Lessons learned from a flying

trash can

"He comforts us in our every affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction by means of the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" 2 Corinthians 1:4

#### Preface

Initially, I suppose I began journaling my story as a therapeutic process, both for my injured right arm and for my injured heart. But then it occurred to me that it may help the people around me better understand me and what I've been through, perhaps making it easier for them to forgive me for anything I've done that might have seemed harsh. I also wondered if the lessons I learned could be useful to someone else. So, I decided to write this for me, but with the idea that it may be read by someone else. For clarity's sake, I do not assume the reader knows me and my situation. Therefore, in some cases, I have substituted the names of people because I do not wish to condemn anything they may have done or judge their motives. All I can do is present the reality I perceived at the time, which of course must be filtered through my own weaknesses. I made every effort to be very honest and transparent. This is a little scary for me because I am not ordinarily very open and I tend to be uncomfortable with vulnerability; but with God's help I am taking the risk.

I believe that these pages contain only a portion of my story because I am assured that God will keep refining me as he solidifies the lessons he taught me. And even when I have written the last page and I am reading this down the road, I still will not have actually reached the end to this story- this wonderful journey I am on with the God of all creation. I am a work in progress, but He will continue His work in me until the end! (Philippians 1:6)

So for now I seek to share only one short year in my story. I will share a devastating year in the most positive light possible, because every storm has a lesson if you're willing to be positive.

#### Introduction

John 16:33 …….in ME you can have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world!

This is not a verse I've heard in very many sermons. Nobody wants to think about trouble, but this verse is poignant and personal to me because I have literally LIVED it. Having a life verse has become somewhat trendy, but before this past year, I wouldn’t have known where to begin to choose one of the many verses I love. I certainly don't think I would have ever chosen this portion of scripture, but now it seems this verse has chosen me! I would love to have a trouble free, carefree life; who wouldn't? But I've found that it has been in the midst of trouble that I've come to know God best.

 Now please don't focus on the "trouble" part of the verse, because I certainly don't. I've learned that the trouble part is totally unimportant- it's true but it's not what matters most. Really, we all know the world has trouble. Who among us has never experienced any conflict, pain, or heartache in life? I think I would be pretty accurate in saying that most people could identify something troubling in their lives right now. I see it as a comfort that Jesus Himself warned us that there would be difficulties in this life, from this warning I can conclude that not all trouble is my fault and that I cannot always prevent trouble. I didn't do anything in particular to "deserve" trouble more than anyone else, and I'm not unusual because I've had trouble.(1 Peter 4:12) The part of the verse that has changed my life is the fact that HE has OVERCOME THE WORLD and that we can have PEACE in HIM! Jesus is a perfect balance of love and kindness that draws us to Him in such a way that we long to obey Him and trust Him.

Religious theologies tend to range from one extreme to another. Unfortunately, many have turned into more rules to follow- just like the law of the Old Covenant. I have come to believe that any doctrine that sees life through any extreme other than the **extreme** love of God is a doctrine man thought up to explain those things he can't understand with his mind. It's through the lens of that extreme love that God has let me see all that has happened to me. There is no theology that can accurately capture the goodness of God. Only relationship can do that.

I live in a fallen world. I WILL have trouble. But MY Jesus has overcome that world! This means I can have peace and joy in the MIDST of the trouble. And that is indeed what He has given me. Hallelujah!

In these pages I attempt to describe something that cannot adequately be put into words. So forgive me if I am ever redundant or if any point is unclear. Simply put, the lesson I have learned is that God is good, regardless of circumstances. He is overwhelmingly kind and gracious all the time!

Psalm 129:14 I shall give thanks to you because of the wonders that you have done, for your works are wonderful and my soul is fully aware of this.

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### Feb 13th, 2011 (Sunday)

Somehow I see this day as the beginning of the "trouble". It may, on the surface, seem to have nothing to do with my accident; but just like a movie that starts with seemingly independent plots that eventually become intertwined, it all comes together later- so just hang on.

 The day started with a sense of excitement! My husband and I had just purchased a new ping pong table. The old one had been warped for a long time and not so great to play on. Christian wanted to ask a few people over and have an impromptu ping pong tournament. This, of course, included Michael (Christian's ping pong nemesis from next door) and several teenage boys from Mallory and Olivia's (our daughters) school that he thought may be fun to play with. Included was also Jay, who Mallory "liked", her friend Jane, and a few others who we knew liked ping pong.

 When we got home from church, we started getting things ready. Mallory and Christian went to the store in Mallory's car to get new ping pong balls, and I straightened up. When they got home Christian immediately found me because he was anxious to tell me about what would turn out to be (in my mind) the first of a zillion things that did not fit in with the plan that **I** had for my day, my year, or really my life.

The story went something like this: Mallory and Christian were in the car when the phone rang, it went to speaker since Mallory was driving. It was Jane, who was crying uncontrollably so that they could hardly understand her; but between sobs she managed to say that she couldn’t come to the ping pong tournament because Jay would be there and she wasn't allowed to be around him and Mallory since her parents didn't approve of inter-racial dating (Jay is black and we are not, to be clear).

(I will interject here to say that we later realized this statement by Jane was likely a misrepresentation of what was happening at her house, but of course it may have been her perception of reality at the time. And so on this was built more skewed perceptions by everyone else involved.)

So I immediately went to Mallory's room to talk to her. I found her bawling her eyes out. We talked some; she said "If they were going to be so mean, why didn't they tell me before I liked him so much?" (Here again, I adopted a perception that turned out to be incorrect.) I interpreted Mallory's statement as "I wouldn't have started liking him if I had known people were actually going to hurt me so badly with their prejudices." So after trying to calm her down and talking to her, I said "We really did try to tell you that some people would be really mean about this and you would be hurt, but it's hard to believe before it happens." (This may have come across as an "I told you so" moment to her, and honestly, there was some of that attitude behind it.)

It's hard to describe the pain you feel when your child is hurt in such a devastating way by people she loves. My instinct as a mother was to take away the situation! This has been questioned and misunderstood by people, but that really was my original intention. (I won't lie, I had already suffered much heartache over this situation for reasons I didn't even fully understand myself-yet). I can't recall exactly how the conversation went, but the outcome was that she would not be going to prom with Jay because I desperately did not want her to be subjected to this kind of cruel behavior that would end up hurting her like this again. (Not to mention that it felt like a knife in my heart as well. These were people I loved too, and I wanted to erase my own pain, along with Mallory's). Preventing future pain became my goal, and I thought seeing that goal accomplished would be worth whatever pain it would cause in the moment.

 Here's the thing…I knew in the back of my heart and mind that this was not the answer. But when my heart and mind didn't agree, I tentatively took the side of my intellect. As a result, I did not actually have much conviction behind my words about prom.

So, after some phone calls and talking between almost every person involved, the ping pong tournament somehow happened anyway. There were a few people there who did not know about all this drama and they may have wondered why everybody else was acting so strangely. Jane came, along with her dad (whom I saw at the time as a chaperone to protect her from the "bad" things going on at our house- which also turned out to be a false perception). I did notice that Jay did not talk to, or really even look at, Mallory all day.

I have to say that this whole situation would have been easily alleviated (in that Mallory wouldn't have been allowed to see him) if Jay had been some "typical" or should I say "stereotypical" teenage boy. BUT HE WASN'T - and isn't. Dangit! Now it was complicated- because he is, without a doubt, one of the nicest teenage boys I have ever met. He is kind and charming almost to an extreme, and he clearly demonstrates Godly character.

The day ended, and so began a long tension-filled week. (I don't even remember what pretense we made of Valentine's Day!) Christian thought I was totally wrong in telling Mallory she couldn't go to prom with Jay. His perspective was that we wouldn't back down to other people's prejudices. My argument was that I was more concerned with Mallory being devastated by people whom she thought loved her more than they loved their long held prejudices, even if my stance would be misconstrued as "backing down". That argument was the product of my perception at the time, of course, and it is our perceptions (or should I say MIS-perceptions) that get us in trouble. Even then, I knew I was not right on this one, though I couldn't yet say exactly why (of course I had not bothered to ask God ), and I wasn't ready or willing to admit it to myself yet. But I knew I was wrong (don't tell Christian I said that!) I knew I would have to reverse my opinion, but I wasn't going down without a fight (and it would really be a fight within myself). Christian (having been with me for over 20 years) was aware of my internal conflict, and in his kindness was willing to wait it out.

The next several days were pretty much torture. I went to work like usual. It's funny how I don't remember much about work that week since I was SO preoccupied with everything going on at home. I talked to Christian as little as possible (I wasn't ready to admit "defeat" just yet). Thursday was the district spelling bee, in which Olivia competed, and Christian and I both went. After the spelling bee we all went to lunch- spellers, parents, and teachers. The kids sat together, and the adults sat separately. Soon many of the adults left with their kids, but we still sat with one other mom and talked. We ended up talking about the ping pong debacle and about Mallory and Jay and the prejudices they face. She was very encouraging to us, in fact I remember her as the VERY FIRST person I talked to about this that had not been shocked or at least at a loss for words. And even to this day, she is really the **only** person who was encouraging from the start, neither silent nor disapproving. (Wow, that tells us a lot about the culture we live in.) When we finally left, several of Olivia's friends came home with us for the afternoon, and the rest of the day was remarkably ordinary.

### Feb. 18, 2011 (Friday)

Why does just typing that date bring tears to my eyes?

 I could not have expected that this would be anything other than another "ordinary day". I was off work and I asked Christian to air up my bike tires so I could ride. The weather was absolutely perfect. I had only been riding my spinning bike inside for the past several months because it had been cold, so I was excited at the prospect of being able to ride my newest "real" bike that I had just bought before winter.

 I got up and straightened up around the house. I wasn't feeling so great; the events of the past week were really weighing on me. Where was my sweet little girl in pigtails? Why does going through teenage stuff have to be hard BOTH times- when I was the teenager and now when I am the parent? I was desperately trying to get my scattered thoughts together and convince myself to get out on my bike after the roads had cleared from the morning commute traffic (the bike paths crossed a lot of roads) because I knew from experience bike rides usually made me feel better. My bike was kind of like therapy to me, clearing my mind and bringing me a sense of peace and calm that I desperately needed in that moment. But I couldn't do it! Somehow I felt the need to stay at home and wallow in my thoughts and self-pity. It was true that I didn't feel great, but I wasn't feeling so bad I couldn't go for a ride. Being his slow season for work, Christian used the morning to run some errands and came home for a few minutes just before lunch. He asked if I had already ridden, "No, not yet". But I would, I was always sure of that.

I finally pushed myself into my room and got on all my "biking stuff", including my heart rate monitor, my bright yellow bike shirt, and my clip in shoes. I did love those ugly shoes; they made me feel like such a **real** biker. And that represented the person I wanted to be: strong, fit, thin, confident…. (Which is not the person I would ever be in the same way again after that day). I got out on my bike with my iPhone in the back pocket of my bike shirt so I could listen to music. I always started the shuffle with Shake it by Michael Franti; it put me in such a good mood. I told myself I only **had** to ride for a little while. I certainly wasn't planning on riding the whole loop.

I headed out of the neighborhood, across Spillway Road, and turned right on the bike trail going toward Hwy 471. My plan was to go to 471 and turn around and come back. The weather was absolutely MAGNIFICENT! By the time I got to 471 I was feeling so good and strong (and really better than I had all week), that I decided to turn left and just go on around the entire loop back to the neighborhood. I rode all the way around and across the causeway before I stopped to catch my breath and get water. While I was resting, Christian called; I recognized his ring on the buds in my ears so I reluctantly answered it. He had just called to see what I was doing. When you've been with someone over 20 years, you get to know them pretty well, so I knew the motive behind the call was to be nice and let me know that he was tired of fighting. "UUGGHH," I thought, "he just smells victory and is ready to put it behind us" and the worst part is that I knew he was right (and I was wrong). He was going to "win". It seems ridiculous to look back and know that I held on to some stupid desire to win instead of just doing the right thing. (I really am working on that). So we just talked a few minutes, he told me where he was and that he would be home later and that was pretty much it. He told me he loved me- he always does- and I told him I loved him too. He's a wonderful husband and puts up with lots of weaknesses (translated - crap) from me.

I got back on my bike and finished the loop; I turned back into the neighborhood on Hugh Ward Blvd and then rode past the apartments. At the next stop sign I stopped and saw a garbage truck up in front of me, in my lane but closer to the center than they should've been. I never for a second considered taking another route to avoid it. There was no reason to; I knew the rules of the road (they are the same for a bicycle as they are for a car) and there was no reason not to pass a stopped vehicle. It was perfectly safe…..

I coasted slowly toward the garbage truck and I saw the guy that rides on the back across the street gathering garbage from the left sidewalk. Before he pulled the cans back across to the truck, he stopped and looked both ways. He looked right **at** me (or now I think maybe he looked right **through** me). So I started moving slowly toward the truck. I was getting very close when he got to the back and started dumping the cans. I could clearly see there were no cars coming toward us from the other direction. I cautiously began to veer into the left lane to pass just as he began emptying the cans, knowing he wouldn't have time to get done and cross again before I was already past him. I did, of course, keep my eyes on him the whole time anyway. I am always very aware of what's going on around me when I'm on my bike. I much prefer the bike trails around the reservoir that are reserved for bikers and walkers only, but I just had to make the short trip in and out of my neighborhood on the streets shared with cars.

 Just as I started to pass, it was like he switched into hyper-speed; with one fluid motion that must have taken a while to perfect, he emptied the garbage can and, with the same momentum he used to empty it, he changed the direction of the can to fling it back across the street toward the curb where he had gotten it.

 I was shocked! "Why would he throw a garbage can without looking?"

 It was probably only a fraction of a second, but I thought "how can I avoid getting hit here?!?" and next came the realization "I can't avoid it!" So I just started screaming as loudly as I could "NNOOOOOOOOOO!" He jerked his head around to look at me or at least to see where the scream was coming from that scared him. In that instant, when I saw the recognition in his eyes that he knew what he had done, it was too late. The garbage can was either out of his hand completely or at least moving so fast that he was unable to stop it. I saw it coming at me, an impossibly huge garbage can that seemed to be traveling at a very high rate of speed headed straight at me! Then there it was coming in contact with my handlebars and the front end of my bike! I remember feeling myself going toward the left with the force of the can. The next thing that happened was\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

it was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

I've wondered a thousand times why I can't fill in this blank; I remember so vividly exactly what happened just before and just after this fraction of a second time period. But as hard as I try, I get nothing. (I have recently prayed about this second in time. I think I would like to remember it. I have asked God to let me recall it IF I can handle it. It may be His grace and mercy that are keeping it from my memory, but if I can handle it, I think I'd like to remember that detail. I've left it up to Him.)

 The next thing I DO remember is that it was like I got shocked awake by my chin hitting the pavement. I don't even remember the actual impact of my arm or my body. The only pain I had in that very first moment was on my chin. I also have no idea how my feet came out of the clips. I think now that since I did not put out my hands to try and catch my fall, I was somehow unconscious for that split second, which was probably good-at least I didn't crush both hands and wrists trying to catch my fall. The first thing I was aware of was being face down, arms out at my sides at about a 90/90 bend; I wasn't clipped into my bike anymore, and it wasn't even where I could see it from that initial position.

Then I felt it! Intense heat and pain coming from my left arm. I picked my head up and looked over at it. A small yellow piece of adipose (fat) tissue that looked like a squiggly yellow worm stuck up from the top of my forearm. I thought "great, a compound fracture!" I never felt any fear, just pain and frustration. This was going to be really inconvenient. (That turned out to be completely under-estimating the situation.) I couldn't see the blood yet, and I instinctively knew I couldn't move. When I felt a trickle of panic creeping into my mind I scolded myself; "OK Gina, be calm and think this through".

So started what I'll call the **aftermath.**

### The Aftermath

Introduction

I wrote the description of the accident and various other pages soon after February 18th, and I now come back to fill in and make the story more complete. As I write this introduction to the aftermath, I am past the six month mark of my accident, of "**the** accident" as everyone tends to refer to it. I feel like my life has been artificially separated into two distinct sections. First there is "before the accident" and second there is "after (or since) the accident". I know people don't mean anything by it, but I'm more than an accident victim. And I guess that's the reason I'm writing this, to remind myself that I'm not just an accident victim.

 God has taken me on the most incredible journey of my life since that sunny Friday in February of 2011. I in no way would ever want to imply that I think God caused my accident. The one question I have never actually asked is WHY? Things happen. I have always said to my patients "All we can do is take what we've got right here and right now and do the best we can with it; no need to dwell on the past or maintain regret. We can only affect the present and the future." Wise words (if I do say so myself) - easy to say to someone else and, amazingly, they are also easy for me to believe. And I really do believe them; because I've heard myself say them a thousand times! It's a biblical principle that believing comes by hearing, and I strongly believe that applies to hearing yourself.

I really do believe my own hopeful words about doing the best I can with what I've got. And I **know** God has been with me every single step of the way. But that doesn't in any way take away the pain I've been through- or the heartache. Having peace and God's presence doesn't always mean you are not in a storm; I am just riding out this storm in God's arms. This is still hard for me to wrap my mind around. **The reality that I could have intense pain and the peace of God simultaneously seems like a clear contradiction.** This concept was puzzling to me (even AS it was happening to me) until God brought this example to my mind.

 When Olivia was 6 years old, she developed appendicitis and her appendix then ruptured; she was in the hosp for 5 days. During that time I never left her-how could I? She was my child, and so little; and I loved her. She had a child-like faith in me as her mother- that as long as I was near, everything would be OK. This in no way diminished the pain she had or what she was going through, but it brought her comfort and peace nevertheless because I was there. (Isaiah 66:13 is a good reference here). It's the same way for me with God; I have had an incredible peace throughout, even in pain and heartache and despair. And it is because of His great mercy and love for me that just like Olivia never actually asked for my presence or for me not to leave her; neither did I. God was and is with me for the same reason I was in that hospital with Olivia.

I am His child.

 He loves me unconditionally.

He will never leave me.

This is a really long introduction. But what I want to express before I get into the aftermath (because it's even longer), is that this is not just an account of a horrible accident, but a story of what God has done in my life and an expression of faith for all that HE will still be doing in my life for years to come-because this is not the end of the story.

### Physical Realities of Day 1-

Lots of heat.

 That's what I remember first.

 Lots of heat.

 I was lying face down on the pavement with both arms out to my side, with both elbows bent and hands to the ground…like a 'stick-em-up' position, but face down. I raised my head as much as I could without increasing the pain too much. What was causing that intense heat and pain? I had felt my chin first when it struck the pavement hard. But now the pain was coming from my left arm. I turned my head to the left. A little yellow squiggly piece of adipose tissue stuck directly out of the top of my forearm. I recognized it immediately from cadaver lab in physical therapy school and subsequent years of caring for deep wounds. That yellow fat tissue didn't just come easily out of your arm, not unless the bone forced it out. “Dangit!” I thought, “A compound fracture. O.K. Think for a second. Maybe it's not so bad, a little surgery and a few weeks of recovery and I'm good as new." The playlist I listen to when I'm cycling was playing softly in my ears, but never so loud I couldn't hear everything else around me. I did hear something else. Where was that voice coming from?

"Hey, are you OK?” I turned my head to the right as much as I could and saw the garbage man who threw the can standing over my right shoulder. "Are you OK?" he asked again. "No, I'm NOT OK!" Surely he could see the adipose tissue sticking out the top of my arm and the pool of blood forming under it. "I didn't see you!" was his next emphatic statement. When I think about those words, the optimist in me wants to take it as an apology, although the tone of voice he used leads me to believe it may have been merely an explanation for why he did it.

 Then the driver got out of the truck. "Are you OK?" he asked. "NO, I'm NOT OK!" Were they serious? I can only guess they just didn't know what else to say. They were not going to be a lot of help. I saw the big guy who was driving already on his cell phone; I didn't know if he was calling for an ambulance or if I even wanted one.

I told the smaller guy who threw the garbage can, "Get my cell phone out of the back pocket of my shirt." I raised my head as much as I could without moving my left arm at all, and I brought my right hand up to accept the phone as he handed it to me. “OK,” I thought, “I know Christian’s not home-- he just called. Who can I call quickly? JO!” I was hoping my neighbor and good friend was home as I brought up the favorites screen on my phone and touched her name; the time read 12:43 p.m. One ring……two rings…..come on Jo……. then she answered.

 I steadied my voice as much as I could and spoke deliberately and quickly. "Jo, I've had a bike wreck. I'm in the neighborhood near Jay Walley's house; I need you to take me to the hospital." She replied, "I'll be there as soon as I can."

 I deliberately left out any mention of the garbage men to her since they were the only people here and I was injured. It was a strange sense of self preservation that kept me from mentioning them. I had a sense of being totally at their mercy. I was lying helplessly on the ground and the only two people who were actually with me had also caused my accident. I didn't think I was in a good position to bring up their responsibility in my injury.

 I lifted my head once more to look at my phone and brought up the favorites page again. I called Christian this time. He answered right away. I told him almost the same thing I told Jo, except I finished up with saying that Jo was going to take me to the hospital. He asked, "You think you really need to go to the hospital?" Well, at least I knew I was controlling my voice pretty well. "Yes, it's a compound fracture". I never heard a reply to that. (He later told me he didn't hear that part.) He said, "I'm coming, let me know if y'all leave for the hospital before I get to you." I said OK and hung up.

 My neck was getting tired of straining to keep my head up. And that heat and pain from my arm! It was getting more intense. The garbage man asked me if I wanted him to pick my bike up. Oh yeah, my bike. I couldn't see it unless I strained my head to the right to look a little behind me. At least I wasn't attached to it. I didn't care about that right now! But I said, "Sure, put it on the sidewalk.”

The next thing I remember is a woman kneeling down beside me; she told me she lived on the street and had heard me scream. Her name was Shannon, and she was trained as an EMT. She asked if I wanted an ambulance. "No" I replied. So she asked if she could call anyone for me. I told her I had called my neighbor and she was going to take me to the hospital. Shannon asked me if I wanted her to take my watch off, since they would just cut it off at the hospital. I said, "Oh yeah, that's my heart rate monitor, they can't cut that!" So she proceeded to carefully lift my wrist and unbuckle the watch. With that first movement of my left arm I felt an unbelievable shock of pain travel up my arm. How was I ever going to tolerate moving it enough to get in Jo's van? I laid my head back down and rested. The heat and pain was getting worse, and I already felt very tired and light-headed. That perfect temperature seemed to skyrocket as I felt a cold sweat break out all over my face and neck. If I could only just close my eyes and rest……

Shannon kept talking to me-- what all she said, I can no longer remember. I was still well aware of what was going on, but everything seemed a little distant. It was like I was watching a scene on TV, but one that I wasn't actually paying close attention to because I was sleepy. I just felt like I needed to rest……

Then suddenly Jo was there, talking to me and rubbing my back. OK, I thought, now I need to get up and go get in her van. That plan had seemed so reasonable at first. But now that heat, accompanied by the pain, was becoming overwhelming. I decided to try to at least change position, and maybe even sit up. I reached over with my right hand and gently wrapped it around my left wrist. "OK, y'all lift my shoulders a little,” but when I lifted my left wrist, only the end of my forearm came up with it. Both bones were broken completely through! There would be no way to keep my forearm together with one hand. I moaned loudly in pain (maybe even **scream** would be applicable here) and I said, "NO, NO, I can't get up! But now I felt like the broken bones of my forearm were wrenched apart from that first small movemnet, and the heat and pain had turned into an excruciating jolt going through me. I had never experienced anything like it in my life! I can't even compare it to the slowly building vice of a contraction in childbirth. This pain hit me suddenly, as if it were lightning. I was light headed again. "Just let me rest….please.” There was also now a large pool of blood that had collected below my arm. I wasn't aware at the time that I had two more open wounds that had been made from the multiple fractures on the underside of my forearm because I couldn't see them.

Many more things happened while I was lying on that road. After that initial attempt to sit up and the blinding pain that followed, it was difficult to focus on exactly what was going on. I was still talking and answering questions, and I saw who was there. Only now I can't remember the exact order of events. I was getting more and more light-headed.

"Yes, I see that I will have to get an ambulance, I can't get up."

"Jo, will you call Cara and ask her what hospital I ought to go to?" (I was even able to recite my sister's cell phone number to Jo.)

"No, No, No- I CAN'T sit up! It hurts!"

Of course, I did have to sit up eventually. Another man from the neighborhood arrived with a towel and helped. The fire truck and paramedics arrived and put a cardboard splint lined with foam on my arm after they forced me to sit up. Putting the splint on my arm was another intensely painful ordeal. They started an IV after the splint was on so that when the ambulance arrived, they could administer pain meds right away. The ambulance finally came, and the EMTs were getting me on the stretcher about the time I remember being aware of Christian's arrival. I instructed him to get my bike and my other stuff they had removed from me (glasses, helmet, and watch) and take it home. I asked him to call my mom and tell her we were on our way to UMC since she worked there. They finally loaded me into the back of the ambulance.

By this time, I had already been through more physical pain than I ever thought a person could tolerate and still be conscious. Applying the splint to my arm had been abject torture as the crushed ends of those bones rubbed against each other and pain shot throughout my entire body. I thought at this point I would have rather just gone unconscious!

 I was exhausted by the time I was in the back of the ambulance. I was protectively holding my splinted left arm to try to minimize the movement and subsequent pain it caused. The EMT with me was great. He talked about his own experience with a broken arm and distracted me by relating the somewhat humorous circumstances surrounding it. He gave me morphine time and time again through my IV. I wanted so badly for it to work-- just to make me sleepy or something! But I couldn't feel anything at that point. The EMT was also anxious for my pain to be reduced. He asked me repeatedly to rate my pain. I actually started to feel bad for him that he was not able to help me get my pain under control. I finally told him that I maybe went from a 10 to a 9 on the pain scale of 1-10, but the truth was that it didn't. Of course, since I had never had morphine before, I had no way of knowing that I wouldn't respond to it or that I would actually turn out to be allergic to it. That was the longest, bumpiest ride of my life.

 Initially, I was really glad to be at the hospital. It meant getting out of the bumpy ambulance, of course. I also had visions of pain medicine, being sedated for surgery, and waking up in what would seem like a few minutes feeling a little better. In other words, I was looking forward to escaping some of this misery! They lowered my stretcher out of the ambulance. I saw Mama standing in the bay waiting for me. We exchanged a few words. I think both of us were trying to be as positive as possible for the other. They wheeled me straight into a room. Shortest ER wait in history! Several nurses and residents came in and out of the room. They all looked at my arm and took my history. I was very protective of my arm. They took the splint off at some point, but I still tried not to let anyone touch it as I told them the story over and over. I would later see by the various residents' notes in my chart that I was either not clear in telling my story or the residents were not listening well. There were explanations in those notes replacing my bicycle with a motorcycle or replacing the garbage can with the garbage truck itself. Of course, the story is so odd that they may have assumed I was too confused to tell it clearly and so injected their own modifications to the story.

 I was taken to x-ray, where I was (as I later learned) seen as a very uncooperative patient! Up until that point, I had been given only morphine, which was actually making my anxiety worse and was not affecting the level of my pain. The x-ray techs called the nurse and doctor to help with me. They reported I was complaining that my pain was too great to let them do anything. Well, imagine that! What did they think an arm full of crushed bones felt like? They finally came and administered some dilaudid through my IV. Finally, I got a small bit of relief from the intense pain! It was not much, but I was grateful for anything. The staff was able to now determine I was not tolerating the morphine and used dilaudid only after that. I was finally able to move my arm enough to satisfy the x-ray tech. When the x-ray nightmare was finally over, they took me back to my room.

