

# **A Blessing in the Storm**

**Muscular Dystrophy messed up my life  
and made me whole**



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and made me whole**

**By Lori Laws**

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My name is Lori Laws, and this is my first book. I am afflicted with a rare form of Muscular Dystrophy. To make a long story short, this disease has brought me into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Since I've been saved, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God has called me to teach His Word...using my life experiences to make others aware that God is indeed in the details of our lives.

This is a memoir of the radical change God has made in my life...



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# Foreword

by Michael Laws

There was a time when I thought, like everyone else we would get married and get pregnant as soon as possible. But then life happens and you have to make adjustments. That was the plan unbeknownst to Lori, and I couldn't wait to get started. The future dream I envisioned was raising a combination scientist and business maven ready to take on the world. Did I mention he was a boy? I wanted to give Lori and this child the best. I never really thought about this mysterious malady Lori warned me about. I was a student of positive thinking and really didn't pay it any mind.

The reality that unfolded now is focused on Lori's survival and not my wishes. My active wife was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy. I was suddenly thrust into the position from lover to care giver, from partner to protector, and from dancer to couch potato. Although I knew I couldn't live with myself as a couch potato, I knew life would change, but I never really knew how much.

Lori went through a few stages like everybody does. She went through the "healthy eating stage." This only lasted a short time. Once she boiled 1 lb of chicken - only to renounce the diet after tasting this bland fare... she thought this would help her malady. Why not?

The next phase was the "Let's try God phase." I have to admit this is the one that really made me nervous, because I have witnessed the "I'm saved - Hallelujah zealot," that is long on promise and low on consistency. You know, the newly found Christian that thinks nobody has the love for Jesus like they do; the on fire, hot Christian that lights up the church with the loudest amen's on Sunday. Only after about a year, they're silent and plotting to excuse themselves for the slightest reason.

Yes, I was sure that Lori would last about a year, if that... because she couldn't spell patience. I was amazed that she stuck. I didn't want to attend the church and build any relationships until I was sure she would stick. No, I was ready to

wait and see before I walked in those doors. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum, Lori found a good church with a band, and she went for two months straight. It took a few more months before I committed, but I decided to take a peak. I'll admit that I was really concerned with connecting with God again. It's really funny how things work out - because this woman who refused to listen to the Christian radio station, and somehow "misplaced" my Christian marriage book, really wanted to seek the Word.

My second concern was that she was starting to watch televangelists that promised healing, and some Christians claiming they could heal. I had witnessed those Christians before. I call them "Crazy Christians," and you probably know some of them personally. I remember one exclaiming that a black hole was heaven...that's right...another one claiming miracle cures with prayer cloths and miracle water - you know...those "Crazy Christians" that approach you and claim that if you aren't healed by their prayers and personal intercessions - you don't have faith.

I was questioned by a few inquiring minds in confidential conversation; why did I stick around? I don't think a lot of married people have the faintest idea of what loyalty in practice looks like, but let me sum it up: It is death do us part, in sickness and in health. That's not convenient to some of our plans when we sign up for marriage. Back in the day, I had arranged for secret dance lessons for Lori. We both used to love dancing, and she was the best dancer I knew – seriously, she really could dance. I didn't think anything could hold her back until this disease hit. I know she had to wonder why I would stick around, why put up with a person that wasn't as perfect as the day we got married; but Lori is my life, and I'm here to stay no matter what.

Loving a person with a progressive disease is for the strong of heart. I know people who suddenly lost interest in their spouses when they became disabled. They grew apart. I'm amazed at how many excuses people can make up when their life is inconvenienced. But I'm here because I know she'll be back, and my Lori will be herself again...While that's my hope, I

know it's a commitment I make or a belief that resonates in my soul. Whatever the reason; my life is hers, my legs are hers, my strength is her strength, and most importantly my God is also her God.

Being a spouse to someone with a progressive disability means you have to stop taking notes; what I mean is that men have a habit of keeping note or credits (call them marriage credits) for doing things around the house. Lori was a cleaning machine, and her disease now prevents her from this work - so I made adjustments. Here are a few examples: She took forever cleaning out our cat's litter box (standing up and walking with the litter was a challenge)...I bought an automatic litter pan and took over the responsibility. She would get on her hands and knees scrubbing stains on the carpet...I got a SpotBot (this is a vacuum cleaner for spot cleaning).

I really love the fact that she needs me so much, although she thinks it's a bother. I secretly love it, but the hard part is to watch the woman I love lose her spirit on the difficult days because of endless physical limitations and unrelenting tension/migraine headaches... being a witness to this hurts beyond belief because I don't have her attention, this disease takes up most of it.



# Introduction

I once heard someone say, "God doesn't always calm the storms, He calms His child." Wow. That's a profound statement! What I initially viewed as a crisis has been a catalyst for an encounter with The Living God. I've been living with Muscular Dystrophy for the last decade of my life. MD is a Neuromuscular Disease that affects my muscle strength, coordination, and balance. It mostly affects my lower body, so my mobility is limited. By limited, I mean difficulty walking; my legs, knees, ankles, and toes are very stiff... top that off with the balance of a drunken sailor, and I think you can see what I mean. My ability to coordinate voluntary movements is severely impaired, which is called ataxia.

Ever try getting someone's attention when they're preoccupied with something else? What do you do when you have a really important message to convey to someone? What if the message is a matter of life or death? I believe with all my heart, this disease has been allowed because it was the only way God could get my attention. It slowed me down to give me a chance to evaluate my life, and get a clear perspective of the importance I was assigning to things. Up until this point, I was living totally apart from God, and was not in the least bit interested in Him. All of that religion stuff happened a long time ago, and I couldn't see how it was relevant to me living in the here and now.

Initially, I felt as if God forgot about me. *How can He claim to love me? Why couldn't He stop this from happening to me? Why, God, why me?*

Through circumstances I had no control over, I have turned to Him. We all have things in life that are beyond our control, or things that seem insurmountable and hopeless. I stand here today only by the grace of God, and can say that I am able to look beyond the pain, and see that it was a severe mercy!

Romans 8:28 says, *"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose."*

Friend, God says ALL things work together, not some things. God has a purpose in your pain and suffering, otherwise it wouldn't have happened. When bad things happen we may feel defeated, but God can use them to make us stronger and develop qualities in us that prepare us for the amazing future He planned for us! He can take what seems meaningless, and open our eyes to see things differently...so differently!

As soon as I said "yes" to Jesus, He did some radical reconstruction! I can't explain how, but from the moment He came into my heart, I just knew that He would use me to write books and teach about His awesome power. I am here to share my life experiences, to encourage you, and let you know there is hope; especially if you feel that this isn't the life you signed up for. I've been there. I know it's a dark and scary place.

So how this book got started is such a God thing...

We were in Florida, and I tagged along with my husband to a business meeting of his. I ended up sitting next to a woman who I never had met before. We were just talking and getting to know each other. I was totally taken off guard when she asked..."When are you going to write your book, Lori?" I thought to myself, "O my God, how does she know about my book?" She was persistent, and it almost seemed like she was scolding me! I could sense the urgency in her voice..."You must write it all down now! You have to tell of everything you've learned through this illness! People need to hear! Tell how you've come to rely on God, how He has changed you, and how you are able to serve Him now! Don't wait any longer! This book is truly written ALL OVER YOU!"

I believe that God used her words as a confirmation to go ahead and start writing. So I just need to trust and obey Him, and know He will help me get the job done. So this book is my story about transitioning from the girl I used to be, to the girl I am today. It's about God's goodness and kindness in the midst of my brokenness and suffering. Most importantly, this book is for *anyone* who is suffering with *anything*. These are the things I'll share with you:

- \* Prophetic words spoken over my life...some have come to pass, and others, I am still waiting on Jesus.
- \* Dreams and visions I've had that I believe spoke, and are still speaking to my circumstances.
- \* Revelations or "light bulb" moments I've gotten through God's Word, and from people and things God strategically placed in my life.

I wouldn't trade anything for this treasure I have found! It's priceless! God is Awesome!!! I can't wait to see what's next!

So here is my humble attempt to share what's in my heart with you...





# Chapter 1

## A Merciful Awakening

Reflecting on my past, I was figuratively living in the Ancient City of Babylon. I certainly had the Babylonian mentality, which is a mentality saying, *“I am the only one, and nothing else matters”* - *“I am the most exciting thing there is”*. Once I explain the kind of person I used to be, I think you’ll be able to understand. So here goes...

I was a self absorbed, overconfident, super snob. Image was everything. I was definitely a high maintenance kind of girl, and looking “put together” at all times consumed me. I was a beautiful, healthy, and vibrant girl – and certainly knew it. Self-sufficiency, gaining money, and striving for material things is what was important to me. I was out to live the glamorous life! Self-esteem or self-confidence problems were never an issue. It was all about being independent; being in charge of my own destiny. People had to live up to my expectations, and anything else was unacceptable. Being self-centered and focusing on my strengths and accomplishments was what my life was all about.

My physical appearance was what I obsessed about; my hair had to look great, my makeup had to be impeccable, and my nails had to be perfectly manicured and polished at all times. Everything was about Me, Me, and Me. I elevated myself on a pedestal; in my mind, I was better than others. There was so much value put on material things, I was fanatical about buying new clothes; it was nothing to go shopping and drop a couple hundred dollars because I wanted to be seen in a different outfit every time I went out. I had to have nice things. Everything in my life was all about status, prestige, and feeding my huge ego. I was conceited, and appearances meant everything to me.

Do you remember two songs from back in the eighties titled, THE GLAMOROUS LIFE by Sheila E., and MATERIAL GIRL by Madonna? Well, they were my theme songs. If you really listen, the lyrics say it all.

My favorite activity was partying. I thought I was the ultimate party girl, and was a regular at many of the local nightclubs. I loved going out and being seen. I knew *I was one of the beautiful people*— and made sure everyone else knew it as well. It was all about flirting, and thinking I was the best thing since sliced bread. Dancing was my passion. I was good, but also convinced I was one of the best, like maybe Paula Abdul and I were in the same league! As a matter of fact, I was 100% confident I could have been one of *The Fly Girls* on the TV show *In Living Color*. “After all”, I reasoned, “*They were pretty like me and I could dance as good as them.*” I used to be the girl who would never pay her own way. Cover charges and drinks were always paid for.

I loved getting drunk - really drunk; drinking to the point of losing my coordination, stumbling, and tripping over my own two feet. Now I understand why I got drunk and goofy so fast; it was because the alcohol intensified the Muscular Dystrophy that was dormant in my body at that time. My friends called me a “lightweight,” and said that I couldn’t handle my liquor. We all just laughed and thought nothing of it. It was just a big joke.

Want to hear something crazy? After the clubs and bars were closed, my friends and I usually went out for breakfast. Turns out, the empty lot across the street where we parked and stumbled out of our cars to go to the diner, is now my church parking lot!

I remember being in one of my first apartments and looking around at all the “stuff” I had. I arrogantly said *out loud*, “Look at all the great things I’ve been able to get by MY OWN POWER.” (nice furniture, great apartment, beautiful clothes). After all, “*I deserve it, I’m worth it, and I’ve worked hard.*” The Bible warns us about pride – thinking we are better than others; thinking we are invincible and not able to fall. God hates pride, and won’t hesitate to let the prideful fall, but He loves to lift up the humble. Here are three scriptures that are relevant to this scenario:

*“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”  
(James 4:6)*

*“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and glorify and honor the King of Heaven. All His acts are just and true, and He is able to humble the proud.” (Daniel 4:37)*

*“You felt secure in your wickedness, ‘No one sees me’, you said. But your wisdom and knowledge have led you astray, and you said, ‘I am the only one and there is no other.’” (Isaiah 47: 10 - God predicted the fall of Babylon)*

I was a runner. Let me clarify; one consistent thing in my life was that I always ran from bad situations. If I didn't like something or if it was problematic, I was out of there. This was true of jobs that I was always quitting, running away from bad relationships...etc. You name it, if it was uncomfortable, I ran from it. It didn't matter where I ran, it always seemed that the same problems followed me; maybe dressed in a different package, but nevertheless, the same problem. It didn't matter how far I ran (once moving 3000 miles to California), the same thing I was running from greeted me at the front door of my new destination. But my running days would soon be over... I have since learned that running from your problems doesn't solve anything.

A few years later in my mid to late twenties, things seemed to be going great. I became more smug and self-satisfied. Life was good. I was making good money, living very comfortably, and had collected a lot of “stuff.” Still being very snobby and self absorbed, the world was pretty much revolving around me.

In December 1999, a new chapter opened in my life; I got married! By now I was 30, and life was progressing nicely according to my plans and schedule. Our lives seemed so carefree when my husband and I were dating. We both loved to go dancing. We loved doing almost everything together. Being so wrapped up in my self-image, I remember telling my husband that *no matter what, I was always going to look good and would always take the necessary time to look my best.* I told him that he “had better get used” to waiting. I was living a fairy tale, and expected nothing less than to live happily ever after.

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Then in June 2000, it happened. Crazy things were happening to my body, things like: not being able to keep my balance, loss of coordination, leg heaviness and weakness, shooting pains up and down my spine. I needed to walk with a cane to prevent myself from walking into things. My knees would lock. My leg muscles, (especially the muscles surrounding my knees) were rigid and wouldn't bend. I walked like Frankenstein.

