Finding Strength through Faith

Presenter: Augie DeAugustinis
The Myositis Association
Chairman of the Board
Diagnosed with IBM in 2008
“In this world you will have tribulation…”

- No one ever said that life would be a cake walk….
- In fact, Scripture warns us:
  - Disease will afflict us;
  - Death will make widows and orphans;
  - Famine, floods and earthquakes will cause devastation.
- But remember, “… be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)
Keeping your life in balance living with a chronic illness...

- Your body is like a 3-legged stool....
  - Physical leg
  - Emotional leg
  - Spiritual leg
- You need to maintain all 3 to stay in balance.
- If one becomes weak...
  - Physical: Doctors, meds, PT, etc. can help
  - Emotional: Family, friends, counsellors can help
  - Spiritual: Most important. Making it stronger is what we will be talking about today.
Keeping the right perspective...

- Dealing with chronic illness shortens your focus to the “here and now.” So, we need the right perspective, but how do we do that?
- Here is our life line:

- To what should we compare?
  - Hint: God has planted eternity in the hearts of all men.
- So here is our life line compared to eternity:
- Our focus on our problems of today pales in comparison to what still lies ahead of us in eternity.
  - But….. eternity has 2 different addresses!
  - We had no choice in our gender or our families, but we do have a choice in where we can spend eternity….. and the choice is ours.
- Goal: To change our focus… Our tribulations today are insignificant compared to what is waiting for us in eternity.
My Story...

- This was my office.....
- Then....the diagnosis;
- Five stages of grief:
  - **Denial:** “It must be a mistake!”
  - **Anger:** People often blame God...
    - “What did I do to deserve this?” or “Why me, God?”
    - Better question: “Why not you?”
  - **Bargaining:** “God, if you’ll just take this away, I’ll (fill in the blank).”
    - What we don’t hear is God whispering, “I have plans for you.”
    - The more I bargained, the more I started hearing, “Accept it.”
  - **Depression:** Much more likely to occur when you leave God out of the equation.
  - **Acceptance:** This is where God wants you to be.
    - Acceptance is not the same as resignation.
More on Acceptance….

- Acceptance becomes easier when you realize that God allows us to have our disease because He has a plan for us to use it for HIS purpose.
  - Rom 8:28…
  - We can make all of the plans we want, BUT…
  - God is in control, not us;
  - He orders our steps
- Not sure of His plans for you? Try looking at things from His perspective…
  - Work to be a walking example of His grace through our acceptance of His will.
  - Show others that He supplies the strength that we need on a daily basis (He wants to be the oxygen of our life).
  - Every day we are given opportunities to share our story with others; that message can help them and bring joy to your life!
It Starts in your Mind...

- Acceptance is directly related to our **attitude**.... And that begins with your mindset.
- You can’t stop thinking negative thoughts by trying harder to not think them.
- You have the power to **choose** what you focus on.
- Two people in the same circumstances can have 2 completely different experiences.
- As an example.....
Excerpts from a Dog’s Diary...

- 8:00 a.m.—Dog food! My favorite thing!
- 9:30 a.m.—A car ride! My favorite thing!
- 10:30 a.m.—Got rubbed and petted! My favorite thing!
- 12 p.m.—Played in the yard! My favorite thing!
- 2:00 p.m.—Got a cookie! My favorite thing!
- 4:00 p.m.—Took a nap! My favorite thing!
- 7:00 p.m.—Got to play ball! My favorite thing!
- 10:00 p.m.—Sleeping on the bed! My favorite thing!
Excerpts from a Cat’s Diary...

- “Day 983 of my captivity. My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre little dangling objects. I continue to swat them away with no success. The only thing that keeps me going is my dream of escape.”

- Same circumstances... 2 totally different attitudes.
- What is your attitude?
- John Milton: “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, or a hell of heaven.”
**It’s All About the Attitude!**

- What is our attitude? Where is our focus when we suffer loss?
  - We have 2 choices:

- We can choose to be **bitter 😞**
  - This happens when we focus on what we have lost;
  - It can sour our attitude and can lead to anger issues;
  - Or worse……it can lead to depression.

- Or we can choose to be **better 😊**
  - How? Focus on what we DO have (loving spouse and family, supportive friends, good doctors, etc.)
  - Develop an **attitude of gratitude!** Make a “Gratitude List”
  - Ask God to heal our heart; let others see His work on the inside;
  - How you are on the inside is of far greater value than what’s going on with you on the outside.
Enhance your perspective...

- Read about others who have had to overcome much worse challenges:
  - **Joni Eareckson Tada**—quadriplegic at 19; now an acclaimed artist; author of 50 books; popular speaker around the world.
  - **Amy Charmichael**—a missionary in India who spent the last 20 years of her life bedridden, but who continued her missionary work.
  - **Nick Vujicic**—Australian born with only stumps for arms and legs. Can now write, use a computer, comb his own hair, brush his teeth, answer the phone and shave on his own. Travels the world as a motivational speaker.
Strengthening the Spiritual Leg...

- When you are hurting, seek Godly counsel.
  - Avoid the pity pot. Look for advice and support from people who have a “God” perspective, not a worldly one.
- Look for ways that you can become a positive influence on others.
- Be intentional about staying in touch with God:
  - Make prayer a regular habit; prayers move God to change the world!
  - Find a Bible-based church; but don’t only depend on “secondhand spirituality” (from the preacher!)
  - Establish a “Quiet/Devotional time” in your daily routine.
    - Consider it “tithing” the first part of each day;
    - Make sure it includes actual quiet time... you can’t listen for His voice if you’re doing all of the talking!
The Power of Prayer...

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.” (Phil 4:6)

Remember this... **Prayer in the face of suffering leads to new spiritual territory.**

If you have an urge to pray it’s because **God is calling you.**

Prayer is a good way to take the focus off of us and put it on God.

Change your attitude about prayer:
- Make it less of an activity and more of an awareness of God.
- While stopped at a light; waiting in line; walking to your next meeting.

Count your blessings each day... and then be thankful!
Getting Outside of Ourselves...

- A great way to take your mind off of your own problems is by helping others.
- Inward focus → Pity Pot → Depression 😞
- Outward focus → Helps Others → Improves your attitude! 😊
  - Great opportunity to help: Support Groups (KIT’s)
- “In this life we cannot do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” (Mother Teresa)
  - Example: Listening... to others who are hurting; you can actually find comfort in another person’s story.
- And don’t hesitate to share your story with others...
  - God is your partner; He provides your strength and hope.
  - Your story might inspire someone who one day might have to deal with their own pain or suffering!
  - Remember: Fellowship with others helps our faith to flourish!
God’s Plan for You…

- Allow Him to be in control!
  - God wants us to depend on Him so that can He supply us with the strength that we need on a daily basis.
- With His strength and provision, you can add joy and peace into your life, and possibly even change someone else’s life.
- Make a difference at home…
  - Start within your own circle of influence—your story of receiving the strength you need from God will touch others.
  - Remember: you only need to touch one life to make a difference in this world…and you may not even know it!
  - Drop a stone…
Closing Thoughts…

- Faith means **believing and trusting** God for the future;
- Faith is **like a muscle**… it **needs to be exercised** to grow;
- Draw your strength from God **each day:**
  - Remember that He is using us as a **living example** of His grace and mercy.
- **Keep your eyes on eternity;** not the problems of today.
- Disease and suffering are part of our world… So is getting older.
  - It’s how we deal with them that will determine our future….
- … and remember, a season of suffering is a small price to pay for a clear view of God!
Thank You!