Being An Esther: Taught By God

I have been a Christian pretty much my entire life. But like many other people, I didn't think I *needed* God. What I didn't realize was that God loved ME and that He had a plan for my life.

My *personal* relationship with God began during my second year of college in 1995. It was then that I found out that I had a chronic illness called *fibromyalgia.* Fibromyalgia is characterized by chronic fatigue, intense muscle pain, sleeping problems, stomach problems, headaches - whatever is associated with the nerves and muscles. A person cannot die from this illness, but it can be very debilitating (and is lifelong).

I was totally devastated at the time of my diagnosis, as I was only 19 years old. I still had my whole life ahead of me. I didn't know what I was going to do. I never trusted God with anything, and I didn't want to. I remember thinking, "How could God possibly use me? I can barely move because of the pain and I get so tired I can't even talk. How in the world am I going to be able to serve Christ?"

Much of that first year was spent in self pity and depression. Questions like, "Why did I have to get this?" and "How come I am the only one in my family to have an illness?" seemed to enter my mind more times than I could count.

As the year went on, things just seemed to get worse and worse. It finally came to a point where I prayed to God and I asked Him to take over my life because I couldn't deal with it anymore. I told God that I would be willing to do whatever He wanted - but He was going to have to give me the strength and energy to do it. And He has. Ever since then, my life has taken on a new purpose.

Yes, I still live with a chronic illness, but God gives me the energy and strength I need to do His work. In fact, most people wouldn't even guess that I have an illness, and that in itself is a testimony to God's power, love and grace!

Isaiah 40:31 comes to mind: "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." This verse is so true in my life. Not once has God NOT given me the strength to do what He asks me to do. Sure, I still have bad times when I don't feel well and I have to rest - but I could also tell you story after story of how God has miraculously healed me so I could go to speaking engagements or so I could meet one-on-one with individuals. Serving Christ is so exciting to me because He makes the weak strong: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sure, sometimes I still struggle with seeing how God can use me. But those are the times that God always seems to be nearest to me. And as I continue to trust God He blesses me more and more.

I used to joke about reading the book of Job because it was my life story. Now, I prefer the book of Esther because I am a woman willing to be used by God for His glory. Having a chronic illness has taught me to see what's really important in life. I learned to appreciate the opportunities God gives me.

I used to think that God couldn't use me and that I might as well die, because it would be better for everyone. I could have lived my life the way it was before - in self-pity and without purpose. I now look at the life God has given me and I rejoice that I am able to be part of His plan. What a privilege it is to serve Him. I wouldn't trade my life with anyone else - because God chose ME to serve Him!

Because of the work God has done in my life, I can actually live somewhat "functionally." I still need to rest quite a bit and I have migraines almost everyday. But even with the pain I struggle with, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of joy and happiness. I don't know what I'd do without the love and peace of God in my life!

What about you? God wants to be our leverage in living, empowering us to feel better about ourselves, more excited about our future, more grateful for those we love and more enthusiastic about our faith.

Credit: Bridget Gazlay