



“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

I remember when I first met Katie Spotz. She jumped into a Wednesday night group ride that I frequented, identifying herself only by her first name. Quiet and unassuming, she had no trouble completing the forty miles of pace lining. In fact, she barely broke a sweat. After the ride we gathered at a local place for food. We knew something was up when a group of younger girls came to the table asking for her autograph. It wasn't long until we discovered that our new cycling compadre had recently become the youngest person at age 22, and first woman, to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Some of you reading this devotion may remember that Katie spoke at First Church, an inspiration especially to the young women and girls of the congregation.

Now a member of the Coast Guard, stationed in Maine, Katie has completed a number of jaw-dropping endurance events that leave us mere mortals shaking our heads in disbelief. Competing in the Kona Ironman is one of her minor accomplishments. As I write this, she is preparing to run 137 miles non-stop across the state of Maine to raise money for Lifewater. When you read this, knowing Katie, she will likely have accomplished the task. She estimates it will take her somewhere in the neighborhood of 36 hours.

As you might guess, this feat does not come without obstacles. She is concerned about hydration, getting enough calories, stressing her joints. The farthest she has ever run at one time is 100 miles (across Vermont as part of her training), so she doesn't know how her body or mind will respond when she crosses that threshold.

But here's the thing. Katie has a very strong and vibrant faith. Her relationship with God is alive and active. She trusts that God will be with her to help her overcome whatever challenges may pop up. In one of her recent blog posts here's what she said about that:

“I am constantly learning what it means to put God first in all things. But with endurance, it has been truly transformational. Before accepting Jesus, my worth came from the world and now my worth is rooted in something much deeper than the world can offer — a belief in God. The endurance adventures continue on, only this time with joy rather than fear, eagerness rather than anxiety, and out of love rather than needing to prove lovability.”

Today, you might face an unexpected challenge. You might receive news about your health, or lose a job, or discover something shocking about a person you’ve known your entire life. Something might happen to cause you to question your faith. The pandemic might present you with yet another obstacle. Your integrity might be called into question. You might look in the mirror and wonder where time has gone. A mentor might disappoint you. Whatever it is, how will you handle it? Will you remember that God is beside you? Will you call to mind today’s focus verse from James that proclaims that testing leads to endurance so that your faith may grow to maturity?

We can’t avoid challenges and obstacles. They are part of life. But we can choose how we respond to them. We can move forward in faith, knowing that God is walking with us, trusting the endurance God is creating in the process will cause our spiritual maturity to deepen. We don’t have to run a hundred miles to make that happen. We only have to face whatever challenges come our way with a sure and certain hope of God’s presence.

In Christ,

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Lord God, we don’t always like or appreciate the obstacles that show up in our lives. But we know that with your help they can become exercises in the growth of our faith. Help us to face each challenge with courage, knowing that you are right there beside us. Amen.

BONUS CONTENT!

For an inspiring video witness from Katie Spotz about her faith in God, go to her blog site at www.katiespotz.com