

ANNE-CÉCILE LACOSTE

Beyond the Waves



GOSPEL
Mag



Anne-Cécile Lacoste

Beyond the waves

Gospel Mag

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About the author

Born in 1982, Anne-Cécile Lacoste is originally from Arcachon, France. A true ocean enthusiast, she has built her life around surfing and bodyboarding, which she now teaches on the Atlantic coast of southwestern France.



Always adventurous and deeply connected to nature, she has a genuine passion for discovering the world. Over the years, she has traveled extensively for competitions and personal exploration, visiting countries such as Costa Rica, Brazil, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Australia, Hawaii, and Indonesia. These journeys allowed her to experience different cultures that enriched her life and, of course, to admire some of the world's most breathtaking landscapes.

She has had the privilege of representing France internationally, achieving remarkable success, including winning the Amateur World and European Bodyboarding Championships in 2015 and becoming French Champion for six consecutive years.

Yet, through all these experiences, she encountered the greatest adventure of all—the one that completely transformed her life: meeting Jesus. From that day on, everything changed, and her life found its true meaning.



“How can we bring our passion and our calling together? The answer lies in this fascinating testimony from a world champion who has eyes only for the one to whom she owes her victory: Jesus!”

Raphaël Anzenberger, publishing director at imagoDei.fr

“What could Anne-Cécile, a young bodyboarding champion, possibly have in common with someone as very senior as me, who would run for his life from the immense waves she rides so playfully? What matters most: the same God, the living God, who has intervened in both our lives. I was deeply moved as I read this personal account. I recognized and admired the extraordinary diversity of our shared Lord’s ways. He asks one person to give up something that holds them captive because this is what is best for them. At other times, he takes the opposite approach. He incorporated Anne-Cécile’s passion for sport into his relationship with her—even making her a world champion! Everything he does is wonderful.”

Henri Blocher, theologian, named Evangelical Personality of the Year 2018 by *Christianisme aujourd’hui* magazine, and author of *La foi et la raison*, Charols, Excelsis, 2015

“With freshness and authenticity, Anne-Cécile tells us how she caught the best wave of her life!”

Nicolas Blocher, author of *Une vie de défis*, Marpent, BLF, 2019

*“**Three things** strike me as I read Anne-Cécile’s short testimony, besides the inner transformation brought about by her discovery of God: what is said about God, what is said on his behalf, and what is heard directly from him.*

***What is said about God:** this is what her friend Mahalia shares from her own experience, without pressure and without trying to persuade her. There is wisdom from above in this, along with confidence in what one has experienced—an experience that itself becomes evidence of truth. The soundness of this approach proved decisive for our champion.*

***What is said on God’s behalf:** this consists of the foolish advice given by people who think they know what is best for Anne-Cécile, even at the risk of depriving her of what gives her life meaning. What kind of shortcut leads people to claim that loving God rules out every other passion, as though such a passion were competing with God? It is fortunate that Anne-Cécile did not listen to these moralizing, repressive voices.*

***What is heard directly from God:** as her faith began to grow, Anne-Cécile started listening to God in prayer, thereby establishing an intimate and unique relationship between herself and the divine. What we hear at such times consists of personal—deeply personal—words. This listening also took place through reading the Bible. It is there that Christians find the essentials they need to live out their spiritual discoveries to the full.”*

Éric Denimal, journalist and writer, notably the author
of *La Bible pour les Nuls*, Paris, First, 2016

“Anne-Cécile Lacoste’s testimony is genuinely joyful and inspires thanksgiving. It is also highly instructive, because it reveals two complementary dimensions of conversion. Conversion is usually marked by a clearly identifiable moment of grace, but it is also made up of a succession of stages, both before and after that moment, each of which has its own importance. From one stage to the next, Anne-Cécile was guided by a compass: inner peace. Her journey also shows us how God can free a heart from every concern for human glory. This is an encouragement to each one of us!”

Étienne Grenet, priest of the Diocese of Paris

Author of *Unité du «je» psalmique*, Paris, Cerf, 2019

“Perhaps, without knowing it, we are world champions in a field that simply has not yet been officially recognized. For Anne-Cécile Lacoste, that field is bodyboarding, a genuine sporting discipline. Her testimony carries us from the crest of the waves to the heart’s true need... from creation to the Creator. Everything is here: the love of God, humility, repentance, the forgiveness of sins, a fresh start, the desire to serve, and the willingness to be led by the God who has a plan for every one of us. And in the realm of wonder and grace, it must be said: Jesus is still the undisputed champion in every category!”

