

## FLAME Youth Congress, Wembley Arena - Saturday 24 March 2012

---

It's absolutely fantastic to be here today and to see so many young people here taking part in this inspiring day.

The Olympics is now only 4 months away, and we are going to see thousands of athletes from all around the world come here to London to compete. Each of these athletes are the best in their country at their sport and will be here representing not only their country, but the Olympic and Paralympic Values of Excellence, courage determination, inspiration, equality, respect and friendship.

Now I didn't start rowing until I was 17 and when I was at school, I would watch the Olympics on the TV and think WOW- they are superhuman! It was like another world – just something I watched on TV. But as I look ahead now to the summer, I know that anything is possible with hard work, determination and MY FAITH. On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 the last 15 years of life that I have dedicated to rowing are going to boil down to one 6 minute race. One chance to achieve my dream of Olympic Gold.

I have spent half of my life as an athlete, training day in day out, in the rain, wind, snow, ice, hail and sunshine too. We get 3 weeks off a year in the summer and that is all the holiday we get apart from the odd day after we have done a race. Lie-ins and weekends do not exist in my world – we train 2 or 3 times every day which can be anything between 4 hours and 7 hours a day and I must push my body to its limits whilst trying not to tip over the edge. I know that in order to achieve my dreams in the summer, every day counts. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and its still dark and raining outside, and I am tired, and I wish that I could have a lie in. In fact often the new girls in the team will come up to me and say – Debbie, I am so tired – and I reply, don't worry – you will get used to it. Do I pull myself out of bed every morning or do I turn over and go back to sleep? In the darkness of the morning I pull myself from the comfort of my bed and head down to the lake and out into the mist, whatever the weather. Because in the summer I do not want to sit on the start line and wish that I had trained harder, or done more. I do not want to have regrets. I want to sit on the start line in the summer knowing that I have done everything I can to be the best that I can be, and all that is left is to race and see how fast I can go. As a full time athlete, the Olympic motto Higher Faster Stronger to some extent becomes your existence. The mind and body are amazing things. They can do more than we give them credit for, and if you believe something – your body will try and do it. It may fail – but it may not, and we must keep pushing to our limits until we can no more in order to be our best.

All the training I have done over the last 15 years will be worth it when I line up on that start line on 1<sup>st</sup> August. That dream of Gold is a big driving force but my main motivation is that God has given me the talents and abilities that I have and I want to use them and go on the journey that He has placed me on. In some ways, being an Olympic athlete is similar to being a Christian. You live with a hope for the future, the light when the day comes. You put your faith and belief in something that you cannot yet touch or see until that final day. That whatever happens in the ups and downs along the way although your belief at times may be strong or weak you must keep faith that what you are doing in your life every day is for a reason. Belief in the final outcome.

But for me being a Christian is the most important thing in my life ABOVE anything else. No matter how much I believe I can win an Olympic Gold medal – if someone is faster than me on my race day then I will not win. But belief in Jesus is something that nobody can take away, and God will never leave your side no matter what.

God has given me the talents and opportunities to row. All of you here today will have a talent, something that YOU are good at. It may be sport, it may be a subject, it may be music, or being a good listener, or someone who is good at caring for others. God has a plan for your life and I really want to encourage you all that you are strong enough to stand up and be counted. You can be a leader and a team player in your school or work or community with whatever your talent or passion is. To be a strong person does not mean that you have to be larger than life or to be the centre of attention, it means you believe in yourself and the difference you can make by being YOU, and being the best you can be. You have opportunities every day to stand up and be counted. To make a difference. That may be a really scary thought for some of you, to be the best you can be and to make a difference in your life and the lives of others is not easy. There will be ups and downs. There may be times where you feel that you have won, and times that you feel you have lost. There may be tears along the way between the happy smiles, but if you have courage and determination to achieve excellence that you are capable of, the journey will be worthwhile.

I want you to ask yourself – what is your potential??? In your dreams and in your life – what is it that you want to do? Discover what your talent is, use the gifts and opportunities that God has given you and be the best that you can be.

To represent my country at a home Olympics in front of my friends and family and a home crowd will be the greatest honour of my career, and for me success will be Gold. I'll be disappointed with anything less. Will I be an Olympic Champion? I believe that I can be. But I will not take my medals with me to heaven when I pass away. My rowing career may temporarily define me but it will not shape who I am inside or change me in any way. Win or lose in rowing, I am part of Jesus's team – and for me, that's a win in life.

Debbie Flood