

“My grace is sufficient for Thee”

How God works in the suffering of his children.

Why do good Christians suffer? How can God allow his children to suffer hardship? Does God really care about his people if He allows them to suffer? These questions, and many like them, arise in the minds of people who wonder why the Lord could allow suffering to come to His people. After all, Christ did say “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” If the Christian life consists of peace, love and joy, why do many Christians suffer affliction and heartbreak?

Suffering in many ways forces us to become totally dependent on the Lord for our welfare. Our sinful hearts often make us deceive ourselves into thinking that we have the ability to handle a certain situation that has come into our life on our own. In our eyes, we do not need the Lord’s help to overcome trials. We strive to stay independent of assistance from others. For this reason, the Lord uses suffering in our lives to bring us closer to Him. The Lord sometimes allow us to try to endure the trial on our own just to display to us that we are wholly incapable to do so apart from Him. God breaks us in order that He might make us whole again.

The question remains, what purpose does suffering have in the lives of believers? Romans 8:28-30 says “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.” Two things become clear from reading this passage: that all things work together for our good and that we suffer in order that we may become conformed to the image of Christ.

Some would say that pain and sickness result directly from not confessing sin. While some medical illnesses do result from immoral actions, I do not agree with the presumption that all sickness results from un-confessed sin. John 9 provides a clear example that this belief does not agree with the word of God. In Jesus’ time, the people of Israel often believed that all sickness resulted from sin. When the disciples saw a man born blind, they asked Jesus “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” However Jesus answers “Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

First, all things work together for our good. The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1 says that “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” God designed us to bring glory and honor to Him and to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. Accordingly, our suffering meets two chief ends: The glory of God and our ultimate good. As we suffer, we begin to trust God and rest in His grace alone to bring us through our trials.

One Sunday morning, a pastor at my church delivered a sermon entitled “Questions to God” based on Psalm 42 in which David stands in the midst of going through a trial in his life. Commentators on this passage have historically split over whether David wrote this Psalm when he was fleeing from Saul or from his son Absalom. In this Psalm, David raises the questions of “Why O God, has this happened to me? How long O God, must I persevere in this trial? Lord, I feel so alone, where are you? Where are you in the midst of this pain?” This pastor said that “We know two things about God: One, he always acts according to His character, and two, He always fulfills his promises to us in the scriptures... we don’t always understand why God does what He does but we must trust in God, in his character, because we know Him and we know that He is a good God who loves us.” The pastor spoke about how the Lord works in our trials in

three ways: the visible hands of Christ, the invisible hands of Christ, and the eternal hands of Christ.

About twenty-eight years ago, this pastor lost his wife in a car accident. Members of his Sunday school class came around him and put their arms around him. For six months after her tragic death, he did not eat a single meal alone because several friends had him over for dinner every night. The Lord used the people in this man's life in order to minister to his broken and hurting heart. These people served as the visible hands of Christ in his life.

He says that often times a person will come up to him and say "I'm going to see someone who is suffering and I really don't know what to say." My pastor will reply to them that "It's not what they say that's important; it's their presence that is important." The pastor went on to say that when he passed through the trial of his wife's death that he couldn't "tell you anything that anybody said but I can tell you everyone who was there." The words that people speak to those in suffering do not hold the importance that their presence and fellowship do.

Second the invisible hands of Christ. Many times the Lord works in ways that remain invisible to our eyes. For example, Joseph went through many trials in his life but ultimately the Lord worked them together in order to place Joseph in the position that he had prepared him for in Egypt. Joseph may not have had the ability to see God's hand at the time of his trials, but the Lord worked in them to accomplish his purpose for Joseph's life. Often, God works in our lives in a very unique way that we cannot see, yet He remains with us.

