

I haven't really shared this with anyone but close family and friends. I never wanted anyone to really know but I think it is time that I begin to share my story about what God is doing for me because I want to give Him all the praise and all the glory. I know that if He will do it for me than he can do it for anyone that may be reading this or may hear about my story.

I have lived with pain my entire life. Pain in my hips, legs, ankles, feet, arms, and hands. The pain gets so bad sometimes that I had to have my husband rub my muscles and take pain medicine. I have always had difficulty climbing stairs, getting up from being in the floor, and walking on uneven ground. I have fallen so many times that I can't even begin to count. I can't count the number of times I have had X-rays of my ankles and had softball size swollen knots and black and blue bruises on my ankles and feet.

I have had to make decisions about where I can go depending on if there were stairs or not or if the ground was going to be uneven. I remember not being able to take my son to the crying baby's room at church because it was upstairs and I couldn't carry him up the stairs. I remember carrying him in the carrier because I was afraid I would fall and drop him.

This is all because I was diagnosed with a hereditary form of muscular dystrophy. My grandmother has the disease and is basically in a wheelchair. My uncle has it and barely walks with braces on his legs. When I was diagnosed, my first thought was that this is what I had to look forward to.

But Jesus says that by His stripes I am healed! With all the hurts and all the pain, I have pushed through and pressed on! I have a promise from God that I will be healed in Jesus name and I refuse to accept anything but strength. I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me!

When I heard about the Genesis running program, I felt that God was telling me to do it! Immediately I felt doubt. I thought to myself, "how am I supposed to do this? I can't even hardly walk up stairs." Then I just said, "devil you are a liar" and I decided to do it in faith! To step out and do something that man says I shouldn't be able to do. Jesus says that He can do exceedingly abundantly above ALL that we can even ask or think and that what is impossible for man is possible with God.

The first night of the run, I was all amped up! I was ready! However, my body was not! I'm going to be honest, it was not easy! I struggled and did not do all the running that I was supposed to do. Doubt came flooding in. I left the first night feeling defeated but I decided again that I was just going to keep doing it and trying because I knew that God would see me through! I went on the next run and still was unable to complete all of the running. The next run, I filled myself with God's word and every time I ran, I repeated over and over in my mind "I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me!" I repeated it over and over and over the entire time I ran and for the first time, I was able to do all the running that I was supposed to do.

I began repeating scripture to myself through every run and it worked! I was running and I was doing something that seemed so far from what man says I can do! About the third week of the program, I was doing one of the runs that we did on our own and I had a rough day at work. My mind was on all the things that had happened that day at work. During the run, I fell and twisted my ankle. This was my biggest concern because I fell just walking down the sidewalk on any given day. My ankle immediately began to swell to a huge knot and my knee was all torn up and bleeding. I went to my car and cried. All the doubt and fear of doing this came rushing back! How in the world can I run a 5K? I can't even run 3 minutes without falling. I took that Saturday off and rested. I prayed and I decided that again the devil is a liar. I have a promise and I am going to stand on it and run on it! I realized that I had taken my eyes and my thoughts off of the Lord that day as I ran and I fell. I put my eyes and my thoughts on what God's word says and that following Tuesday I ran with the group even with a bandaged ankle. I knew God would see me through.

After that, I never missed another run. I ran each practice and again continued to quote scripture over and over in my mind. I decided that failure was not an option with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on my side. I continued to run more and more. It was working! I was able to run for the first time in my life! One day I even scratched my leg and there was something there! It was a muscle!! One that I had certainly never had before! I started to notice that my pain that I was having even when walking wasn't there! I wasn't having to ask my husband to rub my feet and legs anymore. They weren't hurting! Stairs seemed easier! (praise break! THANK YOU JESUS!)

I was able to stay consistent and ran everything past that 3rd week that I was supposed to run in the program. The race was approaching and I was now able to run for 30 minutes without stopping but I was nowhere near the 3.1 mile mark. In fact, I hadn't even hit the 2 mile mark in 30 minutes. Doubt tried to creep back in once again. I thought, "how am I supposed to run 3.1 miles with hills when the farthest I have ever run is 1.75 miles on flat ground!?!?"

The night before the race, I filled up on what God's Word says! I read and studied scripture after scripture and prayed over myself and the race. Two scriptures that I found strength in were Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." and Proverbs 4:12 "When you walk your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble." In fact, I wrote the scriptures on my hand the morning of the race so that I if needed strength I could look at them.

The first mile was the hardest! There were a lot of hills and my mind was struggling with the completion of the 3.1 miles. I kept repeating scripture and looking at the scriptures that I wrote on my hand. I made it through the first mile. Then I started getting a second wind and finished 2 miles! I had never run 2 miles before in my life! God gave me more strength and I began picking up speed! I finished the entire race. The entire 3.1 miles. The girl with the short legs and the muscular issues just ran a 5k and finished the whole thing without stopping to walk one single time!!! I had never run that far in my life and I was sure that I wouldn't finish the whole thing in under an hour! To my surprise

and delight, I ran the 5k in 51 minutes and 46 seconds! That is the fastest pace that I had run to date!

I give God all the praise, all the honor and all the glory! There is no way that I would have been able to do it on my own. But through Christ I can do ALL things and so can you! I am not going to allow this triumph to go unnoticed if it can be used to encourage others and show just what Jesus can do! I have never felt stronger! My muscles are regenerating and my pain is subsiding and Jesus is healing me and strengthening me with every step I take! If you doubt that you can do this, don't! The devil is a liar! Push through and find strength in Jesus!

Leah Sparks