Élie Jalouf, pastor

“At a time when this world’s priorities and purely human recognition can overwhelm us and occupy such a significant place in our lives, Anne-Cécile’s testimony reminds us of the importance of remaining devoted to God while we are in this world. Indeed, as she puts it so well: ‘Our worth is not given to us by the world, but by God.’ This is a beautiful example of Christian faith, whose highest priority remains serving God.”

Sara Jalouf

“Anne-Cécile Lacoste’s testimony is a source of encouragement and inspiration. It paints an accurate picture of who God is and of his intentions for each one of us. This story is a genuine invitation to see God as he truly is, rather than through the lens of what we think we already know about him. As I made my way through this book, I was led not only to rediscover God’s love in a simple yet profound way, but also to see both myself and the world differently. Jesus revealed himself in a powerful way in Anne-Cécile Lacoste’s life. May this testimony awaken in you, as it did in me, the courage and desire to receive the love of Jesus Christ, and give you a foretaste of what he wants to accomplish both in you and through you.”

Méliné Kinossian, missionary in Los Angeles

“With Beyond the Waves, Gospel Mag offers us a radiant story: that of a gifted surfer and bodyboarder who senses, when faced with the beauty of the ocean, that God exists. And it is precisely within that environment that she encounters him, through the testimony of a bodyboarding friend from Réunion Island and a Christian Surfers missionary. But the story does not end with Anne-Cécile’s new birth. It continues through her struggles: should she give up her passion for God, or should she not? I will let you discover the answer for yourselves, although I would like to quote one of the beautiful convictions she holds: ‘Our worth is not given to us by the world, but by God. I want to emphasize this, because being a world champion does not make me any more important than anyone else. It has led me along a path that is the same for everyone who believes in Jesus and wants to follow him. We share the same identity—the one Jesus gave us through his blood.’

Thank you, Anne-Cécile and Gospel Mag!”

Étienne Lhermenault, first president of the National Council of Evangelicals in France (CNEF)

“Watch out—a wave of love is about to break over you. At first, its depth and immensity may frighten you; but as soon as you begin to surf it, you will be swept away by ocean-sized joy and freedom!”