I am hesitant here to even attempt to describe fully what happened in x-ray. The intense pain was only part of it. The x-ray techs had treated me like a belligerent child. My own perception of my behavior in the x-ray room, and indeed for most of my hospital stay, was that I was attempting to communicate to these "care-givers" just what I needed and what kind of pain I was feeling. Apparently this was not what they wanted from me. They wanted me to be calm and cooperative, no matter what my pain level actually was. The problem with this is that when you are in the middle of the most severe pain you have ever had in your life, calm and cooperative are not your main goals. Escaping the pain is your goal! I was always careful not to argue and I really was trying my best to do what I was told. They kept reciting to me the amount of morphine I had received. Well, hearing that information did not relieve my pain! Eventually, they figured out that I was reacting badly to the morphine and gave me only dilaudid from then on. Of course, by then I had so much morphine in my system, I would not sleep soundly until I eventually went to surgery and was put to sleep.

 The attitude of everyone who approached me in the ER was one that seemed to assume I could not be reasonable in this state, and so I must be over-reacting to the situation. This was and is so disappointing to me as health care worker myself. Have I approached patients this way? It is certainly true that I have believed that some of my patients have not been completely honest about their pain, but they didn't have an arm full of recently crushed bones at the time since I do not work in emergency medicine. I am still baffled as to what behavior the staff expected out of me. I can only guess-- and I really want to give them the benefit of the doubt here-- that they assumed the morphine was actually well on the way to controlling my pain, and it was just my anxiety and poor attitude that kept me complaining. They have a hard job in the ER-- nobody could argue with that, but I would have appreciated more patience and understanding. Maybe this would have led to stopping the morphine sooner. Who knows?

The next few hours in the ER were not much better. I kept thinking the worst was over! (I could not have been more wrong there.) Christian arrived during my ordeal in X-ray and I did get to see my sweet girls for a few minutes. Allen, my step-father, had picked them up at school and brought them to the hospital. They came in one at a time. By then, my arm was lying on a small 'table' with a towel over it. I uncovered it and showed them when they came in. I did not even know how bad it looked then, or I wouldn't have done that. I couldn't see the worst part because the greatest disfigurement was on the underside of my arm, and the pain kept me from rotating those bones and turning it over. What they saw when I revealed my arm from beneath the towel was a forearm bent at an alarming angle about midway between the wrist and the elbow. They kept on a brave face, but later they told me they were a little freaked out. Poor girls! I was actually trying to do just the opposite; I was trying to assure them that everything was going to be OK. Because I knew it was. This was a broken arm, not a brain injury. They left the hospital with the assumption I would be in surgery soon. Christian also went home to get overnight things for him and a few things for me. Mama stayed with me.

The residents came in under the pretense of needing to “clean” my arm and wrap it before surgery to prevent infection. OK. Sounded fine, right? Nope. After they poured a bottle of betadine on my arm to clean it, they preceded to attempt manual reduction of the fractures. That means they grabbed my forearm at both ends and pulled the broken and crushed bones apart from each other in an attempt to make them go a little straighter.

What?

 Well, this is the one place where I will admit to screaming and getting a little bit of an attitude. I only thought I was in pain before that! WOW! There are no words to describe it. (I actually tried for a few minutes. I sat with my hands poised above the keyboard waiting for the right words to come to me. But I realized that would mean I would have to really think about it and really remember that horrific pain. And that is the stuff nightmares are made of. This is the one thing I couldn't bring myself to describe.) I was glad Christian wasn't there to see it, but sorry my mom was. Could they really have known how to put the bones back together blindly? Or did they crush the fragile ends of the bones even more by hitting them against each other? I could let that thought run away with me if I didn't have pictures taken before that in which small pieces of bone that had "fallen out" of my arm can be seen lying beside it. I also wonder how they could go on since I was adamantly shouting at them to stop. In the patient's bill of rights, you cannot legally continue a treatment that a patient refuses. Does that not count in the emergency room?

They eventually moved me to a room to await surgery. I was exhausted, physically and mentally. I felt like I had been treated with such disrespect during that manipulation and prior to that in X-ray. I had a feeling of somehow being violated with no one being willing or able to stop it. I also had not had anything to drink since the accident, and I was parched. But of course - no fluids prior to surgery. Crap! I lay in my hospital bed, arm wrapped and propped on pillows. I wanted so badly to sleep, but sleep eluded me thanks to all the morphine running through my body and making my heart beat rapidly.

 Christian sat on the right side of my bed and held my hand. For hours no one came to take me to surgery. We would ask the nurse to call and she would be put off by the surgical staff. "In a little while," they would say. Time had never crept so slowly. I laid there hungry, thirsty, exhausted but unable to sleep, and in more pain that I ever could have imagined was possible. I waited, and waited, and waited. And so day one ended with waiting……..

### Spiritual realities of day one -

If anyone had asked me about the spiritual realities of that day at the time, I would have looked at them like they were crazy. The only thing my mind could focus on that day was the pain and how I was going to escape it. Later, looking back, I was able to see many examples of God's presence that day. My mind couldn't focus on them, but my heart always knew.

I never panicked- from the time I hit the ground until the end of that day (which brought no resolution to the pain); it never occurred to me to question 'why?' I assessed the situation and quickly decided on a plan of action. Now, if you know me well you may say that is just because I always like to be in control. And I will not argue that. But the situation that day automatically took me OUT of control of anything. The things I did initially were to simply get someone there who actually could be in control! But God was way ahead of me. **He was there and He was in control**. The first person on the scene (besides me and the garbage men of course) was a lady from 5 houses down who had just happened to walk into her backyard at the same time I screamed. She also just happened to be trained as an emergency medical technician. This was not an accident. The next person to arrive was my good friend and neighbor Jo. She is a treasured friend and is trained as a Christian counselor. She did a lot to calm me, and most importantly she prayed for me. She had been having a rare daytime 'date' with her husband and almost chose not to answer my call, but she did. This was not an accident. The first person, I believe, to actually come upon the scene of my accident, was another neighbor. He did not stop initially, but hurried home to get a towel (and drop his daughter off). He arrived back on the scene, shortly after Jo arrived, with the towel I needed at that moment. He was trained as a first responder on an oil rig. This was not an accident. He and the EMT were both named Shannon. I think God threw that in so I would know this was not an accident. The EMT who rode with me in the back of the ambulance had also experienced having a compound fracture in his arm and was able to calm me by telling me his story and how well it turned out. This was not an accident.

So you may ask, well why did this "bad" thing happen? I have really still never asked why. I don't feel the need to ask that question, but other people have asked me what I think about it. I have such a confidence in God's hand on me throughout, that asking "why?" seems like a silly question. I have an example from my own life to help explain that confidence. (Now I see why Jesus used parables. It wasn't to be mysterious or cryptic, it was to help our finite minds understand things that can actually only be understood in the spirit, or you could say that they can only be “felt.” There are no words for these things, so a parable can relate it to something that will help evoke that same understanding or feeling).

So here's my “parable.” When Mallory was about seven years old, she was outside playing in the driveway. Actually, the whole family was outside. It was a nice day, and we were just enjoying it. (Sound familiar yet?) She was riding her bike when she suddenly fell and tore the skin on her knee very badly. Not just a scrape, but ripped skin that probably could have used a few stitches if we had chosen to go to the doctor. She wasn't doing anything she wasn't supposed to be doing. She just fell. She cried and screamed. I took her inside and cleaned her knee off gently and dressed it. I spent the rest of the day staying by her and assuring her it would be OK, even though it hurt right now. At the end of the day, it turned out to be an opportunity to show her I cared what she was going through. It also strengthened her “faith” in me that I would be there to help her when she needed me.

That is really not very different than the day of my accident. I was knocked off my bike. I wasn't doing anything wrong. It was an accident. I had torn skin on my arm (thanks to the bone coming through it). My heavenly Father was there with me the whole time. He immediately got together everyone I needed to help me, and He never left my side. He comforted me and assured me it was going to be alright, even though it hurt right now. At the end of the day my faith in Him was strengthened, and I knew He was going to be there to help me whenever I needed Him, which would turn out to be every step of the way.

Did God cause my fall? Of course not, that's ridiculous! He wouldn't want to cause me to fall any more than I would have caused Mallory to fall. At the end of the day, I had a chance to show Mallory how much I loved her, but I never would have hurt her just to achieve that outcome. (Just living in this world provides more than enough "falls".) Since I love her, could I ever hurt her on purpose? Absolutely not! I believe God is the same way. There may be times in her life when I choose to let her learn from the natural consequences of choices that she made of her own free will and against my advice. But my job is to love her and protect her, and try to help her. Also, Mallory **didn't** come back to me and say "you said you would protect me and look what happened, I fell!" I would naturally respond to this "I was protecting you, I didn't let you do anything that would've really hurt you (like running out in front of cars or jumping off the roof) - accidents happen, it's not anyone's fault." So if I, as a mortal parent, would say this; could this be similar to what our immortal Father would say? He would have said it better, but didn't he put that love I have for my children in my heart to be modeled after the love He has for me? I think so. Matthew 7:11 asks "if we, being sinners, know how to give our children good things, how much more would our heavenly Father give His children good things?" I can see a clear parallel with this situation. I love it when he says, "would you give your child a rock if he asks for food? Well, don't you know I (God) wouldn't either?" (That's my translation) I had asked for protection for myself and my family just like most of us have, and I in no way feel like God "let me down". (Psalm 71:1 – “I run to you for protection Lord, don't disappoint me.”)

Maybe then we should also consider this: If you have asked and believed God for protection in your life (as I have and continue to do), then what does that mean? If you get a paper cut, do you wonder why God didn't protect you from it? Probably not. What If you cut your finger with a knife or burned it on the stove? Still doesn't seem too bad to me. Now what if you dropped a plate and sliced your arm on the edge and had to get stitches? Lack of protection or an accident? What about a broken bone? What about an accident like mine? What about a worse accident?

The point is that if you believe God's protection means you will never get physically hurt in any way, then what about the small stuff? And who drew the line in the sand between small accidents and big ones? We do all live in the same fallen world.

What I think is that God has an eternal perspective and we don't. I believe with all my heart that HE was with me that day, and that HE was protecting me. That still doesn't answer the whys and hows, but there are questions we will not ever know the answer to in this life. That's where faith comes in. I trust God. That's the bottom line for me. One thing I know for sure is that He loves me and He is faithful. He can explain the rest to me in heaven one day.

 What about the people who are in worse accidents?

And then there is the difficult question of Christians who die in accidents?

 I simply don't have that answer (and I don’t spend time asking the questions). But in the end all I do know is that **God is good**.

**1 Corinthians 13:12**

**Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. (New living translation)**

Bottom line - we are trusting a God who loves us. He told us we would never know all the answers here. Would there even be a need for faith if we already had all the answers? Maybe our relationship with God is more important than knowing all the answers. Even when it's painful, we can know He is with us every step of the way.

What I do know beyond any doubt is that God was with me and there was no condemnation of “you didn't have enough faith to keep this from happening” or conversely “I did this to you to punish you for some sin or to teach you some lesson.” I did re-visit this topic many times. I wanted to be sure that I wasn't just making myself feel better…that I truly didn’t do something to warrant this action from God. Or, was it possible this happened because I wasn't walking closely enough with God? But each time I sought God about this, there was no doubt about the answer. NO! Absolutely not!

 I knew God was there loving me and holding me just like I was when Mallory fell. I never would have blamed her for anything she did or didn't do to prevent it, and I never would have said "I made you fall to teach you a lesson for doing this or that wron"'. How ridiculous that all seems to me now. The Jesus I have come to know is loving and kind and gentle but yet strong and courageous- protecting me from the devil who tried coming and lying to me when I was probably most vulnerable to it.

And do I not believe that God can heal supernaturally? Yes, as a matter of fact I know he can. I've seen people recover from things at a rate faster and to degrees higher than what is natural, and I have read all the accounts in the bible of course. And it has happened to me personally. It is sad to me when people don't believe in supernatural healing, but only believe healing they can explain; that's not what happened in the bible and the very definition of faith is "believing what you can't see or explain". God could have had me up and back to normal in no time. So why didn't He? I don't know. I do believe God knows what unique solution will bring us closer to Him, which is more important than physical healing. And honestly, I never even asked Him to heal me physically in those moments. That sounds shocking even hearing it from myself. And even more shocking, I actually didn't ask Him for anything at all. I HAD all that I could have possible wanted or needed- HIS PEACE and HIS PRESENCE- I couldn't have thought of anything else to ask Him for.

Don't start thinking here- well you just don't know God's will is to heal everyone, or well you just haven't accepted what God was teaching you (depending which way you lean).

NO.

Listen to what I'm saying- Jesus shattered every pre-conceived human notion I have ever heard or believed when He picked me up and enveloped me in His presence and His peace! And Romans 8:1 came alive! There is NOW NO CONDEMNATION……..that's what those other things had been to me- condemnation. But NOW there was NO condemnation, only LOVE.

Peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7) is such a fitting phrase, because there is no way to understand it with our human minds. I didn't understand it then and I don't understand it now (and I obviously can't describe it with words; I have the sense I am failing miserably). But I also now know that I don't NEED to understand it with my mind. I understand it with my heart and so that is why I seek His presence daily now, because that's where **that peace is** that I have come to love and rely on. And now I know I don't need to understand peace, and I know I don't have to understand **or** explain all the whys? out there. God is good to me - **All the time**. His thoughts are above my thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). I won't ever understand everything perfectly. But it's OK, because I **do** understand that HE LOVES ME!

When I reread these paragraphs, they are so pitiful compared to the strength of the revelation of His love that God has shown me. For some things, there are simply no words.

### Physical realities of week 1-

When I decided to split these time frames into physical and spiritual realities, I wasn't ready for the physical realities section to be so hard. After all, I just have to record what happened, right? But it is bringing back up that pain and despair that is hard. The spiritual realities just "feel" better. But I wouldn't be telling my story if I wasn't honest about the pain I was feeling, not just physically but also emotionally. (And emotionally is different than spiritually). So here goes…

Early that next morning after the accident, I found myself still in the hospital bed awaiting surgery as the sunlight filtered through the blinds on the window. How was it possible that I was still waiting? It had been about 18 hours since the accident, and I was still lying here with raging pain in my yet to be repaired arm. Not too long after daylight, a young resident named Ty came in to talk to me. I had seen him the day before and he would really turn out to be the most consistent caregiver I would have for the next week. He came to tell me that they would be coming to get me for surgery in a few hours, so I should just "hang in there" till then.

A FEW HOURS?!?

They had been telling me for about the past 12 hours that I would be going to surgery very soon, and now he was saying I would have to wait a few more hours? He asked me if there was anything I needed until then. That was a big mistake! I can almost laugh now at the thought of that question, but at the time it was certainly not funny. I said (in the most firm yet calm voice I could muster)

"Yeah, I do need a few things."

"I need to be able to sleep more than 5 minutes at a time without a searing pain jolting me awake to discover over and over that my shattered arm is **still** shattered and **still** incredibly painful."

"And I need something to eat and drink, which I have not had in 18 hours because no one seems to know when I'm going to surgery!!!"

 If I have ever seen a look on anyone's face that could be described as horrified, it was his. I knew he was just the resident and was not actually in control, but I couldn't hold it in any longer- I had been in pain for too long with no real rest. He looked quickly over at Christian with a look that pleaded for Christian to say something or help him in some way. Christian only shrugged his shoulders and looked back at me, he knew how much pain I had been in and how little sleep I had been able to get. Ty just said "OK" in as cheery a voice as I guess he could manage, and patted my foot and walked out. That was it? Seriously? Christian, of course, consoled me. I think in a way it felt good to at least let them know how I felt, even if they weren't willing or able to do anything about it.

 I can look back now and see that my "outburst" was probably the beginning of my reputation on the floor for being a difficult patient. I can look at it objectively now and understand it from the point of view of a health care worker. At the time, however, I could only see it from the point of view of the patient who was not getting the care needed in the face of a devastating injury. Speaking my mind was seen by the staff as being impatient and not understanding the system they were working with. In reality, the system was not working well and what they didn't realize was the extent of my pain and fatigue. I really wasn't blaming any of them personally. I was frustrated and wanted someone to work a little more diligently with (or against) the system and help me get what I needed.

And that is actually what I accomplished with my little outburst.

No more than five minutes later, Ty returned to my room with the news that I would be going to surgery in just a few minutes. Finally! Someone was taking me seriously and helping me. I can look back at all those times when I've worked with "difficult" patients and wish I could go back and apologize for my attitude. But I always knew they got what they needed **when** they needed it more often than more passive patients. I wasn't here to win a popularity contest (and I certainly wasn't going to win any friends here.) All I really wanted at that point was to be sedated for surgery so I could have some relief from the pain.

They indeed arrived very soon to take me to surgery. This was actually the first surgery I had ever had in my life. Fortunately (or maybe unfortunately) I was in so much pain and so ready for the relief of sedation that I wasn't nervous about the actual surgery at all. They wheeled me down with Christian at my side and prepped me. I was wheeled into the operating room, and so began my first surgery. According to the surgery report, which I got to see months later, putting those bones back together was not easy. The surgeon described the procedure in such detail, I am now more thankful than ever to have had such skilled doctors. I had lost so much bone, and so much of what was left was in pieces, that it was a challenge to make sure they made it the same length as the other arm. Metal bars were attached along both forearm bones, but only the holes near the ends could be secured with screws. The space in the middle had no bone at all, and they actually put synthetic bone graft material in the space in an attempt to help the bones grow back together.

 I got very accustomed to all that goes along with surgery over the next few weeks, and it never really caused me any anxiety at all (there's that peace again). Of course the thing about being sedated is that, well…. you are sedated. And while that was a time that I was not in pain I was also not aware of it. It seemed to me that I was waking up just a minute later in a strange room being immediately aware of the pain in my arm and not much else. I was confused. Where was I? Who was there to help me? This started my experience with recovery rooms.

My education concerning recovery room etiquette was swift and harsh. The recovery room became the most dreaded place in the hospital for me. I awoke after that first surgery confused and in pain. I remember moaning or maybe even crying. I was hoping to see Christian, but instead a nurse was instantly by my bedside to "correct me" and tell me to settle down and she would start some pain medicine in my IV. She started the medicine and I did feel some relief from the pain, but I was still groggy and felt like I was trying to understand a conversation I was hearing through a thick glass. I did manage to pick up another nurse coming and asking my nurse if I was ready to be moved back to my room. My nurse answered," when she completely calms down, we can take her back. We can't let her go back like **that**." So, that day I learned a little bit about how to behave in a recovery room.

 My new self-imposed guidelines were:

- Be completely calm

- Only a little talking

- No complaining

Then -and only then- would I be released from this depressing windowless room. Why didn't they just tell me? I'm pretty good at faking my way through a situation. And I always did after that. I was very quiet and tried to put a pleasant look on my face, and they took me back quickly.

The rest of the day was a blur. The girls came. My mom came. And of course Christian never left my side. The sedation lingered and my pain was a bit decreased so I was able get a little sleep. I got water and just a little food. I felt better than I had in 24 hours. That night and the next day (Saturday night and Sunday) passed without complication. I had a few visitors. Things finally seemed to have taken a turn for the better.

 The doctor came and told me that they had not done the elbow replacement and that I would be going to surgery again on Monday for that. I was a little disappointed, but feeling pretty hopeful that I would recover quickly after that. (I found out later that the doctor who specialized in the elbow replacement was not working that weekend and so they had to delay that part until Monday.) The pain was manageable after that first surgery, and I was feeling good about the next one and about my prognosis in general.

Monday morning came to find me hungry and thirsty due to the "no food or drink after midnight" rule that comes with surgery. I went to surgery, not really early, but in the morning. The surgery went smoothly enough, and I tried out my new technique for managing the recovery room. I was pleased when it worked perfectly. They brought me back to my room very quickly when I awoke without a sound and never complained. I was beginning to get the feeling that they don't really want you there; they just want to look like they did a good job getting you and your pain under control. Unfortunately, that was the only surgery that didn't agree with my stomach. Yuck! Enough said about that. That afternoon after surgery I began to actually have more pain. I asked for my pain medicine every hour like clockwork since that was how often the surgeon said I could have it.

That Monday evening marked a turn for the worse for several reasons. My nurse, who I later learned was a “floater” nurse assigned to me because of my illustrious reputation, was not interested in having to inject pain medicine through my IV that often. I can look back and see that she probably had too many patients and was busy, but her nasty attitude toward me was not necessary in any case. After she was certain my surgeon had left for the day, she called the resident still on duty at the hospital and convinced him that the surgeon had put me on too much pain medicine, so the resident cut it in half. IN HALF! When she came and told me this news, it's hard to express the utter despair I felt. I felt like a child being scolded by a teacher for using drugs. My pain had gradually been worsening even with the current level of medicine, and now it was cut in half. There was no way she would hear any of that though. There seemed to be nothing I could do. The nurse actually told me that now my surgeries were over and it was time that I needed to start getting better. (Oh, if she had only known how much I wanted that!) She told me this in as much of a condescending tone as I had ever had anyone use with me, and just 3 short hours after I had the head of my radius cut off and replaced with an artificial joint.

What we didn't know is that I also had the beginning of compartment syndrome, which was the reason for the increased pain.

Compartment syndrome is a condition that can develop after serious injury and/or surgery. After a surgery, your body has a natural, healing process of rushing fluid to an area that results in swelling. Compartment syndrome occurs when this process is overactive due to the severity of the injury. You get way too much swelling for that part of your body to contain. The huge amount of fluid presses on and restricts blood flow to muscles, nerves and blood vessels. It compresses nerves until they are flattened and often damaged. This, of course, causes severe pain that can only be relieved when the swelling is relieved. Compartment syndrome occurs most often in the lower extremities, and so is often not diagnosed quickly in the arm.

Now that we have the medical lesson out of the way, I'll try to describe what compartment syndrome is like to the patient.

Beginning that Monday night, I felt **such** an intense pressure on my arm. It was pressing on every nerve. It was like being shocked or burned from the inside. Or you could say it was a continuous, burning shock. At first the swelling didn't seem too much out of the ordinary for the injuries and surgeries of the last few days. And that made it more difficult to diagnose initially. That was a completely miserable night. I had the ever increasing pain in my arm to deal with, but I also had this strange fear of the nurse who had already treated me badly. That's so bizarre to say, because I'm not the kind of person who is afraid of people or who backs down to someone who has treated me rudely. But I knew that one reason she did not like me was because she had decided I deserved this reputation for being demanding, and that now I had somehow “talked the doctor into” frequent doses of med and that really irritated her. I remember having some idea that she was going to come into my room during the night and……..I don't know. I just didn't want her coming in there unexpectedly. I know I drove Christian crazy that night about both the pain and my fear of the nurse, both of which he must have thought were a bit irrational. Now I can see that the fear was totally irrational-- the pain was not.

 The next morning when the doctor rounded, I told him I was feeling enormous pressure in my arm. He loosened all the surgical garments and saw it was extremely swollen. I was trying not to complain too much about the pain at that point; it seemed a little crazy even to me that I would be having more pain now than the day of my accident. So I tried calmly telling him how bad the pain was. Attempting to stay calm did not help the doctor believe I was actually in severe pain. They are more accustomed to patients who are out of control when they have lots of pain, and since I was so calm he didn't seem to have any sense of urgency to help me with it. (I could not win, either I was labeled as being hysterical or I was labeled as exaggerating if I calmed down). He told me to be sure to elevate my arm, which I had been doing, and he would check back with me later.

As the day wore on I became more and more agitated because of the pain. My mental state seemed to deteriorate in correlation to the increase of the pain and swelling. By the afternoon, I was mostly just lying in the bed moaning and crying. It almost felt like some kind of out of body experience. The pain in my arm had gone from burning to an inferno. Still, I could see how crazy I looked and sounded to everyone around me, and I didn't blame them for thinking I was losing it. I even wondered if I was going crazy. There was no way I could be feeling this much pain! But there it was, I couldn't eat or drink or think about anything else besides my arm. Doctors would come in my room occasionally and tell me to elevate it. "I AM!" I would shout, although usually only in my head. Anybody who knows basic first aid knows to do that. This swelling was **not** from failure to elevate my arm. Dr. Gray, the surgeon who performed the elbow replacement, seemed to be the only rational person on the medical staff that believed me and knew what was happening. Or maybe that just means he was the only compassionate one. I even had residents come in and try to tell me the pain was in my head.

 "REALLY? IN MY HEAD?" Well thank you Mr. Medical Student for your professional opinion, but that's not really helping me right now!

Although he had mentioned it earlier in the day, it was mid-afternoon before Dr. Gray seriously started talking about the likelihood of compartment syndrome and possibly needing more surgery. By late afternoon my hand and arm had about tripled in size and I was getting huge, clear, water blisters from the fluid seeping out through my skin because my arm couldn't contain anymore. (I still have scars from the most severe water blisters)

It was sometime that afternoon that a friend called Christian to give him the sad news that the husband of an acquaintance had been killed suddenly in a car wreck early that morning. Wow. She was our age and had several children. That gave me some clear perspective in the midst of the raging pain. This was just my arm, not my life. It would be OK.

 About 4:00 Dr. Gray came in and decided we couldn't wait any longer and risk more muscle and nerve damage than I may already have. We had to do surgery. He came in to explain that he would have to cut my forearm open from wrist to elbow and leave it open for the fluid to be able to escape. I just looked at him. I think he half expected me to say "Oh no, maybe I can stand it a little longer if there's any other way. But all I could say was "OK". That convinced him he was right about the compartment syndrome because the severity of my pain made me willing to undergo any treatment. At that point I would have said OK to amputating my arm if he had told me it would stop this pain. I was so physically and emotionally exhausted that I felt like I didn't have the strength to hold my head up or say more than a few words.

I was taken to emergency surgery. When they say emergency they aren't kidding. They wheeled me through the back door of the surgical suite. Wow, I was usually already sedated by the time they brought me in here. And now I see why. The temperature was maybe 55 degrees and the avocado green walls and the thousand stainless steel tables and instruments were not designed to make a patient feel comfortable. They hoisted me over to the cold, narrow operating table, and placed an oxygen mask on my face. The anesthesiologist instructed me to count backward from 100. I think that is a little dramatic. He could have just said, "OK, count to three" and I probably wouldn't have made that either before the medicine had me sedated.

The next thing I knew I was in the dreaded recovery room. Only this time the nurse "blew" the vein in my arm trying to push too much fluid through it too quickly. They tried several times to get an IV started somewhere else, but they had already "used up" most of the good veins. By this time, the pain from the gaping wound the surgery had left on my arm was really intense without the usual pain med coursing through my veins. They tried several veins on my right arm and even on my foot. This time I had trouble performing my recovery room act of being calm and cooperative. They finally got an IV started on my knuckle. At that point, they could have put it in my head, whatever helped with the pain. After they got my pain med started they returned me to my room. They weren't too concerned about me being calm this time; I think they were just ready to be rid of me. And they did actually seem to feel bad that they had to let me go for so long without any pain meds.

The rest of the night went reasonably well; at least the pain medicine was actually relieving a more of my pain now. With the pain of the compartment syndrome to compare it with, this level of pain was very manageable. After I briefly related what had happened with the previous night's nurse and my pain med, Dr. Gray gave me a pump for my medicine after surgery so I wouldn't have to rely on the nurses. I began to think maybe he was actually an angel; if I hadn't seen him since I would be convinced of it.

