

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a landscape shrouded in fog. In the foreground, the dark, silhouetted branches of a tree are visible on the left side. The fog is thick and white, obscuring the ground and the lower parts of the trees in the distance. The overall mood is mysterious and serene.

Finding
Hope
Through the Fog

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All scripture references are from The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984.

To anyone who has felt lost beneath the fog:

You are seen.

You are chosen.

You are loved.

It's going to be okay.

Introduction

As my life has been in shambles I've learned some valuable lessons about what it means to run to God when times get tough, but how do I even convey them in words? There's so much God has done and continues to do, so where do I begin?

I'm also sensitive to the fact that each of us, even if we have similar situations, has a different story. We have individual pains and unique ways we handle trials. While we can relate, over-generalizing can lead to hurt and feelings of being misunderstood (*again!*). So, I want to share with you some of what God has taught me as I've crawled through the valleys, unsure of everything I thought I knew.

I pray that you would find pieces of encouragement that will be applicable to you no matter where you are on your journey.

Deep fog has plagued me for 5+ years in a way that I feared I would never escape. I thought that I would either live my life alone, wandering through it without ever being able to fully connect with people again, or I would end up ending my life. I don't share this to garner sympathy, but to admit that when fog covers your mind it's hard to think clearly. When physical and emotional pain is present, seeing light in the situation can seem impossible.

I also write from a place of still experiencing fog, although not as extreme as before. Sometimes I feel the foginess come on, brining forth the flood of emotions that accompany it, and I'm crippled. To be honest, it's actually been one of those hard weeks.

Life isn't full of sunshine now, but as I've surrendered to God, I have been able to catch glimpses of the sun peeking out from behind the clouds. The hope that comes from God is real. I am more convinced of this now than I was before.

He really does love you.

Chapter 1: When Hope Seems Impossible

There's something about mental fogginess, whether it be from depression, anxiety, another type of chronic illness, or just plain tiredness, that can leave one feeling distant from God. We may know the truth that God will never leave us (Joshua 1:5), but knowing doesn't always provide comfort. When we try to pray and feel nothing or when we can't even find words to speak, it can seem like God's not there.

Throughout my struggle with undiagnosed health issues, which I now know are related to Lyme Disease and other chronic infections, I had times when I couldn't pray. After a while, I stopped trying to pray because it felt like a waste. It felt like a lie.

I lived in a state of uncertainty because I desperately wanted to get my life back - every part of my life, including the personal relationship I had with Christ before the fog began. There were even good days and short seasons where I felt more like myself and thought maybe spiritual intimacy with God was back, only to have it pulled away again when the fog returned.

It's sometimes weird how God works. Even though I might not have felt His presence myself, I was still convinced that closeness was possible. I believed it could happen for other people and lived my life in a way where I wanted to share truth with others.

I even felt this strong sense that my calling was to write to encourage others on their journeys, but I felt like there was no way I'd ever have anything valuable to share. I mean, if I couldn't connect with God, how was I supposed to genuinely tell others about how great He is?

Of course, He had answers for my questioning heart, but He didn't provide clarification through an easy means. It took years of walking through the wilderness before I got to the point of complete desperation where I reached out to God and finally felt a true connection again.

The Day I Fell to My Knees and God Showed Up

After the first Sunday night Bible study I was well enough to attend in months, my boyfriend, Jonathan, and I ventured out to the parking lot. We stood there discussing plans for the upcoming week. Coordinating our schedules can be a challenge, so we try to touch base in order to both have an idea of what to expect.

To be honest, many of our schedule discussions used to frustrate me because they were another reminder of the little alone time we would have during the week. We didn't know then, but now understand, how important that one-on-one time is for me. Because of my anxiety, being with groups of people can be too much to handle.

We experienced almost two years of brewing irritation with each other before we understood that my medical issues were intensifying normal relationship struggles. I had no words to explain how I felt. The mood swings would come out of nowhere, leaving us both in shock. I'd say things in hurtful ways and then feel guilt and remorse for days as I replayed the conversations over and over in my mind. I didn't know what was happening to me. Jonathan didn't either.

