Scars of Grace

Finding God's Faithfulness Through Trauma and Recovery

The Graham Family & Lauren Waller

CaringBridge documentation of events following June 5, 2011

My Story

On behalf of Lauren and the entire Graham family, our hearts are overflowing with gratitude to God and to you for your love, prayers, support, compassion and care. We have been encouraged and strengthened by your emails, voicemails, phone calls, notes and text messages. The demands of this situation have saddled us with the inability to respond personally as quickly as we otherwise might. Please accept our sincere regrets. We love you all and thank you for helping bear our burden on this journey.

If you wish to send cards or letters to the Grahams, the best current address is:

Lauren Graham - 2309
St. Mary's Medical Center
901 45th Street
West Palm Beach, FL 33407-2495

This address should be good for at least the next 4 weeks.

We are trusting that God will not only teach us His statutes through our afflictions and obedience through our sufferings, but that God's handiwork in Lauren's life will cause each of you to see that "the Sun of life divine/ Through passing clouds shall but more brightly shine." May we all bring Him much glory as part of Lauren's story.

SDG

Ah, my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.
I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my soure-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.

George Herbert, "Bitter-sweet"

Journal

June 6, 2011

by Brian Bare

Please find this site as a primary means to receive updates on Lauren's progress and the Graham family's heart and mind. Although at this time the family is unable to update these pages themselves Sherwood has expressed his desire to communicate to you directly on these updates as soon as time permits.

Thank you all again for your immense love for the Grahams in this difficult time, may we all be faithful to trust our Lord and Savior and find peace in Him! "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have aneverlasting Rock." (Isaiah 26:3-4)

June 6th Update

by Brian Bare, June 6, 2011

Sherwood, Elizabeth, and Brad all appreciate your prayers and the many expressions of your love for the family. Lauren remains in a very critical condition in the ICU. We rejoice that her vital signs are stable. Please pray for Lauren's healing, along with the wisdom of the neurologist and attending medical professionals. Sherwood has expressed the desire to remain balanced in their dealing with the physical and spiritual realities involved.

Please pray for the faith, trust, and peace that surpasses understanding for the family members at this time.

Day 2: A "Good" Day

Lauren Graham Waller, June 6, 2011

We were warned about the roller coaster. Signs of hope will quickly be followed by reasons to despair. There will be lots of ups and downs. Just try to remember: If she makes it, this is going to be a long process. Don't let the high's get you too high or the lows get you too low." The first full day after the accident proved the warning to be true.

We spoke to the RN at midnight Sunday night and Lauren's vital signs were all steady. Blood pressure. Respiratory. Heart rate. Temperature.

ICP (intracranial pressure). We went to sleep (if you can call it that) as hopeful as we'd been since we understood the seriousness of her condition.

Lauren went in for a CT scan between 5 and 6 AM. The RN told us the initial results were not as good as they hoped. "Good" in this case meant "unchanged." She also told us that "good" is not typical in these types of cases. It appeared that although all her vital signs had remained fairly steady, except for a drop in hemoglobin levels, the hemorrhaging in her brain had continued. Again, that's "normal" but it's not "good." She was reluctant to tell us more until the results had been reviewed by the neurosurgeon. However, she did say she was given orders to increase the medication to keep her in a deep coma and under heavy sedation.

We spoke to Dr. Patel around 11:30. He said after going over the scans his assessment was actually a little more optimistic than the initial report. Again, he told us, it is not "good" necessarily. But it's better than "not good." (Early on we're learning "good" is both an elastic and a relative term; we have to find out what is being compared to what to know how good "good" is.) What was good, though, is that he felt confident enough in the stability of her condition to give a directive to ease the sedation and see how she responded to external stimuli. When the tests were administered the RN indicated there was some neurological response: movement in one arm, posturing in the other, and some tremoring in her legs. Still not "good," but good nonetheless.

1:10 PM came and went - 24 hours since the accident, and Lauren cleared her first significant hurdle. She is still with us. However, after the nurses eased the medication Lauren began to experience sustained tachycardia (high pulse rate). Last night her pulse was steady at 45-50. This afternoon it was 125 and wouldn't come down, even with medication and increased fluids. Continued attempts all afternoon were unsuccessful. In addition, the hemoglobin number continued to drop, indicating there may be ongoing blood loss.

This evening the doc told us he was sufficiently concerned that they were going to check for internal perforations or bleeding in her abdomen that may have gone undetected in earlier scans. If detected, they'd have to perform immediate surgery. Any more trauma to her system was not good for her brain.

The test results were delayed because the trauma docs on her case were called away for an emergency situation. They did arrange for the RN to get the results however. At 9:30 PM she told us everything was clear - no surgery needed. They got orders to transfuse 2 units of blood, which was completed at midnight tonight.

The blood panels have not come back yet. We believe the transfusion will help get the low hemoglobin numbers back up but don't know for certain yet. However, her heart rate is now back under control. All other vital signs are steady. ICP is still acceptable. And Lauren is still holding on.

The RN knew we were exhausted and said we should try to get some sleep. She told us what we already know: it had been an up-and-down day. We asked how she'd assess Lauren's situation. She said Lauren was quite stable for everything she'd been through and for all that happened today. "And," she said, "that's good."

June 7th, 2011 Following is an update on Lauren's status today

Brian Bare, June 7, 2011

Due to the car accident, Lauren suffered what is called a traumatic brain injury. She continues to be kept in a coma thru the use of medications to help her brain rest during this critical time of healing. We can expect that she will have good days and bad days before any improvements will take place. She also is being scheduled for surgery for her pelvis fractures later this week.

That is the nature of being in the intensive care unit (ICU). It may take 5 days or possibly even longer to start weaning her from the medications that are keeping her sedated. She will continue to be monitored very closely in the days to come. There is no way of knowing any outcome at this time but we know the Lord has her in his hands and we must take every thought captive to the glory of Christ. We will try and keep this site updated so the family can rest and take care of Lauren and get much needed rest themselves. It would be best to communicate with the family thru this site for now. If you wish to visit the family, the ICU visiting hours are from 1pm-5pm then 8 pm-9pm daily. The Graham's faithfulness has been such a testimony of God's abundant grace during this most difficult time. Their steadfast dependance on Christ and His Word brings Glory and Honor to His name and much blessings to all those that come along side them as they care for Lauren.

The family has been so blessed by the words, letters, food, gifts, visits, and expressions of love from all of you. There are a couple of practical ways you can help the Grahams. First, for those of the GIBC body, any who desire to serve the Grahams by providing a meal can contact Peggy Ramos, who is heading up the schedule for the meal ministry for the month of June. This scheduled provision of meals may start in a week or two. Peggy will assemble the names of those who want to contribute. In the immediate period, the Grahams' lives are very spontaneous and day-to-day. God has provided them a room at the hospitality house next to the hospital. So for now, visitors might offer them a meal in person. Second, please don't send Lauren any flowers, the ICU staff will simply reject them as they are a source of infection. Gift cards for gas may be another way to help. Thanks for serving the family in such a way as their needs are met, and that they aren't burdened by extraneous demands for communication or response.

Jon/Brenda

June 8 Update

Lauren Graham Waller, June 8, 2011

Lauren, although still in critical condition, is stable. There have been several ups and downs since last night with some scary moments regarding elevated ICP (intracranial pressure). However, they drained some fluid from around the anchor in her skull and the ICP levels have come back down noticeably. (This is good.)

Lauren made some small gains in her neurological response levels in Days 1 and 2, but declined in both Days 3 and 4. However, the neurosurgeon believes that Lauren, being extremely sensitive to the medications, may have been more heavily sedated than they realized. He has now decreased the medication.

The orthopaedic and neurological surgeons recommended Lauren undergo surgery tomorrow to fixate the pelvis fractures. However, they were overruled by the chief of staff (also the chief of trauma surgery) and the surgery has been postponed for early next week. He wants to allow a little more time for other critical secondary matters to be attended to (e.g. low-grade fever and elevated white cell count, both of which indicate there might be an infection).

Otherwise, things will be left fairly quiet for our girl over the next 2 to 3 days to allow the swelling around her brain to begin to subside.

(Remember: Days 3-5 are the worst for swelling and we don't know how bad "bad" is until we've made it through the next couple of days.) The doctors will not have a clear idea as to the extent of the damage or Lauren's expected range of potential outcomes until the swelling subsides to allow them to accurately assess her neurological responses. The swelling masks this at present.

Thanks to the quick work of some caring friends, we have been permitted to temporarily move into a residential facility on the hospital campus in order to be nearby and accessible to Lauren.

A thousand similar kindnesses have been shown to us and they are literally overwhelming. The whole family feels your love, prayers and support - and we want you to know that this is absolutely the best way that you can help us in the immediate future. Lauren - and we - will need your love and support in more tangible ways in the weeks and months ahead.

All in all, we are trying to being realistic while cautiously holding to hope and trusting the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will. As you pray for Lauren's healing, pray also for us that through this process of testing the genuineness of our faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Our love to you all,
SDG

Update June 9

Brian Bare, June 9, 2011

We rejoice in the news the Neurosurgon brought to the Graham family today. I was privileged to be there today when the doctor made his rounds. He was feeling much encouraged today as compared to yesterday. They have decreased the amount of sedation Lauren was receiving and she is more responsive today. He said she turned her head and blinked today. In addition the intracranial pressures are holding steady with no further spikes or need to drain any fluid from the brain. they are measuring this pressure thru a tube called a ventriculostomy, this bolt is inserted through her skull into her ventricular space in her brain to monitor for brain swelling. When pressures get too high, this bolt is used as a relief valve to let off some cerebral spinal fluid and bring the pressure down. As I said though, no

fluid had to be drained today. this is an indication the swelling is stabilized.the doctor has indicated he will leave this valve in place until the repair of the hip fracture can take place. The surgery for that had been postponed until things stabilize a bit.

The Grahams were able to get a good night rest last night at the Quantam House which is located right on the hospital grounds. Not only is it a place to rest but they also provide an evening meal there. Being on site will save them a 45 minute commute each way to Hope Sound.

Please continue to pray that the family will not lose sight of the spiritual realities and the glory of Christ while they lovingly and wisely attend to the medical needs of Lauren.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."
Psalm 31:24

In Christ's loving name
Brenda

Day 6: Peace

Lauren Graham Waller, June 10, 2011

Isaiah 26:3
"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

One of the very real components of this journey, especially in the early days, is that of the over-active imagination. Sometimes just a phrase – or even a word – spoken to us by a doctor or nurse sets our thoughts racing and our hearts pounding. Images of worst-case scenarios storm our minds and flood our hearts and soon we feel the tightening clutches of fear.

Our Lord has been so faithful to minister to our spirits in those times. One day it's a dear brother in Christ firmly reminding us to cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Another day it's a sweet sister in the Lord who sends us pictures of a prayer meeting in which a couple dozen young ladies devoted two hours of their evening to allow the Scripture to search their hearts and comfort

their souls, then persevere in prayer together on behalf of our family.

Even in the solitude, the Spirit of God has often redirected our focus toward our faithful God who, even for a thousand generations, keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments. It is when we capture our thoughts and fix them on our trustworthy God, we find a firm footing for our faith.

Today was a day that set our minds racing. Our encouragement yesterday was matched by our discouragement today. While the swelling in Lauren's brain due to the trauma itself seems to have stabilized, we are now fighting issues that put her gains in jeopardy. The RN told us this morning they are treating her for pneumonia and infection in her lungs. Her oxygen level is not good. They've had to increase the breathing assistance from the life support respirator to keep her lungs working.

Complicating matters further is an increasing white blood cell count (WBC). They've eliminated a lot of causes and seem to believe it is an unidentified infection. They spent a good deal of time questioning us about her trip to India, trying to determine if she possibly contracted something there. Her persistent fever has caused her intracranial pressure (ICP) readings to spike numerous times and there have been several periods where the drain on her brain was left open to keep it in check. When we left the ICU tonight, they had closed the drain to see how her body would naturally compensate for the high ICP.

I have to say again how full our hearts are for how generous you all have been with your kind thoughts, your faithful prayers, and your support. The ICU staff – and even the families of the other patients – have been astonished at the outpouring of affection and genuine concern for Lauren and for our family. (They have also been moved by the graciousness so many of you have shown to the families of other patients who don't enjoy the same support we do.)

Specific prayer requests:

For Lauren:

- That they find the source of Lauren's unidentified infection
- That she makes it quickly and safely through the issues with her lungs

- That her fever will break and the swelling will recede

For Brad, Elizabeth and me:

- Wisdom in being able to satisfactorily reconcile the demands of supporting our families (e.g. the necessity of getting back to work) with our desire (and need) to be near Lauren.

- That we will keep our thoughts appropriately focused so that the many decisions we are forced to make along the way will be prudent.

- That our minds will stay fixed on our Lord and our God, whose ways are higher than our ways, and whose will alone is perfect.

With eager heart and will on fire,
I strove to win my great desire.
"Peace shall be mine," I said; but life
Grew bitter in the barren strife.
My soul was weary, and my pride
Was wounded deep; to Heaven I cried,
"God grant me peace or I must die;"
The dumb stars glittered no reply.
Broken at last, I bowed my head,
Forgetting all myself, I said,
"Whatever comes, His will be done;"
*And in that moment peace was won.**

SDG

*Cyrus S. Nusbaum, 1899

Cards and Letters

Lauren Graham Waller, June 11, 2011

To send cards or letters to the Grahams:

Lauren Graham - ICU/C 2405
St. Mary's Medical Center 901 45th Street
West Palm Beach, FL 33407-2495

This address should be good for at least the next 6 weeks.

Please be mindful that no plants or flowers can be accepted by Lauren due to the risk of infection.

SDG

Day 7: Holding Pattern

Lauren Graham Waller, June 11, 2011

We are now approaching the last half of Day 7 and are in what the nurse called a "holding pattern." No matter the type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) - and, as we've been told a hundred times, "every brain injury is unique" - the stages of recovery are all the same. The road to recovery has many detours and dead ends.

We have gotten to know the families of the five other patients in the rooms around Lauren. Their stories are as heartbreaking - and in some cases, as heartwarming - as ours. All of them have a son or daughter or mother who has suffered a closed head TBI.

There are several types of these:

- Three have what are called an acquired brain injury (ABI), which was not triggered by an external force. These include strokes, aneurysms, and tumors.

- One has what is called a coup contrecoup injury (or cerebral contusion). When his head slammed into a wall at a high rate of speed, the impact not only caused his brain to absorb the impact, the force was strong enough to propel the brain to the opposite side of the skull. His brain is bruised severely in two places.

- Lauren and one other person have what is called either an acceleration/deceleration injury, diffuse axonal injury (DAI), or a shearing injury. This typically occurs in an accident like Lauren's where a rapidly traveling car strikes the car in which she was sitting. Her body was held in place by her seat belt, but the impact launched her brain into a rapid and repetitive acceleration and deceleration inside her skull. [If you look at the attached picture, the Florida Highway Patrol's investigation believes the "B" pillar impacted the right side of Lauren's head, driving it to the left, and then it bounced back instantaneously and hit the pillar again.]

In all six of these cases, the medical team was able to keep the patient alive. All of them are somewhere on the road to recovery. All of them can quote numerous lines from the "Litany of Uncertainty":

- Every brain injury is unique
- We'll just have to wait and see
- Take it one day at a time
- There's no substitute for waiting
- It will be months before we know anything for sure This will be a very slow process
- Prepare for the worst and hope for the best

We are in the holding pattern of the critical pre-healing phase where we're just hoping her condition remains stable. Along with that, we want the injured brain tissue to stop swelling - and stop bleeding - and the swelling to subside. Only once she makes it through this phase can the slow process of healing begin, which will be followed by the even longer process of rehabilitation and deficit compensation.

When we left the ICU last night Lauren's temperature was high and her breathing was fine. Tonight it was something of a reversal: her temperature normalized for about six hours today (it was elevated again when we left), but her breathing worsened. The machine did all of her breathing for her today due to the infection in her lungs and her low oxygen levels.

Please continue to pray that the swelling in her head will subside, the temperature will stabilize, and her lungs will improve. And as we interact with the families of Lauren's "neighbors," pray that God's providential intersecting of our lives will ultimately bring honor to Him.

SDG

Day 8: Praise the Lord

Lauren Graham Waller, June 13, 2011

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6)

In the early AM the nurse told us Lauren's white blood count (WBC) for the first time is approaching normal, her fever is minimal, and her blood gasses are excellent. They were able to reduce the oxygen they are giving her. They also cut back on the antibiotics with which they were treating the lung infections. The skillful practice of this team of professionals is a beauty to behold - and the results almost seem a given.

What's more, when they reduced Lauren's sedation and performed noxious stimulation (which is irritating or painful to the patient) she not only withdrew her hands, but clenched her left fist and clutched the bed sheet. Small gains, but huge gains! Praise the Lord!

The nurse said Lauren was stable enough that the trio of surgeons (orthopedic, neurological and trauma) were going to confer later in the morning and sequence the procedures going forward, including the surgery on her pelvis. Around noon the orthopedic surgeon called to tell us the doctors agreed to proceed. He then reviewed the procedure with us and detailed the pros and cons of the approach they're taking. It is not without risk - infection, blood clots, ill effects from the anesthesia, trauma-induced brain swelling - but it has to be done soon and we're now on the outside of the 10-day window (before the pelvis begins setting and treatment requires further damage).

Elizabeth was greeted with more positive news from the neurosurgeon this afternoon, who informed her he had reviewed the CT scan from earlier in the morning, as well as her intracranial pressure (ICP) history. He believed swelling in Lauren's brain had stabilized to the point where he felt he could safely remove the subarachnoid bolt. He indicated her pressure was now only elevated during times of moving her

about, changing her position in bed, coughing or intentional agitation. Again, praise the Lord!

Having said that, we are still a little nervous because we were told earlier in the day that her pressure would be monitored during the pelvic surgery (because that will increase the stress on her body.) However, the neurosurgeon is confident she will be okay. What's a bit more unsettling is that the other neurosurgeon working on Lauren is a died-in-the-wool Ohio State fan. And, as good Christian men and woman have wondered for decades: Can anything good come out of Ohio? (Megan and Alison excepted, of course.)

Lauren will undergo one more CT Scan between 5-6:00 AM. That will be the final test to pass before they officially decide to perform the surgery. If all is well, Lauren will receive an inferior vena cava (IVC) filter in the large vein that carries blood to the heart. Due to the combination of the surgery, her immobile condition and the inability to use anticoagulants and blood thinners (because of the brain hemorrhaging), she is at a high risk for blood clotting. The IVC filter helps prevent deep vein thrombosis or a pulmonary embolism. (I'm feeling queasy just typing this.)

As Lauren was lying on the cooling blanket Saturday, Elizabeth felt Lauren's hands and toes and noticed they were cold. She pleaded with the nurse: "Lauren hates to be cold! Can we please put some socks on her?" The nurse was touched by this request from a mother and was chagrined when she had to tell her no. "She has a fever and we're not allowed to." When Lauren's fever broke for the first time, we came in the next day and saw Lauren wearing yellow socks. Elizabeth wept. And, in order to keep the Buckeye Bogeyman away, Brad and I duly decorated the socks in the most appropriate fashion we could think of.

The hands of a surgeon may perform their job with confidence and skill - and we're certain they will tomorrow - and yet a patient will not survive. That's because life and breath and health are in the hands of Another (Acts 17:26). It is to Him we appeal for the repairing of Lauren's body and the restoration of her health so that Lauren's voice may soon join with ours to "praise Him for his mighty deeds; [and] praise Him for His excellent greatness" (Psalm 150:2).

Praise the Lord!

Day 10: Pelvis Surgery

Lauren Graham Waller, June 14, 2011

The day began with mixed anticipation and trepidation. Lauren's CT Scan this morning showed that all the hemorrhaging in her brain has stopped and that was the signal the surgeons needed to proceed with the scheduled surgery on her pelvis. It wasn't until the orthopedic surgeon who'd be operating on her sat down with us to inform us of his plan and procedures – with all the attendant risks – that we fully understood just how significant Lauren's injuries are. He told us she has three primary pelvic injuries.

The first injury is a fractured acetabulum. Our hips work as a ball and socket and in a healthy hip the ball rotates freely and easily inside the socket. We've all heard the phrase "broken hip." A broken hip usually refers to a fractured "ball," or a fractured femoral head at the upper tip of the femur. In Lauren's case, it is the "socket" that was fractured as the ball was driven into it at impact. Treatment of the ball is relatively simple. Treatment of the socket is exponentially more difficult because access is impossible without invasive surgery (the last resort for Lauren due to her condition), because of the proximity of the socket to all the major blood vessels in the legs, the sciatic nerve (which provides movement to the lower extremities), the intestines, and the bladder. There is also significant risk of neurovascular (nerves, arteries and veins) or organ damage.

The second injury Lauren has is a right sacral fracture. The sacrum is the wedge-shaped bone between the hips (and the "wings" of the pelvis) at the base of the spine. It is responsible for transmitting our body weight onto the pelvis. Some 2/3 of the time when the sacrum is fractured, the pubic ramus fractures too. This happened in Lauren's case [see photo], and was the third serious injury. Her fracture was so severe that her pelvis was displaced significantly and actually turned in on itself.

The surgeon told us that NOT performing surgery was not an option. She would have to be cut and her bones realigned. Once they bones were realigned, however, he had two options: (1) internal fixation or (2) external fixation. Best case scenario was external fixation (Ex-Fix) to thread pins and/or screws into each side of the fracture(s), connecting them to a series of rods outside the skin (which form a frame), and externally manipulate the bones back into place.

This was Plan A. He told us prior to the surgery that he was hoping for 50% correction. If he couldn't achieve that, there were Plans B and C – depending on what kind of judgment calls had to be made on the spot, along with input from the accompanying team of trauma surgeons and anesthesiologists. These plans included components such as internal fixation (cutting her open above her pelvis), inserting plates and screws, etc.

A word about Informed Consent Forms. We're required to sign them. The surgeons are required to inform us of the procedures and the risks. Fair enough. But it's enough to turn your gills green. If you've never read these forms, they basically say the docs are going to put

your daughter on a table, slice her open, play around inside for a few hours, stitch her back up, charge you $30,000 – and oh! She could die. Or be paralyzed. Or not be any better. And if you have any "advanced directives," which are statements regarding resuscitation or withdrawing life support if the operation results in a terminal or incurable condition, please provide them now. Thank you very much. As Thomas Gray once wrote, "Where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise." My advice: close your eyes, hold your breath and sign them. Do not read them. (The opinions expressed by the writer do not necessarily reflect the views of anyone else in the family.)

Lauren was in the operating room about 2½ hours and we never heard a peep. We were quite on edge wondering how they were faring and I did my share of fretting and pacing. The surgeon met us in the waiting room sometime between 2:30 and 3:00, just about the time a group of five friends arrived from our church – including Dr. George Zemek, the Academic Dean of The Expositors Seminary, and the gentleman who preached on the Sunday of the accident – a beautiful and timely treatment of the subject of God's sovereignty as seen in the life of Esther.

This was the second time in two days a surgeon seemed genuinely pleased with his handiwork on Lauren's behalf. He told us that not only were they able to stick with Plan A, they greatly exceeded the 50% threshold target and were almost able to reposition all the bones to their original position. It's not perfect, but it's pretty close – and much better than even the surgeon anticipated.

After he left, a few in the group shared words of encouragement and exhortation. Dr. Z then read the Daleth stanza of Psalm 119 and led our little group in a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving to God.

I read the words of that stanza to Lauren, Elizabeth and Brad tonight. A little later, as visiting hours came to a close I found myself alone for a few moments with Lauren. For some reason, the words of that Psalm were still on my mind, both convicting and comforting me. I became aware of the intermittent beeping of the medical equipment which seemed to underscore the vacillation of my small heart and little faith. But the steady rhythmic pulse of the ventilator keeping Lauren's little lungs filled with air reminded me that when we are faithless, He is faithful; when we are weak, He is strong.

My heart is filled with thankfulness
To Him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
And causes fears to fly;
Whose every promise is enough
For every step I take,
Sustaining me with arms of love
And crowning me with grace.

SDG

Dr. Petruska | TV Interview

Lauren Graham Waller, June 15, 2011

Dr. David Petruska, one of Lauren's neurosurgeons, in an interview with a local TV station on the recent diagnosis of baseball Hall of Famer and Palm Beach Gardens resident, Gary Carter, who has brain cancer. (This is the doctor who first diagnosed Lauren and whom we have interacted with most; it is not the "Buckeye Doctor.")

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBWUJOeZqPo&feature=player_embedded

Day 12: Baby Steps

Lauren Graham Waller, June 16, 2011

When I saw Lauren walk across the stage in her white graduation gown to accept her high school diploma, my mind flashed back some 17 years. I remembered a cuddly little girl who wobbled when she walked, who rose as many times as she fell, and who – unsteady at first – took one step after another until she strode confidently into her future. It started with baby steps.

Lauren took another one today. She woke up. For the first time in 11 days she opened her eyes wide this morning and looked around the room. The nurse said Lauren still does not register any kind of recognition or follow any commands, but it's a good sign.

It occurred after they took her completely off both the sedative they were using to keep her in a drug-induced coma and the morphine they were giving her for pain. The effects of both wore off enough that, along with a positive improvement in her condition, Lauren opened her eyes for the first time since prior to the accident. She drifted back

off soon thereafter and rested most of the day, as far as we can tell, comfortably.

There are many caveats and qualifications, of course. For one, when I say she "woke up" neither I nor anyone else knows at this point whether she has technically been "asleep." We've been told that there are many coma victims who advance to a semi-vegetative state where their brain functions but their body is unable to respond to external stimuli. Using functional MRI technology, doctors can measure brain activity in real time. So it's possible Lauren has some awareness of her surroundings and potentially could communicate if only her body would let her. We don't know yet. Most likely Lauren is still semi-comatose; not totally in a coma, but not quite conscious yet either.

An MRI was actually on the agenda for today. However, the fixator around Lauren's hip is conductive and thus it not only interferes with the MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) technology, it is hazardous for her. They are working now on procuring another hip halo made of alternative component material. A personal parenthetical prerogative if I may: Just say no to tattoos. They asked us if Lauren had any. We assured them she didn't and asked why it mattered. Apparently the coloring dye used in most tattoo ink contains an iron oxide pigment. We were told it not only distorts the imaging and gives bad readings, it can also cause extreme pain as the magnetic materials in the tattoo convert the radio impulses of the MRI machine into electricity. So, if you feel the need to make a personal statement, I – and at least one medical professional – suggest you buy a bumper sticker instead.

I learned something else today: My perception about those who emerge from a coma has been quite misinformed. I sort of assumed that you were either conscious or unconscious and then you came out of a coma quickly – something like Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep and woke up suddenly some 20 years later and found out he'd completely missed the American Revolution. That is obviously not the case.

One emerges from a coma very gradually. That is very much Lauren's case as well. The initial indicator that there was a lightening of Lauren's coma occurred on Day 5 when they first reduced her sedation and pain medication. She fluttered her eyes and coughed when they performed oral care. In fact, that was really the first sign of life other than the electronic reminders on the numerous monitors around the room. Since then it's been little by very little. Progress has been measured by inches and not by miles.

That's the way it is with baby steps.

Our visit with Lauren this evening was delayed about half an hour while she was being bathed. When we were finally allowed in to see her she was asleep.

However, the nurse told us Lauren had her eyes open again for almost the entire time until she was simply too worn out to keep them open any longer. She informed us Lauren still does not appear to visually comprehend her surroundings or follow commands, but it's a good sign nonetheless. Again, it is not conclusive. Some coma patients who open their eyes never do actually regain consciousness. Most do though.

Baby steps are small and uncertain. But when one follows another, then another, it's progress. Lauren made progress today.

SDG

Day 13: The Waiting Place

Lauren Graham Waller, June 17, 2011

A book by Dr. Seuss called "Oh, The Places You'll Go!" spent 178 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. It has been given to graduates, newlyweds and business people alike to send them off into the future. In the process it became a literary cliché for success. "The world is yours! Follow your dreams! You can do anything you set your mind to!" What most people miss, though, is that Suess' book was written as an allegory of the ups and downs of life. Most readers focus on the heights. Seuss, though, warns us that we all will spend a good bit of time in the slumps – in what he calls the Waiting Place.

The hospital waiting room is a land where time stands still and life is put on hold. Many days it feels like hours have passed and yet the clock on the wall shows it's only been 10 minutes. Day 13 was spent in a waiting room. More than one, actually.

Early this morning it was confirmed that Lauren would be having several surgical procedures done today. We made our way early to the waiting room in the Trauma Center to see Lauren before she headed to the operating room. The nurse was kind to permit us in the ICU/C to visit Lauren outside of authorized visiting hours.

When we entered her room we were curious how we'd be greeted as we were still as excited as a two-year-old at Lego Land since her eyes had opened yesterday. Just our luck: she was asleep. As we spoke gently to her and bid her good morning, she opened her eyes halfway. We caressed her hands and she repositioned her arms and attempted (or so it seemed) to close her fingers. The nurse came in to suction Lauren's mouth (at which point Lauren blinked her eyes then withdrew one arm) and told us the team was coming to get her.

We were filled in on the procedures, of which she was to have two:

- A tracheostomy procedure would be performed in Lauren's neck to allow her to breath without using her mouth or nose.

- A percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) placement procedure would be performed to allow Lauren to bypass the normal eating process.

We spent the next couple of hours in the surgery waiting room hoping and praying the surgeries went well. Elizabeth and I enjoyed a sweet time together drinking coffee, fighting drowsiness, and talking about our kids. They both have dragons they're fighting, albeit each is of a different size and sort. Like every parent we wished we could do the fighting for them, but sometimes our limits extend only to encouragement, exhortation, and intercession.

We were joined in the waiting room by a sweet, and wise, lady from our church. We enjoyed her company and her gentle grace. She was with us when the trauma surgeon came in to tell us: "Lauren's procedures went perfectly." I love that word, especially when it is used in regard to surgical procedures. "Perfectly."

The surgeon then told us we'd be unable to see Lauren for a while because they were changing out the halo around her hip to ensure it was not magnetic and she could safely have the MRI. We asked why she was outfitted with a fixator that would prevent an MRI which everyone knew that would be integral to her treatment. He told us the orthopedic hardware was guaranteed to be MRI-safe. However, a routine scan with a metal detector wand went off and alerted them that something was metallic. To be safe, they replaced the entire apparatus.

So we waited.

When we were able to see Lauren, it became readily apparent – at least to her mom and me – that she was in pain. She was slowly and deliberately drawing her arms toward the halo. Her blood pressure and heart rate were rising quickly and all her vitals, including her respiratory rate, were very erratic. She began attempting to lift herself up off the bed with her hips. I had my hand on her and began to feel a tremor in the fixator. At first I thought the building was vibrating. It was only Lauren. Elizabeth began to weep softly, empathizing helplessly with her daughter in obvious pain and unable to tell us what was hurting or where it was hurting her.

We quickly sought the nurse, who was puzzled. She called the trauma surgeon and we were excused to the waiting room again while they addressed the situation.

While we were waiting we were visited again by a small contingent of folks from our church including our pastor, Jerry Wragg, and Dr. Z. While checking in to see if we could go back and see Lauren again, the chief trauma surgeon came and eased our tensions a bit. He told us that Lauren's reaction was typical for those coming out a coma, and simultaneously withdrawing from her combination of medications and anesthesia (from the surgeries). In addition, we were told that she likely had some stomach cramping because her body has rejected nutrition since the pelvis surgeries on Day 11. He said her cramping was spasmodic, not atypical, and in no way life threatening.

We were told that it was actually a good sign she was purposefully moving her hands – both hands, slightly moving her hip, and even arching her back slightly. This is the most movement to date. It's more than a little disconcerting to realize this kind of progress was only seen because of that kind of pain.

The lessons we learn in the waiting room.

When we went back to see Lauren she was resting more comfortably. Dr. Z read a passage of Scripture and, right in the middle of it, Lauren yawned so hard that it broke up the solemnity of our little circle. Dr. Z told Lauren he usually only sees yawning like that when he is preaching.

After dinner we went back to the waiting room. The nurse allowed us in again and Lauren yawned the entire time. I tried reading a Psalm to Lauren but was interrupted by my own yawn. Soon Brad and I were

yawning as much as Lauren was. After visiting hours were over our family sat for a few moments with a couple friends who'd joined us. Of course, you know where we were sitting.

Why is waiting so hard? Because of one little detail that was missing from Dr. Seuss's story. The dear old doctor never tells us how we get out of the Waiting Place or what to do while we're there. He gives no hints or instructions in his little story. He just says, "Somehow you'll escape/ all that waiting and staying." However, the Scripture has something to say about waiting: specifically, we are to wait for God.

As fallen human beings, we are prone to take matters into our own hands. We want to chart our own course and follow our own hearts. Yet, over and over again we are told in Scripture "wait for the Lord." And we are told of the blessings that attend those who wait. King David said:

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD (Psalm 40:1-3).

Waiting rooms are difficult places. But in two weeks we've already seen relationships built, faith strengthened, lives examined, grace discovered, and hearts expanded. The Waiting Place has become a sacred space where beauty is experienced, foundations are established, and God is found working in the midst of it all.

The Waiting Place confirms that someone loves us enough to cause us to pause and see that a new course, a better course, not only brings more honor to God but more eternal joy to us. We just have to understand the difference between "waiting" and "waiting for the Lord." The first is passing time in an uncomfortable chair in a Trauma Center on Day 13 when everything in and about you is numb. The second is, as Frederick Beuchner puts it, the anticipation that comes when the house lights are dimmed, in the orchestra pits violin bows are poised, the conductor raises the baton, the curtain begins to rise and you hold your breath to listen...

May the music that is heard be a song of praise to our God. And may all who hear put their trust in Him.

SDG

Day 14: Jesus of the Scars

Lauren Graham Waller, June 18, 2011

In The Odyssey, at the end of the story, Odysseus returns home after wandering at sea for 10 years after the fall of Troy. He slips through the door disguised as an old man but nobody recognizes him, not even his own family. That night, just before bed, Odysseus' old nurse Eurycleia bathes him. She thinks she is merely attending to an old stranger who visits for the night. But while bathing him she recognizes a scar on his leg which he received while boar hunting as a boy with his grandfather. She did not recognize him until she saw his scar.

In the gospel of John, the risen Christ slips through the door but nobody recognizes him either, not even his own despondent disciples. He spoke to them as he had spoken so often before. Still nothing. But then John says, "He showed them his hands and his side" (John 20:20). Only when they saw his scars did they recognize him.

The Christ of Easter bears the scars of Good Friday. And somehow a connection is made between believing in the resurrected Christ and seeing the scars of Christ. Being raised from the dead did not erase the marks of his wounds. Jesus' disciples, including Thomas, recognized him as risen only by seeing and touching his scars.

The scars are quickly adding up on Lauren's body. Not only does she have the pinpricks of a hundred needles, she's got more holes and incisions cut in her now than you can count on both hands. Some are rather small, others quite large. Every one represents a scar she will carry on her body the rest of her days.

