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**The Journey: GOD IS WITH US**

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**27Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**

John 14: 27

**Welcome to the Journey.**

Sandy lay there silent in the ICU bed watching as the respiratory therapist moved the ventilator tube toward her mouth. Then just as it was about to be put in place she said, **“This is God showing me I’m not in control…He is.”**

At home in the afternoon two days prior, she mentioned that her hands and feet had that pins and needles feeling, **“…like when they ‘fall asleep.’”** She added that they also felt numb.We talked about it briefly before deciding it must be a reaction to the allergy medicine she had taken earlier that day—and agreed it would probably go away. Then at three in the morning she was awake and both symptoms were getting worse!

At Medina General Hospital’s emergency room, the doctor and nurses quickly checked for a stroke or heart problem. Thankfully it was neither of those. Further scans and blood work were done but those tests came back with nothing to diagnose the problem. All while the mysterious tingling and numbness was now slowly ascending her legs and moving from her hands up her arms. Unable to diagnose what it might be, the ER doctor could only give her Tylenol for the discomfort and admit Sandy to a hospital room for “observation.” In the room for the night, we prayed together, giving whatever it was into God’s hands.

When morning came, the unidentified illness had only continued its slow progression. The muscles of her legs were being overtaken; leaving them virtually paralyzed on the bed. Her arms getting weaker. Different doctors came in to check on her but no one had any answers. I watched as Sandy calmly answered their questions. In the teeth of this “They don’t know what it is” situation, she seemed more curious than concerned about her condition, quietly trying to help the doctors.

For my part I was confused by the sudden onset of whatever it was. Sandy had always been so healthy. In faith, I knew that God is always in control. Nothing surprises Him. He has good plans for all who believe in Him, call on Him. Even knowing the Lord as we do, I still had questions. All of me wanted to know: “What should I do now God?” “What can I do to help her?” Even as I asked; I knew the answers. Just as I know He is always with us; will never leave us. As though He was personally speaking to me, I heard what I had read and learned, **“Fear not,” “Believe in me,” “Trust me.”**

God was there, I knew and felt the Holy Spirit with Sandy and me. There was nothing to fear. I felt that but cannot completely explain or describe it. Only remember the words of the Lord.

**29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

Matthew 11:29—30

Accepting the love that God has for us provides not only a hope but an assurance when there is nothing else. With God all things are possible. I knew that. No matter what happened, Sandy and I knew God’s promise to never leave us or forsake us. We knew that in times like these God holds believers even closer. The Creator of all things was with us and nothing could possibly overcome God’s goodness and the plans He has for those who call on Him.

Draw near to God and God will come near to you.

 James 4:8

Sandy and I knew that being Christians did not insulate us from the chaos of life; injury, sickness, or any disease. Certainly not the spiritual attacks that insult, frustrate and harass this life on earth. At the same time though, our faith had shown us that God who brought us together years before, had prepared us to face these challenges by depending on Him. Reaching out to God in the middle of the night the way we did was the natural thing to do. The second night when someone took me home to get some sleep, I dropped to my knees at the side of our bed to pray. I truly felt God draw me closer when I said, “Whatever it takes Lord.” There was no way of knowing that this was all just the beginning. Or what we would see God do for, with, and through Sandy in the days, weeks, and the months to come.

The next day doctors were still searching to find what disease was slowly and destructively overtaking my wife. The tingling and numbing continued to slowly ascend her legs and arms. We knew that our small church and other local churches, believers as far away as Wyoming were praying for us. All trusting with us that God’s timing is always perfect and His plan was somehow already in motion.

That afternoon pastor Mark Teal and his wife Shelley from Black River Church of the Brethren came in to visit Sandy. As God would have it, a doctor was there in the room looking at her chart on the computer at the end of her bed. As we waited for him to finish and leave out of the blue Mark spoke up and said, **“Aren’t Sandy’s symptoms similar to those of *Guillain Barre Syndrome*?”**

Here my friends, we see God’s plan begin to unfold! The Lord was indeed already at work!