On this particular day of discussing our schedules, I was surprisingly calm. He told me of the upcoming week's rehearsal schedule as his choir director position keeps his evenings pretty busy. I was okay with the fact that our regular Tuesday date might not happen, but that we'd have time together on Thursday instead.

As we stood outside talking, the evening's cool weather had me shivering, so we got into Jonathan's car to finish our conversation. I was still feeling okay about the upcoming week as we continued our discussion. Then, all of a sudden, my heart started to pound and I felt a rush over me. Breathing became difficult. I knew what was happening, but didn't want it to happen right there.

I was about to have a panic attack. I was on the verge of a breakdown and didn't know what to do.

Jonathan had heard me talk about my experiences with panic attacks and emotional breakdowns, but he hadn't seen this particular kind. He'd seen a whole lot of my crying when we'd get into arguments, but this was different because it wasn't spurred on by intensified emotions. I was actually calm when it began.

I quickly decided that the best thing would be to just leave. I needed to get away from the situation. I was starting to feel embarrassed and wanted to deal with the panic attack on my own. So, I grabbed the door handle and began to exit his car.

"I think I'm having a panic attack," I said.

"Are you going to be okay?" Jonathan asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

It was a lie. I knew I wasn't okay, but I didn't want to be emotional or needy. I had to get out of there.

I walked across the parking lot to my car, and then fumbled with my keys as I tried to open the door. I was already shaking. Once inside the car, I bowed my head to pray. I knew that I was on the verge of a breakdown and was uneasy about driving home.

After a short moment, I started my car and backed out of the parking space. As I drove, big, warm tears ran down my face. My breathing continued to worsen and my jaw hurt. The jaw pain tends to come on when my body and mind break down. It

wasn't a good sign.

My mind was racing almost as fast as my heart. I grew angry as I drove across town to my apartment. At each stop sign, the crying intensified. *Why hadn't Jonathan at least followed me home? Couldn't he tell that I wasn't doing well? He doesn't even care about me!*

I began to question our relationship yet again. I was annoyed by the fact that he didn't try to comfort me.

After climbing the stairs to my third floor apartment, I threw my belongings on the kitchen floor, and ran to the living room. I knelt down on the rug, crying out to God. I prayed, repented, and screamed, all while tears ran down my face over and over again. I'm pretty sure both my hair and shirt were already soaked by that point. I blew my nose and tossed the tissues on the coffee table, then grabbed my Bible and moved to the couch.

My soul knew what it needed in that moment. It needed God. It needed real, genuine "quiet time" - or maybe I should call it "loud time" because as I prayed that evening, it was anything but a picture-perfect prayer and devotion time. It wasn't the kind of image you'd see in your Instagram feed. It was the "look God, I'm a mess, and I really, really need you" kind of time. It was the "pour it all out, even if it's ugly" kind of time. While it may not have looked clean and beautiful and perfect, it was me, in all of my brokenness, coming to my loving Father, admitting that I couldn't do this alone.

In previous months, I could barely read a few paragraphs of text. The brain fog was heavy. Confusion had set in to the point where I couldn't remember anything I read. Symptoms of Dyslexia had overtaken me. So, when I opened my Bible to the Psalms that night, I was both overjoyed and in awe over the fact that I could read and understand.

I truly believe that God met me exactly where I was in my weakness. He provided just what I needed. While I had been having difficulty reading any passages of scripture, the Psalms came alive, providing sweet reminders of who God is to us.

You know how earlier I mentioned that I was annoyed that Jonathan didn't follow me home to make sure I was okay? When I later sent him a long text message to share what God had done in my heart, he replied back that he was actually praying that God would do that very thing. What I considered to be unloving and uncaring was actually the most loving thing he could have done for me. Jonathan felt peace about stepping aside from comforting me in the way he had done on many other occasions so that I could meet God in my desperation. I am thankful for that, and am humbled as I remember that God's ways are best and He had a plan for that evening.

Here are a few of the Psalms that helped me as I turned to God that night. I'll also be sharing what stood out to me in the verses.