Thankfully no new ones were added today. The treatment plan for this 24-hours called for Lauren to continue to be weaned off all support. The respirator is still attached but is at its lowest possible setting. (It is breathing for her only twice per minute; the rest of the breathing - 14 times per minute - is on her own.) She is off all continuous-feed sedation, pain medication and antibiotics. She still has pain medication, for instance, but it is on a period basis as needed rather than continuously administered through a drip pump that delivers 3mg per hour.

Lauren's white blood count is back up, as is her fever. The nurse said when it hits 101.5 she will order a pan culture (sputum, urine, blood). 14 days of TPN (total parenteral nutrition) which completely bypasses the GI tract can help keep trauma patients alive in the short term, but it has numerous significant risks: infection, blood clots, liver failure, etc. They are planning to ultrasound her gallbladder tomorrow to check for biliary sludge and gallstones, for which Lauren is at extremely high risk. Yippee.

On the plus side, Lauren was even more animated today. She not only had purposeful withdrawal of her toes and legs to pain, the nurse said (and she told me to write this down) Lauren had "very purposeful movement" of her arms. They had to restrain her to keep her from pulling out her PEG tube and her trach. Her eyes still open but there's no recognition yet or any response to verbal commands. When we left her tonight she was resting comfortably.

Before we see her again tomorrow, we will join a group of Christian believers and unite in sermons and songs around the very God who has ordained that Lauren should suffer. For us, there's one overarching reason why we do so – and with joy. We know who he is. We've seen the scars.

If Jesus is God, as the New Testament declares and as Christians believe, then he is more intimate with suffering than any human who has ever lived. He was betrayed, deserted by his friends, suffered the worst kind of flogging, and was nailed publicly to a wooden cross. He is described in the Bible as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

As Dorothy Sayers wrote in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*:

"For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are – limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death – he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile."

We can worship a God who allows us to suffer because He was not some Docetist deity. He did not exempt Himself from suffering Himself.

But there's another even greater reason we worship a God who ordains that we suffer. The physical and mental suffering of Christ pales into insignificance beside another kind of suffering that Jesus endured at Calvary. The Bible says Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). In some remarkable way, when Jesus hung on the cross He was taking on His own shoulders the the sin of every human being who would ever turn to Him in repentance and faith. This is the amazing centerpiece of the gospel story.

"Christ died once for our sins, the innocent for the guilty, in order to bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus Christ didn't just suffer. He suffered for us – to save us from sin and to reconcile us to God. Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

Tonight we sleep.

Tomorrow we worship a God who would not wound us unless He was first wounded for us.

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now:
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.
The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.
If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.
The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
*And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.**

SDG

**This poem, "Jesus of the Scars," was written by Edward Shillito (1872-1948), a Free Church minister in England during World War I*

Dear Visitors (Updated)

Lauren Graham Waller, June 19, 2011

UPDATE - SUNDAY, 6:00 PM: When we went to visit Lauren this afternoon, we found out they have initiated strict isolation precautions for her. As a result of being immunosuppressed, she has contracted a communicable bacteria - a strain of e coli - that is resistant to antibiotics. The family is allowed to visit but must don gowns and gloves prior to entering her room. We must treat them as contaminated and remove them upon our exit.

If you are planning to visit in the next day or two, we'd ask that you consider postponing until we get a reversal of the isolation precautions. Thank you for your love and continued prayers for Lauren.

We've been blessed with a steady flow of friends who've come to visit Lauren and us at the ICU/C. We are exceedingly grateful to ALL who have come, yet we are chagrined to know we have missed some of you. Please accept our sincere apology.

In order to acknowledge you when you visit, we wish to let you know generally when we'll be available to receive you. Due to the demands of work and everyday life, we will only be at the hospital during scheduled visiting hours: 1-5 PM and 8-9 PM. If we are there at other times it is because Lauren is undergoing a surgical procedure or else the doctors have requested our presence for another reason. Obviously, during those times, our availability will be extremely limited.

Outside of visiting hours, we also have some availability at the Quantum House between the afternoon and evening visiting hours. We'd be pleased to see you then.

Even while we are at the Trauma Center, we are often back in the ICU/C with Lauren and not in the waiting room. So, if you don't see us it does not necessarily mean we are not there. If you wish to see us, our suggestion is to call either Elizabeth, Brad or me, or send one of us a text message. (If you don't have our numbers, they are available through Grace Immanuel Bible Church.)

Many thanks to you all for the personal sacrifices you have made in order to serve our family. We thank our God upon every remembrance of you.

Sincerely, The Grahams

Days 15-16: Father's Day

Lauren Graham Waller, June 20, 2011

Yesterday was Father's day. I called my dad and chatted with him for a bit, then talked to my mom. We spoke mostly about Lauren, but during the conversation the topic turned to others of my family who are going through troubles of their own. When I hung up it occurred to me that there's something about being a mother or a dad; you never grow so big or so old that you cease agonizing over the cares of your children.

My friends know I'm not a very weepy guy. Generally I'm able to keep my emotions buttoned up. There have been a few times in the past couple of weeks in which the restraints of reservation and stoicism have come unbuckled. Usually it is when I'm alone – especially in the mornings. I can keep a pretty stiff upper lip when I'm with others, especially my family. But when I'm engaged in solitary prayer or reflection – or even just driving, I experience something of what the prophet meant when he said of the Lord, who saw Israel's affliction during the aftermath of Egypt, "In their afflictions, He was afflicted." In Lauren's pain, I am pained. In her suffering, I suffer too. Especially when I am alone.

The last two days have brought a mixed bag of blessing and burden, smiles and tears. There is no denying that Lauren's physical progress has been quite significant. Yesterday they removed the arterial line from her wrist. This was the catheter used to track real-time blood pressure as well as monitor blood gasses. Lauren also passed a 2-hour CPAP trial and was then extubated from the respirator last night. Our girl is no longer on life support!

The orthopedic surgeon ordered a pelvic x-ray. The alignment has shifted slightly (not good) but it is still within what they deem to be acceptable limits. The trauma RN showed us a comparison with the original x-rays and the difference is still surprising. Even now I wince when I see how badly Lauren's little bones were broken.

The ultrasound on the gallbladder did show bilial sludge as a result of two weeks of TPN (feeding through an IV). However, there was no thickening, infection or stones, so that's good. In addition, as you no doubt read on yesterday's update, she has contracted an ESBL producing bacteria, which would not be a problem if she were healthy. However, because she is immunosuppressed, it can cause further infection. In addition, it not only can not be treated with antibiotics, it actually breaks down antibiotics and eliminates their effectiveness against other infections.

After having a stable night breathing on her own, and after a review by the neurosurgeon which determined Lauren's head injury is now stable, Lauren was given Stepdown Orders this morning. This means she will be released from ICU/Critical (ICU/C) and admitted to ICU/Stepdown (ICU/S). Naturally, we are a bit nervous since each nurse in ICU/S attends four patients instead of two as they do in ICU/C. In addition, the ICU/S nurses generally have a bit less training and experience. However, since there's only two ways for a patient to exit ICU/C – in a bodybag or with Stepdown Orders, it is not a difficult choice as to the option we prefer. In the two weeks we've been visiting the 10-bed ICU/C, six of Lauren's suitemates have exited. Lauren will be the seventh. She is the only one who still has a pulse.

While Lauren's body and her movements are noticeably improving, her brain is another story. She is still, as best as anyone can tell, in a coma. Although she opens her eyes from time to time she has a blank, glassy stare that neither moves to the left nor right. She also has a slight deviation between her two eyes. (They are not both looking in exactly the same direction.) She will begin therapy tomorrow for coma stimulation. They will attempt to make the rhythm of her days more regular – light and sound during the daytime, darkness and quiet at night.

We've been told that each phase of Lauren's recuperation and recovery will require increasingly more patience as the gains are fewer and further in between. Our fortitude will likely be tested in this next phase. The neurosurgeon said that based upon Lauren's latest scans, he anticipates a "good long-term prognosis." (That explanation requires an explanation that will have to wait for another day. Suffice it to say they will not even project objectively what "good" is; it's relative to her present condition which is "not good.") Short term, those with similar injuries to Lauren can expect to take several more weeks to awake from the coma – bearing in mind that some take longer, and others never

awaken at all.

Last week a dear saint and a treasured friend of our family came to the hospital to visit. She saw Elizabeth's red eyes and immediately felt the tug of that tie that binds the hearts of two similarly-wounded women. She too has wept at the bedside of a daughter whose protracted illness was devastating and whose life hung perilously in the balance. There are some sorrows that only a mother knows.

Nights like tonight, sitting by the side of Lauren's bed, seeing her beautiful face, broken body and blank eyes, it's enough to sap the strength of the world's strongest man. Especially a dad. And, while I've inquired of the heavens as to the answer to the question, "Why?" I've not (at least yet) had the temptation to shake my fist at the silence. Perhaps it's because, since I first became the dad of Brad and Lauren, I've found comfort in Psalm 103:13: "Like a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." There are some sorrows that only a father knows.

The love and pity I have for Lauren is but a faint shadow compared to the compassionate love God has for me – and for her – because we love and fear Him. From the time I first laid eyes on her, I have loved my girl as fiercely as any father ever has. And yet, how many times did I wound her with an unkind word, a harsh judgment, a hasty reprimand? But as for God, His way is perfect. He has never unkindly or unwisely afflicted His children. He has never taken an ounce of pleasure in our anguish or tears (Lam. 3:33). There is no sorrow or grief that God does not see; there is no pain or pity that He does not feel.

God is too wise to be mistaken, God is too good to be unkind. When you don't understand, When you don't see His plan, When you can't trace His hand, Trust His heart.

God has not shown us His ultimate plan for Lauren's pain. We've asked. Yet the heavens are brass, the skies are silent, and thus far He's seen no real need to let me in on the secret. What He has done is remind me that He's a Father.

He knows how daddies feel.

SDG

Lauren Has Moved

Lauren Graham Waller, June 22, 2011

Lauren has a new address! She is still at St. Mary's, still in Intensive Care, and still on the same floor. However, as of yesterday she is in the ICU Stepdown unit. Her room is 2211.

She will be in this unit for the foreseeable future although her room assignment may change. She has captured the attention of the staff and they are trying to get her in a room directly in front of the nurses station in order to be more visible. (Shhh!! Don't tell the other patients!)

Another benefit is that the visiting hours are a bit more liberal. We/she can entertain guests from 12-5pm and 8-9pm. The west entrance is unlocked; just walk in. The east entrance is locked; just call the nurses station from the buzzer outside the unit and they'll let you in. Children 12 and under are not allowed inside the unit. There is no waiting room except the one outside ICU/C where Lauren was previously.

If you'd like to visit, we'd be glad to see you!!

The sign on the Stepdown Unit door says two at a time; however, Lauren's nurse said he'd be lenient if more should arrive. Please be aware that Lauren's room is still under Contact Precautions. You'll either have to wear a gown and gloves to go inside her room or stand outside the room in the hallway, whichever is more comfortable to you.

We love you all!
Elizabeth

Days 17-18: Lauren's Injury | Diffuse Axonal Shearing

Lauren Graham Waller, June 23, 2011

Tuesday morning dawned and the day began at sunrise with a phone call from the Trauma RN telling us Lauren was being released from the Critical care unit. Soon after we had a confab with the neurosurgeon (the "Buckeye Doctor") who signed her release. He told us Lauren's body is healing nicely but her brain is deeply damaged. However, he said, she is stable enough to move her forward to the next stage in her recovery. That will be a long and grueling process with no possible way to predict potential outcomes. Yet.

Let me try to give a brief – and very elementary – explanation of what's wrong with Lauren. As you already know she has a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The type of TBI she has is referred to as a Diffuse Axonal Injury (DAI), or Shearing.

The most basic element in our nervous system is the neuron, or nerve cell. The brain has tens of billions of neurons and, as you can see in the attached photo [click on it to enlarge], each neuron has a cell body that includes the nucleus (where the DNA is stored). Each neuron also has projections called dendrites and axons. These comprise what we call the "white matter" of the brain. There are several dendrites, or "ears," on each neuron. The ears receive information from adjacent neurons. However, each neuron has only one axon, which is the "mouth" of the neuron. The mouth delivers messages to adjacent neurons.

Although the human brain has up to 100 billion neurons, in Lauren's accident potentially hundreds of millions of axons were sheared – either twisted beyond repair or completely torn apart. When you look at a CT Scan of her brain, most of the white matter is gone and the picture is completely gray. Many, perhaps most, of those neurons died from shearing and can not be regenerated. The damaged neurons that remain have attached dendrites which are very likely receiving (or hearing) information and instructions. But unless or until the sheared axons can be regenerated, they are unable to take the information received by each neuron and pass it along to other neurons.

Her brain has been likened to that of a contestant on a game show. The audience is all screaming at you telling you what to do. The dendrites of her brain are receiving a cacophany of input in the form of sounds, smells, sights, and tactile sensory perceptions. However, the sheared axons are effectively like the contestant having duct tape over their mouth with their arms and legs tied up. They receive a lot of information and instructions, but they can't decode the information, pass the information along, or act on the information they've received. So the contestant stands there, paralyzed and helpless. In the same way, Lauren is almost totally unresponsive despite all the sensory stimulation.

When we are babies, the brain begins to wire itself. The beautiful part of the human design is that the basic axonal wiring plan is encoded in the DNA. Studies have shown that even in the developing embryonic stage, nerve cells travel to designated regions of the brain, and once in

place they send out axons along preprogrammed paths to make contact with specific targets. We are hoping the damaged neurons that remain in Lauren's brain will rewire themselves. This will allow her to either regain some of the functionality she's lost, or be able to compensate in some way (typically by relearning information and skills.)

The billions of neurons in our brain connect with one another in complex neural networks. All physical and mental functioning depends on the establishment and maintenance of these networks. The more these neurons become – and remain – disconnected, the greater the level of disability in four basic areas:

1. Cognition (thinking, memory, and reasoning),

2. Sensory processing (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell),

3. Communication (expression and understanding), and

4. Behavior (depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness).

In addition to disability directly caused by the injury, there is further disability due to inactivity. When a person stops performing a given activity, the neural networks for the activity fall into disuse and eventually may die or disappear.

Perhaps this explanation will help you understand the spectre of sadness that sits in the corner of the room and insists on accompanying us on our daily visits with Lauren. It's difficult to reflect upon who Lauren used to be and what we expected her to become based upon the generous and particular gifts that the Lord loaned her for a season. During this season, he has taken them away. The extent to which they are restored is ultimately up to Him.

We are not left without reasons for optimism. Due to Lauren's health, the doctor's plan includes being quite aggressive with her treatment. This includes both therapy and experimental intervention by having her take folic acid and other amino acids that have shown some promise in helping promote axonal regeneration in damaged neurons. Unlike peripheral neurons, the axons on brain and brainstem neurons are resistant to repair; however, for function to be regained requires

their regeneration.

In addition, the human brain is not fully developed until around age 25. Due to Lauren's youth she can expect some level of further brain development.

With that said, said she will have to fight for every inch of progress. She will not plateau for a year, with a final diagnosis not available for two years, so time will provide the tale of the tape. Dr. Buckeye's prognosis was rather grim but he seemed genuinely intent upon giving Lauren every medical advantage at his disposal. For that we are grateful.

Ultimately, we rest in the knowledge that God is great and God is good. And because in His goodness He has put us in Christ and put Christ in us, His will for us – even in this season – is to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. Even when it includes Diffuse Axonal Shearing.

SDG

Day 19: Secondary Causes

Lauren Graham Waller, June 24, 2011

Lauren is still in a coma although her eyes open from time to time, sometimes quite widely and for increasing amounts of time. She is a good bit more animated but any prolonged periods of movement wear her out pretty quickly. Her biggest battle in this phase is with what the doctors call "secondary causes" of trauma. The primary cause, of course, was the brain injury itself. Secondary causes are contingent and either initiated by the primary cause or are complications that arise from treating the primary cause. Examples are edema, blood pressure, pulse, respiration, infections, etc. Secondary causes remind us sometimes the cure can cripple or kill us as quickly as the original malady.

One of the toughest secondary causes Lauren is battling now is what is called a "neural storm" or "sympathetic storming" – paroxysmal autonomic instability with dystonia (PAID) for those keeping score at home. This is consistent with the sub-acute stage of recovery. To treat the primary injury, Lauren was given a healthy combination of sedatives, beta blockers, opiate receptor agonists, CNS depressants, etc. When high doses of narcotics and sedatives are discontinued, and

when the brain is starting to heal, a neural storm is triggered. Lauren's body has been launched into a state of agitation, posturing, high pulse rates (>120 bpm), high respiratory rates (>20 breaths per minute), fever (> 101 degrees), flushed face and perspiration. This can continue intermittently for several weeks.

So far Lauren is fighting valiantly. In fact, the RNs put mitts on her to keep her from pulling out her tubes and IVs. They look for all the world like boxing gloves and she looks as though she's literally fighting her condition. Despite her pugilistic appearance, the RN told us

Lauren is actually calmer today. They have been able to keep her respiratory rates stable and have staved off any further infections thus far. In addition, her eyes are actually tracking movement a little bit and she's increasing her reactions against discomfort and pain. One example: They put two objects in her hands, one a plastic toy and the other an ice cube. She will hold onto the toy but drop the ice cube in reaction against the coldness.

Lauren is not the only one fighting against secondary causes. We are too. Except ours is the fight of faith. Do we truly trust God's character and His word? Or do we second-guess an entire range things that could have, should have, would have happened if only...

If only...

- If only Lauren had accepted an invitation to lunch with the college girls on that fateful Sunday.
- If only she had ridden with us instead.
- If only we hadn't stayed and chatted as long after church.
- If only the car had been 5 feet further ahead or further behind.
- If only ... if only ...

We have yielded to that temptation more than once. And every time we say – or think – "if only" we are fighting secondary causes.

We're in good company, I suppose, inasmuch as we're not the first persons to face a tragedy an say "if only..." When Lazarus died his sisters, Mary and Martha, each said to Jesus: "If only you had been here then our brother

would not have died." I doubt they ever really thought Lazarus' situation caught Jesus by surprise. They certainly knew their brother's death was not chance, fate, destiny, or bad luck. They understood cognitively that God had not left them adrift in an unmanned vessel completely at the mercy of the storm. They were, like us, temporarily crippled by the "if onlys." They were fighting secondary causes.

God is the primary cause who stands behind everything that happens. He is Aristotle's "Prime Mover"; Thomas Aquinas' "Uncaused First Cause." Classic Christianity asserts that every other agent of causation is contingent upon God. He is the One who stands behind both mercies and sorrows, comforts and crosses.

He is the One who breathes into our nostrils the breath of life; it is at His summons that the spirit returns "to the God who gave it." Everything that happens is because God wills it so.

That is not to say some things are not evil. Nor is it to say God personally causes evil to happen. To permit evil is not to commit evil. However, the God of sunny skies is the God of cloudy days. And to rail against the rain is to complain against the One who, at His discretion and for His purposes, sovereignly uses the schemes of fallen men and angels, the natural course of a sin-cursed earth, and the collision of automobiles that wreak havoc upon the brain and body of a beautiful girl. Whether it is the hue of gladness or the tint of grief that colors the complexion of our days, it all passes first through the hand of the One who is rich in His mercy and great in His love.

There is tremendous comfort in this reality. Sometimes God reveals His purposes to us immediately. Sometimes it is not until years later that we can look back and see some good come from our sorrow. Sometimes still our misery remains a mystery; some pain we will not understand until we see Him face to face. Ultimately, though, we place our faith in the God who has demonstrated throughout history that He is wise and loving in all that He does, who declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times things yet undone saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish my purpose."

There's not a plant or flow below But makes Thy glories known. And clouds arise and tempests blow By order from Thy throne. While all that borrows life from Thee Is ever in Thy care, And everywhere that man can be Thou, God, art present there.

Thankfully, God is patient with those of little faith – those who yield to the temptation to say, "If only..." To Martha's "if only" Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. ... Do you believe this?" To Mary's "if only" he said: "Lazarus, come forth!"

Our family does not yet know if God's response to our "if onlys" will be a demonstration of His power in a total reversal of Lauren's condition, the grace to trust Him until the day all things are made new, or something somewhere in between. We do believe (help our unbelief!) that if we have confidence in God's character and believe His word, we don't have to surrender to the pseudo-sovereignty of secondary causes that consign us to a past we are forever trying to unlive. We can rejoice that our times are in the hands of a wise and loving Providence and no matter where we may be, whether its in happiness or in a hospital, our God is present there.

SDG

Day 20: Lauren Needs Your Help (Kinda)

Lauren Graham Waller, June 25, 2011

Dear Friends,

At the behest of Lauren's medical team, we – Lauren's family – have seen to it that she is now in the possession of two new pets: a sock monkey and a very soft doggie.

But alas, our familial obligation is not yet complete. The pets need names. None of our ideas thus far have gotten much traction. In fact, those who visited today and heard our offerings not only attempted to stifle their snorts, they highly recommended that we seek assistance, and pronto, from outside the immediate family.

So, Lauren needs your help.

Please, PLEASE submit your suggestions for names for her two new cuddly creatures. Should your suggestion(s) be chosen, you will be rewarded with our undying gratitude. Lauren – and her pets – thank you.

Sincerely,
The GRAHAMS

Day 21: Stop Signs

Lauren Graham Waller, June 26, 2011

On the door of Room 2217, Lauren's newest stopping place, is a stop sign. In bold white letters with a raised hand, set against a bright red backdrop, it says"STOP. Check with nurse before entering." The sign below goes on to say that Lauren's room is under precautions. To not heed the stop sign and the precautions is to risk catching or spreading a potentially deadly bacteria.

Despite the fact that Lauren is progressing forward inch by inch, day by day, every time we pass the stop sign on her door we see it for the warning it is. It reminds us that we ignore it at ours and Lauren's peril and that she's still in a precarious position.

For the first time, today Lauren turned her head to the left and to the right in response to our voices. There were a few moments when her eyes would open wide– wider than normal – and the haze would seem to lift for a moment. This, along with the temporary dilation of her pupils, let us know Lauren is there inside her body.

Those brief moments of optimism were tempered by three solid hours of agitation and spasticity as she thrashed about involuntarily in an attempt, it seemed, to escape her body. Like a terrified, wounded animal she was panicked, frustrated, and outwardly combative. Adding to her aberrant behavior was an atypical lack of shame. Normally she's a scrupulously modest person. However, her out-of-control hands would pull her gown off her body in a thrashing fashion. Elizabeth dutifully accepted the full-time job of calmly tracking Lauren's hands with her own to help her in every moment maintain her dignity.

We were happy to discover that during the early pre-dawn hours the RN capped her tracheotomy tube to allow her not only to breathe fully on her own but to enable her to speak if she could. During the agitation hours (1-4 pm) she seemed as though she tried to talk several times. Four times during that 3-hour period she turned her head fully to the right, looked into my eyes, and labored intently to get her trembling left hand up to her head and point behind her left ear. She would then make a very pained moaning sound that left her flushed and exhausted. I can not describe the disturbingly helpless feeling that

overwhelmed Elizabeth and me, knowing – or perhaps in our hypersensitive state, merely assuming – she was trying to tell us something but we had no idea what.

After finally getting the RN's attention, we were told that some pain medication had been ordered and was on its way. Before the afternoon visiting hours ended, the RN had repositioned her and given her the medication. As we left the room for the shift change, Lauren was calm and settled down.

We were powerfully reminded today that this event, despite what else it might be, is a colossal stop sign. God has so ordered our lives that everything else in the Graham family has come to a virtual standstill. We are forced to reckon with the implications of this tragedy, both physical and emotional, temporal and eternal. The day before the accident, we – no doubt like you – assumed tomorrow would be like today, and today would be like yesterday. But as we left the hospital for the 21st straight day today, Lauren's beautiful but pained face flashed this reminder: STOP! Our "life is but a fleeting breath,/ a sigh too brief to measure," a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. To presume upon tomorrow is to claim something that is not ours and to which we have no guarantee.

In the weeks and months ahead we will share some of the lessons we're learning at the intersection of God's will and ours, a place where He has placed a cosmic stop sign. I can't help but note, though, that God has providentially orchestrated your lives so that all of you reading this are at that intersection too. Whether you're Lauren's friend, our friend, or just a friend of a friend, Lauren's life and story have crossed paths with yours, and that's not an accident. It's an appointment. Our stop sign is your stop sign.

The warning to us is a warning to you. We all fail to heed this stop sign at our own peril.

I have to ask: In the last 21 days...

- Have you seriously – seriously! – considered how frail and fleeting your life is?

- Have you contemplated how hollow and trivial most of your priorities and pursuits are?

- Have you reckoned with how utterly insignificant and inconsequential the things are that you were bothered by?

- Have you considered what it really means if Christ is God, His claims are true and His resurrection is real?

- Have you considered how long eternity is? How holy God is? How serious your sin is? And how desperately you need to be reconciled with Him?

Do you understand, I mean truly understand, that "all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Is. 64:6), and that by good works nobody will be justified in His sight? (Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16)

Looking at the twisted metal of Brad's car and the tortured movements of Lauren's body are an ever-present reminder that we're not guaranteed tomorrow. But thankfully, now is the time of God's favor; today is the day of salvation."Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7).

If you have not repented and turned from your sin and entrusted your life and eternity completely to the merit of Christ's perfect life, atoning death and bodily resurrection, I urge you to do so. There is no set prayer to pray or formula to recite. All you have to do is recognize your sinfulness before God, confess and repent of your sin, and trust in Jesus' Christ who became the perfect sacrifice on your behalf for your sin. Don't worry about exactly what to say, just speak the truth, confess your sin, and by faith accept His perfect righteousness as your own.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:8-9). Jesus said, "Everyone one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21-23).

Lauren's tragedy has forced our family to stop – to consider what is truly important and to adjust our course accordingly. And make no mistake: her accident was a tragedy; we live it every waking minute. But for any one of us (or you!) to live this life or leave this world without being reconciled with God through faith in Jesus Christ alone would be an even greater tragedy.

Certainly God has purposes in Lauren's story that we don't understand – and won't understand until we get to heaven. But one of His purposes is as clear as a bright red sign with bold white letters. I beg you: Please don't run past this stop sign.

SDG

Days 22-23: The Battle

Lauren Graham Waller, June 28, 2011

A frequent theme we're seeing in our saga is that of a recurring battle motif. In virtually every context and conversation we use, and we hear, terms like war, struggle, fight, enemy, contend, strive, campaign, onslaught. The antagonists are becoming more clearly defined:

- Lauren's injury and its attendant diseases and setbacks,
- Insurance companies, claims adjusters, big hospital policies, and bureaucracies of every shape and size, and
- Our ancient foe and his fiery darts of doubt and unbelief.

The allies are also rallying together:

- Doctors, nurses and professional medical staff,
- Attorneys, insurance agents, and professional advocates volunteering their time and experience, and
- Pastors, prayer-warriors, hymn-singers, and promise-claimers.

The victories the past two days have been small but significant. On Monday Lauren was able to visibly respond to several commands. When asked to stick her tongue out, she attempted to do so. She didn't get it out far, but the PT said she definitely tried. In addition, she asked Lauren four times to squeeze her hand and she did that too.

The PA for the orthopedic surgeon told us they were also able to correct Lauren's pelvic shifting without further surgery. She said the bones are all set now "perfectly." (Have I mentioned how much I love that word?)

As of Monday evening, Lauren no longer has a tracheotomy tube. It was capped on Sunday but has now been completely removed. The temporary hole in her throat is shut and patched and Lauren is breathing completely on her own. She does have a nasal cannula (oxygen tube with two prongs that fit into her nose) so she is guaranteed 100% oxygen for the healing of her brain. Due to being bedridden, she also has respiratory therapy every six hours to ensure her lungs are fully inflated and she doesn't catch pneumonia again.

On Tuesday, the RN asked Lauren four times to blink her eyes and she did. She also asked her to raise her right arm and left arm separately and she did that too. She is laterally moving her eyes better although we're not sure yet whether she's tracking visually or in response to sound. She is also opening them wider and for longer periods of time.

One quirk that we haven't deciphered yet is the repeated blinking (or winking?) of her left eye independently of the right eye. We aren't quite sure whether it's a neurological tic due to her damaged cortex or whether it's an attempt to focus her right eye by covering the left eye. (The left eye is the one that's deviated and does not work exactly in parallel with the right eye.) An eye exam would likely tell us which it is, but such an exam will not help until she is capable of providing feedback.

The PTs have tried to sit her up on the edge of the bed and follow commands, but that has been tough sledding. The first time they tried it (last Friday) her blood pressure fell so rapidly, and so precipitously, that they immediately laid her back down and didn't try again until yesterday. The PTs sat her up again yesterday and, while her blood pressure fell, she was able to stay in that position for about 5 minutes with assistance. Without help she would have immediately fallen over; she was totally limp and looked almost paralyzed. The PTs sat her up for 10 minutes today and she not only handled it okay, she stiffened her left arm in an attempt to hold herself up. So, there's progress.

It's actually good for us when someone comes to see Lauren who hasn't seen her for a week. One of Elizabeth's friends has been in the Midwest for a week and returned today. She remarked that she could

hardly believe the improvement. She said the last time she saw Lauren there was no bodily movement and even her eye movements were minimal. Today she squirms and fidgets and wriggles about – so much so that she worked her legs tonight until they were dangling off the bed.

So, with each passing day there are definite advances in Lauren's battle. Of course, each day brings its new struggles. I haven't talked about the insurance debacle and all we're starting to go through in order to cover what is shaping up to be a massive financial burden, the scope of which is completely unknown at this point. In addition, we're attempting to prepare for the rehabilitation phase, which will be the longest and most costly phase of all, but the phase most critical for Lauren's optimal outcome.

Every hour presents a new skirmish. But we're gratified at the army of allies God has enlisted to sign up and fight with us. We are especially thankful for those who are helping us raise the shield of faith and wield the sword of the Spirit. Most of all, we're grateful for to the One who defeated our greatest enemies, sin and Satan, on a hill far away with an old rugged cross. Victory is always ours when the battle is the Lord's.

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength
Which God supplies
Through his eternal Son.
Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
And in his mighty pow'r,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

SDG

Update on Questions about Giving

Lauren Graham Waller, June 29, 2011

So many of you have asked us in person or through emails about how you can give in order to help offset the mounting cost of Lauren's medical bills, rehabilitation and recovery. We already know we will be completely unable to pay for her treatments. We also know she does not qualify for enough support to receive the care she will need to make a full recovery.

We WILL need your help! Right now though we are asking that you please wait. We are in the process of researching possible ways to make your gifts and donations tax deductible. We also want to make sure we have a vehicle that allows you to give generously with the confidence that every gift will be used wisely and specifically for Lauren's care.

Please keep following this site for updates. Currently our personal needs are well met as our local friends and church family have showered us with grace and affection. Many of you have also sent gift cards which have been a tremedous blessing! We will be seeking your help in the near future and hope to be able to present various ways that you can tangibly and financially support Lauren's recovery efforts.

One side note: Some have asked about the CaringBridge Tribute Donations. Any donations you give through CaringBridge go directly to CaringBridge. In no way do they directly help Lauren. It is one way CaringBridge funds the website so that families like ours can freely keep you updated on Lauren's progress. If you appreciate the service they provide, please donate to them. If you wish to donate specifically to help Lauren, we will soon be giving you specific ways you can do that.

One more note: If any of you have direct knowledge and experience in fundraising or charitable giving that can be directed toward a particular person, please contact us.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
Elizabeth

Days 25-26: It Was a Dark and Stormy Night

Lauren Graham Waller, June 29, 2011

It was a dark and stormy night.

Seriously. The ominous skies on Tuesday night threatened to hide the slim silver lining we look for on each gray horizon.

Wednesday morning didn't dawn with clear blue skies either. When Elizabeth saw Laurenat noon, our girl had a prominent scratch on her forehead. Elizabeth wondered where it came from, especially since Lauren wears the boxing gloves when nobody is in the room to monitor her. According to the RN, at some point during the night the

monitors at the nurse's station for Lauren went blank. Upon inspection, the nurse discovered Lauren had somehow extracted her hands from her gloves. She then proceeded to dismantle every wire on her body within reach, ripping off the oxygen tube along with the blood, pulse, oxygen and respiratory monitors. Her legs were dangling off the bed. And as best as anyone could tell, she had cut her forehead with a fingernail.

The rest of the day was less eventful. Lauren continued her pattern of progress by being a bit more alert than she was the day before.

Several of Lauren's friends showed up and decided she needed an emergency beauty treatment. It wasn't quite an Extreme Makeover, but boy did they did pamper our girl something royally. They washed her hair, wiped her face with a warm washcloth, and braided her hair. They also painted her toenails. All that was left was the reveal! After a meeting on Tuesday, Elizabeth went home in Hobe Sound to retrieve some items, including Lauren's favorite Michigan blanket which she was now using to keep warm. You can imagine Brad's and my surprise that evening when the blanket was lifted off her feet and we discovered her friends had painted the nails on her tootsies alternating maize and blue!

Before Lauren went to India, she and I went shopping together. (Don't judge me; we do stuff like that.) She was eyeing a pair of black Converse sneakers with an almost-idolatrous longing. I was pleased she resisted the urge to purchase them because she needed to save every spare nickel to finance her trip. I was not nearly so pleased when she looked wishfully in my direction, employing a tactic that she knew had a virtual 100% success rate – pouting her lower lip slightly and batting her huge hazel eyes that sparkle green and gold and gray as they scatter the light. You'll be glad to know I resisted. To my chagrin, however, one of our friends who was in the room – and who is a trauma RN herself – made a comment in passing that Lauren would probably benefit from a pair of high tops at some point. When she's learning to walk again, they provide ankle support during physical therapy and keep her feet flat. Who knew that funky fashion and functional utility would converge in a pair of sneakers. I'm not certain of this, but when folks ask if there's anything they can get for us, I'm wondering if Lauren is whispering things in their ear when I'm not around...

Later in the afternoon they removed Lauren's Foley catheter – more progress! She was bathed and given pain medication. The evening visiting hour was spent watching Lauren sleep. I confess I was feeling rather weary myself after hearing about her early AM hijinks.

It was a dark and not quite as stormy day when Elizabeth arrived at noon on Thursday. Lauren was awake and alert and, according to the RN, had been for several hours. The RN said that earlier in the morning, while giving her a bath, Lauren was looking out the window and trying to speak. No words were distinguishable, but it was still another giant leap for mankind.

More improvement was noted in that Lauren is purposefully stroking her stuffed animals – as yet unnamed – to take in the texture. All the while, however, she continues the restless fidgeting of her arms and legs. Around 1 o'clock some friends from Ft. Lauderdale came for a brief visit. They brought her a third pet, a yellow dog (a rather new one, which does not appear to have died out under the back porch). As they prepared to leave, one of the ladies asked if she could pray. Of course, Elizabeth agreed. As the prayer began, Lauren suddenly stopped all her fidgeting and closed her eyes to join the prayer. The stark change in Lauren's response so captured Elizabeth's attention that she didn't even close her eyes.

Apparently this brief and momentary lapse of proper piety was not restricted to just my wife. After a couple minutes, Lauren accompanied her in her sacrilege and started peeking too. When the "Amen" was said, Lauren opened her eyes wide and started fidgeting again.