And finally, the eternal hands of God. All suffering will come to an end. However, this may not occur in our time here on earth. The healing of God may not come until we enter into glory. For instance, the pastor had a business mentor who he became very close to over the years. One day, this man called him into his office and informed him that he had just received a diagnosis that he had leukemia. The mentor passed away about six months later. During the six months, these two men had many conversations. In one of them, the man said "Bill, I am convinced that God will heal me of this leukemia, but it may not be in this lifetime." The Lord will eventually bring an end to all of our suffering. Yet he may not choose to do so in our time here on earth. Thus true and complete healing will not ultimately come until we enter eternity in heaven.

The Lord desires to test us. God uses trials as a way of testing our faith and endurance. Romans 5:3-5 says "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The Lord desires to build character and a firm faith in Him through these tests. In Mark 8:34-35, Christ says that if anyone will follow Him, he must "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Christ makes it clear that the Christian journey often includes suffering for Him.

How then should we endure suffering? James 1:2-4 says "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith workerth patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Can we possibly rejoice in suffering? Suffering brings pain, how can I possibly choose to rejoice in the suffering which I encounter in my life? Does God really expect me to stay happy in trials? The same word answers the first and last questions, yes. The answer to the question of how? Only through the grace given to us by the Holy Spirit can we endure suffering.

John 14:16-18 say "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The Holy Spirit comforts us in our afflictions. He enables us to rest upon God alone. He gives us the peace that Paul refers to in

Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

We should rejoice in trials because of the truth that God brings glory to His name in and through our circumstances. Paul said in Philippians 3:7-8 “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” Acts 5 echoes the same truth when it speaks of the apostles leaving the Sanhedrin “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” Again in Philippians 1, Paul says that “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”

While we rejoice in our suffering, we do so only through the grace of God which upholds us in our trials. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul tells of a time where “there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The Lord’s grace enables us to endure trials and tribulations.

In the book of Isaiah, Chapter 43, there lies a passage of scripture that contains the words to two verses of a well-known hymn, How Firm a Foundation. The passage reads “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Two chapters earlier we find another passage that contains a verse from that same hymn. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

When we realize the power of God’s grace, our eyes become open to the power and protection that His grace provides. God’s grace alone keeps us in our trials. His almighty power upholds us without failure. His work of grace in our hearts enables us to rejoice in our suffering. His gift of grace alone gives us the peace to rest in Him. Grace gives us the strength to endure through our trials.

A well-know hymn, Amazing Grace, beautifully portrays God’s grace. The second verse reads “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fear relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!” From this we see how the grace of God relieves the fears that we may have in trials. Verse three reads “Thro’ many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; ‘tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” God’s grace alone speaks to our hearts in a way as to encourage us and bring us safely through the trials that we will encounter through our lives. This grace will eventually bring us home to Christ in heaven.

Christ walks side by side with us through our struggles. He has suffered the death of the cross. Hebrews 4:14-16 says:

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the felling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Our Savior knows our pains and sorrows. The great High Priest knows and can relate to our weaknesses. In Matthew 28:20 Christ tells us that “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” In Hebrews 13:5 he promises that “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Christ will stay with us to the end and never forsake us in our suffering. He guides us through it, and

when we arrive home, He will welcome us with open arms saying “well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

As we walk with Him in His word, we learn about how Christ endured what we suffer and then some. When we suffer pain, he says to us “I have been there, I know your suffering, I have experienced your pain, I know what it is like to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” When we listen to His word, we know that we do not walk this road alone. Our guide down this road has walked it before. He has triumphed over this walk of sorrow. He stays with us to encourage us on our way.

How the Lord has worked in my life.

In 1991, a young married couple became pregnant with their second child. The doctors wanted to run several tests, but the couple refused the tests if they were going to serve the purpose of deciding on the possibility of an abortion. The mother delivered the child and sure enough, their son had numerous medical issues including orthopedic and cardiac complications. I came into the world in such condition. The doctors told my parents that I would likely not survive.