I had a wound vac on my arm connected to a machine to draw fluid out of the large wound created by the surgery. It was like having a catheter that is attached to a big black sponge that would draw the excess body fluid out of the wound, gross but true. You could see the thick bloody drainage creeping through the long plastic tube. There was constant suction on the sponge which was not painful in itself, but was a really weird tugging sensation on my arm 24/7.

The next few days passed without any problems. By Thursday, I was feeling pretty good (at least compared to how I had been feeling for the past 6 days). We were ready to go home, but couldn't seem to get an answer as to when that would be.

Living with the use of just one arm was not an easy adjustment. Not to indulge more information that anyone really wants to hear, I'll just say I needed someone to come to the bathroom with me and "be" my left hand. Yuck. How humiliating under normal circumstances, but in the midst of the pain and drama going on, I didn't even care. I am left- handed, or I should say I WAS left-handed, it was a long time before I could do anything with my left hand (and I still do most things better with my right hand). Brushing my teeth was hard, flossing could only be done with a floss pick, putting on my contacts was challenging, and getting my hair up in a pony tail was out of the question.

As you may imagine, eating was the most difficult thing. Have you ever tried to eat with your non-dominant hand? I even spilled Jell-O. At least my family found amusement in watching me try to eat. Christian trying to feed me was even worse. He tried, bless his heart, but now I think our kids weren't as messy as I thought when they were babies. Their dad just had trouble hitting their mouths. Luckily, I didn't have much of an appetite that week. (If only I could figure out how to get that problem again!) When I said I felt like something sweet, my family was happy to oblige. They asked me what I wanted and I decided jelly beans sounded good. So they started searching for jelly beans and someone found a small package at one of the gift shops. I maybe ate three before I felt sick again. But for some reason I have really liked jelly beans ever since, they are one thing I can eat easily with my right hand after all.

So I naturally was looking forward to using my left arm again normally, and it never really occurred to me that maybe I wouldn't, until……

Dr. Gray came into my room late in the week and started talking to me about my future function. The first thing he said was that it would be about a year until I had all the function I was going to regain. I kind of felt like I had missed something. What did he mean all the function I WAS GOING TO regain? Was he implying that I may not regain all my function? He was working on the assumption that I already knew how bad my injury really was (which I didn't) and so I must also already know I wouldn't get all the function back in my arm. He probably should have started out with explaining to me that my injury was more severe than they had let me know initially and that I had lost a lot of bone. I discovered later that they classified my injury as more of a crush injury than just broken bones and that they had to piece it together. Add the complication of the compartment syndrome and all the surgeries it would take to fix that- and they weren't giving me a great prognosis. So when he went on to say that I would probably have to have a bone graft later because there were wide gaps in both bones of my forearm, I was a little puzzled. I honestly just looked at him blankly and decided to remember all he had said so I could think about it later and figure it out. I wasn't, at the time, ready to digest the information that my function wouldn't return to normal.

I spent the last several days of that week talking to plastic surgeons about what it was going to take to repair my arm. I also had several visitors that were welcome company, and Christian even left for a few hours on Thursday since I was feeling a little better. They told us maybe we could go home late Thursday. Then they told us maybe Friday morning. Then they told us they would need to take me back to surgery Friday morning to clean and redress the wound and we might get to go home Friday afternoon. But that didn't happen either.

After the surgery Friday morning, I was once again in a lot of pain. The pain specialist came to see me and decided to try me on some new medicines that might control my pain a little better and that I could take at home. So they needed to try that out on me first. Then we had to learn to use the wound vac and get new supplies from an outside company, and they mentioned that - "oh, insurance doesn't cover that so be prepared to pay up front". So after all that was finally done, I did get to go home Saturday afternoon. Eight full days since my accident, almost to the hour, and I was finally going home. It seemed like it had been months. But I was still a little apprehensive about being at home with the issue of controlling the pain still not completely settled. But we went anyway.

The nurse wheeled me out in the wheelchair. Christian, Mallory and Olivia had carts and bags loaded with everything that had accumulated in my room. Clothes, toiletries, food, flowers, balloons, pillows, blankets, wound vac supplies, wound dressings, etc, etc, etc.

It seems funny to think about now, the girls were arguing over who had to push which cart or carry which bag. But at the time, nothing was funny. I was light headed already with a throb all up and down my left arm. We waited on the curb in the chilly air for Christian to get the car. I gingerly stepped into the car on the passenger side and we were off.

I had the strangest feeling during that car ride. It was almost as if I was visiting a city where I hadn't been for years. Every street and building seemed only vaguely familiar to me. I was having trouble recalling places I had seen every week for years. I had been so consumed with myself and my personal drama, everything else was faded in my memory. Christian pointed out that the pear trees had bloomed in the last week with the nice weather. That was great, but all I was really interested in was getting home and lying down.

They took me by the spot of my accident because they wanted to show me the blood stain that was still on the pavement after eight days. When the car was positioned just to the left of it, I opened my door with my right hand and peered out at the black stain about the size and shape of a large cucumber. It didn't upset me particularly. Actually in some strange way it confirmed that “yes, I did have a pretty severe accident in real life; it was not only severe in my head”.

I don't think I have ever been so glad to see my house. I was thankful that our “decorating style” (or lack thereof) was comfort-driven and not “fancy” like my mom's house. (Not a judgment, just a personal preference). Mama was there and had moved in a small table next to my recliner in the den. I was a little unsure if I liked it at the time, but she really knew what she was doing, and it would be greatly appreciated in the coming months that were spent primarily in the recliner. That ugly blue recliner was an oversized lazy boy that we had purchased when I was pregnant with Mallory. It had served me well through two pregnancies and caring for two infants. It was as comforting a place to me as any I knew. Lying down flat pulled on my arm in odd ways and was uncomfortable, so the comfort of the worn blue leather recliner was perfect.

I took my spot in the recliner right away. It was a spot that would really become mine permanently. After Christian returned from the drugstore, we applied one of the fresh fentanyl (pain) patches, and I settled in. Mama was in the kitchen cooking supper. Of course, a meal for me still consisted of about 4 bites, but the rest of my family had to eat.

It wasn't long after supper that my stomach started rebelling against the food. It only took a couple of minutes before those 4 bites were right back up. The fentanyl patches were not going to work, it was the only thing I had done differently. I pulled it off. I could put up with a little more pain rather than that! The whole episode had my arm throbbing.

This was going to be interesting.

### Spiritual realities of week one

I typed this heading and then skipped to other pages for quite a while. It's hard even for me to explain what would seem to be polar opposite truths of this week. They are:

 1) I was in the most pain I had been in all my life- it was almost continuous for the whole week and I seemed to have one complication or problem after another

 AND

 2) I was in perfect peace. I could just feel that I was in God's arms and I felt His presence very strongly.

 Now before this happened, I would have said that these two things couldn't co-exist. It just doesn't pass the test of my logic or my understanding of the world. Even now, I have to constantly remind myself not to “lean on my own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5) and to check my “heart memory” to be able to say that YES, these two things can and did co-exist for me. (I think maybe that’s why after Paul and Silas were thrown into the dungeon and their feet were chained, they were still rejoicing at midnight!)

That doesn't mean I was a perfect patient (apparently not), or that I never felt heartache or despair emotionally. I am not claiming that I was some “spiritual giant” in the midst of trouble. But there was a place in me that was in perfect peace and that always knew that God IS a spiritual giant. There is a verse I liked to meditate on a little while after I came home that seemed to describe it perfectly. Proverbs 42:5 says "why are you in despair oh my soul, Hope in God, for I shall still praise Him for the saving help of His presence." I told Christian several times during that week that I really just felt a peace about everything, and that I wasn't afraid or worried. One of the days, I think it was right before the emergency surgery where I was going to let them slice my arm open and leave it open, my sister said to me "you haven't seemed at all freaked out by any of these things, I just want to make sure you know exactly what's going on here." That makes me laugh now to think of it. She didn't **want** me to be “freaked out,” but she did want to make sure I had a good hold on reality and was making good decisions. It is true that I was on a good bit of pain medicine, but I have seen hundreds of patients on pain medicine that were indeed freaking out anyway, so that wasn't the reason for my calm. I can only say it was God. **He was there, and I knew it.**

When I think back to that week now, the days are blurred together a little. A lot happened in a short amount of time. But the overall feeling I have when I think of it is not misery because of the pain. It is joy…actual joy, because of the strong, comforting assurance of God's love for me and the fact that I totally trusted Him. I had no semblance of control over my life at that point, but He did, and I knew He meant only the best for me. The strange thing is this seemed like a wordless communication between us. The same sort of wordless communication I have felt with my children when they were newborns maybe. But this time, I was the helpless one.

 I felt in some way unable or unwilling to pray, in the conventional way, because of some sense that the wordless communication and trust would be damaged if I did. I couldn't bring the fear and doubt that my natural mind might have into that bond by putting a voice to the negative thoughts that would invade my head. My heart did all the talking. Ever since then, when I have had times when all my emotions could manage was fear and despair, I have “rested” in God and not tried to express anything with words. I knew intuitively that no words at all would be better in the moment than negative words, so I had to just know that God was with me. Quietly.

 Although these words don't completely describe what I felt during this week any more than you could find the words to describe exactly what the love you have for your spouse or children “feels” like, they are the closest I could find.

I have tried several times to make this section longer, but this sums it up. Through all the pain and the surgeries, I was never afraid. Really thinking about that week brings tears to my eyes; not because of the horrible things that were going on, but because God's presence was so strong. I couldn't have expressed it then even with these inadequate words, but my heart knew.

In 1873, Horatio Spafford wrote words that I can identify with. After two years that took the lives of all his children and his business was destroyed by the Chicago fire, this was the song that poured from his heart.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

I can't help but cry when I hear this song. But it's the hope I see in the lyrics that makes me cry, not the despair. I had before believed that he was implying that God was punishing him, but now I see it as an expression of thankfulness to God for His amazing peace in the midst of trouble he has experienced in a fallen world. He felt the same thing I'm trying to describe; a river of peace overtaking him even as he was among the huge billows of sorrow.

### Physical realities of the next 2 months

Coming home was not an end point but was really only the beginning of my journey. I had been so distracted with all the activity in the hospital; I had not realized completely the extent of my functional loss, what it would mean, or what else would be coming.

The first few days I was home were rough, of course. Controlling the pain was a little bit of a trial and error process. The pain patches were out of the question. The pain specialist had given me two types of pain pills so I could alternate and take one or the other as often as every 2 hours. And that's exactly what I did the first week or so. I was always waiting on the next time to take my med hoping that would be the one that would relieve the pain. Pain medicine should more accurately be termed “pain reducers.” I have never had complete relief of the pain. I have had to live with it just being reduced.

We also were learning to deal with the wound vac and its accessories that I had to carry around with me all the time. Getting comfortable in any position was difficult, and trying to get on the bed and sleep was almost impossible. Christian and the girls were there to help with any little thing I needed; they were so attentive and so good not to upset me or get upset with me. The house was so quiet and peaceful, I couldn't have asked for better caregivers.

 During the weekdays there were several people who were always wonderful to offer to stay with me. My sister and my neighbor took turns most of the time so that I was never alone those first few weeks. Mostly I would sit and watch them wash clothes and fix meals and whatever was needed. I was for the most part too weak and in too much pain to do anything other than go back and forth to the bathroom. Thank goodness I could handle that part alone now.

 Of course I was using a stool in the shower, being careful to leave the wound vac outside the shower curtain and wrapping my arm in a plastic bag so it wouldn't get wet. I was always completely exhausted after a shower.

Exhausted had a whole new meaning. It wasn't the exhaustion I felt after our 50 mile bike ride a few months ago; now there was a light-headed feeling that went along with it. My heart would race and I would suddenly feel very hot. At that point, my immediate goal became not to pass out. There was no way I could even shower alone. Christian would come out just as soaked as I was when it was over. After that ordeal of a simple shower, all I could do was collapse in my recliner and take a pain pill- no matter whether the two hours were up or not.

Wonderful friends organized and prepared meals for us every day for weeks. I still didn't have an appetite, so it was nice not to even think twice about what my family would be eating. One friend graciously appointed herself the meal scheduler so we didn’t have too much coming in one day. That was a great idea, I must say. I was overwhelmed by the constant parade of friends that dropped off food and gifts. Some were close friends, but some were friends that I might not have expected to go to so much trouble. Every single person that prayed for us, sent food, flowers or gifts, and the ones who called Christian constantly to check on me, all made me feel more loved than I think I ever have before in my life. How many times have I “not gotten around to” cooking for someone? The answer is - probably more times than I have actually followed through. I had no idea what gestures like this could mean to someone. Believe me-- I will not be too busy to help other people now that I am aware. I recorded everything we were blessed with and who did it, which was its own challenge because I was scratching it out with my right hand. My sister wrote thank you notes I dictated to her from the list.

 Now the girls loved the food. Food other than what was the norm for them was great. They looked forward everyday to what would be coming next. They were as thankful as I was. I guarantee they ate better in those weeks than usual! I couldn't have been in a better environment to recover. Of course, I hadn't really even reached the recovery phase of my journey yet…because I only had six days after I came home until I had to go back to the hospital for my next surgery.

That Friday I had to go to the outpatient surgery department of the hospital to get a skin graft to cover the wound on my arm. The surgeon told me that he may not be able to do the actual skin graft off my leg. Skin grafts will not heal over exposed tendon so if the wound was very deep, I would have to have a layer of artificial skin put on first. I was pretty nervous; not really about the surgery itself (I was getting comfortable with that), but about the unknown-- the skin graft. I was hoping it would not be as painful as people who had experienced a skin graft had led me to believe.

I went into surgery early that Friday morning. We had a little mishap with misplaced wound vac supplies that we were supposed to bring with us, but even the sales rep from the wound care company was going out of her way to help us.

 Christian was there the whole time. He wouldn't have been anywhere else. (I just wish they would have let him come into the recovery room, and then maybe I wouldn't have disliked it so much). Perhaps they were so harsh because they assumed I was still partially sedated from surgery and didn't really know what was going on. Regardless, the surgery was over and I had my typical recovery room experience. Be calm, only minimal talking, and no complaining. That was indeed the magic bullet, in no time I was back in my outpatient room with Christian.

 The nurse came to report on the surgery. The surgeon had only put on a layer of artificial skin and I still had the wound vac over it. He said the wound had been much too deep for the regular skin graft since there were multiple tendons exposed by the previous surgery. So the artificial skin - called Integra- would be sitting directly on the tendons of several muscles. He didn't expound on this, but I knew enough about muscles and the healing process to know that this could mean those tendons would be permanently scarred down to the Integra and could affect function. (What I didn't realize is how much it could affect pain levels as well.) So that also meant…more surgery! Oh no.

I had another week at home before the next surgery. The pain from the first plastic surgery wasn't too bad really. After the first day it felt about the same as it had before the surgery. It was painful with any movement at all, but if I found just the right position propped up on my pillows and was very still, I found I was relatively free of pain for at least a few moments at a time! That was great, and it was the first time in these 2 weeks that I had a single moment free of the excruciating pain. So my favorite activity was sitting very still!

 I was getting a little bit stronger every day. I had gotten pretty good at managing the wound vac; it was like a purse attached to my arm by a tube so I had to take it everywhere. We had a little problem with the first wound vac machine we brought home. It had a small motor in it which was the suction for the wound, and it smelled like they had forgotten to clean out the drainage from the last wound before they put it on me. It was disgusting, we would wrap it in towels and blankets to mask the smell and the occasional warning beep that we didn't know how to turn off. The wound care supply company was more gracious than they had to be with our constant complaints and questions, and came and replaced it until the problems were solved.

 I had begun staying by myself for short periods of time during the day. I was fine to get in and out of the bathroom, as long as I was wearing a sundress and so didn't have to fight with pants- elastic continued to be challenging and buttons were impossible. Showering and fixing my hair were still major issues. Christian could help with the showering part, but the hair part- not so much. About all you can do with one hand is dry your hair in no particular pattern and brush it in no particular style. My hairstylist, who is my cousin, suggested a hand-held round brush style hairdryer, and that did help. One sweet friend gave me a contraption that sits on my counter and holds my hairdryer for me. It has a flexible neck and allows me to use a brush to style it a little with my right hand while it dried. (I still use that to this day.) I could even go to the kitchen and get something out of the refrigerator that someone had left there for me. The only requirement was a light dish that didn't take two hands to lift and was easily opened with one hand. We still had meals coming, so there was always a lot to eat; I just didn't have the appetite for it.

The next Friday I was back in surgery. This time they were sure I would have the donor skin removed from my thigh and placed over the artificial skin. I wasn't very nervous this time. Last time had really gone so well, how much different could this time be?

I was about to find out!

I woke from this second plastic surgery to the usual cast of grouchy nurses in the recovery room. I was still and good and they returned me to my room quickly. I already had a lot of pain on my left thigh where a strip of skin roughly the size of a business length envelope had been removed; it was really more painful than my arm immediately after the surgery. When I got back to my room, I was ready to get to the bathroom. (Those IV fluids demanded it.) Christian came over to help me out of bed. When I sat up, a totally unexpected and excruciating pain came from my leg. "Wait! Something must be wrong." Christian anxiously started asking about my arm. "No, it's my leg!" The closest I could come to describing the feeling of the pain was that in that moment I felt as if the surgeon had accidently left some sharp objects just under my bandage that all stuck into my leg at the same time when I stood up. I immediately sat back down. "How is that possible?" How could it hurt so badly where they removed the skin? They had told me it would be painful, and so I was expecting the kind of pain I was having in my arm after the last plastic surgery. I was not expecting this kind of take-your-breath-away and bring-tears-to-your-eyes kind of pain with every movement, which is exactly what I now felt. In the end, I HAD to get to the bathroom. When I looked down blood was streaming down my leg out of my bandage already. It stained the baggy warm up pants I had been instructed to bring for the ride home. They did not even re-dress the wound; they simply covered it with one more layer of gauze that was also leaking pretty soon. I learned to really appreciate the fact that the original trauma was not to my leg and that I had been able to walk without too much trouble. At least until now! This was not going to be easy.

Somehow I made it home that day. I don't like even thinking about how that donor site felt, it still makes me cringe. I tried lying on the bed with a ton of pillows propping me up on every side just so I wouldn't have so far to walk to the bathroom. Getting in and out of the bed was terrible. Walking the 10 feet into the bathroom was worse. Managing clothes over my leg was nearly impossible and sitting and standing was excruciating. And I STILL had the wound vac on the graft and so had no use of my left arm on top of everything else. Needless to say, that next week was not as good as the one before had been.

The week after that second plastic surgery was Spring Break for the girls. We were supposed to be having a wonderful family vacation—first to Universal, and then swimming with the manatees. I had just recently discovered a place on the western coast of Florida where you can swim with Manatees, and honestly I think I was more excited about that part than anyone else was. I had put a lot of time and effort into planning our spring break vacation. This was lasting way too long! This was not what I had planned.

You never would have known Mallory and Olivia were disappointed that we didn't get to go on vacation. They were so sweet. They stayed with me and helped me. They brought me food and cleaned the house and didn't fight with each other. How in the world did I get such great kids? They encouraged me and loved me in every way they could that week.

I had lots of company that week of Spring Break. My sister and niece and nephew spent a lot of time with us. I was glad to have the distraction. They entertained me by playing dance central on the X-box. My favorite activity now was staying as still as I could for the sake of my arm **and** my leg. My mom and sister were beginning to want me to get out of the house some. I couldn't make them understand I was perfectly fine with staying at home. Leaving home meant walking on my leg and moving my arm, which was NOT how I got my pain free moments. I let them take me out a few times just to humor them really. (There was also a ladies conference in Mobile I wanted them to take me to in a few weeks, so I had to convince them I could handle getting out of the house.) I am generally not the type of person to want to stay home all the time; and so for me, not wanting to even go out a little bit was surprising. But at the time, the pain level I had with activity made even short trips laborious.

Going to a restaurant meant sitting in a booth trying to position my purse (which also held my wound vac) into a comfortable pillow for my arm. Going to Wal-mart meant riding on a little scooter, again with the problem of where to prop my arm, and we were sure to see someone we knew. They would ask me how I was doing and look at me like you might look at a puppy with a broken leg, eyes full of sympathy. Not knowing quite how to respond I would smile and say, "I'm feeling better."

LIAR! (Well, what was I supposed to say?)

I was forever grateful for expressions of love and for prayers, but sympathy was uncomfortable for me. I would leave wondering how I had let anyone talk me into going out in the first place.

About a week after the second plastic surgery, I was having trouble with the dressing on the wound on my leg. I put some surgical tape over it to hold it. Unfortunately when I checked it the next day, it had slipped down some. I then had to rip the tape directly off the wound, opening it back up. I lay on the bed and cried. My own words came back to me: “We just have to take what we've got and go from here, there's no need to question or regret anything.” Those words came back to me often, and they were actually helpful. Emotions and pain can overwhelm you, and sometimes I needed those rational words in my head to keep me from having too much of a pity party.

That same day, I had the humbling experience of going to Sam's with my sister and having to be pushed around in a wheelchair because my endurance wouldn't carry me that far and the pain in my leg wouldn't allow that much walking. Before she came to pick me up, I picked up the phone to call her a hundred times to tell her not to come. I knew I could use the excuse of the bandage being stuck to my leg wound. But those words wouldn't leave me alone. And I still wanted to go to that ladies conference. Being in Sam's that day I understood why my patients sometimes won't leave the house if they have to use a wheelchair or walker. I felt like everyone was looking at me, and whether that's true or not, (and it's probably almost never true) it's hard to overcome that feeling.

There were so many instances like these when I had to endure pain or humiliation. I was getting tired of it and yet there was nothing I could do about it. It was such a helpless feeling. My arm was wrapped to my fingers, and even they didn't move well. I had no use of my left arm at all which HAD been my dominant hand, and I had to hold it up with my right arm because of the weight of the wound vac and dressings.

I returned to the plastic surgeon 10 days after the surgery. I was eager to get the wound vac and the bandages off and see if the skin graft had “taken.” I would not have been so anxious if I had known what awaited me. When my arm was unwrapped in the office, I could see that the surgeon had decided to staple the wound vac to my skin in hopes of getting the skin graft to stay put and heal well. This worked great except for one thing. How were they going to get this thing off? That was the million dollar question apparently.

First, the nurse practitioner tried to pry some of the staples out. Many of the staples had buried themselves inside the delicate skin surrounding the skin graft. First she began to work on the ones that looked like they were very near the surface. As she pressed the over-sized staple remover down into red, raw flesh; tears instantly sprang up in my eyes.

Then the tears were running down my face.

I tried so hard not to scream.

She began to get uncomfortable with the removal process because it was hurting me so badly. She went and got one of the resident plastic surgeons. He removed the rest. He didn't seem too thrilled about it either, but he had no choice.

It was not easy. (And that's an under-statement.)

Unlike the x-ray room that first day, the pain was not unbearable. It was however, so severe that I couldn't help but cry my eyes out, and every muscle in my body was tense. The worse part I think was that it was not a constant pain; with each staple there was a fresh wave of pain that shot through my arm. There were at least 30 staples in there. It seemed like it took forever. Christian told me later he was so nauseous seeing me in that much pain that he thought he was going to have to leave. Poor thing! (That was similar to what had happened when they pulled the long epidural needle out of its sterile wrapping when I was in labor with Mallory.)

When the resident was finally through, my arm looked to me like a bloody mess. OOOOHH, surely this was not what it was supposed to look like! Dr. Walker, the plastic surgeon, came in to take a look. "It looks real good" he said. What?! Christian and I could not hide the shock on our faces I guess, because he tried to reassure us that more skin would fill in and it would continue to look better. But the skin graft had indeed taken! That was the main thing. Even the donor site on my leg was healing really well and no longer had any significant pain in it.

This was also the first time he really discussed what my scar would be like. The scar on my leg would heal very well and leave only a faint rectangular reminder. The graft on my arm would never have any feeling in it (I can feel deep pressure but nothing on the skin itself). I have no oil or sweat glands in the graft, so I will have to be careful to keep it moisturized for the rest of my life to prevent deep fissures. I will also need to be careful of sun, since it has no natural sun protection like the rest of my skin. And very excessive sweating could be a problem because there is no way for it to release heat. (I found that if I got very hot, the nerves in the graft would tingle.) As for the size and shape of my scar, if you put your elbow at your side and turn your palm up, about half of the entire amount of the forearm you can see is covered in skin graft. There is also a much smaller skin graft along the opposite side of my forearm that is about the size and shape of a pencil. The skin taken from my leg was “meshed” before it was applied to my arm and that mesh pattern is still visible in the healed graft. It is red all the time, being brighter if I've been exercising or doing something that gets my blood flowing. I also lost a good bit of muscle mass, and that part of my forearm is sunken in. In certain positions it is very obvious that there is a chunk missing from my forearm. My hand has a straight line scar up into my palm, and the hand and wrist themselves have significant muscle atrophy causing them to not be shaped like my other hand. From my elbow to my fingertips, my left arm is much smaller than my right. Some of this is from actual muscle loss, and some is from atrophy (or “wasting away”) because I do not have full use of my muscles.

Luckily, I have honestly always thought scars were no big deal, and that many were actually cool. If any scar CAN be cool, mine is. I only wish I had a better story to go with it. Christian wants to tell people I got attacked by a shark; he is convinced that would make it much cooler. Having to tell people about the whole garbage can story is kind of a fresh wave of humiliation every time. So I have to try and just laugh it off, because you can believe that laughter is almost always the response I get.

The nurse came to show me how to dress the skin graft, which I would have to do every day. She gave me the supplies to do it for a couple of weeks until I came back. At least I was rid of the wound vac. No more having a machine attached to me! That was a huge relief. They told me I still wasn't ready for physical therapy, not until the skin graft had healed better. As a physical therapist myself, I knew that every day I waited meant more function I might never get back. But even with that knowledge, I could not make myself argue. Physical Therapy would mean moving my arm in painful ways--something that was completely out of the question for me right now. Just accidental movements were still very painful; I couldn't imagine moving it on purpose!

During the next few weeks, I could tell I was getting stronger. My sweet sister came to my house every single day to change the dressing on my skin graft. The kids (mine and hers) thought they wanted to see it, but when they actually looked at my arm they got out of there fairly quickly so they wouldn't HAVE to see it any longer. I could now use my fingers for lightly holding a bowl or for stabilizing a piece of paper when I was trying to sign with right hand. But that was about it. I was having more pain free moments. They were really pain free minutes instead of moments now, but only if I had recently taken pain medicine and I sat very still. The nerves in my arm were finally recovering from being compressed with all that edema before they opened up my arm. I was finally rid of most of the burning.

For Christian's birthday, his sister in St. Louis had bought us tickets to a Christian concert (in St. Louis). I was a little unsure if I was going to be able to tolerate the eight hours in the car, but I am not one to pass up a trip. The ride was not bad at all. It pretty much felt the same as being in my recliner with pillows under my arm. I was getting used to sitting for long periods of time.

When we were in St. Louis, we didn't do too much except stay in the house and visit. Talking and laughing with our hilarious St. Louis family is always fun. The night of the concert, my sister-in-law and the kids went to get a seat. Christian, my brother-in-law, and I went just in time for the show. I was really tired by the end of the night, but in the end I was very glad I had gone. There were even some moments I was feeling almost “normal” when we did fun things. I had planned several trips for this year. I had missed the first one to Universal but I wasn't planning on missing anymore!

