

A Holy Limp

I got polio at six months old. Every step of my life, I have walked with a limp. It was a source of great shame to me growing up because of people's stares. And my limp was probably the biggest reason I hated polio and hated how I saw myself, as the "ugly crippled girl."

One day, as I studied the scriptures, God gave me a divine "lightbulb moment." As I read in Genesis 32 about Jacob wrestling all night with God, the same Lord who touched his hip, asked me, "Do you see the souvenir I gave Jacob from his night with Me?" Jacob walked the rest of his life with a limp. He had been touched by God and it changed the way he walked.

It was a holy limp.

In that moment, I saw that there was nothing inherently shameful about a limp if God gave one to His beloved Jacob.

Certainly, this doesn't magically transform a limp into something beautiful and good—after all, it means something is wrong. But God can, and does, bring something beautiful and good out of the limps of our lives.

Over the past few years of walking with hurting people, I have come to see how God uses my limp to connect with those whose hearts are still scarred and limited by the wounds they've received. As I wrote to a dear friend who left behind decades of life as a gay activist when she trusted Christ, and who still has to submit her feelings to Jesus every day of her life:

"You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of my earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side.

"I know that may sound weird, 'glorifying God in our limping,' but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him."

Connecting the dots between my physical limp and my friend's emotional limp encouraged her greatly. Just as I was deeply encouraged by the godly response of my pastor, Todd Wagner of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, to the news that he has cancer in his foot. He wrote to his church family:

"So grateful for the prayers so many of you have offered on my behalf. I covet them for both wisdom in dealing with sarcoma (the cancer affecting my body) but especially sin (the cancer constantly waging war with my soul). There is no greater kindness than your earnest prayer for me. . . . In the coming weeks I will be watching, monitoring, imaging, praying, continually consulting with caring docs, and trusting in a good and sovereign God Who is never asleep. Having to trust my perfect Father with one more thing is no burden—it is a blessing. Anything that reminds me of His goodness and my futility is a gift. Thank you for praying with me... may my every decision honor my King and may my every step—whether with two feet or one, with cancer or without — find me running hard in His way. Pray for my health... but double down on the health of my walk with Him over my ability to walk physically. If He will allow me both I rejoice. ***If the days ahead allow for only one, I would***

gladly choose to limp in this life over anything that would compromise my running toward His presence in faithfulness. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)" (Emphasis mine)

Can you imagine how Todd's last sentence made my heart soar?

But it doesn't end there. Watermark's worship pastor, Jon Abel, "plays with a limp." Several years ago, when mowing his lawn, his lawnmower blade sliced off his finger—his wedding ring finger, which he uses every day as a guitar player. The trauma of losing his finger, with the attendant threat of losing his livelihood, forced him to come face to face with the question of whether a good and loving God was in control. Jon's godly response to this trial, which is documented in this short YouTube video, is one reason he is one of my favorite worship leaders of all time.

I recently learned from my sister—on Facebook, of all places!—that the doctors told my mother I would never walk. Mom decided they were wrong, and worked patiently with me every day, exercising my once-paralyzed leg in the bathtub as she taught me the ABCs and who knows what else.

I don't know why my mother didn't tell me this fact, but I do know this: *limping means I can walk!*

I am grateful for the gift of perspective. Whether it's my polio-caused limp, or Todd's possibility of limping from losing a foot, or Jon's limited ability to play guitar from a once-severed finger, I just know that if God can be more glorified from our limps than from physical perfection, we'll take the holy limp every time.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/a_holy_limp on November 15, 2013