A few days after my birth, a friend of my dad’s planned on spending his lunch time at the hospital visiting my family. On his way out of the office, a good friend (a co-worker) asked him if he wanted to have lunch. The man declined and explained why. His friend asked if he could come along to the hospital. When they arrived they entered into a conversation with my mom and dad. After the introductions, my mom suggested that my dad take their new friend back to see me in the ICU. Leaving the waiting room, the man put his arm on my dad’s shoulder, congratulated my dad on having a son and spoke about what gifts sons were. This man went on to explain how his youngest son, Aaron, has downs syndrome. He spoke about the gift Aaron was to their family, even though the world may never look at Aaron as being normal, God valued Aaron’s life as well as any other. My father joyfully expressed his affirmation to that statement. At three or four days old, this friend was the first to congratulate my dad on having a new son.

At two weeks old, it became clear that I would need extensive open-heart surgery in order to live. The surgeon who would perform the surgery, Dr. Hisashi Nikaidoh, had served as a surgeon for more than twenty-five years. Dr. Nikaidoh had a Japanese heritage, the grandson of one of the last samurai. One associate of Dr. Nikaidoh told him that he should not perform the surgery as it would only give my family false hope of my survival. Yet another held the view that the surgery should go on because I deserved a chance to live.

Ten days earlier, Dr. Nikaidoh took my father into a conference room to speak to him about my condition. Dr. Nikaidoh explained the surgery that might be necessary to sustain my life. Dr. Nikaidoh spoke about three levels of success with the necessary surgery, listing them in order of best to worst. As he would finish describing a certain category he would say “Matthew is not in this category.” Dr. Nikaidoh finally addressed my father “Mr. O’Hearn, we may have to decide what is best to do FOR Matthew as opposed to do TO him.” My father replied “My wife and I are Christians, and we believe that God has a plan for Matthew’s life. We don’t know whether he will live seven days, seven years, or seventy years... that’s in God’s hands. But we understand that we may have to let him go.” Dr. Nikaidoh quietly got up to leave the room. As he reached the door, he turned back to my father, “I Christian too.”

The night after my first open-heart surgery, a Christian cardiac doctor came into my room. She prayed over my bed, looked over my room and as she came out of my room, she said loud enough for my father to hear “He’s going to make it” as she walked away. A little while later, my parents were told that the surgeons didn’t expect me to live through the night. They had raised my level of support as high as they could and my condition was still quickly deteriorating. At the time, my

father was encouraged to get my mom from the beds in the waiting room so they could spend time with me. After a while, my parents were asked to leave my room as I was given some treatment. My parents retreated to the same conference room in which Dr Nikaidoh and my father met two weeks earlier. As they waited, they prayed. Afterwards, my dad told my mom that he didn't think they would lose me. Upon returning to my room, my dad asked if they could hold me. They understood the gravity of my condition when the nurse said they could. After a couple hours, my dad took my mom and went to lie down. As soon as my dad fell asleep, my mom returned to my bedside.

Two things happened the following day. My pediatrician came to see me. A friend from church came to visit and pray with my dad as he had almost every day for the previous two weeks. As they retreated to the conference room, the friend asked my dad if the night before had been particularly tough... tears welled in my dad's eyes at the question. The friend explained that the night before he was woken up around midnight by bugs that had gotten in his house. After cleaning up, as he got ready to get back in bed, his six-year-old son woke up with what he thought was a nightmare. He couldn't calm his son until he realized that the Lord wanted them to pray for me and my family.

Later, my pediatrician arrived and spent quite a bit of time talking to the surgeon about my condition. When he later came to talk to my dad, my dad had never seen him as discouraged as he looked. Yet, in the midst of their conversation, my dad mentioned that they had been able to hold me for a couple of hours that night. Stunned, the pediatrician said "No wonder he made it through the night!" My parents saw the visible and invisible hands of God on that day.

