

## Finding Strength through Faith

Some Food for Thought

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- **It's all about the attitude!**

- When we suffer loss (losing your good health to myositis is definitely a loss!), we have two choices:
  - we can focus on what we lost and become angry and depressed;
  - Or, we can focus on what we still have and be thankful. Loss can make us either bitter or better.
  - Either way we choose....it is a choice for which we are responsible.
- We can choose to focus on what we do have (a loving family, supportive friends, good doctors, etc.) and to be grateful to God for those blessings. Make a "gratitude list" of all the things you have to be grateful for.
- How you are as a person on the inside is of far greater value than what's going on with you on the outside. God may not be ready to heal our physical bodies, but He can certainly heal our heart.... If we ask Him. Our challenge is to allow people to see His work on the inside. Don't be afraid to step out and trust Him.
- Matthew 8: Jesus and his disciples got into a boat to head out across the lake. Soon they were a good ways out and a storm came up and made the disciples terrified that the boat was going to get swamped and that they would all die.... but Jesus was asleep! They finally decided to wake Jesus and He immediately calmed the storm. And what does He say to them? "Oh ye of little faith. Why are you so afraid?" In other words, "Keep your faith in Me, I'm here to save you."
- Today, while we are in our own rocking boat struggling with the disease of myositis, Jesus may be saying the same thing to us. He is available to meet our needs.....we just need to ask Him for help. Why are we afraid to do that?
- *"Don't be afraid, just believe."* Mark 5:36
  - In the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) we find 125 commands given by Jesus. The one command given more than all others is "do not be afraid" or "fear not" or "have courage" or "take heart", which is given 21 times. The next most given command is to love God and your neighbor (8 times).

- **Have you ever asked, "Why me, God?"**

- Many of us feel that God owes us an explanation about why we have this illness or our physical limitations. But if we stop to think about it, why would the Creator of the universe owe us an explanation about anything? He already knows what our needs are and He has a plan for our lives just as they are.
- Joni Eareckson Tada, in explaining why there is suffering: *"God permits what He hates, to accomplish that which He loves."* God may allow people to suffer to accomplish something good, if we let him.

- Romans 8:28 says, *“We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* He will even use our struggles to accomplish a higher purpose.
- But how can He use me for anything? I’m in a wheelchair! I have ILD and can hardly breathe! I can’t drive anymore! What can I do? What does He want from me?
  - He wants you to turn to Him when you are hurting, when you are sad, when you are struggling and when you are happy. He wants you to depend on Him for everything, and in turn, He will supply you with the strength that you need each day. In short, He wants your heart.
  - Sometimes God uses our struggles to move us to another level in our relationship with Him; one that forces us into a moment-by-moment dependence on Him. We can live without food for several weeks; and without water for several days; but we can only live for a few minutes without oxygen. We are designed to take in fresh oxygen all of the time. Without it, we die. We are also designed to live in God the same way; so completely immersed that apart from Him we can do nothing.
  - So, when our suffering and fear push us to the ragged edge of faith and our doubts are flushed out into the open, we must deal with them honestly and ask God for help. If we learn to trust in God, we will learn that trust quiets the voices of anger and fear.
  - God is ready to provide us what we need so that we can have complete dependence on Him. When this happens, you will see a change in your attitude, and so will others. They will see how God is working in your life. That is what God wants from you.
- Others who have had to overcome limitations to accomplish God’s will...
  - Moses—he had a major speech defect, but God still used him when he could have chosen Aaron or anyone else for that matter. God will use us just the way we are.
  - And what about Job? He lost everything—his family, his wealth, his health....everything he owned. But he never got angry with God, never turned his back on God....he maintained his faith and the right attitude.
  - Joni Eareckson Tada—at the age of 19, she broke her neck in a diving accident and instantly became a quadriplegic. Her faith kept her strong and she went on to found Joni and Friends, a Christian outreach in the disability community. She is also an acclaimed artist, the author of nearly 50 books, and a popular speaker around the world despite the fact that she is racked with pain on a daily basis and needs someone to attend to her every need.
  - Dick Woodward—a rare degenerative spinal disease left him a quadriplegic but he went on to become an internationally known Bible teacher and author.
  - Nick Vujicic— an Australian born with no arms or legs. He learned to write using the two toes on his left foot with a special grip that slid onto his big toe. He learned to use a computer and type using the "heel and toe" method. He learned to throw tennis balls, play drum pedals, get himself a glass of water, comb his hair, brush his teeth, answer the phone and shave. He now travels around the world as a motivational speaker.
  - We all have potential when we depend on God. Potential to influence everyone who we come in contact with. When He has a plan for us, our defects or limitations won’t get in the way.