***But as for me, it is good to be near
God.
I have made the sovereign Lord my
refuge.
I will tell of all your deeds.
-Psalm 73:28***

This is probably the verse I started clinging to the most. I like the part where the psalmist writes, **“But as for me, it is good to be near God.”** To this day, I continually remind myself of this. With the physical and emotional pain I experience as I fight health issues, I must remember that being near God is a good thing!

Next, the psalmist goes on to say that they have made the Lord their refuge. *What does it mean to make the Lord your refuge?* I think it means that when everything else seems to be falling apart, we can go to the Lord to hide. We can escape from the world’s burdens by going to Him. And then, because we know that God is good, we will tell of His deeds. We will tell others what He has done for us!

***Those who know your name will trust
in you,
for you, Lord, have never forsaken
those who seek you.
-Psalm 9:10***

For this verse, the fact that the Lord has never forsaken those who seek Him is beautiful. We can have confidence that God will be there when we cry out to Him. He cares and He won’t leave us.

***Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.
-Psalm 62:5***

It’s easy for me to put my hope in the things I think I can control, like my abilities and work ethic. I trick myself into believing that I can survive on my own strength. However, in this rough season of chronic illness, I have been reminded that there are no guarantees. When we put our hope in anything but God, the outcome will always fall short of our expectations. I want to live my life in such a way that I find rest for my soul in God and trust Him to be my true source of hope.

***But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
for he has been good to me.
-Psalm 13:5-6***

When I think about the ways the Lord has been good to me instead of focusing on the ways my life has been hard, a healing takes place in my heart. Meditating on these verses reminded me of the ways God does provide and has provided for me even during rough patches. We can trust in God's unfailing love. His salvation is a real thing. Let's remember this.

A Restored Hope

When God met me in my weakness on that Sunday night, my hope in Him was restored. Not only did I think and pray about the Psalms I read, but I wrote them on notecards. I actually went to bed that night with the notecards on my side table. I couldn't wait to wake up the next morning to read them and spend time with God. This may not seem like a big deal to those who are always consistent with morning quiet times, but as I had fallen away from the practice of spending that regular time with God, it was a major shift.

I went from months of morning dread to wanting to wake up soon to spend more time with God. It was strange, but it was real. I took those notecards with me everywhere I went so that as soon as I'd start to worry, I'd could pull them out of my purse and remember who was in control.

Find Your Hope:

1. Have you had times in your life when the fog was too much to bear? Were you able to connect with God or did He seem distant?

2. Where are you right now? Are you in a place of fog? If so, I encourage you to be real with God.

- ◆ Find a time and a place to be alone.
- ◆ Open up to God through prayer as much as you can. If you have trouble praying, tell Him that. Ask God to help you pray. Ask Him to give you the words to say.

- ◆ Confess any sins that you have been holding onto and ask for Jesus' forgiveness. Then, turn toward God to let him change you. Romans 8:1 says that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So, if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and have relationship with Him, when you admit your wrongdoing and trust Christ, you are forgiven. You don't have to beat yourself up over it, because Jesus has already paid the ultimate price! If you have any questions about this, you can always email me at emily@emilylofgren.com.
- ◆ Tell God of your struggles. Explain what hurts. Be real, even if you think it's ugly.
- ◆ Read God's Word. I encourage you to take out your Bible and read through the Psalms. I love the Psalms because we can connect with the emotions of the psalmists. From rejoicing, to mourning, to being glad, to being angry, real emotions are expressed. During deep struggles and foginess, we can be reminded of God's unfailing love by turning to His Word.

Chapter 2: Weakness is Actually a Good Thing

One of my favorite things to do is spend time with my niece, Gracie. She's a spunky two-year-old, full of giggles, words and occasionally, some attitude. I love the way she's like a little parrot, repeating anything and everything you say. After a rough day, I can count on Gracie time to cheer me up.

When I visit her, we do anything from reading books, to playing with dolls, to doing yoga poses, to just laughing and chasing each other. It's a riot.

When I'm with Gracie, the limited energy I have doesn't matter because I feel real joy being around her. Being an aunt is one of the greatest gifts God's given me, and I want to cherish the small moments.