By mid-afternoon Lauren was already tired and starting to doze off. The Physical Therapist (PT) arrived and wanted to perform therapy, which usually begins by sitting Lauren on the edge of the bed. Lauren has made small but steady improvement in that exercise. However, since she was half asleep the PT restricted her activity to attempting to get Lauren to follow some simple commands. She tried to get Lauren to speak by pointing to Elizabeth and asking: "Who is this?" "Is this your sister?" "Is this your aunt?" Lauren didn't respond. She asked again: "Is this your mom?" Still no answer.

The PT then tried to get her to move her unresponsive (left) leg. She could not move the leg but she did move her toes. The PT then asked Lauren if she could raise one finger. After a moment Lauren raised one quivering finger. The PT asked if she could raise two fingers and

Lauren flashed the peace sign. The PT then asked if she could open her entire hand. Lauren did. And when the nurse asked her to wave, Lauren began wiggling all five of her fingers.

The PT skipped out of the room and went to the Nurse's Station. She started telling them what Lauren had done. She scurried back to Lauren's room with a covey of nurses in tow and announced to Lauren: "These girls don't believe what you did! Can you wave again for them?" No response... at first. But soon Lauren slowly raised her left hand and began waving her fingers again.

Another friend, who had been in the room Wednesday during the beauty treatment, made another visit today. She came bearing gifts. A pair of black high top Converse shoes with purple trim. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. Her name is Judy.

A couple men from the pastoral staff of our church visited Lauren just as the afternoon visiting hours expired. They spoke briefly with Elizabeth and Lauren for a few moments and then one of them offered a prayer. Lauren quit fidgeting again and closed her eyes as he prayed. She kept them closed the entire time.

During the visiting hour tonight it was apparent that Lauren was exhausted from the day's activities. Brad and I were hoping for something of a reprise of her earlier performance yet half expecting her to be asleep. The RN waltzed up to us and told us that the news had spread like wildfire and all the nurses were going to Lauren's room to get their own personal wave from her. When we entered the room Lauren was asleep but as I greeted her and said her name she opened her eyes. I rubbed her arm, then took her hand. After a moment her hand squeezed mine firmly. And when Elizabeth asked her to raise one finger, she slowly lifted a single trembling index finger – her index finger – and held it aloft for a few seconds. Within a few minutes she was asleep.

Some days it's easy to be overwhelmed by the scope of this situation. The obstacles are so big, the task is so great, the future is so uncertain, and the answers are so few. We get home and collapse in a chair and wish God would split the sky, still the sea and calm the storm with a wave of His mighty hand. But in looking

for the lightning bolt I wonder how often we have missed the candlelight – the small and silent flame through which He comes and

whispers the promise: "I am here, and I'm closer than you think."

We left the hospital this evening about a quarter after 9. It was a dark and stormy night, again. We walked to the car skipping the puddles and barely noticing the rain. We knew God was on His throne and all was right with the world.

A single flickering finger, pointing toward heaven, had told us so.

SDG

Day 27: Praying for Healing

Lauren Graham Waller, July 1, 2011

In prior journal entries I've referenced a friend of our family who has gone through her own long health ordeal – an experimental treatment for Stage IV lymphoma, complete respiratory arrest (half an hour without breathing and no oxygen to her brain), and near cardiac arrest. The Lord graciously spared this young mother and steadily brought her back to her husband and two sons. Today she's a living, breathing testimony that God – in accordance with His own sovereign purposes – took great delight in healing her body and mind, not merely through the agency of doctors and medicine but, by the testimony of the physicians themselves, in an unusual and remarkable way that was most certainly divine.

Our friend has recovered remarkably, virtually 100%, and God has surely been honored both in her healing and in her reflection of His glory and grace. Yet she has a few lingering effects which she battles from time to time that can be attributed to the illness. At times that are completely unpredictable her blood pressure will drop precipitously, the flow of oxygen to her brain will come to a virtual stop, and she will lose consciousness. This has happened a half dozen times or so in the last 7 years, the episodes are generally very short-lived (a few minutes or so), and thus far the medical professionals have not been able to pinpoint the cause.

Yesterday afternoon, when she was visiting Lauren and Elizabeth at St. Mary's, it happened again. As she was already in the hospital, she was quickly rushed downstairs to the emergency room. She was admitted, stayed overnight, and has been undergoing tests throughout the day.

We have taken great comfort recently in the blessing that is ours to not only have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, but a God whom Jesus said is so intimately concerned about us that His care for us extends even to what we eat or wear. That is why it is entirely appropriate that we approach our heavenly Father for help – and that includes our physical healing. Jesus Himself said all things are possible with God. And yet He was the one who set the example for us by praying, "Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done" (Mark 14:36). "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). The key here is according to HIS will, not ours. God is pleased to heal when He knows it is appropriate.

As long as we remain on this earth, our ultimate hope is in the full and final restoration of our souls and bodies in heaven and not in a transient or temporary healing (Rom. 8:24-25). However, we're not in heaven yet. And because God is compassionate, because He cares for us, and because He delights in restoring the health of His children when it accords with His ultimate purpose, I feel no shame in asking you to please continue to pray fervently that God would be pleased to intervene on behalf of our daughter Lauren and heal her mind and body.

Tonight, I also request that you'd please pray the same thing for our friend.

SDG

Day 28: Lauren Needs Your Help (Part 2)

Lauren Graham Waller, July 2, 2011

Dear Friends,

A week ago we requested your help on Lauren's behalf. She has a couple pets who are badly in need of names. The entries submitted via email, Facebook, text message, the CaringBridge guestbook, or verbally now add up to about 170 total names. Which makes our task even more difficult.

Here's what we've done: We've thinned the herd, so to speak, to 20 names each based upon our family's preferences. Brad created a survey where you can vote for your favorite name.

Please select one name each for the Dog and the Monkey. The winners will be announced in one week, after which there will be a private naming ceremony and the winner will be awarded our undying gratitude.

Thanks (again) for your help,
SDG

Day 29: A Good Work

Lauren Graham Waller, July 3, 2011

For I am

confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will bring

it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6)

Charles Spurgeon told the story of a minister who was asked whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. "Well," said he, "I do not know much about that, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God, that where he has begun a good work he will carry it on until it is complete." In other words, if it was God who truly began the work, it will be completed. What God starts, He finishes. That is why every day we remind ourselves that

God is at work and He is in control. In this situation He is working for us and with us to perfect and bring to completion His good work in us.

We saw that no clearer this weekend than on Friday. We spoke first with one of the TBI (traumatic brain injury) professionals who is a PA for the doctors at the neurological institute. There has been enough progress in Lauren's physical stability that they've advised us to begin the planning process for discharge to a rehabilitation facility. Lauren is not ready for rehab yet – she can't respond verbally or physically to enough commands with enough consistency.

However, she's about at the point where she doesn't have to have her vitals continually monitored and that means she will have to be moved somewhere – certainly out of ICU. After speaking to the PA, it is our strong desire that Lauren will advance quickly enough that she can go directly from the hospital to a rehab facility and not have to take a detour through a skilled nursing facility. Please pray to that end.

We spoke next with the dietician who told us Lauren is still at 110 pounds, her exact weight when she was admitted to the hospital. In the 4 weeks she's been bedfast in Intensive Care, she has maintained weight through tube feeding. However, she has lost a significant amount of muscle mass. The plan is to slightly adjust her weight upward so she will have additional strength for physical therapy and will burn more energy.

The Speech Therapist was next on the docket. We were told that beginning next week Lauren's therapy at her current level will be a part of a PEDro (Physiotherapy Evidence Database) clinical trial. As we understand it, this means her therapy will be controlled and reviewed for therapeutic intervention and outcomes. At the present time she can not speak. She does make some guttural noises, especially during respiratory treatments, but she can't formulate words. For the most part she doesn't even really attempt to at this point – although tonight it seemed like she really wanted to.

Speaking of respiratory treatments, we've been in the room several times when they are performed. The therapist uses a metered Albuterol dose inhaler with a mask and spacer attached to a nebulizer machine. Her nose and mouth are covered and she is forced to breathe the treated air. The process is designed to improve lung function now that she is off the respirator and breathing entirely on her own. She usually reacts very violently and acts as if she is suffocating.

Lauren's breathing is still somewhat short and shallow, but is improving quite remarkably. Part of that is due to what the RN called shunting, which occurs because a portion of her lungs has no ventilation. This manifests itself as something similar to a hiccup in her lungs and diaphragm. The rate of gas exchange between the atmosphere and blood is trying to keep up with the body's metabolic demands. The shunting occurs due to the adjustment from being taken off the tracheotomy tube. When Lauren was using the tracheotomy, the distance from the trach (in her neck) to her lungs was shorter than the distance from her nose & mouth to her lungs. The space between her nose and the trach in her throat was effectively "dead space." Her body is now having to adjust to the additional length by drawing more air and more oxygen.

The most important meeting we had on Friday was a private conversation with Lauren's neurosurgeon. We were actually surprised – and pleased – at how much time he gave us. He shared a good bit about

his education and training. (He graduated from Southern Cal and told us he and Dr. Buckeye feel each others pain since both of their football programs are paying the price for "win at any price" coaches.) He discussed various experimental treatment options that are under review in the neurological community. He then gave us a very frank (and somewhat depressing) assessment of neurological rehabilitation facilities in general, along with some specific recommendations. At the end of the meeting he explained some of the particulars of Lauren's condition, with special attention on a couple of her unique behavioral tics.

We were reminded that we can't know for certain all that Lauren is hearing and processing; however, it is very likely much more than we realize – she just can't tell us yet. The strong recommendation by the entire medical team is that we keep the following code of conduct in mind while interacting in her room, either with her or other visitors:

1. Don't treat her like a child by using baby talk or a sing-song voice.

2. Don't whisper about her while standing around her.

3. Don't say anything about her in her presence that you wouldn't say if you were having lunch with her as a friend.

4. Don't say much about her accident, and don't say anything about brain injury or brain damage. (Her family has been coached as to what is appropriate to say and how often to say it.)

5. It is always entirely appropriate to tell her you love her, you care for her, you have been praying for her (specifically her increased strength, her recovery, her perseverance, and her faith in Christ), and what a blessing her life is, or has been, to you or to people you know.

We've already noticed distinct emotional responses from her and she feels extremely frustrated by her deficits, her appearance, and her complete dependence. Behaviors 1-4 either compound her frustration or lead her imagination to go to worst case scenarios that are neither productive nor accurate.

The neurosurgeon continued by telling us the rehabilitation facilities and therapists Lauren will have – speech, physical, occupational therapists – will give Lauren the tools and guidance she needs to improve. Her support group – her family, her friends, her church – will give her the inspiration and motivation she needs to improve.

However, there was one other thing the neurosurgeon told us was simultaneously deeply convicting and very heartening.

He said to us: Ultimately Lauren's outcome will be determined by the combined efforts of Lauren and God. God really began the process of recovery by sparing her life and sustaining her when she was unconscious and unable to help herself. Her rescue was completely out of her hands.

However, he said, her restoration to health and wholeness will be a cooperative effort between her and God. He is the only one who knows what she's capable of. But her growth and progress will be determined by whatever character traits she can put into practice now that were cultivated and ingrained inside of her prior to the accident. Was she self-disciplined, he asked? Persevering? Patient? Dependable?

As he went through that checklist, it struck me like a thunderclap. What he had said without realizing it was that Lauren's ultimate outcome will, in large measure, be determined by the fruit of the Spirit she had cultivated in her life. Her recovery will be decided, to a great degree, by the amount of growth in grace and sanctification she made prior to the accident. Her physical progress after the accident is considerably contingent upon her spiritual progress prior to the accident.

On Saturday, as the afternoon stretched into evening, we were joined by a young lady who was one of Lauren's first teachers at GIBC and who has now become one of her mentors and friends. This sweet woman has shared many of the ups and downs of Lauren's spiritual journey and she knows, as we know, Lauren is no paper saint. For all Lauren's virtues, both personal and spiritual (and there are many), we are unaware of any stained glass windows bearing her image. She'd be the first to tell you she's further down the road than when she started but still has many miles to go, physically and spiritually. As we spent a few moments together we reflected briefly on God's mercy in Lauren's life, not only in drawing her to faith in Christ, but enabling her to persevere in faith through the good times and bad. And we could not help but rejoice that God has graciously developed in her character the very qualities she will need to succeed in this physical struggle.

Lauren has a long way to go until she is "perfect." However, God has begun a wonderful work in her. And He and her (with our encouragement and assistance) will continue their cooperative

recovery effort in her body and her soul. We know God has begun a good work and therefore we have great hope. He never starts a recovery and restoration project that He doesn't complete.

SDG

Corners and Crosses

Lauren Graham Waller, July 4, 2011

I've wanted to post something here for a while now, but it's been more difficult to collect my thoughts than I initially thought. Many have asked with great concern about my well-being in addition to wanting to hear about Lauren's status, and for that I am truly grateful. I would like to thank all of you who have offered support to me and our family in any way, whether it's your prayers, kind thoughts, gifts, or help in any variety of ways. You are all so appreciated.

My Dad, in particular, has encouraged me for a while to post something here. He makes it look easy. It's not. I like to joke with him that he does such a good job with his mini-novels he scares me away. But after hearing many times how much everyone cares about Lauren and us, and how you look forward to reading about her, her status, and how this situation is affecting us all, I realize how important it is to keep this connection. I also want to let you know some of what I've been thinking.

You never know what thoughts will come to mind in times like these until you face times like these. At first the thoughts were more cosmic in scale, i.e. 'why did this happen to me?', 'was there a purpose in this? If so, what is it?' While these questions deserve consideration, they also have no quick and easy resolution. I've discovered the quicker I come to terms with the reality that these things take time and I will merely have to pray and wait and trust that the answers will come, the easier it will be.

As of late, the cosmic questions have begun to give way to memories, some distant and some not-so-distant. I recently began to think back upon the first memory I have of Lauren. When she was born I was approaching my fourth birthday, so I don't have many memories of that era. One of my first memories, however, is very distinct.

It was the springtime, so Lauren must have been about 6 months old. I was in the kitchen with Mom, playing with toy cars on the floor. I

remember Lauren was in the corner watching me play. At this point she couldn't get around real well; she sort of squirmed and did her best when she wanted to wiggle somewhere. I asked Mom, "why can't Lauren crawl?" Mom replied that Lauren was still growing and hadn't reached that point yet, but she would start crawling soon enough whenever she was ready.

This was unacceptable to my four-year-old self, because it occurred to me how horrible it would be to not be able to crawl or walk around. I decided I would dedicate my afternoon to teaching Lauren how to crawl. Little to my surprise, but shockingly to my Mom, Lauren was crawling like a pro within an hour or so. Mom couldn't believe it and immediately called Dad at work to excitedly tell him the news. Of course, I was as pleased as I could be about what we had accomplished that afternoon, but I also remember not feeling surprised. After all, crawling was pretty easy when you think about it, and Lauren didn't seem to have any difficulty, or reservations, about following whatever instructions I gave her. (The reservations would come later!)

I suppose it's not too surprising that memories like these come to mind now, as Lauren is starting all over again, first wiggling then crawling and then taking baby steps in her recovery.

It's hard for me to look at Lauren now and not see that beautiful blonde-haired baby, sitting in the corner, looking at those around her moving about with ease, wondering if and when she's going to get to join in. It's also hard not to feel like, even though I helped her escape that corner 19 year years ago, I am the one who put her back into it.

I know I shouldn't feel that way. But sometimes I do. And when the dark thoughts cloud my mind, I try to think about what Lauren would undoubtedly tell me if she could. Something about God being sovereign and how He has a plan for all this, even if we don't fully know what it is.

I read a book recently by Brennan Manning called Ruthless Trust. In the first few pages was a section that I resonated with, almost as if Lauren was reading it to me directly:

Unwavering trust is a rare and precious thing because it often demands a degree of courage that borders on the heroic. When the shadow of Jesus' cross falls across our lives in the form of failure, rejection, abandonment, betrayal,

unemployment, loneliness, depression, the loss of a loved one; when we are deaf to everything but the shriek of our own pain; when the world around us suddenly seems a hostile, menacing place – at those times we may cry out in anguish. "How could a loving God permit this to happen?" At such moments the seeds of distrust are sown. It requires heroic courage to trust in the love of God no matter what happens to us.

Although these words impact me personally, they apply to us all when we face hard questions that come with few easy answers.

Thank you for your love, concern, and prayers. As you (and we) hope and pray and do all we can to help Lauren crawl – no, walk! – out of her corner, join us in praying also for the "heroic courage" to trust in God, even while the shadow of the cross falls directly across our path.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
And why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
My salvation and my God.
—Psalm 42:11

Brad Graham

Days 30-31: Feelings

Lauren Graham Waller, July 6, 2011

As Lauren has been waking up, it has been an emotional journey. We've been fascinated to observe portions of her function and behavior begin to awaken and re-emerge, and we've witnessed a healing of general cognitive deficits such as information processing. Each improvement has elicited predictable emotional responses from us.

However, the emotion-processing regions of Lauren's brain, such as the frontal cortex, were injured badly in the accident. Because this part of her function was not mechanical and easily visible, we really hadn't given much thought to Lauren's emotional awakening. On Saturday, for the first time, she clearly showed emotion.

To this point, Lauren has become increasingly more alert, more active, more functional, albeit in a reduced capacity. Her actions and reactions have been perfunctory and emotionless. Of course, at the continual prompting of the medical team we've tried to be mindful of overstimulation – too many sounds and sights and smells, they told us,

elevate her heart rate and make her breathing more erratic. So especially when people come to visit, we keep our eyes on her as much as on the visitors to see how she's handling it.

A couple of Lauren's friends from PBA stopped by, one of whom was on the team that went to India in May. In the course of the conversation they asked about the naming of the pets. (We still have a couple days of voting; if you haven't voted, please do!) The young lady who was with Lauren in India blurted out a seemingly bizarre suggestion as a name for the sock monkey: Mera naam Frederique! "My name is Frederique" in Hindi. She then began to share a humorous story.

Apparently, one of the guys on the trip contracted some type of fungus on one of his hands. It was circular in shape and the amateur doctors in the group diagnosed it as ringworm. Lauren apparently believed this "pet" that attached itself so faithfully to the lad deserved an identity. When the question was posed as to what the critter would like to be called, Lauren responded in her best Hindi ringworm voice (with a cockamamie Cockney brogue): Mera naam Frederique! And in that impromptu christening ceremony, the "pet" was named.

We laughed.

And as we looked at Lauren's face, her eyes were glistening and she was smiling. Of course, her facial muscles on the left side are still weak so it was only half a smile. But it was distinct. As Proverbs 15:13 says, a glad heart creates a cheerful countenance, and Lauren was unmistakably tickled. Her amusement was evident, and the good cheer was crystal clear on her face.

We got another laugh later that evening when the RN came in – a caring yet crusty Old Soul who's been around since Hector was a pup. She chortled as she recounted for us how a freshly-minted nursing school graduate who'd been shadowing her came in the room and spied Lauren's Converse-clad feet. She gasped, aghast at the nerve, not only of Lauren's Neanderthal parents who would consider such a thing, but of the knuckleheaded staff that would lend tacit approval to the propagation of such a travesty. Lauren's a very sick girl, drop foot is a serious – and permanent – condition, after all, and such barefaced mockery of the healing profession is intolerable. Intolerable, I say! (in my best Cockney script.)

Old Soul then proceeded to inform Young Fussbudget that the "high top therapy" was standard operating procedure until very recently and is every bit as effective. And, she said, when you consider that the approved Orthotic Foot Drop Boot cost the insurance company about $750 and the high tops cost Santa about $50, it should cause one to pause and ask: who's really making a mockery of what? So, let's just move along, worry about something worth worrying about, and let the young lady enjoy her sneakers.

And all God's people said: Amen.

We saw marked emotion on another occasion over the weekend. A group of people gathered around Lauren's bed for the reading of a couple of Scripture passages. Lauren was undeniably engaged and not only heard, but had some understanding of, what was being said. When a prayer was offered she again closed her eyes and refrained from fidgeting. However, as the people were assembling around her a look of consternation creased her brow, her eyes narrowed slightly, and her lips pursed together in a bow. She was uneasy about something. We think we know what, but until she can tell us we can't be certain.

Since Brad and I work during the days our time with Lauren is limited to the evening visiting hours.

As this was a holiday weekend and we didn't have pressing daytime obligations, we wanted to avail ourselves of the opportunity to spend time with her during the day. Sunday morning we scurried out of church after the final "Amen" in order to get to the hospital as close as possible to when visiting hours began. The happiness hangover from Saturday evening spilled over to Sunday morning and we were quite lighthearted when we entered St. Mary's, passed the hospital security, and marched behind sergeant Elizabeth up the second-story stairs. (She forbids the use of elevators because "we don't exercise enough." Bah humbug.)

We entered Lauren's room, waved, and greeted her with a cheery hello. She didn't even look at us. Her head was down, her eyes were wet – from her own tears? – and she wouldn't make the effort to meet our gaze. Attempts to chat and cheer her up were fruitless. We asked the RN if she'd been given any medicine. No, we were told.

As the afternoon progressed her movements remained minimal, restricted to a bit of reflexive fidgeting and purposeful scratching of her head. A single repeated and heart-rending movement telegraphed the source of her melancholy. She would raise her right hand, rub the short hair on her head where she'd been shaved for the ICP monitor, and after feeling the course texture of the bristles and the staples, her hand would fall with a thud to the bed. After 5 or 10 minutes, she would do it again, almost (it seemed) to convince herself that this was her self. Her new self. Her broken self.

Everything about Lauren is antithetical to pretense. She's naturally attractive and she presents herself naturally: no façade, no preening, no outward image carefully-crafted with ornate plumage, haute couture, or two-hour coiffures. She is probably more of a 1 Peter 3:3 kind of girl than even the old apostle envisioned. However, those waning weekend hours made it apparent that Lauren had not only become aware of her functional deficits, she realized her appearance had been altered.

Even now she is still in a standard issue hospital gown, still has not had a bona-fide shower in 31 days, and can not get up and go to the restroom when her body – and her dignity – begs her to go. Whatever she knows of the details of her injury, she understands it has robbed her of the personal things that most defined her: her quick mind, her sharp wit, her lifetime of learning, her health, her personal autonomy and mobility. Her burgeoning awareness of her personal loss is soul-shattering, intimate and intense.

We spent Sunday afternoon helping Lauren grieve.

It was a very different grief than we felt the day of the accident. That was grief to be sure – the natural emotional response any one of us would have whenever we lose something valuable. And certainly, the looming expectation of losing Lauren's life tilted the lid on the fountain of our grief. But this was a different grief caused by a different loss, the loss of 20 years of selfhood.

One might think grief is an inappropriate emotion in this particular situation, at this particular time. After all, we know that God has willed that Lauren should live, at least for now. We also know that God is sovereign over Satan; whether someone is killed or kept alive, injured or healed, it all passes through the hands of the Lord. Knowing that is one thing. Staring full-faced at our final enemy is another. Death is in

league with the devil, the one who was a murderer from the beginning, and seeing that grisly hand tightening around the neck of our child is not something we can walk away from unaffected. The ancient foe did not take her life, but did get away with much of her earthly identity.

So, we grieved.

The gladness we felt this weekend has still been heavily outweighed by the sadness of the last four weeks: Heaviness of heart, sorrow and grief. We are comforted by knowing it is not a lack of faith or trust when we respond to turbulence with negative emotions. After all, Jesus did.

Well did the prophet express of our Lord, "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He was at Gethsemane preparing for His own rendezvous with the Reaper when He told his friends, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." Earlier, when Jesus saw Mary and her friends – who were His friends – weeping over the death of her brother, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And in perhaps the most poignant phrase recorded in Scripture, the writer records His reaction.

Jesus wept.

The writer of Hebrews expresses this remarkable truth about our Lord: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). The feelings of our infirmities can be pretty bad, but Jesus felt them, just as He was touched by the feelings of Martha and Mary grieving over the loss of their brother. He put His arms around them and He wept. And that was only a few minutes prior to His presentation of a living Lazarus.

I trust that's how we grieved too: not as those who don't know how the Lazarus story ended. We understand that darkness always comes before the dawn. Death always precedes a resurrection. The Son of Man had to be placed in a grave before He could triumph over it. Even we ourselves had to buried with Him through baptism into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too could rise to walk in newness of life.

On Monday morning, Lauren was a totally new girl. The physical therapists (PTs) were staggered by Lauren's steely resolve and fierce determination. They sat her up, checked the balance in her back,

leaned her forward, then checked her head control, arm strength and range of motion. Her neck, weak from atrophy and combined with pectoral and trapezius tightness, would not support the weight of her head. So it lay forward, sagging on her chest. The PTs asked her to raise her head. At first, she raised her limp right arm up and tried to push her head up. The PTs laughed and said, "No. Raise it without using your hands." She struggled and labored and inch by tiny inch she got her head up. "Again," they said. Again, she did it. Over and again they worked with her until her body was exhausted and she collapsed on the bed, completely worn out.

Tuesday, she refused to rest. It was as if someone had flipped a switch. She knew what she had to do and she wasn't going to let a weak body and an uncooperative brain deter her. Every time someone came into the room, it seemed, she wanted them to help her do more exercises. Help her do arm lifts. Help her do bicep curls. Help her raise her head and back from the bed. We finally had to quit last night because whenever we'd hold her hand to, you know, just hold her hand, she'd seize the hand – and the opportunity – to use it as a bar to help her lift herself one more time.

We were energized by her enthusiasm! At the end of the evening we unveiled a surprise we had for her. I had swung by the house in Hobe Sound on the way to the hospital and retrieved her glasses. We put them on her face and immediately her surroundings came back into focus. She was looking at us, looking around the room, looking at her temporary world with eyes full of wonder. We turned on the TV that hung over the door to see how she'd respond. Brad and I suggested ESPN. Elizabeth suggested Animal Planet.

Fifteen minutes later Lauren was still watching the wildlife in Yellowstone, totally mesmerized by some broad-antlered bull moose that weighs over 1,000 pounds. We were almost giddy.

It occurred to us that this had been a grueling day for our girl. It was getting late, she was visibly fatigued. We were ready to shut off the TV, put her glasses away and let her call it a night. She wouldn't let us. She swatted our hands away from her glasses. "Aren't you tired?" Elizabeth asked. She couldn't speak, but she wouldn't look at us either. "Sis," I said, "will you squeeze my hand if you want us to leave the TV on for you?" Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, she replied.

We could hardly contain our emotions – smiles and watery eyes all around. It felt good, really good, to share in Lauren's joy. Of course we're completely aware of the gap between where Lauren is now and where God's ultimately going to take her. But the mystery of redemption, and the gap between our justified and glorified state, is that very same laughable incongruity.

That wonder must permeate Paradise, don't you think? If there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, it's no great leap to imagine quite a happy hullabaloo when the emotional journey of a handful of those repentant sinners takes a turn, at least for a night, in the direction of delight. Psalm 147:11 says, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love." That's us, those who hope in Him. And that's Him, taking great pleasure in us.

I'm pretty sure they don't have rubber chickens in heaven, or sock monkeys named Frederique for that matter. But I do think I know what the Lord did last night while He was watching over His girl Lauren.

Jesus laughed.

SDG

Days 32-34: Of Ephiphanies and Miracles

Lauren Graham Waller, July 9, 2011

After the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they went through a season of murmuring and discontent because of a lack of water. The water they did find was bitter and undrinkable. God showed Moses a certain tree which, when cast into the waters, turned the waters sweet. As the people drank, they were refreshed and strengthened for the rest of the long journey ahead. Their grumbling was turned to gratitude as their confidence in God – and their leader, Moses – was renewed.

It was a time of testing. God said He was putting them to the test to see if they would listen to His voice and be obedient to His will. If they did, He said, He would not afflict them with any of the diseases He had brought upon the Egyptians. Why? Because "I am Jehovah-Raphe", the Lord your Healer.

The word "raphe" appears almost seventy times in the Old Testament, and means "to restore," or "to heal," as a physician, not merely in the physical sense but in the moral and spiritual sense. Jehovah God

pledged to His people, conditioned upon their trust and obedience, to always be their Healer.

Our Lord, the Great Physician, still heals His people of their spiritual illnesses – the disease of sin – through a trust in Him that is evidenced by obedience to His Word. He also heals our physical illnesses. Sometimes He heals by the natural recuperative power of the body. Sometimes He heals dramatically and immediately and supernaturally. Sometimes He heals through the agency of doctors or medicine. In all cases, He heals His children ultimately and completely at the resurrection. But whether we are sick in spirit, soul, or body we call out to Jehovah-Raphe. He is still the Lord our Healer.

Friends and neighbors: The events are transpiring so quickly in Lauren's healing process that the information I begin typing becomes obsolete before I finish.

Thursday AM we got the word from the doctor that Lauren has been cleared for release. As she was not eligible as of Thursday to be admitted to a rehab facility yet, we were instructed to seek out a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) to admit her for a few weeks until she could reasonably do the following things:

1. Speak (or communicate in some fashion),

2. Assist with her own physical therapy (PT),

3. Handle three hours of rigorous PT a day,

4. Hopefully eat, chew and swallow, and

5. Hopefully put some weight on her feet.

We were told by the orthopedist that, while Lauren's pelvis is healing nicely, she still has to be off her feet for another 3-5 weeks. So that's one strike against us. However, Lauren has been determined the last couple of days to do all she can do to knock out the other items on the list.

On Wednesday afternoon, Lauren was able to sit up in a wheelchair long enough that some friends took her for a ride and let her escape the confines of the hospital for a few minutes. They took the elevator down to the first floor, through the coffee shop to the garden patio area outside. For 10 minutes or so she got to feel the fresh air and a

hint of sunshine. It was hard to read on her face the full extent of her enjoyment because she was already pretty tired.

It didn't take long to figure out, though, how much that brief excursion only increased her wanderlust. We became aware of just how much when Elizabeth got to Lauren's room Thursday morning. During the night they had to change her bed to one with rails around the entire perimeter because she was trying so hard to climb out. We found out later in the day that they had also considered giving her medication for Parkinson's because her hands trembled so much. However, after reviewing the evidence it appears it's a condition that comes and goes, mostly after therapy. They now believe she is expending so much effort in her attempts to get stronger that the trembling is caused by overexertion, which dissipates after she rests for a while.

One bright spot during the day Thursday occurred when several friends commandeered the room and took over Lauren's beauty treatment as their personal project. They took several Chux underpads and put them under her back, shoulders and head. They raised the bed to an almost-upright position. One of them beat a hasty retreat down to the gift shop to purchase some shampoo. Warm water was run into a wash basin, and using a cup to pour water over Lauren's hair, the team performed an emergency shampoo. Afterwards her hair was combed out and braided, and Lauren was a brand new, squeaky clean girl. That single act of kindness brightened Lauren's disposition for the rest of the day – and did her parent's old hearts a world of good.

A couple other friends capped off the effort by giving Lauren a foot massage and rubbing her feet and legs with lotion. Others sprayed her with body spray and made her smell pretty. Another friend earlier in the week had given her some pretty pink fuzzy socks which she thoroughly enjoyed. However, when a friend returned from Michigan and brought her some vintage, home-grown maize and blue argyle socks, the pink socks were replaced pretty promptly. In fact, Lauren has worn them for three straight days now and won't let us change them out – yet.

Late in the afternoon Lauren had the staples removed from her head from the ICP bolt placement. There is a large red scar there – maybe ½" x 1" and we don't know yet what scarring will remain permanently. Lauren removed the patch from over the tracheotomy hole in her neck and the RN left it off for a while. It has not healed much and is contributing to Lauren's difficulties speaking. The Speech Therapist

said Lauren has tried to speak but air leaking through her throat has probably spooked her – either because the sound of her voice was different, the effect was off-putting, or the effort was (and is) painful.

Thursday evening we walked into Lauren's room and without even waving hello she proudly held up a bright red resistance stretch band that had been given to her by her PT. I asked her if Dr. Buckeye had been sneaking in and trying to wear down her resistance. She smiled. Not just a half smile, but a full toothy smile! We laid aside our grievances long enough to go through another thorough workout of her arms, neck, and shoulders.

We were curious as to whether she could read or not. I took a notebook and wrote in large block letters (why do I keep pretending she's a 2nd grader?): "Hi Lauren. I love you. Will you squeeze my hand if you can read this." Before I even got the page fully in front of her, she had reached out, grabbed my hand and squeezed it. We spent the better part of the next hour letting her read entries on her Facebook page that I called up for her on my phone. She was thrilled, as were we.

Friday morning dawned with the prospect of us having to take some time to interview SNFs. During the day Thursday I'd contacted some friends and former colleagues in the industry who gave us very helpful recommendations as to which facilities were highly regarded with top-shelf staff and administrators. We'd narrowed them down to three in Martin/Palm Beach counties. We planned to take half a day and personally visit them Friday afternoon.

When the Physiatrist examined Lauren on Friday morning, he was so astonished the entire schedule changed. Word had gotten around that Lauren is a special case that defies explanation. But even after seeing it first-hand on Friday he was like the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon: "I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me." He told us it's as though "Lauren had an epiphany" and has catapulted forward in her improvement.

Just a side note: It has been fascinating to hear medical professionals who live and breathe and work in this environment grasping for words to explain Lauren's progress. Not only have they told us her improvement defies their typical scientific and medical categories, they've done so by appealing to the vocabulary of the metanormal and the supernatural. We've heard the word "miraculous" a lot; this was the first "epiphany" we've heard. I've wondered often what it must have

been like to witness Jesus' ministry first hand. And while nothing that's happened to Lauren is qualitatively anything like what Jesus and the apostles did, this particular doctor's animated and enthusiastic report was reminiscent of the incident in which Jesus healed the paralytic and told him to take up his mat and go home. Not only did the healed and forgiven man sing praises to God, but those who observed were filled with awe and gave praise to God also and said, "We've seen amazing things here today!"

Two days ago, the MD told us, Lauren measured between a 3 and 4 on the RLA (Rancho Los Amigos) Cognitive Scale for coma and brain injury patients. ("0" is totally non-responsive; "8" is totally purposeful and appropriate in all actions/responses. "4" is the baseline for acceptance into most rehabilitation facilities.) He said that according to his assessment now, she is a solid "4" on all aspects with some being as high as a "6". He said that he has now signed off on her release from the hospital, as well as her need to make an interim stop at a SNF! As soon as she's accepted by a neurological rehab facility, she will be released. If this actually goes through, it is another remarkable answer to one of the prayers of our heart. Moving Lauren out of this room could take up to a week since the rehab acceptance process is barely underway.

Nobody, and I mean nobody – in any department or in any fashion, expected our girl to improve this much this rapidly. Category-defying, indeed.

When the Speech Therapist started performing vocal exercises, she asked Elizabeth if Lauren had ever sung before. Elizabeth noted that she had. So the therapist asked her to whisper the words of the vocal scale. "Say 'Do'," she said. "Do," Lauren whispered. Then, without prompting, Lauren began to whisper, "Re – Mi – Fa – So – La – Ti – Do." She can't get the words out yet because the hole in her throat has not healed. But she recalled the words of the scale and began whispering them on her own initiative. Again, it reminds us that not only did they not anticipate being able to take the trach out so quickly, but nobody expected her to be attempting to speak this soon after removing the trach. Someone has put her on a fast-track for recovery and she is bypassing all conventional expectations and limitations, smiling and waving at all the bystanders on her way past.