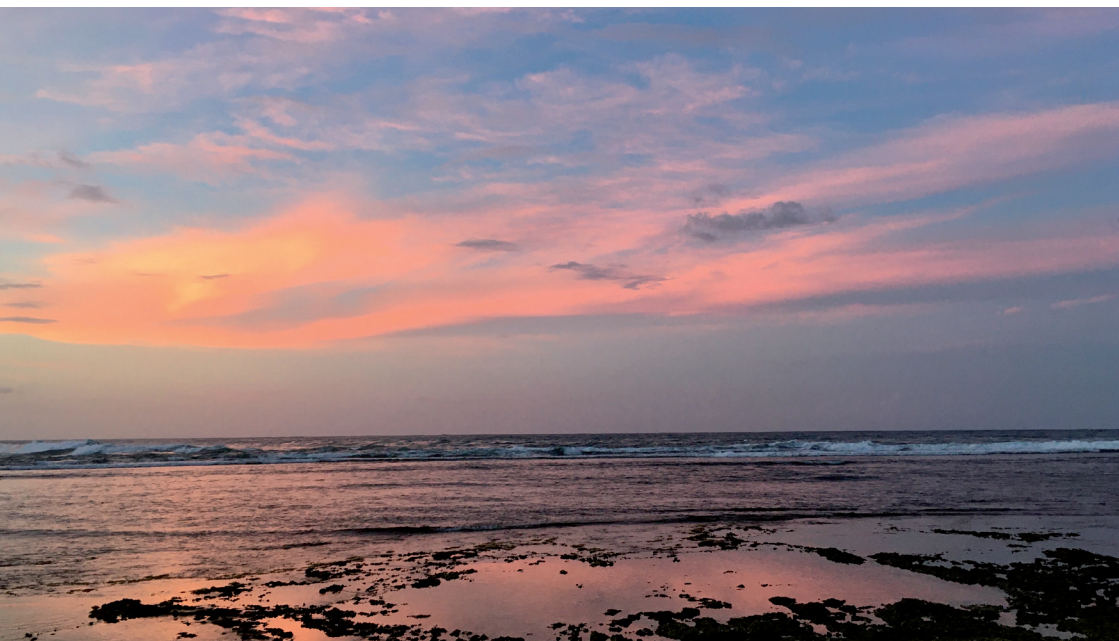
Samuel Plante, Sam’Parle

“Anne-Cécile Lacoste is in love with the world, its vast expanses, and its landscapes. She is also a talented swell chaser. For many years, she lived for boardsports and competition. Yet today she has chosen to ride a different wave: the wave of God’s Love. Here, Anne-Cécile tells us about her encounter with the Lord and gives us a sincere, down-to-earth account of her conversion. Touching in its simplicity, this is the story of an ‘ordinary’ woman with whom we can easily identify. ‘Everything through love, nothing through force,’ said Francis de Sales. This is also what Anne-Cécile’s story demonstrates. The Lord came to her gently, without pressuring her. Wave after wave, transformed by his Love, Anne-Cécile allows herself to be guided through the plans the Lord has made for her. With complete trust, she surrenders herself to him: ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for peace and not for harm, to give you a future and a hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11).”

Olivier Theurelle, educator and surfing enthusiast

PREFACE

For some people, the complexity of the universe naturally leads them to acknowledge the existence of a creative intelligence. For others, the path is more difficult. Faith may seem irrational, or even incompatible with reason.



Yet the Christian faith does not require us to stop thinking. On the contrary, it invites us to seek the truth. Anne-Cécile's faith, like mine, is not based on blind belief, but on a conviction shaped by reflection, personal experience, and trust in God. If our universe is governed by physical laws, we may also ask whether there is an objective foundation for good and evil. Are

moral values merely the product of our preferences, or do they point to a reality beyond ourselves?

Some believe that scientific discoveries have made faith in God unnecessary or obsolete. Others think that the Bible and science are necessarily incompatible. Yet many of these tensions arise from the way we read biblical texts. Understanding their literary genre, historical context, and intended purpose often enables us to avoid false conflicts.

The history of Christianity also raises legitimate questions. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the Wars of Religion, spiritual abuse, and more recent scandals have left a deep mark on people's minds and, in the eyes of many, discredited the Christian message. But the wrongs committed by those who claim to follow Christ do not necessarily tell us who Christ himself is. Above all, they remind us that human beings remain capable of both the best and the worst.

Another question has echoed down the centuries: how can a just and loving God allow suffering? This is undoubtedly one of the most profound questions any of us may have to face.

Finally, many people live without taking any real interest in God, or choose to define their own standards. This freedom may seem



absolute, but it sometimes leads to new forms of dependence, whether material, ideological, or personal.

Christianity nevertheless proclaims an astonishing truth: God did not remain distant in the face of human suffering. In Jesus Christ, he came to share our human condition, bear our sins, and offer forgiveness. At the heart of the Christian message is an encounter with a God who loves, saves, and calls each person to a new life.



Anne-Cécile's testimony tells the story of a woman who discovered that faith in Jesus Christ transforms a life.

I wish you a most enjoyable read.

Marcel DIJKMAN

Testimony

Anne-Cécile Lacoste



The Ocean as My Horizon

My name is Anne-Cécile Lacoste, and I was born in 1982 in Arcachon, in the Gironde region of France. My parents love the sea, and I grew up close to that wonderful place—the ocean.

My brother and I spent all our free time running along the beach, building shelters out of driftwood, and playing in the waves while our parents watched us and gazed out at the sea. Life was simple



and good. Ever since I was a little girl, I have felt a profound sense of freedom in the face of the ocean's immensity.

Our desire to surf came naturally. From our very first waves, my brother and I fell in love with boardsports. Little by little, this passion shaped my life, eventually becoming my profession.

It also opened up the world to me. Travelling, competing, encountering different cultures, and discovering new landscapes all fuelled my taste for adventure. In the water, I experienced intense emotions: the anticipation, the commitment, sometimes the fear, followed by the joy of letting a wave carry me. The ocean was at once my playground, my school, and my horizon.

I am deeply grateful to my parents for the love, the home, and the quality of life they gave us. Thanks to them, my brother and I were

able to pursue our dreams. They remain role models and a source of inspiration to me.

My family was not Christian. Yet when I looked at the beauty of nature and the love surrounding me, I always believed that someone or something existed above us. With the heart of a child, I would simply say thank you.



The Bible says that God knows us from our mother's womb and that nothing in our lives escapes his notice (Psalm 139:13–16). I did not know it yet, but those words would one day shed light on my story.