Several years later my father and my sister participated in a home school field trip to a local museum. They arrived early and had to wait for the start of the event. As they waited, my father talked with the grandmother of a teenage girl whom also arrived early. As they spoke, the grandmother quizzed my father about my obvious orthopedic needs. She then launched into a story about her granddaughter's own odyssey. The girl's heart had been upside down when she was born. The granddaughter had heart surgery 12-13 years earlier. The grandmother spoke about their surgeon... although he and his wife attended a bible study, he did not believe in Christ. Their family spoke to their surgeon about Christ often in those days. After my dad asked the surgeon's name... he told the grandmother that I had also had heart surgery performed by Dr Nikaidoh and he was able to tell the grandmother that Dr Nikaidoh had become a believer in Jesus. Though this girl's family never knew it, the Lord faithfully used their witness to help bring Dr. Nikaidoh to Himself. If Dr. Nikaidoh did not have a personal relationship with Christ, he may not have performed the surgery I needed.

A couple of years ago, after having a Cat-Scan at the hospital, we stopped and talked with the doctor who had said "no" to my surgery. This doctor said "You know that in all my years of working together with Dr. Nikaidoh, only once have I questioned his medical judgment and that was with your son." Within a few weeks, Dr. Nikaidoh suffered the loss of his son in an elevator accident. After his son's memorial service, Dr. Nikaidoh spoke the same words to my family. "In all my years with Dr Leonard, only once has he questioned my medical judgment and that was with your son." My father replied to him "That was a decision made by God." A very hearty "Amen" was Dr. Nikaidoh's response to my dad.

During my extended recovery from my first surgery, my family began to develop relationships with the other families in the ICU. A mother in the ICU had a daughter with a critical condition. This mother, from South America, spoke conversational English. This woman did not believe in Christ. As with a number of other occasions, one evening my father felt led by the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with her. He saw another mother whom he had frequently seen reading a Spanish language Bible. My father knew she spoke almost no English as the first mom had acted as an interpreter for the second on a few occasions. He communicated to the mother that he

wanted to borrow her Spanish language Bible. When she understood, she ran to get her bible and together they shared the gospel with this woman as she read passage after passage in her native language. About three or four months later, my parents received a letter from the first mother. She thanked them for sharing Christ with her. She said that her daughter had eventually passed away but that she had shared the gospel with her before she died.

My first surgery only began the series of trials in my life. I was nearly two years old before I spent more time at home than I spent in the hospital in Dallas or in Houston. By the time I was six, I had another open-heart surgery along with two heart catheter procedures and ten other surgeries on my lower body. The doctors numerous times told my family that I would not likely survive. However, God said otherwise. Several times the doctors told my family that I could never walk. Again, God had other plans. Over the years the Lord revealed that his will, not the odds presented by the doctors would prevail.

During this time in my life, the Lord used my trials to bring my sister to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. One night, during my initial six week stay in the ICU, my father and my sister were driving home. My father could tell that something bothered my sister. "Why's Kaitlin sad?" "I'm not sad" she replied. After my sister's third denial, my dad replied, "Well, Daddy's sad." "No, Daddy's not sad, Kaitlin's sad" responded my sister. He asked my sister if she was afraid of the tubes and wires on me. My sister said yes. My dad asked if she thought she would have all those things put on her. She said yes. My father explained to her that those wires and tubes were there to help me. When he got home, he drew a picture of a heart on a piece of paper. Then he drew another heart with a crack. He used these pictures to explain that my heart was broken and I needed the wires and tubes. He said my sister's heart was not broken and that she did not need all the tubes and wires. On the way to the hospital a couple of weeks later, my sister prayed the sinners prayer and receive Christ into her heart after he explained how everyone's heart is broken by the effects of sin and how God heals our broken hearts through Christ.

After the fourteen surgeries and procedures noted above, I did not have another surgery for almost nine years. However, last year I had another surgery. This surgery consisted of breaking ulna bones near my hips as well as breaking my right ankle. Both ulna bones were rotated to set them straight. The same happened to my ankle. This surgery occurred because my legs had become "wind swept" and turned towards the right and the surgeon feared this would put my back at risk of serious injury in the years ahead.

While I stayed in the hospital, many of my family, close friends and acquaintances visited me. The Lord used them as His visible hands in my life. Like my pastor, I could not tell you most of what anybody said. Yet I can tell you everybody who visited or wrote letters of comfort.

