

I Thought It Was My 'Doomsday Birthday,' but God ...

My 20th birthday was approaching during my sophomore year at Louisiana Tech, but I had no desire to celebrate it. Why? I truly believed it could be my last. I had never forgotten my doctor's words once said during a checkup on my heart. I was just a child then, but he observed to my mom that his oldest patient with my condition, Tetralogy of Fallot, was in his 20s. As a kid, I assumed that meant I would only live as long as his oldest patient who shared my illness. When you believe something as scary as that for long enough, it makes it hard it hard to enjoy any birthday, especially the 20th, in my case.

I was headed to a high school football game with a college buddy the day before my "doomsday" birthday, heavily depressed. In the months leading up to it, I'd grown reclusive, pulling away from friends and family to throw myself into my studies. It probably seems strange that I distanced myself from my loved ones in that time to study instead. But even though I didn't believe I'd live long enough to become a doctor, I wanted people to at least think that I could have been a good one.

To my surprise, my 20th birthday came and went, and I continued living, healthily, might I add. I should have been overjoyed because of simply being alive, but instead I felt lost.

I knew I couldn't say that to anyone. What person in their right mind would bemoan having more days ahead of him? Well, when you've planned your life on a 20-year-scale, living beyond that deadline produces a lot of unanswered questions and new fears.

Sometime between my next birthday and working through the shock that I was still alive in the first place, I decided that God had given me a little “lagniappe”—a Louisiana word that means, “something extra.” At the time, that was how I viewed the rest of my days after my 20th birthday: something extra.

Having that expectation of suffering an early death shattered showed me that God clearly had a plan for my life that was better than mine. It would be pointless to try and guess how long my days would play out, so I finally decided to just let God take care of me. Allowing Him to do that meant my becoming a pediatric cardiologist. I was born with a life-threatening heart condition that God used to ignite my interest in medical practice.

Waking up in good health the day after that 20th birthday was just one of the many powerful instances in which God reminded me that He is the maker and keeper of my life. I am able to do far greater things with my time on earth by looking ahead to His purpose for me, rather than fearing that my days are coming to an end. Fears still cropped up that my heart condition would require another intensive surgery, but remembering how far I’d come since that birthday always reminded me that God had a plan for my life far better than my own.

This article has been adapted from When I Wished Upon A Star by Brandon Lane Phillips and Jeremy Miller. The book released May 21.