Can I express to you how humiliated I was? I was mortified! I was so scared! A simple thing like walking was now almost impossible! The world I knew - my world - was falling apart, and there was absolutely nothing I could do! My physical body *used to be beautiful*, but now it was broken and ugly. Here I was judging on appearances, and now my own appearance was horrible! I was really depressed - really, really depressed. Things absolutely looked hopeless! I wanted to crawl under a rock, and die. I found myself "trapped" with no way out. I had to quit my job because I couldn't physically handle it anymore. I had to go on permanent disability. It seemed like any desires and dreams I had for the future – were now dead. Everything was falling apart at the seams. It was a huge pill, and it was very hard to swallow!

The Muscular Dystrophy I have is hereditary. This disease has been dormant in my body up until about ten years ago. I was able to run, skip, dance - do everything considered physically normal. Looking back, there were red flags (clumsiness, dragging of my feet, burning sensations in my legs and back, and weak leg muscles), but I could still function as if nothing was going on with my body. I was pretending, and was in a major stage of denial. When this disease initially manifested itself in 2000, I had no clue as to what was happening to my body; so you can imagine the stress, fear, and hopelessness gripping my heart. This is a progressive disease, and the way it affects people is different. It's impossible to medically predict what the future holds. Something I didn't know, and you probably didn't either; Muscular Dystrophy is a general name for a myriad of neuromuscular disorders. There are many Muscular Dystrophies, (more than two dozen). Currently, there is no medical cure. MD is rare, but millions are affected.

Every step I took was... and still is a huge effort. The heaviness in my legs feels as if buckets of cement are on my feet. My balance feels like I am walking on stilts. I was a control freak, and I had no control over what was happening! And being out of control is the worst thing that can happen to a control freak!

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*“But then I will win her back once again, I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope. She will give herself to me there...” (Hosea 2:14-15)*

After the Exodus out of Egypt, God led the Israelites into the wilderness for forty years, where He taught them obedience and dependence on Him. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, I believe that God had planned this transformation for me long ago. The first thing He did, which was not pleasant, was to take me out of *my Egypt*; my environment, my comfort zone, my perception of the perfect world - a separation from my old life. He took me into the wilderness. I wasn't kidding before when I told you that my running days would soon be over. There was no way I could run now. I was alone with God, forced entirely to depend on Him, and I learned how to accept help from others. God changes us in the wilderness. He removes things that prevent us from fulfilling our purpose. We can only fulfill our purpose by spending this time of preparation in the desert. This is where our true character is revealed, and we find out what is really in our hearts. He had to erase my way of thinking and replace it with His way of thinking. My spiritual eyes were starting to open. God knows our need for a wilderness experience, and He knows exactly how to produce in us the qualities He desires for us to have. One of the hardest lessons to learn is that God is sovereign and above all things. As our Creator, He knows what will get our attention.

The dust has now settled, and I am able to take a step back and see the fingerprints of God throughout my situation. He revealed Himself to me, has taught me, and is still teaching and preparing me for His purpose. The Bible says...

*“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” (Ephesians 2:10)*

When a crisis hits, your world is turned upside down; the blinders are on, and you can only see two feet in front of you. An all consuming darkness clouds your view. I will always remember the darkness...the hopelessness...the suicidal thoughts. God rescued me in the nick of time. You may be in that same place now. I want you to know that you do matter. You're life matters. Things can change. There is a better way...

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My husband and I moved to a new apartment complex two months after I had to quit my job. My life was in chaos, both physically and emotionally. I was not a happy camper; I was bitter, embarrassed, and hated the world! *“Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?”* I truly felt I would never enjoy life again. My chance for happiness was gone (that’s how self absorbed I was). As we were moving our stuff into our new home, we ran into some of our new neighbors. They were an older couple who were very nice. We made our introductions, and they welcomed us to the community. They saw I was walking with a cane, and having a hard time. The man asked me what had happened to make me need assistance with my walking. I honestly don’t remember my response, but I know my bad attitude was clearly shining through. I do remember telling them that whatever I had, I was going to have it for the rest of my life (I didn’t have a diagnosis then. The results from tests I had gotten were all normal. I had been going from doctor to doctor with no avail. Even they were stumped as to what was wrong with me. I wanted answers, but it seemed like nobody could help). My new neighbors looked me straight in the eyes and said, *“Well, we believe in prayer.”* That is all they said. They left, and I wasn’t sure what to think. I hardly spent any time thinking about God, yet alone praying. All I knew was that *God had let me down.*

All throughout that first year, most of my time was spent trying to find medical answers. I was putting my hope in the medical community, and it didn’t take long for me to get tired of

going to doctors. I was especially frustrated with arrogant doctors who thought they were God. Some of them were sure they knew more of what was going on in my body than I was. One particular doctor told me, "Everything was in my head", because he couldn't find any physical abnormality on any of the tests I'd had done, (Blood tests, MRI's, EMG's ...etc). *In my head? What a quack!* Anyone could plainly see just by the way I was walking, that something was seriously wrong. I'm not sure "irritation" is a good enough way to describe what I was feeling!

Still drowning in my misery, I was watching TV late one evening. While channel surfing, I came across a religious channel and stopped...I don't know why I stopped there. The people on TV were promoting a book about Generational Curses. I didn't know exactly what a Generational Curse was, but I thought that maybe I had one? After all, a curse would probably explain a lot! All other efforts had failed, so maybe there is something to this religious stuff? Something in me directed me to go online and buy the book. The book came in a day or two, and it was fascinating. I learned that a Generational Curse involves negative patterns from your family history, which are repeated in your own life. The book was about identifying and breaking these Generational Curses. The book was about God. There were Bible references in this book, and it took me only two days to finish it. It was interesting, and it made me hungry for more of God. What? Hungry for more of God?

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I was raised in the church. Like a lot of people, all the Spiritual knowledge I had was in my head - not in my heart. So as a result, I really didn't understand much. But I thought I was a nice person... I think most of us are nice people. We try to do the right thing. We try to outweigh the bad by the good we do. We try to keep "The Golden Rule." The plain old fact is that despite how good we are, we're missing something vital. And because we're missing this, we can be as nice as we want, but still be miserable; even though our lives on the outside tell a different story to make others believe that we have it "all together." Throughout my life, religion was drilled into me, and I

was taught the Bible was indeed the inspired Word of God. But I guess I never took that seriously enough - until now.

When I look back at this time in my life, it's so clear to me that God was drawing me to Himself. He was leading me to read the instruction manual for life.... I went to a local Christian Bookstore and asked the lady who was working there to help me find a Bible I could understand. I bought a New Living Translation Bible, which is easier for me to identify with. I was on a mission - a mission to find God. I wanted so desperately to be healed. I knew if anyone could heal me, it would be Him. I also thought about times in the past when I had tried to read the Bible, only to get really confused, fall asleep, and eventually give up because I couldn't understand what the Bible was saying. This time was different. I can't explain how, but I understood almost every word.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 13:12, *"To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them."*

God also says in Jeremiah 29:12-13, *"In those days when you pray to me, I will listen. If you look for me with all your heart, you will find me."*

I was looking for God with all of my heart and found Him! I was open to His teaching, and He gave me understanding and an abundance of knowledge! The truth of God's Word simply blows me away! That entire time period was such a precious time. My spiritual eyes were beginning to open; I truly understood for the first time, despite what was happening to me, God still loved me! My disease does not change who He is or who I am in Him. I know that He is much greater than my pain.

All the knowledge about Him in my head somehow started to penetrate the depths of my heart. It was just like that song... "I once was blind, but now I can see." He loved me so much, that He had planned from the beginning of time to send His Son to take the punishment everyone in the world deserves. That punishment is death. He died on a cross for us. He died on a cross for me. The Bible helped me put two and two together –



when Adam and Eve sinned, (they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit) their spirits were separated from God. Their sin brought death and suffering. And because we descended from Adam and Eve, each one of us has inherited their sin nature (or original sin). God came up with the solution that was needed to bring us back to Him:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son and whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

It's important to know that the word “believes” doesn't just mean to know about Jesus; it's not just about head knowledge. I looked up the Hebrew meaning of “believe,” in the Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible. The Hebrew meaning is “to place confidence in, and to trust.” The Vine's Dictionary tells us that to “believe”, is to have reliance upon, not mere credence or lip service.

He died so my spirit could be reunited with His! He wanted me to know Him, and have a relationship with Him! Jesus clearly tells us: *“And this is the only way to have eternal life - to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.”* He wanted to be my Savior. I wanted Him to be my Savior. The Bible says that if we confess with our mouth, and believe in our hearts that Jesus is The Son of God who died, and was raised to life again, we will be saved. So I did exactly that! I asked Jesus to come into my heart and change me! September 5, 2001 was my spiritual birthday! Lightning didn't come down or anything - there was no immediate change, at least no change I could see. But I know God doesn't lie. He told me He would put His Holy Spirit in my heart if I ask Him. I knew that I was saved! My friendship with God was restored! The Bible says,

*“Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.” (1 Corinthians 15:22).* I finally understood that this is what it means to be born again.

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The next day I was off to my physical therapy appointment. Then, and all throughout the day, I felt a presence with me. I felt loved so completely! It was a feeling I had never experienced before that day. I felt protected, and things felt peaceful for a change! Yes, I still had my physical limitations, but the bad feelings didn't consume me like they had before. I died to self. What I mean by that is I let go of the pride, bitterness and anger keeping me in bondage. This is a Great Exchange. I mean that God gave me a new and lasting hope because I gave Him all of that junk I was carrying around. I was happy for the first time in a long time! I am a friend of God! He has forgiven me, and removed my sins as far as the east is from the west. (Psalm 103:12) Jesus saved me! I stand in awe of God's mercy. You and I can do absolutely nothing to earn our salvation. It's a free gift from our Creator.

*"I will never leave you or forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)  
What an awesome God!*

This is how my journey began...

# Chapter 2

## A New Beginning

Jesus rocked my world! He changed my perspective and attitude on things! That doesn't mean I was completely made perfect and holy. I didn't intuitively know how to live victoriously, but *The One who is Victorious* was now living inside of me. All along, He was teaching me how to live an extraordinary life! The Bible tells us In Romans 12:2,

*“Don't copy the behavior and customs of the world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”* This meant I was to keep immersing myself more and more into God's Word. I stumbled into these words in John 8:31-3...

*“If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

This promise really motivated me to keep chasing Him. I didn't have to be all “holy” and “have it all together.” He met me at the point where I was at. God didn't just see the person I was, He saw the person I could become. He saw me as a sparkling diamond in the rough.

When a person first gets saved, they are so excited! They want to save the world. I know, because that was me! The exhilaration and freedom I felt in my new life with Jesus compelled me to share everything, practically shoving God down people's throats! I want to let everyone know that my intentions were never to offend or step on toes. Thanks for loving me and my zealous preaching! I know God is crazy about you. You know I love you. So give us new Christians some time to gain discernment and maturity, and then the world will be able to see Christ's light in us. They will see the radical difference He can make in a life!

My hairstylist saw that change: It was Easter time and I was getting my routine trim. My stylist and I got to talking about Easter baskets, decorations, candy...etc. I knew my hairstylist

for a while, so I felt this would be a great opportunity to talk about Jesus. I knew immediately after I said, "You know, Easter isn't about the Easter bunny," that the Holy Spirit was taking control. There were things coming out of my mouth that were amazing! I'm naturally a pretty bold person, but this boldness was uncanny. Her exact words were, "You should teach this!"

That day was heavily booked with appointments, so we couldn't continue our conversation when she was finished with my hair, but she told me she wanted to hear more. I asked if we could meet at a time when she wasn't so busy. We met sometime later when she was on her break, and we sat inside my car to talk. Being a new believer, I was not well-versed in the bible; scripture didn't automatically roll off my tongue. I was convinced that I confused her with every word I managed to fumble out of my mouth. But God used my excitement to draw her to Him! God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called! Her heart was open to the truth about Jesus, and she chose to ask Him into her life and make her a new person! As the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*" She got saved! How great is that?!!!

It was at one of the first Bible studies I attended that God shone a light on the person I would become. We started praying, and one of the ladies got a Word of Knowledge from the Lord (this is both a prophecy and encouragement from God). She told me that God was revealing to her that I would be a woman of the Word. I was astounded, and told her that I was thinking about going to Bible School. She told me she was feeling that wasn't the right thing for me. God wanted to teach me Himself. Wow! Is God the most awesome teacher or what! Everything and everyone that He has put in my path either has taught or is still teaching me. I never want to stop growing. I know He'll never stop showing me things. Most importantly, ***I am a woman of the Word!*** I'm absolutely crazy about God's word. "...His word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones." (Jeremiah 20:9) It directs and guides me through life. I know that if I don't know the truth in God's word, I'll fall for anything that comes along. It truly is, "*A lamp for my feet and a light for my path.*" (Psalm 119:105)

I watched many Christian shows on TV, and listened to Christian radio. There was a radio program I listened to called, Turning Point with Dr. David Jeremiah. He's one of the many people God has used to help teach me His timeless truths. Dr. Jeremiah helped me see how even after two thousand years, God's truths still are so relevant to us today. He reinforced the love God has for me... especially in the midst of my circumstances. God is on my side. Even though I was reading the Bible myself, I was able to see and interpret things differently thanks to Dr. Jeremiah.

I love getting free stuff, so whenever free information was offered I made sure I called to receive it. I believe that one of the things I received in the mail from Turning Point would help direct my future. They were cards with Scripture on one side, and a quote on the other side. One particular card had a quote from Charles Spurgeon, and it said, *"The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction."* I can't explain how, but from that moment I knew at sometime I would be starting a ministry for people like me - people with physical afflictions. I just knew God would heal me, and that I would be a testament to how God can heal. I would be able to share this with others.

