

# VONETTA FLOWERS – BIOGRAPHY

## LEAP OF FAITH

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In 1982 at the age of 9, Vonetta was recruited for her elementary school track team. Under the guidance of her track coach, Vonetta became the 1st in her family to attend college, when she accepted a track and field scholarship to the University of Alabama at Birmingham. When Vonetta graduated, she was one of the university's most decorated athletes, with 35 conference titles and victories in the Penn Relays and The Olympic Festival, and its 1st Seven-Time All-American.

Vonetta credits her faith in God, steadiness, and determination to help her realize her Olympic dreams. She says having God on her side makes it a stress-free place. In both 1996 and 2000, Vonetta qualified for the Olympic Trials, held in Atlanta, Ga., and Sacramento, Calif., respectively. At the 1996 trials, she competed in the 100-meter dash and the long jump but was unsuccessful in her quest to earn a spot on the team. After a disappointing performance at the 2000 trials, Vonetta felt it was time to retire from track and field, and hoped to start a family with her husband, Johnny. Two days after the 2000 Olympic Trials, Johnny spotted a flyer urging track and field athletes to try out for the U.S. bobsled team. Vonetta and Johnny only knew about bobsledding from the movie *Cool Runnings*.

Since the age of 9, she dreamed of winning an Olympic gold medal as a track star. Injuries kept her from achieving her goal but led her down a new path to competing in bobsledding. However, that dream looked as though it would be dashed too, when just a few months before the Winter Games she was cut from the U.S. Bobsled team. Vonetta says her faith in Christ kept her from giving up her dream. Vonetta continued to train as though she was still on the team. Two weeks later, she had not one, but two offers to return. “I began to realize maybe God does have me in this sport for a reason. Every time a door would close another door would open. I really began to develop a peace about it.”

It is a peace Vonetta says she did not have as a young track star. Without Christ in her life, her focus was completely on her athleticism. By the time of the Winter Olympics, Vonetta had a completely different outlook on competition. “As it says in 2 Timothy 1:7, ‘For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of **self-discipline**.’” Vonetta continues, “I was living on faith not fear during the Olympics. I was able to relax, have a good time, and focus on what I had to do.” In 2002 Vonetta and her partner, Jill Bakken, slid into history by winning the gold medal at the inaugural Women's Olympic bobsled event, which was the first medal for a U.S. bobsled team in 46 years. Vonetta became the first person of African-American descent to win a gold medal in the Winter Olympics. She is now training for the 2006 Olympic Bobsled team. Her advice is to find what you enjoy, work hard, and never give up.

## WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Vonetta Flowers

Gold Medalist Winter Olympics 2002

Women's Discipleship Group

Terri McFaddin Series #5-13

**Scripture Focus:** For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of **self-discipline**. (2 Timothy 1:7)

**Key Word:** Discipline: Training that corrects; molds and perfects mental and moral character. To gain control by a prescribed and reinforced pattern of behavior.

**Opening Statement:** Every well-balanced human being wants to be a winner. This mandate to be victorious is echoed by the Apostle Paul. *"I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* Phil. 3:14. To "press" means that there must be pressure that comes with the goals that we aspire to obtain. We are hindered by enemies that work out the outside to block us, as well as enemies that attack our minds on the inside. Perhaps that is why Paul says in Phil. 3:13, "...*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.* As you read the story below of Bob-sled, gold medalist, Vonetta Flowers you will discover that as stated in 2 Timothy 1:7, **power, love and self-discipline** were essential in her quest to capture the prize that the Lord has prepared for her.

1. **Power:** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)
2. **Love:** (Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:7)
3. **Self-discipline:** I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

In the face of defeat as a track star in the Olympic trials, Vonetta refused to give up. In order to reach her goal she was willing to leave track and field and learn a new sport, bobsledding. And even when she was rejected at the winter Olympics she continued to train and be prepared for unexpected opportunities. As we reflect on the story of a trailblazer ask yourself if you are doing all that is required to reach your desired goals.

1. **Dedication:** Are you willing to set yourself apart from others and make the sacrifices that are required in order to reach your goals?
2. **Education:** Have you perfected your craft or profession by obtaining the necessary studies and training?
3. **Participation:** Are you involved and networking with people and organizations that are connected to your avenue of pursuit?

**OBSERVATIONS:** Read the story of Vonetta Flowers below. How did the Holy Spirit use Vonetta's husband to move her into God's will?

**INTERPRETATION:** In 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul states that God did not give us a spirit of timidity. Why did he make this statement and what was he referring too? How would you define a spirit of "timidity?"

**PERSONALIZATION:** Who did the Lord use in your life to keep you from giving up on your dream?

**APPLICATION:** Examine your life and find an area where you are undisciplined. Set a goal to correct your behavior for seven days in a row.