Gracie adores singing. From good 'ol Barney tunes like "If All the Raindrops" to the ABCs, this girl sings them with soul. On a recent trip across town to visit Gracie, we were playing and singing like usual when she began to sing "Jesus Loves Me." Even though I grew up going to church and had the lyrics to that song engrained in me from an early age, whenever I hear Gracie sing it, I can't help but smile. Each time, I am reminded of the importance of helping her cultivate a relationship with Christ.

This particular evening when she started singing, though, I paid more attention to the lyrics as I joined in.

***Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me so
Little ones to him belong
They are weak but he is strong***

***Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so***

Gracie and I sang of Jesus loving us. We sang of the little ones belonging to him and of him being strong when they are weak. It was at that moment that I was reminded that I, too, am a "little one." I think because it's a children's song, I tend to just picture children coming to Jesus' open arms. I've always envisioned it to be like a story time, where Jesus sits down and children gather around him as he speaks to them. They might take turns going up to tell him something or sitting on his lap, but they all rely on him to guide them.

In my own life, I am a "little one." I may not be five years old, but I've come to accept the fact that that I'm weak and I can't do it all alone. I need more than self-discipline and great friends and family. I need Jesus. The times when I am weak, Jesus' strength shines through.

When I think about Jesus being strong during the times when we are weak, I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul was sharing about a vision he had where there was a thorn in his flesh and three times he pleaded for the Lord to take the thorn away.

You know what Jesus did? He didn't just go ahead and take the thorn away, even though he could have done so. It would have been easy and it was what Paul wanted. We don't know exactly what the thorn meant for Paul, but it was clearly something that hindered him. It was something that caused him great trouble and distress. Paul wanted it to go away.

Jesus replied to Paul's plea by saying, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** (2 Corinthians 12:9a)

Then Paul goes on to write in the letter,

"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. This is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."
-2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

Wow, Paul! Delighting in weaknesses? Being happy about the hard times? I don't know about you, but I struggle to see weakness as a good thing. But, you know what? On this journey, I've learned that the times when I don't have it all together are the times when God shows up and becomes even more precious to me. I can see God's greatness when I recognize my smallness.

No matter what "thorn in the flesh" you are dealing with, God will turn it around for your good. It may not seem like a good thing at the time, but God can and will use the hardships of our lives to show us a greater peace than we ever could have imagined.

It's not easy to admit that you can't figure things out on our own, especially if you're like me and grew up believing that hard work is the key to success. Hard work is a great thing, but self-reliance is not God's plan. We need something more, something outside of ourselves. Our souls thirst for that something more (John 4:13-14). What we are longing for is God. At our weakest, we can recognize our need for God's grace.

Find Your Hope:

1. The world tells us that being weak or needy is a bad thing. God's word tells us that when we are weak, we are strong because of the strength of Christ. Have you had times in your life when you felt too weak? Too clingy? Too needy? How did you respond? How did it make you feel?

2. If you have had times when you felt too weak, ask God to shift your perspective. Think about how things would have been different had you seen your weakness as an opportunity to experience God's power. What would it look like in those situations to run toward God for your strength?

3. The next time you are in a situation where you feel weak, remember that weakness is a good thing because it reminds us of how small we are and how big God is. Something else that I think is really cool is that Jesus understands our weaknesses. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin." Think about that. He was tempted in this life here on earth, too. So, He really knows what we're going through and can meet us there.

Chapter 3: The Distractions Must Go!

A few days after being officially diagnosed with Lyme Disease and other chronic infections, my heart was heavy. I felt a flood of relief to finally have explanations for the painful sensations that had overtaken my body. But, I also felt deeper emotional pain.

I knew that with the right treatment I could feel better, but the complexity of chronic conditions meant that there was no definitive solution that was guaranteed to work. I knew that getting better would be hard work, and with little energy, I didn't know if I could handle all of the life changes that were coming my way.

So, what's a girl to do when she's struggling?

What happens when everything she thought she knew begins to crumble before her eyes?