Over the years, God has healed me, but not in the way I planned or expected. It's almost never the way we plan or expect. God had healed my soul, not my physical body – not yet anyway. God has given His life to my spirit that was dead and disconnected from Him, and is now transforming me. My character is changing to make me more like Jesus, and God has given His life to my spirit that was dead and our Father promises to complete the work He has started. Philippians 1:6 says, *"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* My physical body continues to be a challenge. Actually, this disease is progressing.

*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life". Proverbs 13:12*

I know the meaning of this scripture so well! It seems that nothing I do medically helps my quality of life with this disease. My hope is deferred, and it hurts so badly. But He goes on to say,

*“When the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”* So according to His Word, it’s a matter of waiting on God. It’s all about His timing.

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches us to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. *For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds.* To everyone who knocks the door will be opened. That’s His promise. He tells us we will receive **if** we are persistent. He never tells us that it’s going to happen the moment we ask, but be assured, it will happen. That’s where faith comes in. *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.* (Matthew 17:20) Do you believe Him? I do.

Here's something very cool...

We have a skylight in the bedroom above our bed. Unfortunately, there is so much light pollution it’s hard to see stars. I was feeling discouraged because of my physical condition, and I suddenly heard the Lord speak to my spirit. I was looking up in the sky and saw a really bright star, (I think it may have been the North Star). The Lord said, *“I am that bright star.”* Clouds rolled in and completely covered the star. All I could see was black. Then He said, *“Your problems and trials will sometimes be as thick as these clouds, making it impossible to see me. But I am still there.”* The clouds rolled away, and I could see the star again. He continued, *“Just as these clouds dissipated, yours will too.”* (Wow!)

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Love this! Here's a nugget of wisdom from a Bible study titled, [When Your World Falls Apart](#), by Dr. David Jeremiah...

*“The Purpose of the Storm - God's purposes in the storms you encounter are always to guide you to a haven. Think about it: We don't just go out on the sea to sit there: we go for a purpose. If a storm interrupts that purpose, God will direct you through it, or... He may change the purpose of your trip altogether. I have learned this about storms: The place you thought you wanted to go heading into the storm is*

not always the place you think you want to go coming out of the storm. Sometimes storms can change your mind about things that you thought you wanted. The secret to experiencing those changes is starting the journey with a receptive heart. If you head into a storm saying, "Thy will be done," then your will and God's will become one. Jonah's will was changed, wasn't it? He was headed in one direction, away from the will of God, when a literal storm resulted in his spending a few days in the belly of a great fish. But he became a little more "flexible" during that time; and when he was deposited back on dry land, he hit the ground running to accomplish God's will. A God - designed storm can serve the purpose of bringing our will in line with His."

I can only speak from experience when I say that everything I've been through and am still going through, has given me an entirely new perspective on life. Material and physical things were where I placed importance and value. What I used to view as small, unimportant things are now huge... and vice versa. I can now identify with the pain and sufferings of others. I no longer have a shallow view of their hardships.

The past few years I've had the privilege of meeting others who are also afflicted with some chronic illness...whether it's Fibromyalgia or Multiple Sclerosis. "Privilege? How can something as horrible as that be a privilege?" It's difficult, but let me try to explain: There is an immediate bond that takes place when someone with a chronic illness meets someone else with a chronic illness. Call it a mutual respect, because they both have gone (or are going) down the same road. It's kind of like the kinship between soldiers who have fought in the same battle; they know what it's like to be in the same foxhole.

*"...so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you." 2 Corinthians 4:11-12*

All of our humiliations and adversities are how Christ's power and presence are demonstrated through our lives. The reason I call it a "privilege" is because we have the God given honor of knowing that death has worked out something pretty special in our lives. This ultimately leads to life in others.

God has trained me to be able to identify a hurting or brokenhearted person from a mile away. Things I've learned would not have been possible to learn if not for this malady. Connections I have made would never have been made if not for MD. Do I hate this disease? You bet. But I can now comfort others because of the work He has done in me.

I am thinking of one particular woman who I am incredibly blessed to have as a friend...she has Cerebral Palsy, her speech is garbled and she's in a wheelchair. She's such a special woman. We love to pray and do Bible studies whenever we're together. She loves the Lord with all of her heart! She's a mighty worshiper, who dances for God in her wheelchair! What an inspiration! She is just one example of someone I would have missed out on knowing if not for my disability. She ministers the love and acceptance of God to me...A reminder that we are all made in His image. As I'm typing, this scripture comes to mind...

*"Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world; things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God." 1 Corinthians 1: 27-29*

I'm a music lover. Always have been, always will be. I remember being a little girl singing into a hairbrush, pretending it was a microphone... serenading millions of my adoring fans. What kid hasn't done that? After becoming a believer, things shifted from singing to fans that adored me, to singing to an audience of one, whom I adore. I only want to sing to, praise, and worship my beautiful Creator! Christian music is cool! Had no idea how good it was! Come to think of it...my taste in music was probably one of the first things that changed for me.



I remember packing up all of my secular CDs in a box, and then giving them to our maintenance man! That same day, our Leasing Manager called me to thank me for the CDs he shared with her...she couldn't believe I gave up all that music...But that gave me the reason to tell her why. It's great, because now I have an MP3 player, which has the capacity for me to download up to 20,000 songs! I love Christian Pop, Christian Rock, Gospel and Urban Gospel. All of it helps me sing to, praise, and worship the One I am crazy about! I was recently listening to some of the Christian music CDs that I haven't played much since I became a believer. I'm now thinking of how those songs drew me to Him, and taught me about Him and His truth, through the lyrics.

All of the TV and radio programs I was watching and listening to were always stressing church attendance. I kept remembering church from when I was younger, and how it was so boring! I hated it. I didn't think I needed anyone else. I didn't want to go to church. I thought it was just me and God. *I honestly thought the church was full of hypocrites, so why should I even bother to go?* I know that a lot of people think like this.

Jesus addressed this: In His Parable of the Weeds, He said the church is like a wheat field. When the crop began to grow and produce grain; weeds also grew and were intermixed with the wheat. In the parable, the farmer's workers asked the farmer if they should pull the weeds. The farmer told them not to, because they would uproot the wheat if they did that. He told them to let them both grow together until the harvest. Then he will sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them. Jesus later explains the parable. He explained that the field is the world, and the wheat represents the church. The weeds are the people that belong to the evil one. The harvest is at the end of the world. Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. You can read this story for yourself in Matthew 13.

So, my "hypocrite" excuse was now nullified and void. I've learned that there are true believers *and* false believers that go to church. Some people talk a lot about faith, but that's all it is – talk. Going to church on Sunday is one thing, but what about

Monday through Saturday? Yes, there are hypocrites, but not everybody is one. People make up the church, and people aren't perfect. We can only see outward appearances, but God sees the heart. It's not up to us to judge. God says we will all exist together till the end.

Jesus also taught us how we can identify false believers; In Matthew 7:15, He says, *"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions."* Here is something that happened to me I feel speaks volumes about this...

Being a new born again follower of Jesus Christ, I made the mistake of thinking everyone in church was like me. Boy, that statement really makes me sound arrogant, doesn't it?! I mean, I'm not saying that I'm perfect, but I do know right from wrong. I became friends with a woman I met at one of the first small group Bible studies I attended, affiliated with my church. We had lunch together, and we even joined a weight loss program together. One day she had opened up and started telling me things that were going on in her life, very serious things. I found it really hard to believe that she didn't understand how serious things were. She was blinded to something that was so obviously wrong! Sometimes when we're in the middle of something, we don't see so well. It was crystal clear to me, that she was having an affair on her husband! Of course I knew adultery is a blatant sin. Knowing this about my friend made my spirit uneasy, and I wrestled with what I should do. Should I be silent, and just let it go unnoticed? Should I address the whole situation? I knew something had to be said, but what? I knew that God had the answer, so I went straight to Him...

I prayed for guidance, even went to the computer and did a search for "exposing adultery." Amazingly, the search resulted in exactly what I needed. I'll explain-- I ended up reading about

Disorder in the Church, and how Paul condemned spiritual pride in chapter five of First Corinthians. Paul told the Church of Corinth that any sins left unchecked or ignored can infect and paralyze a church. In other words, poison spreads; one bad apple spoils the whole bunch. The Corinthian believers were ignoring a grave sin. One of the male members of the church was having an affair with his father's wife. Paul says it is the church's responsibility to discipline flagrant sin among its members. "Flagrant" means obvious, outrageous, and disgraceful. Paul instructed the Corinthians to even go as far as excluding him from fellowship, in the hopes of motivating him to repentance. Depending on if he repents and turns away from his sin, they should then return him to fellowship with the church. Paul isn't saying we're expected to be sinless. However, those who deliberately sin can jeopardize the spiritual health of a church. As followers of Christ our role in the church is to help exhort or instruct those who are sinning, to repent and turn away from their sin.

Feeling very optimistic, I just knew that if I followed this council...my friend would respond like the loving Christian she portrayed herself to be. I sent my friend what I thought was a loving email confronting her sin. It didn't take her long to respond. I was wrong about the loving, Christian response thing. Her response wasn't pretty. She went ballistic! The email she sent back to me was extremely defensive and hurtful. She sounded furious, sarcastically accusing me of being a *"perfect" Christian*, and *"How dare I" judge her? I would be judged by the measure I was judging her!* Ever talk to someone who takes the Bible out of context, and twists scripture to suit them? She also told me that I needed Christian counseling!

I was taken aback by her accusations, so I went back to the Bible and reread 1 Corinthians chapter five. It just amazes me that when God wants to get a message across nothing can stop it from coming! I was rethinking this whole thing, and considering that maybe I had no right to say what I said. Maybe she was right. Maybe I was judging her? Upon reading what was in the Bible, verse 12 seemed to put an end to all of the second-guessing going on in my mind; that scripture verse says,

*"It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside; but as the scriptures say, 'You must remove the evil person from among you.' 1 Corinthians 5:12*

That was exactly what I needed to hear! I took that scripture to heart, and it made me certain that I did the right thing. Paul says that I have no right to judge people on the street, but people who proclaim to be Christians are a different story. So this supposed "friend" of mine arranged a meeting with the elders of the church. She was certain that I overstepped boundaries, and was convinced that I was in the wrong. She wanted vindication. It was so obvious she wanted the church to reprimand me, and "straighten me out!"

So we both showed up at what was like the church's version of "People's Court." She told her side of the argument, making sure she emphasized how evil I was for saying what I did. But I was on God's side. The Word of God was applied to the situation, and the elders pointed out that I was following scripture. She refused to even acknowledge that her actions were in opposition to what God says in His Word. Ultimately, the Word prevailed. It always does! I was exonerated. She stormed out of the building. I don't see her anymore at church. I truly wanted to be her friend. Through this experience, I've learned that speaking the truth in love isn't always easy or convenient, but it's necessary if we want to be followers of Christ.

In Matthew 18, Jesus teaches us how to treat a believer who sins: *"...If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector."*

Amazing! That just goes to show you...if you take the Bible seriously, God will reveal more and more truth to you. What I am trying to say is: The first step is to believe what Jesus says. Secondly, the Word of God will instruct you. Thirdly, when you persist in the Word...God shows up. An example of this is Psalm 37:6 that says, *"He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun."*

The woman in this story was certain I was guilty, and she was badmouthing me to everyone. I was simply following God's word with a sincere heart, His truth won out and He showed everyone my innocence! What an awesome, faithful God!

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It was Christmas 2001, and I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my mother and my cousin. It was hard to stop thinking about church, so I made the announcement that I was going to start going, but I had to find one I liked. My cousin agreed to go "church hopping" with me. It was the first Sunday of the New Year, and the first church we visited was a Moravian Church. During service, I understood their tradition was to cut out Bible scriptures, put them into a basket, and then pass the basket around the congregation so we could pick a scripture. They believed whatever scripture you picked applied to your life for that year. I wasn't sure what to think of that, but what did I have to lose? So I picked one. The scripture I picked left me speechless! It took my breath away! It was a scripture from the Old Testament. It was 2 Kings 20:5...

*"I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears."*

Understand, for almost all of the time prior to that, I had cried a river. Only God knows how I've prayed. I remember lying on my couch, wailing and crying out to God, *"What's going on? Don't you see what's happening to me? Don't you hear me?"* I was terribly distressed. Sure enough, that day at the Moravian Church was the day God spoke... He directly told me He had heard and saw me! I felt like He was telling me I was on the right path, I was finally on the path He chose long ago for me. I had to keep chasing Him. The scriptures say, *"Draw close to God and He will draw close to you."* (James 4:8)

The service was over. I loved getting the scripture. I wanted to hear more from God, but decided to keep looking for a church. That church was a little too traditional for me.

I asked around for some names of churches. By this time, I knew God was leading. The Lord says, *"I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."* (Psalm 32:8). The next Sunday I walked into a church that

didn't look like a church. It was a really big auditorium. It was a Non-denominational Church. I walked in by myself and found a seat. Again I can't explain it; I just knew this is where I belonged. People were friendly. I felt love. Did you ever feel love before? And I strongly felt the Spirit of God. The service began, and people started praising and worshipping the Lord. They had their eyes closed and hands lifted, and they were singing to God as if He was right there! The pastor got up to speak, and together we read out of the Bible. It seemed like every word he said was meant just for me.

I'm not saying that other churches don't use the Bible, but this was so different. To me, the scriptures seemed to jump off the page. At the end of the service, anyone who wanted to pray with somebody about anything was invited to go to the front of the Sanctuary. I thought it would be really great to pray with other people, so I walked up to the front. There I met a woman and her husband, and they prayed for physical healing for me. Afterward, this woman invited me to a weekly Bible study that she held at her home. The church was also having a breakfast for the women's ministry the next week, and she invited me to the breakfast as well.