Of course, there could be a natural explanation. Lauren discovered prior to taking the trip to India in May that there was a local pastor

there who was burdened about the lack of essentials among the local children – things as simple as eyeglasses and multi-purpose vitamins. The mother of one of the guys on the team had access to these thing and each team member was able to transport eyeglasses and a huge gallon-sized bottle of vitamins called Vine Vites for Kids, supplies from the Vitamin Project by Vine International in which they provide essential nutrition, medicine and vitamins for undernourished kids around the world.

The bottles of vitamins were quite distinctive – white, large, and disturbing, if you attribute a creepy personification to them. As some of the team members apparently did. [You can see the team holding these white bottles in one of Lauren's Facebook pictures.] One of the young men took to holding a bottle of Vine Vites, making a creepy face, then hiding behind the bottle whilst hissing in a distorted whisper: Vinnne Viiites. At some point the entire team started making faces every time a bottle of vitamins made a cameo appearance, and Lauren introduced what became the universal Vine Vite hand signal: A Delhi-ghetto twin-Vee salute replete with a bunny-faced, bottom-lip-biting sneer.

One of Lauren's team members was in the hospital room today attempting to pull up pictures and videos from the trip to see if Lauren had any memories of the trip. As soon as the words "Vine Vites" escaped her lips, Lauren flashed the Twin-Vees and gave the grin. [See attached picture] There is now a rumor afoot that these Vine Vites have mysterious recuperative powers and by merely holding the bottle and flashing the signal, brain function is exponentially increased and vitality and strength is enhanced to near-Samsonian proportions. If this is true, and if you are a Philistine, I'd advise you to not come visit Lauren any time soon.

However, if there is any other explanation for the remarkable recovery and progress in her healing, it must be attributed to the One whom even the doctors acknowledge gives "epiphanies" and performs "miracles" – which they admit openly and without shame that they can not do. Lauren and I (and you) know Him. At times when we least expect it, He turns our sorrow to joy and makes our bitter waters sweet. His name is Jehovah-Rapha.

SDG

Days 35-36: Robins and Sparrows

Lauren Graham Waller, July 12, 2011

"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

We knew this day would come: the day the money ran out and the hospital notified us they had exhausted all insurance policy limits. Lauren is cleared for release, Elizabeth was told, and we may have to take her home even though Lauren still requires 24-hour care and desperately needs in-patient rehab.

This day, more than any other, we battled anxiety. Which is not to say there hasn't been anything to worry about until now.

- During the first 24 hours we didn't know whether Lauren would live or die from the trauma of the accident.
- As she made it past Day 1, we didn't know if she would survive the brain
- bleeding and swelling.
- As day 3, then 5, passed, we didn't know whether she would succumb to secondary causes – hemorrhaging, edema, pneumonia, staph infection.
- As we passed day 10, then 15, we wondered if she'd ever awaken from her coma.
- As she made it – open-eyed – past day 20, then 25, we wondered whether she'd remain in a permanent vegetative state.
- Then we crested day 30, then day 32, and we wondered if she'd ever have significant functionality in her arms or legs or brain.

And now as we've passed days 35 and 36, Lauren is demonstrating remarkable capacity; the professionals are optimistic that she can achieve heretofore unanticipated outcomes if she can get into rehab. Those initial days of fears and tears which led to days of shock and numbness have recently given way to determination and hope.

Therein lies the rub – the fuel for the flame of our anxiety.

It was one thing to wonder if our girl would ever return to anything approximating the young lady we all knew and loved as "Lauren." It's quite another to finally hear those oh-so-sweet words of there being a great chance for a remarkable recovery, then have one door after another after another shut in our faces.

Thus far, every in-patient rehabilitation facility to which the hospital has applied has denied her application. Same reason at all of them: "Insurance benefits exhausted."

Early on in the process we were told this type of injury crushes most families under the weight of devastating debt. In fact, we were told, we should expect nothing less than to be bankrupted by the process. We were also told that our best hope for Lauren's recovery was to hope for some kind of a lawsuit settlement to finance the recovery and rehabilitation. That, of course, will not be a factor in our case.

The average cost for the acute care and rehabilitation of a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) costs some $3,000,000, with the total cost of many exceeding 3-4x that amount. That's direct cost, which does not include the indirect costs of lost earnings, work time and productivity, as well as the costs associated with personal or social services. Those costs add upwards of $1,900,000 more over a lifetime. All of this is the reason that, unless there are strong mitigating circumstances, rehab facilities don't waste their time with "private pay" cases. Why take patients whose very injury places them in a category which (a) has little prognosis for significant improvement and (b) has statistically almost zero probability of making even a dent in the total medical cost that will have to be absorbed by a facility that is likely losing money already?

Which begs the question regarding worry: Why? Why worry when those types of numbers are completely out of reach? Isn't that kind of hurdle too high to even waste time fretting about? If one is predisposed to panic or to succumb to the darkness when the outlook is bleak, these are the kinds of situations in which many wish (in the immortal words of Job's wife) to "curse God and die."

Lauren has made so much progress thus far. And there's so much hope for so much more. But there's this trifling matter of a couple million dollars – give or take. So we worry instead. Is there anything that

churns out more anxiety than stretching and stretching until hope is at the tip of your fingers, then having the current shift directions and the wind slowly carries it out of reach?

Anxiety is so common to the human condition that we rarely consider it. That is, until we head to the pharmacist for the elixir to cure its ill effects: tension headaches, peptic ulcers, tight neck and shoulders, nausea. Of course, anxiety does not manifest itself in a single, solid color but in varying shades. We all have different levels of anxiety and it's tough at times to discern between legitimate concern and inappropriate worry. However, to those of us who claim the name of Christ, our Lord has a simple and stern word: "Do not be anxious for your life... do not be anxious for tomorrow." The apostle Paul repeats this command: "Be anxious for nothing."

Note to newcomers: This is the part of the update in which I preach to myself. You're welcome to listen in if you'd like.

Anxiety and frustration and worry are in a category which Jerry Bridges calls, "Respectable Sins." Most of us who claim to be Christians have gotten so caught up in the "major" sins of our society – which we, of course, are not guilty of committing – so that in our preoccupation with everyone else's sins we've lost sight of our own: jealousy, anger, pride, ingratitude, selfishness, greed, envy, impatience, intemperance, anxiety.

Anxiety almost looks like it shouldn't belong on that list. After all, if we're worried about something that just means we care. Right? Not if we've heard the birds.

Three times in His "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus said His followers are not to worry. Anxiety is no "respectable" sin because, at its core, it is unbelief. Anxiety reveals that, at that particular moment, we are not trusting that God loves us, God cares for us, God sees us, and that He is causing everything in our life to work together for our good and His glory.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble
(Matthew 6:25-34).

Jesus tells us it makes no sense for us to be anxious. It is useless. It is faithless. And it is heathenish (as Spurgeon would say). This passage prompted one poet to pen this little refrain he "overheard in an orchard":

Said the robin to the sparrow,
"I really do not know
Why it is these human beings rush about and worry so."
Said the sparrow to the robin,
"I think that it must be
That they have no Heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me."
He that has ears to hear, let Him her what God is saying through the birds.

It is possible to misapply Jesus' exhortation and assume nothing is required of us. Like the pious monk who was too spiritual to handle a hoe or spade, when the brotherhood assembled for dinner they did not call him because they rightly concluded he was too spiritual to eat. That is why we've been on the phone every available minute:

- Talking to friends and colleagues and acquaintances who have connections in the medical community,

- Calling Rehabilitation facilities and their representatives to see what programs they have available for those in this situation, and

- Contacting every government and advocacy group possible to piece together every available bit of help.

If there is a bush to beat or a stone to overturn, we will find it. The sage says it is the sluggard – the lazy fool – who sits and wishes while the wise man works diligently. One gets nothing; the other is richly supplied (Proverbs 13:4). Faith is not presumption; trust is incompatible with idleness and inactivity. Hard work and wise planning are generally the prudential means by which God bestows His blessings.

However, in passing I might suggest another temptation to misapply Jesus' words. That is in an attempt to decrease anxiety by laying up and hoarding as many resources and possessions as is possible. Please, by all means, make sure you (and especially your kids of driving age) are not uninsured or underinsured! It is wise to give our earthly responsibilities due attention. At the same time, though, Jesus deals specifically with the matter of laying up treasure on earth. An excessive concern with seeking one's ultimate security in big insurance policies and fat portfolios bespeaks a lack of faith in our Father. And there are some accidents which, no matter how wisely you plan, you can ever really be prepared for.

The lesson we've been trying to learn during the anxiety of this day is that God is glorified by our dependence on Him. All we have to do is look to Him and listen to what the birds are telling us. Do we really understand – do we really believe – that not a single sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of our Heavenly Father? Do we really believe we are much more value to Him than they?

If so, how do we cure anxiety? The answer Jesus gave was simple: Fix and focus on your priorities. Seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness first, and God will personally attend to all these other things.

But there's an additional answer too - one more antidote to anxiety we can apply while we 're waiting: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). Recall God's goodness and faithfulness in the past. That will, in turn, help guard against anxiety about the future. Be grateful for God's grace that has brought us safe thus far, and that will give us confidence in the promise that His grace will lead us home.

This morning, Lauren was a bit out of it. Two straight days of wall-to-wall company during the day and interruptions every couple of hours

during the night had taken their toll. She was not very engaged with Elizabeth or energetic during therapy.

However, as a couple friends started trickling in and began brewing their special blend of good cheer, Lauren started to perk up a little bit. She got another wheelchair ride outside for about 15 minutes in the sunshine on the patio. She then had her hair shampooed – the second time in four days – and her hair French braided. After that she was lotioned, spritzed and sprayed. By this time, though, she was so exhausted from the effort she was almost too weary to get back into bed.

Before she closed her wide eyes and waved good-bye to the rest of the world, Lauren had a message to everyone who had done their bit to brighten her day. She wanted them to know what she felt in her heart but wasn't able yet to verbalize. One of the ladies printed out a couple pages of printed words (50 of them) that Lauren could use to communicate. Lauren took the papers, looked them over carefully, and found the word she wanted.

"Grateful," it said.

I sometimes ask myself why I insist on crawling upon a cross of my own making and allowing myself to be crucified between two thieves: a past I can't change and a future I can't control? God has shown Himself so remarkably faithful during Days 1 through 35. (I only have to read my own journal.) So, why do I get so anxious and worry that He will suddenly quit caring or lose control on Day 36?

As a little encouraging news began to trickle in this evening, Jesus' words played over and over in my head: Stop worrying! Don't be anxious about tomorrow. Your Father, who arrays the lilies in a splendor greater than Solomon's, and whose eye is on every single sparrow, is watching over Lauren too.

I'm looking forward to seeing exactly when and how and through whom God will work this all out. But tonight I know tomorrow's going to be alright. A little bird told me so.

SDG

Brief Rehab Update (revised)

Lauren Graham Waller, July 13, 2011

More details will be forthcoming; however, we wanted you all to know that Lauren is now in room 2309 at the neurological rehabilitation wing of St. Mary's Medical Center. She was moved in last night (Tuesday), will be evaluated by the staff today (Wednesday) and will officially begin rehab tomorrow (Thursday) morning.

Yes, right now is an appropriate time to give thanks to the Lord!

The means by which this all came about is one of those wonders that we'll likely never fully know while our understanding is hemmed in by our finitude. However, the more we see God at work, the more wonderful we see Him to be. This is quickly becoming one of those stories of which poets write and psalmists sing. Meditating on how God has worked, not just in the history of His people but in our own story throughout this ordeal, has become a never-ending source of appreciation and amazement.

Three quick things:

1. Lauren has been placed again on restricted visiting hours: 4-9 PM. Shewill be working in the mornings and early afternoons with the therapistsand they insist on being uninterrupted. Weekend visiting hours are 12-9PM. We've again been advised that since she is being significantly stressed during the day, we must be conscious of not permitting sleep deprivation (which can affect neuro response and recovery) and overstimulation in the afternoon and evenings. If she gets fidgety, minimally responsive, yawns a lot, or gets tired during your visit, it may be time to cut it short.

2. The financial arrangements are in the process of being worked out. We
will still be responsible for quite a sizeable tally. However, it will be MUCH more manageable – probably totaling in the hundreds of thousands instead of the millions.

3. We are finalizing the arrangements necessary to get the fundraising efforts rolling. There will hopefully be an update on that within the next 1-3 days.

Please accept our sincere and heartfelt thanks for your prayers on our behalf as we have shared our struggles and our joys. Your helpful suggestions, encouraging words, and your countless tokens of kindness have been a healing grace to us.

Again, more details to come. But right now, seriously, you need to pause and join us in praising our great God for the inexpressible faithfulness and mercy He has shown us again.

SDG

PSALM 111: Great are the Works of the Lord!
1 Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
2 Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.
3 Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.
4 He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful.
5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.
6 He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.
7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;
8 they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!
10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Pet Naming Contest | WINNERS!

Lauren Graham Waller, July 14, 2011

The creativity and imagination of a few fortunate people has now etched their names into the pantheon of pet-naming immortality. And so, without further ado, the top 5 names suggested for Lauren's pets which simultaneously garnered the most votes and launched the name-suggestors into the orbit of our undying gratitude, are:

For the Doggy (in alphabetical order):

1. Bilbo
2. Englebert
3. Hope
4. Pavlov

5. Sir Fluffalot

For the Monkey (in alphabetical order):

1. Bongo
2. Darwin
3. Kong
4. Lulu
5. Socks

The names you selected for Lauren's pets are (*drum roll please*): Hope the Doggy, and Bongo the Monkey.

Hope as the name for the Doggy was suggested by Les Henson and Aleesha Langley. (It was suggested as a name for the Monkey by John Knapp and Diedre Stutsman). Bongo as the name for the Monkey was suggested by Lenore Ekar and Nancy Parnell.

If any of you winners (of our contest, not Charlie Sheen's) would like to send me your mailing address (email it to 4LaurenGraham@gmail.com) we do have a little token we'd be glad to send you. Please include your name along with your address in the body of the email.

Thank you ALL for participating! Over 80 people contributed suggestions, and over 300 people responded by actually voting on the survey. We had a total blast with this – and Lauren contributed more than a few smiles as we discussed some of the suggestions.

Up next: A poetry contest! Stay tuned for details... Our love to you all.

SDG

Fundraising Update

Lauren Graham Waller, July 15, 2011

Good news!

We have tabbed the person who will be spearheading all of the fundraising efforts on Lauren's behalf. Her name is **Karen Vaughn**.

She is a delightful person, a true professional, and someone with whom you'll thoroughly enjoy working. Karen can be reached the following two ways:

- By **email**: 4LaurenGraham@gmail.com By cell
- **phone**: 772.214.7224.

To those of you who have contacted me privately: I have forwarded your information to her and she will be contacting you directly.

A lot of friends will be required to make the overall campaign a success. Every fundraising event will require a team to help with budget planning, publicity planning, site planning, donor recognition, etc. Karen is glad to organize or mobilize any of you who wish to volunteer to assist.

Karen is also delighted to accept suggestions you may have for businesses, individuals or organizations that might be interested in helping.

If you are a business owner who would like to partner with us – or have influence with an owner who would, let us know if you're interested in sponsorships, selling branded products, purchase plus, co-branding, or even donating funds, products/services, marketing services, facilities or volunteers.

When you contact Karen, please let her know the following:

1. Your location,
2. Your contact information,
3. Your connection to Lauren and the Graham family (high school friend, college friend, church, work, community, etc.), and
4. How you specifically are willing and able to help.

NOTE: For those who wish to give a cash gift directly to help defray Lauren's medical expenses, we will gladly accept your donation. However, we still need a little more time. We have been in the process of setting up a "Supplemental Needs Trust." We've discovered it is more complicated than a typical trust because it must be drafted to

conform with certain State and Federal regulations and steer clear of others. However, it is necessary for us in order to keep the gifts from creating an undue burden either on Lauren or our family because of tax consequences. It also is designed to preserve any Social Security benefits, Medicaid, or other public benefits. Please give us a few more days and we'll announce that as soon as possible!

Thank you for your support.

Days 38-40: Guilt & Grace

Lauren Graham Waller, July 15, 2011

How is one supposed to feel if they have received grace? Or let me ask it this way: How is one to feel if they have received grace that someone else did not?

We've become more and more aware of this curious conjunction of realities in the last six weeks. At every turn, it seems, we have received favor from the Lord that is impeccably-timed, totally undeserved, and lavish to the point of extravagance. And then I see others pray just as fervently who are no doubt much more deserving, and yet God – in His sovereign wisdom – chooses not to intervene for them as He has for us.

Not only have we seen more people die than live in the trauma ward, we've seen fewer people advance to rehab than those who do not. There are those who, for a myriad of reasons, don't have advocates or friends or associations as we do and their chance at recovery and rehabilitation never comes. At every juncture along this journey we've been shown grace. So many others have not. And sometimes I feel a little embarrassed that we rejoice while others weep. Who would expect guilt to accompany grace?

Lauren has now finished her third day in rehab. While at this point she seems to have adapted well, it didn't look that way at the start.

The first day was evaluation. They performed a behavioral analysis to see how she responded (appropriately or inappropriately) to various stimuli. They wanted to determine what kind of post-coma behavior issues they might have to work with.

They then performed a physical analysis to see what kind of strength and control she has in her body. The first day they wanted her to be

able to sit upright in a wheelchair for three consecutive hours – which she did. She also was able to move the wheelchair about 15 feet on her own. They also tested arm and leg strength and control. She's a very weak girl after being immobile for six weeks.

Afterward they also performed a cognitive analysis to determine what kind of deficits she has in memory, problem-solving, attention, planning and judgment. The program is a multidisciplinary one where all of the therapies are integrated.

Lauren obviously was ready for therapy the day before she began. However, we got nervous when we saw how she performed during analysis and evaluation. She seemed lethargic, unresponsive, and very incoherent. There was talk of reinserting a catheter. She was fidgety again, pushing and pulling on her ex-fix, ripping the patch off her neck that was covering the not-quite-healed tracheotomy hole, even with consistent pleading for her not to do so. She had trouble with basic cognitive skills: unable to sequence, to remember things that just happened, to process basic information. All this was in stark contrast to the day before. By the end of the evaluation we wondered if her "backsliding" might cause her to perhaps forfeit her rehab, even though the director promised the day before that her spot was secure until she had received the maximum benefit from the program. (Is it appropriate to pray that they have a Calvinist running the rehab unit?)

We were relieved to hear later that Lauren's behavior is typical for emerging coma patients. New surroundings, new faces, new voices, new and increased demands, mental and physical fatigue – all serve to disorient and depress new rehab patients. Lauren certainly fit the profile. It was a long day that began full of promise but ended in a moody tiredness.

With the new mercies of a new day, however, came a new resolve and a new Lauren. It was also the day Lauren found her voice. I received a call in the early afternoon from Elizabeth but when I answered the phone it wasn't my wife speaking. I heard a soft but firm voice say, "Hi dad." Lauren was on the phone. After she answered a few yes or no questions, she told me she loved me and her mom took the phone to finish the conversation.

Apparently, wherever she'd left her voice she also left her appetite. Because when she found the one, she discovered the other as well. Elizabeth said Lauren had just eaten her first "real" food in 40 days –

applesauce and a cookie. Apparently she gulped them down so fast she had to be cautioned about actually chewing her food! She was unable to drink anything without it being thickened first, but it's a start.

I said to myself: Now this is more like it! This is a Graham girl! After all, would you expect anything less from someone who obviously has Lauren's superior genetic inheritance, extraordinary intellect, unsurpassed academic achievement, and a spirituality so sublime as to be almost beatific?

After we got the news that Lauren was accepted into rehab we were a swirling cauldron of emotions – bliss, thankfulness, disbelief, relief. And for half a second we – or more accurately, I – was tempted to think it was pretty much the result of unrelenting effort, strategic planning, smart networking and timely execution. Who needs grace, really?

As I was hurrying to the hospital after work, the Lord apparently thought I needed reminding of who is whom. Elizabeth had locked the keys in the car in West Palm Beach so she was carless all day. She asked if I could stop by the house and get a spare. Of course, when she needs a little grace I'm just the guy to give it, even though it put me about 20 minutes behind schedule. But who's counting?

After performing my act of sacrificial service, I decided to drive through Wendy's for fast food so that I could eat on the fly. However, it took them 14 minutes to finally get my spicy chicken nuggets to me. I had to drive through the Drive-Thru twice and would have driven off but they already had my $6. And I wasn't leaving without at least $6 worth of superlicious chicken nuggets! When I tore into the package, not only did I discover those little treats were drenched in spicy barbeque sauce, so was bag and the container, and then my shirt and pants. To add insult to injury, the fowl was... foul! The nuggets were nasty.

After pulling over and doing the best I could to clean up with a few napkins in the glove box left over from Tropical Smoothie, I tore off down the road to try to make up for a serious loss of time. That worked well until I saw the blue flashing lights in my rear-view mirror. The patrolman said I was doing 49 in a 35 (which was 45 on the last sign I saw). By the time I was on my way again, I wasn't even surprised when every stoplight turned red just for me.

Yes, I had to stop at the crossing for a train. Why do you ask?

I made it to the hospital an hour behind schedule. I got to the room, said hello to the family, and readied my weary self to sit down at the side of Lauren's bed on a chair with a few soft pillows on it. As I properly positioned my posterior portion, the pillows joined in a conspiracy with the chair to propel me forward onto the floor. It was bad enough that my wife and son gleefully guffawed at me, sitting at the side of a hospital bed on the floor. But when I looked up I discovered Lauren adding to the ignominy by using her newly-found voice to chortle at my calamity. Oh, the humanity!

Oh, the humility.

I was quickly reminded that I am a Graham guy. Were not the Lord graciously providing and sustaining us every step of this journey – at just the right time, in just the right way and through just the right people, our best efforts would have us busting our keister, making a mess of ourselves, and never quite being there on time.

Not only is God's grace sufficient, God's grace is essential. If He dispensed His blessings on the basis of merit, I can show you in the span of one single hour just where I'd be. But thankfully this is not a matter of simple justice. It's pure, unmitigated, unadulterated grace.

We rejoice and give Him praise for the favor that has spared Lauren and attended to her recovery needs. We feel compassion toward those whom God has apportioned a greater measure of suffering and hardship than we have faced. Even though He may have withheld this grace, He has not withheld all grace. One of the ways He may have ordained to extend His mercy to them is by having us help them bear their burden and point them toward the Christ of the cross – and of the empty tomb.

I know I shouldn't feel guilty about receiving grace, although sometimes I do. I think it's because whenever I'm tempted to consider the notion that any favor I receive is because of something I am, or something I've done, the Lord has shown me (and everyone around me) in graphic and plenary detail that I'm no better than those who haven't received it.

That doesn't mean I'm seeking further hardship to sort of even things out! Trouble has a way of reaching my destination before I do then tripping me as I walk through the door. If there's any doubt about who really needs grace, the Lord decided to punctuate the point by giving

Lauren her voice back just so she could laugh as she watched me fall.

SDG

Days 41-43: No Place Like Home

Lauren Graham Waller, July 18, 2011

"What are you doing out here?"

To Elizabeth's question, Lauren's eyes opened wide but her mouth remained shut.

When Elizabeth arrived at the hospital yesterday she was surprised to see Lauren in her wheelchair sitting out at the nurse's station. As the nearby nurse saw Elizabeth quizzing Lauren and getting no reply, she walked over and interjected with a wry smile: "Lauren and I are keeping each other company this morning."

The nurse proceeded to tell us Lauren had repeatedly been trying to get out of bed and in the process was putting herself at considerable risk. Not only could she hamper the healing of her pelvis (she's not supposed to put any weight on it at all for another 3 weeks or more), but were she to fall and hit her head on the wall, the floor, or even the side of the bed, the results could be catastrophic. With each of Lauren's attempts to clamber out of bed, the nurse continued to ask: "Are you thirsty?" "Do you need to use the restroom?" "Is anything wrong?"

"No," Lauren finally replied. "I just want to go home."

More and more lately Lauren is feeling a deep sense of homesickness. She eats and sleeps and lives in Room 2309 at St. Mary's. But that's not "home." With no perceptible provocation her heart aches for something she doesn't have, someone who's not present, someplace she can't describe to us.

Emptiness? Heaviness? Sadness? We don't know - and she can't really tell us.

Coziness? Security? Wagging tails and wet noses? A place where she won't be poked or prodded or pushed? Whatever the place or person or thing she's looking for, there's only one place it can be found.

At home.

Perhaps there are some factors we do understand that are contributing to her homesickness. Various issues are common whenever a TBI patient emerges from a coma, and they are affecting Lauren as well:

Post-traumatic amnesia (PTA) occurs whenever the person can't remember events and dates from one day to the next. Lauren experiences this and we have quickly learned not to quickly applaud her recollection of certain things as many of her memories are either miscast or recently suggested. She "remembers" visitors who never came at all, or perhaps came at a different time than she states. She recalls facts, but sometimes there is little correspondence with the question to which she cites those facts as answers.

So far, Lauren hasn't shown any significant sign of seizure activity or epilepsy since the first week in the ICU-C. However, they are treating her for it since up to 5% of TBI patients experience it.

We were told virtually every TBI patient experiences chronic pain and it can range from headaches, to aggravation or infection of wounds, to pain from the other injuries Lauren sustained. Lauren has never had a very high tolerance for pain. Remarkably, though, she has said very little about it. We were in the room Saturday when the nurse gave Lauren an injection in her stomach to help prevent seizures. Her little tummy looked like a starry sky of purple prick-marks from a hundred shots she's had. Yet as she took one more she never winced or flinched or even made a sound.

Saturday afternoon a sweet lady from church came to pay Lauren a visit. She encouraged Lauren in her faith by letting her know what an encouragement Lauren has been to so many. Because every good gift comes from the Father above, this lady said, "Praise God!" Lauren must have deemed that doxology all too insufficient so she added, "...from Whom all blessings flow!" When she asked Lauren next, "How can we pray specifically for you, Lauren?" Lauren thought for a moment then answered simply, "For pain."

We have been baffled by how calmly – almost serenely – Lauren is responding considering all she has faced, and continues to face. It's not as though she doesn't feel the pain. She request prayer for it. We've also observed as she grimaces or recoils at various times when she moves a certain way or is touched in a tender spot. And yet she has not

complained or acted angry or annoyed, neither has she been demanding or difficult – as other patients around her are. Even though she's been served bland chicken and tasteless mashed potatoes for lunch and dinner three straight days she looks at it, takes a deep breath, wrinkles her lip a bit, then eats. She has in many ways reverted back to her childhood self, but not the willful, obstinate and temperamental two-year-old we used to know.

She's now able to call the nurse and let her know when she needs assistance going to the restroom. Yesterday, however, after she had just used the restroom and gotten re-situated in bed, she reached out again in the direction of the handheld call unit. Elizabeth asked her what she wanted. She said, "I want to call the nurse." We asked her why. In her soft, halting voice she replied, "So I can see if she'll let me go home."

We all know the sensation of being surrounded by a mass of moving people in a strange city yet feeling like we're stranded somewhere by ourselves. The low-grade panic looms inside us as the myriad of faces outside us become a whirling blur. We're not sure if it's the house she misses – or the town, or her family, or even the home-cooked meals. She looks as though she's feeling the slow suffocation and disorientation that weighs like a heavy blanket in a house or hotel where you really don't "belong." There are more and more moments when Lauren's most compelling desire is not for survival or rehabilitation or healing at all. It's just to go home.

This acute feeling of homesickness has seemed lately to override even her elementary analytical capacity. She certainly has some understanding of her situation and she's able to process the basic ramifications of it. After she was denied her request to call the nurse to get permission to leave, we told her that the nurse did not have the authority to make a discharge decision. She was silent for several minutes. Then out of the clear blue she blurted: "I can't even take care of myself." No emotion. No elaboration. Just a simple statement of fact – a declaration of dependence.

Her limited insight into her situation surely doesn't get rid of the heavy emptiness that hounds her throughout the day; it only delays its return for another time, another hour. Elizabeth asked Lauren on Saturday evening, "Do you want me to come up tomorrow (Sunday) morning like I have every other morning" – Lauren began to nod – "or," she continued, "do you want me to go to church instead?" Lauren paused, then smirked and said, "You need to go to church." We laughed along

with Lauren. Elizabeth then said, "We'll go to church then. But we'll be back as soon as possible afterward, okay?" Lauren sobered up quickly, then nodded.

After church Sunday morning we ran back to the house in Hobe Sound to pick up some clothes and gather the mail. After entering the front door and climbing the stairs, I did what I often do – paused and peeked into Lauren's bedroom. There I saw everything lying just as it was when she left for church the first Sunday morning in June – suitcases still stacked in the loft at the top of the landing. Lauren had not finished unpacking from her trip to India. Because the trip began concurrently with the last day of school, Lauren had not officially "come home" and settled in for the summer after her sophomore year.

Elizabeth's cell phone rang. It was from St. Mary's. "Hello?" Elizabeth said. There was no "hello" in return. After a pause, a familiar soft voice in a deliberate but uneven pattern, said, "Mom?" "Yes?" Elizabeth replied. "I want you to come visit me." Lauren had, we discovered later, paged the nurse. She came into Lauren's room and helped her dial the number we'd left on the whiteboard there. If Lauren couldn't leave the hospital, she figured, at least she wanted to make absolutely certain we hadn't forgotten her. So she called us. Odd, isn't it, that she caught us at home.

Well, maybe she didn't. If home is indeed where the heart is, then it's not – at least for now – in Hobe Sound.

Home is in room 2309 at St. Mary's.

SDG

Days 44-46: Flights of Fancy

Lauren Graham Waller, July 21, 2011

Since Brad and Lauren's accident I (Elizabeth) have spent every single day with Lauren. Sometimes it has been as little as 3 hours, sometimes as much as 15. It all still seems very surreal and it's hard to believe that six weeks have passed. Sometimes it seems like just yesterday. The images of the crash and seeing Brad so shaken up and Lauren looking lifeless are no less vivid and haunting than they were the day after. Sometimes it seems like an eternity and I think one morning I'll wake up and find out it was just a long midsummer night's dream.

In so many ways we have been amazed at Lauren's progress. Part of the amazement is because the doctors and nurses and therapists continually act amazed at how fast she has come as far as she has.

Their amazement is contagious...as long as they are still in the room! Honestly though sometimes I see the gap between where she is and where she used to be and it is very hard emotionally when I think of how far she has left to go. Part of the sadness is because sometimes friends will come visit who haven't seen Lauren since the accident and they can't hide the sadness when they mentally compare the girl they see now with the witty, brilliant, vivacious girl they loved (and still love) as a friend. When I see them so shaken up I know exactly how they feel because a lot of days

I feel the same way too.

Lauren is getting physically stronger each day. She can fully support herself while sitting up and spends at least four hours a day in the wheelchair now doing therapy. She can totally feed herself and is almost back on a regular diet. She still has some trouble with straight liquids because she tries to drink too fast but that is coming back pretty quickly.

Lauren looks bright and alert but she still has a lot of cobwebs to clear from her mind. During speech and occupational therapy they have her do sequencing exercises to help her begin to relearn how to process things logically and progressively. [Put these in order: (a) Drive the car, (b) Get into the car, (c) Put the car in gear, (d) Start the car.] She did very poorly a couple days ago but is now doing well. She can still process things better verbally than in writing. When I see the level of the problems they are asking her to solve I sometimes wonder when or if the brilliant college honors student will ever emerge. Then I think back and remember two weeks ago she couldn't speak or even open her mouth on command. Didn't somebody famous once say, "Patience is a virtue"? Maybe it was my mother who said that. :-)

Yesterday for the first time I saw Lauren get visibly upset. I went back to the Quantum House around 6:00 to have supper with my husband. After we ate he stayed for a little while to work on stuff for the website we're creating for Lauren. I went back to the hospital and walked into Lauren's room and she didn't wave or say hello like she usually does. The first thing out of her mouth was: "Why have you been lying to me?" At first I thought she was joking with me. I said, "What do you

mean?" She was deadly serious. She said, "How many people have you lied to about me?" I still didn't know what she was talking about so I asked, "What lies do you think I'm telling people about you?"

She then gave me the longest sustained speech she's given since the accident, by far. She said a friend had just been in to visit her while I was gone to dinner. That friend told her she was in a hospital in West Palm Beach and she had been in a car accident. She was convinced I had lied to her friend and brainwashed everyone because she knew the truth! She was really in Europe! She had been attacked by an alligator! I asked her why she thought she had been attacked by an alligator and she started pointing to all the bruises and scars and scabs from IVs and needles on her arms. She said, "If I was in a car accident, all these scars just aren't adding up!" I asked her what made her think we were in Europe. She said, "Well, if we aren't in Europe then we are in Africa!"

We had been told that this kind of cognitive malfunctioning was a phase she would go through (hopefully very quickly!). I explained to her that I would never lie to her about what had happened to her. I told her if she had been attacked by an alligator that I would tell her that is what had happened to her. There was no reason for me to fabricate a story about how she ended up in the hospital. She was reluctant at first and finally agreed that we were in Florida and that she had been in a car accident.

Later on her dad walked through the basic details with her and explained where all the marks came from. He took out his phone and showed her a couple pictures of her being tied up to tubes and hoses while she was in a coma and it started to make some sense to her. She asked about the tracheotomy because she had heard about it but didn't remember it. (Her lack of memory about having the trach seemed in her mind to lend some credence to her alligator explanation. Also, she may have seen some alligators on Animal Planet. Maybe ESPN was a better idea!) My husband showed her pictures of the trach and told her if she had gotten attacked by an alligator he would have taken her whole arm off and gobbled it up like a chocolate chip cookie and not just left some prick marks and bruises. She nodded and seemed to be satisfied with the explanation.

Speaking of gobbling things up, over the last few days Lauren's attitude toward hospital food has grown a little tepid. As her ability to eat and sense food flavors has returned, so has her discriminating and pretty narrow range of taste. At first she devoured whatever was set in front

of her. Now she pauses a little bit and tries not to look too nitpicky before she eats. She sure doesn't approach her food with nearly as much gusto as she used to. Except for Tuesday night. My husband stopped at Carrabbas on the way to the hospital and hand-delivered her all-time favorite meal: lobster ravioli in a white wine cream sauce. She attacked it with a vengeance (like an alligator attacking a cookie!) and didn't come up for air until she had completely finished every piece that was in front of her. She wouldn't even acknowledge anybody else in the room until she had wiped the last little bit off her lips!

During Lauren's dinner last night (bland white mashed potatoes and chicken again – no, wait, that was the previous five nights...I think it was turkey instead) I asked her what else she would like to eat if she could have anything she wanted. She said with a straight face, "Well, as long as we are in Europe I would like some tea and crumpets!" I started laughing and she did too. I looked at her and asked, "Do you really know where we're at?" She said, "St. Mary's." I asked, "What city are we in?" She said, "West Palm Beach."

Compared to the six weeks we've been at the hospital her trip to Europe was pretty brief. It was actually only an hour or so. It sure was good to see her arrive safely back to us in West Palm Beach!

Thank you for continuing to pray for us and write to Lauren and to us. We thank God for you all!