In April, my mom and sister took me to a women's conference in Mobile, Alabama that was being held by a good friend. As a pastor's wife, she and their ladies ministry were hosting a conference on friendship, so I certainly didn't want to miss my friend's conference on friendship!

The trip was easier than I had imagined it would be. We even had some time to go to the outlet mall near Mobile for a couple of hours. They were both very understanding of my limitations but encouraged me to do what I could at the same time. I know I could not have gotten through those months after the accident without their love and support.

 I got pretty tired on this first outing, but I really was now glad to be out, especially without the wound vac. The scariest thing for me was being away from Christian. Of course, my mom and sister are both nurses and handled me just fine. But I had become so dependent on Christian for almost every aspect of my life. This turned out to be one of the greatest blessings of my accident. Christian and I had never been quite so close before. It seemed that he knew the perfect thing to say or do in every situation (well, he did have a couple of missteps, which we laugh about now). But what I never could have imagined is what a great caregiver he would be. Not babying me, but being gentle when I needed it.

 Probably the biggest thing I missed about Christian when I was away from him was that he always made me feel like it was perfectly OK to need help. Other people did indeed want to help me, but they would also make odd comments about how I just “liked being waited on.” Well yes, having people help me did feel like a comforting expression of love since I had such a hard time doing pretty much everything. On the other hand, no, I wasn't glad I couldn't do things well and I wasn't just using this as an excuse to be waited on. This was of course my perception of things, and I learned some valuable lessons about giving people the benefit of the doubt and just letting things go that didn't really matter anyway. This was a lesson I really needed to learn. To this day I don't take things nearly as seriously as I used to. If someone says anything that may feel a little hurtful to me, I try to automatically assume they didn't mean it that way. And whether that's true or not, it certainly helps my feelings and helps temper my response, not to mention my sense of peace.

When I returned to the plastic surgeon and the orthopedist, they agreed it was time for me to start Physical Therapy. The skin graft was more than 75% filled in with new skin, with only small spots of open wound showing in the grid-like pattern of the graft. The bones in my forearm were NOT healed; in fact the "middles" were not even close to touching because I had lost so much bone in the original injury. Instead, they were being held together with plates and screws. I was assured that they would be strong enough for therapy. The orthopedist told me we would worry later about what to do if they didn't heal. Great!

I couldn't have imagined how awkward it was going to feel going to Physical Therapy as the patient and not the physical therapist. I chose the clinic I believed was the best at complicated upper extremity cases, which described me perfectly. On my first visit to PT for the evaluation, I discovered there were actually very few things I COULD do. The list of things I couldn't do was much longer. And it was not only my arm and elbow, now my shoulder had begun to really hurt. It was presumably because I had not been able to use my arm for so long and therefore had not really used my shoulder either. This turned out to be the beginning of adhesive capsulitis of my shoulder (or frozen shoulder). As the pain in my arm became less severe over the next few months, my shoulder picked up the slack and was more painful than I ever could have imagined a frozen shoulder could be.

My sister drove me to PT for the first few weeks. Doing much of anything on my own created as much anxiety as it did pain. By the time the girls were out of school for the summer, I decided I needed to try to drive myself. There were challenges to driving I hadn't even thought about. Once I got into my car there was first the problem of closing the door with my right hand. I usually would have to swing my legs out so I could reach it across my body and try to jerk my legs back in before the door closed. I did bang my shins more than once, but I got pretty good at it. Then there was the problem of buckling my seat belt. Reaching that far across my body wasn't easy. I tried to forego the seat belt sometimes, but the ever-increasing volume of that insistent beeping could get under my skin quickly.

I was now able to walk around the house freely and I would plan things for myself for each day. It was ambitious for me to even balance my checkbook (one-handed of course) or go to Wal-mart to get 3 or 4 things in one day, but doing both in a single day was out of the question. I would spend several hours getting ready, resting between each activity, and then I would muster up all my physical and emotional energy to complete my one task. Some days I felt a sense of accomplishment after I did that one task, but mostly I felt frustrated that I could do so little, and would end up in tears.

I was still tired most of the time. I had to wear sundresses or skirts all the time because I couldn't use my left hand to manage pants. I am so thankful it was summer, and I never had to worry about wearing warm, bulky clothes. This is, however, when my appetite began to come back with a vengeance. All that alone time not being able to exercise, not to mention the comfort I derived from eating my favorite foods, only encouraged my eating. I was still getting food from friends and was being treated to many lunches by the best friends I could imagine having! Unfortunately, in my loose sundresses, I was completely unaware of the beginning of the 30 pounds I would gain within the year. It wouldn't be until winter when I had to wear warmer clothes that I would have to face that. So for the time, I was blissfully ignorant of it.

I was able to do more and more over the next few weeks. At the end of April, Christian and I went on a cruise that we had long before planned (and paid for) to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. I was still weak and had to wear a contraption on my arm that they made for me in therapy that was like nothing I had ever seen. They had molded a hard splint for my arm to encourage wrist extension and since my elbow motion and rotation of my forearm were also big problems, they molded a hard splint for my upper arm as well with a large hook on the front. I then had to wrap a strap between the two splints in one of two patterns they had carefully configured to encourage elbow flexion and forearm supination and pronation (hand up or hand down rotation) which I alternated between. Talk about some funny looks! I couldn't go anywhere on that vacation that we didn't have people stopping us to ask about it. I couldn't blame them. I know I would be dying of curiosity if I saw someone wearing that thing too. I just don't think I would be as bold as many of them.

Vacation was a welcome break to the therapy and constant difficulties I faced at home every day. Christian never left my side and was helpful in ways I couldn't even have imagined. Sometimes I felt like I had died and gone to" husband heaven". When I told him this, he only laughed and said "I must have been a real jerk before.” I stressed to him that this was not the case. It was hard to put into words the difference in the special bond that was forming between us from the great bond we already had. Of course at first I liked to think it was just Christian being nice to me because I was hurt, and I'm sure that's part of it. But I began to realize that maybe I was also responsible for the change in a way that went beyond my injury. Maybe I had lost some of that pride I carried around and that tendency to argue about anything and everything. Could I keep this newfound attitude? (HELP ME LORD!)

### Spiritual realities of the next 2 months

This may be a challenge to separate the spiritual and emotional during this time. It was a time of a lot of physical change, and it also brought lots of emotional upheaval.

I cried.

A lot.

Every day actually.

And it wasn't because of the pain in my arm and shoulder (and leg). Those things definitely hurt, but my response to that pain was generally not tears. I think that, as we get older, tears come more often in response to emotional pain. (Which can actually be worse than physical pain at times.) There were certainly times when tears were a response to intense or unexpected physical pain: the pain of the initial injury, in the worst of the compartment syndrome, and when they were removing the staples from the skin graft for instance.

But now these tears were a response to deeper, more intense pain.

Of what?

That's so hard to define, either then OR now. Everyone was really nice to me. Family and friends were going out of their way to help me and accommodate anything I wanted. I also always felt God's presence and His peace. That may be a surprise to my family who saw me upset a lot. But it was more like He was holding me tightly while I cried and not that He was taking the emotional pain from me. So what was I actually so upset about? I couldn't begin to articulate that at the time. But looking back I have more perspective. So what was it?

In a word - Loss.

Pain of loss is the only pain I've ever felt that intensely. I think I knew I had lost parts of me I would never get back. Oh, I still had my arm and it would even get back to at least functioning partly, I never doubted or really even thought much about that. So I had lost……….what? I think the answer is a sense of independence that I had developed through the tough times of my life. We all have something tough in our pasts. For me the earliest conflicts I can remember are things like fights with my friends in elementary, developing cliques, losing old friends and gaining new ones. And somewhere in there represented the first time I realized that not everyone loved me, or even liked me. That's a lesson every child learns, unfortunately. I realized that for some people to like me, I had to act a certain way or do some certain thing they approved of. I began to learn to please people. I guess we all learn some form of that; it is called developing “social skills”.

 And we do all need some form of that to live in peace with others. (Romans 12:18) Now, if you know me well you may be saying; "you sure don't seem like a people pleaser to me". And I never would have used that term for myself either. And actually, my response to that lesson was that I became adamant about NOT pleasing anyone unless they liked me first. Twisted maybe, but somehow that was my version of being a people pleaser.

I think all people fall within one of two major categories of people pleasers. There are people like me (we'll say type 1 for simplicity), who tend to want acceptance first before we will really work at a relationship. And then there are those people who work at relationships in order to get acceptance (we'll call them type 2). Most marriages (at least among the people I know) seem to contain one of each of these personalities. I don't know if two people of the same type would get along very well. Type 1 can be quick to write off someone if they have been hurt, type 2 tends to NEVER want to lose a relationship in the belief that they will be able to build it back up. Type 1 is too quick to abandon relationships, and type 2 will not abandon a relationship even when that would be the healthy thing to do. So, as a type 1, when difficulties arise in any relationship, getting out is my instinct.

The biggest conflict/difficulty of my childhood was the divorce of my parents when I was a preteen. Bad timing for sure! I was already unsure of myself and now the people who I thought were required to love me and do the best for me were putting my fragile psyche into untold turmoil. Well, I couldn't physically leave the relationship at that time, but I could leave emotionally. I decided that I wasn't going to be nice to them unless they proved they loved me first……and maybe not even then (a reflection of my immaturity). I was obedient, at least in appearances. But I did this mostly just to avoid punishment, not out of a sense of love. Of course I can see things from a different perspective now. I can understand what a difficult time this was for them, but as a child/teenager, I couldn't see (and wasn't interested in seeing) anything from any perspective but my own. God has helped me work all this out, and I've come to understand what happened and I know my parents have always loved me. But that was not an easy process.

Parents who divorce and tell themselves that "children bounce back easily" and "it really won't be that hard on them" are deluding themselves. Even the best possible divorce where everyone is polite still means tearing a family apart. God forgives all, but there are natural consequences to your actions. Such a traumatic shift in a support system WILL affect a child. I don't know any person who was a child of divorce who would tell you that they were not affected in SOME way.

Of course everyone has their issues, but that feeling of the loss of the love of your parents can be particularly devastating when you are young and so dependent on them. Children are very literal. It doesn't matter if the parents' love for their children never actually changes; tearing a child's family apart **feels** like rejection, and words can't change that. As a child I seemed to have no way to really express that overwhelming sense of rejection, so I just locked it inside only to later be expressed in other ways. Now God can heal any wound, and He has. But it took many years, and now I wonder if certain family relationships would have been stronger if it had not happened. I feel sure they would have been. It seems to be a natural consequence.

 That pattern of not being willing to love anyone unless they first loved me continued through most of my young adult life. (And honestly I still fight that tendency.) When I was a teenager I really had thought that I wouldn't get married until at least my 30's - if then. At that point marriage didn't look so great to me. It would have to be a very loving, kind man that could make me fall in love with him and marry him. (That's also how God got me, with His amazing love- just as He gets us all.) Christian was all that and more. He “proved” he loved me from the beginning, so I was able (and even eager) to dive into the relationship. It was the same with friends. I would not seek them out but if they came to me and loved me “in spite of me,” I was intensely loyal and developed very strong bonds with them.

So now I felt like I was losing some of that sense of… “Independence,” I'll call it. Although what I was considering independence and strength was only a wall I had built around my heart. If you were courageous enough to scale it - you were there forever. You may be wondering why I would be upset to lose the wall. It doesn't sound so great. But it's who I was. And it was loss. What would replace it? I couldn't imagine turning into more of a “dependent” person! That sounded like weakness to me. But here I was, physically as well as emotionally dependent, but also on my way to a greater spiritual dependency on God.

It was in the light of God's overwhelming love for me (that was so tangible) that I could not deny the truth I saw there of who I was to Him. 1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father lavishes on us, that he should call us his children." I could no longer believe the lies I had believed about myself for most of my life; that I was not good enough or worthy of great and unconditional love. It was not through a word spoken to me, but through the substance of His love that I now could see how He saw me. I am "holy and dearly loved" by God because He CHOSE me (Colossians 3:12). So I had to begin the process of letting go of that lie, and it is a process. You hold your core beliefs so deeply; they are not quickly or easily uprooted.

I think that at least some of the tears in those days were actually caused by pain from a literal “dying to self". Romans 8:13 says, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." I always thought this was purely figurative, but it didn't feel figurative. It felt really literal. I've always liked to be in control, and now I wasn't. But I wanted to “live” in Christ, so I had to be willing to “die to the deeds of the body” first. And it was horrible. Now I see that dependency on God is the only way to be truly happy, and my “independence” was always a lie.

It isn't so strange that God would allow me to go through this pain in order to get rid of an attitude of my heart that didn't glorify Him. We've all been through it before. The most obvious example that is common to believers and unbelievers alike, and one that any parent can relate to, is the time following the birth of your first child. Oh, of course in many ways it is one of the most precious times in your life. On the other hand, that root of selfishness is pulled out suddenly and painfully. It starts when we are not allowed to sleep for more than a couple of hours at a time. Then, as if that weren't enough, we don't get to eat a meal in peace, talk on the phone without interruption, or go to the bathroom alone. Selfishness then wants to turn on our spouse and blame them for not doing more of the work, but they are going through the same “dying to the deeds of the body” process. (Or we can refuse this painful process at the expense of the needs of our child or spouse.) Our innate selfishness cannot be removed solely by reading bible verses; real life experience that causes us to put it into practice is needed. So in the same way, God was using my real life experience to get some things out of my heart.

A few of the things I liked to associate with myself-- control, independence, and strength (or to use a more biblical term – pride) -- had been knocked loose when that garbage can hit me. Now this does not mean, unfortunately, that I would never struggle with them again; actually we are on a lifelong journey with God and I will learn more and more as He completes His work in me (Philippians 1:6). But now I was no longer glad they were there and would fight against them with God's help. How was it that I considered those traits such good things in myself? I have read Galatians 5:22 and I know none of these is a fruit of the spirit. So if they were not fruit of God's Spirit, they must be fruit of my own sinful nature. Darn!

What about God's presence and His peace? It was still with me. I guess I could say it was not "as strong," but still there for sure. Peace means to be without worry or anxiety. And I can honestly say I was always without worry. I wasn't actively worried about the surgeries, or how my function would turn out, or about the money I wasn't making since I couldn't work. The pain of loss really had nothing to do with worry or anxiety. I think if I hadn't sensed God's presence so strongly, I might not have felt the pain of loss of self so much. It's a paradox: in order to gain the greater benefits in my relationship with Jesus, I had to lose some parts of me. I can't have both the sinful nature AND a mind controlled by the Spirit.

I think it was towards the end of this period that I felt like it was time for me to seek God myself. I had so far not actually had to make any effort myself to be close to God, to be in His presence. It was His gift to me. That “wordless communication” was all I needed. But now it was time for words. I can't remember what day He told me, because I didn't want to believe it. I thought "Oh, maybe that wasn't God saying that to me, maybe I just made it up." Nope, it was God. I could feel a slow; I would even say…a gentle, withdrawal of the weight of His presence. It was in such a way that I knew He was still there and I could still have His presence, but it was just time for me to put some effort into seeking it.

So I began my journey into seeking His presence for myself. It wasn't easy at first, I almost felt a little resentful that I had to “work” for it now. But after living in that glorious peace and presence, I couldn't imagine letting it go. I began by awkwardly reading my bible. I say awkwardly because I felt unsure of where to start. I had spent years, on and off, studying the bible and I knew there was lots of “good stuff” in there. I was just unsure of where I should start.

So I started with word searches for verses that would apply to me. The first one I meditated on was **Proverbs 3:5: " Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding."** If that had ever applied to me in my life it was now. Of course, at this point I HAD NO understanding of my own to lean on. So this was perfect.

The next verse two verses that became what I kept on my mind constantly were:

**Psalm 42:5 Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise him for the saving help of his presence.**

**Psalm 27:4 I have asked one thing from the LORD. This I will seek: to remain in the LORD's house (presence) all the days of my life in order to gaze at the LORD's beauty and to search for an answer in his temple.**

Repeating all three of these verses over and over to myself was my lifeline at that time. When any discouraging thought or feeling would come up, I "grabbed" onto one of these verses and repeated it in my head. I came to know exactly what Hebrews 4:12 meant- His word really IS living and active. It saved me. That's the best way to put it. God's word saved

### Physical Realities of the Summer (months 3, 4, & 5)

Well, the physical side of my recovery definitely took a turn for the better during the summer. I had already had six surgeries and was still unsure if a seventh would be required; it depended on how well the radius and ulna healed, and that would take time. I was also getting more comfortable with physical therapy and was driving myself without too much diffictulty. I was feeling a little more like getting out of the house and was going regularly to Wal-mart, although I still needed help to push the cart and pick up the groceries.

Of course the hard part was that, even though I felt a little more like doing things, my arm wasn't cooperating. I continued to have big deficits in strength, movement, and sensation. Being left-handed, I naturally would attempt to do things with that hand and would regularly drop things I tried to pick up, often breaking them or making a huge mess. I was always in some amount of pain. A significant part of my pain during those months was from my shoulder. The joint was now solidly frozen and extremely painful whether I kept it still or tried to move it. Even as a physical therapist, I had absolutely no idea how painful a frozen shoulder could be. It kept me awake a lot at night, and even when I was asleep, Christian told me he would wake up to me moaning as I slept.

I was constantly frustrated by my pain and my lack of mobility. I tried any number of things to help relieve the pain in my shoulder in addition to the narcotics including; cortisone shots, physical therapy, and heat packs. Nothing was working. I began to hope that I could just have surgery on it if I had to have the bone graft. I think I actually started to hope for the bone graft for that reason. The doctors had already told me that they wouldn't want to do just the shoulder surgery by itself, and it can take one or two YEARS for a frozen shoulder to get better with more conservative treatment.

 I went to see Dr. Gray in late May thinking he would tell me then if I would need the bone graft. Unfortunately, the bones were not healing well, but he wanted to wait longer to make a definite decision on the bone graft. I was also having a lot of pain in my wrist, which is not uncommon for this type of injury. So he wanted to send me to a hand/arm specialist to get his opinion of what more could be done.

At the end of May we went to Florida with Christian's sister and her husband from St. Louis. They had bought the use of a condo on Perdido Key in a silent auction and invited us to go. We planned an "adults only" trip, so my niece came and stayed with Mallory and Olivia.

I did pretty well on the trip. It was another nice break from the stresses I was surrounded with at home. Unfortunately, I couldn't get away from my arm and that was the biggest stress of all.

We went out to eat several times, walked a little along the beach every day, and even lay on the beach for short periods of time. The weather was great, and we have such fun with them that we always lament when we are with them that they don't live closer.

The day we returned home was my birthday. When we got back to our house, the girls had a "surprise party" of sorts for me. Each of my daughters had been hard at work on a scrapbook for me. It was an overwhelming expression of love from them and definitely one of the best presents I've ever gotten. The love of my family and friends and especially the love of God is what got me through each and every day.

I saw Dr. Weiss, the upper extremity specialist Dr. Gray had referred me to, in June and got yet another cortisone shot in my shoulder before he scheduled me for an MRI. The tests on my wrists were inconclusive, but the doctor had an idea what to do for it. He said that the capsule at the joint where the radius and ulna meet near the wrist had frozen much like my shoulder joint and would also need to be released. One bone in my arm was beginning to heal, but the other was a long way from it and would need the bone graft after all. So he would do the shoulder and wrist capsule surgeries at the same time as he took bone from my elbow to fill in the unhealed gap in my radius. Because he was a well-known surgeon and in great demand, I wasn't able to find an opening in his schedule to have the surgery until the middle of July.

There were several other things going on while I waited for this seventh surgery. Of course I was still going to physical therapy, but now my insurance refused to pay for any more of it and I would be responsible for the charges of about $400 per visit. I decreased myself to once a week, of course I didn't have the money and I was just not sure if I could justify that expense (which would become another debt) since I myself was a therapist and could do a pretty good job with my home program. The problem with that, of course, is that you really need to be motivated to do 1-2 hours of painful, difficulty therapy every day. And my motivation was running a little low after all this time. I was, in the end, able to force myself to do my home program at least 2 or 3 times a week. I was still making progress which the hand therapist monitored and used to revise my home program as my strength allowed.

Also it was during this time that the home health company I was working for decided to fire me because I had been on medical leave too long and now they legally COULD fire me. The most frustrating part was that they went through a complicated charade of having me fill out all these forms and having me get Dr. Gray to fill out a lot of forms in order to "continue my leave". As it turned out, they only needed all the forms to protect themselves from any legal damages. They hadn't ever intended to extend my leave. And they informed me in the form of a letter from the corporate office. It was very formal and it assured me they were very sorry. Yeah right.

So it won't come as any surprise that this was also when I was the most emotionally fragile. I went to see a counselor a few times. I didn't tell many people that. I'm not even sure why. Maybe I just didn't want to have to try to explain how I was feeling when I didn't have a handle on it myself. God led me to a counselor who was perfect for me as she only dealt with people who had been injured or very ill. I felt a little funny about it honestly. Two of my best friends include a licensed Christian counselor and a pastor's wife who both have been counseling people for years. And they both have helped me tremendously. But I guess I felt like someone with a little more distance and a little more objectivity would provide a different point of view. And she did. She assured me I was totally normal and she was actually the one who introduced the idea of loss and grieving to me. It really resonated with me. I was grieving. I would have never called it that before she explained it to me that way, but it was true nonetheless. I was grieving. It is a hard word for me to hear even now.

It was hard for me to call this “loss.” But I knew it was true the minute she said it. It didn't feel like this was a big enough deal to be considered a loss. Someone I knew had just suffered the loss of her husband! I certainly didn't want to compare myself to that. But that's the problem with comparing ourselves. It doesn't work. We get caught up in trying to decide where in some ranking system we fall. And since this loss fell well below the rank of her loss of a spouse, I didn't feel like I had a right to grieve. But right or no right, here I was. And I was grieving. The words “loss” and “grieving” still sound strange to me. And I wouldn't even type the words if I wasn't so sure they were true. This one little word “loss” and all it implies is what helped me sort out what had been going on with me in the last few months. The loss I have already talked about actually seemed to begin to heal when I could name it. It wasn't really a big scary monster in the closet; it was one little word. And when I looked it in the face and acknowledged that it was there, it lost its power to hold my emotions hostage.

We once again went to see my sister-in-law and her family on the fourth of July. Getting out of town became one of the few things that made me feel a little better. I couldn't get away from my arm, but I could get away from all the other unpleasant things like therapy and my looming surgery.

This time we went to stay with them at their condo at the Lake of the Ozarks. We have never gotten to spend so much time with them in one year. It was always a welcome distraction. My family and friends who lived close by were a steady source of help to me in those months, and the ones who lived further away provided a welcome break from the realities of my situation.

So my final surgery was on July 15. I had a bone graft on the shaft of my radius with bone taken from the olecranon, just above my elbow. At this same time I had an arthroscopic debridement of my shoulder capsule which had thickened and become frozen. I also had a release to the joint capsule of my distal radial ulnar joint near my wrist. This surgery went really well and the recovery was not too hard. Compared to the first six surgeries, this one almost seemed fun. This was the only surgery I had in a different place. The nurses in the recovery room were actually nice and let Christian come in to be with me. Prior to the surgery I received a nerve block in my entire arm so that it was paralyzed for the entire day and I had absolutely no pain immediately after the surgery because I had no feeling. I'm glad I had not known what I was missing having the pain relief of a the nerve block with the first six surgeries or I would have been upset.

I had such a sense of closure in terms of surgeries. And just like I was anxious to get the fasciotomy to relieve the pain of the compartment syndrome; I was thrilled to have the shoulder surgery to reduce my shoulder pain.

 I was using my hand a little more now in many activities. I continued to be on pain medicine daily, although now I was down to only a couple each day instead of a couple every 2 hours as it was in the beginning.

By the end of the summer I was feeling a little better physically and emotionally. I was having less pain and I felt like I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. I was anxious for the doctors to release me so that I could try and find a job that I could do. I was overall pretty optimistic about things by the time the summer ended. God had gotten me through so far, and I trusted Him to get me through the rest. I think it’s a very good thing we can't see into the future and know what’s next for us. God lets us know just how much we need to know and how much we can handle at one time. I was feeling like my ordeal was finally coming to a close.

I was mistaken.

### Spiritual Realities of the Summer

I chose to include my visits with the counselor under the physical realities section for the summer because I was beginning to be able to separate emotional and spiritual more clearly. My emotions were actually more connected with the physical side of me than with the spiritual side. God gave me great understanding and insight about the issue of loss, in order to bring healing.

There have certainly been many other things I haven't understood in this process. And in order to allow healing in those areas, I have had to learn to trust God with them and not try so hard to understand them with my mind. My human understanding is so limited. During this time I found that the best way for me to rely fully on God and not on myself was to spend time with Him and in His word (not an earth shaking revelation, but one that had just become very real to me). Every morning I had this precious time when I would wake up early -usually because of the pain- and get up and spend large quantities of time with God, praying and reading His word before the girls got up (they liked to sleep in since it was summer).

One of the verses that I added to the previous ones and that I repeated to myself continually was:

Psalm 27:14

I will wait for the Lord; I will be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord

But really there were so many scriptures that profoundly affected me; it almost seems unfair to choose only a few. I was so comforted by God in those early morning hours, and He spoke to me in so many different ways- of course through His word, but also through books, television programs, through the words and actions of family and friends, and on and on.

Summer was definitely a healing time for me. That was obvious physically, but I was healing emotionally and spiritually as well. I was learning to seek God's presence daily. Now God was giving me His presence freely when I sought Him; whereas before the indwelling of His presence was His gift given because of His great love and mercy in the hardest times. God's presence is always free to us for the asking, and now I was choosing to ask.

When I look back on the summer, I remember feeling so close to God and feeling such a joy living daily in His presence. But one of the great mysteries with God is how there is always more to know and more of Him to experience. As much as I knew Him then, I know Him better now. And as much as I know Him now, I know there is no limit to how much more I can know Him. All I have to do is ask, and diligently seek Him. Isn't that amazing? That all we have to do is ask and seek? God doesn't have a big chart with gold stars by the people who do the most or the best works. He freely gives to anyone who seeks Him, and then of course the works follow out of our sheer love for Him.

The most precious memories of this past summer, and this entire journey, are not actually memories in my mind. For lack of any better way to say it, they are memories of my heart. Just like there are days from my past (like my wedding and the birth of my children) that I recall more with the emotion I felt than with the words that were spoken, it's like that with God. He fills my heart and soul and I know He's there by what I feel, not by what I hear or see.

This has been the hardest section yet. I just don't know how to put into words what God has done in me. I am continually awed by His love and His goodness. He took the most devastating thing that has ever happened to me personally, and turned it around so my strongest sense of this entire journey is an overwhelming sense of His love for me.

There were issues in my heart that I did not have a certain answer for before my accident. Faith, trust, hope, why things happen- just to name a few. I always thought they could and should be understood and explained with the mind and human reasoning. But I no longer see it that way. I now have an understanding of many of these things in my heart that I don't even completely know how to verbalize. But the overpowering answer to any theological question is LOVE. Every issue must be seen and understood through the reality of God's love. There is no other reality. God's love for us means I will not understand everything that happens, but it also means it doesn’t even matter. All that matters is that HE LOVES ME! How do I get over the fact that the God of creation loves ME? I can't get over it. I hope I never will.

