

The Joined-Up Life of a World Rowing Champion

Debbie during SLC at El Rancho, Waikanae



An Interview with Debbie Flood

Debbie Flood's Great Britain Rowing Team won silver in the Beijing Olympics, and gold in the 2010 World Rowing Championships. In an interview with Ben Carswell and Nigel Pollock, Debbie describes how she integrates her intensive sporting life with her faith in Jesus Christ.

“Being a Christian on the team makes a massive difference to me... it's who I am in a sense - I'm not a rower; for me I'm a Christian, and that comes first and foremost.”

Ben: Why don't you tell us a bit about how you got into rowing?

Debbie: Seemingly by chance – at 17, on the rowing machine! Someone said to me: 'You're pulling quite good times, are you a rower?' I decided to give rowing a go. I spent my first few months swimming a lot, because I fell in so much... My coach actually came up to me and said 'Look Debbie, you're not going to be anything much more than an average club rower'. And as a 17-year-old, I was absolutely gutted; but I was encouraged to give it another go, which I did. I got picked up by the Chief Junour Coach of Great Britain, and started to understand the technique a bit more. After that I progressed quite quickly... into the Senior Team.

Nigel: So you've obviously got a degree – how did you grow as a Christian, while you were a student?

Debbie: I joined the Christian Union and went away with them when it fitted in with training, and went along to my local church whenever I was in the UK. Having that fellowship was really important for me because most of my friends in the sporting world were non-Christians. Just finding time to spend with God myself, too - that's something that I do struggle with... and when I do have the time I'm tired, so I want to sleep! But even if it's just two minutes, five minutes - whatever it might be, it's good to keep taking time to spend with God.

Ben: What difference does it make being a Christian on the GB rowing team?

Debbie: Being a Christian on the team makes a massive difference to me – it's central in my life and it's who I am in a sense - I'm not a rower, for me I'm a Christian, and that comes first and foremost. I remember Steve Redgrave saying "Higher – faster – stronger", the Olympic motto, becomes your existence'. But as a Christian, God is the first thing, and if anything challenged that in terms of trying to be higher-faster-stronger, then God is my priority. It's not my everything to be winning that gold medal; it's what I spend a lot of my life doing, but being a Christian I have that bigger perspective. I always just come back to that trust in God: that He's got my life in his hands and whatever the situation is, I'll come through it.

Nigel: You're passionate about sport and you're passionate about God; how do you get that 'joined-up' enthusiasm?

Debbie: Well, yeah, I mean I love my sport - for me God is a part of everything you do in your life, God wants you to enjoy the things that you do well, and gives you the ability to do that... it's that personal relationship with God, every second of your life, and He's given you the opportunities to try and be a witness for him. It's not that you go and play your sport and then you go to church on Sundays: He's everywhere, which really joins everything up.

Nigel: You say you'd trade all your medals for an Olympic gold; would you trade an Olympic gold for your faith in Jesus?

Debbie: (laugh) Would never trade anything for Jesus; Jesus is not just for now, I'm not going to take any of my medals to heaven; I want to spend my life with Jesus rather than without Jesus, so I don't think anything trades for that.



Debbie (right) and the British Rowing Team



Debbie Flood

Ben: How can we best pray for you and those who are involved in high-level sport?

Debbie: Really that we'll get opportunities to witness, and that we will be good ambassadors, for God. Nobody's perfect, but if we can aspire up to Jesus - we know what we should and shouldn't be doing –to be straight in our path; and to be open, approachable, and to spread the good news of Jesus.

Final comments from Debbie:

I really enjoyed my time at SLC, meeting the students and learning alongside them. I want to encourage you all to keep praying, reading and always trust in God - He will direct your paths and will never leave your side.