Much later, after my baptism, my mother told me that my great-grandmother had been an evangelical Christian. As a child, she would hear her praying in her bedroom. This discovery moved me deeply. Paul's brief invitation—"Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)—now had a face, a history, and a legacy for me. Thank you, my God, and thank you to my dear and courageous great-grandmother.

At the age of seventeen, I was also blessed to meet the woman who would become my best friend, Mahalia. This bodyboarder from Réunion Island loved the ocean as much as I did, but I sensed something more in her: a light, a gentleness, a peace. She was a Christian and

had an intimate relationship with God, very different from the image I had formed of religion.



Mahalia would read the Bible beside me, pray morning and evening, and talk to God as though this relationship were the most important part of her life. She never tried to persuade me. She simply lived out her faith and her love for Jesus beside me. After praying for me for fifteen years, I believe she was one of the happiest people when I finally gave my life to Jesus.

Between my great-grandmother's quiet prayers and Mahalia's faithful presence, I can now see a thread running through my story. At the time, I was unaware of it. I could only see that my friend's faith produced a peace I could find nowhere else.

Looking back, I can say that Jesus had been close to me from the very beginning. I sensed him in the beauty of creation and in the love of those around me, without yet knowing how to recognize him.



Yet it took me a long time to trust him. I am strong-willed and determined, but these qualities also led me to go through life on my own. I wanted to accomplish everything through my own strength and hard work. If I succeeded, I was proud of myself; if I failed, I thought I simply needed to do more. The entire weight of my life rested on my shoulders.

I believed that God was watching me from a distance without intervening because I was not good enough to deserve his attention. He seemed beyond my reach. Yet he first revealed himself to me through the things I loved most: the ocean, the majestic light, the journeys, the people I met, the intense sensations, and the challenges of competition. Little by little, I understood that he was not far away. He was very close.

Every reflection of light on the water, every landscape that stopped me in my tracks, and every unexpected encounter became a sign of his goodness. I did not yet know the face of the God I was thanking, but my heart was beginning to recognize his presence.



The Encounter That Changed Everything

After many experiences, both beautiful and painful, everything truly changed in Costa Rica. There, I met Barrett Cruce, an American pastor who, together with his family, was involved in a mission serving surfers.

At that time, I was going through a profound inner crisis. A romantic relationship was draining me, and my professional future seemed

to hold no prospects. I no longer had any plans or direction. I felt as though I were drowning, with no idea how to escape or whom to turn to.

Barrett had sensed my distress. He invited me to one of the meetings he organized in a seaside skate park that had been built for children. I went there in despair, telling myself that I had nothing left to lose.

Hearing the Gospel for the first time turned my world upside down. The words did not remain on the surface; they reached something deep within me. It was painful, but the more I listened, the more I felt a path opening before me.



I even felt guilty for being sad. When I looked around me, I became aware of everything I had received: my family, my brother, my friends, and all the opportunities and protection that had accompanied me throughout my life. Yet nothing I tried to build could fill the

emptiness inside me. The joy and faith of the people there touched me deeply, while I remained trapped within my own distress.

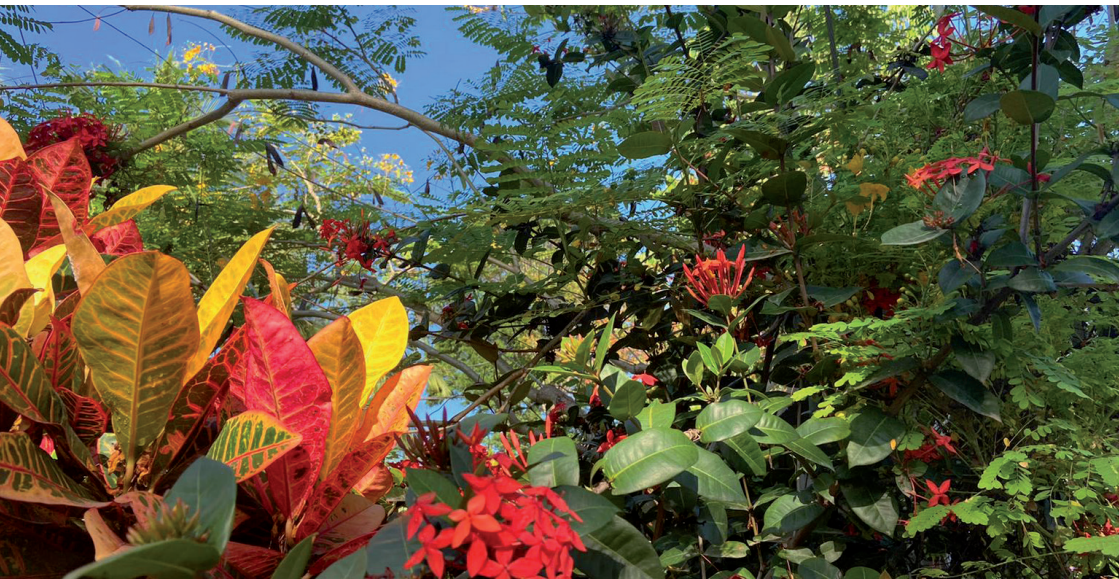
I began to look back on my life differently. I saw everything God had given me and all the times I had been protected, but I also realized that my own decisions were not enough to save me from myself. I had wanted to control everything; now I had reached the point where I had to acknowledge that I needed help.



