

From Fears to Tears

In a previous blog post, *I'm Scared, Lord*, I wrote about my apprehensions concerning my upcoming hip replacement surgery. My doctor was cheerfully confident that I would not experience the post-operative pain I was afraid of, but I was all-too-aware of my potential complications. As a polio survivor, I'm twice as sensitive to pain as those whose brains were not infected by the poliovirus. On top of that, I was extremely aware of the fact that my severely arthritic hips had become basically frozen, leaving me with a limited range of motion. I knew that the surgeon and her team would be moving my legs in all kinds of unnatural (to me) contortions during the surgery, and I was extremely concerned about how my muscles and ligaments might scream in protest once I woke up from surgery. So I was scared.

But when I shared my fears with God's people, hundreds of them graciously prayed for me, and the Lord swept away my fears like blowing away smoke. Suddenly the fear was gone and I was graced with a very matter-of-fact willingness to just get 'er done. It was amazing. I was held in my Father's gentle and loving cuddle, and I walked in peace the remaining days until the surgery. Metaphorically walked, that is. I hadn't physically walked for well over a year because of pain and weakness.

Well, it has now been over a week since my surgery, and every day I stand amazed at the healing grace and pain-control grace of my gracious Lord. Not a metaphorical standing, either. For the first time in two years, I am able to stand upright and pain free. I try to maintain an awareness of the huge grace in which I stand, marveling at the privilege of being able to once more stand at the sink to wash my hands or brush my teeth. My recovery has gone exceptionally well. I'm able to walk with the aid of a walker and each day the distance I can walk grows longer. Soon I'll be able to go home from the inpatient rehabilitation facility I've been in—once we figure out how to get me into our car.

But I was not prepared for what kept happening in the therapy gym: tears.

I was flummoxed by the unbidden tears that sprang to my eyes the first time a physical therapist asked me to exercise my polio leg in the same way I had just moved my surgery leg. I knew I couldn't; I don't have the strength, and never have. My left leg was originally paralyzed when I got polio as an infant, and it barely functions. But I also live with the mindset of trying to do what people ask me to do, and the clash of those two realities rose up in sadness and frustration that leaked out my eyes. It was rather embarrassing. I didn't know what was going on, I just knew my heart was a storm of unhappy feelings.

When the therapist asked me to climb a two-inch step and I didn't have enough pain meds in me for that, the stabbing pain in my surgery leg rose up through my body and exited through my eyes in tears again. It seemed that tears were just under the surface, ready to leak out at the slightest provocation, for two days.

I was so confused! What in the world was going on? Where were all these tears coming from?

It was my husband who provided the answer, and I thank the Lord for using Ray to bring clarity to my maelstrom of emotion. He texted me, "Honey, you have lived with decades of loss you have learned to manage. Now the loss is renewed and you now are reminded further of the loss in ways you haven't dealt with for a lifetime. Polio sucks. I understand."

That was it! The pain of loss is *grief*. I was grieving the impact of polio's losses on my life yet again, this time with a freshly painful punch: polio is now interfering with my recovery from surgery. Other

people can just use their other leg to support themselves and climb into a mini-van with its higher seats—no problem! I don't have that choice. That's a loss. When asked to do the same exercise with both legs, other people can do that, but I don't have that choice. That's another loss.

I manage to navigate the losses of polio for months and sometimes years at a time without having to actively think about it, allowing me the luxury of not having to face my grief every day. But that luxury has been taken away today and I want to be real and honest about where I am. I live in a fallen world where the evidence of sin's destructive impact on our world is everywhere. My grief, the pain of my losses, is part of that fallen world. But what is also part of that fallen world is God's promise that He would never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). He tells me He is "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

I remind myself of my new life verse that just seems to incredibly appropriate for one whose body is compromised:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I cried today. I let the tears fall as the grief flowed. But then I chose not to lose heart, because this momentary, light affliction is producing for me an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

It's gonna be okay.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/from_fears_to_tears on June 26, 2018.