I lost friends because of my newfound relationship with Christ. They just couldn't see what I saw. I used to make fun of "Jesus Freaks," thinking they were way off base...The Bible says, *"The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 1:18) I also lost friends because of my Muscular Dystrophy. I could no longer physically "keep up." They stopped calling and hanging out with me. It didn't take very long to realize they weren't true friends, but God gave me new friends. Everything just fell into place-I'd go to church for something I was invited to, where I would meet other women, who then invited me somewhere else. Over the years, relationships were built. I now have Sisters and Brothers in the Lord. Church is cool. It opened up a whole new world to me.

It's true that we don't have to go to church to be with God. After all, God is everywhere. But why wouldn't we want to go? Our family is the church. I used to think, and it may be the

general consensus, that we are all God's children. Well, the Gospel of John 1:12 tells us a different story:

*“But to all who believed Him (Jesus) and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan – this rebirth comes from God.”* Romans 8:15 says, *“You received God’s spirit when He adopted you as His own children.”* Galatians 4:6 says, *“And because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out Abba, Father.”* Now you are no longer a slave, you are God’s own child. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir.” ... That puts everything into the proper perspective. Doesn't it?

A great moment for me was when I was baptized in October 2002. By being totally immersed in water, I was identifying with Christ in His death, (it was a deathblow to my sin nature; it no longer has the upper hand). Coming up out of the water is a symbol of being raised to new life in Christ. We aren't saved by baptism. It's a way of publicly declaring we are now following Christ...we now belong to Him.

God was working fast. He got me plugged in and very comfortable with His church. My desire was to serve Him. After all He has done, how can I give Him any less than all of me?





# Chapter 3

## Serving

In the beginning of 2002, my husband and I were in church. It was Sanctity of Life Sunday (this is a day set aside to honor life), and there was a guest speaker. A young woman, about seventeen years old, was telling about her experience at a local crisis pregnancy and resource center (Care Net of the Lehigh Valley). She told us she was devastated when she learned she was pregnant, and wasn't sure what to do. She thought that she would maybe have an abortion, which would be a fast and easy solution to her problem. The people at Care Net of the Lehigh Valley helped her weigh her options, and educated her with both pregnancy information, and with what God says about life. There was much more to her story, but the bottom line was that she accepted Christ as her personal Savior, and chose life for her baby! What a great testimony!

The entire time she was speaking, I felt this tugging on my heart. A voice inside of me was saying, *"You should be a part of this. You've had many experiences in the past that you can use to help guide and offer direction to these girls."* I knew it was the Holy Spirit prompting me. I was certain that talking with these girls would be something I would enjoy and be good at. After all, "I've been there, done that."

There are many things in my past I regret. One thing in particular that I initially buried, but somehow kept creeping back up... was that I had an abortion when I was sixteen. Here were some of the thoughts going through my mind at that time: *"There is no way I want to be a pregnant teenager. My life is only beginning. I have dreams and goals. A baby would only cramp my style. I'm not dealing with the embarrassment of being a pregnant teenager, besides, what's the big deal? It seems as though everyone else is abortion minded."*

My Babylonian mentality was beginning to surface, (**"I am the only one and nothing else matters"**). It didn't matter that

a baby was growing inside of me. It was all about me. James 4:4 says,

*“Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: if you want to be a friend to the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.”*

Remember when I was talking about Generational Curses, and how they involve negative patterns from your family history that are repeated in your own life? Let me give an illustration of that in my life:

I was adopted when I was ten weeks old. I don’t know much about my biological family, with the exception of knowing I have an older brother. I could never make family trees with the other kids when I was in school. When this disease manifested, I did some searching into my biological family for medical information. I found nothing medical, but I did find a half sister twenty five years older than I am! We were able to put together what little information we both had... we came to the conclusion that our birth father loved woman, young women, and he was indeed a womanizer. I’ll tell you why I say that...

The very little non-disclosing information I had from the adoption agency said my 21 year old mother was married to my 57 year old father. I also knew that I had four other siblings who were adults when I was born. The adoption agency told me those children were from a previous marriage. So between my birth mom and this other women were two marriages and six children. The half sister I was able to meet... her mom and our father weren’t married. Her mom was only sixteen. Was my birth father maybe having an affair? It’s crazy, because my half sister’s mom would never speak about our birth father. My half sister described her mom turning very bitter whenever my birth father was mentioned. One of my half sister’s aunts used to babysit her when her mom and our dad went out. She didn’t have nice things to say about him either.

When I think about how chaotic my life used to be in this area, and how I probably was destined to go down the same road as my father, his father, his father before him...etc. That my friends, is a generational curse. Who knows how many siblings I have out there in the world somewhere? Only God

knows how many wives or partners he had. I know nothing about my birth mother's side of the family.

In the Bible, God tells us that He will lavish mercy and unfailing love on those who love and obey Him, but if He is not the central focus of our lives, He tells us in Exodus 20:5, *"I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations who reject me."*

This was an eye opener for me. Even though I don't know specifics, the things I was able to find out about my birth father really made me think of those same negative behaviors that had manifested in my past. Only God knows what kind of dysfunctional things were passed down to me through my birth mother. But I know God has big plans for me, because she *chose* to give me life! It's all about the *choices* we make. God spells that out for us clearly in Deuteronomy 30:19,

*"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life so that you and your descendants might live!"* Then God goes on to tell us how to do this: *"You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying Him, and committing yourself firmly to Him. He is the key to your life."*

God will not force His will on anyone. He lets us decide. It truly is *choosing* over a matter of life or death. We all have the power of *choice*. I have chosen the better way! I've turned to God, and He broke the curse! Now any Generational sin has no power over me! God keeps His word. He's lavishing mercy and unfailing love on me, and He will continue with my descendants. We certainly cannot control our circumstances, but we can control the way we respond by the choices we make.

Yes, Jesus defeated sin and death on the cross 2000 years ago, but our sin nature is still here trying to trip us up. That is why making good, godly choices is vital to living a victorious life. I've learned in a way that brought on so much heartache, that making bad choices can create all sorts of unwelcome problems and chaos.

Getting back to church...I had goose bumps when we left. Even though I knew I should get involved with Care Net of the Lehigh Valley, I didn't act. I opted to go on vacation instead!

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We were vacationing in Arizona, when I found myself in the Emergency Room at the hospital. I had a whopper of a migraine. The pain was so bad, I couldn't think or reason. After the ER doctor gave me a shot of something and some oral medication, he left me in a room by myself, where I just laid there waiting for some relief. The only thing I definitely remember doing, was calling out for Jesus. Nothing happened. He didn't appear or anything. There was no immediate healing. But moments later, I was feeling better and the doctor sent me home with a prescription for some medication for future headaches.

All throughout the day, I couldn't help but to think that God had forgotten me again. Even though He tells us in His Word that He will never leave or forsake us, I just didn't understand. I was angry and confused! *After all, I was His child now, so where was He when I was in pain and really needed Him?* I couldn't shake this feeling, and kept thinking about it all through the night. I kept asking "Why Lord?" While I was lying in bed, that still small voice told me to read Psalm 77. I wasn't sure if that was God or just me talking to myself. I took a step of faith, and opened up my Bible to Psalm 77. Do you know what Psalm 77 is about? This still blows me away when I think about it. Psalm 77 was written by someone who was feeling everything I was feeling. The psalmist cried out in deep distress to God! He wondered where God was, or if He even cared about him. He wondered if God had rejected him forever! Did God's promises fail? Has God forgotten to be compassionate? Friends, those are exactly the kind of things I was asking.

Yes, he was overwhelmed, but the Psalmist's focus suddenly changed. Instead of thinking of himself, he put away his doubts and worshiped God. That's how he eliminated his stress. From that moment on, I realized that when we shift our focus onto God, rather than ourselves, God will make things well with our souls.

I love the psalms. It's so comforting to know that David, and the other Psalmists, were real people with real emotions. The psalms have helped me stay afloat when I was in some pretty deep water. There's power in the Psalms. There's power in the Word. God says, *"It is the same with my Word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to and it will prosper everywhere I send it."* (Isaiah 55:11)

The book of Hebrews is amazing. Listen to what it says about God's Word: *"For the Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12).* Wow! Who knew that the Bible would be full of so much truth and wisdom? His Word is refreshing, electrifying, and life-changing!

Always remembering God's goodness, and how He has strengthened me in the past, is one of the things that helps me overcome any doubts or trials that come. Never doubt in the darkness what you believed in the light. Remembering how God has been faithful in the past will strengthen your faith for the future.

I also want to mention something else that happened in Arizona ... I don't remember what radio program I was listening to, but whoever was speaking was telling us God is not in a hurry to heal (I believe he was talking about physical healing). He said that only when we are sure it was Jesus who healed us, that there is absolutely, positively no other way our healing could have happened... that is when it will happen. (I've meditated on those words, and hidden them in my heart). I believe that is God's way of saying, *"If you never suffered, how would you know I could heal?"*

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Much time passed, but the tugging on my heart never went away. I kept thinking about Care Net of the Lehigh Valley, and how using the experiences I've had could help these girls. I procrastinated almost a year, but finally signed up for the training to be a counselor.

During training, I learned there is something called Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS). Sometimes we may have feelings of

sorrow, anger, denial, guilt...etc, which don't surface immediately. We may suppress these feelings but they're very real, and Satan absolutely uses this guilt trip to keep us in bondage.

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9*

Until I became a born-again follower of Christ, I hid and suppressed any feelings or emotions from the abortion that took place almost 25 years ago. It was out-of-sight, out-of-mind... or so I thought. The realization of my abortion had finally hit me when I was training to be a counselor. We were learning all about fetal development, and the feelings and emotions I had bottled up at sixteen, came to the surface. All I could think was, *"How could I have done this to an innocent child?"* It was then that I realized I had murdered my baby. *I let people lead me to believe my baby was only a lump of tissue, and having an abortion was no big deal."*

For years after having my abortion, I felt totally uncomfortable around anything pregnancy or baby related. I tried to avoid that stuff like the plague. Avoidance is another symptom of PAS. All volunteer counselors, who in the past have had abortions, were required to participate in a Bible Study specifically for PAS. The Book we used was called FORGIVEN AND SET FREE. It was so incredibly healing... there were other women there. One particular scripture God had used to minister and heal me was from the book of Ezekiel...

*"And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." Ezekiel 36: 26*

I was shadowing other counselors to get a feel of what counselors do. I finished the actual counselor training, but did not start to see clients on a one on one basis until I finished the PAS Bible study. I was not happy at all when I started seeing clients! I wondered why I signed up for this. I absolutely did not like what I was doing! I didn't like kids. I honestly thought they were all brats! I just kept thinking to myself, *"What in the world was I thinking by volunteering here?"* I remember asking God why He had put me there. *"After all, isn't serving Him supposed to bring me joy? But here I am--all stressed out!"* I told God that

I was going to quit, because I didn't like any part of the crisis pregnancy center.

I went to bed that night with all this weighing heavily on my mind. I just was lying there looking at the sky through the skylight. What I saw was amazing! It was winter, and the ice was chipped on the skylight in the shape of a fetus! That was a crystal clear sign for me. I have to believe that was God's way of letting me know that Care Net of the Lehigh Valley is where I belonged, (At least for this season of my life). God knows. Remember, through a friend, God said He would teach me Himself.

I cannot tell you how much I have learned, and how much I have grown at the Pregnancy Center. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this was one of God's training grounds for me! It took a little while, but God healed my heart! I enjoy being around babies and kids! That's a miracle in itself! I've been educated along with my clients. We show expectant mothers videos about fetal development, and what they can expect with each trimester of pregnancy. We educate our clients about breastfeeding, baby care, baby safety, and parenting skills. There are classes that deal with Labor and Childbirth. We also teach basic life skills (money management, nutrition...etc). It's an honor to teach our clients God's view on sex, love, and relationships. Care Net of the Lehigh Valley also has an abstinence program, in which trained volunteers or staff visit local high schools.

Volunteer counselors aren't licensed, but exclusively trained by Care Net of the Lehigh Valley. We're peer counselors, and our clients can talk with us as friends – like girlfriend to girlfriend. We always give godly advice. We're there for them with whatever emotional support they need.

Most importantly, we're there to help them spiritually. Care Net of the Lehigh Valley is a Christian Center, where all the volunteers and staff are born again believers. We love the Lord. I get so excited when God gives me the privilege of telling someone, maybe for the first time, that He loves and values them. Sometimes it's a challenge for our clients to believe that, because life hits these girls hard. We don't pretend to have the

answers to all of life's problems or questions. My job is to simply carry them to Jesus. But the great thing is that we can give immediate help to mothers and small children (in the form of diapers, formula, baby clothes, maternity clothes, car seats, strollers...etc).

In training to become counselors, we learned this scripture from Ezekiel 2:6-7: *“Do not be dismayed by their dark scowls....You must give them my message whether they listen or not.”*

Oh, and some of them do come in with dark scowls! We see all kinds of battle scars, lots of chaos and drama. Just a simple word of encouragement or a hug is maybe all a client needs. Being here, I've discovered my God-given gift of evangelism! I've learned to be tuned in to God, listen to His voice, and be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Being committed to serving others brings me unspeakable joy, allowing me to keep the focus off myself!

I believe pouring out to others is a huge part of my recovery, and is a way of “getting over myself.” It's the best therapy. It is amazing how when we take our focus off of ourselves and place it on others, how much we can grow in Him and how much we can feel the love of the Lord in our lives. Honestly, there have been and still are days when my spirit has to fight my body to get up and start moving. My spirit has determined that I cannot let my physical limitations get in the way of serving and fulfilling what I feel I am called to do. With the help of great friends (fellow volunteers and staff), things seem to work out. I use a quad cane for assistance with walking, but they do a lot of the legwork for me. I am truly humbled and honored that God has let me be a small part of this incredible ministry!