While I lay in my hospital bed, my orthopedic surgeon desired that I would lie on one side for a period of time and then switch to the other side in order to help me get over the pain. At the time I did not want to do this as I believed that it would make my pain all the more worse. However, I had to do it. One of the assistant pastors at my church said that I provided an example of how we must work ourselves through the pain and lean on Christ. This pastor has written several books and he said that if he ever used such an example in one of the books he writes, he would call it the "Matthew Principle."

Afterwards, during my recovery, I spent ten weeks in a wheelchair because I could not put any weight on my healing legs. While I recovered from the procedure at home, my mother gave me two weeks off from school. As a result, I had extra free time. The Lord used this period to keep me in His word as I worked to memorizing the book of Philippians for the Swordsman Award of the Pilgrim Handbook.

Through the memorization of this book I learned about how Paul rejoiced in his trials because he recognized the Lord using his situation to bring the gospel to others. In chapter 1, verses 12 & 20 he encourages the Philippian Christians saying:

“But I would ye should understand brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel... According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”

Paul tells us in chapter 2, verse 17 that “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” His concern for the Philippian believers’ faith and walk with Christ outweighed the magnitude of his suffering. The apostle understood that through our suffering we become partakers in the sufferings of Christ (Chapter 3 Verse 10). Paul also wrote in Romans 8:18, 37-39:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Through Christ we have received the ability to conquer in our trials. We cannot even compare the suffering that we endure to the unbelievable joy that we have now and will have in glory. We will conquer our trials only through Christ. Nothing will ever separate us from the love that our God has bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus. This passage in Romans should serve as a hope for all of who experience trials in life. It certainly has served as such in my life.

Paul provides an example of how to remain content with our circumstances, no matter how dire. In chapter 4:11-13 he explains about how he has “learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Paul shows to us that this trait of commitment comes through Christ alone.

I have had to learn this in many ways throughout my life. Through these trials, I have learned that I must be content with the position in the Lord has placed me. I must be content with the Lord’s directing my life. The Lord sovereignly places us where he wants us and provides for all of our needs. He alone knows and does the best thing for us. Discontent with the Lord’s provision essentially tells the Lord that he cannot provide for our needs.

Seven weeks after the surgery I underwent a second procedure to remove several metal pins that the doctors inserted into my ankle during the surgery. Later in the afternoon I stood for the first time in seven weeks. I endured immense pain in my hips from the lack of usage and quickly laid back in the wheel chair. Beginning with the following morning, every day I would have to stand and work to bring my legs back to full strength. This process totally exhausted me.

Typically, my father would take me out on the sidewalk of our street early in the morning before leaving for work. I would walk with a walker from one end of the street to the other end. Again in the middle of the day, I would walk with my Mom. When my father arrived home from work in the evening, we would continue that routine. Over the next few weeks, my strength and ability to walk improved. However, my exhaustion would increase at the same time. Many instances I

wanted to stop because I believed I did not have any more strength. Yet my parents would make me continue.

One morning my father and I woke up around seven and, as usual, went outside to work. The previous day had been busier than normal and I did not get much sleep that night. The chilly air that morning made my legs stiff and I struggled to walk. After I had walked about three yards I begged my father to allow me to stop. He would not allow me. He told me I had to continue on. I ended up walking six street lengths that morning... three times more than any time before that morning. By the end of the morning, my legs had tired out. Nevertheless, that morning greatly benefited my recovery.

I learned from this how we cannot endure trials on our own. Christ upholds us in the palm of his hand. He carries us through the fire. He helps us stand when we have no strength of our own. I could not have walked that distance relying on my own strength. I could only walk that distance with the invisible arms and hands of the Savior wrapped strongly around me. Those same hands that healed the blind and the deaf... The same hands that voluntarily became outstretched on the wood of a cruel cross... The same hands that will welcome His children when they arrive safely home. Christ has conquered the sorrows of our life. We have nothing to fear in our sorrow. Our Victor gains our own victory through the blood that He shed on our behalf.