I returned to those meetings. Each time, I cried, but I continued to resist. I knew that God loved me, although I had not yet understood the true nature of Jesus' love and grace.



Then came one of those days that marks a life forever. I had gone surfing at a beach some distance from the village. Barrett had joined me there. After catching his final wave, he left the water and began walking towards his car. I saw him stop, turn around, and paddle back out to me. He seemed overwhelmed by what he had to tell me.



I can still remember the light, the breeze on my face, and the atmosphere of that beach. Everything seemed ordinary, yet that moment would remain engraved on my heart.

He took a deep breath:

“Anne-Cécile, I can’t leave like this. I believe God wants you to know that he has more for you—something wonderful. He doesn’t want to leave you in this difficult life. Accept the gift he wants to give you.”

I was speechless. His words reached me as though God himself were speaking to me through him. Tears welled up in my eyes, but I remained guarded. With a nervous laugh, I replied, “Thank you, Barrett, but I’m fine... Everything is fine.” He smiled at me and then left.

When I came out of the water, my circumstances had not changed: I was on the same beach, in the same country, facing the same struggles and the same questions. Yet something inside me was different. I felt peace and hope. As I gazed at the sea, I was convinced that God was holding me in his arms and that he would help me. I was no longer alone. For the first time, I allowed myself to let go.



My journey was drawing to an end. As I was making my way to the bus stop to travel to the airport, Carine, a French friend I had met at the meetings, came running towards me. She wanted to say goodbye and give me a card. Deeply moved, she said, “Read it on the plane. It is the most precious thing I can give you.”

On the plane, I discovered the passage about love in 1 Corinthians 13. As I read it, I burst into tears. Everything finally made sense. It



was as though the blindfold that had covered my eyes for so long had fallen away.

I understood that God's love did not have to be earned. I did not have to become perfect in order to receive it: it was freely offered to me through Jesus, by grace. I no longer had to carry the weight of my life alone.

I also understood what the cross meant for me: Jesus had given his life to offer me forgiveness and a new life. Neither my efforts nor my good deeds could make me right with God. I could simply believe, receive this love, and respond to him. This discovery was no longer a religious idea; it was becoming an intimate reality.

When I returned to France, I chose to entrust my life to God and allow him to work within me. This was how I experienced being born again: not as the immediate disappearance of all my difficulties, but as the beginning of a new life. Fear began to recede, and at last I discovered through whom and for whom I existed.



This decision did not make me a perfect person. It began a process that is still continuing today: learning to trust, giving up my need to control everything, and allowing God to transform my priorities.

A New Peace in Chile

My conversion did not erase all my inner contradictions. In particular, it revealed the place that surfing still occupied within me. My passion controlled my time and often remained my highest priority. I wanted to put God first, but I was still trying to achieve this through my own strength.

Some people told me, with the intention of helping me, that I had to stop surfing because it was taking God's place, or that a Christian woman could have no passion other than Jesus. These words placed a heavy burden of guilt upon me.

Tormented, I decided to stop surfing almost completely and devote myself to the Lord. I thought I had finally chosen the right path, but it was still my path, not the one God was preparing for me.

Yet God knew the desires of my heart better than I did. He was not simply going to ask me to give up an idol; he was going to restore my passion to its rightful place. I could not understand this as long as I continued trying to construct, by myself, the Christian life I imagined I was supposed to lead.



While I was living this life as a “good Christian”—if you will allow me the expression; I enjoy a little humour—I prayed, read the Bible, attended church, and served in Sunday school. One day, I received an email from the French Surfing Federation: I had been selected for the 2015 ISA World Bodyboard Championship in Iquique, Chile.