Many months have passed since being an active counselor. Due to the progression of this disease, I am no longer physically able to counsel at Care Net. But I know God has a plan. There is a season for everything.

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Remember my new neighbors I ran into when we first moved? I ran into them again after my conversion. There was so much excitement as I told them I knew who Jesus was, and how I had asked Him into my heart. They said they were having some of their Christian friends over their house. They called this "Share group," and invited me to come. I told them I would think about it and maybe show up. Throughout the remainder of the day, I couldn't shake the feeling that it would be good for me to go. So I went, and if I remember correctly, there were about seven or eight people there. This was my first experience of Christian fellowship. Another perception I had, was that hanging around with Christians would be boring. I quickly learned that this perception was wrong. These people were really nice. We met for about two hours, sharing our individual journeys with God and how He was working in and through our lives... thus the name "Share group". I really enjoyed our time together and meeting others who loved God as much as I did. I seemed to really click with one particular woman there. I remember her telling me, "*Lori, God has a purpose for what you're going through. Just watch, in time He will bring people to you, people who are going through something similar.*" She told me that in 2002 (her words were a definite confirmation of things to come).

*"But that's the future. What about the things I'm going through now? Why don't you heal me?"* That was the cry of my heart. I wanted to be used by God in a powerful way, but I desperately wanted to be healed. I can tell you that I'm not desperate about this situation anymore - only desperate for Him. Even though God did not yet physically heal my body, He healed my spirit and my soul. Please don't get me wrong, I still long to be free of this disease. It's truly a daily struggle.

My friend's words that were spoken to me in 2002 have come true. God has given me the privilege of starting a great ministry. A door has been opened for me to share things I've learned about myself and about God through my illness. I started a support group that reaches out with a life raft, giving hope to those who are struggling with their own suffering. The group is very intimate. There are only a handful of us. The group encourages and strengthens women who are coping with a chronic illness/disease or a physical disability. Just like the Bible

says, I am able to comfort others because of the comfort God so freely gave me. The group is called NEVER ALONE. When I was first diagnosed with this muscle disease, my emotions and feelings were all over the map. I needed godly support, but there was nothing out there. Sure, there were a few support groups out there for those with Muscular Dystrophy, but there were none that were Christian ~ Please don't get me wrong, secular groups have some good things, but they're missing the most vital ingredient... God! So NEVER ALONE was birthed out of that need. Getting past myself by investing time in others, helps heal my pain. Our meetings are a place of refuge; we may not have the same physical things going on, but we all most certainly have the same feelings and emotions that only someone who has been there can understand. It's easy to have pity parties and feel sorry for ourselves, but we can overcome, because we are grounded in the Word of God!

The major reason I started Never Alone is to reach out to people who are feeling the way I used to feel. I can see God work through my illness to help others. I am able to use my suffering as a means of reaching out. The women in this support group (me included) are able to connect emotionally and spiritually to each other. We can never replace friendships with other Christians who understand our journey. When we have done all that we know and nothing works, God is telling us to, *"Be still and know that I am God."* (Psalm 46:10) And learning how to "be still" is hard, but it's the only way for some of us to "Let Go and Let God."

I can tell you from personal experience: when God takes you into the desert, things will not change until He says so. So it's counterproductive to strive against Him. I want to remind people that *"God will come to save you."* (Isaiah 35:4) But we need to realize that our expectations may not be in line with His intentions of how or what He plans to do, or how He will rescue us.

I am so overwhelmingly amazed that I can stir up hope and give comfort to people just by sharing my life experiences; this is proof that through everything (good and bad) that has happened to me – God has prepared me. The power of Christ shines in me. Wow!!

I was talking with a friend of mine who has MS. From time to time we share similar feelings of embarrassment and feeling ashamed of our bodies. We both used to be active and physically fit, (really, I used to do high impact aerobics) and getting this disease was a major blow! She reminded me of how shameful and embarrassed Jesus felt hanging on that cross. He was naked, for all of Jerusalem to glare at and mock. They shouted all kinds of obscenities, hurled insults, ridiculed Him, blindfolded Him, spit on Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and threw dice for His clothes (*That* is embarrassment and humiliation). After being reminded of what Jesus endured, I can assure you that any little pity party I was having for myself was over. Can you see how God works? He sends people to speak truth to my soul, always at the exact moment I need clarity.

One more thing about Share Group... A friend that I met through Share Group sent me an email in 2002. I saved it. When I think about this, I believe I saved this email because God had intended for me to put it in this book. Doesn't it just amaze you how God knows EVERYTHING? It says...

DEAR LORI THANKS FOR YOUR KIND NOTE. YOU ARE A BLESSING TOME!!! I KNOW BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT THAT GOD IS GOING TO HEAL YOU COMPLETELY! I THOUGHT THAT GOD WAS GOING TO DO AN INSTANTANEOUS MIRACLE WHEN WE LAID HANDS ON YOU, BUT I KNOW NOW THAT HE IS GOING TO WORK IT THROUGH YOU ONE STEP AT A TIME. HE WANTS TO WORK SOME THINGS OUT OF YOU, BUILD YOUR FAITH, FILL YOU UP, AND USE YOU TO WITNESS FOR HIM ONE STEP AT A TIME!!! JUST BE PATIENT, REST IN HIM, LISTEN TO HIS STILL SMALL VOICE, AND WALK WITH HIM ONE STEP AT A TIME.

Wasn't that really cool? I believe this was a prophetic word spoken in 2002. This encourages me so much. It inspires me to keep running the race of faith. All I can do is cling to Jesus, and I know it's all He wants me to do.

And I think this is the best, and most exciting part...God has turned me into a writer! All I need to do is put pen to paper, and things seem to naturally come. It's so awesome to realize that

God truly has prepared me for what I need to communicate to others through all of the good, the bad, and the ugly experiences throughout my life; especially with learning how to cope with this disease, (although that's an entirely different subject, for another book). And it's so amazing how God handpicked my husband for me... it just so happens that Michael knows a thing or two about computers and technological things. He set me up on the wonderful "blogosphere," where I'm able to reach people all over the world with God's love. He also helped me get this book into your hands! When I sit and write, things seem to pour out of my heart, and hopefully will connect with someone who needs to hear the exact words I write. And then of course there are times when I'm simply amazed at what comes out of my pen, or how I knew what keys to press on my computer's keyboard! Writing is my ministry. God is taking my mess, and making it a message! I'm so humbled, yet so honored. That's why I write! That's why I blog! And whatever happens next, I will give God all the glory! I will always give God all the glory! Hallelujah!

This is a cool story, and I want to share it...

Something I really wanted was a new laptop because I've been working on a dinosaur computer since I've started my writing "career." My husband planned to get one for me on Black Friday. He went last year, and brought home some pretty amazing things at some pretty amazing prices. For example...I had to have a new Christmas tree, and there was one advertised at JC Penny for \$108 (the retail price was \$479). Michael tells such a funny story of his Black Friday escapades. He planned to fight the crowds and do it all over again this year. His strategy was to get a few hours sleep after Thanksgiving dinner and then he would wake up around 12:30 AM... plenty of time to get in line at the store before they opened at six.

So the alarm was set for 12:30 AM. Michael said that while he was lying in bed, something told him to "GET UP NOW." So he got up, and was in line at Office Depot by 10:30 PM. He was geared up for the 15 degrees temperature outside with a poncho, blankets, and a beach chair. Picture that. If that's not

love then I just don't know what is. See how blessed I am to have a guy like this?

It gets better. Michael told me as he was getting out of the car to go stand in line, there was a lady walking in front of him. She managed to be number six in line—the newspaper said there were only five laptops available (the one we were interested in). So did this mean we lost by one? Well, my husband is a take charge kind of guy, and puts it this way...“While we were standing in line, I had two distinct roles: (1) I would use my charm and wit to convince people to buy the more expensive laptop...diverting their attention from the laptop I wanted. (2) I was the enforcer...I made sure nobody dared to cut in line, especially in front of me. There were college students in line that would actually wake me up if anyone threatened the order of the line.”

To make this long story shorter, two of the people changed their minds and decided to buy the more expensive laptop; my husband convinced them on the superiority. Michael came home with the laptop we wanted, and went to sleep. The greatest part is that my new laptop is one of the best gifts I've ever gotten. It's been the means...the channel...the way... I have been able to continue teaching God's Word in cyberspace. I'm learning how to tell my story. I'm learning how to promote and market this book. I'm blogging. I need this computer! It's amazing how God is getting His love out on cyberspace! I think of how Jesus said we are going to do greater things...

*“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.” John 14: 12*

“Something” told my husband to get out of bed... Hmmm.



# Chapter 4

## Purpose in the Storm

Having a Neuromuscular Disease is no fun. It really stinks to be struck down in the prime of your life. It feels like I've been robbed. I was 31 years old when this MD hit me with full force, and now I'm 40. I've had this hereditary disease all my life, but it was living dormant in my body throughout my youth. As you had previously read, I was devastated, and thought I had nothing left to live for. Then I met Jesus. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says...

*“Come to me...all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens...I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and the burden I give you is light.”*

I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders, and life seemed impossible and hopeless. But He told me He would give me rest, and He is a keeper of His word. Jesus taught, and is still teaching me how to be humble and gentle at heart. Indeed, I found rest for my weary soul.

It's still no fun having MD, but I no longer feel like it's the end of the world. I've learned that your reaction to any suffering or adversity directly affects you spiritually. Let me explain that...any kind of adversity or suffering can make you either run away from your Creator, or make you cling tighter to Him, holding on for dear life. When you realize you are not the one in charge; when you realize your efforts and strengths aren't paramount; when you realize you can't make it on your own – God becomes everything.

The bottom line is... Do you believe what God says in the Bible or not? Ever since I've been saved, it's become a practice of mine to print out scripture on my computer and tape it to things I see every day. When I read something in the Bible that encourages me, I write it down on a separate piece of paper.

Then, I'll go to my computer, open a Word file, and type out that particular scripture. I then experiment with different fonts and colors - to try and make it look "pretty." Then I print it, and cut it out. I laminate it (scotch tape does the trick), and then tape it to something I see every day or somewhere I visit every day. What works for me, is putting scripture on my kitchen cabinets, on mirrors, on shelves, in the bathroom...wherever I can see it every day. It's definitely all about the renewing of my mind; letting God transform me by the way I think.

*"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Romans 10:17

I had told you earlier I believe with all my heart this disease was allowed. I was preoccupied with living a life so far away from God. He had to let me fall flat on my back so He could have my undivided attention...it was the only way I could pass from the world of darkness into glorious light. Even though I am ambulatory, I am pretty much confined to being home on Disability. I no longer have to be a part of the rat race we call the workforce. God has given me the gift of time, and has allowed me to draw close to Him, learn from Him, love Him, and be loved by Him. I am in a place free from distractions, so He can teach me His deepest truths.

He will always deliver us, almost never in the way we expect. Sometimes He delivers us from the storm, and sometimes He delivers us through the storm. In the storm is where we grow. I am truly a different person now that MD is a part of my life. I am 100% more compassionate towards physically disabled people. Before, I wouldn't think twice about handicapped people, yet alone the struggles they encounter daily. I pitied them, but that's as far as it went. Not much compassion or empathy, I just figured that it would never happen to me. I was living my life taking simple things for granted, like so many do. I know now that God isn't a respecter of persons. It's so different when the shoe is on the other foot. Over the years, I'm learning that God will reveal things to us that otherwise would have never come our way if not for being in the pit of adversity. Adversity builds strength and character. I now know that many others can also receive great insights and



blessings through what we (those of us who suffer), have gone through. I also know by saying this, I may challenge or upset someone's theology, but I know this to be true because I have lived it. I'd rather be physically challenged and know my Creator, than be as healthy as a horse and not know my God.

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As far as feeling I have been robbed, God tells me in Joel 2:25, *"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."* He also tells me in Zechariah 9:12, *"I will repay two blessings for each of your troubles."* God doesn't lie. These are promises I stand on, they cause hope to well up on the inside of my soul. God can do what man can't. I know who I am, and Who's I am. 1 Peter 4:19 is on my bathroom shelf, and it says, *"If you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right; and trust yourself to the One who made you, for He will never fail you."* According to His word, He will step in... I expect Him to step in! It's all about faith. Although my flesh screams for relief and still struggles with my spirit, God's unconditional love and grace win out every time. God has brought me to a higher level. It's a level where I can tell Him, "God, I really hate this disease, but I love you so much more. So use this to accomplish Your purpose and give me more meaning and direction to my life." I realize that it is only He who knows the whole story.

From time to time I read the email my friend from Share group sent me: "He wants to work some things out of you, build your faith, fill you up, and use you to witness for Him one step at a time!" How encouraging! I meditate on and keep thinking about how my friend's words are so true. I can think of some things worked out of me, but I can also think of things still waiting to be worked out. He took this broken vessel, repaired me, built up my faith, and filled me up! He is using me to witness for Him, especially with this disease. God tells me that my weakness shows how strong He is...

In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul tells us that he was given a thorn in his flesh. We don't exactly know what that thorn was because he never says, but it sounds as if it was a chronic and very painful malady. Paul says in verses 8 and 9, *"Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He*

said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." In other words, I won't take it away, but I'll help you manage it. I'll empower you with enough strength, in a way that will make others able to see My Power in your life. God gave me a powerful illustration of this...

