

How I Met God After Rowing the Atlantic

Humble Beginnings

I'm just not an athlete, I thought. Like most children, I played team sports—my top priority having fun with friends. Once team sports became too competitive, with the pressure of letting down teammates and upsetting parents, it was no longer fun. Too much time spent on the bench rather than on the field or court, I counted an athletics future out. I found out just how wrong I was years later.

It was my senior year of high school, and there was one class between me and my diploma—a gym class. The “walking and running” class seemed like the class that would give me the easiest A while avoiding the anxiety-inducing team sports. Sheer boredom from walking led me to curiosity. I wondered, *Can I run one mile straight?* I doubted that it was possible but had nothing to lose by trying. It wasn't easy, but I learned it was possible.

That one mile opened up a world I didn't know was available to me. If I never thought I could run one mile, and I did, what other false limitations had I put upon myself? I had to know. What happened next is not something that I or any of my former sports coaches would have imagined.

Adventure Found Me

First, it was a marathon at 18. Then, 3,300-miles cycling across America at 19. There was a 325-mile swim, becoming the 1st person to swim the length of the Allegheny River at 21. Perhaps the biggest challenge was a solo row across the Atlantic Ocean at age 22 after 70 days alone at sea. During that journey, I encountered pods of dolphins, close calls with freighters, 30-foot waves and breathtaking sunrises and

sunsets. Media outlets worldwide shared the story of an ordinary person doing the extraordinary. The adventures served a purpose bigger than myself, though, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund clean water projects around the globe.

Bigger Than Adventure

If you don't have God in your life something else becomes it. Adventure and achievement became mine. It was a turbulent time when I began running. I was searching for a sense of security, worth and purpose that I was struggling to find. Excelling in endurance sports felt more like a need than desire. That need to excel was an incredible source of motivation, but it came with its consequences.

It is difficult to truly enjoy something when you think your worth depends on it. I often felt a sense of loss after reaching a new goal or setting a new record. With each achievement, I reached my goal but lost my purpose. I reached my goal but didn't find the promises of achievement that happiness, joy and contentment would be waiting for me on the other side of that success. I wondered if my life had more value than miles covered by swimming, cycling or running. I wondered if my life had more meaning than dollars raised for charity. Until I found out, I vowed to take on my biggest challenge yet: no endurance challenges for 365 days.

A Simple Conversation

After doing extraordinary challenges around the world, it was an ordinary conversation that led me to understand who God is and who God isn't. While at a museum with a friend, Megan, we strolled past the Lucy exhibit, when I asked her opinion on how we all got here. Did she believe in evolution or something more? Hesitant at first, the floodgates opened as she shared her faith and belief in God. There was honesty, sincerity, authenticity. I learned about how faith is more about a

relationship than rules, leaving me with enough curiosity to learn more. A few days later, I met Megan and some of her friends from church to attend my first service outside of the traditional family attendance for Easter and Christmas.

The Difference in My Life

Before I met God, one lie dictated my life: Love is earned. Believing this lie left me striving to reach an oasis that could never be found through anything but God. Today, I still embark upon adventures and accept challenges, but because of God, this is an extension of joy rather than fear, a feeling of eagerness rather than anxiety. God gave me back what I couldn't handle without Him, transforming the passion for endurance into what He had intended to use it for in the first place: good.

No words will ever be able to justify how good and awe-inspiring God is. But as Christians, we get to constantly witness God's goodness and love for us. Seeking adventure brought me to the greatest adventure: the adventure of faith. {eoa}

Katie Spotz is a Christian adventurer, charitable ambassador, author and world-record holder. Katie was the youngest person to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean and was the first person to have swum the entire length of the Allegheny River. Spotz recently completed 11 ultramarathons in 11 days to raise funds for 11 water projects in Uganda. To date, more than 30,000 people have gained access to clean water through her challenges and events, getting closer to creating a world where everyone, everywhere, has clean, safe water. Connect with Katie Spotz on Facebook and Instagram. Visit her website to learn more and to give water.

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