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SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

What God Teaches Us When We're Forced to Slow Down

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What did you do for vacation this summer?

I'm guessing that instead of getaways, many of you experienced unexpected changes of all kinds: a sudden lack of ability to find toilet paper. A sudden shift to remote work. A sudden shift to online school. A curtailed social life. A strained family life. A reduced — or increased — workload. Maybe even outright loss: a job, a family member, a friend. ([I pray](#) that you have not suffered that kind of loss, but realistically, it's likely that some of you have.)

Each of us has endured significant life interruptions this year that have forced us to slow down.

I have too. Here's what happened when I took a leap of faith — one that sent me backward. I'm sharing my story with the hope that it will encourage you as you navigate yours.

Summer of Standstill



My interruption had nothing to do with a pandemic. Besides dealing with COVID-19-related impacts to work location, family/social life, and T.P. inventory, I also spent the summer recovering from ankle surgery. The procedure took place in early June ... three months *after* the original March surgery date we had planned. And I know what you're thinking: "But COVID-19."

Well, actually, no. It's: "But chicken." **I chickened out of surgery in February, weeks before elective surgeries were put on hold here in Colorado.**

The chickening out, I know, stemmed from several root excuses:

1. I don't want to spend the summer being so limited.
2. I don't have time for this.
3. I don't want my life to be interrupted any more than it already has been.



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the shunammite women encouraged me, to have faith and confess positive in the midst of any circumstance you are facing...

4. I'm afraid something will go wrong.

Reality Check

I finally cried "Uncle!" during quarantine. I called the clinic and scheduled the surgery for the earliest date I could get after Colorado began lifting state restrictions.

You may be wondering how this came about. Well, God got particularly creative when he designed my feet and ankles, tossing some structural anomalies into the architectural plans. I knew about them — or thought I did. We discovered another one during the diagnostic process. It was crowding a tendon, and the tendon had finally reached the point where it couldn't compensate anymore. When it first flared up in late 2018, I could hardly walk. I spent all of 2019 trying to fix it.



Here I am running in Colorado Springs before my big interruption.

Despite this struggle, the last thing I wanted was another surgery. Back in 2013, I got so sick after a surgery that it broke my endurance. Before that interruption, I was enjoying newfound running and athletic talents, competing in races from 5K to marathon, road to trail, mountain to triathlon. I was winning age-group awards — something I never thought I could do. It opened up a whole new world for me, and I loved it!

That 2013 procedure took my normal away. I started trying to rebuild my strength and reconnect with the running and triathlon communities. After five years of relentless work, I was finally seeing glimpses of my former self.

Then the ankle went on strike, and I felt my progress start to fade. I was very afraid of this surgery. But the only choice at that point was to move forward and accept the risk.

Curveball



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The procedure was supposed to be simple and straightforward. But during the surgery, the medical team discovered yet another structural anomaly in the ankle complex. I kid you not! It had successfully hidden from the X-rays, the ultrasounds and the MRIs. The team had never seen this variation before. And just like that, the straightforward procedure turned into an experimental and involved surgery.

When I learned what had happened, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry (I laughed). **Between you and me (and a certain enthusiastic Creator I know), I could have done with a little less creativity!**

He Raised Me to My Feet

My summer, by the numbers:

- Sixteen weeks of recovery and counting.
- Twelve physical therapy appointments and counting.
- Seven massage therapy appointments and counting.
- Three post-op appointments and counting.

The road back to mobility has featured muscle spasms. Nerve pain. Swelling. Atrophy. Instability. Weakness. Fatigue. It has included a soft cast, a scooter, an Ace bandage, crutches, a walking boot, a pile of ice packs, and an array of rehabilitation tools. It has required countless hours of physical therapy "homework." It has caused gritted teeth, frustration and tears.

It has called for creative solutions for everyday living — not to mention a sense of humor. (It's not a scooter, it's an all-terrain vehicle!)



With COVID-19 restrictions in the mix, it has also meant having little direct social contact during a time when I really could have used some. Forced recovery and isolation was a place where I never wanted to go again. My husband and I prayed fervently that this surgery would be free of complications.

God said no.

But here's the thing: When my ankle finally reached a certain stage of healing, **I started experiencing breakthroughs like these:**

- I went from pulling my seated self up and down stairs with my upper body, to carefully "going vertical" with the support of a crutch.
- I went from hanging on to the kitchen counter for dear life as I tried to take a step without crutches, to walking around the block, to walking for an hour.
- I went from struggling to get on my bike, to riding for several miles with confidence.

Pick Up Your Boot and Walk



As the world endures massive, universal disruption, you can see and hear and sense the groans for life to go back to the familiar. People's daily routines, from [Compassion sponsors](#) to the children they so lovingly support, have been dismantled. Adapted. Reinvented.