Elizabeth

Days 47-49: Changing &; Unchanging

Lauren Graham Waller, July 24, 2011

As the road we've been traveling lately has its share of dim lighting and unexpected obstacles, we've sought reassurance many nights in the songs of Scripture. The skill and training of professionals have been providing therapy for Lauren's mind and body, but the ancient words of the Psalms have been providing therapy for our spirit and soul. Often, as the psalmist records his thoughts and feelings while he faces adversity, he is able to move from lament to praise. This shift occurs when he ponders the character of God, confesses his trust in God, and vows to focus on God instead of his trouble.

Psalm 102 is but one example. The author describes the affect that his deep distress and affliction is having on him emotionally, physically,

and even socially. It is consuming his time, sapping his strength, robbing him of his sense of productivity – and his appetite. But then he lifts his head and shifts his focus to contemplate the nature and essence of God. In a single, simple realization of one of God's key characteristics, he gives this amen to a concluding declaration of praise: "You are the same" (v. 27). Comfort is to be found, says the psalmist, in the immutability of God.

Almost every day brings us a change of some sort – some good, some not. A new joy, a new holdup, a different diagnosis, an unexpected struggle. The underlying difficulty of the situation itself often merges with the swirling currents of emotion and the rigid demands on our time. The results range from a substantial loss of energy and focus to – some days – a depleted supply of the simple oil of kindness that generally prevails in situations with less stress and friction. Thankfully, though, God does not change. The all-powerful, all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving, all-compassionate, all-merciful God was, is, and always will be simper idem: always the same. The thin reed of our lives bends with every breeze but the Rock of Ages withstands all weather, whether sunshine or rain. Every day something shifts or moves or changes. But not the unchanging One.

The course of Lauren's progress changes frequently. Sometimes her mind is rather sharp and clear; other times its quite foggy, especially in the mornings. Her short-term memory is not very good and it's hard for her to chart her own progress as she doesn't clearly remember the gains she makes from one day to the next. She'll generally forgot in the morning what she was told the night before, although she does remember a bit more each day than she did the day before. (She remembers that Michigan = good and Ohio State = very, very bad [as you can see by her choice of clothing in the picture]. You can also see she is dipping Chik-Fil-A's primo waffle fries into cranberry juice. Her basic association was red = ketchup, but after tasting it she knew something went awry then laughed when she found out what she'd done.)

Since Thursday, Elizabeth has gotten a call every morning from Lauren to remind her that her primary obligation is in room 2309 at St. Mary's!

On Thursday Lauren called and said: "Mom... I'm in the hospital!" As if Elizabeth needed to be reminded that Lauren was not staying overnight at a friend's house. Lauren believed her mom needed to show some urgency in getting to a daughter in distress.

On Friday she called and said: “Mom? I just called because I was concerned about how you are doing.” When it became apparent Lauren was distraught about possibly being abandoned, Elizabeth started writing on the whiteboard in Lauren’s room the time she would be there in the morning so Lauren would have the assurance of her mom’s arrival.

On Saturday Lauren called Elizabeth five minutes before the posted time, even as Elizabeth was in the car in the parking lot of the hospital. “Mom? How are you doing?” “Fine, Lauren.” She was speaking in a clearer voice than usual for this early in the morning. Elizabeth said, “You sound a lot better!” Lauren replied, “Well, I don’t know about that! I fell out of bed twice last night and really bumped my head.”

Elizabeth didn’t think that was the case, but taking no chances she hurried inside. She passed the physiatrist in the stairwell (apparently there are others who always take the stairs) and told him what Lauren had said. He told her there are railings around Lauren’s bed in addition to the bed alarm being set every night. If she’d actually gotten out of bed at all it would have created more than a little commotion. The staff is obligated to contact him first – no matter the hour, day or night – and then contact the family immediately. Most likely Lauren had awoken and found herself in bed, feeling pain throughout her body and realizing her mind wasn’t working as she knew it should. She reached the conclusion that she’d fallen – not just once, but twice.

Some changes are positive. The orthopedic surgeon took an X-ray of Lauren’s hip and had some heartening news for us. Apparently the concerns we’d had for the last few weeks about the timeline being extended were for naught. He said the bones were healing “very well” – quicker than expected. In fact, they are going to check again at the end of this week and if all goes well they can remove the external fixator. (Lauren refers to it as her friendly monster; it is most unattractive and causes her much grief so she shows it no affection, and yet it remains quite attached to her. She has a name for it – which must be said in a “Darth Vader” voice: EXFIXIATOR.) Even while it is still in place they are now allowing her to do transfers from the wheelchair to the bed (or to the toilet) on her feet.

We received another “status change” phone call over the weekend as well. The Brain & Spinal Cord Injury (BCSI) program of the state of Florida has a contract to fund services provided by the Brain Injury Association of Florida. We've been lobbying the regional BSCI

program manager quite passionately to place Lauren in their program. We've gotten nowhere to date because there was a good bit of concern initially by the hospital case manager and BSCI program manager that Lauren did not qualify based on the nature and extent of her injury. The program is restricted to brain injury patients that are medically stable and not assessed as having a permanent disability. (The assessor must demonstrate that there is a reasonable expectation that the patient will be able to return as a productive member of their community.)

Nevertheless, because of Lauren's quick progress, the regional program manager called to tell us that Lauren had been re-assessed, then officially certified and placed in the program. The benefits to Lauren are significant: Upon release from in-patient rehab, she is now eligible for basic program-sponsored rehabilitation services at home: physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), as well as speech and cognitive therapy. For a certain period of time the program will pay for all of Lauren's therapies, medications and doctors appointments. "O give praise to the Lord for He is good: for His mercy is unchanging forever" (Psalm 106:1).

Some of Lauren's temporary setbacks are self-imposed. On Thursday she so wore herself out in therapy that she woke up Friday in pain and with a throbbing headache. After she fumbled through OT, the RN gave her Tylenol and Percocet and cancelled the rest of her AM therapies. She slept the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, but woke up in time to go to PT. She did very well, and more than just with her strength and motor skills. Even during the non-cognitive therapy sessions they are asking her questions and pressing her to recall and process information.

Part of her cognitive therapy includes both basic practical math problems (telling time, calculating change, etc.) and abstract problem solving (tell me three things you can do with a rock, or a shoe, or a chair, etc.). The therapist talks her through her answers and forces her to verbalize her processing. Saturday the therapist asked: "Tell me three things you can do with a paper cup." Lauren answered quickly, "Take a drink." Then she paused for a long while then said: "Make a paper airplane." The therapist got the most quizzical look on her face. Anticipating the question, Lauren began providing her rationale: "Well, it's made out of paper so... yeah, there's that. And you can use the wide part of the cup for the wide part of the plane. Then use other parts for the propeller..."

There was a silence as Lauren saw her answer was not resolving the perplexed twist to the therapist's countenance. So Lauren said, "Hey, you never said it had to be a good airplane!"

Little things let us know that some of the "old Lauren" is coming back – including her offbeat sense of humor: Her oft but ill-fated attempts at punning, her wry glances, her dry wit. All we're missing is her insistence on demonstrating that white girls can indeed rap which, in the process of attempting to break the stereotype, she simultaneously reinforces. (On her grading scale she scores herself mega-bonus points whenever she combines rapping and punnery, as she vainly attempted to do in India where she composed an ode to the unsettling aftereffects of the local cuisine entitled "The Delhi Rap" [e.g. The Deli Wrap]).

Those of you who have visited Lauren recently know that she is becoming more socially engaged. She is making eye contact more, initiating more conversations, asking more questions, and broadening her answers to questions outside of the standard, "That's a good question" or "Mom, what is the answer to that?" She's also hugging everyone that comes. I'm not going to say she's indiscriminate with her affection, but even Jim Devine got a hug... :-)

Yesterday, Lauren's physiatrist was again remarking to us about how phenomenal and unordinary Lauren's progress is. We've learned that all the professionals and staff are well-schooled in giving positive affirmation and expressions of enthusiasm. While their comments are quite encouraging, there's a tendency sometimes for them to be given wholesale, indiscriminately and tinged with hyperbole with no real baseline or context. So we often have to press them as to "what do you mean by phenomenal" or "what is ordinary." He told us that, based on the trajectory of Lauren's progress so far, it is not unrealistic for her to be a university student again. It won't be this year, he told us, and she may have to start with a light load so her anticipation of A's doesn't end up becoming D's. But, he said, that expectation is a very real possibility and is by no means out of reach for her.

There's still a long way to go and a lot of good days and bad yet to face. We keep reminding ourselves of that, as does Lauren's spotty memory and wandering focus. But from time to time her limitations come packaged in her own unique, idiosyncratic wrapping so that we can't help but be equally reminded that our girl is slowly, but surely, coming out of her cocoon. As she was reclining in bed last night we asked her a simple question that should not have required any

hesitation. As the air grew a little tense from the too-long silence, she burst out laughing. The question wasn't funny, and neither was her inability to answer it – even after thinking about it for a full half-minute. She explained,

"I'm sorry guys. I was distracted by my hairy legs."

I guess if you're a conscientious young lady with fastidious grooming habits, you'd be distracted too if 50 days of growth had turned you into a hirsute hippy-chick. Elizabeth and Lauren actually made a date with a razor but the RN put the kibosh on the plan; Lauren is on a blood thinner and can't risk any nicks or cuts. Elizabeth made it to Target today and got some Nair so, in the words of TS Eliot, all things shall be well.

We are thankful for the reminder that when the doctor's timeline changes, God's plan is the same. When our strength fails us, God's power is the same. When our minds are stressed into fuzziness and forgetfulness, His word and His promises remain faithful and true. And when our compassions frazzle and fray around the edges, we can pillow our head on the immutability of a God who does not change. Because when the sun rises again in the morning, as it did this morning and the morning before, His compassions will not have failed and His mercies – once again – will be new.

SDG

Days 50-52: The Saviors Face

Lauren Graham Waller, July 27, 2011

One of the ways I know I have been blessed by the Lord is because of the wife He has given me. Elizabeth has been endowed by her Creator with certain unalienable virtues – her patience, her loyalty, her organization, her honesty, her candor, her frugality, her selflessness, her modesty. But as good a partner as she is, she's an even better mother. The things I so admire about her as a woman and a wife are never more exemplified than when she is selflessly caring for her children, especially Lauren.

We are both at the point of sheer exhaustion, when the temptation is for every minor frustration to seem major and every major one to seem cataclysmic. In the late evening after the sun has turned to moon, we'll leave Lauren's room and attempt to squeeze as many of our personal

and family affairs into the waning moments before we cave in to fatigue. It is then she will invariably unburden her fears and uncertainties. She'll wonder how she can continue to carry on, but we'll leave it with the Lord and go to sleep. In a few short hours, before the roosters have awakened the sun, she is already out of bed crossing items off her task list. Almost before the staff change at St. Mary's is complete she'll back in Room 2309, cheering and coaching and supporting and loving our favorite girl.

Since I'm not at the hospital during the day, most of what is reported in these updates comes through Elizabeth. She not only tends to Lauren, she faithfully fills me in both during the evening and several times during the day. She wants to let me know what's happening while it's happening because, even though I want to, I can't be there. She's the wife of my youth; my bride. And although I love Lauren, who brings me great joy, I really love her mother. She's in a league all her own.

Elizabeth has told me Lauren has been complaining of a couple things that had the MD concerned. Lauren was – and is – having headaches that are severe enough to prevent her from performing therapy sometimes during the day and sleeping well many times at night. They have been trying to treat it with Tylenol to stay away from anything that might either have a rebound effect (Ibuprofin), side effects, or be addictive. The fact that they are recurring caused enough concern for the MD to order another CT scan on Day 50. We have been here long enough to hear stories of other brain injury patients who seemed well on the road to recovery only to later experience hemorrhaging, an aneurysm, or even a stroke. Obviously we were concerned. Fortunately, the results came back positive and the only thing that stands out on the scan is the place where the ICP bolt was placed in her head.

Lauren also has significant hearing loss in her right ear. The MD also examined that and said it is a combination of two things: blockage of the ear canal by wax that has hardened, along with after-effects from the impact of the accident to the right side of her head. They are treating the blockage and are hopeful that the effects of the accident will dissipate – and perhaps disappear – with time.

Physically, Lauren continues to heal phenomenally well. She continues to gain alertness, exhibit increased cognitive gains, and have higher levels of motivation to be awake and active. She is eating a lot – everything on her plate, and probably twice as much as she did prior to the accident. She's gained one pound this week. She swallows well and

there is no indication of difficulty. The only trouble she had was breaking out laughing at one point while drinking. While we were all laughing, her mom was apoplectic at the thought that her only daughter would survive an atrocious accident only to die by drowning whilst quaffing a cup of Gatorade!

Lauren has been pronounced stable enough and eating well enough now to transition from the feeding tube to only food eaten orally. So, last night the RN removed the final tube from her body – the PEG gastronomy tube that has been in her stomach since Day 12. Lauren is now totally rid of all lines of external support! Thanks be to God!

The X-ray results came back from Lauren's pelvis. They are going to keep "Exfixiator" on for another 6-8 days. However, they believe her pelvis is healed well enough that they are starting to allow her to put weight on her feet.

Again yesterday the MD made a point of telling us Lauren is an exceptional case. He said (as we heard over and again at the outset) improvement in this type of brain injury is usually measured in weeks and months. However he said they see gains in her in days – and even hours.

After waxing rhapsodic for several minutes about Lauren's remarkable progress, the MD made a special request. He asked if Elizabeth would give Lauren a wheelchair ride back to the Neurological Trauma ICU/C where she spent her first 16 days in a coma. He said the nurses and staff there, most of all, have a grueling and thankless job with so few happy endings. Those good people give their lives to save the lives of others. But there are so many who don't make it. Seeing Lauren would bring incredible joy to the staff, he said, who worked so hard to get her where she is today.

He was absolutely correct! For the first time Lauren got to see what she never could when she was struggling to survive: the faces of those who saved her. And they got to see the fruit of their labor, a precious girl who has been totally transformed since they saw her last - in no small part due to their incredible skill and hard work.

I have been meditating on that since Elizabeth told me about it yesterday. In the heart of every one of God's true children is a yearning to see the face of the One who saved us, isn't there? The apostle Paul expressed this when he said: "I have a desire to...be with Christ above"

(Philippians 1:33). And though we haven't seen Him we love Him, the apostle Peter said (1 Peter 1:8). However, as incredible as it may seem, there's an even greater longing in the heart of our Savior to see the transformed faces of the ones whom He has saved! A. W. Pink wrote a book, Comfort for Christians, and the final chapter is ironically called "Precious Death." The title may seem strange to us, but Pink explains what Psalm 116:15 means when it says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Have you ever wondered why that which is so grievous to us is so joyous to Him?

They ever were and always will be dear to Him. His saints! These are they on whom His love was set before the earth was formed or the heavens made. These are they for whose sakes He left His Home on high and whom He bought with His precious blood, cheerfully laying down His life for them. These are they whose names are borne on our great High Priest's breast and engraven on the palms of His hands. They are His Father's love-gift to Him, His children, members of His body. Therefore, everything that concerns them is precious in His sight. The Lord loves His people so intensely that the very hairs of their heads are numbered: He has sent forth the angels to minister unto them; and because their persons are precious unto the Lord, so also are their deaths. ...

While we are sorrowing over the removal of a saint, Christ is rejoicing. His prayer was "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24), and in the entrance into Heaven of each one of His own people, Jesus sees an answer to that prayer and is glad! He beholds in each one that is freed from "this body of death" another portion of the reward for His travail of soul, and He is satisfied with it. Therefore the death of His saints is precious to the Lord, for it occasions Him ground for rejoicing.

For those of us who understand how hopeless was our plight and how desperate our need of salvation, seeing our Savior will bring us great joy. However, it will be nothing like the indescribable joy experienced by "Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). What made Him do it? What sustained our Lord during the excruciating ordeal of Calvary? There are many facets of that joy that are beyond the scope of this little update. But one considerable dimension was His anticipation of being together forever with those for whom He spent His life – those whom He saved and transformed to be His perfect and radiant and spotless bride!

My bride is not perfect, but she's not as far away as most - and she's still the thrill of my life. Especially when I see how beautifully and tirelessly she gives of herself for me and for the people I love most - our children. But I'm not the only one who feels this way about his beloved. "As a young man rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Lauren's doctor reminded us of a simple truth we don't often consider: Those who've been saved aren't the only ones who rejoice. Saviors also get a lot of joy when they see the results of a job well done.

SDG

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

Days 53-55: The Warrior Is a Child

Lauren Graham Waller, July 29, 2011

Lately Lauren has been winning battles left and right and amazing everyone who sees or hears of her heroics.

Physically, she has regained significant use of her arms and hands. She can feed herself, partially dress herself, brush her own teeth, and even write – although it is something of an oversize scrawl. She has increased the strength in her legs and can now stand up with assistance. She is regaining her balance. She can even put one foot in front of another for a short distance as long as she is supported and steadied.

The next step in her physical rehabilitation is to regain the use of her legs. Her most immediate goal, she told one friend who visited tonight, is to learn to walk again. She continues to push herself to the point of collapse. She works hard and tires easily, but continues to battle back against her physical limitations. And little by little she's gaining ground.

Cognitively, she's not yet able to multi-task, process or problem-solve at a quick pace so she's not ready to re-enter her former fast-faced environment. However, she is improving daily. Her short-term memory is increasing slightly; things she tells us that happened in our absence are now just as likely to have happened as not. She can concentrate more than a mere short moment. She is also communicating more but still has difficulty expressing her thoughts. Her wit and droll humor are coming back strongly, if slowly. When she is fresh she is rather sharp and alert; when she is weary and wiped out everything happens in slow motion.

The first step in her cognitive rehabilitation was for her to become aware of her surroundings. She certainly possesses that awareness now and there's not a day that passes – or hardly an hour – that she still doesn't ask about going home. The MD jokes with her about giving her an "eviction notice." She smiles but is not really amused.

The next step in cognitive rehab is re-learning how to concentrate and pay attention, reason logically, solve problems, and regain short-term memory skills. She's still working through that process before she moves on to the third step, which is self-monitoring and executive skills such as initiating, planning, goal-setting, and performing self-evaluation and self-correction. That third step is the highest level of cognitive function. Because she's not fully there yet, it is difficult for us to appraise how she's faring in terms of spiritual battles. She still expresses a love for Christ and His word and is able to recognize and reflect, to some degree, upon how God may be working through her in this situation, if not in her.

We've been both astounded and appreciative at how her spiritual growth transformed and reshaped her character so that even when the accident set her back to childlike levels of physical and cognitive function, she didn't behave the same way she did as a child. Her responses to the various situations throughout a given day are seasoned with a graciousness that belied her difficulty. And yet, as she's persevered through those daily physical and mental skirmishes, it's been hard to ascertain the extent to which she has felt and experienced spiritual reality at a soul level.

As friends near and far have shared their love for Lauren and the prayerful concern they have for her, we've seen her nod her head and smile and even verbalize her appreciation. We've also heard from people who've told how her life, her counsel and her witness have either led them to faith, strengthened their faith, or prompted them to

seriously examine their faith. Lauren has received those reports with appreciation and gratitude and we've seen her – in simple gestures – deflect the praise to God. We've seen the spoils of personal and spiritual victories she's won in the past. What we hadn't seen, until yesterday, was any sign of present spiritual struggles.

Our family is keenly aware of one another's personal weaknesses and spiritual shortcomings. We know Lauren's too. I don't think she'd mind me sharing a specific one of hers because it's been hinted at here, everyone who knows her well has heard her talk about it, and our entire family struggles with it.

Impatience.

Lauren is ordered, detailed, self-controlled. She plans her work then works her plan. She refuses to let the thief of procrastination rob her of precious time. She has a wonderful plan for her life and doesn't like obstacles in her way, people that disagree, or anything that makes her wait.

She inherited this from her mother. (Okay... perhaps her dad too.)

This is a strength of hers in many ways; she gets things done when necessary and doesn't tolerate needless delays. But she's aware of its fatal flaw. When productivity and planning give way to impatience, it becomes unbelief. Impatience is being intolerant of opposition or criticism or delays. It is being easily irritated, provoked, annoyed, or exasperated when things don't go precisely according to our plan. Impatience is not just a minor flaw or the characteristic quirk of an overachiever. It is a refusal at any given moment to trust in God and wait on Him to accomplish His purpose according to His timing. It is, as John Piper says in Future Grace, a failure to:

Stay in God's appointed place
Or move at God's appointed pace.

Impatience springs up in our hearts when our will is thwarted, our progress is stymied, or the pathway to personal achievement is blocked. It can be something as little as a traffic jam or a long line at the Secretary of State's office. It can be something as large as an accident that cripples your body, mutes your mind, and steals what you thought was your future.

Piper is helpful on this point. He says when our plans are hindered, hampered or stopped altogether, the unbelief of impatience generally pulls us in one of two directions:

1. We will give up, give in, and give out. Just forget it. Quit the job. Ignore the crying child. Leave the marriage. Surrender to the dragons of depression and despair. Or,

2. We will force sudden and thoughtless counter-moves. We will make impetuous or impulsive decisions or act in rash and reckless ways. Our short fuse will be ignited. We will turn the car around, scream down the median, and rush into some ill-advised detour to try to beat the system.

Our battle against impatience - and yours - is a spiritual one, not an emotional or psychological one. It's the issue of whether we believe God is in control, His promises are true, and His delays or detours are part of His greater plan. "By your patience you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19). "To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will give eternal life" (Romans 2:7). "Do not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). Patience is not an optional virtue. It is the fruit of faith. And the battle against impatience is a spiritual battle against distrust and unbelief.

We have an advantage over Lauren in that we now well understand this road is going to be a long and tough one. We've had 55 days to begin the process of reorienting our thinking and reordering our lives to get in synch with His will. And God has been so gracious to us. He has not only given us a glimpse of some of what He's doing through this tragedy, but He's also brought people to Lauren's bedside whose lives have already been impacted – for time and for eternity – through her witness for Christ. A couple nights ago we met a charming young lady with whom Lauren was meeting for breakfast on a weekly basis to talk about Christ, and who ultimately committed her life to Him. In subsequent days she was then privileged to see her mother and boyfriend also come to Christ in repentance and faith.

God has also been kind to allow many of you to witness how He has used Lauren and her story to see your own friends and family members and acquaintances consider their spiritual condition before God, examine themselves, and call upon the name of the Lord – in some cases for the very first time. You have been so thoughtful to share your

stories with us, and to share them by email or in cards or in person with Lauren herself. Truly there are spiritual victories in which Lauren was used in some way, and for which we give praise to our great God.

Lauren has some appreciation for this and in her heart she wants to honor her Lord, even as she schleps and slogs through an ordeal more grueling than she ever imagined facing. But sometimes the desire for His honor seems to slip when the weight of the burden she's bearing brings her to her knees. There's not a day in which, several times a day, she doesn't ask – beg, almost – for release. "When can I go home?" "When will they let me leave?" Sometimes she'll respond in an unproductive way (like trying to get out of bed so she can walk out); other times she simply resigns herself to her situation.

Thursday afternoon after four hours of physical and occupational and cognitive rehabilitation and therapy, Elizabeth wheeled Lauren's weary body back into Room 2309. Elizabeth asked her if she wanted to watch a movie, to get on the computer, to take a nap. Lauren just stared ahead for a while. She then looked up at her mom and said, "I want to go home."

Elizabeth began reciting what has become a well-rehearsed response: "This is the best place for you right now. The doctor will let you go home as soon as they believe it's that's the best place for you. And Lauren, God is using you! People are coming to Christ because of you, they are praying more because of you. God is being glorified through you!"

Lauren's eyes began to water. Elizabeth quickly added, "You are being so brave, Lauren! I can't believe how much strength God has given you!"

At that point, for the first time in eight weeks, Lauren began sobbing. Elizabeth swept her into her arms, wrapped her in an embrace, and mother and daughter sobbed together until there were no more tears.

The prophet Isaiah promises that "those who wait for me shall not be put to shame" (49:23). "No eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him" (64:4). "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (40:31). The prophet says that we battle the unbelief of impatience by using God's promises to persuade our heart that His timing and His

sovereign plan will take this painful, restrictive, and seemingly wasteful situation and make something eternally beautiful out of it. There will come a blessing, a strength, a vindication that buoys us upward until we soar like eagles.

God's assignment for Lauren at the moment is to wait upon Him. And that's a battle - a spiritual one, and she's fighting it just as hard as the physical and mental ones. She continues to win many of them and inspire us all with her courage and strength. However, on Day 55 she wanted to say she's not a spiritual hero and never ever wanted to be.

Lauren is a tired and wounded young warrior. And beneath the armor beats the heart of a girl who just wants the battle to be over so she can finally go home.

SDG

Lately
I've been winning battles left and right
But even winners can get wounded in the fight
People say that I'm amazing
Strong beyond my years
But they don't see inside of me
I'm hiding all the tears
Unafraid because His armor is the best
But even soldiers need a quiet place to rest
People say that I'm amazing
Never face retreat
But they don't see the enemies
That lay me at His feet
They don't know that I go running home when I fall down
They don't know who picks me up when no one is around
I drop my sword and cry for just a while
'Cause deep inside this armor
The warrior is a child

Twila Paris – "The Warrior Is a Child"

Days 57-59: How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Lauren Graham Waller, August 3, 2011

As a young man I could always look forward to one predictable start-of-school ritual. Inquisitive (or nosy) teachers wanted to discover what all we did during our 3-month hiatus. We invariably got an assignment to write an essay entitled: "How I Spent My Summer Vacation."

We've asked ourselves often the last few days exactly where this summer has gone. It seems as though yesterday was the month of May, then somehow we blinked and it turned into August. The previous journal entries stand to serve as a reminder of what transpired during the blink. So there's no need to revive this nearly forgotten back-to-school tradition in order to share the highlights of our travels and travails. As the wise man has said, many are the plans in the heart of a man but the sovereign purpose of the Lord prevails.

The summer break for students everywhere is almost over. This year, however, Lauren will not mark the end of the summer by going back to school. She will wrap it up by going back home. After 59 days in the hospital, Lauren only has 1 more day left. She got the news on Tuesday.

We knew we were getting close: Lauren had her external fixator ("Exfixiator") removed on Monday. The X-rays on Sunday came back positive so she was wheeled into surgery at 7:30 AM Monday morning. She was hooked up to an IV then given a combination regional and general anesthesia. The pins were all unscrewed from the bones in the pelvis then extracted. The incisions were closed and when she woke up she was free from the apparatus. This was a red-letter day on Lauren's calendar to be sure.

Even though she was in pain and quite woozy, she felt so liberated she attempted to proceed full-tilt with her therapies. She (again) wore herself out by pressing too hard and too fast. She was groggy and punch-drunk by evening that she wasn't making much sense – slurred speech, some incoherence and many inaccurate memories. For the first time in over a week, however, she didn't call Elizabeth prior to her early AM arrival to make sure Mom hadn't forgotten her. That night our girl slept like a box of baby rocks.

Tuesday morning Lauren awoke to hear the sweetest words she's heard in two long months. Thursday morning she's being released. Lauren grinned like the Cheshire cat. Elizabeth commenced a-panicking! We have a lot to do in the next 24 hours, both at the hospital and at the house. While Lauren is euphoric at the prospect of regaining her freedom, Elizabeth is suddenly feeling the weight of

having to be the primary caregiver. Lauren will need a lot of care – around-the-clock supervision and moment-by-moment assistance.

At the hospital today they will be working on basic skills to help assist mother and child in the transition, like transferring from the wheelchair to the car (and vice versa). At home we have issues to resolve quickly since our current house is not equipped to accommodate Lauren's near-term needs. (All the bedrooms and bathrooms are upstairs, for instance, and the house is not wheelchair friendly.) We've got some big decisions to make in the next 24-48 hours. When you offer a prayer or petition on behalf of our family, please ask for guidance and wisdom from the One who gives generously to all and without reproach.

Elizabeth's sister, Anna, has been here the past week being both Aaron and Hur to Elizabeth, supporting her on every side. Her quiet presence has not only been a comfort to my two favorite ladies, but her assistance has been priceless. Duty has its demands though, and tomorrow she flies back to Kansas City. We love you Anna.

Tomorrow morning we'll also pack our bags and say a sad goodbye to the doctors and nurses and security personnel at St. Mary's Medical Center – as well as the incredible staff at the Quantum House. These people have been more than professionals just doing a job. They've been counselors, comforters and friends. We will miss them and bid them Godspeed as they continue doing – with excellence – what they've been called and gifted to do. The road was a little more smooth and the ride a bit less stressful because of these precious people God brought alongside of us to keep us company during this leg of the journey.

One never knows ahead of time how life will change after a collision with the sovereignty of God. I can assure you that after the Summer of 2011 we'll view the world through a newer, clearer set of lenses. From this point onward nothing will appear the same; we'll see a lot of people (including many of you) differently. We now know that beneath the shy smiles and everyday faces rests the spirit of the stalwarts and saints of whom we've only read and heard about till now.

And so we begin the next phase of an improbable yet incredible journey. We take with us a myriad of memorable lessons about God, His Son, His children and ourselves. We can attest that pain really hurts, trauma is traumatic, and only when you are in over your head do you discover whom or what you really trust. However, we also take

away a character more refined, hurting people with whom we more closely identify, and a sympathetic Savior with whom we enjoy a deeper love and greater intimacy.

Other than that, we didn't really do anything on our summer vacation. Maybe next year we'll have something better to write about. But for now I just hope we passed this assignment.

SDG

Days 60-62: An Update From Lauren

Lauren Graham Waller, August 6, 2011

Lauren has written an update. Please go here to read it.

SDG

Days 63-65: Lauren & Esther

Lauren Graham Waller, August 9, 2011

Lauren has written her second update which is posted here. It includes her recounting of the past two days and reflections on the two "Sunday sermons."

SDG

Days 66-68: Lauren Talks Chicken

Lauren Graham Waller, August 12, 2011

Lauren's third update is posted here. She discusses therapy, home, and her "favorite" food.

SDG

Day 69: Week 9 Rehab

Lauren Graham Waller, August 13, 2011

Week 9 was a good week – continued improvement in Lauren and daily strength from the Lord for our entire family. Despite one car going down and being in the shop for five days, then having to handle the discharge and move on almost a moment's notice, we were able to juggle things around and make it all work every time. We've not missed

a meal, not gone without clothing, not slept a minute in the rain – every single need has been supplied!

Since we've been out of the hospital/rehab, the Lord has helped us chart this new, uncertain course. We have the same doctors but Lauren is being introduced to a whole new panel of nurses and therapists. All of them so far have been wonderful and Lauren (and we) have bonded with them nicely. Our loving church family has continued to be exactly that – a family, a great source of strength and support. God has measured out blessing upon blessing: friends, colleagues, a wife and children who love our Lord Jesus and seek to model His character in even the most mundane drudgery of the day.

Sometimes my mind begins to wander off the reservation and I catch myself dipping the toes of my thoughts in the wintry waters of discontent. Almost immediately the sweet Spirit of God arrests my mind and confronts me with the Word which asks, "Why?" When our days are bounded by so many blessings, why does it sometimes still seem insufficient? Why is manna for one day never enough? God is faithful, day after day, to provide for every single need. We must – and shall! – bless His name for His faithfulness to our family.

Elizabeth, Brad and I still need an extra measure of strength to navigate the regular rigors – and the uncertain vagaries – of every day, plus the additional weight of being what we need for our daughter and sister. Lauren also needs patience and strength from the Lord to persevere through this challenge to become all He has willed for her to be. We know you have prayed, and we know you will continue to pray. To all of you we say thank you, thank you! We also hope you enjoy four more clips showing Lauren in therapy at different points this past week and rejoice with us as we see God's faithfulness in her daily improvement.

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine with ten thousand besides! Great is Thy faithfulness!

SDG

Day 72: Beauty Will Save the World

Lauren Graham Waller, August 16, 2011

For 59 of the 60 days Lauren was in the hospital, a picture hung on the wall. If you visited her you saw it – her Senior Portrait, the one posted on the Welcome Page of the CaringBridge site. Lauren is standing in front of an ash-colored tree, golden blonde hair, sparkling hazel eyes, wide warm smile. That picture was there for a reason.
During the first 24 hours after the accident, when we didn't know whether the door at the end of the dark corridor would be marked Life or Death, her neurosurgeon told us to bring in a photograph. "Find a picture," he said. "A large picture. A picture of her at her best and most beautiful. We want to hang it on the wall for the entire staff to see. Our world here is a tragic one and our days are marked by death and dying. We need a reminder, a visual aid, to let us know who your daughter really is and what it is we're working toward – what we're trying to save."

A quick glance around the trauma unit underscored the significance of his statement. The only visible beauty was the cold mechanical symmetry and the eerie blue glow of the computer screens. There were ten units, each containing a person, eyes closed, lying comatose on their back – lifeless but for the machines. If their hands had been folded and their gowns traded for suits, they could have been in a funeral home.

All ten were jarringly similar: bundles of wires, panels of monitors, ventilators and respirators, EKGs and ultrasound machines, beds and cables and leads and tubes, pumps and drains and catheters and IVs and drugs. Lots and lots of drugs. Despite all of that, the surgeon intimated, it still might not be enough.

If Lauren was to survive, if she was to be saved, the surgeon was suggesting it might require more than miracle pharmaceuticals in copious quantities, more than technological wizardry on display in immeasurable proportions, more than skilled technicians and medical masterminds in bright white coats and blue scrubs. It might require beauty. A picture of her face. Something to raise their gaze, sharpen their focus, capture their attention and show them what – and whom – they were working for.

His request, superficial on its surface, betrayed a very human appeal. There is an intrinsic aesthetic appetite inside each of us as humans that is naturally drawn to beauty. We crave it. We are attracted by it. We are drawn into it. And we try to save it and preserve it. It is a human response, a distinctly human response. Cats do not vacation at the Grand Canyon. Dogs do not gaze in wonder at the splendor of a

sunset, the stateliness of a cathedral, or the grandeur of the Alps. Humans do, however, and we respond at a very visceral level.

In the weeks after the picture was hung we heard countless people, scores of them – nurses and visitors alike – tell us, "Your daughter is so beautiful!" To some it was a candid appraisal of the symmetry and color and proportion in the picture. To others, it was the austere juxtaposition of the flawless face in the photo against the broken figure lying on the bed.

At first it may seem audacious to believe that beauty is essential to living, to healing, indeed, to saving. But it was the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970, who reflected in his acceptance speech on the oft-quoted statement of another Russian author, Fyodor Dostoevsky: "Beauty will save the world." How could this be, he wondered. Is such a thing possible? "When in our bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything? Ennobled, elevated, yes; but whom has it saved?"

When discussing those things which we find most appealing, Plato argued that the world which we apprehend with our senses is but a shadow of the ideas – and the virtues – that transcend the sensual. There were three transcendental properties: truth, goodness and beauty. Whatever is beautiful, he argued, is also objectively good and true.

And if there is anything good, or true, it is also objectively beautiful. All three transcendentals converge into a single great transcendental which Plato called "the One." The One, however, had no name. It was Augustine of Hippo, the theologian of the patristic era, who identified the One as the true and living God. Taking Plato's metaphysical speculation into the very heart of the Christian gospel, Augustine suggested that followers of Christ uniquely understand that the good, the beautiful, and the true are indeed one, because they are established in the reality of the self-revealing God – the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He alone is beautiful, He alone is good, He alone is true. That is not to suggest that nothing else reflects beauty or goodness or truth. It is simply to say that He alone, by virtue of the fact that He is infinite in all His perfections, is the source and the judge and the end of all that is good, beautiful, and true. "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever," said the apostle Paul. "Amen."

