

When Life Attacks

I love to run for exercise. Recently, my youngest daughter, Jessica, decided to start running with me. Currently, she is working toward running enough times to earn a pair of good running shoes and some running apparel.

There is a particular loop in my neighborhood that I often run: two blocks down, one block over, two blocks back up, and one block back to where I started. In the middle of that last block, there's an alley. And as we passed the alley on this particular day, a dun-colored dog ran out of the alleyway toward us.

We had seen this dog act aggressively toward us on a previous run, and we had simply turned around and run the other way. But this time, the dog was having none of that. He approached us aggressively, cutting off our opportunity to turn and go back the way we had come.

"Mommy! There's that dog again!" Jessica called out (I was slightly ahead of her).

"Don't look at it," I instructed in a calm voice. "Just run smoothly, and look straight ahead."

"Mommy!"

I turned and stopped. Jessica was standing frozen in fear, staring directly at the dog—who, fortunately, had stopped several yards from her. "Jessica," I said, in the same ultra-calm voice, "keep running. Don't look at the dog. I'll protect you."

Jessica tried to obey, but as she ran on and I moved in between her and the dog, the dog began to bark and advance toward us. Again, Jessica stopped and looked right at it.

"Jessica," I said firmly but still calmly, "keep going. I will

protect you. You have to keep going.”

For some reason, the dog let us go. It still barked after us, but it didn't advance. Until we rounded the corner toward our house, that is. “Mommy, it's following us!” Jessica cried out.

By this point, we were close enough to home that I could tell her, “Jessica, run up to the porch.” She obeyed, and the dog left off its loping pursuit and trotted away to find something else to do. We were safe.

In case you're wondering, I reported the dog to Animal Control, and a few days later, they were able to find the dog loose again and pick it up. But that's not the point of the story.

The point is this: What happened with me, Jessica, and the dog has important spiritual parallels, and it all comes back to the reason I told Jessica to keep going and not look at the dog.

Why did I do that?

You may be aware that when you encounter an aggressive dog, one of the worst things you can do is make eye contact with it and stare at it. Often, that only provokes the dog and makes things worse for you. So I told Jessica not to look at the dog so that the situation wouldn't get worse.

And I told her to keep going because I needed to know exactly where she was so that I could more easily position myself between her and the dog, as well as because I needed her to get some distance from him.

I could protect her better if she did what I asked.

When we face attacks in this life, our natural, human inclination is to freeze in fear and focus on the terrible thing that happened (or is threatening to happen). But Jesus tells us to do exactly the opposite. He tells us to keep going

and to focus on something else (God). All too often, we assume that He's trying to minimize or invalidate our fear, or maybe just that He has a thing for being obeyed and doesn't really care what's happening to us.

The reality is that Jesus knows exactly how to help us deal with our distress, and *that's* why He tells us not to focus on it. Focusing on it only makes things worse for us. He's not telling us to deny it; He's always all about truth and accuracy. He's simply telling us that there's something better to focus on—something that will help us out a whole lot more than making the attack the primary focal point of our attention.

That's why He tells us to keep going—because He knows that if we don't, we'll stay stuck, and things will never get any better. Just as I wanted Jessica to run toward home, so He wants us to run toward our home—heaven—where all the fear and pain will be behind us.

As Jessica ran, she was still afraid. I knew she would be. I wasn't suggesting that she not deal with her fear. I was telling her something she needed to do *despite* her fear. At first, she didn't see how she could obey, and she remained frozen. But when she began to obey, *then* she saw that my instructions were, indeed, to her benefit.

Likewise, Jesus only tells us to do things that will help us, not hurt us. Oh, if only we believed that, we would be ready—eager, even—to do whatever He might ask.

But there's one more thing we need to consider. And this is perhaps the most precious thing of all.

Remember where I was when I was telling Jessica to keep going, and not to look?

Between her and the dog.

Oh, precious mom, hear me. Better yet, hear the heart of God for you. When trials come—when you're attacked—it may *feel* like Jesus has left you alone to deal with them. But He hasn't.

He's standing between you and the dog.

Keep going, Mom. Fix your eyes on God, and keep going. Let Jesus stand between you and the dog, and head for home.

James 1:12—"Blessed is the [mom] who perseveres under trial, because when [she] has stood the test, [she] will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

*Adapted from **Megan Breedlove's** blog, *Manna for Moms*. Megan is the author of *Well Done, Good and Faithful Mommy* and *Manna for Moms: God's Provision for Your Hair-Raising, Miracle-Filled Mothering Adventure* (Regal Books.) She is also a blogger and a stay-at-home mom with five children.*