The things we do are so pointless. To argue or debate over how we think God works in this situation or that one. I would almost laugh at the absurdity of it if it wasn't so sad. Christians judging each other because one believes God only works one way and the other believes He works another. We know that Jesus died for our sins and that God raised him again so we may have life. He did this all because of His unspeakable love for us, and that is really all we need to know.

Of course I am not saying studying and understanding the word and living it are not important. By nature, I am inquisitive and I love to learn. What I am saying is that we can't let pursuit of knowledge get in the way of His Love. Increasing our knowledge of His word should never come before the pursuit of HIM!

The greatest thing He has given me is the absolute faith that I can and will come through anything because He is with me.

I love Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the dark valley of death, because you are with me, I fear no harm. Your rod and your staff comfort me and give me courage. (God's word translation)

### 6 months after accident

On the very day marking the 6 month anniversary of my accident, I began a bible study that my wonderful friend and neighbor Jo had asked me to do with her and another woman. It was just 3 of us taking turns meeting at each other's houses one morning a week following a curriculum and DVD's that were all about freedom in Christ. I can see that this was absolutely no coincidence! God knew that somehow that 6 month point would start a whole different kind of challenge for me, so he marked the day. I wasn't sure what I actually needed to “be free” from (well, I guess we can all see pride is one obvious thing since I thought I didn't need any setting free). But God knew exactly what He was planning on doing in my life!

School had just started, and now I had this new experience of having large amounts of time on my hands. I know that stay-at-home moms still have plenty of mom responsibilities, but there is quite a lot more flexibility in your daily schedule than that of working moms. That seems obvious, but some stay at home moms I’ve met (certainly not all) seem to defend how busy they are (another perception, I know). But I have to say, being busy is not the virtue our society has made it, and we should never wear busy-ness like a badge of honor when we are busy; NOR should we apologize for NOT being busy when we are not! Having time to be in a bible study, plus time for prayer, study and exercise (without having to get up at 4 a.m.) was a great gift. I had never experienced this! Having time I could schedule as I wanted?!? I still had responsibility, but I also found time with God that I didn’t find so easily when I worked. It was wonderful! I was so blessed to be in a season where I was able to spend large chunks of time in prayer and study of God's word, and He really used it in my life. I also believe that in seasons when I am busier, God blesses the time I carve out of my day for Him like the widow in Mark 12 who gave out of her lack. When we give out of our lack of time, it is a precious sacrifice.

So I could say I'm realizing that God has plenty of blessings to go around for us all. If we are living the life God has for us, we can have great peace and joy. Some people seem out to convince us, as moms, that we should never work or alternately that it's always the right thing to work. The right answer is the one God has for me. That's the life I want, no matter what anyone else says.

So many things happened during these months and God taught me so much about myself and about Him that I hardly know where to begin, so I'll attempt to categorize it somewhat.

### The 6-month dilemma

I have always heard people say that it was 6 months after the loss of a loved one that is the hardest. I assumed that was because the reality of the situation hadn't hit home until then or something like that. And while I am in NO WAY comparing my loss to the loss of a close friend or family member, I do have a different perspective on why it becomes, in some ways, harder after about six months. I have an acquaintance whose husband was killed suddenly a few days after my accident, so the timing of our milestones coincided somewhat. A mutual friend spoke with her often, and I would pray for her and inquire about how she was doing. Our mutual friend remarked that it had been six months and that she really needed support from family and friends maybe even more now than she had initially. It was after hearing this that God told me “that's like you, after six months, everyone else is over it (so to speak) and ready to get on with life as usual.” I think there is something about that six month time frame; maybe that it is the maximum amount of time most people can handle feeling pain for someone else. And perhaps that is how it should be. If we all went around feeling other people's pain for as long as they felt it, we would spend our whole life in devastating pain. But for me, and for her, the loss/change is just as real now as it was six months ago, only we no longer have the same type of emotional support we did in the beginning. The biggest difference is I have Christian, because in a way my pain is his pain; and she has only her children for the same reason. I don't think there was anyone who wanted to just put the accident behind us more than ME! I didn't want to have these limitations I still had! I didn't want to have to wonder what my future held! I would LOVE to act like this never happened and get back to life as it was………. Or would I?

In some ways, but I would never give up the journey I'm on with God, the things I've learned, or the peace I have. What I WOULD like to give up is the pain, the depression, and the uncertainty. So my solution is to try and act as if everything's back to normal. That makes relationships easier, but it doesn't make them more intimate. I don't blame anyone for the way they feel at this point! Not at all! I would just like people to be aware of what a person who has experienced loss is going through. A little compassion and understanding could go a long way for me some days.

Of course, I can't expect anyone to know how to react to the situation appropriately when I don't even know. When someone asks how my arm is doing, I am suddenly in this strange limbo in my mind between “I'm fine, I don't want you to feel sorry for me” and “I'm still going through a lot so don’t act like it's no big deal.” What I actually say is something more like “I'm doing better all the time.” That statement is true and does not commit me to one side or the other of my conflicting emotions.

Christian seems to have an almost uncanny understanding of where I still am. He has never hurried me to get over it when I wasn’t ready, but he never babied me and kept me more dependent than I should be either. And I do admit that because everyone else appeared to be over it, including the rest of my family, I probably got on with regular life a little quicker than I might have otherwise. It was really the perfect combination: the person I was closest to and relied on the most was so empathetic, and everyone else was ready to get back to normal. It gave me the best of both worlds of compassion and challenge. I didn’t have to feel bad about how still I felt, and I could press on to get a little closer to normal. Just another example of God working all this for my good. He is so good and so faithful, some days I am so overwhelmed with His love I can't even express it! Did I mention the depth of His love is hard to put into words?

###  Returning to the doctor (and to work?)

The 6-month mark came barely one month after my final surgery. Christian's slow season was approaching, and we were anxious to get on with the law suit and for me to return to work if possible. We met with our attorney and he filled us in on when we may be able to move forward. We needed to know what the final outcome was going to be functionally before that could really happen. (There were a million reasons I wanted to know that also). But basically, we needed to know how my limitations were going to affect my life in the future before we could file our claim. A lot depended on what the doctor would say the next time I saw him.

 Just a few weeks after that 6 month date, I returned to Dr. Weiss for a follow up appointment from my last surgery. He is a wonderful surgeon with one of the best bedside manners I've ever seen. He ordered x-rays for my arm so he could see how the bone graft was healing. It was great! He said it was beginning to fill in. Judging from the way the healing was progressing, there was no doubt it would heal completely from here! I would like to say I was relieved, but honestly I never considered that he would say anything else. We talked at length about work and my limitations. He advised me (and wrote instructions for me) that I could work a reduced schedule with only higher level patients because I was not safe to perform any patient lifting. I thought that sounded great! I was absolutely confident that I could find exactly what he described.

 I was excited for so many reasons. The most obvious was financial; I am blessed to be in a field where I can work even a little every week and it is helpful financially. But, the main reason for my excitement was that I would be back to some sort of normalcy and usefulness. Over the years I had begun to feel like I got more from my patients than they got from me. I loved getting to know people, listening to their stories, and really being able to make a difference in their lives. Home health is an incredible opportunity to go into someone else's private world and not only be welcomed, but often be able to make a significant positive impact on the quality of their lives.

I was tired of being the patient; I definitely preferred being the caregiver.

 In the next few days I made several calls to people I knew. One agency that needed help would call back next week to schedule an interview, I felt sure of it. Great! "Here we go God; I've done the work for you. Now just open the doors I need to go through and everything will work out just fine".

"God?"

"Hello?"

"Why haven't they called? It's been a few weeks. I'm trying not to take on the anxiety of this, but you know we are about out of money. "

"Is this not the right thing to do?"

My mind was trying to run away with me; I thought "Oh no, what if I'm trying to open doors that God doesn't want opened?"

"God?"

"HELP ME!!!!"

In the meantime, I called my most recent employer who had just fired me. I strongly felt this wasn't my answer, but I asked God if I could do it and didn't feel any opposition. So I met my supervisor for lunch one day. And I saw why this wasn't my answer. They didn't have any openings; indeed the branch in Jackson was not doing well and was running with fewer employees. But I was also convinced I had been right about no opposition to doing this. This lunch served as good closure to that chapter of my life. We had a wonderful, candid talk about a lot of things and I was able to share a little about what God was doing in my life. I was so glad I had called her and we had that talk. "Thanks God, I didn't even know I needed that."

As much as I prayed about it, the only answer I felt I was getting about an actual job was- Wait. UGH, that is the hardest thing to do. One home health office where I used to work didn't have any openings, but they had referred me to another branch that did have openings. I had even talked to the director there a couple of times and she had sounded excited, but then she didn't call back.

What was going on?

"What should I do now God?" "Wait," I heard again. So I waited, and waited, and waited. Finally I felt it was the right time to call. I talked with the director and she said she wanted to set up a meeting for the next week. Great!

The next Wednesday I went to our scheduled meeting. I prayed LOTS in the days before. "God, please put on my heart and on their hearts what you have for me, please make it clear." When I walked in to the meeting the director turned out to be a lady that had been in my Sunday school class several years earlier. The first thing she said was that this wasn't an interview.

"Excuse me?"

She said I HAD the job just based on the referral of the office where I had previously worked and the purpose of this meeting was simply a formality so we could all meet face to face.

 Well, I don't know if it gets any clearer than that.

"Thanks God, for the answer **and** for being patient with me."

I did a drug test, and they had to conduct a background check and would call me in about a week to get started. Great!

It took a little longer than that, but I wasn't worried anymore. On October 24, 8 months and 1 week since my last day of work, I was seeing patients again. It was such a strange feeling at first. But the greatest part was that when I walked into a patient's house, I was totally focused on them and what they needed. For the first time in a long time, I could be totally focused on an injury or a need other than my own. And that felt amazing!

I would learn soon enough of the consequences to ignoring my arm and doing things I didn't necessarily have the strength to do. I could certainly do anything they needed since I was seeing only high level patients, but doing more than I should with my left arm would only leave me hurting.

### 'Breaking Free'

My choice to put this section third does not reflect its importance. It is actually the most important part of this stage, so I wanted to think it through before I wrote it. God has used this bible study to speak to me in powerful, personal ways that I never could have imagined.

From the first day I opened the book and began exploring the benefits we have with God (Psalm 103:2), I found myself totally engrossed. These were not material benefits; instead they were benefits like knowing Him, praising Him, finding peace, joy, strength, and deep soul satisfaction in Him. HIS word really is alive! My heart leaped when I read passages I had heard before, but somehow they were fresh to me again. God had already been using these past months to teach me about His presence and what He offered me there, so this study only deepened that for me. For months Psalm 27:4 had become my “mantra” in my heart. I repeated it to myself over and over, "This one thing I ask of you, Lord, this in what I desire! To live in Your presence ALL the days of my life" (paraphrased). And now my understanding of what I could have in His presence was becoming more real every day. I grew to understand that everything else I needed or desired was in His presence: fullness of joy, peace, wisdom, understanding, etc., etc., etc.

### HIS Peace and The Bogue Chitto River

PEACE!

This was the big one for me; I had been fully immersed in God's presence and felt His peace so strongly since the day of my accident! This seems so contrary to my circumstance or even the times of depression I've felt. But peace was something I never doubted, because I felt it so strongly. I spent time (probably way too much time) trying to reconcile my pain, which was real, with God's peace, which was also completely real. So to help me, in His mercy, this is how He taught me about peace.

 Verses I gravitated to immediately were Isaiah 48:18 and 66:12-13 that talk about 'peace like a river'. That was the phrase I meditated on, the phrase that seemed to jump off the page at me. Peace like a river, peace like a river- over and over and over. What did I know about rivers? I had only one experience with a river that is really memorable.

 When I was in college and dating Christian, we decided to go tubing down the Bogue Chitto River one summer. (It was a popular thing to do where we lived). So we invited my sister and her boyfriend to go along. We left early one summer morning, eager to start our day. We packed our cooler full of drinks and leftover crawfish from a crawfish boil the night before. We rented our tubes, one for each of us and one for the cooler to “ride” on, and took a shuttle up the river (from where we left our car) so we would float back down to the car and leave from there. We chose the shorter 3-4 hour float trip, unsure how much time we were actually going to want once we were on the river. We got to the river, loaded the cooler up, and tied its tube to Christian's so it wouldn't get lost, and we were off. The water in the river was high after substantial rains over the past few weeks, and we moved swiftly on the current. There were a few trees, stumps or rocks in the river that we would occasionally get caught on, but we would just laugh and let the current and each other help us off or around them. We stopped at a sandbar along the way to bask in the sun and eat our crawfish. We stayed until the food was gone and we’d had plenty of rest, sun, and playing in the water. Then we got back on our tubes and continued on. We reached the place on the river where we had left our car very soon. Way too soon, if you had asked us. The only disappointment of the day was that it was over so soon. What a glorious day! Perfect weather (and no sunburn), lots of fun, and great food. We would definitely have to do this again! The sooner the better!

We didn't get to go tubing again for the next several weeks for some reason I don't remember, but it was still on our minds. So when the opportunity arose that the four of us could do it again, we jumped at it. We loaded up just like before, with our cooler of drinks and crawfish (if we were going to replicate a perfect day, that would even involve the same food). The drive was long, but we were still giddy from the excitement of our last trip. It had really been a perfect day; it just didn't last long enough. And we could fix that. The difference this time was that instead of going on the 3-4 hour float trip (which had actually only taken us 2 1/2 hours), we were going to take the longer 5-6 hour float trip (which we figured we could do in 4 or so). We rented our tubes and the van took us farther up the river this time so we could float back down to the car. We put the tubes in, with the cooler on a tube tied to Christian's, and we were off.

 What we realized almost immediately was that the currents were not as fast, and the river's water level was not as high. We supposed that it was because there hadn't been any rain since the last time we came. Hhhmm, we hadn't thought about that. Oh well, we weren't gonna let that ruin our fun! We were here to have another perfect day. There were the same trees, stumps, and rocks in the river as before. However, this time there were even more that we could see (and get stuck on) since the water was so much lower. Well shoot! But at this point we were still determined that we WERE going to HAVE FUN!

 The initial humor of getting caught on a tree wore off after it kept happening, and it took us longer to get to that sandbar to eat. We were pretty hungry by the time we got there, and so we devoured our food. (Oops, should have brought more for a longer trip, guess we didn't think that one through.) We didn't stay and rest as long this time; the sun was a lot hotter today and we were beginning to get a little more anxious to get back to our car.

The final leg of the trip was the worst. We had long since abandoned the pretense of having fun and mostly just floated (or even paddled at some particularly stagnant parts) very slowly. When someone got stuck on a tree, no one offered to help anymore. The stuck person was totally on their own unless they screamed and argued with everyone else until they could be convinced to help. We were out of food **and** drinks, and we were all hungry and thirsty.

 Christian's tube soon popped on one of the rocks that was visible today but not visible when the river was higher, and he was trying to share the extra tube with the cooler. His tube eventually lost so much air it rode in a heap on top of the cooler. On the last trip this may have been funny, but we couldn't see the humor in that right then.

 Cara's boyfriend dropped Cara's shoes in the river and hadn't been able to find them, so they were arguing about that.

 Just when we thought we couldn't stand another minute with each other, it started to get dark. CRAP! There had to be undesirable animals living in and around this river! So now fear began to creep in along with the darkening sky.

We suddenly started working together (or at least screaming more at each other to hurry) until we finally reached our car just before it was so dark we couldn't see. We all left our tubes, including Christian's deflated one, on the bank and got in the car. We were so relieved to be out of the river! What a long day. But the torture wasn't over yet.

In the excitement of the morning, we had not noticed we were almost out of gas. Priority one was a gas station before we attempted the hour and a half drive home. At that time in rural Mississippi, country gas stations closed at dark! Yikes! We finally found a small station to buy expensive gas and stale potato chips and cokes since we were hungry and thirsty. We rode in silence all the way home; tired, cranky, sunburned and ready to get away from these other people. How had we thought that was so much fun before?

Needless to say, we did not go tubing again. In fact, we went a few days without speaking to each other at all, and it was months before we could talk about the second disastrous trip. I have never been tubing again. Canoeing yes, but tubing no. I like to tell myself that it is because I am older and thinking more about snakes. But truth be told, tubing doesn't sound so fun after that day. We can laugh at this story now, but believe me; it wasn't funny at the time!

So what does all that have to do with peace? Well, we know that Jesus can make a parable out of anything, so here's the one He made for me…

### Parallels drawn from the Bogue Chitto

 We are all (at least those of us who are saved) in a river of peace. In John 14:27, Jesus says "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

 When we've had an abundance of “spiritual rain” through prayer, study, and spending time with the Lord we can really see that spiritual fruit of peace. In John 15:4, Jesus tells us, "Live in me, and I will live in you. A branch cannot produce any fruit by itself. It has to stay attached to the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit unless you live in me." So when we are really living in Him, peace is abundant.

Our “river” is flowing swiftly at these times and we are enjoying every minute. Just like that first tubing trip, we don't seem to mind or really hardly even notice all the rocks and trees (i.e. troubles) in the water that are potentially hazardous. We are floating along in our river of peace on the inner tube of grace that God provided when he dropped us in the river, and enjoying every minute of the warmth of God's presence. We are talking and laughing with other believers that we pass in the river, and we are free to offer our help to anyone who is temporarily stuck. We just have to keep seeking that “spiritual rain” and our river will be full of swift currents.

When we haven't had as much spiritual rain, the opposite is true. Our river is slower and we are getting stuck on, and fighting with, every obstacle in the river. We are tired of fighting the stagnant water, especially the trees and rocks, and our inner tube of grace seems to be low or even deflated. There are some people with us in the low river that could possibly help us, but they are fighting the same obstacles we are. Where are those folks in the higher river? They are always willing to help.

 Here it is important to consider who we are hanging out with. If their river is as low as or lower than ours, we are all in trouble. But if we can hang out with the people with higher rivers, we will always have help when we need it. Proverbs 13:20 says "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble" - but I think in this case we could think of it as “Float with wise and become wise; float with fools and get in trouble.”

 Don't think we can completely escape the obstacles that could entangle us. John 16:33 clearly tells us we WILL have trouble (obstacles), but that we can have peace in Jesus anyway since He has overcome the world. So He never promised no obstacles; we just have an easier time floating over and around them if we have more rain in our lives. We can laugh about the obstacles even if we get a little stuck at times, and we are more likely to want to help each other if our own obstacles don't seem so overwhelming. So just like in the Bogue Chitto, the size of the obstacles themselves never changes; what DOES change is the amount of rain you've had and how high and swift the river is.

So this is what this looked like in my life.

 That week before the accident, I had not been getting much spiritual rain in my life. That hurts my pride to admit that, but my pride needs to be hurt. So here I was wading along in ankle deep water in my river of peace. My “grace tube” seemed to have popped, but it was so shallow I could walk; you can't really float on a tube in ankle deep water anyway. Maybe a new tube was waiting for me in the deeper river, if only I could get there, but you know I'm **so busy** that I don't have much time to seek any rain. And if only I hadn't also dropped my shoes, this shallow water may not seem so bad. There were moments when I was on soft, sandy ground and I noticed the cool water on my feet and I was thankful. The other 90% of the time I wasn't noticing that cool, peaceful water. I was concentrating on the penetrating heat of the sun and on the rocks I was stepping on. There was a rock of unforgiveness here and a rock of anger there. I was getting caught in a tree of pride here and a tree of discontent there. I kept wondering why in the world the water was so low that I could hardly feel it. Oh yeah, I didn't make any time to get rain. The sun was baking me like the Mississippi heat in August. Didn't God care about me? Didn't He see me in this dried up river bed with all these rocks and trees and no tube or shoes? Satan was whispering to me that maybe I just needed to quit walking, or even get out of the river altogether.

Just when I was almost over the enormous rock of prejudice that was causing all this pain, I fell head first over a tremendous waterfall. Once in the waterfall, I had no control over my direction. I immediately hit the biggest, sharpest rock you can imagine. It broke my arm and crushed my elbow. (It may have also crushed a little of that pride and selfishness in me.) I was free falling in the waterfall for quite a while.

What you have to understand about the waterfall is that, although I was out of control and in great pain, I was also SUBMERGED in the water of the river. I had more peace than I had ever had for one extended time period in my life. I also had more pain than I have ever had for one extended time period in my life.

It took me a while to get down that waterfall. I knew when I was at the bottom as sure as I knew when I was inside the waterfall. Jesus was with me at the bottom just like He was in the midst of it.

The water at the bottom of a waterfall is still very deep thanks to the waterfall itself. (Now I just had to be careful not to let it dry up). Jesus was there with a brand new tube for me. It was pure grace- because now I would float. I would not be submerged all the time, but I always had the option to float and even go under and submerge myself at times. I knew it was time for me to take responsibility again for the spiritual rain, (not for making it- just for seeking it) and for making sure the water stayed up in my river of peace.

Of course I did argue. (If you know me you will not be the least bit surprised at that.) I said, "No Jesus, let me stay a little longer in the waterfall. I am willing to take the pain if I also get the peace." That's when He showed me I could be in the peace without all the pain. The river had indeed leveled out. The water was still high from the waterfall, but I knew that wouldn't last forever. I found a stronger craving for that spiritual rain than I had ever known in my life. I am not anxious to be going over any more waterfalls, but I can never regret going over that one because of the river of peace it brought me into.

So here I am today, just like that first day of tubing, floating on a swollen river. I'm still going over the obstacles, even getting a little stuck on some. But the difference now is that I am relying on the grace in my tube and on the One who sent the rain to watch out for what's ahead. I am enjoying the ride and when I hit an obstacle, I don't focus on it. Instead I focus on the One who can get me off. Sometimes he sends someone else to help me. Sometimes He helps me Himself. Whatever His plan and however He wants to complete it, I know there is no better way. His plans for me are for a hope and a future. And I am resting in His arms and, at the same time, straining my eyes-- excited to see what's ahead. The hot sun feels good on my skin when I'm in the cool water. There are many small rocks I now pass over without even realizing they are there. My perspective of those obstacles has changed completely. They seemed really big and scary and they did cause me a lot of pain. But now they seem smaller. The more peace I have and the more my focus is on Him, the smaller the obstacles seem. I think this is **exactly** what Isaiah meant by “peace like a river.”

### His Presence

Although I always described what I felt as peace during those weeks after the accident, I believe I only felt the peace **because** I was in His presence. Now I was discovering what else was available to me in His presence: joy, strength, all the fruit of the Spirit, love, mercy, understanding, and all things pertaining to godliness (2 Peter 1:3). I don't even know the words for it all. Whenever any of these didn't seem near me, I would go back to my mantra. "This ONE thing I desire, to live in your presence all the days of my life." Because all the good things are there, in His presence. If I can live in His presence, I can have all those things. Wow, if I could only learn to live in His presence every moment of every day……

I have tried explaining a few times what it was like in the first few weeks after my accident. God's presence was so strong. What strikes me most is that in those first days and weeks when the thought crossed my mind to pray, I couldn't. I couldn't seem to think of anything to pray about. I realize how ridiculous that sounds. Here I was with this accident and then the complications and all the pain and all the surgeries, and I didn't pray? I wanted to, but in the depths of my heart I had every answer I needed in the form of His presence.

I feel so inadequate to explain the way God literally captured my heart. I could not think of anything I could desire that was greater than His presence, and I already had that. I was thankful for all the wonderful people around me that were praying for me. But I had what my heart needed most, His manifest presence. And now that I knew that kind of pure love, I wanted to continually stay in His presence. There is a wonderful quote from Mother Theresa that a friend brought to my attention that seems to explain it perfectly. It goes like this: Dan Rather in an interview asked Mother Theresa “When you pray, what do you say?” Mother Theresa responded, “I don’t say anything, I listen.” Dan Rather, not satisfied with her answer, asked, “Well, then when you pray, what does God say?” Mother Theresa smiled and responded, “He doesn’t say anything either, he listens. And if you can't understand that, I can't explain it to you."

 But if you know me, you're probably thinking "you sure haven't learned to be at peace in His presence all the time.” And that's right. That is what I seek, that is what I desire, and I WILL HAVE IT every moment of every day….in heaven. Bummer! With my usual impatience, I want it now! But the relationship God is drawing me into as I seek His presence is actually the reward in itself, and I can have it now.

This deeper relationship results in more and more moments submerged in His presence. I wish I could say "I've got it, I'm perfect now.” But I don't know anybody who has gotten it completely. I think that is what we have to look forward to in heaven. Right now we see a reflection, and we know only in part, but then we shall see clearly and know fully (1 Corinthians 13:12). So for now, everyone around me will just have to have some mercy with me for all my faults (just as I will strive to have to with them), but they can be assured, I am working with the Healer and the Perfecter of my faith (Hebrews 12:2)!

### So why am I in a bad mood?

This topic may seem a little unexpected or out of place, but my children will understand why I threw this in. After a discussion of peace and God's presence, it would seem to me that a good mood should naturally be the visible result of it. I have never heard a deep theological lesson on joy and peace and living in God's presence that said anything about being in a good mood. And isn't that really where we live? When I see one of my teenage daughters snap at the other over something minor, I think - Wow, she must be in a bad mood- and I don't think- wow, she must not be seeking the peace and joy that come from God's presence today.

I have a somewhat deserved reputation in my family as being moody. I say “somewhat” because there are certainly times when I am in a bad mood, no doubt about it, and then there are those times when I am not in a bad mood until someone gives me that label because I disliked something they did (like not cleaning a room after being asked). So, whatever the reason, I get a bad rap for being moody. Even now after all these great revelations of joy and peace!

 What's that about?

The answer seems to be that while I felt all this inside and I was so peaceful and joyful when I was just with Jesus-- my family wasn't seeing it too much. I realized (with God's help) that I was still letting small insignificant things bother me and was reacting badly. I know the perception of my girls was that nothing they did was right in my eyes. POOR GIRLS! Nothing could be further from the truth. They had both been so wonderful throughout all of this; I have felt so loved by them. But now I wasn't making them feel that love in return, I was giving them a false perception of me. And I could only expect them to give me the benefit of the doubt for so long.

So what should I do about it? Pray. Of course! I began to pray for a good mood. That may sound a little funny and not very "spiritual", and believe me, I felt funny about it. So after I prayed this way for a few days, I asked God, "Is it OK for me to pray for this? I haven't ever seen anywhere in the bible where it mentions that you promised us a good mood." Now, I am not one to say that God “said” something to me very often. More often I can just feel God's leading in one way or another. But I think in this case He SAID "Silly Child,” and then led me to the book of Galatians.

Galatians 5:22-23 are familiar to most of us as the fruit of the spirit. I looked up parallel translations for these verses and wrote down every translation of the fruits I could find.

They included: Love Joy Charity Endurance Peace Humility Patience Temperance Kindness Gentleness Goodness Sweetness Mildness Meekness Longsuffering Self-control Kind Acts Modesty Gentle behavior Quiet mind Benevolence Faith and Faithfulness

Then verse 25 says "If we are living by the Spirit's power, let our conduct (mood) also be governed by the Spirit's power." I think we could all agree that there is no way a person can be conducting themselves in a way that demonstrates all those words above and NOT be in a good mood.

I had my answer! Immediately preceding these verses, verse 19 went through the nature of the flesh (which is what is “natural” to us). I won't list them, but they are pretty much just opposite of the Spirit's nature. So I had been enjoying God's peace and joy in His presence, but I was not conducting myself according to His nature or His spirit.