Sometimes we choose interruptions in life. Sometimes interruptions choose us. No matter the circumstance, there's a new normal in town that's uncomfortable. Unpredictable. Aggravating. Restrictive. Lonely. Exhausting.

How do we respond in faith? How do we reach those breakthroughs that feel like they're never going to come? How can we even think about running when today, we can't even walk?

The particulars look different for everyone, but **here are some principles that have helped me navigate my convoluted path:**

1. Accept that life is going to throw you some curveballs, even when you pray that it won't.
2. Recognize that the new normal isn't a sprint. It's a marathon.
3. Identify healthy, life-giving activities that you *can* do at each stage of interruption. Then make the most of them.

interruption, then make the most of them.

4. Do the work to rebuild a solid foundation.
5. On hard days, choose to trust your Surgeon (God). Focus on taking the next step — and hang on to him for dear life.
6. Keep a long-term goal in view. Work toward it relentlessly. Hold it loosely.
7. Celebrate victories, both large and small.
8. Ask for help when you need it. Offer help when you see a need.



I've also focused on several [Scripture verses](#) during this time:

1. "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." — Isaiah 43:19
2. "He touched me and raised me to my feet." — Daniel 8:18
3. "He picked up his mat and walked." — John 5:8
4. "Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus." — Matthew 14:29
5. "Run in such a way as to get the prize." — 1 Corinthians 9:24

Forward (Finally)



As I developed this article, my surgeon cleared me to start adding a little bit of running back into my routine. Music to my ears! But I have to remind myself that I'm not out of the woods yet. I still have to apply patience to this season of rebuilding. Whatever happens, all I can do is what I can do. And I'm determined to make the most of it.

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Holly Johnson

Holly Johnson is a donor relations communications specialist for Compassion USA.

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Adina Avram September 28, 2020

I am so thankful I ran into your article. It's a God-send, at the absolute perfect time (just like HE always does, always in perfect time!!) Earlier today, I started reminiscing of how our lives were impacted when the world declared covid to be a pandemic.

I remembered how at the beginning, my husband and I (both registered nurses working in acute ambulatory care) fervently prayed He would spare us from becoming infected with the virus, as we take care of our ill patients day in, day out. We daily claimed Psalm 91 over ourselves and our medical teams, and our loved ones. Those first few weeks were absolutely terrifying as we had no idea how this would evolve over time, and even more importantly, how we would fare through it! Well, fast forward to today, and it has been over six months that we have managed to avoid the illness.... until a week ago, when both my husband and I suddenly started showing concerning symptoms. Within 24 hrs, we were both tested and diagnosed with Covid. Our busy lives suddenly got interrupted -in a MAJOR way. Today, I wondered why God chose not to keep us from becoming ill. I echo the same thoughts you had through your own journey.... I asked God to spare me from this...and yet, in all His omniscience, He knows better than to listen to that specific request. I completely trust that HE has a greater purpose in all this- and I need to trust more, question less.

thank you so much for sharing your story. It has encouraged me, and reminded me that in our lives, it's not always about getting our prayers answered the way we want...Sometimes, it's about just holding on to Him, His peace, and trying to understand the purposes behind the way He works in and through our lives.

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Shayla September 29, 2020

Hi Adina! Thank you so much for sharing this incredible story with us! I believe it is often easy to doubt God when we have something go the way we specifically do not want it to. While you very easily could have given up hope when you got your diagnoses, instead you stayed faithful! We will pray that God recovers you and your husband quickly. ??

[Reply](#)



Shandela September 27, 2020

Thanks for sharing Holly, what an inspiration to not grow weary in the race and battle we face daily as followers of Christ.

Thanks for the reminder not to grow weary in the struggle. I have had an Achilles tendon issue since 2019, I had physical therapy several times since then. God in his time sent me a good physical therapist this past March-end of May, I still struggle with the pain, but I do my exercises at home. I did need that reminder, I will save your scriptures, what an inspiration reminding us the Lord is in control of our bodies and the very steps we take. God Bless you and keep you with continued healing always!

[Reply](#)



Girma Dejene September 25, 2020

God was faithful in all walks of your difficulties and am sure you are reminded about the courage stored in you for those challenges. Thanks for sharing.

[Reply](#)



Jagodish ray September 24, 2020

The Lord will provide everything for His glory

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Tom September 24, 2020

Thank you for sharing your story. It was such an encouragement for me to hear your story and thoughts. May God bless you and restore you to a better place like He did with His servant Job.

[Reply](#)



Nadja Vilela Leão September 24, 2020

Obrigado, este testemunho me incentiva a Continuar tentando até ver o milagre de Deus em minha vida.

[Reply](#)



Andrea J Sulak September 24, 2020

Holly – What an ordeal. I'm sure it seemed like it was never going to end. It's a good reminder though that in order to get well, sometimes we have to go backwards and we have to hang onto hope that better days are coming. God bless, Andrea

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Kim September 24, 2020

Well written and very thoughtful introspective Holly!

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