She starts to hold onto whatever she knows - whatever has been constant in her life.

At the point of the diagnoses, I had already gotten back to trusting God again and had been spending time reading the Bible. But, even then, I was having a hard time praying when the complexity of my health issues hit me. It stopped me dead in my tracks and shook me up more than I thought it would. When it became more than a quest for answers and became my real life, I was devastated.

Even though I know that God is where I should turn, when making small choices in day to day life, it's easy to fall back into old habits of turning toward what I think will make me feel better. Ultimately, I know that God's ways are best and that He promises to meet our needs, but even so, I sometimes turn away from Him and turn toward what I can see right here during the hard times.

Because my strict elimination diet left me unable to turn toward my usual comfort foods, I began to lean on my boyfriend, Jonathan, in a stronger way than before. He was my greatest source of support.

It's interesting how things went with Jonathan supporting me. I clearly wanted him there and needed to feel his support, but at the same time I began to despise my need for him. When I would become what I considered to be too needy or clingy, I would lash out at him.

I knew deep down that I was making him into an idol and putting him before God in my life, but I didn't want to admit it. I think that's why I so desperately didn't want to need him. I knew that Jonathan was becoming an unhealthy need, and because I do love the Lord, I want the Lord to be first in my life.

When discussions got tense between Jonathan and I, I wanted to run. I wanted to end

the relationship and flee because I couldn't figure out how to attain a healthy view of our relationship. Of course, God could do it, but was I trusting Him to do that? No.

Missing Out

Having to miss out on vacations and social gatherings is another unpleasant consequence of having chronic health issues. Less than a week after finally getting the diagnoses, Jonathan and I were scheduled to go on an annual vacation with his family. I went the year before and loved the experience. This time around, I was hoping to at least go for part of the week, depending on how it would work with my job.

When my health went downhill, though, I realized that I probably wouldn't be able to go at all. I wasn't thinking much about it because at the time I was trying to just get through each day without worrying about the next. I was literally living step by step, day by day because that was all my mind and body could handle.

Once it dawned on me that the trip was soon, I was hoping that Jonathan would say something about how he'd stay back to help take care of me. After all, I was at such a low point that I truly needed his support. The thought of him being gone for a whole week brought me to tears each time it crossed my mind.

When I talked about how it would be hard to have him gone, he didn't offer to stay back or only go for part of the week. I honestly didn't know what I would do without him.

I, of course, had to confront Jonathan about the fact that he was just going off and leaving me to fend for myself. I was angry. I was hurt. It felt like he didn't understand how hard it was going to be for me.

But, at the same time, I was unable to recognize how much my health issues had taken a toll on him, too. I kept reiterating that I was going through a lot, but he would correct me and say that "we were going through a lot." It was true. It wasn't just affecting me.

Not only did he have me to worry about, but he was in the midst of preparing for a huge trip to China for the choir program. He constantly felt like he was drowning in all of the work he had to accomplish, all while he was still trying his best to be there for me in my distress. Jonathan needed a break. He needed the only week of the summer he had scheduled for a break. He needed to breathe, relax, and seek God.

Knowing that he needed a break didn't help much at first. I was still angry and hurt. I felt alone. But, God was working there.

A Time of Fasting

After the big confrontation about Jonathan leaving me to fend for myself, I opened my Bible, crying as I read through the Psalms. I was frustrated. I felt like God had taken everything else I had away from me. *Why would he also take Jonathan away from me when I needed him?*

I started to realize that while I was in need, my need was for something far greater than Jonathan could ever provide. My need was for true comfort and healing. I did (and still do) need physical healing, but more crucial than that, I needed heart healing. I needed God to warm my heart in the innermost place. I needed God to do some soul work in me.

So, I started praying about the coming week. I didn't want Jonathan to leave, but since he needed the time away, I needed to rely on God to get me through it. Instead of just seeing the week as something I'd have to endure, I began to see it as an opportunity to connect with God in the way I needed. It felt like God was leading me to fast from my boyfriend for a week.

