

Real Life Stories Strength In The Struggle



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Last month while we were in Nairobi, on a routine clinic visit, I noticed Emily had been drinking a bit more water than normal. I decided to test her blood glucose. I wasn't too worried, I do this every now and then if I suspect an abnormality in behavior or health. Well, turns out my gut was right ... again. Within 24 hours Emily would be diagnosed with Diabetes. (We just had confirmation this week that it is Type 1 Diabetes and is not CF related.)

I was shocked, overwhelmed, devastated for her and myself ... it was like a sucker punch to my stomach. It was late at night, there was nothing we could do at that point, so although the kids and I were crying (we all knew what this would mean) I tried to calmly get them to sleep and then called my husband with the news. I was in Nairobi with the kids and Aaron had just taken a missionary guest who had arrived in from Canada back to our small village in Kithumula. Aaron, who has repeatedly bolstered my faith and reassured me of God's care for us in these health crises, texted me: "Its hard dear, and I don't know what to do, but we have to keep trusting the Lord...I know that much...and we will take one day at a time. I know the Lord will make a way."

But I was distraught.

I thought to myself, this is it. This is going to finish me. I can't do anymore problems, anymore diseases. I can't look after another set of blood sugars! I can't do more hospitalizations and more appointments. I can't bear anymore piteous looks from doctors giving me news of a diagnosis.

But since that long dark night before I took Emily into hospital, I confess I have enjoyed a strength of soul that I know is not my own. I didn't fall apart like I expected. The Pastor's wife of the church we attend in Nairobi was able to take the kids for the day. Emily and I actually enjoyed those 5 days together alone in Nairobi. Thomas split his lip but seemed to enjoy some freedom from his hovering mama, and the other kids survived in the bush with Aaron as their caregiver!!

I sensed the Lord's presence with me in a new and fresh way, and he lifted the immediate burden of anxiety from me. Now that's not to say I did not feel bewildered; I still had my frustrations and concerns, but the dread and fear of the future was replaced with peace and the ability to think clearly.



I know God's people were praying for us on many fronts, but I also feel some things have changed deep within me.

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Being here in sub-Saharan Africa has taught me a lot. I've learned that this life is one of struggle. I've always accepted that—at least intellectually. But in reality? I have spent the last ten years wrestling with the concept of struggle in my life; I don't think I had fully come to terms with the fact that this world is the broken, fallen place.

Struggle is very obvious in Africa, especially in the bush. Peel away the layers of ease that we have accumulated for ourselves in the West—the little comforts that numb the pain, distract and shelter—and you will discover that struggle is a normal part of life.

The second thing I have been learning this past year and a half in Africa is the reality of God's sovereignty. I'm learning to take comfort in this knowledge sooner than I used to.

This leads to the third lesson I've learned: that strength in the struggle is only found in accepting, appreciating and enjoying the sovereignty of God. For years I have been clinging to the hope that if I can just control my kids blood sugars well, they will be healthy adults. If I can just control the environment for Thomas and Emily, they won't be exposed to harmful bacteria. I always clung to the hope that if we had the right doctors, and the right lab, and the right medications, then the kids would be ok.

Never did it cross my mind that Emily could become diabetic ... something I had no control over whatsoever! I'm not saying we should not make an effort to do our best. We have agency in this life to work hard, to be excellent.....I spend much time and energy making sure my kids are well cared for so they can have happy and healthy lives. But sometimes God works in and around and alongside our agency to do his will, to show us that he is ultimately in control. He is in fact designing each detail, yes, even the hard details.

When Emily was first diagnosed with CF it was devastating. I did not find much comfort in thinking that God had simply allowed this bad thing to happen but was there beside me to comfort me. Just 'allowing' something denotes the idea that God is sort of weak and incapable of stopping what would be her fate.

The other option then is difficult to grapple with too. If he didn't just allow it, then did he in fact design it?

The truth is that God designs these things which hurt us, just as he designs the things which give us pleasure—and both are for our good. You may find that hard to hear, but to me it is reassuring.

It is reassuring because he is a strong Saviour. He entered into the struggle and sorrow with us, and his death was no mistake simply allowed to happen....it was planned from before the foundation of the earth. This is the God that I needed back then and the God I need now.

Optimism and positivity just don't cut it; one needs a sure knowledge of this sovereign, strong God who provides the strength to undergo whatever he performs.

Isaiah 45:6: "That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none beside me. I am the Lord and there is no other. I form the light and create the darkness., I make peace and create calamity; I the Lord do all these things."

About the Author: Grace Dunlop



Hi, I'm Grace. I am married to Aaron and we have five kids. Four of our children have chronic illness, two with Type 1 Diabetes and two with Cystic Fibrosis. We are also a missionary family, recently moved to Africa, where my husband teaches at a small Bible college in rural Kenya. We live on a compound with a medical clinic, an orphanage with one hundred and thirty children, and a baby rescue unit.

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