

Why Me?

BY ELIZABETH QUIGLEY

Why me? Why now? I had just gotten back from competing in a major horse show held in California and was at the height of my hunter-jumper equestrian riding abilities. I was busy with school, piano lessons, and Beehives. I was doing everything I had been taught to do, and I thought that my life was about as perfect as life can ever get. Then it changed.

The Trial

I was now in a hospital bed, too sick to even open my eyes. I had been diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. My illness came just four years after my mom died from a similar cancer. I was on heavy chemotherapy to get rid of the cancer, and the doctors were saying that I would have to undergo chemotherapy for two and a half years to make sure that all the cancer was gone. I couldn't understand why me and why now.

I soon learned that being diagnosed with cancer was not the only challenge I would face. One of the drugs used to treat leukemia is a steroid given at extremely high doses. It is very effective at killing the leukemia cells, but there is a small risk that it can result in avascular necrosis (a condition in which bones die near the joints), particularly in teenage girls. My doctors thought that, at 12 years old, I was too young for that to happen. However, within one month of my starting chemotherapy, the steroids ended up destroying most of my major joints and parts of my spine. I was living in constant pain. Four months after I


was diagnosed with leukemia, I had my first hip surgery to begin trying to repair the damage done by the steroids and to lessen the pain. The surgery did not go as well as I had hoped, and my orthopedic surgeon told me that I would probably never ride a horse again. All of a sudden, the future I had planned was gone.

I was a good student, and I really enjoyed school. Now I couldn't go to school or even out in public because the chemotherapy had destroyed my immune system. Instead, I stayed home with my stepmother. At this point I thought things were pretty bad, but they got worse.

Six months after my hip surgery, I had to have another hip surgery because the first one hadn't worked. I was in a wheelchair because it hurt too much to walk. I was absolutely sure that I wasn't going to ride horses again, and now I was worried if I would even be able to walk again. Living life sick, in constant pain, and confined to a wheelchair didn't sound like a lot of fun to me.

The Prayers

I was praying to my Heavenly Father, and I know many other people were praying for me also. Through all of my trials, I prayed that I would be healed, that my joints would recover, and that I wouldn't have to go through the rest of chemotherapy. I felt that my prayers weren't being answered because I still had to go to Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City every week for more chemotherapy. I still hurt. And I was still stuck in a wheelchair. At one point, I

A young woman with long, wavy brown hair and a headband is shown from the waist up. She is wearing a blue dress with a white and green floral pattern. Her arms are crossed, and she has a serious, contemplative expression. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a building.

**Adversity
taught me not
to worry about
this question—
or about
anything that
doesn't really
matter.**

started to think that my parents were crazy for believing in a God who wouldn't even listen to a poor little sick girl.

Years before, I had gone through a similar trial of my faith when I prayed for my mom to get better. She was on oxygen all the time and was too weak to even walk around the house. I prayed and hoped and prayed some more that she would miraculously be healed. However, she wasn't. After she died, I learned that we can pray for what we want all that we want to, but we need to pray for the right things—praying that the Lord's will be done—to have our prayers answered.

Remembering this lesson, I changed my prayers from "Please heal me" to "Heavenly Father, I would really like to be done with these trials, but I will accept Thy will." As soon as I changed my prayers, I found that I was able to handle the chemotherapy more easily, and I had a better attitude. That was just the beginning of the blessings and the answers to my prayers and questions.

My dad and grandfather gave me many priesthood blessings.

Whenever I had to go in for surgery, I would ask for a blessing. The blessings

helped me and my family feel calm about the procedure. One time I had a high fever, and we had to go to the hospital. I received a blessing from my dad and a neighbor before we left. By the time we pulled up at the emergency room door, my fever was gone, and I didn't have to stay the night in the hospital. I know that priesthood power is a gift from a loving Heavenly Father.

The Lessons

One moment that will always stand out in my mind was the day I came home from the hospital after I was diagnosed with leukemia. The young women and Relief Society sisters had moved my stuff from the basement into a room on the main floor so I would be closer to my parents and wouldn't have to use the stairs. They had cleaned and decorated the room to make a great place for me to live while I was sick. My family was the recipient of many other service projects. In the beginning, it was hard for me to accept service. When people would do service for me, it would make me feel like I couldn't do anything for myself. However, I soon learned that it was OK to ask for help. When I started





Elizabeth played the oboe in the general Young Women meeting in March of this year

(which can be viewed at www.generalconference.lds.org).

feeling better, I began looking for opportunities to serve other people more. Now I try to serve as much as I can. I get a good feeling when I serve other people. I have come to realize that by letting other people serve me, I allow them the same good feelings.

I have learned to think more about the future and my choices because I was so close to death. At school, I heard girls complaining about how they were having a “bad hair day.” As I was sitting there in my hot pink wheelchair with a wig on my head, I would think, “Well at least you *have* hair!” Girls would also complain about their feet hurting from walking around in high heels. I would think to myself, “At least you *can* walk.” Now I try to focus more on the big picture instead of the small things I used to worry about.

Over the past few years I have learned many other things through the blessings of having leukemia and



GUIDED THROUGH THE STORMS OF LIFE

“Sometimes the Lord allows us to have trials to shape us into productive servants.

... His all-seeing eye is over us and ever watching us as our Eternal Heavenly Parent. When trials come, as surely they will to all of us during mortality, let us not sink into the abyss of self-pity but remember who is at the helm, that He is there to guide us through all the storms of life.”

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “Be Not Afraid,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 5.

the complications from chemotherapy. I have become closer to my Heavenly Father. My testimony has grown. And I have learned what is truly important. I have learned to appreciate all of the small things that people do for me. I am now in remission, in less pain, and gradually getting back some of the use of my joints. As I continue to heal, the blessings and learning experiences keep coming.

So why me? Why now? I don’t ask those questions anymore because I grew spiritually during my trials. I have discovered who I really am because the Lord loved me enough to let me experience adversity and the blessings that can come with it. ■

Note: Elizabeth is in remission and recently passed her third anniversary of being off chemotherapy. Her joints are healing, and she is no longer in a wheelchair. While there is still a risk for a relapse, Elizabeth doesn’t think about it. Instead, as a freshman in college, she is focused on studying for tests and practicing the oboe and English horn.