Beauty, as Augustine understood, is a crucial category for Christians. We can not appraise anyone or anything accurately without understanding the power of beauty. In his Confessions Augustine said:

I have learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and so new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. The beautiful things of this world kept me from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all.

Augustine prompts us in that confession to remember that whenever beauty beckons, it is actually our Creator who is calling. Whenever we allow ourselves to be distracted by things of apparent beauty in the world – charming things, seductive things, fading things – it is because we forget their appeal is an extrinsic attractiveness, a dim reflection of the intrinsic beauty of God their Creator. All earthly beauty is derived from and circumscribed by the essential beauty of God.

Jonathan Edwards, the great American philosopher and theologian of the Great Awakening, was led to faith in Christ by contemplating the beauty of God. That theme became a key linchpin of his theology. However, Edwards' elaboration on this theme makes an obvious point. When we examine the references to God in the Hebrew Scriptures we don't really find the word "beauty" much used to describe Him. His beauty is most commonly referred to as His glory – the effulgent manifestation of His infinite perfections. The fathers and the prophets tell us, rather, that if we possessed the capacity to actually gaze upon God, we would not see beauty (as we classify it). Instead we would see glory. That is because there are no categories by which we might characterize Him as beautiful. He is totally "other." Completely set apart. Utterly separate. Altogether distinct. Or, to use biblical language, He is "holy." (Or, as the seraphim put it, "holy, holy, holy.") That is why Edwards says of those who would sincerely contemplate the beauty of God:

True holiness must mainly consist in love to God, for holiness consists in loving what is most excellent and beautiful. Because God is infinitely the most beautiful and excellent being, He must necessarily be loved supremely by those who are truly holy. ... To love completely what is most completely good is to be most completely perfect. From this, it follows that a truly holy mind, above all other things, seeks the glory of God and makes the glory of God His supreme governing and ultimate end.

When we compare classical Christianity's view to our contemporary bankruptcy concerning all things bright and beautiful, we are instantly and agonizingly aware that something has gone terribly awry. Why do we so blithely seek to sunder the unity between the good and the beautiful and the true? Why do we flippantly regard as "beautiful" anything that is unholy, traveling the road described by G. K. Chesterton "from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect"? That is a symptom of a deep-seated human sickness. That sickness is sin. Al Mohler rightly ties the profane misconstrual of beauty with the original sin:

Our understanding of beauty as a category in crisis begins not with contemporary confusion, but in the Garden of Eden, where our first parents were attracted to the forbidden fruit at least in part because it was attractive to the eyes. A false understanding of beauty–the false allure of the evil rather than the good–is a part of the story of the Fall. Thus the confusion over beauty is not merely an item of cultural consternation... It is a matter of redemption. The only way out of our confusion over beauty is to know the Creator, to know Him not merely conceptually but personally, and to have our relationship with Him once again set right.

The Christian vision of beauty demands a moral context, a truth context, to every question about beauty. Beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder, something subjective, relative, entirely preferential and self-referential. ("I like Bach; you like Britney.") Mohler says, "by affirming the unity of the transcendentals in the singular person of the triune God, we are required to see beauty as a matter of truth to which taste is accountable, rather than a matter of taste to which truth is accountable." The disruption and confusion over beauty is not a mere fault in human perception; it is a matter of human rebellion.

In our fallenness we often view the fallen aspects of creature and creation and regard them as beautiful. We then attempt to validate ourselves and our appraisal by worshiping both. Isn't it true that when we look at our fellow human beings, or even when we look in the mirror, we are guided (or misguided) by prevailing concepts of beauty rather than that which conforms to the image of God? And what does it say about our condition that we believe the models in the magazines are the ideal when no one truly looks like that? (This is not to suggest that we should not engage in a certain level of cosmetic transfiguration before we face the day. However, we must not confuse the gift with its wrapping and misjudge which is truly of value.) Why are we unable to look past the wrinkles and scars and into the eyes of our elders and

say, “You are beautiful”?

The Christian worldview provides the spiritual vision necessary to look past the aesthetically unsightly and see the good, the true, the real. How else could a father can look at his hobbled daughter and see her as entirely beautiful? Or, better, how else could we something as ghastly as a bloody cross and not recoil in horror but rather celebrate in worship? Dawkins, Harris, Chomsky, Sartre, Nietzsche, Marx – none of them would dare speak, much less sing, of surveying a “wondrous cross” where “thorns compose so rich a crown.” And they would be justified in their refusal to do so, but ONLY if the cross and its Christ is not good and true.

When we look upward at the cross and behold the face of Christ, what do we see? We behold the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth – we see the intrinsic beauty, the holiness, of God Himself! (John 1:14) Only when we have a true knowledge of what – and Whom – it is that we’re seeing, when our lives have been linked with His by faith and we’ve truly been transformed by that same grace and truth, do we view the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross as glorious and genuinely beautiful.

The infinitely glorious God is also infinitely wise. He surely knew we’d be no better than our first parents, tempted to conflate true beauty with some cheap charm, cosmetic prettiness or superficial attractiveness. That is why, when He gave us His Son, the prophet Isaiah said “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (53:2-3).

Christ came into a mad, mad world, drunk with its obsession over superficial beauty. So He Himself had none. And it almost seems a foregone conclusion that we would cast him aside, reject Him, kill Him. But did we really? He said He laid down His own life of His own accord – for us! (John 10:18) Why? Because we were so lovely, so enchanting, so beautiful? Hardly. It was because that was the only way He could save us from ourselves, and in so doing restore us to what we once were before the Fall. He willingly laid aside all claims to superficial beauty so He could make us truly beautiful – radiant, spotless, and holy.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
Ephesians 5:25-27

I hope you understand that the Christian gospel is not just a simple story of a homely peasant sage and an old rugged cross. It is redemption's story, the story of a beautiful Savior who hung on a beautiful cross and died the only beautiful death – one that would atone for all our treachery and repulsiveness and evil. He laid aside His beauty because it was only way to make us truly beautiful.

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky has one of his characters speak this phrase: "Beauty is the battlefield where God and Satan contend with each other for the hearts of men." It is the Evil One who tempts us with shallow appeals to the senses while corrupting the good and twisting the true, severing them from each other and celebrating our confusion. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). However, it is the Holy One who restores the harmony between the true and good and beautiful through regeneration and redemption, unifies them in our hearts, then beautifies even the very feet of those who carry the good tidings of this transforming truth.

That picture of Lauren is our favorite. When we see it we are reminded that our girl is a beautiful young woman – attractive too! It also reminds us that Dostoevsky was right: If the world will be saved, it is beauty that will save it. As much as we love Lauren, we understand it is neither her beauty nor her prettiness that will save her – or anyone else for that matter, much less the world. That distinction goes to the One who stands alone as the fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God displayed in the face of Christ Jesus.
2 Corinthians 4:6

SDG

Days 73-76: Lauren is 100 Times Happier

Lauren Graham Waller, August 21, 2011

Last Sunday I went to church for the first time since the accident. I found out I didn't miss any of the Romans series because pastor Jerry has been with his wife who had knee surgery. He also went to Honduras and California and other places over the summer. Pastor Jerry started on Romans 9. It comes after Romans 8 that ends by saying nothing can separate us from the love of God. But someone in Rome that Paul was writing to was wondering about the Jews because they seemed to be separated from God and He turned His love toward the Gentiles instead. There was more but I don't really remember and I should probably go back and listen to it again. It was nice to go back to church but it was a little overwhelming with the amount of people showering me with attention. Joshua [the minister of music] was not there and I missed him. He is an excellent piano player and he's funny and a good [choir] teacher.

On Monday we went to the doctor in Hobe Sound, Dr. Coleman. He has a cool accent. He didn't do anything major. He ordered an x-ray [of Lauren's hip] and he said it was normal which is good news. It looks like my pelvis is healed. He looked in my ears and said they were both full of wax and why didn't St. Mary's clean them out. St. Mary's didn't because it would make me dizzy and I would fall over and hit my head which would be bad news. "Catastrophic" actually is what Dr. Lochner said [Lauren's physiatrist]. Dr. Coleman did some other things after that but I don't think they were that important. I got weighed and I'm where I should be. 101.8 pounds. I am 5'7" according to them which means I am as tall as mom, except she is 5'8". Last time I was 5'6¾" but I don't think they pressed down as hard on my mullet because it's too awesome!!! Actually I think they were scared of touching my head.

After that we went to Mangrove Bay, a really nice retirement place in Jupiter where Mom worked before the accident. I was a little bit of a celebrity! Everyone knew who I was but they really love and miss Mom. They know all about Chick-Fil-A and Carabba's because they all read the blog. Some of them get on computers but somebody prints off a bunch of copies and passes them all around and they read them at gatherings and talk about it a lot. The staff and residents all came around and were hugging me and Mom and some were crying. A shout out to all the friendly and loving and sweet people there! My Mom and

I love you! Thank you for your support!

On Wednesday Judy and Brenda came over again. Mom went to Hobe Sound to pack up some more stuff while they were here. They worked with me on therapy. Judy was going to take me to get a haircut but it didn't work because people were coming over. I think they may take me to a movie too. Also some of my very best friends, Danika, Jon, and Ethan came over to visit. They were my first friends when I moved to Florida and I love them! We watched a movie together and had a nice time. Danika knows my appreciation for cool hats so she brought me a couple. The craziness level on these is pretty high but that's very cool! How do you like them?

On Thursday I had a physical therapist come do an eval. Mr. Peterson. When he saw how good I was doing he was very surprised. He said they didn't tell him much before he came and he was shocked I could move so well and talk and even kinda walk. He said he has two other patients who had the same injury as me and both are in Skilled Nursing Facilities. They have been there for a while. They can't write or anything. One can't even talk and neither one can get out of bed. He said they probably won't get much better. I can't do all I want to do but I am thankful I can do more than some people can.

Two Sharons came to see me too. One of them brought me some Bible study books but I haven't read them yet. I am going to use them, at least one of them, but not enough time so far. We played a matching game and Racko. I didn't do so good at the matching thing because there were so many pieces and my memory is bad. I thought I did okay at Racko but I still lost. One of the Sharon's won both games. I like games. They are fun and they are something to do. My speech Therapist came and did an eval the next day and said games are good therapy. She told me I should play Scattergories, Catch Phrase and Bladderdash. So if any of you are up for games some time hit me up!

We went to the pool twice last week and did PT in the pool. It's better than doing it in real life. It's nice and warm except one day we had to use a different pool because they were doing work on our pool. There's like 15 pools in the development. They are nice in the hot Floridian summer!

Yesterday evening some friends from church came over. We chatted and sang and played guitar. Pastor Jon [Anderson] came and his wife April and brought their four kids. I got to see their new baby, Derek

Lloyd-Jones Anderson. He was cute. Mom kept saying he was adorable and she wanted to keep him. She hogged him and wouldn't let his mom hold him. She's good with kids though. I don't remember if she was that good with me when I was a kid though. She's a good nurse now and everyone should hire her. (After I'm done with her!)

My good friends Jesse and Loren got engaged yesterday! Congratulations! I know they will have a good marriage because they are Michigan fans! If you can be a Michigan football fan after the last three years then you have the loyalty needed to be a good husband or wife. They are coming over for the first Michigan game in two weeks. All the Michigan fans in Florida can come over. It's a tradition. (I am volunteering my services for engagement pictures though if they haven't got anyone lined up yet!)

My speech therapist said she could come here instead of going to outpatient therapy because she lives in our same development. So that is an answer to prayer that we never even prayed about I don't think. We don't have to spend money on gas and drive a long ways away! Plus it's very cool to be at home. (Have I said how much happier I am to be at home? About 10 times happier. Or 100 times. Or more than that!)

I am walking a little better and my memory is getting a little bit better, slowly. I am not sure if I'm talking any better; you tell me. Mom thinks I am but Dad says sometimes I talk like I have oatmeal in my mouth. I should work on practicing it more but the mouth exercises look stupid. But apparently they help. My speech therapist said I need to exaggerate them more to get any benefit from them. She said they look stupid but they help with talking better. She also said the brain exercises partly work on working memory and partly compensatory for parts of my memory I have lost.

Johanna and Julie came over to see me today. It was nice to see them and to see baby Alice. She has gotten so much bigger than when I last saw her. She is cute. She does have a sin nature though! For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God! She started crying and got mad when she didn't get her way! She needs Jesus but probably doesn't know that yet, but I'm sure Johanna and Matt will teach her about him soon. Julie is pregnant with a girl who will be Alice's best friend. I'm sure she has a sin nature too. Johanna and Julie brought me a Vanilla Rooibos Tea Latte from Starbucks! (My Dad was surprised I know how to spell all these words; that is one thing I didn't lose in my memory. I missed one of my grandma's funerals because I was at a

regional spelling bee in Chicago and missed going to Nationals in Washington DC by two places.) I love Starbucks. I like their beverages (especially Frappucino and Tea) but I like their ambience too.

I want to tell everybody that we've moved. Our new address is:

The Grahams
1554 NW Sweetbay Circle
Palm City, FL 34990

Please send any mail to the new address. If you are coming to visit you should come to the new address too or you won't find us at the old place in Hobe Sound. If you do go there you can bring a load of stuff over for us!

Thank you for your prayers and support and Go Blue!

Lauren

Days 77-80: Lauren Discusses Hurricanes & Hairstyles

Lauren Graham Waller, August 25, 2011

I went to church for the second time since the accident on Sunday and got to hear Pastor Jon speak on 2 Corinthians 2, the last paragraph. It was about how you deal with despair in Christian ministry. It wasn't just a sermon for pastors; it was for people who do ministry of any sort, whether you're leading a Bible Study, or ministering to people in your own family, or any time you try to teach or live out the gospel and people respond negatively or not at all.

2 Corinthians 2: 14-17: *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

He said our job isn't to smell pleasing to everyone, it is just to "smell like Christ." Paul knew that the message of Christ would be pleasing to those who were being saved and awful to those who weren't. The big

thing to me was that Paul was disappointed that he wasn't accepted by people everywhere but he didn't change the message of God's word so that people would like it better. If we are sincere ministers who tell people the truth about Christ then God will lead us in triumph. It was a good sermon and a good day.

On Monday the new PT guy came. He is a surfer dude and a lifeguard and really, really tan and muscular with long blonde hair. He was way too old for me, in his 30s or something, so he is more Mom's age. (Lucky Dad has to compete with a surfer dude who comes to our house while he's away!:)) We are going to do some therapy in the pool and the fitness center. His name is Robert. He is very nice and we (me and mom) like him. He is going to college for his doctorate.

He said I am doing really good. He uses stretch bands a lot for my legs and feet and a bar for arms. Arm stuff we did was curls for my biceps and arm raises for my deltoids. After I'm finished I may have to go shop for new shirts that show off my glistening guns. This will be impressive because I've never had a real muscle in my arms before! :)

I finally got to go see Harry Potter with Judy and Molly's mom, Emily. The end was the most interesting because I heard it was going to be a lot different than the book but it was pretty close. I read the whole book just before I went to see the movie. I had read the book a couple times before the accident but didn't remember 75% of it. I remembered that Harry beat Lord Voldemort but that's about it. I also remember that he had to destroy horcruxes. I also found out that Brad and Dad already saw the movie while I was in the hospital! The stinkers! I didn't know the movie was even out because I was out at the time so it's not that big of a deal. I feel like I should say something more epic about this whole series but I don't really have any special words. Thank you Judy and Emily for taking me!

On Tuesday the Speech Therapist came. That was story day. I had to read a story in a magazine then Visualize and Verbalize. I did more verbalizing than visualizing. I'm not much for visualizing unless it's with graphic design stuff. I was supposed to look at the pictures and bold and italicized words to see if I could tell what the story was about. The article was about taking care of the caregiver. Caregivers like my Mom need to remember to take care of themselves or they are not much good to the people they are taking care of, like me. There's more that I remember but we don't need to write about it because it's not interesting to anybody but caregivers.

That night the Baldwins came over for dinner. The Speech Therapist said that complicated recipes are good for me because it helps me to sequence and process things. So we made a recipe that had about a dozen spices that I measured out. I also peeled potatoes. My Mom did the rest. The supper turned out real good, but I don't think it was because I had anything to do with. My Dad believes the secret to the success of the supper was the exquisite finesse and skill he had in grilling the Poulet. But that's because he wants to give props to himself and there's really nothing that warrants that kind of boasting! (Except the Poulet actually was quite good...you know, for chicken.) It was nice to have our good friends the Baldwins here and we mostly talked about fundraising stuff. They even said the supper was delicious. Anna brought a delicious fudge and ice cream dessert with a brownie on the bottom that was excellent but I couldn't eat it all. Frank gave me homework (design stuff) that I haven't worked on since yesterday because I'm trying to work on India pics.

Today the Physical Therapist came again. I got a good workout. We were going to get in the pool but because of the hurricane we were having lots of rain and winds from the outer bands. The waves are 10-15 feet high here compared to the 45 feet high where the hurricane is. Joyce and Mary came over and brought Chik-Fil-A and an Arnold Palmer. It was quite good, thank you very much. I didn't get to stay too long and chat with them because Judy came to take me to get a haircut, but they stayed and talked to Mom. That was good for Mom and for them, but probably more for Mom. They are Mom's good friends and she really likes them. (Mary is from Michigan so she has to be a good person! Joyce is a good person too because she's a small group leader.)

Speaking of haircuts, this was the mane event. Get it? Mane? M-A-N-E? Pretty punny, huh? My hair has always been long so I was kind of sad at the thought of getting it cut. My hair is part of me, plus I think I look better with it long. Also I don't want to look like a man. But I was actually tired of having it short in front and getting weird looks whenever we went somewhere. At least cancer patients are bald all over so it's natural but I looked like I had an unfortunate run-in with a renegade pair of scissors. So I wanted it to all be sort of the same length so it can grow out evenly.

When we got to the salon I showed the hair stylist some pictures I liked. She liked the ideas and talked them over with another hairdresser. She took the long parts of my hair off in three pieces so we

can donate it to a cancer patient or someone. (Does anybody know who can use some long hair that stuck by me through thick and thin? Actually it would be thin and thinner!)

After she cut it all off she put gel and hairspray in it and styled it. Everyone who sees it loves it and says it looks cute but I'm not sure yet. What do you think? It still feels weird for me so I don't know if I like it yet. I think I will if for no other reason it will cut way down on shower and getting-ready time. Mom will be happy because she won't have to braid it and brush it every day. Plus it really offsets the fine facial features which were a generous bestowal from my parentals. :) Thanks guys! It doesn't make me look more intellectual (that's the glasses!) but it makes me look less weird and more human. So all in all I think it's a win.

After the hair event we went to Too Jays to meet the new Family Ministries pastor and his family. They are from Arkansas so he might know hillbillies like my Dad so they probably speak the same language. They seem really nice. He is a singer and has a high voice and my Dad says he sings like Keith Green. By then it was raining very hard and my Dad was coming home from West Palm Beach from working there today. He picked me up in Jupiter and got soaked when he got out to get me. Mom was on the phone with us a lot worried about us driving in the storm and even worried that we were driving while on the phone although she's the one who called! She gets worried whenever we cross the street so it's nothing new! But when we got home Mom wanted to go to the beach so she could see the waves pounding the beach and possibly get washed out to sea. Go figure! I'm glad the hurricane missed us, but I thought about my friend Regina who lives in the Bahamas where the hurricane hit. Hopefully her family is okay.

On the way home my Dad and I were talking about the mystery of God's providence and why He allows so much sin and evil and painful things to happen to us, even storms. John Wesley said the mystery of providence should humble us before God because if a worm can't comprehend a man, how much less of a chance does man have of comprehending God?

Then Dad told me about William Cowper who was a poet and a hymn writer. He was very talented but he was a little bit weird just like my Dad! (He once wrote a poem to celebrate the life of a halibut he ate for supper! Cowper, not Dad). Cowper was depressed a lot and had a lot of bad things happen to him in his life and he even tried to commit suicide many times but God always intervened. After the seventh time

he tried to kill himself he read the words in John 13 where Jesus said to his disciples that they couldn't understand what Jesus was up to but later they would understand. That inspired Cowper to write a poem which I memorized and you should too in case you ever have to go through some troubles or storms or things that you don't understand:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Lauren

Days 82-85: Lauren Witnesses a Miracle

Lauren Graham Waller, August 30, 2011

Someone has said "there is a purpose to our pain." The Lord has used that thought to bring Romans 8:28 to my mind lately. God has a reason for having us go through everything we go through even though it may not make sense to us at the time. For those of us who love God and are called by Him as one of His chosen ones God's ultimate purpose

means He works everything out for the ultimate good.

In high school I was an AP student and dual-enrolling my junior and senior years. Good grades came easy to me (even though I also worked very hard for them too!). In college I was in the Honors program and have always taken pride in my ability as a student. I enjoy reading, even non-fiction, including the classics. (Not a huge fan of epic poems though like the Aeneid and the Illiad, although Beowulf was vaguely interesting because it had violence in it – but it was central to the plot so don't think I'm a blood and gore freak – I just happen to like good action in my classics!) Meanwhile, after that detour around Grendel's barn, I think my (formerly) Great Brain was kind of an idol.

I found my identity and joy in that more than in Christ. God has helped me see that. The fact that I can't remember things is very frustrating. Also, my cognitive functioning is not quite up to where it used to be and that doesn't promote much personal happiness either. So God is using this accident for my spiritual growth in addition to His ultimate purposes that are beyond me personally.

On Friday I went back to see Dr. Petruska, my neurosurgeon [not the Buckeye doctor]. This was the first time to visit him since I have been out of the hospital and this was the first time I ever met him when I was "awake" – at least that I remember. He was the one who first talked to Mom and Dad on the day of the accident right after he saw my first CT scan. He told them it was bad news and I would never be the same again even if I lived, which he couldn't even promise that. When he saw me on Friday he came up and shook my hand and apparently he couldn't believe I looked as good as I did after only 11 weeks. He just kept staring at me and kept shaking his head without saying anything. He finally said, "I just want to pull up a chair and sit here and look at you." He was in awe and thinks I'm a miracle and he can't believe I'm doing so well.

We talked about me going back to college and he wasn't at all surprised that I wasn't going back right now. I told him I couldn't really remember hardly anything about last semester. I can remember some of the classes (especially the ones I didn't like!) but can't remember the rest or anything much of what I learned. He asked how that made me feel. I said, "sad." He was puzzled and said that was a strange response. He asked why I felt sad. He said I should expect to be so depressed that I might just start crying in the middle of a McDonald's commercial. I laughed out loud but he didn't think it was funny. He said most

people with my kind of injury feel frustrated and angry and bitter and mad and fly off the handle at people. He asked if I ever felt like that and I said no and I don't think he even believed me but it's true.

He knew I just got back from a missions trip and he said I have got my life more together than most people twice my age and I've accomplished more in my 20 years than most adults do in their entire lives. He thought I should be angry (maybe at God?) that part of my memory was gone and I've been robbed of some part of my life. I don't know why God decided to let this happen to me but the secret things belong to the Lord our God (Deuteronomy 29:29). His ways are not my ways and His thoughts are not my thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than my ways and His thoughts higher than my thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). My life and my brain belong to Him anyway and He just loaned them to me. If He thinks I can honor Him more if He takes a portion of it then I'm cool with that. (If He gives it all back I'm very cool with that too though!)

Dr. Petruska asked if I had any questions. I asked him how much of my memory I'd get back. He said he thought 80-90%. He said I am still in the beginning stages of recovery that will last for a year or more and I have to keep reminding myself that I'm still fresh out of the hospital. Mom asked about my short term memory and he said I might always have some trouble with it but I can always blame my forgetfulness on having a brain injury. I told Mom I have a valid excuse for not getting the dishwasher emptied! That doesn't help me with tests or quizzes but it might get me out of some chores! :) (My Dad heard that and he asked if I had any spare "Brain Injury" Excuses he could borrow! Then he started using that excuse without my permission; I need to start charging him royalties!) I like Dr. Petruska; he is a jolly good fellow but I don't think he understands how good God is even when life is hard. He said he was very glad I'm still alive and that I'm still here and Mom said God wasn't finished with me yet on this earth.

Dr. Petruska also said he usually would do a functional MRI but he wasn't going to on me because it might show a lot of weird stuff that would just depress me and my parents and put psychological stress and worry on us. I'm doing good, he said, even if an MRI might say differently so he didn't think we should bother with it. He wants me to see Dr. Lochner [the Physiatrist] next because he was with me at the end at Rehab in St. Mary's. He said he thinks I can be weaned off my seizure medication. Mom asked if I had a seizure in the hospital and he said no but he said I was doing some funky stuff that he thought was

symptomatic of seizures.

He asked if I had been back to ICU because all the staff fell in love with me and would be very excited if they could see me now. I told him we did the day we left, even though I didn't remember any of them, but we wanted to go back and see them again. He also asked about my weight too because I look pretty thin. He probably thinks I can't afford to lose much more because I look like a shell of my former self! I told him I only lost five pounds but I guess for me that's quite a bit to lose. I'm up to 103 now so I'm almost ballooning out of control!

That night [Friday] Robbie, Aubrey, Sara and Mark (from the India Team) came over. All five of us wore our kurtas and ate Indian cuisine and drank yummy Chai(!!!) and looked at a bunch of pictures from the trip. Seeing everyone again was so nice. They are all friends of mine and we spent a lot of time together in a foreign country and experienced a lot of very emotional and heart-breaking things together. I don't miss India so much but I do miss being with my friends and I miss the children we met. I wish Brent and Ben and Ashley and Peter and Liz could have come; it was only half the team. Maybe when Dr. Thom [the missionary in India] comes this fall we can all get together. It was still very nice to have some of them come and help me remember all the parts of India I had forgotten. (I had even forgotten we visited the Taj Mahal until someone reminded me!)

Saturday there was a car wash in Jupiter to help the fundraising cause. It was very nice of all of them. They stayed outside in 100 degree weather for a long time and some of them got sunburned! A lot of very nice people are going way above the call of duty to help me out. I wish there was some way I could tell all of you how much I appreciate it. Love never fails, it says in 1 Corinthians 13, and God is showing me what it means when people really have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit he has given to us.

Saturday night I witnessed a miracle. The Detroit Lions beat the New England Patriots in a blowout. I don't have anything to say about that because I don't think I could figure that out if I had a whole brain working flawlessly!

Sunday we went to church again and heard more on Romans 9. There's nothing that we have done to merit salvation, which is not given on the basis of any ethnicity or other advantages. It is God who saves out of His own love toward us. All of us have received many good things from

God (like the Jews did) but that doesn't mean everybody will be saved. The real children of God are not those who do good works or have a good heritage but who answer His call and believe on His Son.

After church we went to lunch with Mary and Mike and that was nice. It was good to talk to them again because we haven't seen them for a while. They are going to come to the Michigan Football Kickoff this Saturday at our house at 3:30. You can come too if you are a Michigan fan, or if you want to become one, or if God is moving on your heart to turn your back on lesser teams and follow the one true team. :) Sometimes it's a trial though being a Michigan fan though as we all know from these past years!

Which brings me to another one of my favorite passages: "Consider it all joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4). The joy is not that we face trials or have pain and suffering but that the suffering is not the end. God has the final word. He is using our trials for something good and glorious and He is preparing us and others for that glory. He has sent us His Son who suffered worse than we ever will so that if we trust Him then He can take us to a place where suffering and pain can never touch us again. Even a person with only half their brain can see that's a good deal!

Lauren

Day 91 - Lauren Goes Golf-Carting

Lauren Graham Waller, September 4, 2011

Today it has been three months since the accident. A lot has changed in my life in that time and it's hard to believe. Three months ago I had no idea I would not be going back to school, that I would be crippled, that I would be living in a new town in a new house. This is where the Lord has me now so I guess I will see what His plan is as it unfolds.

Since the first day we came to the new house I spied the hot tub. It was crying aloud: Come, get in me. I'm hot! I kept asking if I could get in the hot tub but my parents wouldn't let me until my wounds had healed. When I finally was able to get in the hot tub it was nice but from what I remember, which as we know by now isn't that accurate, it wasn't that hot. Which, when a hot tub isn't hot it is cool and if it is cool it is a

pool, not a hot tub. So I have been able to get into the hot tub a few times now and it has been relaxing and enjoyable but not so hot.

Mom called Chuck the Hot Tub guy to find out what was wrong. When she called him he said he would need to come over and show us how to run the hot tub. There is a routine you have to go through in order to turn the gas on and heat up the hot tub. Mom got it figured out and since then we have been in quite a few times. After I do therapy in the pool me and Mom go get in the hot tub. Mom takes my hands and supports me as I step down because I can't support myself and my legs are really weak and there's a big step and no rails. The hot tub is really relaxing and I'd recommend that if you have to have therapy you should always get into a hot tub afterward if you have one.

We were supposed to go see Dr. Lochner this week but we had to postpone for a week because we had to be out of our old house on Tuesday and we still had almost everything there. I really don't have many memories of the time I was there at that house although I know a lot happened. I guess that's what happens when you lose your memory so it's sad but maybe it's a good thing. I couldn't do anything to help move so I sat in a chair while Mom and Dad moved everything out. One good thing that happened is while they were working I was able to read almost a whole book that my 1st grade teacher sent to my Mom to read. It was called "Mistaken Identity" and it was about a group of college kids who were coming home from a church camp in a van. A truck crossed the median and hit the van. Five of the kids were killed and one of them wasn't killed but was in a coma. They got two of the girls confused and mistook the identity of one of the dead girls with the girl who was in a coma and had a TBI like I had. It was a good book and it got me through the day. It was interesting and the girl, Whitney, sounds similar to me from the little I read about her. We are both girls, both Christians, both in college, and both got a TBI from a car accident. We are also both very private but have a lot of attention focused on us that we didn't ask for but God has used our experience to help other people.

Thursday and Friday I had two therapies on each day: Speech and Physical. I was sore after PT. We did therapy in the pool again. We worked on arms and legs. We use pool weights for my arms and feet that add resistance and help strengthen the muscles. I do curls with my arms and lifts and stuff with my legs, forward and backwards. When we get finished I am very tired and my muscles are sore. It's safer to do exercises in the pool because if I fall I just land backwards in the water. It's also

cooler [because the weather is hot]! There's also good resistance.

For Speech Therapy we did stories again. She would read a story and then ask me about what happened to see how much I remembered. (We use Visualizing & Verbalizing, Chunking, and Text Scanning.) I am remembering more than I was but still not everything. I really like my therapist. She is nice and she lets me read Scripture for therapy. She is really working hard to go to bat for us to get more therapy. She is making phone calls and writing emails because the people that were paying for the therapy have said they don't have any more money. [The Brain & Spinal Cord Injury program that agreed to pay for all of Lauren's therapy has exhausted their funds and will not find out if they get more funding until either October or January. In the meantime we have to pay for therapy out-of-pocket.] My Mom said the therapist was going to start me on the LiPS program this week because of what she called "dysarthria" and "decreased verbal output rate." That means I can't talk very fast and the word pronunciation isn't too snazzy because the part of my brain that controls my speech has been damaged. I hope the therapy can continue because I think it is really helping me.

The Standridges came and brought us lasagna. They seem really nice and the lasagna was really good. They have cool accents but I am really more interested in the country they are from [Italy] than the accents. They came to see me at the hospital several times but never got past the waiting room to actually see me because something always happened so they couldn't. It was very nice of them and I'm sorry they didn't get to see me. Not that I'd remember them and I wasn't that much to look at then anyway! But it's the thought that counts. And the driving. That was very nice of them to drive all the way out here to bring us dinner!

Friday my Mom and Dad let me drive the golf cart. I have been begging them to let me but I don't think they let me because Mom didn't know how to work it. My Dad showed me how to work it and let me drive around the block. We rode down to the St. Lucie River. We saw a big turtle and a lot of blue crabs. Mom has tried to rescue them because they are everywhere and one even got in our garage. My Dad forwarded an email about them and they all come up to the land to mate for a few weeks and then go back to the ocean. Driving the golf cart was fun but I think I scared Mom half to death and almost flipped her off the side with the sharp corners that I took! We need to do that again!

Yesterday we had a bunch of friends over for the Michigan game. Before anyone got here Mom was all stressed out because the house wasn't spotless and we weren't totally moved in yet. We had to get the proper ornamentation up – the Big House Football flag and the Michigan banner – to celebrate the season. It was really nice because Allie and Jeremy and Johann and Loren and Jesse and my good friend Sten came over. [See the attached picture with Bud, the Long-Necked Michigan Giraffe, minus Johan. Shout out to Mandy Mahrt who was rooting for Michigan all alone in Tennessee!] My Mom and Dad's good friends Mike and Mary came over too. I don't think they care as much about football as our family because Mom and Mary didn't even stay to watch the game but went for a walk! They probably talked about stuff married women talk about. Michigan won but there were two rain delays and the game was called because of lightning and thunder storms.

Today we went to church again. On the way to church we discussed what the sermon was about, Election, and my Mom and Dad didn't agree on it so much. Some people never talk about it but it's in the Bible so if you are going to read Romans 9 you can't ignore it if you believe all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Pastor Jerry talked about it and on the way home Mom said he made her point and Dad said he made his point! It must have been a good sermon if my Mom and Dad don't agree with each other but they both agree with him. I thought it was a good sermon from what I remember, but I don't think I've ever heard Jerry preach a bad sermon because he always preaches from the Bible. My brother Brad thought it was good too. He said Pastor Jerry took a different approach than he thought he would and he was pleasantly surprised. It is a controversial subject, God's sovereignty and human responsibility, and those two things don't go together so well. Pastor Jerry said both of them are true and how they go together is a mystery that we shouldn't try to solve because we are finite and God is infinite and it should cause us to worship God and be thankful He had mercy on us.

This is the part of the blog where I need to offer a disclaimer. If any of you think I am typing this I am not. My Dad and I get together and we talk about what happened the past few days and my Dad types it up. He dresses it up some so it makes sense but I don't type. I'm the injured cripple and my Dad is the typist. My Mom is the brains because sometimes she joins us with the calendar to help remember what all happened. After it's finished my Dad emails it to me for final comments to make sure he got it all correct then he posts it for me. My typing

skills used to be good but they're not so great right now and I can't type so fast. My writing still needs a lot of work too. I'm like my Mom now because she wants Dad to look over everything she writes before she sends it. I guess I don't know where we'd be without Dad!

One more thing: Psalms 73:25 says, "Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." That's a verse we read in church today and it's a good verse because it's about our desires. A lot of people desire just about everything on earth except Jesus, and a lot of people desire everything in heaven except Jesus. He's all that matters though and if heaven can be heaven to you without Jesus then maybe you haven't really met Jesus yet.

One other thing: Shout out to PBA! I'm going to be there Tuesday to stop by for a visit in the evening. I have an interview at 4:45 then after that is done

I would like to see any friends that are available! Chik-Fil-A on campus around 6:00 is where the fellowship happens!