When Jonathan came over to say goodbye on the night before the trip, I shared how God was already working in my heart and shifting my perspective. I even suggested that we look at him being gone as a time of fasting from each other so we could both get our hearts aligned with God and seek His will for our lives. We would already be away from each other physically, but we ended up deciding to take it a step further and chose not to call or text each other during the week.

The week of fasting ended up being the best week I had in months. It may sound strange or even hurtful for me to say that I had a wonderful time when my boyfriend was away, however, it wasn't like that. Yes, he was gone and we missed each other, but the contentment I felt is something I will never feel if I choose to put my trust and hope in Jonathan instead of in God. I felt content again. I needed to have my heart realigned. I needed to let go of Jonathan as an idol in my life and allow myself to just enjoy him again as my friend and mate.

Making idols of the people we love is dangerous. Idols are anything that we put before God in our lives, even if it's unintentionally. We don't generally wake up and think, "today I'm going to love my my boyfriend more than I love God." It just starts to happen as we begin to rely more on other things or people to be our source of support.

There are many, many warnings against idolatry in the Bible. I like the way that Samuel reminds Israel not to go toward idols: **"Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless."** (1 Samuel 12:21)

Idols are useless. They do no good. They can't rescue us. Wow.

So often, we've placed the things we're idolizing onto pedestals. We think they'll satisfy us and that they are good. They might actually be good things, but in comparison to God's perfect goodness, they are nothing. Why have a cheap substitute that doesn't satisfy when we can place our hope in the One who can satisfy?

When I let go of Jonathan as an idol in my life, I began to crave God again. The craving was about as strong as my craving for Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, and for those of you who know me, that's saying a lot!

Craving God meant that I was excited to get away and have time alone with Him. On days at work, that meant I couldn't wait for my lunch break to go home and sit on my couch to read and pray. I listened to sermons and Christian conference messages online and soaked in the information. I wanted God to fill me and be the place for me to run. He showed up when I turned to Him.

God can do the same for each one of us. We just have to be willing. We have to put our lives before Him, lay down our idols, and be open to receiving Him as our source of life.

It's pretty cool what God does through those who are willing to let Him work.

Find Your Hope:

1. Admitting that Jonathan had become an idol in my life was one of the hardest things I had ever done. I felt horrible about it. I really do love the Lord and want Him to be everything, but somehow, in the midst of the fog, I began to lose my way. Even though I was praying and reading my Bible again, I still let Jonathan remain first in my life. Bible-believing, praying Christians can let things or people get in the way of their relationships with the Lord. It's easier to slide than we often care to imagine.

This is the place where I encourage you to check your heart. Where do you turn when times get tough? Where is the first place you run? Pray and ask God to show you who or what you are trusting.

2. Now comes another hard part. If there's anything in your life that even slightly resembles an idol, it's crucial to lay it before God. Idols can come in the form of anything: from significant others, to children, to food, to work, to entertainment, to sex, etc. None of us are immune to the impact of idols. We can be pulled in the wrong direction by things that are seemingly good, but, ultimately, are not the best thing for us to rely on.

I'm not saying that everyone should fast from the things that are competing for God's place in their life, but I think it's wise to ask God if He wants you to fast. Because each

of our personal relationships with God look different, the way God works in our lives will look different. It's not about what we specifically do, but about where our hearts are.

Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

When it comes down to it, Jesus is calling us. He's inviting us to ask, to seek, and to knock. Go to Him and He'll show you.

Chapter 4: Stay the Course

One of the most discouraging things about having a chronic illness is not being able to predict how you'll feel from day to day (or even hour to hour or minute to minute). The way you feel may change drastically from how you felt the day before or how you felt just a little bit ago.

Making plans is nearly impossible because even if you feel great when you make them, you may end up having to cancel at the last minute because you just can't do life that day. From the pain, to the anxiety, to the overwhelming emotions, it may not be possible to pull yourself out of your house and be social. If you end up forcing yourself into a social situation, you may also hate it the entire time because it just doesn't feel good to be there. That kind of life is not fun.