“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5. When we go through periods of suffering, we must understand that God does what he does in order that we may receive His declaration of worthy of His kingdom.

In 1 Timothy 6 Paul calls upon believers to fight the good fight. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 he says “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” In another passage he speaks of running the race to as to win. We should “press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

A good family friend battled cancer for a period of three years. He passed into glory early last year. When he underwent treatment, he would always stay joyful, no matter how sick he felt. The doctors and nurses that treated him asked him how he could keep a happy face in the midst of such pain? What did he have that they did not? He answered “It’s not what I have, it’s who has me.” The great physician holds us in the palm of his hand. His diagnosis always proves right. His solution for our sickness infallibly cures us. In him alone do we find the ability to say in the midst of our illness that “Yes, I hurt, but I do not fear death for the King of Life has already defeated it.” May we ever rest ourselves in the care of our sovereign Lord!

Since my recovery, the Lord has brought about a great milestone in my life. After fourteen years of orthopedic operations, I no longer require braces on my legs, a lift on the shoe of my left foot (my left leg has been shorter than my right), and no longer require the services of my orthopedic surgeon. For fourteen years, my life consisted of countless doctor appointments and operations. Now all those days have ended. Only the Lord could bring such a miraculous feat.

Currently, I’m working on getting to the point where I can walk without crutches. When I reach that goal, this will mean finally walking without any artificial aids, something the doctors said would never happen. I have learned through this experience to never rule anything out of possibilities with God. The doctors, surgeons and medical experts can say what they will. However, if God says otherwise, all the medical expertise in the world cannot stop his plan. As Matthew 19:26 most accurately words it “With God all things are possible.”

My father and I have shared my experiences on multiple occasions at our ALERT unit. Often times, when I have struggled with walking over the last year, I have often thought about the Cadet motto "Strong to Overcome." I have prayed that the Lord would enable me to live up to this motto in my life. I have prayed that I would not think anything impossible to overcome through Christ. I think that too often, we allow our hearts to deceive us into thinking that we cannot overcome a circumstance in our lives through Christ. We allow ourselves to think that Christ does not have the power to enable us to overcome such a circumstance. If we do not rely on Christ, we cannot defeat this trial. We will fall on our faces if we try to. But if we rely on Christ alone, we will stay true to the Cadet motto in every aspect of our lives.

A month and a half ago, my great aunt passed away from complications related to having smoked for most of her life. The day that she died, we had planned to attend our ALERT unit's meeting. However, when her health took a turn for the worse, we spent the day at the hospital with our family waiting the hour of her passing. On the way to the hospital, I called the other Cadet Specialist in our unit to tell him that we would not attend the meeting and the reason why. Shortly thereafter his mother called back to get more information in order to send out an e-mail prayer request to the unit. While I spoke to her over the phone, she told me something that I had not thought of. She said that maybe the Lord had a purpose in this situation. The purpose of giving me the view point that my family has had with me over the years of watching a close relative suffer while knowing you could do nothing to help it.

About two weeks after my great aunt's death, my sister was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. This came as a great shock considering that rarely does such a diagnosis occur at the age of eighteen. Usually, diagnosis occurs much later in life. Soon afterwards we placed our situation on our church's prayer list. Many people have come to us and expressed their sorrow over the diagnosis. In fact, many have responded with words such as "This isn't right. You don't need another sick child. This shouldn't happen to your family." One family friend heard about the diagnosis and immediately prayed "Lord, how much can this family take?"

We believe that these people have unfortunately missed the fact that God has brought this trial into our lives. He's sovereign over all things. He does what he wills to do in our lives. Everything that he decrees works for His glory and our ultimate good, even if it entails suffering and pain. We should not fear what the Lord has brought into our lives because we know that he does it for our good. We have no right to tell the Lord that he does not know what best to do for us. Romans 9:20-21 "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" In these verses we see that the Lord does what he wills and we have no standing on which to question his will.