“Good mood” is kind of a slang term we use, but the bible is full of stuff about it even though it doesn't use those words. Ephesians 4:22-24 says to “THROW OFF our old nature (flesh) and renew our thoughts and **attitudes** so we can put on our new nature (the nature of the Spirit).”

So now I can daily ask for and claim my good mood because I know God has said I can have it when I'm abiding in Him (especially when someone who shall go nameless forgets to clean her room). Of course I'm still a work in progress; I won't be perfect just as no one else is perfect. But I will try my best to walk and conduct myself by the Spirit!

### So what's the catch?

So all this has been wonderful. To study and learn and meditate on all the good God has to offer us in a relationship with him. But then came the “catch.” I felt that perhaps God had built me up so I could address a few areas that were in need of repair in my life. Oh Boy! I was ready for the things I knew I needed to work on. These are more or less the same for many of us. Of course, we all have strengths and weaknesses in different areas and so the list will differ a little. Among other things, I knew I needed less pride and selfishness and more mercy and patience (and the aforementioned good mood). These did not surprise me, but what came next did. In fact, these tougher issues caught me completely off guard. I think I knew in the back of my heart and mind that they were there; God had just never forced me to look at them so honestly or in the light of generational “weaknesses.”

I don't believe God **curses** any of us (under the new covenant) with generational curses (Numbers 14:18), but I believe this is still relevant and refers to the fact that we have the tendency to participate in the same sin as our family before us because of their influence and example in our lives. These areas of sin may be so much a part of our environments that they seem normal and a natural part of our personalities that we expect other people (and God) just to accept as part of who we are. "Oh, I've always been like that. That's just who I am. You will just have to accept it." That is a lie from the pit of hell! We can't ever just accept our sin as a part of our personalities that can't be changed. God is bigger than that!

As I've said before, I first started writing this only for myself, as a kind of journal to look back on when I don't have some of the clarity I have today. But then I got to thinking that this could help some of the people I love the most understand me better and what this whole experience has been like through my eyes. And that certainly does include family. Yes, the same family members who have the same generational issues that I have and am about to share. Yikes!

 I wouldn't be being completely honest if I didn't include this subject, and my goal has been to be completely transparent and completely honest. So, where does that leave me? I’ve got to say what's in my heart.

First, though, I must say that, while I have been diving into some personal issues that I believe are learned from my family, I still really do have a wonderful family. I have been blessed with a large family (on both sides) of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, great-aunts, great-uncles, and 2nd and 3rd cousins and on and on. I have such a sense of where I came from. And there are many outstanding people in my family tree. (Also, since I have such a huge family- they can't be sure who I'm talking about….just kidding.) Second, I think we can all agree that EVERY family has their issues! If you think yours in an exception, then pride may be your generational weakness.

 The weaknesses that seem to be prevalent in my family and passed down from generation to generation do not include anything illegal or any drug addictions, alcoholism or physical abuse. Whew! God has been so merciful and gracious to us, and there have been (and ARE) some spiritual giants in my family for which I am so thankful. Now, if I've made myself clear enough that I want to honor my family heritage and all the positive it has brought me, let me also say that I want to claim my spiritual heritage through Jesus. And this has included, for me, going through my past and getting out what is not pleasing to Him. Right here I am focusing on just two areas of generational sin-

1) Pride and a critical/negative spirit

2) Prejudice

### Pride and negativity

When I try to remember back to all the people in my family on each side I've ever known, it seems to me that a real sense of pride has been evident in many lives. I am defining pride as - feeling like we are right about pretty much everything and consequently, feeling like everyone else is wrong. The natural companion to pride is then criticism or negativity about everyone and everything, and airing that negativity is justified as stating the “truth” about others’ wrongness often accompanied by suggestions for what they should do to be as right as us. That's as diplomatic as I know how to be.

I will not go into specific examples of negativity. The negative side of me wants to, but if I try to listen as the Holy Spirit teaches me about this, I see that it’s not necessary. Unfortunately, we all know what that negative or judging spirit looks like, because this is a naturally prevalent (i.e. human) attitude. An attitude of wanting our way, and when we don't get it, assuming someone else must be wrong.

Matthew 7:1-2 may be some of the least quoted passage in the bible. We just don't like it, unless we are applying it to someone else. These verses tell us that when we judge others, we will ALSO be judged. And then they say we will be judged AS harshly as we judge others. OUCH! Judging applies to so many different situations. We don't like the decisions people make, the things they say, or the things they do. So we talk about how wrong they are. The bible didn't say they weren't ever wrong, it just said we are not the ones who will judge them for it.

The next few verses get even worse. We are cautioned not to pick out all that is wrong with other people, when we aren't perfect either, especially if we are not looking inwardly to allow God to work on us. And back in the previous chapter, it tells us if we don't forgive those other people (who we weren't supposed to be judging anyway) then God won't forgive us! So now God, in His grace, is helping me learn this difficult lesson. This is a process, and I just aim to follow Jesus and ask for forgiveness whenever I screw up (daily, in other words).

So now what? The answer is always found in the same book and involves two steps. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

First, I have to start with my own thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says "think on whatever is good, noble, and true (this is referring God's version of the truth here, not ours). So if I have an unkind thought, I replace it with a kind one. If I have a thought of doubt, I replace it with one of faith. If I have a depressing thought, I replace it with a joyful one. And so on.

The next step is my words. I love the God's Word translation of Proverbs 18:21. It says, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and people who love to talk will eat their words." So we WILL eat our words, the good ones AND the bad ones. James chapter 3 has lots to teach us about the power of our words (the tongue). It describes the tongue like the rudder, turning your life. It describes the tongue as the spark that can set your whole body on fire and even send you to hell. It also says a wise man is known by his good conversation.

I want good conversation. Bad conversation, full of negativity, is not only contrary to God's word; it makes you feel bad. I've never left a conversation full of complaining and criticism feeling good. But a conversation full of hope and optimism does leave me feeling good. Good conversation also leaves me feeling “built up,” which is contrary to the devil's lie that you will feel “built up” only by tearing someone else down. It's just not true. Tearing a person or group of people down will only make you feel worse in the end because, if you are a child of God, you are grieving the Holy Spirit within you. (Ephesians 4:30)

In my new enthusiasm for positivity, I wrote out a “motto,” so to speak, for my life and shared it with Christian and our girls in the quest to make our home a more positive and peaceful place. The funny thing is that when I first read it to them, they gave me these blank looks, and asked if we were moving. I told them "no, we are not moving".

Then I realized that while I was writing it, I felt inspired and every word was really heartfelt. But now it just sounded like a very “churchy” thing to say. I tried explaining the meaning it had for me with examples.

I got more blank stares.

So now I have come up with questions for any situation that can help up apply this "motto" to our everyday lives.

But first the motto itself. It goes like this:

**"I believe that God, at THIS time, has placed me in THIS family, home, community, school, church, work opportunities-paid and unpaid, with these friends, and in these activities. I will not question God's decision to put me here, but I will be willing to move if and when He tells me to. God already knew that the people He surrounded me with would be imperfect because they are people just like me and NONE of us is perfect. But if our perfect God is willing to extend love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness to these imperfect people (including myself), then I should be willing to extend love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness also- with HIS help. I will strive to give everyone God has put in my life the “benefit of the doubt” while believing that they are doing the best they can and that God is always working all things together for the good of those who love HIM (which includes ME!). I will focus on what is true, noble, and good, seeking to speak life and not death, good and not evil, in every situation. I will ask and trust in the Lord for HIS strength to do all these things. I will seek HIS presence daily in my life and all that HE has for me there (joy, peace, strength, wisdom). I will apply this mercy to myself as well. Thank you Lord. I love you."**

Question with which to apply it:

If I am unhappy (or find myself complaining) about any situation, which one of these could apply?

 -I believe God put me here at this time and I can "take it up" with Him if I don't like something so that I **CAN** find the good, give the benefit of the doubt, etc.

 OR

 -God did not put me here and I need to find out where He wants me instead.

It must be one or the other.

It sounds simple, and sometimes life seems more complicated than that. But if we really apply what God would have for us, it would be easier to learn FROM a difficult situation and not just complain ABOUT it. While I never believe God caused the difficult situation, I know He can use it to bring about a positive result in our lives. But sometimes I will need to face that perhaps I myself am the variable that needs changing. (Oh, I don't like thinking about that!)

There it is, and it's a lofty ideal to live up to. But if I don't aim high, I will never achieve it. And nothing is impossible with Christ!

This is all sounds so great when I'm alone with Jesus. He doesn't irritate me or tempt me. But when I'm around other people, it's not always so easy. Negative or critical conversation can seem to bring some sense of unity within a group. After all, we are all sitting around agreeing on negative things about whatever or whoever the topic is. Even when the topics seem as harmless as politics, sports (especially individual players and coaches we know), or just someone's poor fashion choice, it all counts as negative conversation. Expressing a difference of opinion without judgment of the other person would be fine, but I think we all are familiar with the critical nature of some conversations that I have am describing. If these same critical conversations were to be applied to my new “life motto,” they would not stand up.

Dang it!

Not even the poor fashion choice?

 Not if it singles out a person or people and does not give them the “benefit of the doubt” while believing they are doing the best they can. Sometimes I wonder what I will even talk about. But that question may just be why James 1:19 warns us to be slow to speak, and why James 1:26 warns that if we can't even control our tongues, we are fooling ourselves about being Christians! After all, if we love our negative words we will have to eat them. Proverbs 29:11 says "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back." And negativity creates its own cycle that can be hard to break. When we are negative or critical, our spirit moves from unbelief to doubt to fear. This cycle can keep repeating itself until we let Jesus in to break it. Here is how I have thought about this cycle in my life:

 Doubt that God will be able to work this circumstance for MY good

Unbelief that God really Fear of what has control of things will happen in the future

I have tried various forms of not participating in the cycle of negativity and criticism. I have tried removing myself from the situation, in which case people sometimes question what's wrong with me, since I keep leaving the room and I'm more quiet than usual. I've tried countering a negative with a positive. This has sometimes resulted in someone else coming up with a stronger negative to counter my positive. UGH! What's the answer? Should I just risk sounding “holier than thou” and say "I won't be participating in this evening's negativity?” Yeah right. What I can do is trust God to guard my heart and my mouth and trust that He will help me say the right thing at the right time. (Mark 13:11)

Now, the thing I can imagine may happen is that if I should let anyone read this, their first reaction will be "What makes you so holy?" And that's SO TRUE! That's why I need God to help me so badly. Because I can be the worst one in the room, and that is heart-breaking to me.

I want to change. With God's help I can change. It's not easy! And it won't happen overnight. But he never promised me easy. He did, however, promise to be with me in that river and make the rocks and trees a little easier to float over.

The bottom line is that in “bucking the system” of family dysfunction, you WILL be seen as the outsider. Ultimately it is our need for the approval of our families that keeps us willing to go along with whatever is the norm. But we have to let our need for the approval of our HEAVENLY FATHER give us strength to withstand the temporary disapproval of people. Because it will be worth it every time! That brings me directly to the next generational sin. And unfortunately, I know that my family is the not the only ones who struggle with it.

### Prejudice

What a loaded word!

 What a loaded subject!

 I immediately feel a need to tip-toe around the very word. But I'm tired of tip-toeing! That hasn't gotten me anywhere.

The word “prejudice” carries many thoughts and feelings of a time we would just as soon forget. And I really do believe we are over the 60's and 70's; we just can't forget lest we repeat the errors of the past.

 When I look at racial prejudice in the south, and particularly in my family, I see it as a kind of generational sin in reverse. Generally speaking, this is how I see the last few generations.

-My grandparents’ generation had black maids and cooks to whom they were (hopefully) friendly, which led them to believe they were not prejudiced.

-My parents’ generation had a few black friends and co-workers, and while they didn't invite them to their homes often, they also believed they were not prejudiced.

- I have black friends, co-workers, and many black patients that I love dearly, and I have not seen myself as prejudiced in any way.

- My daughter's generation has each of the qualities of the previous generations and they have also increasingly embraced inter-racial dating, and they are NOT prejudiced.

 It seems that every generation has seen more enlightenment on this issue. My daughter has crossed the final boundary, in my opinion, between black people and white people. She has a black boyfriend. Before I was forced to deal with this, I happily accepted any black person any time, in any way…..except in dating or marriage relationships. And I have discovered I am not alone. But when I look way deep inside, and pray, and ask for understanding; I see that what I am afraid of is what other people will say about me.

There, I said it. And I hate to admit it. I like to think of myself (a little more pride there) as someone who doesn't really care what others think. But this is not just a few people's disapproval, it seems to be the majority of the people I know who disapprove! Of all the people with whom I have actually discussed Mallory's relationship with Jay, the great majority seemed taken aback initially. And that is stating it mildly in some cases. And I have been surprised to discover that this ambivalence and silence on the part of people I care about is really more hurtful than outright criticism from more distant acquaintances.

I recently came across a quote on twitter by Martin Luther King, Jr that almost brought tears to my eyes: "In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies but rather the silence of our friends." What a profound truth; and I assume the quote was originally referring to this same subject. I have literally talked to only a couple of people who have been encouraging from the beginning. I have found that people that I care deeply for are all actually prejudiced! Or maybe to give a little more benefit of the doubt, I should say they have not shown complete acceptance of inter-racial relationships. I can't throw stones since I was myself guilty, it was just an unexpected realization.

Now I feel sure very few of them would have said they were prejudiced in any way if they had been asked in casual conversation, and I probably wouldn't have said that about myself before either; but it was true nonetheless. I have gotten assurances that they would support me, or at least not separate themselves from me, if I decide to allow Mallory to “do this.” But they've let me know with their silence that they don't approve. One sweet, honest friend said "I wish I could say I wouldn't mind at all if it were my daughter, but I don't know."

One reaction I've gotten several times, that I have been surprised by, is a question of Mallory somehow rebelling against us. I think it is strange that anyone thinks dating a polite, friendly boy with good character could be classified as rebelling. I have found, with further conversation, that for some people there is honestly no place in their reasoning process where they are able to believe that Mallory could like Jay for the person he is. They try to come up with a reason she is "willing" to go out with a black person that fits into their own paradigm of prejudice.

The most prevalent response (and one I actually said to Mallory myself in the beginning) is "I just don't want to see her get involved in an inter-racial relationship because it will make her life hard.” Well, that is true. If Mallory chooses to go against a cultural norm (even though that norm is a sin), she will have some heartache. But do we believe that we should only seek an easy life? Does God only lead His children down the easiest path? I hardly think so.

I wonder if Christianity were not the “cultural norm” here in the Bible belt, would we choose not be Christians because that made our life hard? (I want to stress that I am NOT throwing stones. I would have had a similar argument before God put this truth in my heart. But the reason doing something that goes against a cultural norm makes life any harder is because of the prejudice out there, the fear of what other people will think of you, and the fact that some people will choose not to associate with you. (This is what motivates us to go along with cultural and generational sin in the first place). I know these people who want to “warn” her about a harder life mean well, but I am now convinced, because I have been convicted, that this attitude is directly opposed to the love of God. And so many people continue to be fooled into thinking that it's not a sin! James 2:9 (NLT) plainly says, "if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin". Until you can see your own bondage, you can never be free of it. (AA knows that one- first you have to admit you have a problem.) In John 8:31-32 when Jesus said "If you hold to my teachings, you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free," I believe he was also talking about the truth about ourselves, letting him expose our hearts and our true natures so we will be ready for all HIS truths, and not filled with lies from Satan.

 Why has this been such a blind spot for Christians for so many generations? White supremacy groups have even claimed to be Christians and used perverted interpretations of scripture to support their beliefs. But even many “ordinary” Christians, who would never dream of violence against anyone, still hold their own prejudices. Even while they sit and read their bibles, they are teaching their children that you will go to hell if you marry someone of another race. (I'm sorry, that is astounding to me.) They love to use the command to the Israelites not to marry anyone of a different culture (Deuteronomy 7:3). This clearly is pertaining to being a child of God and the “other culture” being the gentiles. (And the punishment was not going to hell even for those who did it- like David and Solomon.) 2 Corinthians 6:14 also warns New Testament believers not to marry unbelievers, but again, no mention of race. Actually, Galatians 3:28 states plainly "There is no longer Jew or gentile….for we are all one in Christ. We are all children of God if we are saved, so any believer would qualify as a potential mate.

The irony here is that believers often marry unbelievers, and that seems to be accepted pretty well. But if a white believer marries a black believer, it is not as easily accepted. And what if someone you know marries a Middle Eastern believer? Jesus himself was of Middle Eastern descent; even though all those pictures in Sunday school showed a white Jesus, we know he was an Israeli.

 I have been nothing short of completely overwhelmed by the reactions of people around us. When you are involved in a fairly close knit community, you are always aware of what other people are saying. It is perhaps most devastating to learn that the very people who have not voiced their opinions or disapproval directly to me are some of the harshest critics in the bunch. The things their children say to my children are not too far a cry from the 60's (and I have to believe they must have learned it from their parents). I never would have guessed this about some of them. They seem like some of the most “Christian” people I know, holding positions of authority in local churches. I have to wonder if they tell their children those things in fear that their own children will one day want to get involved with a black person. Are they afraid of what other people would think too? And I do know that this is not always limited to one side of the relationship. I have had many black patients with a child or grandchild in an inter-racial relationship, and their families were often not comfortable with it either. I have been given no reason to think this would apply this to Jay's family, but these struggles can be common to everyone.

The biggest struggle for me in this has been to deal with the value I personally place on the approval of others. In Galatians 1:10 Paul asks, "who am I'm trying to win the approval of, God or men?" That is so easy to say. I want God's approval and not man's. We have all heard sermons on it and would completely agree with the concept without a second thought. But the truth is - we want both.

I think God is OK with us **having** both, but not OK with us **wanting** both.

If we only seek God's approval and men approve also, great. But if we seek men's approval, we are bringing God down a notch. Ouch! I don't think I have ever had to really live this out like I am now. I tend to think most people I know haven't. It is intensely, devastatingly painful to know you have the **dis**-approval of almost everyone you know. And the next dagger is that many of them will pretend that's not true; you inevitably will hear it from some other source or even accidentally overhear things.

 So the next part of Galatians 1:10 says "if I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” I used to think that meant that since many of the men of Paul's day didn't accept servants of Christ, it must follow that he wasn't trying to please men. But now I see that it doesn't mean that at all! It means that whoever you are trying to please is **already** who you are a servant to! So Paul was saying he would be a servant of men and not Christ if he was trying to please men. So although there is indeed intense pain and heartache in this journey, I can see the freedom of living to please Christ and not men! I don't ever have to go around trying to please anyone or caring about what they may think of me - because I'm already approved of by my heavenly father and HE is the One I serve. Matthew 5:10 says "God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right" and I am learning what persecution is all about.

OK, I know that sounds a little dramatic. It's true that nobody has tried to stone me in the town square. Instead it's a slow, painful, passive-aggressive persecution that sometimes takes my breath away because it hurts so much. 2 Corinthians 4:8 says "I am pressed but not crushed; frustrated but not in despair.” My only solid rock has been God (and of course, in his great grace, He gave me Christian who stands with me).

But I've finally got it right. If this is what it took for me to finally “get it,” then I will "count it all joy" like Paul said when people say bad things about me--because I am doing what God has told me is right. Romans 14:22 says "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.” I will no longer condemn myself by being quiet about and therefore effectively approving of something wrong! And this must apply to many more issues than race. Being quiet is so easy, though! I know I will need God's help for this one.

 It's hard for me to get over the fact that many of my Christian friends are not angry about this with me and standing with me. They mostly don't say anything. Maybe some want to but don't know how to bring it up. I myself don't because I haven't yet learned how to tell them these things without sounding judgmental or self-righteous, and I really am trying to speak only as God leads me. (As someone who likes to talk, that is a work in progress.) Now here is where I can begin to feel a little self-righteous. And I have absolutely no right. I would not have been any different than the majority of the people I know if roles were reversed. I imagine that if interracial dating had happened in any other family we know instead of mine, I would have thought, “better them than me to have to deal with all that.”Sadly, that is a common way we tend to look at other people’s issues. We don't really want to get involved; we just stand by silently and watch how they handle it.

Sometime we criticize their choices. (Remember that negativity issue?) Perhaps on our better days we may wish them the best or even pray for them, but that doesn't mean we have to **actively** support them. Or does it?

I am really just speaking out of the conviction I now have, rather than directing this at anyone in particular. I am committed to change this complacent attitude within me, with God's help. I will be more diligent to listen to His guidance of where and how to get involved to encourage and support others. This will not be an easy task I know.

For the most part, people don't discuss deep thoughts and issues, and maybe it has to be that way to some extent. It would be hard to go around with your emotions raw all the time (and most of us have learned people are not always as gentle with our hearts as God). I have a few close friends with whom I discuss significant topics, but even then, I can tend to communicate on a theoretical level like a preacher in a church. Those discussions are valuable but not always personal and don't require us to reveal many of our own feelings to others. Strangely enough, I have one friend who is always comfortable revealing her own issues and weaknesses to me and laments that I may not always feel able to do the same with her. (Just wait until she reads this; she will be amazed. Risking vulnerability like this is so out of character for me.—that's how I know its God.)

Recently the movie “The Help” opened in theaters. It was a fictional story of the process of the writing of a book in the 60's in Jackson, MS. It followed the trials the main characters underwent and the persecution they experienced as they wrote it. It was interesting to see that almost all the people in the sold out theater we visited were white, and for the most part under 50. Now maybe that's just more typical of the time of day and of the location of the theater, or maybe there was a reason. In light of my current struggles the appeal of this movie is a mystery to me (except maybe that it was made in Jackson). More about that in a moment.

One thing I have noticed is that anyone who lived through that time period, as adults, did not seem to like the movie as much as everyone else. Maybe it hit too close to home. Maybe it called them out a little (otherwise known as convicting them) and they didn't like it. Most people seeing it that didn't live through it seemed to like the movie. Maybe it was just because it was a well made entertaining movie. Maybe it was because they really don't believe in that kind of prejudice.

But out of the same mouths that say good things about the movie, come degrading remarks about Mallory and Jay. We can't have it both ways. If anyone firmly believes in his prejudice as being right, then why do they act otherwise? Anything that is not said in the open is shameful to a person. 2 Corinthians 4:2 says "we reject shameful cover-ups/secrecy and we do not walk in deception or distort the word of God. As God watches, we clearly reveal the truth to everyone."

Acting like you love your black friends and then teaching your children they will go to hell if they marry a black person is nothing other than shameful and deceptive. And, I might add, “double-minded”: "a double minded man divides his loyalty between God and this world and is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8).”

Even after having all this “revelation,” I was also guilty of secrecy. I had been careful not to let certain people know about Mallory and Jay because I was so fearful of their rejection. But God showed me that I would never fully be satisfied with approval from them or any other human anyway. I HAD to let HIM fill that void in me if it was ever going to get filled. So I had to come clean; even with the knowledge that I would be the subject of gossip and unkind words for quite a while. That's hard. No matter who you are - that's hard. Nobody wants to be shunned by those whose friendship they want. But I could no longer live as a servant to them. I had to learn fully to seek only God's approval and serve only Him.

 I was scared - there's no other way to say it. I worried about it for a while. Time after time, I had to cast down “vain imaginations” (2 Cor. 10:5) of what would happen. I had lots of ideas about how to respond to this or that. But in the end, I had to trust God for the right words to say. I knew without a doubt I was doing the right thing. I knew without a doubt that I had heard God on this, and no one could take that away from me. I had to be willing to risk the approval (or disapproval) of everyone else to follow His lead. God helped me. I studied scripture on courage; I even typed up a list of verses to keep in front of me and meditate on. Now the only thing left to do was obey.

Well what I had worried about and made into a drama in my mind turned out to be very anti-climatic (and really a non-issue in some cases). Here's the difference: I had sought God with all my strength about this, and HE took the situation and turned it in a way that I never would have expected. HE is so good to me! What a lesson here. When I seek Him first, HE's there….every time! Not everyone reacted with kindness or grace. But God has given me the difficult task of praying for them. Maybe that's more for my sake, because it's hard to hate someone when you are praying for them.

I am currently doing a study on the life of the apostle Paul, and I recently read a story I had not read in a while. In Acts 5:17-42, it tells the story of the apostles appearing before the Sanhedrin and then being flogged for preaching the gospel. Verse 41 says "the apostles then left rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus." At the time I thought, does that literally mean they were happy they were flogged? How's that possible? Well, God brought that verse back to my mind the other day. After I stepped out the first time and told a relative about Mallory even though I knew the response would not be approval (and I was really scared), God filled me with a sense of joy and peace in a way I haven't ever quite known. It's so hard to describe, but I have actually initiated encounters like that since then, and I almost feel excited to encounter the next person who disapproves.

 But now I am coming from a place of wanting to tell them how God has worked in my life through all this. I'm saying things I wouldn't have ever thought I would be saying to these people. That first time I was so nervous; I felt sure I wouldn't be able to go through with it. I kept repeating Deuteronomy 31:6 to myself (I paraphrased it and made it personal): “The Lord has commanded ME in what to do. I WILL be strong and courageous. I will NOT tremble. I will NOT be dismayed. For the Lord my God is with me wherever I go.” My biggest question for God that day was "Why don't I FEEL strong? Why AM I trembling?" until He pointed out that the verse said I WILL, not I already am. In other words, it took that actually beginning that step of faith before I actually saw this verse realized. And the joy and peace God gave me spilled over. That bad mood stuff? Not a problem as long as I'm obeying God and **taking** that next step He is showing me.

What is all this about racism? This was supposed to be the story of my accident.

That's wonderful proof of how God works all things TOGETHER for my good. Because I had the accident and was available to God to be humbled and to experience His presence and love, He was able to teach me all these things. (I like to think of this as God taking advantage of a “teachable moment.”- modern day psychologists certainly didn't invent that concept)

I have discovered more freedom through what God has taught me about racism than through anything else in my life. Because what He taught me wasn't only about racism; it was about seeking the approval of God alone instead of trying to please men. It was about God’s faithfulness to answer so many prayers… prayers to know Him better, prayers for relationships and direction in my life. He even listened carefully to what I thought was a silly little prayer about being in a good mood, and answered that too!

 I had to access this freedom before I could really demonstrate the nature of the Spirit in my daily life. So really it's all about freedom. It's freedom to serve God alone in the face of disapproval without fearing that you won't be able to bear it. It's freedom to be happy (and in a good mood) because I completely trust God with my life and my children's lives, and I'm not worried about tomorrow. It's freedom to choose not be angry at any person for anything they've said (or haven't said). My new understanding that we are all doing the best we can with the emotions and perceptions we have (that are shaped by our unique past experiences) is what has given me the peace of mind to believe that no one I know actually has ill will toward me, and that the actions of others probably have more to do with them than with me. (And even if any person does have ill will toward me, it doesn’t actually have to affect my life when I am living to please God- not people.)

Am I still hurt by the gossip and meanness and even the ambivalence (or at least by my perception that it's there)? Yes, of course it hurts. I'm human - I want to be loved. But now I am so connected to God that this pain is tiny in comparison to the magnificence of His love for me. "His grace is sufficient for me (2Cor. 12:9)” has become so personal to me. His grace really IS sufficient for me. Now I know it with my heart and not just with my head. And I know that I have been given the measure of grace according to MY gift in Christ (Eph 4:7).