One day I went to the grocery store, (physically, it was a struggle getting from my car to the store). I got to the entrance, and much to my dismay, there was a soda display at the spot where the grocery carts usually are. I had to walk to the other side of the front of the store to get a cart. Because walking is challenging for me, the walk to the other side seemed like a mile, when it was only yards away. There was an employee outside smoking a cigarette, and saw I was having a hard time walking. She saw me making a tiresome effort to walk to the other side, and I heard her laughing! I was appalled! At that exact same time, another employee came out. Because she saw what a hard time I was having, she asked me if she could get a cart for me. I told her that would be great, and then I thanked her. The employee who was laughing just watched. I couldn't believe that happened. I kept questioning God why He let that happen. A day or two later, 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 came to my mind:

*"God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And He chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world; things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important."*

Only God knows what happened in that employee's heart.

I subscribe to a quarterly magazine published by the Muscular Dystrophy Association. It has various articles ranging from current research to the newest assisting devices. The reason I mention this, is because I wrote a small article that was published in 2002. I sent it directly to Jerry Lewis...The article was about how God strengthens me, how He rescues me every day, and how He gives me grace to make it through MD. That was the first time it really sunk in my thick head that God really

is working all the bad stuff I'm going through for good. There is no way to know how many people read what I wrote in that magazine, which is published nationwide. Maybe someone was searching for answers, and because of what I wrote in that article found what they were looking for. Who knows? Only God knows.

I was praying with a friend, and she told me that one day I would wake up and be physically whole. This word is hidden in my heart. Also, a friend of my husband's called one morning to tell him that his wife (me) would get better after she learns to get over herself. Get over myself? I actually have a good idea of what that means. One major thing God is helping me to get over is pride. Sometimes pride still gets the best of me, but not nearly like it used to! Early in this disease, I didn't want any kind of help. I was determined to do things on my own, refusing to acknowledge my need for any kind of assistance at all. I was used to being very self-sufficient, but now there are limitations with which to deal. I used to get so embarrassed and humiliated by the glares and stares from people, all because I was using a cane or wheelchair. This was a major blow to my ego (my husband once told me ego stands for Edge God Ot). I was so concerned about the way other people saw me. My distorted perception of myself made me believe that I was some kind of freakish-looking person, and was someone to pity. I felt totally unworthy. My identity and value was based entirely on my physical abilities. God had major work to do in me.

I remember a friend, a godly friend, told me that I was robbing someone of a blessing by refusing to accept their help. That was profound! After all, Jesus told us, "*Whoever gives a cup of cold water to the least of my brothers, gives it to me.*" He goes on to tell us that how you treat others directly affects Him. That settled it. I don't want to rob anyone. I need help because of the progression of this disease. I'm no longer afraid or embarrassed. Here's another experience I've had to teach me about my prideful self:

My husband and I were in the Atlanta airport. I was in a wheelchair, because an airport is too much walking for me. I had interpreted that by the look on his face, the airport

employee pushing me thought I was a burden; seeming as though he had better things to do. Consequently, I was embarrassed about my physical situation, and resented the fact that I was in a wheelchair. What I remember is being pushed into the elevator with this huge chip on my shoulder about being in a wheelchair. I heard God speak to my spirit. He said, *“You should be glad you have a wheelchair, otherwise you wouldn’t get around.”* The attendant may have still resented having to push me around, but God spoke truth, and turned my whole attitude around. I remember being pushed out of the elevator a person with a brand new demeanor. I was truly grateful for that wheelchair. Unfortunately, the world is full of insensitive people (I used to be one of them), and the attitude they have towards disabled people will be here until Jesus comes again to reign. I recently heard the testimony of an abortion survivor who, as a result of lack of oxygen to her brain had Cerebral Palsy. What she said was so profound, it will always play over and over in my mind... She said, “You need the weak among you. You will learn things that can only be taught by the weakest of society.” My response to that is amen, and amen!

And sometimes, things that come out of the mouths of well-meaning Christians hurt. Here’s a good example:

I recently went through a major physical ordeal that really tested me. I have chronic daily headaches that are usually kept under control by medication. Sometimes I get headaches that no matter how much medicine I take...just seem to linger. I had a severe migraine that lasted two days, requiring me to visit the ER at the hospital. They gave me an injection that took the edge off my headache. In church the following Sunday, I was telling a friend all about this particular tragedy. I confided in her how difficult it was to have this happen to me on top of what I already have. Without hesitation she said, “God doesn’t *want* you to be sick. His plan is for you to be healthy and whole.” My thought was, “Yes, that was true when He created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But now we live in a fallen world where things are far less than perfect. And, how do you know what God wants for me? No one really knows.” She went on about prayer...all I heard was...“You must not be praying right. There

must be something wrong in your spiritual life. Maybe there's not enough faith or something." (GIMME A BREAK!)

I'm not looking for sympathy. I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me; having pity parties for myself used to be a specialty of mine. I really want friends to encourage me in God's words, pray with, and stand in faith with me.

It took me many years to realize that I need to be the woman, the beautiful woman God created me to be. It isn't a mistake that my legs don't work to their full capacity. God is using this time to teach me and build my character. I know who I am. Why do I need to be completely stressed out about having this disease? Can I heal myself? Is this my fault? No, it's just where God has allowed me to be for this season. I had a choice to make...either fight Him or join Him. I've stopped fighting Him and now I just try to go with His flow. The Bible tells us that when we give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, He will transform us and renew our minds, and our will is going to line up with His...that's in Romans 12. I realize now that God has been pursuing me since the day I was born.

But it isn't always easy! Many times I wanted to quit, (quit going to church, quit Bible studies, quit volunteering, and quit everything that required me to walk). Walking is too hard when you always feel tired and drained of energy due to muscle atrophy and weakness. My flesh sometimes overtakes my spirit, where I can get really down and depressed. I think, "What's the point? I really don't want to live like this anymore. I'm too tired." I've already begged God to take my life. Do you know what God showed me? He showed me 1 Kings 19; this is when the prophet Elijah felt pretty much like me. He told God that he had enough; it was too much, and begged Him to take his life. God saw Elijah and sent an angel to minister to him, and to lead him out of his depression. The angel gave him food for strength, and then let him rest. God then sent Elijah on his next mission: to speak God's words. Elijah had many battles ahead of him, but he still had work to do. I whole heartily believe that I have more work to do. And yes, there will be more battles ahead.

I've read the story of Moses many times, but something recently jumped out at me... Moses was really frustrated with

leading the Israelites in the wilderness. They were a royal pain, constantly whining and complaining. Moses got fed up with it and told God, *“If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!”* You can read this in Numbers 11. This tells me that I’m in good company! I’m sure that many of you can understand that frustration also. Because I’ve been there and at times still frequent this place, all I can say is: “keep plugging along” – it will get better. We have God’s promise that He has plans for our lives: they are plans to give us a future and a hope! And you can take THAT to the bank. (Jeremiah 29:11)

God always comforts me somehow, and knows how to get me out of my depression. He is so faithful! He always brings me back! His faithfulness never fails me – I will read something or hear something that touches my situation. While writing this, I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, which says...

*“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.”* Praise God!

I also receive a daily devotional via email from a man named Os Hillman. It’s called TGIF Today God Is First. God uses Os mightily to speak truth and to encourage me. Os also has a book titled The Upside of Adversity. I believe this book gave me a revelation about the whole quitting thing. He says,

“Perseverance is the key to every great accomplishment because nothing of lasting value has ever been achieved without adversity.” In the book’s introduction, Os says, “So I want to encourage you to trust God and persevere. Your suffering is not meaningless; it’s a process of preparation. There is joy at the end of your trials.”

Romans 5:2-4 says, *“...but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”*

"Perseverance is a refusal to quit. It's falling down 100 times and getting back up 100 times. We need to remember that perseverance is not a matter of forcing doors to open; it's standing in front of the doors as long as it takes before God chooses to open them." Love that!

Is there something you're tired of dealing with day after day? Even though it may be driving you crazy, don't give up. Persistence is rewarded. But we need to remember, God's timetable is different than ours.

God never promised a smooth ride, but He did promise a safe and happy landing! James 1:12 tells us: *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."* Wow! Perseverance! Keep in mind that anyone can obey and praise God when times are good. Our faith is tested when things take a turn for the worse. Will your faith persevere in bad times? Hebrews 11:6 says, *"It's impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that God exists and He rewards those who diligently seek Him."*

While we're on the subject of perseverance, I have a story...

There was one morning I was feeling very sad... just another pity party. In my spirit I heard a very soft, warm, and authoritative voice say, "Lori, it's OK you feel sad. I also struggled with the Father's will."... I had just heard Jesus!!! Jesus truly understands. He was a Man of Sorrows, but He submitted to The Father by saying, "Not mine, but Your will be done."

One more thing about submitting to God: Something a friend told me about marriage really relates to this; she told me she always had a very strong desire to get married. It got to the point of obsessing about it. So when she was twenty six, she questioned God as to why she was still single. She told me that she saw a vision of a lamb being sacrificed on an altar, and written across the lamb's body was the word "marriage."

How cool was that? God was letting her know that she had to place her desire on the altar – give the entire marriage thing to Him. He was telling her to just let go and submit, and He will take care of the rest. What came to my mind when I remembered her story, was a lamb on the altar with the word “health” written across its body –now that really spoke to me and my situation.

It was a happy ending for my friend; God mightily blessed her with a great husband and four children.

It still stinks having a neuromuscular disease. Canes, walkers, and wheelchairs are accessories I can definitely do without! But you know, if not this particular malady, there would be something else to help teach me and build my character. But the precious blessing that has come out of this storm, and is still coming, undeniably makes it all worth it!!



# Chapter 5

## I'd like Some Answers

Everyone wants to have answers. Can you imagine what it's like not knowing exactly what you are suffering from? Not knowing specifically what was going on with me physically, caused me many sleepless nights wondering what was happening to my body. The best way to describe this kind of angst is like being a child and your mother tells you to "Wait until your father comes home." The spanking usually took less than thirty seconds, but the waiting and anticipation drove you crazy. Now imagine living with that worry for many years. I really can understand why Job's wife, when after seeing Job suffer day in and day out with no answers as to why, told him to curse God and die.

But I couldn't do that. I have a loving husband who saw everything I was going through, but still encouraged me to keep on searching for answers. We believed that one of those answers would be found at a laboratory in Atlanta, Georgia. There is lab down there that specializes in taking muscle biopsies for rare metabolic disorders. Honestly, this was the last thing I wanted to do, because I knew just by discussing it with my doctor, it would be extremely painful! But I reasoned that it would be worth the sacrifice if I could get a definite diagnosis. So my husband and I made the trip. It's was classified as an outpatient surgery for insurance purposes...so I didn't stay overnight, but they should have kept me, because I was in a huge amount of pain whenever I attempted moving ANY part of my leg ( because they cut a good-sized chunk, about two or three inches, off my thigh muscle). What an experience! I started to lose consciousness when the nurse took the IV out... maybe this was because of the trauma I was going through...who knows? I seriously thought that this was the day I was going to meet Jesus!

We made it safely aboard the airplane, and got home. I endured the pain, and many months of waiting for the results.

They came back inconclusive, but at least showed enough muscle abnormality to rule out some of the more dangerous and fatal diseases. I guess that was good?

The overall lesson I learned is how faithful God is towards his children. There are times when we are so tired and worn out, that we just want to give up and throw in the towel. And believe me, that's exactly what I was planning. But that's when God sends us someone to encourage and lift us up. My husband was the vessel He used on this particular occasion. God promises us that nothing or nobody will snatch us from His hand-- all we need to do is keep holding on.

I can't even pretend to know how Job felt when he lost all of his children. I don't have any kids. Oh, but I do know how sorrowful Job felt when he lost his possessions and his health! The story of Job is disturbing for some and reassuring to others. By saying this I mean our natural flesh nature sometimes makes us want to scream obscenities at life's adversities, but Job maintained integrity and never cursed the Lord. He worshiped God in the midst of his trials. I can say that I've have definitely learned... it's no use fighting or striving against the circumstances in your life. An example in my life of how I was striving against God, was trying to do everything I could not to use any kind of assistive device; whether it was a cane, a walker, or a wheelchair. Why was I striving against this? You guessed it – Pride. I didn't want help from anyone. Striving doesn't work. It only results in discontentment and bitterness. God is one hundred percent aware of your situation, but you must realize that He has allowed whatever it is for a reason only He knows. We need to understand that things could be much worse. Lamentations 3:23 says,

*“By His mercies, we are kept from complete destruction.”*

Read that again... He is keeping us from being totally ruined! I find it's somewhat comforting to know that everything is first filtered through our Heavenly Father before it even reaches us.

When I first met Jesus, I thought He would take away all of the physically painful and unpleasant things going on with my body. I really and truthfully did think that my health would change for the better. In fact, many new Christians think they'll

find a “get out of jail free” card tucked inside the cover of their new Bible. And it’s not only new Christians who think this way. It’s hard to hear fellow believers giving me all different kinds of possible reasons as to why I’m suffering. HOW DARE someone suggest that suffering comes as a result of sin? Sounds like Job’s buddies. I’m tired of that, so how about just standing in faith with me...what I mean by this is to encourage me with God’s word. Just know that God ultimately has a purpose for what I’m going through. Tell me you’re going to keep believing in God’s faithfulness. I understand people are just trying to comfort me the best they know how. The fact is that bad things happen to everyone – even Christians.