Earlier, I spoke about how the Lord gives a peace to those who undergo a trial. He enables them to not fear. He has blessed me with such a peace over the years. One time last year before my last surgery, some one asked me if I feared the operation. To which I replied that I did not fear the surgery because I knew who had control over the ultimate outcome of it. As God's children we should not fear but rather rest our hearts in the sovereign hand of the Lord. He holds us in the palm of his hand and we do not have to fear falling out of his hand. In his hands, he shelters us from the pain and sorrow in our lives that we really cannot understand. His peace abides forever and provides for our fears.

When we become afraid, the voice of the Lord calms our hearts. His Spirit speaks to our hearts. Romans 8:16, 26-27:

"The Spirit itself bears witness to our spirit, that we are the children of God. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should

pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

The Spirit knows our hearts. He makes intercession on our behalf to the father with groans that we cannot begin to understand. The Spirit comforts us in our affliction. He tells us that we are not alone, that the Lord comes near to us in our affliction.

Many people think that the Lord will not allow us to undergo such affliction as that which we cannot stand. Looking to 1 Corinthians 10:13 “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” I believe this speaks to temptation as opposed to trials. When Paul encountered suffering in his life, he asked the Lord to remove it on three occasions. When the Lord told him no each time, Paul wrote: “And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” When we rest in this truth, we can see that we have nothing to fear in our trials. Whatever we suffer, God remains faithful. He knows our weaknesses and He stands in when we cannot. We only have to gaze at the cross to know this truth. We could never endure God’s just punishment for our sins. Where we could not, Christ Jesus did it for us.

I have learned that the Lord draws near to the afflicted. He has taught me that when I suffer, he stays there with me. He has not, nor will He, forsake me in the midst of them. The Lord controls how much pain I will experience at any given time. He knows my limits and the frailty of my heart. He alone gives me the power to stand when my body says I cannot. He alone works all circumstances in my life together for my own good. When I suffer pain I know that he allows me to suffer that which I cannot stand in order that His name might reign over all other names... and that in my weakness His strength is displayed in my simple endurance.

In conclusion, I have seen the hand of the Lord shaping me into the man that He wants me to be. He has given me the joy of walking through the fire without allowing me to suffer burn. He has granted me His grace to walk through the deep waters of sorrow without drowning. While I must still go through the waters, I no longer fear them because I know that He will hold me up. He has walked through the same waters and fire. This fire and water do not harm but rather refine. He has done all this in order to accomplish two purposes: That His name should be glorified over all other names and that I might grow closer to Him in my relationship with His Son. I know that my present suffering does not compare to the glory that we will experience in heaven. I know that my suffering is for but a while, but the joy of heaven is eternal. With this hope in mind, I long with Paul “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:23)

Trials do not come upon only some of God’s children. Trials do not happen to some and leave the others alone. They fall upon all of His children. The Lord causes them to come into the lives of His children in order that He might remove their dross and refine their gold. He will not bring a trial in which He will not also reveal His strength in our weakness. He does not bring trials to his people in order to punish them for their sins. He causes them because He loves us, He wants us to know Him, He wants to train us into whom He would have us to be, and have us to suffer in order to partake in the glory of Christ.

When these trials come into our lives, we should not run and hide. We should not fear them. We should not become bitter and turn to God and ask questions like “What did I do to deserve this? I have given my life to you and this is how you treat me? Lord, I have been faithful to you, why are you not treating me the same? Do you even care about me?” Yet, when we do, The Lord will not become angry, but rather deal gently with us because he has commanded us to bring our troubles before him. He knows that we are sinners prone to complaining and he will listen to our

cries because of his great mercy. Rather than ask such questions we should meet trials with a joyful heart knowing the end result of them. We should welcome the trial with a willing spirit to learn what the Lord would teach us. If only we will quiet our hearts, humble ourselves before the Lord, and listen to His voice. Then we would recognize his mercy and grace... as it has been before us the whole time. We would see the ultimate end of our suffering. We would see the truth behind his promise "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in thy weakness!"

- Cadet Specialist Matthew O'Hearn, Texas 4th Alpha Unit.