to God when good things happen? Should we lead such guilt-ridden and joyless lives that we do not allow ourselves to enjoy our feelings of a job well done or our feelings of gratitude in the moment?

Honestly I hope the God who became incarnated in a body takes pleasure in seeing bodies do beautiful and graceful things. Because now, as someone whose body no longer performs as it once did, I find great joy in watching the elegance of a disciplined body perform incredible things—whether that's a ballet dancer's strength and grace, a hurdler's speed and form, a wheelchair racer speeding around the track, a double amputee climbing a mountain, or a quarterback and team not giving up and mounting an incredible comeback.

In fact, I hope God takes joy in all bodies of all kinds, regardless of our abilities.

Because our bodies are important, beautiful, and they're how we experience and connect with God.

So maybe God didn't orchestrate the Seahawks comeback. But I certainly hope our God of incarnation found some measure of joy in the beauty of bodies in motion.

See, I think God really does find joy in the beauty of human activity, whether it's the extraordinary or the mundane; the prophetic, or the poetic, or the prosaic. Whether it's the bodies of athletes on the field of play, or the bodies of protesters in the streets marching for justice, the bodies of parents taking small children to school, the bodies of senior women taking meals to grieving families, the bodies of school volunteers showing up week after week to read and offer hugs to children, the stories of our bodies are beautiful.

And I thank God for them.

Originally posted at [Henson's blog](#)