

Rare Painful Skin Condition Won't Keep Mom From Her Blessings

Mother's Day has past, but I wanted to share something to bless and inspire each of the incredible moms I know, as well as remind daughters and sons of the depth and breadth of a godly mother's heart.

Over the last couple of years, I've had the immense pleasure of getting to know a wonderful woman through our gym, CrossFit 925. Jennifer Kipp, whom you are about to meet, has a megawatt smile and a pair of sparkling brown eyes that absolutely light up a room. There is an air of sweetness and joy about her that is infectious and spirit-lifting. And she possesses a strength that far surpasses what she's trained her muscles to do at the gym with barbells and kettlebells. It's a strength that allows her to thrive with a thorn of no small size that impacts not only her daily life, but her daughters' lives as well.

I've asked Jennifer to be my guest blogger today because I want you all to get a glimpse of a marvelous mom who has learned, as Paul did, to be content in any situation, to consider trials as joys, and to believe without question that God's grace is sufficient. I pray her transparent testimony and God-given wisdom inspire you to fight the good fight of faith, whatever your fight looks like, and to know that our Father is ever-faithful, infinitely gracious and unfathomably good; He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, and has an amazing plan for each of His children.

Jennifer Kipp's Story

My name is Jennifer and I am 29 years old, and just a few weeks away from turning 30. I have been married to my best friend for six years and we have two beautiful girls, Madison

(5), and Makailyn (3).

I've been a stay-at-home mom since Madison was born. Even way before I had kids, I knew this is what my heart desired. It was very important for me to be able to work from home somehow and be able to be involved in the little details of my kids' lives. Losing my dad at 4 years old and growing up with a single parent who couldn't be there made it further motivates me to do whatever I have to to stay at home. While I am a stay-at-home mom, I am very busy and active. I'm involved with my church, there are playdates, I own my own photography business, I participate in school activities, I do CrossFit and am involved with other workout groups, and spend time with friends and family.

My life can look rosy and carefree at times, I admit. But what most people don't know or understand is that I, and my girls, have a rare genetic skin condition called Epidermolysis bullosa, or EB.

While family members and lifelong friends have known about it my whole life, what they don't know is exactly how I deal with it. I grew up being extremely shy about it. I hated talking about it. While we have a very mild version of it, it can be very painful.

EB is a genetic skin disorder characterized clinically by the formation of blisters brought on by mechanical trauma. There are four main types with additional sub-types identified. There is a spectrum of severity, and within each type, one may be either affected mildly or severely. EB ranges from being a minor inconvenience requiring modification of some activities, to being completely disabling and, in some cases, fatal. Currently, there is no cure for EB.

I only have EB on the tops of my hands, elbows, from the knees down, ankles and the tops of my feet. It also affects my nails and toenails. I have to wear lace or mesh swim pants while at

the beach. While they are cute, I would give anything to show my legs. To have “normal”-looking feet. I never can throw on cute shorts. I always have to plan what I can wear for the occasion. I can’t wear certain shoes or cute flip flops. I wear pants when I work out despite the Texas heat. The crazy thing is that depending on the weather, my skin can look clear, but of course during the summer, it’s more noticeable and red.

It’s easy for me to get down. I have to constantly remind myself that God doesn’t make mistakes. We are made in His image, and while He chose me—and my daughters—to carry this, He knew we were strong enough to do so. He knew He could shine through us because of it. He knew it would bring me closer to Him. I look at my husband and see a heart of gold for falling in love with my heart before noticing my skin.

My girls show it on some of the same areas, but not as noticeably. My oldest has fallen several times and completely skinned open several layers of her palm. Each time she cries for approximately 15 minutes, and is then up playing and laughing again. Her strength amazes me. The hard part is holding her down while she’s screaming because I have to change the bandage every day until it’s healed.

People don’t see or hear me talk about the “behind-the-scenes” much. The last time Madison really hurt her hand she said, “Mommy, why does God want me to hurt? Why did He gives us this?”

Imagine how my mommy heart felt in that moment. What do you say to something like that? I ask myself that very question. All I can do is trust Him; my whole life has been learning to do so.

For much of my life, I wanted to pretend this condition wasn’t there. But that would soon change, only with the Lord’s divine assistance.

Being thin growing up used to be so easy for me. I could literally eat whatever I wanted. But when I hit my 20s, got married, and had babies, that all changed. I felt like I had let myself go. I made a commitment to overhaul my diet, and dropped 40 pounds. And then, as someone who didn't enjoy working out, I started Zumba. Zumba was followed by running, and then running led me to CrossFit. CrossFit has now led me to be more open about EB, publicly.

My life has been modified because of my skin. My ankles and legs usually hurt 80 percent of the time. The throbbing doesn't go away, but I've learned to tolerate it and it doesn't bother me much. I began learning that taking care of my body is not just physical, but is spiritual, too. It has been freeing and has brought healing for me. I never used to show people my legs. My friends will tell you that and now I have a private EB album for anyone who wants to see and learn more about it.

I feel like being open about this is causing me to step into what God has planned all along. At times, I do feel like my story has become tiresome and redundant, and that it seems like I'm playing the victim to my circumstances. I certainly don't want pity. I want to inspire and encourage others through what I wrestle with and face on a daily basis.

CrossFit has been empowering for me, knowing that I can do this regardless of a small setback. Just because I'm susceptible to getting hurt doesn't mean I can't do it. Anyone can get hurt. Honestly, knowing that I can take a "battle wound" from a workout is the best part. I survived it. I did it without letting it stop me. CrossFit and working out in general have elevated my confidence to a whole new level.

I tell this story because our stories and life circumstances aren't for us to keep but for Him to use to bring healing for ourselves and others. My girls need me to be open about this because one day, when they are faced with the same things I

was, they'll need to know they are stronger than they think. I want them to know they are beautiful despite their scars, despite what the world thinks or says is beautiful. I want them to be brave enough to tell their story and to share with others how EB has affected them and how they've overcome it.

My life is not perfect, and I struggle. My whole life has been a struggle, in fact. I used to care what people thought about me, but now I'm more focused on what my Creator thinks about me.

We cannot be fixed unless we are first broken before Him. He can take our broken pieces and use them in ways we can't even imagine.

If you are struggling with something, I encourage you to look past the struggle and see how God can change and use you. Never in a million years did I think someone like me would LOVE lifting weights. A girly girl such as myself who loves hot pink, fashion and so much more has no problem getting roughed up. EB could easily stop me but I refuse to let it. Refuse to let your struggle stop you from doing what you want or love to do.

My life verse is Proverbs 3:5, and I'd like to encourage you with it:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths."

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