To this day, I don’t even know that doctor’s name, but from that day I’ll not soon forget the way he slowly looked up at Mark and paused in thought for a long time. Then this enlightened smile slowly came across his face. He began quietly, **“You know,”** then louder, happier he continued saying, **“Actually, they do! They really do! They truly do! Where did you get that?”**

The doctor was excited and went into what Mark and the Holy Spirit had just given all of us. Mark would later tell us he did not personally know much about *Guillain Barre Syndrome.* He had only recently talked to another who did. He admitted, **“God must have given me the question or suggestion, or whatever I said.”**

*Guillain Barre Syndrome* (GBS) is an unusual autoimmune disease that affects the nerves outside the brain and spinal cord, causing weakness, numbness, pain, and sometimes paralysis. GBS is extremely rare, affecting only about one in one-hundred thousand people a year in the U.S.A. By far most doctors and nurses work their entire careers and never encounter the disease. What causes GBS is a complete mystery.

As with any disease, the sooner GBS can be diagnosed the better. Unlike other diseases, due to its rare occurrence, GBS is often completely overlooked. When that occurs in the diagnostic process the consequence of delay can be life changing paralysis, and even death.

Understandably, a neurologist was needed to confirm a GBS diagnosis. However, Medina General had no neurologist on staff. A difficult stumbling block it would seem if one forgets that God’s hand is already at work in this. The pieces for His plan were obviously in place. This was early November of 2022 when the Covid 19 Pandemic was gripping the U.S.A. and the world. Offsite “video exams” had become a familiar tool in the medical response to that crisis. Hence, arranging such an exam with a neurologist in Cleveland and his assistant in Sandy’s hospital room in Medina was not as difficult as it might have otherwise been. That offsite exam was soon done and it was confirmed that Sandy did indeed have *Guillain Barre Syndrome*.

Please note here my friends that without the hand of God and His Holy Spirit’s work in this it could have been a week or possibly much more. Much longer before the GBS diagnosis. No one can say the degree of physical damage that Sandy would have suffered in that amount of time. Brothers and sisters, praise God, all praise to our great God! He is so good to us in every way when we simply believe and trust that He will be there for us. As difficult, chaotic, and hurtful as life can sometimes be, seeking God our Father in Heaven, reaching out to God we find Him and His plans, whatever they may be for each of us, are always unfolding.

After the GBS diagnosis Sandy was moved at once to the ICU at Medina General. She needed to be put on that ventilator right away. The GBS was still ascending her legs, advancing up her arms. If it moved as far as the muscles of her diaphragm, it could interfere or inhibit her ability to breathe. The ventilator would prevent that from happening.

Now that they knew what the disease was the doctors knew how to treat it. Sandy would need a plasmapheresis or PLEX treatment to remove the harmful antibodies that were attacking the peripheral nerves. However, the PLEX procedure could only be done in the Cleveland Clinic ICU on “Main Campus” in Cleveland, Ohio. Due to the pandemic however, there were no empty beds in that ICU. Another difficult as well as detrimental stumbling block. But once again, we knew God was in control. The ventilator at Medina General would assist her breathing if needed but there was no way to stop or even slow the advance of the GBS while we waited.

We couldn’t talk while she was on the vent, and other machines were monitoring her vital signs. I ached for the sweet love of my life to be well again. And it seemed I should be more upset than I was. The feeling was hard to understand at first.

It was simply as Sandy had said though, “God was in control.” There was nothing to fear. God was with us; I’d seen His Holy Spirit give the doctor all he needed to know in the hospital room. I could see this journey had just begun but knew God was with us. In my private prayers I felt His presence and His assurance. Our lives would never be the same. My “Whatever it takes Lord.” prayer that second night was what I got. Sandy and I both knew she was in God’s hands. With God’s assurance, I could breathe again.

 Two days would pass waiting for a bed to become available at “Main Campus.” I was with Sandy all day and in the evening someone from our church came to give me a ride the short distance home to our house in Medina from the Hospital. I don’t drive because I have epilepsy.

To a certain extent I’d forgotten about my epilepsy and not driving while preoccupied with Sandy’s condition. That is, I hadn’t given much thought to how I’d be able to be there with her every day when they moved her to the Clinic in Cleveland. Once again, God was way ahead of me. I had no more than prayed about this that a friend let me know that my brothers and sisters in Christ at Black River Church would take care of it. Praying and caring for us the church had also come up with a plan. When we found out she could be moved to Cleveland they already had a list of volunteers who would drive me up in the morning and pick me up at night so I could be with her during the day as she recovered and be there to interact with her doctors as needed.