- Getting outside of ourselves....
  - Sometimes it is too easy to focus on our own problems and we fall into the pity pot, which can lead to depression.
  - A great way to take your mind off of your own problem is by helping others and sharing with others. Support Groups (KIT Groups) are a great way to connect with others.
    - *“In this life we cannot do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”* (Mother Teresa)
  - Even while you are living out your own story, it can be deeply comforting to be invited into another person’s story. It can be a welcome distraction.
  - The fellowship of suffering is not an exclusive club. We are all invited. Just look at this conference. We can always choose isolation, but you will find great comfort by reaching out or stepping into the fellowship. You will find it a place where deep bonds are created with others and with God.
  - Don’t hesitate to share your story with those around you. Don’t worry about rejection or pity—when God is your partner, you will find that others will love and admire the way you are dealing with your life.
  - You never know when you might inspire someone who someday might have to deal with their own pain or suffering.
  - Bottom line: Alone your faith flounders; with others it will flourish.
  
- **Building faith**
  - Faith is a muscle—it grows through vigorous exercise; being pushed beyond its comfort zone.
  - Imagine if you had to compete in the Olympics with no training. How far would you get? It’s a recipe for failure. Athletes have to practice day after day for years to build the skill and endurance they will need. They learn to push through the pain to build muscle size and strength. Pushing hard becomes a habit so when they compete they know they perform at their best. Our training is in suffering and endurance. Our trust in God to care for us is our peace and freedom. If our pain and suffering is prolonged, then God’s purpose is to strengthen our faith for a purpose we may not realize. Our job is to persevere just like an athlete in training.
  - Building faith is placing more dependence on God. When you submit to God completely, your destiny becomes greater than your capacity. When you stop to think about it, depending on God is actually taking the easy way out. Instead of trying to carry the burden of your illness alone, give it to God who will carry you forward.

- **Finding joy and purpose**

- Allowing God to be in control of your life not only gives you strength, but it brings you joy. Through faith, you accept the way God sees things rather than limiting ourselves to only what we can see.
- Pain and suffering (physical and emotional) can actually increase our capacity for joy. Kahlil Gabran wrote, *“The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.”*
- *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thes 5:16-18)
- We are to give thanks to God **IN** all circumstances, not **FOR** all circumstances. In every circumstance we can find something to be grateful for, and finding those things can change the climate of your soul.
- You will find joy when you begin to notice all of the transformation God is doing in you. You can also find it when God gives you a glimpse of how you are impacting others.

- **The power of prayer**

- We are all affected by myositis, but God can use that for His good purpose. When you start feeling hopeless or overwhelmed....pray, pray, pray. God will hear you and respond. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.”* (Phil 4:6)
- Praying in the face of suffering leads us into new spiritual territory. God will use your prayers to change you inside.
- If you have an urge to pray it is because God is calling you. He calls us to pray to get closer to Him. Remember, we are not even capable of seeking God without Him calling us first. When we pray, it is because God has willed it and we have chosen it. He knows what He is going to do, but He still wants to hear from us.
- Prayer is a good way to take the focus off of ourselves, which easily happens when you have an incurable disease. God wants you to turn to Him for help. He knows that you cannot bear this alone, but He is there to provide relief and support. It doesn’t take much effort to see someone who is worse off than you so you can count your blessings each day.

- **Suggested reading...**

- “If God is Good” by Randy Alcorn
- “A Place of Healing” by Joni Eareckson Tada
- “Don’t Waste the Pain” by David Lyons and Linda Richardson
- “4 Spiritual Secrets” by Dick Woodward
- “The 4:8 Principle” by Tommy Newberry