Love, Lauren

Day 94: When Darkness Seems to Hide His Face

Lauren Graham Waller, September 7, 2011

> *Who is among you that fears the Lord? Whoobeys the voice of His servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God (Isaiah 50:10). I will wait for the LORD, who is Hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in Him.*
> *Isaiah 8:17*

Isaiah, in one of his Servant Songs, pens one of the most peculiar passages in all of Scripture. Note three things about the subject of this verse: It is a man who (a) fears the Lord, (b) obeys the voice of His servant, and (c) walks in darkness without so much as a ray of light.

It is not darkness of unconfessed sin, unresolved guilt, or overt demonic oppression. It is instead a "divine darkness" – an inexplicable sense that God's presence has been withdrawn. No matter which way you turn, you feel or find no sign of God. Tozer calls this "the ministry of the night." Spurgeon spoke of it as "the child of light walking in darkness."

With each passing day we see improvement in Lauren's physical condition. However, there is a corresponding increase in the physical and emotional toll of mounting obligations - with new ones added by the day - and the already meager resources approaching their end. Elizabeth and I more and more feel something of what the prophet is writing; there are times we both feel as though the darkness has sucked every sliver of light from our lives. It's not as though a bevy of trivial concerns and peripheral problems have relegated God to the back row of our consideration; it is almost as if – even in our seeking His face and desiring His honor – He has deliberately hidden Himself from view. There are days our spirits resonate with the words of Job: "I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him. On the left hand where He does His work, I do not behold Him there, and He hides Himself on the right hand so that I can not see Him" (Job 23:8-9).

Like many before us – and many who will follow, we have sought solace in the story of Joseph. Four times in one chapter (Genesis 39) we read that God was present with Joseph:

Genesis 39: *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him...*

Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him (1-3,20-23).

These statements form a set of bookends at the front and back of Jacob's conscription into slavery in North Africa. On the front end of the story Joseph has been kidnapped then sold to the Egyptian pharaoh's captain of the guard. The point of the author's description is to show us that, despite Joseph's circumstances, he prospered and became a "successful man." He rose through the ranks to the major domo of Potiphar's household; everything the captain owned was entrusted to Joseph. True, he was a slave. But life was good and – most importantly – God was there. "The LORD was with Joseph."

Our family is no different than yours. We've enjoyed seasons when we've been blessed beyond measure. And it's a simple step, isn't it, to surmise that success and prosperity represent the blessings and favor of God? We were faithful to bow our heads and thank God for "every good and perfect gift that comes from above." We even counted our blessings (and named them one by one!) and, in the cornucopia of abundance when things are going well, it was reasonable to conclude that – like Jacob – God was with us.

But the Scripture is neither so narrow nor naïve. As Jacob's story develops things quickly, and severely, take a turn for the worse. And that inserts the back bookend into this story. Joseph now finds himself the unwitting victim of the false accusation of sexual assault. It is the stuff of nightmares: living right but accused of wrong; declared guilty while utterly and unequivocally innocent. Egyptian justice did not presume innocence without compelling evidence of guilt. Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph but he flees the scene. And thus the woman scorned unleashed hell's fury upon him. She cries, "rape," and Joseph is flung into prison.

Where is God now?

When our days go dark and our nights grow long, when our faith fades and our spirits sink, what do we make of God's promises then? It's easy to conclude that God is with us when we're happy and healthy, when every rainbow ends at a pot of gold and every story has a happy ending. When everything is going badly it's difficult to conclude the same thing. And yet this is precisely what the story of Joseph tells us! When Joseph was falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned, the Lord was still with him. God was with Joseph in the bad times as well as the good, in the darkness as well as the light.

It is worth our while to reflect on this. We might expect to believe that when things go from good to bad – or from bad to worse, that God must surely be against us. It's quite natural to assume that bad things are the indicators of divine judgment and retribution. Surely God must be punishing us for something we've done. (This was the reasoning of Job's friends. And indeed, as Paul tells the Corinthians, it is sometimes the case [1 Cor. 11:29-30] but it is not necessarily so.) In Jacob's situation that would be an entirely incorrect conclusion. Sorrow and suffering are not necessarily indicators that God is against us. And darkness is no indicator that God has abandoned us, His character is flawed, or His promises are untrue.

What Joseph did not know, but what the end of the story in Genesis 50 makes clear, is that God had a precise purpose in placing him in prison. Joseph would only later discover that God temporarily left Joseph in the dark so that he could one day be the right man in the right place at the right time in order to save his entire family. Joseph would not live long enough to know that God's plan for him was a trans-generational one that would save a covenant nation and continue to unfold as part of the greatest story in human history: the master plan of redemption.

Only faith in the mercy of a reliable and trustworthy God (v. 21) can accept this answer. But isn't it the nature of faith to reason in just this way?

When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.

Our God not only created the brightness of day,
He also created the darkness of night (Isaiah 45:7). God is the One who inhabits even the darkness (Duet. 5:22) and the darkness is as light to Him (Ps. 139:12). That means He not only is the Author of our joy and gladness, He is also the Author of our night seasons.

We may not understand all the reasons why, but that's not ultimately what's important. His word to us is the same: Trust Me! Rely on Me! Hope in Me! Because, when darkness seems to hide His face, we must believe that even then He is there, His promises are true, and His purposes are good.

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied, "Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!"
So I went forth and finding the Hand of God
Trod gladly into the night.
He led me towards the hills
And the breaking of day in the lone east.
So heart be still! What need our human life to know

If God hath comprehension?
If in the dizzy strife of things
Both high and low, God hideth His intention?

SDG

Day 98: Lauren Just Gives the Main Points

Lauren Graham Waller, September 11, 2011

Another week has passed since I gave you an update and things are going well. Other than not being able to walk or write or use my hands, I should say. But really, things are great. Life is good and God is good.

My hair is even starting to grow on me (yuk yuk). I still think I look like a boy sometimes, especially when I wear a hat. Makeup helps to look more feminine, but I miss my hair I have to say. And, of course I'm still single so... I guess that's good if that's where God has me. "The Lord God is a sun and shield, bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." So if I'm still single and I'm walking uprightly then that wouldn't be good for me right now. My mom says to say I'm single and not looking. I'll just say I'm single. All young, handsome, God-fearing men please send your applications to my Dad or Judy Zemek! (Judy doesn't believe in arranged marriages like my parents do so that's why you should probably send them to her!)

On Monday Dad and Brad were home because it was a holiday. We unpacked some more and I think we'll be unpacking for quite a while. We had movers pack everything and put our stuff in storage and we can't find anything. Mom and me also wrote some Thank Yous. (If you haven't gotten one yet my mom said to apologize because it's hard to keep up.) It's good therapy for me to help write Thank Yous but my handwriting is really poor. While we did that my dad filled out more big stacks of insurance forms and disability forms and social security forms for hours. I think he would enjoy it more if it meant we got more help but we don't get much. Plus he has to keep telling them his daughter's a cripple and I don't think he likes that. (I'm really not a cripple even though I say that a lot; I'm just disabled. Temporarily, I hope.)

On Tuesday we went to see Dr. Lochner, my physiatrist, who is the doctor in charge of all my rehab. He knew our insurance had run out and got cancelled so he only charged a small amount. That was very nice of him. I like him a lot. He is nice and polite. He told us to

remember him when I become famous because he thinks I inevitably will. He said I have healed so fast and he is pleased with my progress. He said several people have been patients of his who have written books about their hospital experience. He thinks I have healed very fast for what I went through and I could write one too.

I told him I didn't have much appetite and have trouble sleeping and he said those are side effects of the medication I'm on. He is going to see if I can get weaned off of it but he has to talk to my neurosurgeons. He asked me to stand up and see if I could hold my balance but I couldn't do it very well. He said I should practice standing up on one leg to try and get my balance. He said the inner ear issue is good so the lack of balance is the effect of laying in a hospital bed for two months and the way my bones and muscles changed during that time. To get stronger and regain my balance I just need more physical therapy and working out. I'm not sure how that's going to work since the insurance is out and the BSCI program is out of money so they're not covering anything. We're paying cash for doctor's visits and medications and the Speech & Cognitive therapy but don't know if we have enough to cover Physical Therapy so we're holding off on that for now.

I really miss running and biking and still look forward to do that again but I don't know when I'll be able to do that. Besides Dr. Lochner doesn't want me on even a bicycle, even with a helmet, because I can't keep my balance so well and he said it would be devastating if I fell and hit my head. One step at a time I guess. I guess that means ballet and ballroom dancing aren't in the cards for now. Wrestling maybe? Just kidding!

He wants me to do neuropsychological testing to see how my cognitive function is. He thinks I may have lost some of my IQ but he said I have plenty of brains to use so it won't be much of a great loss and I could afford to lose 10% but most people can't. He said if I had a 120 IQ before it might go down to 110 or something like that. I didn't tell him my IQ used to be a lot higher than that and this might be God's way of removing one of my idols.

Dr. Lochner gave me a list of things I can't do right now. He said I couldn't drink alcohol because that kills brain cells too. Maybe a sip or two if it was a special celebration or something. He also said it would make my balance worse and cause me to fall over more. He said it would have more impact on my brain than another person who hasn't been through a closed-head brain injury. I didn't tell him I don't have any temptation or desire to drink.

He wanted to make sure I wasn't driving. Not that I've been tempted to do that (except on the golf cart maybe). With my memory the way it is I don't think I could handle traffic anyway. He said I have to go to an 3-hour adaptive driving program to determine if I'm ready to drive again.

He also said to not go out and get pregnant. It became pretty obvious when he was going through this list of things I shouldn't do that he doesn't know me very well at all and doesn't know I'm a Christian. I don't think I told him I was a follower of Jesus Christ or asked him if he was too so that may be why. (I did ask my physical therapist and my speech therapist.) It's very likely that he tells everybody this who has the injuries I have had. Also, because the surgery on my hip and pelvis was successful I can have children, it's just that getting pregnant right now wouldn't be good news. It would be an immaculate conception but it wouldn't be according to prophecy!

He said I could start being by myself for short periods of time and not have 24-hour supervision. Since then I have been by myself once for 5-10 minutes once and 20 minutes once and I did okay. He said I have to keep my phone with me and do what my parents say or I lose my privileges. I'm used to doing that anyway so that's cool. Mom asked about taking vitamins and supplements and he said I was not supposed to have mega-doses of anything and have to stick to the PDV (that's percentage of daily value). My mom is very big into vitamins and health stuff. She's actually nuts about it and gives glory to vitamins instead of to God. :-) Okay, it's not that bad but she does take them a lot and tries to get everyone else to too!

Dr. Lochner said I may experience some changes in my personality and aptitudes. He said I might have been good at some things but won't be any more, and not good at other things that I am now. I used to be lousy at playing the guitar and can't play it any better now, so I guess I still have to practice! I was good at math before but not so good now. My English and spelling are still good. My dad says I still am very skilled at being sassy, but Mom says I don't complain as much and I'm sweet now. I do think I'm more patient than I used to be. Of course I'm on some pretty good drugs now so my spirituality may be pharmaceutically-enhanced.

After the doctor's appointment I went to PBA and saw a bunch of my friends. We hung out at Einstein's Bagels and did an interview for the paper. We went to the Greene [the Sports, Recreation, and Fitness Center] and talked to my old workmates and a lot of people I know

and a lot I don't know. After that we went to Chik-Fil-A and talked with people. It was very nice to get to see a lot of my friends, but it was sad to not be going back to school like everyone else. I know it's weird to a lot of people but I actually like college and what I'm majoring in and was really looking forward to going back to school. God is teaching me a lot of other things though that are more important right now though. I want to go back, hopefully in the Spring, and be able to graduate on-time. If I can get my AP credits to count for Honors I hope I can graduate on-time. It's weird to think I would be an upperclassman but I'm missing it. I really want to go back but I know I can't because I can't write or type or get around. Dr. Lochner even said it wouldn't be a good idea right now. I am where the Lord wants me to be right now and that is getting better and stronger.

Friday we went to Mangrove Bay to see Mom's friends there. We got to see the apartment of one of her friends and it was very cool. He is retired from the CIA and his decorating combined two of my favorite things: art and travel. We went to lunch with Judy and Sharon and I ate all my flatbread. It was that good, but I was hungry too. Friday evening a group of friends from church came over again. We sang some and played Catch Phrase. I did a passable job but not super great. My mind works better than my mouth does right now. That is why my Speech Therapist started a new program with me that focuses on cognitive and speech and how they tie together. The first time I did it was very frustrating because I knew in my mind it should be easy but I couldn't get my mouth and brain to coordinate together. It was so exasperating because before the accident I would have thought it was stupid because of how easy it was. The next time I did it I had more success so that was improvement. That is the most difficult part of rehab is that all these exercises look so easy but I can't do them. I can see where I have made some progress but not nearly as much as I would like.

Other highlights of the week:

- Watching Fruitcake and Ice Cream by Louie Giglio. It's about a girl who has a roommate who is a Christian but she isn't. The roommate convinced her to become a follower of Christ. After she got saved she was in a car accident and got killed and she left a testimony to what God can do. I identified with it a lot and hope God can use my story to be a testimony to Him.

- Watching The Help with Mom. It's about civil rights in America and a whole bunch of black women who told about their lives to a white

journalist. Mom cried all through it because of how heartless and cruel these women were treated, like they weren't on the same level as white people and were completely dehumanized. I don't think anybody can watch a movie like this and deny that all humans are depraved and are born with sinful hearts. Even people in that movie who professed to be Christians treated black women like dogs. Those people didn't know Christ, at least not the one in the Bible who loved women of all ethnicities and ran off all the people who abused women. He has no ethnic preferences because all people are created in the image of His Father.

- Watching the Michigan-Notre Dame game. This was surely the highlight of the entire weekend. It was the first night game ever played at the Big House and it featured the two winningest teams in college football history. Brian and Victoria came to watch and we had a grand time. Michigan wasn't the best team but they are all winners so they won! Hail to the Victors! You know where to find us on game day and all you guys who keep saying you're going to watch a game with us need to get on the schedule! The only problem is that I got tired and went to bed and missed the best part which was Michigan scoring 28 points in the fourth quarter to humiliate the not-so-Lucky Charms of Notre Dame. (If you are Irish I harbor no hard feelings, but you should pick a better team!) Really I didn't miss the best part. Brad and Brian bought Tropical Smoothies and Hurricane Wings (which for chicken wasn't so bad) so we feasted like rock stars. (We didn't drink any Dr. Pepper but we still had a good time, a real good time!)

Actually the real highlight was pastor Jerry's sermon this morning. It was on one of my favorite topics: the sovereignty of God. He talked about one verse, Romans 9:17. And he talked about 9/11 and national tragedies (like Pharoah and the Egyptians) and where God is and what He is doing when there is catastrophe and calamity. He then went through the whole Bible to show that in everything that causes massive suffering to great amounts of people, God is ruling over it all:

1. God is sovereign over all earthly rulers

2. God is sovereign over all persecution

3. God is sovereign over all unholy angels & evil spirits

4. God is sovereign over all murderers & manslayers

5. God is sovereign over all natural disasters

6. God is sovereign over all physical injuries & diseases, including car accidents.

I am just giving you the main points and I am not writing down all the scripture references because it would take forever and you can go hear the sermon. It was an excellent sermon and was confirmation that God has a purpose in everything that happens, even when it is horrible. This sermon didn't quite push Pastor Jerry back into the lead over Rick Holland as my favorite preacher but it was really, really close. This next Sunday I get to hear Pastor Rick at our church for the Ekklesia Conference so if he doesn't do so well he may fall into second place behind Jerry. Of course I have never actually heard him lay an egg of a sermon but God is sovereign over that and he might this weekend! Also, as much as it sounds like I am, I'm not a Paul or Apollos or Cephas groupie (Jon A would be Cephas in this metaphor). I think they all handle the word of God with skill and they are good shepherds and have been a real blessing to me.

Well, that's the weekly report. We'll have another report soon if the Lord wills. Thank you to all of you for your prayers and cards and notes and support.

Lauren

Day 105: Lauren Announces Third Place (But Closing Fast)

Lauren Graham Waller, September 18, 2011

I got to hear Pastor Jerry this weekend and I got to hear Rick Holland too since they both spoke at the Ekklesia Conference. I already know what you want to know: Who is Lauren's favorite preacher? Well, they both are very nice people and I don't want to hurt any feelings so that makes it hard. They both spoke very clearly and eloquently so that makes it even harder. Also, they both spoke on my favorite subject, the sovereignty of God, so that made a decision even harder yet. And so, with much regret to the non-winning party, and after much reflection and soul-searching and travail of spirit, I have finally made a decision. My favorite preacher is ... *drum roll* Smedly Yates.

Okay, I admit that was pretty much a gutless dodge. But Smedley spoke Saturday night on the gospel message being foundational. He then

asked: Is the gospel foundational in the sense that it is elementary to the Christian faith and a truth we graduate from in order to move on to deeper truths? Or is the gospel foundational in the sense that it is something essential that we should always embrace and emphasize? He took us to the future in Revelation 5 and showed us that at the center of the wonder and worship of heaven forever is concentric circles of multitudes of worshippers of angels and saints from all the ages singing about the Lamb who was slain. He then said that if in the eternal eons of heaven we will never stop singing about the gospel, if the holy angels never get tired of the wonder of the gospel, and Christ puts his cross-wounds on display on center stage for all eternity, then how can we ever imagine graduating from the gospel while we're on this earth? It was an excellent sermon and a highlight of this week.

Last week ended with a bang: Michigan beat Notre Dame in a series of fourth quarter heroics. Unfortunately, I missed them because I went to bed after the third quarter because I was tired, and also because Michigan looked like a poor dog that got beat up, beat down, and beat all around. When I heard how it ended though and how they scored 28 points in the fourth quarter I was sorry I missed the ending. Fortunately there was a re-broadcast of the game and I got to see what I missed. It was pretty epic! Almost Lord-of-the-Rings epic! So thankfully I got to enjoy the epicness even if it was delayed. Which just goes to show that gratification delayed is not gratification denied!

On Tuesday Mom took me to the Oikos meeting at PBA. It was formerly known as Point 58, which is the weekly PBA Bible study ministry. We want to have at least one qualified and available Bible study leader in every dorm on every floor. The Oikos meetings are for the leaders to discuss the former week and plan and encourage one another for the upcoming week. I was supposed to be the co-director of Oikos for the PBA campus this year but God had other plans for me instead. The other co-director, Daniel Martin, invited me to join them anyway for this meeting even though I'm a cripple – well, half-cripple now! :) It was really encouraging for me to see that the ministry is in good hands (Becca Brajdic is taking my place). God hears our prayers and sometimes answers them in ways we can visibly see so we can thank Him and praise Him for His kindness to us (John 14:13-14). There were about 25-30 Bible Study leaders there and that was great to see so many people who have a passion to teach God's Word to students on campus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servants of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy

3:16).

I also had speech therapy and apparently I speak much better and my brain is healing. We surpassed what I did the first time we started the new LIPS program and I had a complete meltdown and ended up in tears. I knew what I was supposed to do and say and I knew it normally would be easy for me but it wasn't. It was very frustrating and I kept saying the wrong things. The therapist gave me an option of going on an easier program or a harder one and I chose the harder one because I thought it would be best for my improvement. But it really kicked my kiester big time.

I am thinking and processing things better now though so taking the harder route has been a better choice and I must say I'm glad I chose it. The therapist gave me a bunch of nonsense words to read for time (as fast as I could). They are three, four and five syllable words. There are also different colored logos and slips of paper that represent different sounds and syllables. It's difficult to explain and hopefully you'll never need to know this stuff for yourselves so I won't go into any detail. Besides, if you need this program you will have had a brain injury and won't even remember what I said about it so ... I won't say any more! :) I am feeling pretty good about my progress so far and we'll continue this for a few more therapy sessions then move on to the next thing which will probably kick my kiester too! I am getting to be an expert on making up nonsense that sounds believable. I do believe that's a trait I inherited from my Dad! Which he says he inherited from my brother Brad. (Just kidding Dad and Brad!)

On Wednesday Emily Crosby came and we puzzled for a while. She brought a Mary Englebert puzzle with 1000 pieces and we have it about 2/3 done. Or maybe it's 3/4. I'm not going to count the pieces and give you a precise count. We wanted to go to have lunch at a tea room that was very cute and quaint and have tea and crumpets (like I had when I was in Europe... ha) but we got there too late so we went and had lunch at the Osceola Street café. It was very good. I must say Emily is one of the sweetest persons I have ever met. Her daughter is my good friend Molly (who is at the Air Force Academy now). Emily and her husband Chris are some of the kindest, most Christ-like people I know and is a good example of what I should be like if I want to reflect the glory of Christ with my life. I am incredibly blessed to have many women like her in my life who serve as examples of what a godly woman should be like.

On Thursday morning we took my dad to have a surgical procedure done. He was pretty tired because he was up till 1:30 AM that morning doing some work, then got up at 3:30 to start again. He got to sleep for a couple hours when he got home from the hospital though because they gave him some good drugs that knocked him out. He needs clients so pray that he finds some so we don't have to move to where he has job offers (that are not in Florida).

Thursday evening after therapy Michelle Habegger came over. She is an excellent photographer and has her own business (go to MK Photography to check her out) and she came to take pictures of me. We spent a couple hours taking outdoor shots. We rode around on the golf cart and found cool nature spots and she snapped 636 frames. That is a Lot of Lauren and I'm sorry she has to look at that many pictures of me. But as good as she is they probably look pretty spectacular. Her specialty is people (weddings, families, seniors, babies) in natural settings using natural light. I didn't know her super well but got to know her better and she is a super sweet person.

She joined us for dinner and we got to learn a lot about Nebraska where she grew up. It was very fascinating and sounds a lot like my childhood in Michigan, except Michigan has the Great Lakes and also has a better football team :) (Sorry Michelle, I had to!) Shout-out to Cornhusker fans everywhere! Seriously though, if you are anywhere near West Palm Beach you should give her a call. She will make you look better than you really are and I'm living proof of that! Just see the picture at the top; it's one that she took!

On Friday I went out for lunch with Judy and Sharon again, two more sweet godly women I really look up to. I got a touch-up on my hair since it is now long enough (if you can call it long) to get it even across the top, even though it's probably only an inch long. That night I got to join my India team mates (minus Peter and Liz) at Mark Kaprive's house. Dr. Thom was there and some people from previous India teams. Some significant others were there too. Also keeping us company was Tucker, the ubiquitous slobberingly-happy Golden Retriever. Tucker reminds me of Coconut who was our dog in Michigan. He was happy, happy, happy and jumped a lot and ran after our car and follow us all the way into town (Coconut, not Tucker). I must say I don't miss having a dog even though Coconut thought I was a rock star!

We ate Indian food from Taste of India (yum, yum, yum) and Dr. Thom (a missionary and professor we worked with in India) who spoke to us for about an hour. He talked about his wife finding her voice. Apparently she has always been pretty shy but now it sounds like she has found an outlet through blogging and writing. She has written about the experiences of little girls and women in India. One little girl she wrote about was not given a name by her parents because she was a girl and they had so many children. (That tells you what they think of children in India, but especially baby girls.) When she was six years old one of our translators there gave her the name Keerti, which means "praise." She was so happy to have a name and she couldn't believe it. When I was in India I experienced some deprivation of certain creature comforts but never thought of being deprived of even the most basic form of identity. I am praying that little Keerti can come into Christ's family too and her identity can be found in Him and her name can be written in the Book of Life for all eternity. It was a good night and it was good to be reminded of some of the things that happened in India which I could not remember.

Yesterday, after doing chores all morning, we stopped to watch Michigan beat Eastern Michigan. It was nice to see them win and it's nice to see them 3-0. I'm not too excited yet because they went 5-0 to start the season last year and ended up losing 5 of their next 7 games.

Last night we were able to go to Ekklesia conference for the evening session. I told you about Smedly's sermon on never graduating from the gospel. But let me tell you about the music. It was glorious! Josh had an awesome all-star cast of musicians. Two of them are from the Resolved band (and one attends our church). So the music was incredible but the highlight was learning a new song I had never sung before. It was called "Behold Our God." It starts with the questions God asks Job to put him in his place and help him see just who this God is that he has the audacity to question. It then talks about this same God, who became the man Christ Jesus, who condescended and humbled Himself to pay the price for our sins on the cross. Nothing can compare to Him and if we understand who He is and what He did then we have no other rational response except to humble ourselves before Him in obedience and worship! As Jon Anderson says there's nobody even in second place in the race for the supreme deity of the universe.

Verse 1
Who has held the oceans in His hands?

Who has numbered every grain of sand?
Kings and nations tremble at His voice
All creation rises to rejoice

Chorus
Behold our God seated on His throne
Come, let us adore Him
Behold our King—nothing can compare
Come, let us adore Him

Verse 2
Who has given counsel to the Lord?
Who can question any of His words?
Who can teach the One who knows all things?
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds?

Verse 3
Who has felt the nails upon His hands?
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal, humbled to the grave
Jesus, Savior, risen now to reign

One highlight of the weekend was actually getting to meet Rick Holland personally. That was a blessing and a privilege because he has been something of a mentor through his teachings at conferences and online. (His whole series on the Roadmap to Righteous Relationships was very helpful to me to get a biblical understanding of how to be the right person and how to find the right person.)

He autographed one of his books and wrote a note in it telling how I was a blessing and an example to him. Now I love me some Rick Holland but that's craziness! I think he got the parties confused on who is the example and blessing to whom!

In conclusion, you should know that both Jerry and Rick are faithful ministers of the gospel and servants of the Lord. Christ is building His church through these men and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I am privileged to have both of them as teachers. And I must say Jon Anderson may be in third place but he is putting pressure on both of them so don't count him out! Of course, Jon A and Smedly Yates are brothers-in-law so maybe Smedley's goodness is rubbing off on him – or vice versa!

It has been a good week and I am still improving by God's grace. Please keep praying for me and our family because God hears your prayers and in His kindness and compassion He loves to answer them that He might display His power in us and that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth (Romans 9:17). We love you and we love Him, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Lauren

P.S. Kirstie Wragg has organized a Lauren Is My Sister fundraising event this week at the Chik-Fil-A on Northlake in West Palm Beach. The Good Chicken People are hosting a WHOLE WEEK LONG FUNDRAISER starting when they open on Monday (tomorrow morning!) at 6:30 AM till they close on Saturday night at 10:30 PM!

All you have to do is eat your fill of chicken and trimmings at Chick-fil-A at Northlake Blvd and tell the cashier that "Lauren is my Sister"! 15% - did you catch that? 15%!! – of your total purchase will go directly to the Lauren Graham Fund!

There is a Focus Night on Tuesday, Sept 20 from 5:00 - 8:00 PM and our whole family will be there. If you want you can buy some LIMS merchandise plus spin the Spinning Wheel for $1 to get Chick-fil-A coupons!

Please be there early and often, EAT MOR CHIKIN, and tell them "Lauren Is My Sister!"

Day 112: Lauren Counts Her Blessings

Lauren Graham Waller, September 25, 2011

This week the lesson I have learned the most is that God wants us to call out to Him for His blessing and His help, in the day of plenty and the day of trouble. That's one thing that set the Israelites apart from the other nations. That's what set King David apart from other leaders. That is one thing that set apart the early followers of Christ who gathered for prayer and were with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer. Jim Cymbala says, "God is attracted to weakness and He loves to show Himself strong to those who humbly and honestly admit how much they desperately need Him" (Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire).

This week I haven't had to call out to God for blessings so much as to thank him for the ones He has already given me! I still get to memorize verses for speech therapy so that is a blessing. Another blessing is that on Monday my therapist said my thinking is getting a lot better. My speaking still needs work so I have to read aloud to her and to my family. Guess what I have been reading? So far this week I have read Luke 1 and Psalms 1-18. I am supposed to read for 20 minutes at a time but it took me 28 minutes to read Luke 1. In my defense I stopped a lot because I had to practice elocution and also I yawned a lot. (Not because it was boring but because I needed oxygen. Stinking asthma!)

Another blessing is that Tuesday I got to work on designing some logos. Ryan at Exceleron asked me to do some graphic design work for his company. He knows I am a cripple but he wants to help me out and let me ease back into design work. So he gave me an easy project with a long lead time that I didn't have to have done the same day. I use Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. After the accident I couldn't remember how to use them like I used to but I recall more inDesign than the other two programs. I have had to look things up and ask questions but in the last couple weeks I have picked up quite a bit of what I lost. I think I have a pretty good handle on Illustrator and inDesign now. This has been very helpful so a shoutout to Ryan Kidd at Exceleron Designs. If you need a website or some web marketing then give him a ring-a-ling.

Who knows... I may be the one to work on your project!

Another blessing is that I am able to read a lot. This week I finished Slave by John Macarthur and Uneclipsing the Son by Rick Holland. On my reading list for this upcoming week is Ravi Zacharias' autobiography (which my dad just finished) and Girls Gone Wise (In a World Gone Wild) by Mary Kassian. (She compares the wild woman in Proverbs 7 with the wise woman of Proverbs 31 and gives the traits a wise biblical woman should have.) I started Bonhoeffer before the accident but have forgotten all I read so I have to start over. (Brad is reading it now so I have to wait until he's done.) Any book recommendations any of you have for me? I like to read books with biblical themes as well as biographies and some fiction.

I just have to say my favorite chapter in Uneclipsing the Son was about the importance of communion and celebrating the death of Christ. As often as we partake in communion we are declaring the Lord's death until He comes again. We don't usually celebrate someone's death but

Jesus' was totally different. His death was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies that one day a perfect Lamb would bear the punishment for the sin of the world forever. If God had overlooked sin He would have been unjust. But only someone perfect could pay the price for sins, so He sent His only Son as the perfect Lamb to pay for the sins of those who trust in Him. When we celebrate communion we remember that we are sinners and that the only perfect Person who ever lived died for us so that we can live forever. We celebrate His death because of what we received as a result of His sacrifice for us. That's good news!

Tuesday we went to see Dr. Muniz, who is another one of my neurologists. He specializes in seizures and epilepsy. I have been on medication for it because people with my kind of injury have a lower threshold for those problems. The good news is that I have had no episodes of seizure activity. He thinks I can go off the medication and just take certain precautions like getting plenty of sleep and not drinking alcohol. He really wanted to do an EEG to measure electrical activity in my brain but we couldn't right now because we don't have insurance for me. I think we are going to find out this week if I get accepted on my Dad and Mom's insurance policy so please pray that I get covered and that the price is not super, super high.

Dr. Muniz also showed us my last CT Scan so we could see how the injury affected my brain. Most of my brain apparently looks better than it did after the accident but there is still a lesion in the right frontal lobe that may or may not get much better. He said that is the area of my brain that affections large motor function (like walking), speech, short term memory, and my inhibitions. (If I say or do something funky just remember I have an excuse!) He had me try to walk for him to observe my gait and way of walking. If you have seen me trying to walk you know I look like a drunken sailor – maybe slightly better. Dr. Muniz said it was not because of my pelvis but because of my brain. Everybody says I look like I am walking better but it sure doesn't feel like I am. My right leg feels stronger but my left leg is more flexible. When you put them both together you don't get anything too snazzy but it least I'm mobile, versatile and worthwhile (with a hostile argyle hairstyle!). Sorry about that... seriously! It's the brain injury...

After the doctor visit we took a late book back to the PBA library that I had planned to read over the summer. Obviously that didn't happen. So the book was like 5 months late and the fine was over $40. Ooops! But I smiled at them and they were very kind and waived the fine for

me. They seemed glad that I just turned the book back in. Now that I know they don't enforce the fines for people with a square mile, Gomer Pyle big smile (sorry again!) I should have just taken home a bag full of books! Just kidding!! Seriously though, that was a blessing to not have to pay that.

Tuesday night was another big blessing. We went back to West Palm for a fundraising event that Kirstie (Harris) Wragg organized at, of all places, Chik-Fil-A! I think CFA and I are joined at the hip and will be lifelong companions until death do us part! They gave 15% of all the proceeds to help pay my medical bills from anybody who said they were there to support me. They also let us sell some t-shirts and wristbands. We got to see a lot of our friends who were there to support us. Chik-Fil-A is truly where the fellowship happens! Plus the waffle fries. And Arnold Palmers. And the Honey-Roasted BBQ sauce that's tasty enough to create world peace if we could just get the word out! Anybody who wants to do anymore fundraisers at CFA won't hear any objection from me! At 8 o'clock we finally said "so long and thanks for all the fish!" Kirstie and the crew at the Northlake CFA did an excellent job! If any of you want CFA to cater lunch to your company or business meeting or gathering, it sure beats burgers I'll tell you that! Plus Kirstie will treat you right and everybody at your company will love you for bringing the savory goodness to where they are.

Wednesday we went to the gym. I did quite a bit of cardio and some weights (if you can call the amount I lift "weight"). Me and mom are doing our own physical therapy now. The trainers there are helping us with a program. While I was there on Friday I got to meet another woman who was in a bad motorcycle accident and she had a brain injury and broke her neck. Her husband got killed so that was very sad to hear. Her accident happened in 2009 and she has worked really hard to get back to where she is. She works out at this same gym and wants to be there when I am there. I don't know if she is a Christian but I am looking forward to talking to her about Jesus.

We wrote a lot more Thank Yous this week and that reminded me how blessed we are to have so many friends and people who care. We still are working our way through them and if you haven't received one yet you will soon! Thank you for your patience with us.

On Thursday I also spent some time editing pictures I took in India. I got to the ones where we visited the Taj Mahal. For some reason I was overcome with a feeling of really missing India and the people there.

That struck me as odd because I still don't even remember much about the trip but I felt really nostalgic looking at the pictures. It was great because it helped me see what I had forgotten, but it really stinks because it helped me see what I had forgotten.

It's a weird nostalgia – not just missing something that was meaningful in my past, but more realizing that something was meaningful to me in my past and the memory of it is gone and I'm missing the fact that I can't miss what I can't remember. (That probably doesn't make sense to you but ... I guess you'd have to have been there.)

Thursday night was a huge blessing too. It was the first night I got to go back to Bible Study at our church. I haven't been able to go because it is in the evening and (1) I am usually asleep about the time Jon A starts preaching and (2) because my memory and recall is so bad at night so it wouldn't have done me any good to go even if I had been able to stay awake until the end. I really enjoyed going back and seeing my friends and hearing the truth preached and enjoying the fellowship. Also Brad went with me so that was very cool too. (He's a cool bro and I'm glad he's around to spend time with.) Jon A's dad taught that night and he spoke on Hebrews 2 which was about Jesus being a faithful high priest. See? I remember! (Actually I took notes so I don't know if I would have remembered otherwise or not...)

On Saturday I watched Michigan beat San Diego State. That was the college that Brady Hoke (Michigan's new coach) came from and he turned them into a really good team. As it turns out Coach Hoke's new team prevailed and Michigan won 28-7. They are now 4-0 and ranked in the top 20 teams in the country. It's not what they're used to but compared with where they've been lately we'll take it. Go Blue! Hoke springs eternal!

Today was a blessed day because we were able to go to both services at church – the corporate worship service and the Bible Fellowship. For the most part I can remember what was said, at least what Matt Borgstrom spoke about! A lot of people say encouraging things to me about how I am a miracle and that I am an example to them of faith and perseverance. I am glad God is using me and is being glorified in my life. But Matt gave a good warning about boasting only in the cross and not in our flesh (from Galatians 6:14 which says, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and me to the world"). If there is anything in my life that is praiseworthy or that causes people to see the beauty of

God and the worthiness His Son it is only because of what He did for me on the cross.