This is where I felt the loving arm of God around my shoulders and Sandy saw and felt it also. Sandy and I truly cannot imagine going through this without our church. Our faith family truly were the hands and feet of Christ in all of this. In addition to praying for us they had put this plan together. We were not to walk this challenging journey alone. God has promised He will never leave us or forsake us and the church is certainly one of the ways He fulfills that promise.

Still on the ventilator and monitors in the ICU on the Clinic’s Main Campus Sandy was where she needed to be. We were relieved when the PLEX treatment alone did its work and the doctors found one would be enough. GBS sometimes requires multiple treatments before it is reversed. The tingling and numbness began to descend and recede right away much the same as it had invaded her body. In its wake however, the muscles and nerves of Sandy’s face, arms, lower body, and legs had been severely compromised by the after-affects of the disease. There was a long period of physical rehabilitation ahead of her. We were told it could take two years of rigorous, constant physical therapy for her to make a complete recovery. A new challenge, a new struggle, God had never left us though. With God all things are possible.

Sandy was transferred to Edwin Shaw Therapy Hospital where her body responded well to the care and the physical therapy she received. Our friends from church continued to take me to be with her every day. They were so much more than drivers for me, that should be clear. The beginning and the close of those days as Sandy continued to recover were a spiritual challenge and God placed those friends in my life along the way. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are there for spiritual reasons I’m not sure we can fully understand. God needs to love us somehow when we need it. We were never meant to go it alone. Especially, at times like this. My church members were there for me. I will be there for them. As it is meant to be. We are incomplete without God and He can often be found in our relationship to one another.

At Edwin Shaw Sandy responded well to the daily therapy learning to stand up, strengthen her arms, hands, legs, feet, and facial muscles. Brushing her teeth was a challenge at first. But she was determined and worked hard. I was built up each day to see the progress she was making. Other patients, nurses, and therapy staff would mention that her focus and work ethic were inspiring. People also remarked to me about the closeness and support of our “faith community” they called it. Whenever I could I shared the Good News and witnessed to whoever would listen.

After a few weeks at Edwin Shaw we learned that even though she was still in a wheelchair Sandy had made all the progress she could there and would be moved to a nursing home to continue her therapy and recovery. That is how it is with *Guillain Barre Syndrome.* If and when full recovery is possible the medicine and therapy can only get a patient to the point where they are able to take over their own therapy by exercising and staying as active as they can be. Even that point will be different for each patient.

At the nursing home we continued to make new friends, touch and be touched by the lives and stories of the people we met. Our faith and Sandy’s condition continued to grow as she recovered. Sandy inspired some others who were there for therapy as we were. We shared our faith in Christ when we had the chance to. After several weeks of more hard work she was released to come home.

With a hospital bed in the living room and a wheelchair ramp in the garage out-patient therapists came to the house three days a week. Outpatient nurses twice a month. And we thanked God for all of it every minute of every day.

God is with all of us right now my friends. What happens in times such as I have described here is that we want even more of Him. Ask, and He draws us close.

All I knew is that she was home, she was safe, and in God’s time, she was going to be just fine. Hallelujah!

The home therapy would last for a while to help strengthen her legs and ankles until she could walk again. She had “homework” exercises that I helped her with on the days there was no therapy. She did those more than the therapists asked her to. Painful stretches and repetition rendered small gains. Each step in the process was a great victory in this plan that God had for both of us. We give Him the glory for all of it.

 The weeks became months as we simply trusted in Him, prayed, and did as the Spirit led us to do our part. Sandy did as the therapists and visiting nurses asked her to. Time went by and the wheelchair ramp was removed. Not long after that the hospital bed. God would slowly give us our life back. Good friends and neighbors would take us to checkups and therapy appointments at Medina General Hospital. Soon Sandy could drive again. The appointments became fewer and farther apart. Sandy stayed with her exercises, even increasing her walking and other activity at home. Then one day her therapist told her she “graduated!” There was no reason for her to schedule another appointment. Hallelujah!

 After sharing our journey with you I want to also say that coming close to God; knowing Him, even if you have been away for a while, is simply a matter now of stopping, being still, and trusting in Jesus again. Nothing to fear, because He will never leave you or give up on you. Seek Him, you’ll find Him, and He will never let you go.

**This is The Journey**