 I am firmly convinced that this attitude of racism if profoundly prideful (and therefore sinful). In it is wrapped up fear, judgment, hatred, and strife. I hope to be able to at least challenge people around me to be honest with God and themselves about the attitudes of their hearts and let Him work in them where He wants to. It can be painful, but it is DEFINITELY worth it!

I may have seemed to go way overboard with this, but this has been on my heart and mind so much. Jay is a wonderful, godly boy. He and Mallory may be together for the rest of the day, the rest of the year, or even the rest of their lives. That's for them and God to decide. Some of my greatest hopes for Mallory (and Olivia) are purity, godliness, and the right man for each of them whenever they are ready to get married. I am the last person to push my girls to have a boyfriend or think about getting married. I would rather they not even think about boys until at least age 21 (but this is not about what I want).

I have not specifically mentioned how Christian feels about all this. The answer is found in the argument we had the week before my accident; he has never had the same hang ups I did. He is such a great man, and he loves everyone until they give him a reason not to. And skin color is not a reason. He loves Jay and his family, as do I. The strange twist here is that much of Christian's heritage includes people that are blatantly prejudiced in more areas than relationships. Thankfully, he and his sister seemed to be aware of the blatant sin of racism and chose instead to reject all forms of it, where as it was harder for me to identify the vague sense of racism in my own family.

I still sadly anticipate that rejection that will continue to come from some of the people I know when they learn about Mallory and Jay. I don't say fear anymore because fear is cast out by Perfect Love- God's love.. It feels more like anticipation, I am not fearful of it, but I know it will happen. There may always be acquaintances, friends, or family that disapproves when they “find out,” and I will always be human and would prefer to have others' approval. The difference now is that I know I don't **need** it, and I no longer seek it. Even if this issue was to vanish, there is always something that other people will find to disapprove of. So I will let God worry about tomorrow; today has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34).

### How is all this connected to my accident?

 It may seem I have strayed far from the original story. But I haven't. This is all part of my story— the story of going over that waterfall. Now that I'm in the river at the bottom, I am learning that, if I want to live in God's perfect peace (and stay in a very high and swift river), I have to give him all of me--not just the parts that are convenient. I have to hand over my tendencies toward negativity because I have to be positive in order to trust God completely and fully in every situation. Negativity and pessimism are directly opposed to faith. And I have to expose and surrender that tendency toward prejudice of inter-racial relationships, because there is no room for hate if I want to experience God’s love.

 I very much regret that dumb snap decision about prom, which I wasn’t able to reverse in time when my life turned upside down.. I know now I hurt Jay and his sweet family with that decision. I am just thankful now that God revealed my mistake to me, and now I can walk in His truth and love. And being in God's presence and enjoying His peace and love is of more value than the approval of any one person, and that keeps me coming back to Him.

Therefore, I will continue to let Him show me my weaknesses. Because more than anything, I long to spend my days floating in that swollen river.

### Understanding it all- the sticky subject of faith and my accident

I decided to add this section because I've been thinking so much about this since I addressed it briefly early on. First of all, I should spend a little time on my background.

I grew up in churches that definitely could be described as charismatic or “word of faith.” And I am SO thankful! I learned so many wonderful things and saw so many people authentically living out their faith. I will say I no longer believe ABSOLUTELY everything I ever learned there. But I imagine most people would say that; we all learn and grow over time. The churches I attended encouraged us to study and read the bible for ourselves to see if what we heard was true. So that is what I've done. I can honestly say I believe every minister in every church I've been a part of has been very sincere in what he believed and taught. But none of us know everything perfectly; there is always room to grow.

God has done so many wonderful things in my lifetime. Sometimes He didn't do them like I wanted Him too, but in the end His way was always better (imagine that!). Besides the obvious accident I had this year and this subsequent journey, I have been thinking about one other thing He has done for me in particular.

When I was in my early 20's I had pretty intense pain and muscle spasms in my neck and shoulders. I think it first began when I started working as a physical therapist. Poor posture, lifting patients, and stress were the most likely contributors. Because I worked with other physical therapists, I was always talking someone into massage, heat, stretching and any other treatment for my shoulders we could think of. Nothing helped. I was pretty much constantly in some pain and at times it was intense.

The moments when it always seemed to hurt the worst was actually in church during the praise/singing portion of the service. Many churches no longer used hymnals but had words up on screens overhead as mine did. It was this posture of looking up continually that would make sharp pain shoot through my shoulders. After a few songs, I had to look down and sing from memory. This lasted for quite some time; I would say 4 or 5 years. I don't even remember praying earnestly about it, I am sorry to say. I know I had mentioned it in prayer, but somehow it didn't seem important enough to bother God with. And from the doctrine I had learned at that time, I was pretty sure I didn't have enough faith for the healing anyway; so why try? And this was not a life threatening or even very debilitating condition, so I wondered if God was really even concerned about it? I was about to get the answer to that.

One day in church we had just finished singing and my neck was killing me. I was already in the “praying” posture when the pastor shifted the service and began to lead us into communion. He spoke about the last supper and the meaning of the communion. He then quoted Matthew 8:17. "It was he who took our illnesses away and removed our diseases."(ISV) Those words took my breath away.

 Suddenly I was no longer aware of anything the pastor was saying. God seemed to whisper to my heart. “Jesus died for YOUR pain. So let me have it.” I whispered “yes, Lord. Please take this pain away from me. In Jesus name.” The next thing I was aware of was intense heat in my neck and shoulders. It wasn't on my skin, it was in my muscles. It felt so hot; I would say it almost burned. I don't have any idea how long it lasted. Not very long I think. And then I had no pain. What?! Just like that? I looked around to see if anyone was looking at me. Could they tell what was happening? No, it didn't look like it.

Now, have I ever had any pain in my neck and shoulders since? NO. Tightness yes, pain no. The tightness I have now is easily managed with stretching. I have not had that intense pinching, shooting pain since that day. I didn't tell anybody what had happened to me. I'm not even sure why. Somehow I felt like it was so personal. Just between me and God; something to treasure in my heart. I had never felt such a confidence in God's presence in my life.

This may be hard for many to believe. And some people who don't believe God would, or maybe even could, do such a thing might say it was pure foolishness for me to believe that it even happened (1 Corinthians 1:25). I know this in the same way I know that some people support abortion rights; I am not angry about what they believe-- I just don't understand it. These are the matters of the heart that for me are not debatable, no more than I would debate my name or if Mallory and Olivia are my biological daughters. There are things that are not a matter of “belief;” they are just fact to me. **I know** the pain I had in the years prior to that, and **I know** the pain I HAVEN'T had in the years since. I could not have conjured up that burning sensation that came and left so quickly, especially since the pain left with it.

Now it was about 12 or 13 years between that and day of my accident. During that time I have certainly had many ups and downs with God. There have been times I have followed Him as hard as I could, and times when I seemed to detour off on another path altogether. Oh, I always wanted to keep Him in sight in case I needed Him, but I wasn't always interested in obedience. But God has been with me through it all. And I could list a hundred things He has done for me, big and small. And this year, when I wasn't exactly walking closely with Him, He chose to perform another miracle in my life-- the miracle of smothering me with His love and presence even though I didn't deserve it.

Now, according to my understanding of the doctrine I grew up with, the reason I had an accident would have been because I didn't have the faith necessary for God's divine protection. If I had been being led by the Holy Spirit, then I would've known not to be in that place at that moment. And then, to add insult to injury, some people would even say I didn't have the faith for a healing miracle after it happened.

In contrast, there are some who would say that according to “denominational” doctrines, God was using this injury to teach me some lesson. According to this school of thought, it would be best for me just to accept that it was His will for me to get hurt, and then try to learn His intended lesson. (I DO NOT use the terms “word of faith” and “denominational” in derogatory ways; they are only used to differentiate two extremes that exist in the body of Christ. I don't like labels, but I need to make a distinction between these views.)

Here's the problem with both of those. I now see them as condemnation (condemnation that God is NOT putting on me). In the first, I am condemned for not being able to produce a great enough level of faith to deserve God's protection in my life. And in the second, God Himself is condemning me because I need to learn some lesson. Both are taking back what Jesus did for us. "There is now NO condemnation to anyone who is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1-NIV).

Please don't misunderstand me. I know emphatically that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). And Jesus Himself recognized levels of faith as “little” in Matthew 8:26 and “great” in Matthew 8:10. But looking at both of these examples, I notice He helped the people of little faith as well as the people of great faith. He didn't say, "You don't have enough faith yet, so ask again when you do." In Matthew 8:26 it was His own disciples that had little faith. If his closest followers could falter in their faith, do we think we could never do the same? Would He not help us even then, just as he calmed the storm for his disciples? Maybe He especially longs to help us in those times. His love and grace are immeasurable. But since our love and our grace are not, it can be hard to grasp.

So after some time and several major events, God had us leave our “word of faith” church and go to a church near the other end of the spectrum. (I say near because they were actually considerably “liberal” compared to traditional denominational churches.) There was great love and compassion in this church, but what seemed to be missing was some of the faith and the power I had seen in lives in church before. Everyone was so nice, and I got to know people who loved God with a love I hadn't really seen before. They were passionate and compassionate. This was exactly what I had been missing in my own view of God. They believed IN God completely. But the part less apparent to me was belief in His divine intervention in ordinary situations.

I had lived and breathed faith for years, and now, at this new church, I was living and breathing love. God used this time to teach me so much about His love for me and that was, and is, indeed an invaluable lesson. But I quit trusting God for every detail of my life. I felt like I was content to live in His love and let whatever happened just happen. I was not developing my faith in God to trust Him for every step I made. The view I had grown comfortable with seemed to be more like, “well I will ask God to intervene- but He may not want to so I will take what He decides to give me.”

What happened to “you have not because you ask not” (James 4:2-KJV) and “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting” (James 1:6-ASV)? I prayed, don't get me wrong, but it was more like “If **You** want to do this for me God, then I would be grateful;” it was not a powerful prayer of faith.

Where was the balance? I felt like I had gone from one extreme to another. How could I use faith like God wanted me to? How could I trust Him and ask Him for things without thinking I could demand whatever I wanted, exactly when I wanted it, if I only had the faith? I asked God these kinds of questions all the time. And I was about to get an answer in a way I never could have imagined. But one thing I know for sure about God was that He does things in much bigger and greater ways than what I could imagine.

So on February 18, 2011, God seized my heart in a way I didn't even know was possible.

I consider this year to be the biggest miracle of my life, without compare. The difference I now see is this: a more charismatic type of faith believes for and desires big, immediate miracles we can see (like healing). The more denominational type of faith desires and trusts God for the deep miracles of the heart which often happens much slower. But here I was experiencing a big, immediate miracle of my heart, which was sudden in its onset but slow in my understanding of it; and a healing miracle that was anything but immediate on top of that. God had messed up the neat little compartments I had put Him into.

We know from the bible that immediate or external miracles do not necessarily turn people's hearts to God. As far as we know, the centurion who had his ear put back on by Jesus did not turn and try and defend Him from the other centurion (which amazes me since he experienced this awesome healing miracle himself). And it seems that miracles of the heart usually DO turn people's hearts toward God. The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears in Luke chapter 7 was forgiven much and so loved Him greatly (implying that her love may not have been as powerful if she had not needed to be forgiven so much).

What if we could combine the best parts of the two doctrines? I don't think they are polar opposites, instead I think they are just two different pieces to the same puzzle. In Galatians 5:6, it says that the only thing that is of importance is having **faith that works by love** (paraphrased). Wow, faith and love working together. Faith that works ONLY BY love. How do we put it all together?

What if no matter what doctrine we grew up with or currently believe, we could accept that we do not know all things perfectly (1 Corinthians 13:12) and that we can likely learn something from other brothers and sisters in Christ who are just as sincere about their love for and pursuit of God as we are (Proverbs 27:17)?

Something that has bothered me in people, and even with some Christians, is a sense of judgment toward anyone who doesn't believe everything the same way they do. I have even heard leaders publicly ridicule other Christians and imply that maybe they are not saved at all if they do not believe a certain point. (James 5:9-WNT: “Do not cry out in condemnation of one another, brethren, lest you come under judgment. I tell you that the Judge is standing at the door.”) In John 13:34-35(NLT), Jesus Himself tells us to love each other as He has loved us, and that by doing this, it will prove to the world that we are His followers. Those verses have always made me a little sad. I don't see much of that among the body of Christ-- at least not between different churches or different denominations-- and often not even between members of the same denomination. I think what starts as great love for God and conviction from the Holy Spirit (in what you believe) can end up making people turn from each other, and can lead to spiritual pride (believing that there is nothing we could possibly learn from each other).

Over this past year God has led me to listen to and read many teachings by two great women. Beth Moore and Joyce Meyer do not “run in the same spiritual circles,” and are generally associated with one of the two extremes I mentioned. (Beth Moore tends to be thought of as more mainstream denominational, while Joyce Meyer seems to be more on the “word of faith” side.) I have found that I can often tell which of these doctrines people tend to subscribe to the most by looking at which one of these women they prefer. I have not found a lot of people who love both like I do. The amazing thing I have found, as I become more familiar with their teachings, is that as far as faith, they are very much alike. Now they have very different styles and personalities, but the message of faith is the same. Their teachings have been so helpful to me in understanding a more balanced faith message than I ever have before.

In Beth Moore's book Believing God, she spends considerable time discussing the importance of trusting God for the big things, often the external miracles, and she gives personal testimony of the miracles she has personally witnessed (something you might associate more with Joyce Meyer). Alternately, I read a quote from Joyce Meyer that seems to sum up what she believes about faith, "Your faith is not to help you avoid problems but to go through problems with stability." This is where both of these teachers find biblically solid common ground.

I understand there are differences in these two leaders. But there are differences in just about everyone in some way. I don't want to compromise what I believe just to be inclusive, and I don't want to exclude the very brothers and sisters in Christ that Jesus told me to love because they may believe differently on some point of doctrine.

I personally have grown to love how varied God has made His church. I love slow, worshipful music, and I love upbeat praise music. I think there is a time and place for quiet reverence and a time and place for joyful noise. I want to be careful not to limit what God can show me or the ways He can work in me.

So how will I approach the difficult question of faith in the future? Will I have faith for the external miracle or the internal miracle? I would say both. My perspective is now broadened (but is probably still way too small for our BIG GOD!). I love Jesus' prayer in the garden: "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42). Even in his flesh, Jesus knew God's plan, but He still told the Father what would “feel good” to Him before he submitted himself to God's will--whether his flesh liked it or not. I have tried to model some of my own prayers after this. I present the problem to God; I tell Him the answer I think I want, and then express that I trust Him for the **best** answer. In a way, I know this almost sounds like I don't really have faith and I'm just accepting that God's will might not include an answer to my prayer. On the contrary! I now have so much greater faith than I ever have. I believe deeply that God absolutely cares about every detail of my life and **will** **definitely** answer my prayer. The difference is that I now know He may have (or that He DOES have) a solution way better than mine because "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine" (Isaiah 55:8 NLT). 1 John 5:15 (NIV) says, "And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for." So I am full of expectation when I ask, but now it is greater joy because I am not trying to limit God only to the solution that I come up with. I'm asking for His greater solution, and I know I have it! I'm not HOPING I have it, I KNOW I have it; and I'm excited to find out what form it will take. His solutions are always more “fun” than mine.

God has shown me such a clear example of this in my own life. (Here comes another parable from my own life.) A couple of years after Mallory was born, Christian and I became more serious about going to church and serving God. Since we had just begun to get really involved in church, we didn't have many close friends in the church yet. We had friends outside church, and it's not that they were bad people, but they weren't walking closely with God. So I prayed for new friends. I told God that we needed some good “couple friends.”

Over the next few weeks, I would go to church and check out all the couples our age. I even picked out a few that I thought might make good friends. I would then let God know which couples I would like to have as friends. (I hope you catch the sarcasm as I describe my presumptuous attitude.) And we did start spending some time with some couples in our church. They were all great, but we just hadn't really connected with any of them yet. Of course, I was impatient and I couldn't understand why God hadn't answered my prayer yet.

So in a seemingly unconnected circumstance, a missionary came to speak at our church one night. That sermon affected me more than any other had before and probably more than any other has since. Christian and I were both touched deeply. The missionary was actually a man I had known as a teenager and so we went to speak with him after the service. We determined in our hearts to get involved with their ministry and wouldn't leave them alone until they let us start volunteering in their stateside office. One thing led to another and we took on more and more responsibility in the stateside operations.

Now we had not connected this event to our desire for Christian couple friends at all, but we quickly became very close to this couple. They have had a huge impact on our lives, and we are still great friends now. They are back in the states pastoring a church about 3 hours away and we visit them every chance we get. Adrienne is one the closest friends I have to this day and we both know our friendship was a gift from God when each of us needed it most.

So the point is, I prayed earnestly for this, and even told God how to answer my prayer. But he didn't do it my way. He did it in a different time frame and in a much more powerful way than I EVER could have imagined! God would not be limited to the solution I had come up with, THANK GOD, because He had a much greater one!

Now back to comparing the miracles in my life (the healing of my neck and the wonders God had done in me since my accident). When I think back over these two examples of the miracles I've seen in my own life, one thing that sticks out to me is that I was not **at either of those times,** activelypraying or trusting God for the specific miracles I received. I had at other times prayed for the pain in my shoulders and neck (probably a little half-heartedly) and I had (on occasion) prayed for God's presence in my life. But in both cases, the answer came in ways I didn't expect (and at times I didn't expect), and God showed me such tremendous grace to perform both of these miracles without a particularly great level of faith on my part in that moment. I guess what I know now, and what I am so desperate for other people to know (in their own hearts), is that God loves us completely, and so He is ALWAYS trustworthy.

There are some times when we can't see God's hand on a situation and we naturally wonder “**why,"** but we **can't** come up with our own answers! The one who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23), ALL the promises of God are "YES in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20), and He has promised to go with us and will NEVER leave us NOR forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:18). And I think that's the best promise we could have.

### Fall and the New Year

Fall brought our over-due trip to Universal Studios in Florida. Our wonderful friend and travel agent had taken care of getting everything changed to the end of September. We didn't miss out on any of it, and there were smaller crowds than there would have been at Spring Break. We didn't get to swim with the Manatees, but that could wait for another vacation. We had a great time, and I was so glad to be able to spend some time with the girls. I found that adjusting to life after my accident had been harder on them than I originally knew. I committed to myself to spend more time with them and grow our relationships. This became a focus in my prayers daily, and I have seen God give me answers I never could have imagined (of course that's what He always does).

By November I began to work part-time, I was riding my spinning bike inside again (although with the adjustment of bearing less weight on my left arm), and overall, I really thought things were getting back to normal for me. My pain had been steadily decreasing in the last several months and I was weaning myself completely off pain meds. Winter was also coming quickly.

So I don't know which of those factors, or maybe some combination of them all, caused the sudden increase in pain I began to have. Was it the cold weather? The fact that I was no longer on pain meds? The fact I had started working and so was using my arm a lot more than I had been previously? I couldn't seem to figure it out. I did know that my pain was now closely associated with use, since I had less pain in the morning and it increased throughout the day. I tried going to my see my regular doctor about this. I'm not even sure what I wanted or expected him to do, but he didn't do much of anything. I even tried a new doctor thinking she may be different; I was wrong. I assumed from their attitudes (my perception of course) that they either did not believe I was having a lot of pain or simply did not know what to do about it, so they left me with nothing. I discovered a pain specialist (who treated more than back patients) and so was referred to him by my regular doctor, only after I repeatedly requested the referral. The soonest I could see him was a month away, so I had to deal with the pain the best I could on my own until then.

Here's the hardest part of this. I was having days when the pain was as intense by that evening as it had been on some days in those first few months, but I didn't feel like I could let anybody know it (except Christian). Now I don't mean to sound harsh; there are other people who cared about my situation. Maybe part of the frustration was that they could do nothing for me, so I felt bad burdening them with my pain. I'm always **very** conscious of keeping pain from showing on my face, and I try to keep it from being apparent in the way I'm holding or using my arm. It's only on the worst days that I can't keep from just holding onto my arm all the time to keep it from moving.

Most of the time, however, I can create the illusion that I am able to use my arm pretty normally; or at least the activities I have to adjust are fairly subtle. So it naturally follows that there are people who assume from just what they can see that I'm back to normal. The crazy thing is that even though I am trying hard to act like I'm back to normal (and acting is absolutely necessary in my job), I begin to worry about what people are thinking. "Do they think I'm just being a baby for being on pain medicine and for working a reduced schedule if they think I'm back to normal?" But the Lord just brings back Galatians 1:10: “For do I now seek the favor of men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Who am I serving? Who am I trying to please? Whose approval really matters? I should have learned this lesson already, but applying it to this circumstance seems to be a problem for me.

**Of course** I'm trying to please God! I have to quit serving men by letting their opinions (or perceived opinions) of me control my actions. Let them think what they want. I know the truth, and God knows the truth. I have no obligation to explain myself to anyone else. I have to keep reminding myself of that. But still it's not easy to let that go.

 Truthfully, it is probably mostly perception anyway. No person really knows how another person feels physically anyway. Why do I waste mental energy on worrying one day whether people think I'm doing fine (because that's how I'm trying to act), and the next day about whether people assume I am malingering because they think I'm back to normal?

AAAGGGHHHH! It's exhausting to think about it all. I'm relying on God to help me with this. And He has, and still is.

I somehow, even after all this, have trouble accepting sympathy OR praise from anyone other than Christian. I still feel like people are seeing it as a weakness in me when they are sympathetic and are inconsiderate when they act as though I'm back to normal.

I know this must all sound ridiculous. (Am I the only one who deals with crazy thoughts like this?) But if the doctors I was seeing treated me as if I was either weak or just faking, then was it true? There are days when the pain is not horrible and I feel particularly strong emotionally and I like to think "I'm just going to handle this pain on my own, I don't need help.” Then I will have a day of more intense pain and less emotional strength (maybe the lower emotional strength is **caused** by the more intense pain), and I think "oh, I don't care what anybody thinks of me, I have to have help controlling this pain." And I adjust my activities to make the pain more tolerable (without being too obvious about it).

 God has shown me that this is the same problem I have with judging others (part of the pride and negativity issue) that is now causing me to heap judgment and condemnation on myself. Not a single person has said any of this too me; I am just assigning them feelings that I think they may feel when they look at me. But it stops NOW, in Jesus' name, IT STOPS RIGHT NOW!!

 I completely quit doing my spinning bike before Christmas because I couldn't stand the weight bearing on my arm anymore. I limited how much I cleaned the house because scrubbing kills me (of course I was never sad to give this up). On bad days, I would find that I liked to spend evenings in my chair with my arm perfectly still.

 These changes happened gradually until one day I put them all together and thought, "Is this it? I have had to alter my daily life this much and I still have pain, with the adjustments only making it a little more tolerable?” I found myself feeling nervous about seeing the pain specialist in mid-January after my doctor referred me to him in December. What did I want him or expect him to do? I wasn't crazy about the idea of being on narcotics all the time. But of course, I wasn't comfortable with the idea of never riding my bike again and having my normal routine compromised to such an extent.

In December I went back to the hand center to have a Functional Capacities Evaluation by the same therapist I had seen before. The purpose of the evaluation was to establish concrete evidence of what exactly my deficits were after the injury for purposes of the lawsuit. By the end of all my treatment I had accrued roughly a quarter of a million dollars in medical bills (which the insurance company did not feel responsible for), not to mention all the work (and paychecks) I had missed already and would miss in the future. We had borrowed money both for medical expenses and to just live. With mountains of debt that had no end in sight, the lawsuit had become a necessity we had to take seriously.

 The evaluation took about 6 hours total- all done in one day. I was familiar with the test as a PT myself, but I had never worked in a field that required me to administer one. The test had two purposes:

1) To find out if I was being honest about the level of work I could do with that arm (or was I faking?).

2) To determine how much loss I actually had (and how much work I could do).

 Well, I knew I wasn't faking, and so I was not surprised that I passed this part of the test easily with no room left for doubt. But the other test results did surprise me a little bit. I knew that losses would be in categories like strength, range of motion, scarring, and pain and I expected that when it was quantified, the loss may be around 25%. The actual result of the test for strength was more like 55%. Wow. Could that be right? The tests were done by sophisticated computerized tools that could detect even small differences in effort indicating that you were not doing your best, and the results showed that a 55% deficit in my left arm was the best I had. I did expect many of the work limitations that were identified: difficulty lifting, decreased fine and gross motor coordination, and the like. So what the therapist put into words were the facts that I knew but didn't want to face. This injury had taken away many options that I had previously had as a PT.

1) I could now work only with higher level patients that did not require much or any physical assistance.

2) I could no longer effectively do manual therapy.

3) I could no longer work at a full schedule.

This ruled out many work environments where it would be impossible to work within these guidelines, and so limited what kind of work I could do and how much I could earn in the future. Crap! I've got 2 kids getting close to college, and I will want to retire with my husband one day. But here's the part that may be hard to believe. I really wasn't worried about any of these things. God continued to guard my heart with a peace that truly did pass all my ability to understand. I would just have to let him handle it. It wasn't for me to worry about. So although the hand therapist had put into words what I hadn't really wanted to hear or admit to myself, I still knew God was in control.

The part of the test she was concerned about was my pain level with function. The therapist pored over all kinds of anatomy models and diagrams, and performed extra tests, attempting to discern the source of the pain. She was very patient in doing all this extra investigation, and we discussed my pain at length, which helped me to pinpoint it. So what we came up with was that, since the plastic surgeon had needed to use that layer of artificial skin because many tendons in my forearm were exposed, those tendons seem to have scarred themselves down, no longer free to glide when the muscles are used. This is what is causing the pain and why it gets worse with use. The harder the tendons try to work, the more the muscles tighten up; and the tendons are pulling on the rods themselves, causing pain. The rods being of considerable size and the sheer amount of bone and muscle loss I had were no doubt contributing to the complicated picture of my pain. She recommended that I see a pain specialist (which is why I pursued the referral).

In some ways, it was good to have some answer for my pain, even though that did nothing to relieve it. And in some ways it was even more frustrating to have this answer because the only solution that seemed to present itself was to quit using those muscles, which I didn't consider an option. When I tried to explain all this to my regular doctor, he wasn't especially interested in hearing it.

The middle of January and my appointment with the pain specialist finally came. I woke that morning with a feeling I had not had in many months. It's so hard to describe that feeling of despair. And what's even harder to define is why I had it. I had some sense in the back of my mind that this was my last chance for any doctor to help me; and if those other doctors didn't believe me, then why did I think this one would be any different?

But the Lord helped me recognize pretty quickly that these were lies of the enemy, because my first line of defense now was to seek Him while choosing not to wallow in my despair. Much to my dismay, recognizing the lies didn’t immediately change the way I felt. I was not able to change those feelings all day before I saw the doctor. I did, however, continually remind myself that this doctor was not my savior! I have a Savior and He is much greater than any one doctor; and whether HE chose to use this doctor in my solution or not, HE was still my savior and still had the perfect plan for me. I repeated several of my verses over and over in my head. I prayed. I listened to praise and worship music. And still I could not shake that feeling. But if there is anything I have learned over these past 11 months it is that emotions are not always reliable to tell you the truth. Knowing the truth doesn't always make them go away, but God's truth is greater than my emotions every time.

So by the time I got to the doctor, I was not resting my hope in him, and I did not have any expectations of what would come of that appointment. What I did have was a renewed, strengthened faith in my God and His perfect plan for me. (But that doctor may never have had so much prayer sent up for his wisdom by any other patient before a routine office visit.)

