

When You Can't Even See the Path

Vaneetha Rendall Risner

June 11, 2021

A decade ago, I remember walking out of another doctor's appointment, discouraged. They offered no help. No answers. No direction.

I had been experiencing some new pain with my post-polio syndrome and wanted to find an orthopedic physician to help me. So I asked around to find trustworthy orthopedists and made appointments, carrying my x-rays with me. As I walked out of the last one, I got into the car and burst into tears. The doctor was kind but said to me after I explained the situation, "I'm so sorry but I only do sports medicine. I really can't take the time to understand your situation because I don't have any patients with post-polio. It's a complicated disease.

While I understood the doctor's predicament, this was the third time I had heard that in a month. **I was exhausted, tired of trying, feeling abandoned and unwanted by the medical community. I was envious of people who had caring doctors and found effective treatment for their diseases while I was foundering.** Since I contracted polio well after the vaccine had been developed, there was little research being done on my condition. While I understood the dilemma that doctors have with specialized cases, I sat in the car feeling hopeless. No one wanted to even bother figuring out what was wrong.

The next morning, I got up and poured out all my frustrations to the Lord. I journaled what I was feeling. I read the Bible even though I didn't feel like it. And as I was writing and reading, something shifted inside me. The Lord met me in my disappointment. I realized that I wasn't alone. I left that time filled with hope and direction, though none of my circumstances had changed. Here are a few things I learned:

When Things Are Hard, Talk to God

God wants us to talk to him. *I used to think God wanted my words of gratitude and praise, regardless of how I was feeling, but God actually wants my heart and not empty words. **Genuine thanks and praise flow out of honesty and vulnerability.*** When I'm willing to acknowledge my pain and let God comfort me when I feel discouraged, lonely and helpless, I am drawn to him. I then want to praise him because I have experienced his faithfulness, which doesn't happen when I deny my pain.

I told the Lord I was frustrated because I felt everyone's life was easier than mine. Even others who were struggling physically seemed to have answers, good doctors, clear diagnoses, and proven routes for treatment while I had none. I poured out my "if only's" to the Lord. If only a doctor would see me and understand my condition. If only I could get the right treatment or at least know I was on the right path. If only I had someone to advocate for me.

As I looked through the Psalms, I found the psalmists often felt as I did. The unknown and the uncertain was as unsettling for them as it was for me. Yet even in my unsettledness, as I engaged with God, I began to sense his peace.

Ask God for wisdom. Then do the next thing.

My life and my suffering were not a mystery to the Lord. He had created me and knew exactly what I needed. I remembered the account of the woman who had been bleeding for years. She spent her life savings on doctors with no answers. But Jesus knew exactly what was wrong with her and healed her instantly (Mark 5:24-34). The doctors never figured it out. ***I realized I needed to ask God for healing and for wisdom. Too often I forged ahead without prayer – pinning my hopes on my own efforts. I needed to stop worrying and start asking God what to do next.***

Over the next few days, I looked around to see how God was answering me. I had an appointment with a foot and ankle orthopedic specialist for a minor problem – never thinking that she could handle other issues. But as I mentioned my story to her, she offered to help. She was willing to do any research, and if appropriate make appointments with other orthopedic specialists she knew personally. I was stunned by God's answer.

Through the process, I also realized that my hope didn't rest in finding the right doctor. The Lord could lead me to whomever I needed and use non-traditional sources as well. I found a publication with helpful information. I talked to others with post-polio or similar diseases who offered good advice. Friends stepped in to help with practical needs.

Trust God with the results

As I was reading the Bible and journaling, I was struck that I was talking and listening to the God of the universe. All the resources of the world were at his disposal. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10). All things are his servants (Psalm 119:91). Nothing is too hard for him (Jeremiah 32:17).

He would give me exactly what I needed and would not withhold anything good from me (Psalm 84:11). Physicians and friends were important, but they were not my source of hope. God could use them, and did, ***but even if my condition continued with no answers and no reprieve, God would sustain me and draw me closer to him.***

This thought was revolutionary to me. *I had always pinned my hopes on people, or answers, or resources. I assumed that if I found the right person to understand and help me, things would be fine.* Without that, somehow my life would be lacking. But God reassured me that he was the one leading me. **Even if I didn't even have any light to see the way, I could trust that God himself would take me by the hand and guide me.**

Isaiah 50:10 says, "Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God." Yes. This.

So if today you can't even see the path ahead, trust the Lord for the next step. You may not have access to the best doctors or counselors or medicine, but you are in the loving hands of the God of the universe who has access to all those things and will graciously give you all that you need (Romans 8:32).