

Mom Discovers the Surprising Meaning Behind This Popular Verse

My son wears a necklace almost every day that reads, "All Things." If you're listening, you might also hear me screaming those words to him when he's playing left field, competing in a local fiddle competition or just using them to remind him of the man he's chosen to be when he leaves my side.

Several years ago, as we were studying the meaning of Philippians 4:13 around our breakfast table, he decided it would be his life verse. From that point on this abbreviated version of "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" has served as point of reference, a secret handshake if you will, between mother and son.

And I love it.

My sons, both of them, love baseball. They get it from their dad, who has been a die-hard New York Yankees fan his entire life. I often joke with people and say, "You have to be a Christian and a Yankees' fan to get into my husband's family ... and I'm not sure which is more important!" Of course I'm joking, but they really do love the Yankees. For his entire childhood and into adulthood, baseball has been one of the main ways my husband connects with his father. He still loves to go watch baseball with his dad, so it was only natural to pass that love along to his two sons.

My oldest son and his two cousins were all born within about two months of each other, and they all love baseball. So when we made a huge move last year back to our hometown, we were really excited about the opportunity for these three cousins—all with the same last name—to play the game they loved together.

Several times during the season, the bases were literally loaded with McGlothlins. From the outside, it looked to everyone that our family was having a great time. In some ways, we were. There is something seriously fun about seeing three boys who are the exact same age with the same last name playing on the same team. But behind the scenes, my oldest son was fighting a serious internal battle. He wanted to play the infield, and when he got placed out in left field instead, he was devastated. All the joy he felt as he looked forward to the season was sucked right out of him, leaving him feeling deflated, overlooked and downright depressed. Instead of feeling like he could do “all things,” he felt like he couldn’t do anything. The first practice after positions were announced found him slumped over in left field, defeat pulling him down like a rock tied around his neck.

We spent hours lying in bed, talking through the disappointment he felt over baseball. I even had to admit that *I* felt very disappointed for him, and if I’m honest, I continued feeling that way for him most of the season. One night, as we discussed it yet again, I decided to take another look at Philippians 4:13, but not just that one verse. As powerful and popular as this verse is, I realized in order for him to fully understand the meaning of “all things,” he needed to understand the verses preceding it.

I do not speak because I have need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know both how to face humble circumstances and how to have abundance. Everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13).

Most of the time, when the church uses Philippians 4:13 it’s with an emphasis on the first part of the verse—“I can do all things ...” I’ve said it myself in moment of weakness. When I

fly, I usually chant this verse all the way up and all the way down. Any time I face something hard, I use it as a reminder that I can do all things, but often I forget the second part of the verse. And for the Christian, the second part is just as important.

Philippians 4:13 isn't a blanket formula guaranteeing our success. I don't believe Paul meant it to be the $A + B = C$ equation it has become. It isn't proof that we can do anything we put our minds to, and it doesn't give us the right to expect God to give us the strength to do whatever we decide we want to do.

No, I believe it's something completely different.

What Paul was saying, supported by his own experiences having been shipwrecked, beaten, abused, abandoned, bitten by a snake, slandered and yes, even disappointed, was that because Christ was at work in him, strengthening Paul for His purposes, he could still serve "to advance the gospel" (Phil. 1:12), no matter what his circumstances brought. In this letter, Paul mentions the word "gospel" seven times. He talks about the Philippians' "fellowship in the gospel" (1:5), and their "defense and confirmation of the gospel" (1:7). He proudly proclaims that what has happened to him (imprisonment), has, "resulted in advancing the gospel" (1:12), and again mentions that his purpose while there is the "defense of the gospel" (1:17). In 1:27, he urges the Philippians to let their lives be "worthy of the gospel" and later describes how his son in the Lord, Timothy, has "served with him in the gospel" (2:22). Finally, he mentions two women who have, "labored with [me] in the gospel" (4:3).

For Paul, life was the gospel. There was no separation between his everyday life and his life preaching Christ. For him, to live was Christ (1:21). No matter what circumstances God brought his way—good, bad or ugly—his life could still be used for the gospel. From an eternal standpoint, his

disappointments didn't matter as much as how his circumstances could be used to bring others to Christ.

This meant my son could still be the young man God had called him to be—patient, loving, service oriented, compassionate, caring, encouraging, full of integrity, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled—“advancing the gospel” as a 12-year-old boy, while playing left field. In the middle of his extreme disappointment and discouragement—playing a position he passionately did not want to play—he could still do all these things. From an eternal standpoint, his position didn't matter as much as how God could use it to draw others to Himself.

It took a few more practices and maybe a game or two for this new way of thinking to sink in, but somewhere along the way, he made a conscious decision to be the best darn outfielder he could possibly be. Twice during the regular season he dove, flipped, flopped and turned to come up with two of the prettiest “uncatchable” catches the team had ever seen.

Life is full of hard things. I know at just 12 years old, my son will encounter much harder, much more disappointing life circumstances than the position he plays in baseball. But God calls all of us to do hard things with the goal of advancing the gospel no matter our age. The way we respond to the challenges of life matters to God, and the way we understand His Word influences how we're able to respond. We really *can* do all things through Christ who gives us strength. We just have to understand what the “all things” really are. {eoa}

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*For more information on Brooke or her new book, **Gospel-Centered Mom: The Freeing Truth About What Your Kids Really Need**, visit: ; Facebook: ; Twitter: or .*