I feel like I'm constantly battling an internal tension between how I'm feeling in a particular moment and how I think I should be feeling. I grow angry with myself when I'd rather stay home and rest because I feel like I'm unsocial, but when I go out to be with people I end up too sick to handle work and important life responsibilities. I constantly have to weigh the pros and cons of each situation to figure out what my body and soul need.

Even if I think I'm making wise decisions and I'm doing everything I'm supposed to do with treatment, I still have days where symptoms get exponentially worse and die-off reactions happen. Sometimes, it's so severe that I, once again, want to throw in the towel and quit trying. Even though I have real hope in Christ, I still have days where I have a hard time seeing the hope in the distance.

Mood swings with intensified emotions happen a lot for me. I get down and discouraged. I used to harbor guilt about this. I used to think that because I am a Christian, I shouldn't struggle so much. I'd place all the blame on myself and keep trying harder to get better and be a better person. That doesn't work, though.

If you are suffering from a chronic illness or just general life struggles, a lot of times trying harder is not the answer. As cliché as it might sound, we really need to let go and let God work.

In the previous chapters, I shared about how I was able to find hope even as I was walking through fog, but the thing about having hope is that it's not a one time deal. Having hope in Christ is an active, daily choice to trust Him even when it hurts. But, how does one practically do that?

The following Find Your Hope section includes three main things I've found to help stay the course. I'm going to share them with you because they've really helped me as I've walked out this season. I genuinely pray

that you would be able to keep pressing into God even in the midst of difficulty.

Find Your Hope

1. Praise God for what he has done. When you have a good day or when you have an answered prayer, thank God for that. Try to look at the small moments and find something in them. What is good in the situation? It may seem impossible to find good, but there's often something we can find if we allow ourselves to let go of the bitterness we have about unpleasant circumstances. When we are trusting God, He is working and there are reminders of His goodness around us.

For example, it may not be ideal to drive 4.5 hours out of state for appointments with my specialist, but God provided a doctor who is treating all of the underlying conditions that are contributing to my illnesses. He placed the right doctor on my path so that I could start making progress. It would have been easier to have a doctor nearby, but I needed an integrative approach and this doctor does that. Without this approach, I would not be seeing as many improvements. That's a huge thing to praise!

Sometimes just being able to laugh is another thing to praise God for, especially if you've felt numb for any amount of time. Actually being able to feel joy is the best thing. So, when you can laugh and are happy about something, praise God!

***Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.
-1 Chronicles 29:13***

2. Remind yourself of God's promises. I find that just going back to the verses I hold onto helps me to remember that God is good. A verse I've clung to over and over for the past several years is this:

***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
-Romans 8:28***

Remember that even when it hurts, God is going to turn around the darkest times for our good. It may be a bad situation, but God will use it to make us stronger, grow our relationship with Him, or allow us to help others because of it. We don't know how or what God will do with our individual life circumstances, but when our hope remains planted in Him, He promises to work for our good.

3. Share with others. As God meets you in your weakest times, share what you're learning with the people closest to you. When you share with your friends and family, mutual encouragement happens. All involved can gain something from hearing about what God's doing in your life.

When I read my daily devotional and then the accompanying Bible passages, I often

take a photo of the page in the devotional book to text to Jonathan. Occasionally, I'll also send texts of scripture and share what I've found significant. Not only do I benefit from spending that time in the Word, but I'm able to pass it on to Jonathan for his benefit as well.

Sharing with others also helps you to be accountable for that time with God because those you share with might start asking you about what God's teaching you. It's a good little push to keep you in a place of pursuing the Lord.

Conclusion

Thank you for joining me on this journey by reading some of the story of my battle with chronic illness. I truly believe that even in the midst of our greatest struggles, we can have secure hope in a God who does not leave us. Walking through the fog is tough. If you are experiencing this type of fog, I am so sorry. It's not easy. Please remember, though, that you are not alone. Many of us have been and still are where you are, and God can and will meet you in it.



About Emily Lofgren

Emily Lofgren's heart beats for authenticity. She craves true connection where we can be real about our struggles and find hope together. Emily met Jesus in college and since then has had a passion for writing in a way that helps others encounter life.

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