Dr. Vine was fabulous. He was actually a **physiatrist,** which is a doctor of physical medicine. (Not a psychiatrist, although I often questioned whether I needed one for my mental state at this time.) He was interested in my injury specifically and did a good bit of testing on it. (I consider a physiatrist the MD version of a PT). He was not the least bit surprised I had pain, and he completely trusted I was being honest about it. He also thought the pain was from deep scarring (just as the hand therapist had) and from loss of muscle mass in that area as well. He treated me with respect and discussed treatment options with me. He gave me a couple of prescriptions to try, and I scheduled a follow up appointment with him so we could re-evaluate whether this treatment regimen was working.

I am beginning to notice a trend here. Whenever I pray “seriously” about any particular circumstance and commit it to God, HE works it out. Of course I don't mean that this is a sure way to get what I want. Instead, my dependence on the Lord automatically increases my faith that what happens is what God intends, and I can trust that His solution is much better than the one I had planned. And of course I have that overwhelming sense of peace in His presence when I am obeying.

So like in everything else, maybe there's a balance.

Now, it occurs to me that I may be perceived as believing that God did not heal me physically. But that's not true. The function I have is evidence of God's hand on me. When I see one of the doctors who were there in the beginning and know how bad it really was, they are completely amazed at my recovery. They did not honestly think I would ever go back to work or have near the function I have. It is true that my arm is not back to what I call normal, and I don't know why. But I also have no desire and no need to ask why. God has placed contentment in me that I can't begin to understand. If I weren't me (not sure if that makes any sense), I would think I was just saying that. You can see it's hard to put this into words, the contentment I have with where I am is real, and it's there. I just can’t explain it.

In February, my mother mentioned to me that an out of town relative (and one that I love dearly) had seen pictures on facebook, and asked if Mallory was dating “that black boy.” My reaction surprised me a little.

I laughed.

Could I really have no anxiety about what people think at all? (Now that I believe that it's only important what God thinks, it truly is possible!) I was actually a little amused that there are people who really are so narrow-minded. And then I was in awe as I thought about how God has so completely changed my heart, because I was one of those narrow-minded people not so many months ago. So I don't mean to sound harsh or judgmental; I can't judge something I've been so guilty of. But now I see the better way. Of course people's judgmental attitudes do hurt me, and there are groups of people who we choose not to be in relationship with anymore because of it. But I will continue to pray for them and perhaps God may change this in the future.

It had only been a few weeks since the last time I had dealt with prejudice attitudes. But somehow it seemed like years. We have come to like Jay so much that we really do forget race is even an issue for some.

It amazes me now that people choose to take time to be concerned about the prejudices of the past. They worry about what other people are doing, even though it doesn't actually affect them. I used to also let such things have too much of my focus. I definitely prefer the freedom I have now. I am certainly not perfect; but when I am tempted to engage in gossip or judgment, that feeling of turmoil comes up in my throat and I know I don't want to go there. Freedom tastes better.

I have been considering what a change there has been in my perspective on just about everything. It's not just the bigger issues of prejudice and judgment; it's about a million little things. I think it's funny when someone expects me to be concerned about something I used to think was a big deal.

I used to think things like school rivalries mattered. Like what colleges my daughters attend and whether they were schools I liked or “rivals.” (Once I realized that I would not actually be the one attending the school and that the important thing is that they are on the path to what God has called them to, I was able to really let that go.)

I am also no longer pre-occupied with things like if my daughter's sports teams have winning seasons. Now I really want her to do her best and winning is a plus, but not a requirement in order to consider a game a success. (I'm pretty sure my husband doesn't see that one.)

I am not caught up in the inter-personal drama that naturally surrounds people at every workplace and school (and often church). Things like, who is considering leaving or who is unhappy with what or who will get what position. It seems hard for me to even be a little concerned over these things anymore. This is precisely what I was talking about when I wondered why people were worried about things that didn't affect them. Now some things may actually affect me and my family at times, and then we will have to consider them and pray about them to make decisions for our family. But unless we are one of the people who make the decisions in a certain situation, aren't we just trying to involve ourselves in the process and the drama surrounding the decisions when we have no power to change the outcome?

I mean, what are we doing really? I was watching American Idol at 3 a.m. (on another sleepless night) and I was caught up in some of the stories. (OK, I know I've mentioned twitter and facebook already and now American Idol, but please don't hold it against me). There was a contestant from Liberia who spent years in a refugee camp because of a civil war. And there was a girl who now must serve as caretaker to her long-time boyfriend after a debilitating stroke. This makes spending energy concerned about how many basketball games we have won and where our rank is in the district seem a little frivolous.

So what is important? My job has always given me a much needed perspective on what is important in life, and now I was also able to gain perspective on dealing with the physical difficulties as well as the relational and emotional. I consider what my patient faces who has a progressive neuro-muscular disease and will be on a ventilator for the rest of his life. Although he has ever decreasing strength and function and ever increasing pain, he has a determination to make the most of the time he has left with his family with no complaint or self-pity. I am also touched to see the elderly patient who never learned to read or write and had very few worldly possessions, but has inspired such a love in his daughter that even at age 65 she sits and holds her daddy's hand like a little girl. Now those are legacies. Those are people who have found what is important.

I try to stay away from “meaning of life” questions myself because they depress me if I look at them through my own understanding. Maybe in those moments like when you first fall in love or when your child is born, even the natural mind can have hope that life has promise without God. Then there are the thousands of days when you get up and go to work or clean your house or whatever mundane things fill your days. That's when the question of the meaning of life seems a little hopeless.

At least it may seem hopeless without God.

With God, I am full of a hope that I can't name. I'm not even sure what I'm hoping for. But whatever God has for me will be better than anything that I could possibly hope for myself. So it seems more appropriate to say that I am sure WHO I'm hoping in.

My hope is in God. I didn't really understand what that meant until this year. I love Romans 15:13 (ESV)- May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. That says it all. My pain, my strength - or lack of it- fails to seem important in light of HIS hope.

For me the meaning of my life can only be found one place. If I turn aside from seeking Him, I get caught up in all the things that don't even matter.

#### Conclusion

When I look back at my life before my accident, I can hardly recognize the person there. I had a great family, a great job, and great friends. I had lost weight and was in good physical shape; but it was the broken condition of my heart, that only God and I could see, that wasn't so great, and that is what He has changed the most. Please don't misinterpret that to mean I think God caused my accident or that I would have chosen it if the choice was mine because there was immense pain and heartache. But I think it was an accident. So what I am actually thankful for is what God has taught me and what He has done for me since. I know He could have definitely taken me on this journey without the accident, but I might not have been as cooperative. So He took the opportunity when my body and heart were both broken to heal me completely.

I am not angry with the garbage man. While he is definitely responsible, I am not angry. The one thing I do look back on at times is the attitude he had that day. One of the people who was there to help me related stories of him taking a break to have a drink and a snack as if this were nothing but a minor interruption in his day. And maybe he did just see it that way, but it was a permanent interruption in my LIFE. He could not have possibly have known all that I would go through, but he did see the blood and the compound fracture. I guess a little show of concern would have gone a long way. Now I feel sorry for him, for his apparent lack of compassion that can't serve him well in life, and I pray for him whenever he comes to my mind. I don't even know who he is, but I know from his reaction to a horrific accident (that **he** caused-accidently or not) that there is something lacking in his life. So sympathy is my feeling toward him now.

I now live with chronic daily pain, partial loss of function in my dominant hand, and with a large scar. I've learned to accept that, because I also now live daily with a greater revelation of God's love for me and in a deeper relationship with him.

Chronic pain (along with loss of function) is a strange thing. It's like a little piece of me is always a little sad or missing. I can only compare it to having a good friend who you relied on daily die unexpectedly, and, while you get over it in time, there is always a piece of you that misses her and is sad-- especially in those moments when something comes up that she would have helped you with. But then I also live with so much more joy and peace in Christ. It really is a peace that passes understanding. And just like I learned that through God, extreme peace and extreme pain can co-exist; now I'm learning that human sadness and pain can co-exist with a joy and peace like I've never known. (Also, some days that joy and peace must co-exist with disappointment, anger, frustration, and other human emotions- but the miracle is that they still CAN co-exist, I don't have to lose peace and joy every time I have a negative emotion!) The most amazing thing for me now is to see that daily pain can co-exist with that good mood I had asked for - and am daily receiving more of. I choose to let my functional difficulties, my pain and my scar remind me of the beautiful journey that God has**, and is**, taking me on and not just remind me of the accident. So I actually don't mind my scar, and I am constantly learning to better handle the pain.

I'm so excited to see where God will take me from here. He has put so many dreams and desires in my heart. I plan to enjoy the time I have left with my wonderful girls before college. I will love to see them grow and create lives of their own. I am going to have an ever growing relationship with the wonderful husband He has given me. (Every relationship will still have its ups and downs, but now I'm not afraid of the downs.)

 I dream of Mission trips, vacations, and even grandchildren (one **distant** day). I just know with God it will be an exciting journey filled with love and joy and peace (and some trouble, according to Jesus in John 16:33). I am filled with anticipation for all He has for me, and I am not the least bit concerned about any “trouble” that may come my way. I will seek continually that spiritual rain that will make those troubles seem like nothing but minor distractions. Because I wouldn't want to be anywhere other than in His will and in His presence- no matter what that brings.

### February 18, 2012

Typing that date a year later still brings tears to my eyes. But now they represent the journey I have taken and not just the accident that started it. I have known for quite some time that this would be the last day I would add to this book. Oh, I will go back and make grammatical corrections, but I will not add anything significant after today. And I am actually writing this section on this day, so I will be in present tense now.

This day had loomed large to me, but now I find that day 365 is not so different from day 364. Here I am, just like yesterday. I've got all the normal struggles and joys that life brings us all. Only now I've got more. I've got a deeper relationship with the only One who can make sense of it all. So while day 365 is not so different from day 364, it is very different from day -1 (before the accident).

Having had an accident doesn't exempt me from life. It did for a few months, but then life came back with a vengeance. But I am better equipped to handle it now. I am no different than most people. We all tend to put our best foot forward with most of the world and on the outside everything seems to be pretty good, while our struggles are mostly inside. What made this year different is that I had a struggle that was very much on the outside, and people around me responded with love and kindness. Is that how other people would always respond if we let a few more of our struggles out? Maybe not always, and that's what keeps us within ourselves. But there is One who already knows our struggles and loves us anyway and will ALWAYS respond with love and kindness.

Along with life's usual collection of joys and heartaches, now I have some extra pain and weakness to add but I also have more peace through it all. Money continues to be an issue with medical bills and debts. A recent assessment of the situation by our attorney tells us it could still be a year or more until that's settled. So we will continue to trust God for His provision.

I am exercising again, mostly not cycling, and I have made a 5 pound start into the 30 pounds I've picked up along the way. It will come, it just may be slower than I'd like. I have still not been able to get back on a regular bike. I can ride a trike which doesn't take much upper extremity control or strength, but I am still hoping to be able to get on my “real” bike again one day.

I continue to try different pain medicines in different combinations and doses. I am still seeing the pain doctor and probably will for some time. It is not about relieving the pain completely; I don't know if that will ever happen. Instead it's about finding the right medicine to relieve pain to a manageable point without more side effects than I am willing to live with. So I will have to be the one to decide when we have found that perfect prescription, and I'm not giving up or compromising on that.

 My sweet girls have not stopped growing and every day they are getting a step closer to being grown. My wonderful husband and my precious daughters bring me so much joy. I am working hard to keep focused on what's important. I don't want to miss a single day.

I had imagined this day a million ways. But now all I can keep thinking is how thankful I am for God's presence in my life. That's really what it all comes down to. There are still days of despair and days of delight. There are days when Dr. Gray's words come to back ("You will have all the function you're ever going to have at one year") and there are days when my own words come back ("we can only take what we've got and go forward; there's no use in questioning or regretting the past").

God's presence doesn't make the circumstances perfect, He just gives me this incredible grace to go through them with a greater hope than I've ever known in my life.

I got up today strangely feeling the same way I did on the morning of February 18th a year ago-- a little tired and having trouble convincing myself to exercise. I finally decided to get on my spinning bike since it is raining outside. I felt some of that same sense of power and strength I always feel when I cycle. My left arm aches with the pressure of the handlebar, so I usually stick to the Stairmaster. Today, however, I felt compelled to ride the bike.

I am thinking of something I haven't let myself think about much this past year. Not long before the accident, Christian and I were in our first 50 mile benefit bike ride. I was starting to form a plan to ride in several of these every year and even travel to do it when we are empty nesters. I was thinking of the fun and the exercise and keeping us in shape.

I haven't been willing to admit to myself, until now, that it may not happen that way. Today I can see that maybe God has way bigger and better plans than the little plan I came up with. In fact, I know He does, because He always does. I don't know what it is, but I know He will show me, just like He always shows me the next step.

I have a deep sense of contentment and hope now that I can't remember ever having. It has nothing to do with my circumstances and has everything to do with my Lord.

I couldn’t keep myself from visiting the "scene of the accident" today, even in the heavy rain. I don't know what I expected from that; it was a rainy, wet road, and the offending garbage can was even there. Christian and I were in the car and stopped and looked for a few minutes, and even took a picture just because it felt like we should. Still, the visit this afternoon was very anti-climatic.

But at 10:00 tonight I found myself walking my neighborhood streets alone. The rain had stopped and the temperature was pleasant. I stood in the deserted street and I really believed I could see the outline of the blood stain. I tried to re-create the scene in my mind. I never had a good view of the entire scene since I was lying on the ground, although I did get a glimpse when I was on the stretcher going to the ambulance. I tried to imagine the positions of the garbage truck, the fire truck, the ambulance, and the various cars of the people there.

What I discovered was, reliving the actual accident didn't make any real difference to me one way or the other. It's not something I will forget of course. But what really matters are the three people back at my house who didn't even realize I was gone.

We had not had a great day. There were a few arguments over what seemed like somewhat typical teenage angst. But I really believe it was only worse because of what this day represented to all of us.

It represented a shift in our lives that wouldn't be undone. I believe it is mostly for the better in the long run, but the process has been very uncomfortable. When we add that to the already uncomfortable part of the teenage years (learning how to express independence and pulling away from us), it can seem unbearable at times. But it always pushes me right back in to His arms. I can, and will, get through anything, and He will help me to help my family get through as well.

How could I have ever known how my life could change in one year? I can never again doubt that **anything** is possible with God after this year. I would not hesitate to say it has been the worst year of my life; but I also wouldn't hesitate to say that in some ways it has been the best year of my life. God can turn any situation around and bring so much good from it. And he certainly has this one.

The day ended with a few similarities to the last February 18th. Instead of a hospital bed I was in my bed, but Christian was right by my side both times. Instead of waiting for and expecting someone to come take me to surgery, now I have a deeper expectation and hope for my future in general. Something that is no different at all is that I feel God's presence now just as I did then. God has always been there, I am just now able to be aware of His presence like never before. I know that God will be with me on every February 18th for the rest of my life. And of course, He will also be there on all the days in between.

### Verses that have defined my journey

**Proverbs 3:5-8 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.**

This was the very first scripture the Lord really led me to meditate on after I came home. Of course my bones needed refreshing and I didn't understand anything. On the surface it seems obvious that what I didn’t understand was my accident and why all this was happening to me. And I didn't understand it- BUT I wasn't really trying to understand it anyway. What I didn't need to try to understand myself or to figure out was what God was and is doing in my heart. He was placing in it His love and grace and mercy, and the PEACE the PASSES understanding. So my first lesson was to lean not on my mind's understanding, and I have learned immensely more leaning on my heart's understanding instead.

**Psalm 42:5 Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise him for the saving help of his presence.**

This particular verse was the first verse that I memorized and repeated over and over to myself. It seemed to fit so perfectly. At first when I was so limited in my function and mobility, I had plenty of days that my soul just felt “disturbed,” but the main focus of my life was the saving help of God's presence. It was so undeniable and almost tangible. It was truly God's gift to me during that time.

**Psalm 27:4 I have asked one thing from the LORD. This I will seek: to remain in the LORD's house (presence) all the days of my life in order to gaze at the LORD's beauty and to search for an answer in his temple**.

After all my surgeries were over, there came a time when I felt God telling me it was now time for me to SEEK His presence. It was something that had been His total gift to me during that first month, and I could keep it-- I would just need to do my part to maintain that relationship. At first I repeated this verse over and over to myself at least a hundred times a day. Once I had known the strength of God's presence and the wonderful things He offered me there, I was desperate to keep it.

**John 16:33** **I have told you these things (that you may ask God directly for what you need), so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

This verse makes me smile. I feel like it has been the theme of my life this past year. Before the accident, I would have focused on the “you will have trouble” part and thought "oh no!" (It's totally unbiblical to teach that we won't have any trouble if we're obedient, like I was taught as a child. We all should know that, we've all had trouble already.) Now I see the important part is “take heart! I have overcome the world.” God has taught me so much and I so completely trust in Him that I do not fear anything this world may have in store for me, because I know who will be with me every step of the way.

**Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God-those whom he has called according to his plan.**

I have always loved this verse. Before I probably thought of it more as “everything is gonna work out.” Now I see it as a deeper theological statement that God knows the schemes of the devil and He already has a plan to work all those bad things Satan has planned and all the good things God has planned perfectly together to bring about a completely perfect result. He told us we would have trouble in this world because he knows the plans Satan has. But then He told us to take heart, and reminded us that He has overcome the world. And He overcomes the world by using Satan's evil plans for good before he is even able to complete any of them. Then we can say, like Daniel, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”

**Isaiah 55:12 You will go out of your bondage with joy and be led out in peace. The mountains and the hills will bread into singing and all the trees will clap their hands.**

I AM now coming (and HAVE COME) out of my bondage with joy! He IS now leading me out with peace. I'm waiting for the hills to sing and the trees to clap any day!

**Galations 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Am I just trying to please men? I f I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

I love this one for driving home the importance of trying to please God ONLY. We WILL BE in bondage to whoever we are trying to please. This verse sounds so easy but I have learned just how incredibly difficult it is when you feel like all “men” are displeased with you. We all need love; we just have to learn to seek it only from God-- and He will supply all we need.

**Isaiah 48:18 (I changed the verb tense) If you pay attention to my commandments, then your peace will be like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.**

“Peace like a river” was a big one for me, of course. God really related this to staying in His presence and seeking Him.

**Isaiah 49:15-16 (paraphrased) I will never forget you! Look, I have a mark on my arm; you are always on my mind.**

When I first came across this verse from a daily devotional site I screamed, "ME TOO LORD!” I had already decided that I would never hate my scar, but it would serve as a constant reminder to me of what the Lord has done in my life. I had never seen this verse as far as I know. Many translations say a mark in my palm, but this one I saw said arm. I think HE put that in there FOR ME! ☺

These are the scriptures I printed out and would carry around in my purse when I was really dealing with people talking about me and not approving of me. I would get them out and read them aloud to myself over and over. What a HELP!

Psalm 61:2

When I am in a place I am not accustomed to I will cry out to You for help because my heart is overwhelmed.

 Lead me back to You Jesus; help me and keep me safe.

Isaiah 1:9

The Lord has commanded me in what to do

I **will** be strong and courageous

I will **not** tremble

I will **not** be dismayed

FOR THE LORD MY GOD IS WITH ME WHEREVER I GO!

Isaiah 41:10

I will **not** be afraid because GOD is with me.

I will **not** be intimidated because the Lord is MY GOD.

HE **will** strengthen me,

HE **will** help me;

HE **will** support me with HIS victorious right hand.

1 Peter 3:14

But even if I should suffer for doing what is right;

I AM blessed.

I will **not** fear or be frightened.

Deut. 31:6

I **will** be strong and courageous.

I will **not** be terrified or afraid because of them

for the Lord MY GOD goes with me; HE will NEVER leave me or forsake me.

Psalm 27:14

I will wait for the Lord; I will be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool has no interest in understanding;

They only want to air their own opinions.

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a gossip are swallowed greedily;

and those words go down into the inner most parts of your heart.

Proverbs 18:13

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish. (NLT)

Whoever gives an answer before he hears is a fool and IS brought to shame. (GWT)

Prov. 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run into it and are safe.

 1 Corinthians 1:5-9

In HIM I am richly blessed; I have readiness of speech and fullness of knowledge.

Therefore I do no lack any spiritual gift as I wait for the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He will keep me strong all the way to the end, so that I will be blameless on the day of our Lord.

God, who has called me into fellowship with Jesus, IS FAITHFUL!

John 16:33

…in ME you can have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Isaiah 48:18

If you listen to my commands, you can have peace like a river

and righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Philippians 4:4-7

Always be joyful in the Lord! I'll say it again: Be joyful! Let everyone know how considerate you are. The Lord is near. Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:5

Hope does not disappoint because the Love of God has been poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit.

Galations 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit is LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS,

 GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

LOVE

-IS PATIENT -IS KIND

-DOES NOT ENVY -DOES NOT BOAST

-IS NOT RUDE -IS NOT SELF-SEEKING

-IS NOT EASILY ANGERED -KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS

-REJOICES WITH TRUTH -ALWAYS ENDURES

-ALWAYES TRUSTS -ALWAYS HOPES

-ALWAYS PERSEVERES

Psalm 27:4

I have asked the Lord for this one thing- this is what I desire:

I want to live in the Lord's house (presence) all the days of my life

so I may gaze at the beauty of the Lord.

Romans 15:13

Now may the God of hope fill me with peace and joy as I believe in Him

so that I may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 3:6

In all my ways I will acknowledge Him and

He will make my paths straight.

Psalm 42:5

Why are you in despair, my soul?

Why are you disturbed within me?

Hope in God!

For I shall still praise Him for the saving help of His presence

Psalm 16:11

In His presence is fullness of Joy!

Galatians 1:10

 Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.

Epilogue

July 18, 2014

41 months since accident

I wonder how many months it will be before the 18th is no longer significant to me? Maybe never, and that's okay. The thoughts that come first when I think of my accident now are not of pain but of God's faithfulness, of which we can never be reminded enough.

At the conclusion of that first year I was hopeful that both my arm would soon be feeling a lot better and that our legal case would be resolved. It's funny how events never happen quite like I have imagine they will.

As for my arm; there can be no doubt that it is better than it was after one year. My function is better and the pain is less. There are occasionally even days when I almost feel like I'm back to normal. Most days, however, I deal with pain. And that pain is usually associated with function. But I have, for the most part, learned what I can and can't do (or at least what I should and shouldn't do- which is not the same thing) to keep my pain under control. I do take an extended release pain medication every day and on some days I have to take an extra medication for what they call "breakthrough pain". That seems to me to be a bit of a misnomer since the pain is always there and doesn’t breakthrough but only get bad enough to make normal functioning difficult. Of course the medications carry their own side effects, and so it's a constant balancing act to decide what I can live with that day.

I don’t mean to make it sound as if I'm miserable. On the contrary I feel extremely blessed that God has healed my arm to a degree that my doctors never thought possible.

As for our legal case, that lasted longer than we ever thought possible. For the first two and a half years, Waste Management was able to stall the case by bringing in different defendants due to the structure of the company and by sending us around in circles dealing with various insurance companies. Stories of the tactics large companies employ seem like fiction, but reality was actually worse than any story we had ever heard.

We finally got a trial date of September 3, 2014 and Waste Management was forced to begin to take us seriously. I underwent a 7 hour deposition in September of 2013. This was, in my mind, the first of many significant events that were to follow. Having heard many horror stories of depositions, I was more than a little nervous. As it turned out, the deposition was an almost pleasant experience. Of course I give God the credit for that, as I went in totally relying on Him. My attorney, Willie, said the other attorneys were attempting to make me believe they were my friends so that I would be comfortable enough to say something they could use against me. What they did not know was that there was nothing that I was not planning on being completely honest about anyway. The result was that they did indeed make me feel comfortable. In fact, they were so good at their game that I left feeling like they actually liked me and cared about my story and my pain. Unfortunately, there would be things to come that seemed to prove the error in my perception, but their strategy backfired that day.

The lead attorney for Waste Management, a young man named Matt, made a lasting impression on me. I saw in him a good heart and caring nature. Now some of the things he did would seem to contradict that assessment, but being an optimistic person in general I like to believe I was right about him.

In October of 2013 (Halloween Day), we sat in on the deposition of the driver of the garbage truck. The man who had actually thrown the can had passed away and so the only other person who was present at the time of the accident was the driver.

I can't say it was easy sitting across the table and listening to this man talk so casually about my accident. He was not consistent with the story of his involvement in the accident. In one sentence he said he didn't actually see me fall and a few sentences later he swore he did see me fall. He also implied that the accident was completely my fault and that the garbage men were just unlucky enough to have been there. He seemed to be surprised at the fact that I was holding Waste Management responsible and seemed to imply that although he saw that I was hurt badly, I was only coming after them for the money.

I never get used to the fact that some people lie. I just can't. Although I was not expecting the driver to be happy about the position this put him in, I did not expect him to say so many things that were just not true. It was easy to see that he was not being truthful by the way his story changed. I believe this was the general feeling in the room as Matt and the other attorneys were visibly frustrated.

In the end, the overwhelming impression I got from the driver was actually one that seems contradictory to everything else I've just said. He is a young man working hard to support his family. I do believe there may have been times when he knowingly did not follow company policies (such as allowing cans to be thrown across lanes of traffic). But even this was probably done out of a spirit of trying to get the job done quickly in order to please superiors and meet deadlines. I have no hard feelings toward him. I sincerely believe he did not believe he was doing anything wrong and never intentionally did anything he believed would hurt anyone.

I get a general good feeling from him, just like I did from Matt. People's hearts are not always defined by their actions. If we can get a feeling for the motives behind people's actions I think we can more clearly see what is in their hearts.

After the depositions had all been taken, there was more apparent stalling by the other side. By the time the 3 year anniversary had come and gone I was asking God if this was really ever going to be resolved. It seemed that going to trial was becoming inevitable although that was the last thing I wanted.

The biggest lesson I learned in those 3 years was that God is more important than ANY outcome I could have. As long as I have Him, there is nothing I lack; nothing of true importance anyway. I truly reached the point where my greatest desire was (and is) God himself, and not any blessing.

So I can truthfully say that right when I least expected it, and even when I least desired it, the breakthrough came.

In April of 2014, Matt called my Willie to say that they would like to schedule a mediation proceeding for our case. We were excited at the possibility of our case coming to a close and subsequently not going to trial.

The day of mediation arrived in early May. We met at the posh, downtown offices of Matt's law firm. There was a paid mediator who would listen to the needs and arguments of both sides and try to help us reach a compromise and settle the case.

To say the day turned out to be a disappointment would be a gross understatement. It seemed that the room full of attorneys and insurance representatives on the other side were interested only in discrediting my story and convincing us that this case was not worth their time or money. Now that may be a somewhat dramatic assessment of what happened. But I was really hurt by the end of that day. Willie warned us what may happen, but until you face a group of people whose goal seems to be to discredit you for the gain of the companies they represent, it is hard to understand how that feels. We left feeling dejected and disappointed.

It was the very next week that Matt called Willie and made an offer to settle. It was an offer that we had let them know at mediation we believed was reasonable to compensate us for medical bills and lost wages. I was headed to Mobile to visit a friend when I found out. I was amazed! Was this actually the end Lord?

Yes, and no. It was the end of our legal case but it was not the end of our story. Actually it only marked a new chapter for us. But the story of God's faithfulness in our lives is never-ending!!!