Proverbs 13:12 tells us, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick...This is something I can easily identify with, so let me tell you why:*

Sometime in December 2003, I had the opportunity to get Botox injections in my legs (Botox is not only for smoothing out wrinkles on your face). Botox paralyzes overactive muscles so there can be some relief of the tightness and rigidity. Botox is temporary, only lasting 3-6 months. I absolutely thought Botox would be the way God would choose to heal me. I remember driving home from after meeting with the doctor...he said that he was hopeful this would help. Of course I got my hopes up and cried for joy, thinking this was the answer. To make a long story short, I got the injections...and nothing happened! I was crushed! It seemed like all my hopes and dreams for a healing were trampled on. My hope was deferred.

I’m always engineering something. I had the bright idea to try stabilizing my knees. For some strange reason I thought it would help me with my balance... sounds logical, right? I tried knee straps; I tried virtually almost every knee brace under the sun, and even tried taping my knees, all without any success. I tried physical therapy numerous times, I tried having Neuromuscular Deep Tissue Massage, I wore AFOs, (Ankle Foot Orthotics; these are braces that go inside your shoes to prevent tripping, and also help with lifting up the foot when walking). These didn’t work either. My hope is deferred again.

It's so discouraging to have your hope deferred. It's a constant reminder that only heaven can satisfy – not this present world. My relationship with God somehow gets me through. There's no way I'll ever give up – remember perseverance? Hebrews 12:1 tells us,

*“...let us run with endurance, (perseverance) the race God has set before us. Verse 2 tells us how to do this: “We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.”*

There's something about being taken to the end of yourself that makes trusting and holding on to God second nature. Next to my bad balance, spasticity is what really bothers me, (Spasticity is just like it sounds; its rigidity and tightness in the muscles, with the added perk of involuntary muscle spasms). Spasticity makes walking almost impossible. No matter how hard I try, I can't bend my knees or ankles because of the severe muscle tightness and rigidity. My feet have become so stiff, that my toes curl under. It's not so easy to walk when your toes curl! It's beyond frustrating.

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I was searching online to see if there was another way besides oral muscle relaxants to treat my spasticity. The oral medication I was taking wasn't a high enough dosage to be effective. Let me try to explain...by taking the medication orally, it goes through my entire bloodstream. It relaxes all of my muscles, making me very sleepy. I only need the muscles from my waist down to relax, not my entire body. So in order for me to get my leg muscles to sufficiently relax I would have to take a much higher oral dose, which would be taking like a sleeping pill. Make sense? So getting back to my search... I found something really interesting that treats severe spasticity. I found a Baclofen Pump (Baclofen is a muscle relaxant medicine--also called Intrathecal Lioresal). It's a pump that is surgically implanted below the abdomen. There is a thin, flexible catheter that delivers a constant stream of Baclofen (in a liquid form) to the area surrounding my spinal cord that controls my legs. That seemed to solve the oral medication problem. This way, the

Baclofen wouldn't be going through my bloodstream. It would only be going to where I needed it to go—to my legs.

In 2005, I had the Baclofen Pump surgically implanted to help treat my severe spasticity. I was sure that once I had this pump delivering medicine to my legs, I would return to my active physical life that I had been mourning the loss of.

Let me take you back to a few days before the surgery; I was joyfully anticipating the arrival of the pump because I was given the Baclofen via a Lumbar Puncture, (this is a test to determine if the medicine would work before being considered to have the pump surgically implanted), and it really loosened my legs. But I was also battling a spirit of fear; fear of the pump not working despite the test results, and all kinds of fear about things going wrong. While telling God all my worries and insecurities, I was led to go to my Bible Concordance and search for the word “suffering.” The Concordance listed many scripture verses with the word “suffering” in them, but a scripture in Jeremiah caught my eye (maybe because Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet, and only God knows how much I've wept).

It was the exact thing I needed to hear, at the exact moment I needed to hear it. It gave me peace. To paraphrase Jeremiah 15:16-20, Jeremiah questioned God as to why his suffering seems never ending, (I feel like my suffering is never ending). Jeremiah told God that His help seems distant and uncertain, (Remember hope deferred?). God tells Jeremiah that He will restore him so that he can continue to serve Him. Jeremiah is to influence others for God. God assured Jeremiah He would protect and rescue him! Again...God gave me hope and clarity!

After the surgery came many complications; ranging from a Spinal Headache to Bladder problems, (A Spinal Headache happened when some of my spinal fluid leaked out the hole the needle left in my spine where they inserted the catheter. Every time I lifted my head, it felt as though someone was lifting me off the ground by my neck. It was excruciating! For relief, I had to lie flat on the bed without a pillow. This problem was only solved after going through another very painful hospital procedure). I

was at an all time low. It felt as though all my impending fears were coming true. I just knew having this surgery was a huge mistake! I was telling people that I should have never gotten it done. I was licking my wounds and feeling sorry for myself. The words that came up in my Spirit during this time pierced my soul: “You are just like the Israelites in the wilderness; murmuring and complaining about how they want to go back to Egypt.”

YES, I WAS ACTING JUST LIKE them. A pump to help my quality of life was given to me, and here I am murmuring and complaining because things aren’t perfect. I wanted the pump out. I said having the surgery was a mistake. I literally “wanted to go back to Egypt.” SHAME ON ME! I was also online searching to see what other people were saying about their Baclofen Pumps; misery loves company, so a lot of people were saying many negative things, but there were a few positive comments.

I searched my Bible to find where the story was, and I found it in Numbers 14. I read down to where ten out of the twelve scouts sent out to explore the Promised Land came back with negative reports, causing great rebellion among the people. But Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to act on God’s promises, and to rely on His power, for they knew that He will surely give them the victory! I immediately thought of the people who were online complaining, and how they were like the negative scouts. At that moment, I knew I had to be like Joshua and Caleb. There is no way I can ever stop trusting and relying on God. He has brought me this far, and He will never let me down! He is a God of completion! Again, I can’t depend on feelings. I can only depend on God’s Word.

It has been almost four years since I’ve gotten the pump. After my body had adapted to the Baclofen, things have been fine. I’m still not out there climbing mountains, but I’m glad I got it. I thank God for the pump – See, He knows what He’s doing – One step at a time. Zechariah 4:10 always comes to mind: “*Don’t despise these small beginnings...for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.*” I thank God I can walk. Even though it’s not the way I’d like – at least I’m on my feet.

I'd like to share some things Jennifer Rothschild, who has been blind since she was a teenager, said in her interview with Today's Christian Woman:

*"Who I am and what I struggle with are not the same thing. The situation may be frustrating, and yeah, the situation on the surface may not be worth it, but I'm worth it and my relationship with God is worth it. So I'm not going to quit, I'm going to persevere."*

When asked how she makes that choice in the midst of difficult circumstances... she adds,

*"What helps me most is speaking truth to my soul. I've learned I'm either going to be governed by feelings or fact. So I choose to be governed by what God says about who I am. But that takes mental discipline. Some of our difficult circumstances might not ever change - and that's messy and hard. But when we hold on to bitterness, it's never going to be well with our soul. Hope comes from deliverance and healing. But hope also comes from the knowledge that even if we don't receive those things, God is still sufficient."*

Amen! God is still sufficient! I tried everything I could think of to better my quality of life with this disease, and now all I can do is wait on God. Throughout the Bible, God tells us to wait patiently for Him. I have a scripture on my vanity mirror that I read every day and meditate on, and it says, *"Trust me in your times of trouble and I will rescue you."* (Psalm 50:15). I choose to believe the voice of truth. I know that God can take away all of the ugly things that happen to us, and in His time, make everything beautiful.

I think one way God gets through to us is by giving us dreams. Let me share a dream I had a while ago, because I think it really drives home the point of needing to trust God:

Someone was holding my hand and guiding me as we swam into the depths of the sea. We kept swimming until we were in shark infested waters. As we swam, I could feel the

shark's skin brushing up against mine, making me cringe with fear. But I instinctively knew I would be safe as long as I kept holding this person's hand. I was swimming face to face with man-eating sharks. They didn't hurt me...and then I woke up.

I knew that was a reassurance, telling me to keep holding on. I'm OK as long as I hold on to God's hand. To me, trusting God means thinking about everything He has given me, and letting go so He can take care of the rest.

What healthy people consider molehills are mountains to people who are physically challenged! There are many things some people don't have to put much thought into, but for some of us it takes some planning. I have things "set up" in my home to accommodate me and my limitations. For example: because my balance is bad, I need to place objects (chairs, tables, bookcases...etc) close together so that I can grab onto them to help me navigate and walk around. I sit on a shower bench and use a long shower hose. It just makes bathing easier. I also have glass shower doors with a towel rack on each door. This may sound funny, but these doors make me feel safe; when standing, I can lightly grab onto the towel bar to help me with balance. So having only a shower curtain concerns me; there is more of a potential to lose my balance, fall, and rip the shower curtain off of the rod. So whenever my husband and I stay at hotels, we try to get handicapped access rooms, because the bathrooms have grab bars. I have grab bars available for traveling, (These grab bars have a strong suction, but are removable. They will adhere to any tub or shower surface.)

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My husband and I went to the shore, taking a mini vacation for a few days. I have an aunt who lives not far from the beach so we stayed at her house. It's a great place and I'm more than thankful for the accommodations, but it's not at all set up to help someone with any type of physical limitations. To me, it was too spacious. Furniture and things were not arranged close together. It wasn't my house, so I couldn't grab onto the walls or use anything to help my balance and walking. That really bothered me, and kind of ruined the entire trip. My limitations were magnified, and simple things were more of a challenge for



me than they usually are. I had to physically work harder and expend more precious energy. I have only a limited amount of energy in reserve. Instead of being able to enjoy my surroundings, I viewed them as a barrier.

We left the house to go sightseeing at one of the local beaches. My photographer husband was taking pictures outside, so I went into one of the small souvenir shops nearby. Let me remind you that I was not happy at all with my present surroundings. I was fixated on my limitations, having a pity party, and I just wanted to go home. Something suddenly got my attention: It was a refrigerator magnet that read, "Delight yourself in the beauty that surrounds you." That was enough to jar me back into reality. I laughed – mostly at myself. I was so focused on my pain, and my stuff, that I couldn't see I was in the midst of some of God's prettiest creations. My eyes were opened to see the beautiful ocean and sand, the seagulls, and everything else the seashore has to offer. You can bet I bought that refrigerator magnet, and now every day I see it hanging on my fridge. I constantly remember how God is always so faithful to deliver me out of my pity parties, and how He repeatedly saves me from myself!

I can't stress enough how important and life saving it is to put God's Word in your eye's view every day, because it will transform your mind and build your faith – it always increases mine! Meditating on and remembering God's goodness will take your mind off your present situation and inability to help yourself. I love the words of Psalm 42:5...*"Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again – My Savior and my God!"* Remember that nothing ahead of you is bigger or stronger than the power of God behind you. The entire theme of Psalm 112 is how God guards the minds and even the actions of those who follow His commands. The author of the psalm teaches us that fear of God can lead to a fearless life. Verse 7 says, *"They do not fear bad news, they confidently trust the Lord to care for them."* Wow! It doesn't get any better than that!

Just in case I didn't get the first message, I saw another refrigerator magnet. This time we were in a different store. It read, "So it's not home sweet home...Adjust!"

I just laughed some more.

# Chapter 6

## Hope is Alive!

I would like to make an appeal to anyone who's hurting...it may be your health, a bad relationship, financial heartache, loss of a loved one, emotional turmoil, or whatever tragedy is knocking at your door. This is directly from my heart to yours:

No matter how hopeless your situation may appear...it may look like there is no way you're going to make it...you're situation may be screaming at you to give up...there's no logical sense to be made. Your future may look bleak and barren because your present is so bitter. I understand what it's like to feel like you've had the wind knocked out of you. I understand what it's like to be depressed. I understand what it feels like when life seems awful and hopeless. Then Look up! Change begins with making a choice; if you trust God to reshape you, and get rid of the things holding you back, you'll discover that He will use the very thing getting under your skin to move you from the ordinary to the extraordinary!

I'm living proof that you will see His power move in your life like never before! You cannot walk in victory on your own. A friend of mine put it this way; He will take your mess and make it a message. With God's help, I know you can turn your misery into a ministry.

Through years struggling with this disease, I've learned that if you put your hope in this world; there is none. From my story I truly hope that you "get it," and start taking your eyes off your circumstances and put them on God. It's probably the hardest thing you'll ever do, but the intimacy you'll have with the God of the Universe is so worth it. It's so easy to get discouraged and overwhelmed when all you see are problems. So why put your focus on God? Because when you do, you're able to get new perspective. Tell your problem how big God is, not vice versa. Any situation can be turned around for good. I can confidently tell you that turning your face towards God is all the effort He

will ever need from you to starting moving in your life. Romans 8:28 comes to mind:

*“We know that ALL things work together for the GOOD of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.”*

No question about it, we have a relentless enemy of our souls...

God originally created a beautiful and magnificent angel named Lucifer. He was extremely prideful, and wanted to be equal with The Almighty. As a result of Lucifer trying to exalt himself above God, he was cast down from heaven. He is the fallen angel who now *“prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8)

He has an overwhelming hatred of God and of all mortals because we are made in His image. Satan can't hurt God Himself, so he hurts and tortures us – that's how he can indirectly grieve Our Father.

The Bible tells us *“...the world around us is under the control of the evil one.”* Satan is the one behind everything having to do with any type of evil in this world we live in. *“Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe.”* (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Satan's greatest strategy is to make people believe he doesn't exist. Some fall for his deception, making the thought of the devil a joke. He is NO JOKE... Satan is here to kill, steal, lie, and destroy! A lot of people focus too much on the devil. He is nothing in comparison with Jesus. God has the ultimate authority. The Bible says Satan attacks us with “fiery” darts or arrows. These darts come in the form of despair, hopelessness, deception, anguish, bitterness... etc. He will try to trick you into thinking that he can destroy your life, but he can't!

