

My Strength in the ICU

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:26

In January of 2010, I was blessed to begin teaching my first semester as an adjunct professor. I was also blessed to be in my first trimester of pregnancy with my third child. As I walked across campus on my first day of teaching, I found it difficult to breathe. I didn't think I was *that* out of shape. Then I couldn't catch my breath enough to talk to my classroom of students. Since it was cold season, I thought perhaps I had developed pneumonia following a virus. I scheduled an appointment with my doctor for the next morning.

Through the night, I struggled with extreme dizziness—enough to make me sick. I felt numb in my arm and face, and struggled to breathe. In the morning, I went to my high-risk obstetrician. After listening to my heart rate and lungs with his stethoscope, he sent me immediately to the ER to be tested for blood clots in my lungs. He was right. I had a few. The Lord had graciously kept me safe through the night. He preserved my life, and my baby's life, through a potentially fatal pulmonary embolism.

*All praise to thee, my God, this night
For all the blessings of the light.
Keep me, oh, keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thine own almighty wings. (CW 592:1)*

The following week in the intensive care unit (ICU) was an emotional struggle for me. I wasn't able to snuggle and care for my little boys. Children weren't allowed in the ICU, so I missed them terribly. My husband split his time between my hospital room and home, where our moms were helping to watch our boys. The nights were long and lonely. I felt my place was at home as a mom and wife, and teaching in the classroom a few afternoons a week. What was I doing lying around all day hooked up to the monitors and a heparin drip? I even had to buzz for a nurse to help me use the restroom. That was a little embarrassing.

When my pastor visited, he suggested we sing a hymn. I couldn't take more than a shallow breath. I wanted to be able to sing! It would be a few more weeks before I would be physically able to “sing a new song to the Lord.” (Psalm 96:1) I was so accustomed to serving God in my usual ways. What was my identity laying in the hospital bed?

“My flesh and my heart may fail,” Psalm 73:26 says. My body was broken, failing me again. When I'm physically down, it's usually not long before my heart follows. I got sad and gloomy—moods to match my physical pain. When I was cruising along as a healthy woman, accomplishing this and taking care of that, it was so easy to feel proudly in control. When I couldn't even breathe, that grip on all the details slipped away. I couldn't feel pleased with how much I accomplished in a day. When my body and heart were broken, though, I was closer to the truth. As it turns out, even on a good day, I'm not in control of

my world. My physical challenges brought this to light. I am an imperfect person in an imperfect body. I do need my Savior.

*Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son
The ill that I this day have done,
That with the world, myself, and thee
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be. (CW 592:1)*

When I went home from the hospital, I learned how to give myself shots of Lovenox. As the medication dissolved the blood clots, I slowly gained breath and strength, despite some setbacks. For a time, it was difficult to sleep at night. I rolled around searching for a position that allowed me to breathe and relax. I loved to use "All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night" (CW 592) as a prayer, asking for enough sleep and strength to accomplish all that was in front of me to do.

*Oh, may my soul on thee repose
And may sweet sleep mine eyelids close,
Sleep that shall me more vig'rous make
To serve my God when I awake. (CW 592:2)*

My work does matter to God and it is important for accomplishing his purposes in the world. My works and actions are not my identity, though. That's good news, because the devil points out the imperfections in what I try to achieve. He tries to focus me inward on myself and what I do, rather than on what Jesus has done for me. For each broken day I've had, for every time I focused on my works instead of his, Jesus lived every day perfectly and selflessly. Then he clothed me in that perfection. I'm a dearly loved child of God, forgiven and made perfect. I can rest and heal with a peaceful heart.

Jesus also lived in this broken world, so he knows how it is. He knows how I hurt. He's there to listen and love me. I can hear his voice answering that hurt in his Word. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) I don't weather physical suffering in the most gracious way, so I thank him again and again that I stand in his grace. My inadequate efforts to put my world right are washed and made perfect. "God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)

I have sure hope of eternal life in Jesus. Because of that, his grace alone is enough for me. Yet he goes above and beyond with so many blessings. Breathing and singing are two such blessings! Being able to carry my healthy baby, be a mom and wife, and teach a class are all beautiful gifts. The things I do are out of thanks to Jesus, who lives and loves me to the end.

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (CW 592:3)*



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