My first reaction was joy, immediately followed by guilt. I thought this competition could not possibly be God's will. That evening, I knelt down and asked the Lord to guide me. In prayer, I received this gentle and clear conviction: "Follow my peace. Where there is peace, I am there." My tears turned into a smile. I knew I had to go.



I was no longer going to Chile simply to surf or to win. I was going there with the desire to know God better, to serve him, and to remain attentive to the people he placed in my path.



During the competition, I took time to listen to my teammates and the other competitors. I prayed for them and simply shared what God had changed in my life. I also became friendly with members of the housekeeping staff. One of them told me that a colleague had been involved in a car accident, and we prayed for her together.

I was discovering that serving God did not necessarily mean leaving the world of sport. It could begin right there, in the midst of a team and a competition, through a conversation, a listening ear, or a shared prayer. Little by little, my attention shifted away from the medal and towards the people around me.

The days passed and, almost without thinking about it, I progressed all the way to the final. I was already profoundly grateful simply to be there.

Just before the final, I was singing Lauren Daigle's *How Can It Be* and thanking God for his faithfulness, patience, protection, and love. At that moment, one of the staff members called out to me, waving her arms. Her colleague had not been injured in the accident. She believed it was a miracle. I began jumping for joy.

I had to get ready very quickly to enter the water, but I savoured every second. My physiotherapist, who was usually very thorough when giving his final instructions, approached me, deeply moved.

He simply said, “Anne-Cécile, I’m happy to be here with you and to see you happy. Go out there and enjoy it!”



I headed towards the water with a huge smile. Amid the stress and adrenaline, I felt a peace I had never experienced in a competition. My opponents were technically better than I was; to win, I needed to find the right waves. Two beautiful sets came my way. I experienced that final with extraordinary focus and freedom, as though I were flying and dancing with God.

I was singing inwardly, and the tears of joy continued to flow. In the midst of the pressure, I experienced this peace as a personal gift of grace: I felt protected from my own fears and free to welcome whatever came.

That day, I won the gold medal in the Open Women's category and became the 2015 ISA Bodyboard World Champion.



Even more than the title I had dreamed of for so many years, the true gift was serenity. I had been prepared to give up surfing for God. In Chile, however, I received this conviction: “You are where I want

you to be, and I am happy with you.” That peace and joy will remain engraved on my heart forever.



Then these words of Jesus echoed within me:

“You are the light of the world. [...] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

— **Matthew 5:14–15**

I understood that God loved me as I was, including my passion for the ocean and boardsports. This passion did not need to disappear; it could become a place of encounter, service, and testimony.



A Worth That Does Not Depend on a Title

Yet the title did not relaunch my career as many people had imagined it would. Shortly after this victory, I lost my sponsors because the brands supporting me were experiencing financial difficulties. My professional career came to an end, although I still occasionally took part in a few competitions.

People were calling me from every direction. I was interviewed and asked how I planned to search for new sponsors or prepare for the following season. Yet I felt no peace at the thought of rebuilding my life around that ambition. Losing my contracts eventually became

a form of freedom: I was no longer required to follow the path that others had imagined for me.



What followed was unexpected. After winning a world title, everything seemed to be urging me to come back stronger, seek greater recognition, and devise a new career strategy. Yet, for the first time, I no longer needed to chase success in order to know who I was.

Receiving a world title can open the door to pride, comparison, and the fear of no longer measuring up. I faced all these traps.

To guard my heart, I returned to the Bible, to prayer, and to this essential truth: my worth did not depend on a medal, on my image, or on what I was capable of achieving.

Being a world champion does not make me more important than anyone else. God does not look at our status in the way the world does. He looks at the heart:

The Lord looks at the heart. — **1 Samuel 16:7**

Today, I teach surfing and bodyboarding on the Landes coast. The ocean remains at the heart of my life, but it is no longer where I seek to prove my worth. It has become a place of sharing, encounters, and gratitude.

There, I still experience the freedom I felt as a child. The difference is that today I know to whom my gratitude rises. The passion that once took up all the space in my life can now be experienced as a gift to receive and share.

If I share my story, it is not merely to recount a sporting victory or what I have experienced with God. It is to pass on this conviction: your worth does not depend on your success, your position, or how others see you. You are precious in God's sight.

You can seek him with your questions, your weaknesses, your talents, and your dreams. You do not need to wait until you are perfect before approaching him. His love cannot be earned; it can only be received.

*With love,
Anne-Cécile*