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I specifically want to reach out to those of you who are in agony, discouraged, or deeply grief stricken...hopelessness may be gripping your heart. You may feel that suicide is the only way to get relief. Please know that Satan is the father of lies! He

wants to kill and destroy you! He's the one whispering those "not-so-sweet nothings" in your ear.

On the other hand, you may not be contemplating suicide, but you're not considering God either. The great deceiver will fight tooth and nail to make you think that surrendering to Christ's lordship is bad for you. He will dip into his bag of tricks and try to convince you that God is "pie in the sky," and nothing about Him is true. The opposite is true! Hope is found in seeking God! Don't buy into Satan's deception! Satan loves to see you angrily shake your fist in God's face!

Our enemy is way too strong for us. It will be devastating defeat for us if we try to fight with Satan in our own strength. Satan will do whatever he can to get us to turn from God. He can defeat us if we let him capture our thoughts and feelings; he does this in the smallest, most subtle ways. Jesus Christ is the only way we can defeat Satan and stand in victory. God has more power in His little finger than any power Satan could ever have. 1 John 4:4 says:

*"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."*

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Because you're still here, God isn't finished with your life. God clearly tells us in the Bible that eternal life is certain. We make the choice to live in God's presence or in the absence of God's presence. Our relationship with God is the only thing that counts for eternity; everything else will be taken away. Good things here on earth may last a lifetime, but God will give you good things that last forever. Don't give up! Keep holding on. I know you can make it.

Any type of adversity can bring the strongest qualities and characteristics out in us, if we allow it. I have come to a place where the outcome of my circumstances is no longer as important to me as it was before. Truly knowing God is what I long for the most. What He wants for me is more important than what I want for me. I struggle with that statement sometimes; my physical body screams for relief, but I also know that this malady is keeping me humble and may be the very thing I need to keep me anchored to God. I realize this is a hard truth for

some, but it's the way I feel. I don't claim to know all the answers, but I can confidently point you to the One who does.

*"I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering. I will rescue you for my sake—yes, for my own sake!" Isaiah 48: 10-11*

Why would a loving God allow His children to experience difficult and unpleasant and things? This verse plainly tells me that God is changing and testing me in "the furnace of suffering." Rather than complain and have pity parties, our response should be to turn to God

Writing this book is good for me, because I'm able to do some major reflecting on how far God has brought me. I didn't realize how blind I was at the time -- we never do, we're so wrapped up in ourselves or other stuff. I was being deceived, and making all the wrong choices leading me straight to the pit. But God saw me, and in His great mercy saved me, and brought the sweetest peace.

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I want you to know that whatever happened in the past...whatever sin or misery you're carrying around with you...all hell may be breaking loose in your life now. God is ready to change things for you, provided you are ready to receive those changes! What seems impossible for you is entirely possible for God. If He changed my attitude, and gave me peace and a purpose, He can and will do the same for you. Please don't let any situation prevent you from having a relationship with God. He is for you, not against you.

*"Come now, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool." (Isaiah 1:18).*

God doesn't lie. You can take Him at His Word. I'm not telling you to "do as I say" and not "do as I do." Everything written in this book has been learned through experience. So basically, I'm in the same boat as you...I may be paddling ahead of you or behind you. I have not yet made it to the other side - but I will, as long as God is leading me. I'm going to

continue to run my race of faith. The Bible tells us to forget what is behind us, and keep our eyes on the prize (Jesus). Don't live in the past, and choose not to let it dictate your future. Without a doubt, God wants you to break free from the past, and wants to restore you. The Bible really is amazing when our eyes are opened to understand what God is saying to us! Here's something God says that's really cool...

*“For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19)*

He's the Author of Life, not death! Remember making choices between blessings and curses? Choose life and be blessed! Now is the time to determine on which road you will travel, because when you are tested you will be able to firmly hold on and not be tempted to turn back. Put your trust and hope in a God who you can't see with your natural eyes – only by your inner being that's says, “There must be more to this life than what I can see or feel.”

Our suffering is helpful when we take time to think and ask questions. People often return to God when life becomes too much to handle-- I did! Our suffering can actually be a severe mercy. On the other hand, suffering is pointless when we refuse to ask questions; we can get bitter and miss out on any life-altering lessons. Bitterness is fatal; it eats away at your soul! It's tough, really tough, but we must try to look at things from God's perspective. He's in control of things, and He's not at all surprised when things seem to spin out of control. Even when evil seems like it's prevailing, God is still on the throne. Ecclesiastes 3:1 comes to mind...

*“For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.”* Only a season – trouble won't last forever. Remember the Resurrection follows the Crucifixion!

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We're all on the same lake, but we travel in different boats. We're all human. There are a few things common to us all, but we definitely have our personal “crosses” to bear. You're not

alone. The enemy wants you to think you're alone. He wants you driven to despair. But God wants to prepare us to bear all things, and he wants us to trust Him to work all things for good.

In the Bible, Peter tells us, *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you."* (1 Peter 4:12). Do you hear that? **DON'T BE SURPRISED!!**

Keep holding on. Hold onto Jesus...call on Him! If you've done everything you can do...now is the time to give it all to Him. He will fight for you! Remember HE said, *"Come to me...all who are weary and heavy burdened. I will give you rest...!"* (In Matthew 11: 28-29) You can be sure that I'm standing in faith with you.

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*"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* (Galatians 5:22-23)

Each of these characteristics is given to believers from the Holy Spirit. They're truly only found in the nature of Christ. They are the evidence that God reigns in our hearts. Let me take you back to sometime in 2002... (Not long after my conversion)

I was praying with a friend and she gave me a Word of Knowledge from the Lord. She first told me that she saw into what looked like the walls of my soul; the wallpaper that lining it was beautiful-- very flowery and ornate. She explained to me that this was my perception of what I thought was important. It was the way I thought things should be. She then told me that God was tearing down each piece. He was going to replace the wallpaper I designed with His wallpaper. She said He also told her He was working on producing the fruit of patience in me. She said He was smiling, because He was pleased with the progress we were both making.

Wasn't that amazing? I can now visualize the wallpaper lining my soul as a different kind of beautiful...my new wallpaper is lined with the words naming each individual fruit of the Spirit. The words "Patience, Kindness, and Joy" really stand out to me. I was led to do a Bible study on these three fruits of the Spirit...



The Vine's Concise Bible Dictionary defines **Patience** as "an abiding under." To be patient means, to wait for" or to be "long-tempered." Faith and hope have everything to do with patience. Do you have faith in God's word? Read the psalms; they repeatedly tell us to "wait patiently" for the Lord. When we have faith or believe in God's promises, hope appears. Our hope is that we will receive all He has promised. James 1:2-4 tells us when our endurance (patience) is fully developed, we will be strong in character and ready for anything. Our age of "instant" everything has caused us to lose the ability to wait. The only remedy is to transform our minds with God's word. I've learned to trust God to give me the patience I need to wait on Him. A miracle happens ... He gives me patience!

It only took me 33 years to finally even consider God. I must tell you that I am in awe of God's patience. 2 Peter 3:9 says, *"The Lord really isn't being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but He wants everyone to repent."*... Think about this: these words were written over 2000 years ago. 2000 years!!

How He can wait for someone like me...just blows my mind! The evidence is right there of His love for me! He loves you too! But one day His patience will come to an end. Jesus warns us, *"But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the Day of Judgment by the truth I have spoken."* (John 12:48)

Vine's Dictionary defines **Kindness** as "serviceable, good, pleasant (of things), gracious." "To be kind" is said of love. God's kindness is the only reason you and I exist. His Patience and kindness go hand in hand:

*"Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that His kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?"*  
Romans 2:4

**Joy** (Jesus Others You!) The world tells me I should be depressed and unhappy because of having this disease (No thanks. I've been there--done that). Yes, it's difficult, but it's not impossible. It can never steal my joy! I know the situation I'm in

is only temporary. There is so much more to look forward to; there's so much more in store! I am overwhelmed at God's amazing grace!

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Was blind, but now I see*

I am convinced that you will never understand how awesome salvation is until you are able to truly comprehend what God has done for you. Understand that we who are saved, used to be the wretch to whom that song is referring. To those of us who trust in Jesus; we are given the indescribable privilege of knowing our Father, and having Him as our best friend. We are joyful because our names are written in heaven!

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I'm a child of God – a daughter of the King – a Princess. My life has never been a bed of roses, and I don't think it ever will be. But my life has been good. I've learned that good doesn't mean the same thing as easy. The absence of trouble or adversity isn't what true victory in a Christian's life is all about. It's all about the presence of peace that Jesus gives. It's a peace that passes all human understanding. Philippians 4: 6-7 says,

*"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* Don't want to worry? Then pray more. I can't explain how, but He replaces mourning with joy!

*You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have turned my sorrow into joy!" Psalm 30: 11*

I can't physically dance, but you can be sure my spirit is! My life is just one example of many; how much a child of God can suffer without being destroyed and left destitute. I've learned lessons that could only be taught through having this affliction. To truly grow we need to actually experience things –

not just read about them in a classroom. God tells me He will keep me in perfect peace if I trust Him and fix my thoughts on Him. That my friends, is the only explanation ... the only way I am able to rise above my circumstances.

*“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you.” Isaiah 26: 3*

It's time for a dose of reality... After spending years with this disease, I still cry. Yes, God has indeed healed my spirit, and most of the time I cry for joy. But I'm human, with emotions that flip from one extreme to the other. I'm in no way hopeless, but everyday things I see can trigger tears – tears of sadness. It hurts to see people walking around, shopping, playing and running around with their kids, getting out of their cars effortlessly...etc. It hurts because I used to do those things with no problem, but now doing anything physical is just a big hassle. I'm a prisoner inside my own body.

I also get chronic daily Tension and Migraine Headaches, (It's just another bonus of having this neuromuscular disease). Most of the time my headache medication works. When it doesn't work is when I can't do much of anything. My entire day is shot – perhaps two or three days.

Much of my time is spent engaging in silent or spoken prayer. God has definitely taught me how to wield the mighty sword of prayer. I've learned to truly love being alone with God. He has a way of calming my soul and making everything OK again.

God doesn't necessarily deliver us from things that go wrong or things we think are bad. It's easy for us to talk about faith, but it's not until we suffer...that our faith is perfected. So don't harden your heart towards God when things go wrong – you're growing! Just as a body builder exercises his or her muscles to get huge, you have to exercise your faith muscles – and in time they will get huge. Or just as a mother gives milk and food to her baby to help him grow, imagine God spoon-feeding you His Word to help you grow. Let Him soften your heart.

I used to hold onto resentment and unforgiveness. I was only hurting myself. A gigantic lesson learned is that harboring resentment and being unforgiving will accomplish nothing, and it will only stunt your growth.

*“I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering. I will rescue you for my sake—yes, for my own sake!” Isaiah 48: 10-11*

Why would a loving God allow His children to experience difficult and unpleasant and things? This verse plainly tells me that God is changing and testing me in “the furnace of suffering.” Rather than complaining and having pity parties, our response should be turning to God and asking Him for strength to endure. For without testing, we would never know what we’re capable of, nor would we grow. And without the refining, we wouldn’t become more and more like Christ. Seek God, and let Him do the refining in your life. To be “refined” hurts! There’s no doubt about that, but you’ll be overwhelmingly surprised at where God is going to lead you!

So it’s entirely possible to *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).*

1 Corinthians 6:10 says that although we own nothing, we possess everything. What? How can we remain joyous and content in the midst of difficult circumstances? The answer is Jesus. What a difference knowing Him makes! We have to grab onto this and really understand... Happiness depends on what happens, and it’s only temporary. Joy depends on Christ, and it’s everlasting! You’ll never really know how great things can be unless you try Him. I don’t know how He does it. If we’re connected to Him, He gives us supernatural joy. Jesus tells us that we are the branches, and He is the vine. Apart from Him we can do nothing. You can read it for yourself in John 15.

The most productive thing is to make lemonade out of your lemons. Who really wants to be carrying around a bunch of lemons? God tells us to learn from hardships.

*“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when*

*your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.”*  
*James 1: 2-3*

My advice is to dwell on what you do have instead of stressing out over what you lost or don't have. Dwelling on the former makes blessings come and makes life flourish. But dwelling on the latter brings bitterness, disappointment and death.

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I'd like to end this book with a letter. It's a love letter I wrote to God in September 2001, not long after my conversion. It's taped to my bible. I read it from time to time. I think of how merciful and good He is...

*My God,*

*You are my lifesaver. In my despair I turned to you, and you lightened my load making my heavy burdens bearable.*

*I was once depressed and had no purpose, but I'm happy again. You have opened my eyes to see your precious love and feel your awesome presence.*

*You are an awesome God, in control of everything. I trust in you completely because you have a plan designed for my good.*

*You truly rescue me every day.*

*Love, Lori*



# My Bio

I live in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with my husband, Michael. I am a born-again follower of Jesus Christ. It's my passion to write about my personal experiences to make you realize that God is in the intricate details of our lives.

When I sit and write things seem to pour out of my heart and hopefully connects with someone who needs to hear the exact words I write. I also enjoy teaching the Word of God, whether in a small group or on my blog PERSEVERE ([lorilaws.com](http://lorilaws.com)). I'm all about pointing the way... and sometimes that means carrying people to the only One that can truly turn the tides. That's why I write! That's why I blog! And whatever happens next, I will give God all the glory! I will always give God all the glory! Hallelujah!

