

What God Wants to Do With Your Ugliest Weakness

I'm not in a wheelchair. I'm not on chemo. I've ended up in the hospital only two times, for brief outpatient visits. To see me, you'd assume I'm the picture of perfect health. But underneath this strong exterior lies deep weakness.

I've been given the gift of chronic illness. And while I would love to reject such a gift, it has been my invitation into a thousand moments of grace—to feel where I was once numb, see where I was once blind, hear where I was once deaf. It's been my merciful undoing and my gracious remaking.

You see, in my own strength, pain-free and healthy, I am proud and self-sufficient and the greatest people pleaser. But here, in the throes of weakness, I am forced into postures of humility and dependency upon God. This brokenness has surfaced every cranky, weary, impatient, mean, insecure, fearful, shortsighted aspect of my character. So I cry out to Him.

And I find Him.

Why Healing Isn't Everything

Over the course of these seven years of illness, I've been prayed for and prayed over by countless people. I've seen medical doctors and homeopathic specialists. I've changed the way I eat and exercise ... multiple times. I've made progress, and then I've regressed—taken five steps forward and four steps back. Because sometimes God says “no” or “not yet” or “only in part” so that we learn how to sit in silence a little longer, until our heart is on a first-name basis with surrender, and we go deeper with Jesus.

These aches and pains and frailties are a telescope to see distant glory up close. The God of the universe is near to the

brokenhearted, and He lifts up those who are bowed down. And that nearness is my good. He says, "I see. I hear. I care. And I am with you. I have everything you need for this."

Too Much and Not Enough

In every season of our lives, there comes a time when we feel that God has given us "too much," and we're "not enough." We look at our circumstances and then at our resources—and we despair.

Why do You push me so far past my limits, Lord?

When I was young and healthy and had the world on a string, I envisioned a life of monumental and celebrated ministry. But on this side of weakness, I've been surprised by the joys of small and simple servanthood.

When I'm tempted to bemoan my limitations, I remember that God can feed more than 5,000 people with just two fish and five loaves of bread. My weakness serves to highlight His strength.

I feel as if He regularly poses the same question to me as He did to stammering, fearful Moses: "What is that in your hand?" But instead of a staff, I have a four-year-old son to love and disciple; a laptop and an hour to write an encouraging word; dinner, doubled in portion, so we can share with friends; a chair in my living room and an ear to listen to a hurting young woman.

On the weeks of better health, I do a little more. On the weeks of bad health, I do a lot less. I've found that God is happy to be with me no matter how I feel or how much I can get done.

So while I still ask Him to heal me, I also thank Him for the miracles He's working through illness. In the most unlikely, unexpected ways He has been carving out unique ministry for me, increasing my joy in Him and in others, and working all

things together for my good. It doesn't look anything like I had planned—but it's beautiful this way.

Dare I say, it's better this way? It's better that I wasn't healed quickly like we all wanted. It's better that I can't praise a doctor or medicine or methodology for my healing. It's better that my marriage and motherhood have been forged in weakness. It's better that I have needed God so desperately.

We are made for perfection, aren't we, dear one? We are made for eternity. This chafing against weakness makes sense. But someday soon (sooner than I can imagine), I will be made perfect, and so will you. And all these trivial maladies—these light and momentary troubles—will be forgotten in the glory that far outweighs them all. We will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint. We'll see our healer face-to-face, and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Whether your struggle is with chronic illness or some other form of weakness, God is not wasting it. He's fulfilling the purposes He's planned for you since the beginning of time. He sees, He hears, He knows and He cares. May you experience the gift of His nearness and goodness today.

Scriptures referenced: Isaiah 40; Psalm 73; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Revelation 21:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5; Psalm 34:18; Mark 6:34–44; Exodus 4:2.

*Adapted from Revive Our Hearts. Married at age 34, **Colleen Chao** writes about her journey from singleness to marriage to motherhood, celebrating God's faithfulness in every season of life. A former book editor, English teacher, and youth leader, Colleen is now mastering the finer arts of diapers, dirt, and dishes. She makes her home in Southern California with her long-awaited husband and son.*