As I said already one of the biggest blessings I have is all the people who have continued to pray for me and my family. God still hears them all and I have been the beneficiary of the concern for me that you have taken to Him in your prayers. "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (Colossians 3:2). We ALL have been so blessed. If you run out of things to give God thanks for, then thank Him for His grace and mercy to me! God is good and I am so blessed!

Lauren

Day 119: Lauren Recommends Journaling (and Biographies)

Lauren Graham Waller, October 2, 2011

This has been a good week. Monday I finished Ravi Zacharias' autobiography: "Walking From East to West". I have known about him for awhile – since I lived in Michigan. He is Indian (was born and spent his childhood in India) and moved to Toronto while he was in college. He has an itinerant speaking/lecture ministry and is an evangelist mostly to what he calls "happy pagans" – those who are otherwise happy with their life and aren't swayed much by the whole "if you come to Jesus he'll make you happy and healthy and give you a better job/spouse/car" spiel. I was especially drawn to the book because of my recent trip to India and I wanted to know what he had to say about how he was drawn to Christ in a Hindu culture, and also how he presents the gospel to those in a culture so much different than ours.

I recently wrote in my journal that there's nothing like a near-death experience to immediately straighten out one's priorities. I was surprised to find out that is also what happened to Mr. Zacharias. He was one of the "happy pagans" about which he speaks – those who had a reasonably satisfying life but nothing seemed meaningful. At age 20 (my age) he attempted to commit suicide by swallowing poison. God spared his life but while he was in the hospital a Christian worker stopped by and dropped off a Bible. He asked his mom to read from it and she read from the book of John. One verse captured his attention: Jesus said, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:9). He realized that if Jesus really rose from the dead, then all his questions about our

origin, morality, meaning and destiny were wrapped up in the teaching of Jesus and in His life and death and burial and resurrection. That was the turning point in his life – and tens of thousands of people have come to Christ because of the power of the gospel and Mr. Zacharias' "hospital experience." (I wonder how many people God has reached by means of a hospital?)

Tuesday my Mom and I went to the Fitness Center again. While I was there I got to spend some time talking to the lady I met once before who was hit by a car while riding a motorcycle with her husband. (He was killed; she suffered a TBI like I had.) We talked about what life was like before our accidents. She gave me a lot of helpful advice, especially about regaining physical strength during the recovery process. She is a lot like me – we both push ourselves pretty hard, sometimes more than is good for us. With this type of injury that is not a good thing. She reinforced what my doctor told me: to not overexert myself when working out or during physical therapy. Hopefully I will get to talk to her again. She was very nice.

That night I had a crazy experience. I watched the movie "50 First Dates." One of the main characters was in a car with her dad and while he was driving he ran into a cow. She ended up with short-term memory loss. All was going along just swell until a guy meets her and thinks she's the most perfect girl in the world until he finds out she can't remember him more than one day. In a strange way the movie made me thankful for what I do have. At least I remember everybody from one day to the next. (Just don't ask me to remember your name or what we talked about!) I do know my memory is getting better. Not only can my family tell, but I can tell. If I think of something one night, instead of having to write it down I can usually remember it the next day. I have to say though that I still keep a pretty detailed journal just in case.

Speaking of which: I'm extremely thankful I developed the discipline of journaling while I was in high school. All you English teachers out there should require that your students keep a journal and have them hand it in for a grade at the end of a semester. (Obviously you would give it back after grading it.) I can give you a hundred reasons it's a good habit to develop. Here is just ten that come to mind:

1. It helps develop writing skills (handwriting and composition)

2. It helps you develop and organize your thoughts

3. It captures your thoughts at one particular moment in time so you can editmor arrange or sharpen (or go back and refer to) them

4. It helps with relationships because you can think through and process things that really overcome you with emotion otherwise

5. This is a big one: It helps to memorialize events in your life so you can go back and see how God has answered prayer and changed you as a person. (It has really helped me see a depth of God's faithfulness that I never would have otherwise.)

6. It helps you sort out and identify the things you really value and what your true motivations (and idols) are

7. It increases (and refreshes) an accurate memory of events

8. It is a counselor that is uncritical – it doesn't care if your writing or grammar is bad!

9. It is a way to speak truth to yourself – and hear truth from yourself!

10. It is also a way to express yourself to God in writing.

So... a word to the wise (and those who are not wise but want to be): Journal!

Thursday I finished "Timeless Stories: God's Incredible Work in the Lives of Inspiring Christians" by Vance Christie which is a collection of brief missionary biographies. It is a book I got from the Ekklesia Conference last weekend. I read about the lives of John Wesley, George Whitefield, George Mueller, William Boothe, Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, and others. I especially enjoyed the chapter on Corrie Ten Boom because she and her sister Betsy clung to the verse that said, "Give thanks in all circumstances because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). They had to put that verse into practice in a concentration camp. That sure helps me with perspective. I also enjoyed the story of Amy Carmichael who went to Japan then later India where she lived and ministered for 56 years. She helped lead a ministry that specialized in helping children who had been rescued from lives as temple prostitutes. I can't even imagine what that would be like, which makes it even easier for me to give thanks in my circumstances because I've experienced nothing like

that. I would highly recommend that you read stories like this because they not only make you extremely thankful for what you have, they help us realize how petty the problems are that we complain about.

Thursday I had a dentist appointment to check and see if there was any damage from the accident. Praise God, everything was okay! I also wondered what my teeth would look like since I went so long without having my teeth really brushed while I was in the hospital. Everything was good though! Another thing to be thankful for! (Also, be thankful for the privilege of being able to brush your teeth!)

Thursday night pastor Jon finished teaching on Acts at church... 28 chapters in 2 years and 2 months, so if you're looking for a preacher who will cover a book in 1 or 2 settings then he's probably not the preacher for you! But if you want someone to cover it in-depth and learn about the founding and first days of the Christian church, then he's your man. I missed quite a bit of it ... I think he was on chapter 19 when I went into the hospital. I'm thankful for his faithfulness in teaching the Word and it is really nice to be back on Thursday nights.

The one bit of bad news we got this week is that we were denied insurance coverage for me. Because my dad is self-employed and not part of a group policy the insurance company is allowed to take into account my "pre-existing condition." And because my parents didn't have insurance for a while because it was so expensive, there is some kind of "termination of coverage" thing that says the insurance company doesn't have to accept me as one of their dependents. We'll see what happens but that was kind of a let-down but God will provide.

On a happier note: Yesterday I watched Michigan beat (no, pulverize!) Minnesota and keep the Little Brown Jug, the oldest rivalry trophy in college football. It was started in 1903 when Michigan's coach told the student manager of the team to go buy a crock to carry water for the team during the game because they were afraid the Minnesota players or fans would put something in the team's drinking water. He bought the 5-gallon jug for 29 cents. The game ended in a tie and the Michigan team left Minnesota and headed back to Ann Arbor but forgot their water jug. The Michigan coach (Fielding Yost) wrote to the Minnesota coach and requested the jug be returned. Their coach told them they'd have to win it back. That wasn't so smart because they've played 93 times since and Minnesota has only won the jug 22 times. Michigan dominated them again yesterday 58-0 to reclaim the jug once again.

Go Blue!

Today I finished a book called "Feel" by Matthew Elliot. I was reading some research on Traumatic Brain Injuries and one of the sad side-effects in many cases is that TBI patients either have diminished or lost capacity for emotions and feelings. The reason is because emotions are "cognitive" meaning God has given us emotions as a barometer to let us know truly and exactly what we think in our minds or believe in our hearts is true at any given moment. When a person has a brain injury, to the extent that their cognition is impaired, they lose the ability to "feel." Elliot gives a lot of test cases of brain injury patients that he studied for his doctoral dissertation and how it affected their emotions. It is an excellent book and there are a lot of biblical and theological lessons to learn about the emotions in our spiritual experience, especially how to sanctify our emotions, but it also left me feeling very grateful to God for little things that I always took for granted, things like affection, fear, anger, joy, sadness, compassion, love, humor, enthusiasm, surprise, grouchiness (sorry, I still feel it sometimes!), sorrow, guilt, loneliness. I guess the first emotion I felt after the accident was homesickness, which all of you know who read my Dad's accounts of the hospital experience! For some reason my emotions seem more stable than before but I don't know if that's spiritual or physical. Either way I'm thankful for being able to feel, and the feeling I feel most lately is gratitude.

Please keep praying for my healing, but God to continue to provide for our family, and that God will be glorified through our lives. Also pray for a couple situations in India: one for divine protection (one of the pastors we visited, along with his family, is being threatened for preaching the gospel), and another for divine intervention (the head of the guest house we stayed at died this week and we pray that situation will be used to draw his family and friends to God). Jai masiki! (Praise the Lord!)

Lauren

P.S. The picture is another one from Michelle Kristine Photography. Seriously, she is amazing and a really super sweet person.

Day 122: Lauren is Celebrating!

Lauren Graham Waller, October 5, 2011

I know what you're wondering: *To what do we owe the privilege of having Lauren write during the middle of the week instead of the customary weekend blogpost?* See, I guessed it, didn't I? Well, there's just something I have to write about!

Today is a special day. We are "celebrating" the four month anniversary of The Accident that happened on June 5. I know that's not something most people would celebrate, but it's pretty amazing to see what all God has done through this whole experience that could never have happened otherwise!

My aunt Renee wrote me a letter that I got yesterday and she quoted someone who said, "God's greatest servants have often been the greatest sufferers." I am honored to be a servant of the Most High God, and I know I endured quite a lot in the hospital and when I first was released. Right now though I think my greatest suffering is having no social life and that's not even real suffering! That in itself is something to celebrate! I almost never feel any real pain and I have learned to a great degree how to compensate for my physical and mental deficiencies. (It's more frustration and exasperation than pain). In a lot of ways I think my family suffers more than I do because of all the financial burdens. (I know my Mom worries a lot!!) So one thing I have to celebrate is obvious: how quickly God has allowed me to recover and how positive the prognosis is for even further recovery. God is a healing God and in His great compassion He saw fit to heal me!

I am also celebrating how God has deepened my dependence on Him. God has ordained that prayer is a means by which He effects many of His purposes on earth and The Accident has caused me to pray more, to pray more fervently, and to pray with more faith believing that He hears and He answers.

"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. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7-11)

I also am praying Jesus' pattern of prayer a lot more, "Thy will be done on earth (by humans) as it is in heaven (by saints and angels)." The angels in heaven don't neglect God's will or grumble about His will, or

obey Him reluctantly or halfheartedly or selfishly or slowly. There are no angels in heaven who refuse to do God's will. There are none who obey him out of fear and not love and adoration. God has given us a will in order to do His will. We are not like rocks or plants or animals; we can choose whether to conform our will to His or not. I am celebrating that God is transforming me so that I not only desire to please Him in everything, I totally enjoy doing His will.

I am celebrating that God has taught me so clearly how much he values and honors patience and perseverance. He loves us profoundly and always seeks what's best for us, whether this means healing us from injury or giving us the grace to trust Him and make much of Him through it all. James says, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:7, 10-11).

I do want to be an example of suffering and patience, not so much that anybody will focus on me but that they will see the end intended by the Lord and know that He is very compassionate and merciful. That's why I am celebrating that God has been teaching me contentment despite these circumstances!

I am celebrating how God has used The Accident in our family. God blessed me with the most incredible family I could have ever wished for. Before The Accident there were some tensions between me and my parents (which, compared to most of my peers, were not really that tense). But God has totally healed that and drawn us together and strengthened the ties of love between us. God has also given Brad and me a unique bond because of the shared experience. He is the one other person who also survived The Accident. He has been absolutely the best brother a sister could have and he has sacrificed almost all of his short-term ambitions without a single complaint in order to be there for me and with me. He never missed a single day coming to the hospital. I know he is going to make some special lady very happy some day (ladies, send your applications to Judy Z!) because he is a great guy and the most kind and gentle and loyal person that I think I have ever met.

This whole experience has been very humbling for all of our family. We are all pretty much overachievers who succeeded at pretty much everything we've ever done. God has really broken us and put us in a place where we have to trust Him and trust other people because there is no way we can rely on our own resources or strength or intelligence or diligence (or uncommonly good looks in my Dad's case!) to get us through. I am celebrating that God is teaching us that the just are not only saved by faith, they also must live by faith.

I am also celebrating the work God is doing in the lives of my friends and even the lives of people I've never met. There's no way I could ever know all that God is doing or will continue to do, but a ton of my friends have told me how God has used The Accident to cause them to examine their faith, get their priorities straight, and even question the false gods or idols that have not been there for them like God has been there for me. I love hearing from people who tell me how my story has impacted them and their friends. It just reaffirms that God is truly causing all things to work together for good to those who love Him, according to His purpose. Along the same line I am celebrating the opportunities that God has presented to me to share the gospel of His Son Jesus Christ!

Speaking of celebrating, yesterday I turned 21. I am thankful God allowed me to see another birthday. Although, come to think of it, turning 21 in heaven with Jesus wouldn't have been such a bad deal (Philippians 1:21!). But even here on earth in Florida it was pretty special. Mom and I started the day by going to the Fitness Center and working out. That doesn't sound so great unless you spend 2 months in a hospital bed and don't know if you'll ever walk (or even balance a checkbook) again. I also spent some time by the pool catching a little sun and reading "Unbroken" by Lauren Hildenbrand. That is a good book that my Dad wanted me to read and I'm glad he did. After that I then did a little more work on a photo-journal I'm putting together about my trip to India. (I hope to have it ready for release by Christmas.)

Mom prepared a birthday dinner that I requested: Roast Beast, Green Bean Casserole, Garlic Mashed Potatoes & Gravy, Pumpkin Pie with optional Whipped Cream. (I know I'm capitalizing everything but when Mom cooks something you can't just put it in normal lower case!) After supper I opened presents. What I got I shall leave a mystery but it was all very nice!! The evening ended on a sour note as the New York Yankees beat the Detroit Tigers in Game 4 to tie the Series at 2-2.

Sudden death! Go Tigers!

Mostly I am celebrating that because through The Accident God is making me look more like His Son. He loved me enough to send this trial my way knowing it would increase my joy in serving Him, increase the shine on the mirror of my life so I more perfectly reflect Him, and increase the glory that is due to Him. I want you to celebrate this day with me, but even more I want you to hang out with me in eternity where we will have a glorious time enjoying ourselves and enjoying Him forever! That will be the greatest celebration and I wouldn't miss it for the world!

"Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would make you worthy of His calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

Lauren

Day 126: Lauren Writes (About) Music

Lauren Graham Waller, October 9, 2011

On occasion I find myself stumbling across old journals because I can't remember where they all are. As I review my Pre-Accident history, which is interesting to read, it reminds me of how awesome I was! JK! Actually, I read them to remind myself of what I was thinking and the issues of life I was dealing with because there's quite a bit I have forgotten about myself. So I was looking for an external hard drive this week to dump photos from my laptop and in the process I found a song notebook that I used to capture thoughts or song ideas and even a few Not-Ready-For-Primetime attempts at writing a rap. Seriously, here's a sample (can you imagine Eminem rapping this?):

I see you over there broken over your sin
And now back to our regularly scheduled programming.
But I know that Jesus Christ can restore you again
He is the great Messiah, the eternal I AM
He is Jehovah-Jireh the one spotless Lamb
He died to save the world came to rescue the lost
He sent His Son to die and pay the ultimate cost
So we could have redemption and that we might be free
To live our lives to serve Him and to gain eternity

What?!?

While reading my journal I realize now that I didn't realize then how much God was preparing my heart beforehand for The Accident. In my journal I wrote that I had this weird feeling that something big was going to happen. I also found in my songbook a song I wrote that had the lyrics, "God, it's what you want, not what I want...so that I may glorify your name." It was written without any thought of a major accident in mind but the truth still applies. I knew that God was in control of everything because I referenced Proverbs 16:33 which says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." I'm not so much into premonitions or omens but it is amazing how God was stirring my heart with anticipation that something significant might happen in my life and I wanted to be surrendered to Him so that, for better or worse, I would glorify Him through it.

Through reading my journal, I also realized how God has answered quite a few prayers, but one in particular. Last semester was difficult in one sense because I was trying to sort out some theological questions that are secondary issues but were major to me because my parents and church has a different view than many of my friends do. I was really struggling to work out my own convictions. In the process I was praying that my convictions would be biblical but, even more, that they would flow out of a love for Christ and not just a desire to be "right." In fact I specifically wrote in my journal that people (including those in India, as well as my teammates) would know I had been with Jesus.

In India, a group of us had an opportunity to ask various questions of Dr. Thom in something of a free-for-all. The subject came up that I was confused about and a couple of us asked questions, especially me and another good friend who was also working through this issue. Dr. Thom asked us what we believed and what was the basis of our belief. I don't want to oversimplify because it's not a simple subject but Dr. Thom told my friend he asked good questions but he told me I gave good answers (because mine came more from the teaching of Scripture instead of just my own personal experience). But what was most encouraging to me was when he said even though I was not a ministry major he could tell by listening to me (and I am quoting exactly) that "you have been with Jesus." He sensed I wasn't just searching the Scripture for "answers" but was searching for Jesus who is Himself the answer. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39). Looking back I can see even then the truth of what I tried to

write in another song: "[The Lord is] faithful, [The Lord is] graceful, compassionate and loving, kind."

Before The Accident my "life verse" was James 1:2-6. (Okay, I realize that's really "life verses" plural. I also realize the entire Bible is inspired by God and is profitable and that God gives life through all of His word, Psalm 119:92-93. What I mean by that is it was a passage that was very significant to me that it really defined my Christian life and I could hold on in almost every circumstance. I memorized it and quoted it and even had it on my Facebook page under "About Me." It reads:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Now I realize that most of the trials in my life weren't really trials but were more annoyances and minor adversity and my lack of joy was more my failure to find my identity in Christ. I still love this passage (and all of James for that matter!) but I guess I'm making an official declaration and going on the record: my new life verse is Galatians 2:20. I get a lot of comments about how strong I've been and how encouraging I am. I realize everyone is being sincere and nice. (Please don't stop with the encouragement!) But even though I have lost part of my memory I still remember who I was (and am) without Christ and I promise if there is anything remarkable or redeeming that's come out of this it is NOT because of me! And I'm not just being self-deprecating. It's true! It is only because "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

While I was in the hospital music was a part of the experience, even more than I realized. My parents brought in an iPod and played music a lot while I was still in a coma. Many times people from church came and sang hymns around my bed even though I don't have any memory of it. Even after I came out of the coma, Eric Blythe and Dave Magdales would bring their guitars and friends from church would come and pack out the room in Rehab and sing songs. We must have created quite a spectacle! People could hear us singing all the way

down the halls. My parents tell me that when they came was the highlight of my day and I would really perk up and sing in my spirit (because I couldn't sing with my voice).

Even after having a brain injury and losing a good part of my memory, I can tell you that musical melodies and lyrics are not one of those things you forget. I can't even remember what I had for breakfast or where I put the toothpaste but when we go to a restaurant I can sing the lyrics of the songs on the radio. Even in the hospital the first words I said for the Speech Therapist were "do re me fa so la ti do" and I even sang the "50 Nifty States Songs" we learned in my sixth grade geography class and which I still use to help me remember the states. I also use a song to recite all the countries in Africa ("Ruwanda, Uganda, Western Sahara, also Kenya, Chad and Ghana..." Shall I stop now or keep going?)

There are like 10 different mnemonic devices that we use to help us remember facts and information and music is by far the most powerful one. I think that is why the Bible says whenever we get together as Christians we should "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." He doesn't say "sing to one another" but "speak to one another" in songs. When we sing hymns and psalms and spiritual songs we are teaching one another the most important things about spiritual life. We may only remember a sentence or paragraph from a sermon but we remember songs forever, even if we lose half our brain! We really need to consider what we're listening to and what we're singing. (A lot of this echoes recent sermons I've heard from Jon Anderson and Andy Snyder: "Unmasking Entertainment" by Jon Anderson and "Worship and the Local Church" and "The Sacrifice of Praise" and "Three Marks of Servant Worshippers" by Dr. Andy Snider.) Bob Kauflin tells us, "God gave us music as a gift to direct our attention to him. In the Bible, music is connected with worship, weddings, funerals, work, play, and war." And music is a large part of the scriptures. Along with [the Bible] having a whole book of songs, Ephesians and Colossians say virtually the same thing about it. Ephesians 5:18-20 tells us, "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." So here we see a few functions the Bible specifically gives for music: it is a way of making melody to the Lord; it is a way to give thanks; it is also a way of addressing one another, and if we address one another like it says, it is a sign of being filled with the Spirit. So we see that music is a

fairly important topic in the Bible.

It's important also because of its power for bad as well as good. If we accept the doctrine of original sin or human depravity, Bob Kauflin tells us that "...music amplifies the deceptive voices of the world. Listening to music is never neutral, because our sinful hearts are involved (James 1:14-15)." I think it's safe to say that what you sing about is a reflection of your heart.

Kauflin again tells us, "Listening to music without discernment and godly intent reveals a heart willing to flirt with the world. We get into trouble when we don't THINK about the music we listen to." So if your heart is filled with the love of God and good theology, that's what you'll be singing about. On the other hand, if you're singing about what we'll kindly call junk (and this has a wide range of topics—and I'm guilty of my share of this), that's probably what your heart is filled with. To again quote Kauflin, "if we listen regularly to ungodly lyrics, it's only a matter of time until we become dull to sin or drawn by sin. Some Christians say they don't know what songs are saying. If we don't listen to what's being said, why don't we find out? Christians, more than anyone, should know what the songs we listen to are saying" (Phil 4:8).

To summarize Pastor Jon and Andy Snider's sermons (especially from Ecclesiastes 2 and Philippians 3), a major function of music is worship. Often we love music for the emotional experience — everything from screamo to "My Heart Will Go On". We also shouldn't be mastered by it, to echo the words of 1 Corinthians 6. A lot of what Pastor Jon said had to do with the fact that we should not separate the tune from the content (lyrics).

The easy thing when thinking about music is to identify the black and the white, the uplifting and holy as well as the sinful and immoral. But what about the gray? There certainly are gray-areas in music—music that isn't overtly good or evil, because music itself isn't inherently sinful. But Matthew Elliot, in his book Feel, tells us that we need to be discerning in what we listen to. He also says "but we need to avoid things in our media-driven society that glorify and celebrate evil." Kauflin has a few good sections on this entitled Fruit and Associations in his article (which I would encourage you to read) that can help identify these.

I know this isn't as much of an update as an exhortation but I wanted say that I've experienced first hand the power of music in my recovery

process. Music is a wonderful gift from God that is extremely powerful but the power can work for you or against you. I will close with some verses from one of my favorite songs, "In Christ Alone":

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless Babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live
There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Lauren

Day 133: Lauren Says "Semper Fi!"

Lauren Graham Waller, October 16, 2011

This week has been one where God has really been emphasizing His faithfulness. It is not something I've ever really doubted because He promises that He is faithful and true and He keeps His promises. But sometimes it's easy to believe that He is more faithful to Bible characters than He is to us. God has impressed on me that when He says He is faithful (and His faithfulness is not just good, it's great!) that promise is true even for me. My journal this week has been a record of His continued faithfulness.

On Monday after Mom and I went to the gym to work out, I was browsing through all the pictures on my computer. It occurred to me that God has allowed me to travel to a lot of places in my brief life. I have been to three continents, eight countries and twenty nine states. I enjoy traveling quite a bit, seeing and experiencing new things. I enjoy the different architecture, scenery, people, and culture. There are three parts of travelling abroad that I have the most trouble adapting to: language, food, and the time difference. I have studied Latin, German

and Spanish in school. I studied a little bit of Hindi so that helped a little. When I was in 10th grade we spent 10 days in and around Germany. By then I had two years of German. Part of the time my German teacher was with us and he spoke fluent German so we didn't have to. One day I wanted to try out my skills at a restaurant. I asked the waiter (in German) where I could find the restroom and he just started laughing. It made me really self conscious so I didn't talk too much more in German. I asked if I screwed it up and the people we were with said I did fine but the waiter was probably amused at my accent. To this day I'm not sure if they were just saying that to spare my feelings or if that waiter really thought I was some kind of hillbilly from the hinterland!

On Monday night I saw a sight I have never seen before: The Detroit Lions on Monday Night Football! The Lions are the NFL poster child for ineptitude. They haven't been on MNF in forever because, after all, who wants to watch a team that totally redefined what it means to be a Loser. Believe it or not they actually beat the Chicago Bears to start the season undefeated(!!!) at 5-0! That is weird to even think about. Sometimes I wonder if I woke up from this injury and found myself in Bizarro World where everything has been turned upside down, the Real is Unreal and the Unreal is Real.

Tuesday was another first. For the first time since the accident I got to go to the beach. Mom and I went and I was able to walk a little on the sand, although I was very wobbly. It was really nice outside but there was a tropical storm out at sea (my Mom said it was a "fish storm") so the water was choppy and the waves were super high. While I was getting as close to the water's edge as I could without becoming a permanent part of the seascape, the waves reminded me of the passage in James about those who ask God for wisdom but don't have faith when they ask. He says that person is as unstable as someone who is like the waves of the sea being tossed around by the wind. I could identify with being physically unstable, but God reminded me that even if my walking is wobbly I can have a strong faith that is not spiritually unstable. Me and Mom took a break and had a little picnic together. I'd say we had quality time together but we have quality time every day, which is actually a blessing if you think about it. How many 21-year-old daughters get to have quality time every day with their Mom? Me!

Another first: payback time for my brother Brad. When we were kids he used to play video games quite a bit. He claims he let me win from time

to time but he lies! He really never did! He was very competitive and found much joy in thrashing his helpless, little, younger sister soundly! He even laughed when I would accidentally kill myself in some combat game. (I imagine I was the first person to ever figure out how to eliminate myself from a game by blowing myself up with my own grenades. I bet even my video game enemies were laughing at me like the German waiter!) Anyway, Brad got me a Wii for my birthday. (Which is super cool because my physiatrist recommended it for therapy!) Then Brother Brad obliged me by playing a few rounds of Wii bowling. I beat him two times compared to his one! Yippeee! So let's hear it for Wii Superioritii!

On Wednesday during Brad's lunch break from work he and I got to have lunch with Pastor Jon. That was really nice that he drove all the way up from Jupiter to have lunch with us in Stuart for less than an hour and just chat for a bit. He is a great pastor and God has blessed us with a good teacher who cares about me (and Brad too, I think). The Marine Corps says they are always looking for a few good men. "Semper Fidelis" is their slogan: "Always faithful." Pastor Jon is not a marine but he's a good soldier of Christ Jesus. God reminded me again this week that one of the ways He has always been faithful to me is by surrounding me with men who are faithful to Him and faithful to His word.

After lunch that afternoon I started blocking in on a canvas what will be my first painting since the accident. The fine motor skills in my dominant (right) hand are nowhere near great, but they have improved enough that you can probably at least identify what I'm drawing. That means this painting could be a real disaster or it could be a cool, new funky style! I guess I have to start somewhere. You'll have to wait for the reveal to find out what it is I'm painting. I'm really looking forward to it because I have missed it a lot.

On Thursday my Mom and I went out with Nancy Kearney and Emily Crosby to have tea at Lady Ann's Tea Room in Stuart. That was the first time I had ever been there and it was very nice. I was looking forward to it and it did not disappoint. Of course we invented a little fun for ourselves by trying on the tea cozies as hats [see the picture]. I don't think anyone saw us. At least they didn't chase us out! It was a nice time with some very lovely ladies. That's what I want to be when I grow up: a sweet, godly lady who loves goofy, crippled girls. Good examples = God's faithfulness!

Friday and Saturday there was a Women's Conference at our church. The speaker was Mary Lonetti from St. Paul, Minnesota. (I'm not sure how far that is from Lake Wobegon.) She and her husband were missionaries for like 30 years on a remote island in the Asia-Pacific. We saw a film that told their story of how they brought the gospel to the Taliabo people there. It is a very fascinating story which you can see online. (You actually should go watch that instead of reading the rest of this blog.)

After watching the film she taught four total sessions (one Friday and three Saturday) on the subject of Contentment. God again proved Himself faithful by showing me two very important things real clearly: (1) I still have a long way to go in being satisfied with those things God has or has not provided me. (2) He has brought me a long way from where I used to be. Like somebody has said: "I'm not what I wanna be and not what I'm gonna be, but thank God I'm not what I was!"

The passages she taught from were mostly these two:

1 Timothy 6:6-7:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Hebrews 13:5-6:

Let your content be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say, "The LORD is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

One of the things she touched on is something I've struggled with the most recently and that is loneliness. Loneliness is not a sin. Even the Bible says that two or three are better than one (Eccl. 4:9). When I am lonely is the time when it is a temptation to feel that no one really understands what I am going through or no one really cares. It is helpful to know that Jesus sympathizes with my weakness in that area and that on the cross He felt like He was even forsaken by His Father. He wants me to seek my contentment in Him and remember that He has promised He will never leave or forsake me. It is also comforting to know that even when I felt the most lonely (in the hospital) He was faithful, right there with me even though I wasn't with it enough to

know it then.

Before The Accident I borrowed a book by John Piper ("Let the Nations be Glad") from the PBA library. In it he says missions is not the ultimate goal of the church, worship is. Missions only exists because there are places where worship doesn't exist. I only got to read a couple chapters of the book but it was enough to know I wanted to read all of it. When I woke up from The Accident and remembered I still had the book, by then it was four or five months overdue. I had to return it unfinished. Since I can't drive and really don't have much opportunity to get to that library I didn't know when I'd ever get to finish it.

When we got to the conference, along with the registration packet they gave us a voucher for the conference bookstore where they brought in books just for the attendees of this conference. When I was browsing the selections, there on one of the tables was the same book I never got to finish! When Mom and I put our vouchers together we had enough credit to buy that book and enough left over for a CD. I couldn't go get the book so God brought it to me. Then He made sure it was paid for so I'd never be charged a late fee! Plus, I can highlight and underline in it... added bonus! Praise the Lord for another reminder that He is faithful, not just to Bible characters but even to me.

Your love, oh Lord
Reaches to the heavens
Your faithfulness stretches to the sky
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains
Your justice flows like the ocean's tide
I will lift my voice
To worship You, my King
I will find my strength
In the shadow of your wings
"Your Love, Oh Lord"
– Third Day

Lauren

Day 136: Lauren Has a News Flash (kinda)

Lauren Graham Waller, October 19, 2011

This has already been a great week, starting with the special time we had on Sunday. We had a (belated) birthday celebration with my family and some friends. The Doerzbacher family threw a fish fry for us. Now, I'm not normally over-fond of fish but the way they do it is overly-tasty. Mr Doerzbacher [he goes by "Wink"] should open a franchise called "Fish-Fil-A" with Mrs. Doerzbacher's [Mary Jo's] special sauce and cole slaw. Their son Brad caught the fish fresh the day before (I think). It was Cobia and Dolphin fish and some Tuna. "Captain Wink" is a professional fisherman. He told Dad he has caught quite a few fish over 700-800 pounds and even caught one over 900 pounds. He is not only a good captain and fish fry-er, he is a very nice man. He and his wife – and their kids, Brad and Melissa – are super people that ooze character and Christlikeness.

Speaking of which... I know a lot of Christians are accused of being hypocrites. That's because a lot of Christians actually are hypocrites. I understand that at a certain level because living up to the example Christ left us is pretty much an impossible task, although it's what we all strive for and what we are called to. However, Jesus is the one who was pretty harsh with hard-core hypocrites and He said they aren't even in the kingdom and will be judged as non-believers. (So if you call yourself a Christian but aren't even trying to live like Him, examine yourself please!?!) It's easy for those who take our faith seriously to become jaded by the stories we hear, and even by people we know, who claim to be Christians but don't look or act or speak like Christ. My Dad and I were talking about what a blessing it is to attend a church that, while it is not perfect, is filled to the brim with honest, humble people who just obey God's word and do what it says. I think that is because our pastors are committed to teaching the Bible line upon line, precept upon precept because it's God's Word after all! What can you teach that's more powerful or life-changing? Those who love God will love His word and hate anything that is anti-Christ; those who don't will probably find another place to hang out where they will be more comfortable. For all of you who are judging Christianity based on a bunch of fakers, you need to come hang out with people from our church. For those who attend a church like that, then you already know what a blessing it is! I got to do that on Sunday and it was such a real blessing to me that I won't take for granted.

While we were at the Doerzbachers I got to see some of my PBA friends again. It was so cool to mingle with them and catch up since I don't get to see them and I'm suffering from pretty severe withdrawal. I miss you guys!!! Also it was a treat to get to chat a while with my friend

Johanna, who had to leave Alice home with her husband Matt. (Alice is teething and was fussy so Johanna left her with Matt to deal with.) I miss my coffee dates with Johanna. (Actually, Johanna usually had coffee and I had tea.) By the end of the afternoon the women were off by themselves chatting about girl stuff and the men were off by themselves watching football. Guess which group I was with? Too bad the Lions lost to the 49ers in the last minute. It was a memorable afternoon that I won't soon forget, unless I have another car accident. God forbid!

During Speech Therapy on Monday, my therapist broke out some new exercises. One of them had me attempt to remember words by putting them in pre-determined categories. I didn't start out so hot but I got better as time went along. These kinds of exercises are difficult because they are so new to me and require me to do things in different and unexpected ways. It is kind of fun because it is new and interesting, but it is also work because it exposes the weaknesses I have. Poor performance is always humbling, whether you're recovering from an injury or not; I guess that's why they call this "therapy." Today I did the same exercises again. On Monday I got 8 out of 30 correct (27%). Today we were shooting for 15 out of 30 (50%). I actually got 25 out of 30 (28 with prompting). That's 83% - which still wouldn't be an "A" if it was a test, but definitely not a flunker! I was rather pleased with the progress.

My homework is to read a passage of Scripture from the Old Testament and be able to recount the narrative. I then have to memorize three verses from the narrative. I have been doing quite a bit of memorization lately. I would have thought it would be getting progressively easier but it somewhat goes in cycles – easier some days than others. My memory is generally improving but there are some days I definitely have an easier time and better recall than others. I don't know if I can tie it to anything specifically (tiredness, nutrition, etc.) but my Mom says the poor performance is probably days I don't take enough vitamins! Ha!

On Tuesday a reporter from the Palm Beach Post came to interview us. He was a pleasant fellow. It was very interesting to hear Dad and Mom telling him about things that happened while I was "asleep." It made me even more grateful to God to realize the extent to which He was working in me and on me even while I was totally unaware. It was also a privilege to be able to tell the reporter that this story is more about God than it is about me, even though he often wanted to redirect the

questions toward things like school, hobbies, and friends. We have told our story to other reporters and it has been very discouraging to see how they want to focus on the details of the Accident and not report the main story – how God was working before the Accident, during the Accident, and after the Accident. We just have to leave it up to Him and trust that even if the whole story doesn't get reported, the reporters get to hear the gospel and how great our God is. I was glad this reporter even said before he left that there is no question that "a Higher Power" was at work behind it all.

The Post then sent out a photographer to take pictures for the story. It was actually kind of fun for a photo shoot. I had quite a bit in common with him: he changed majors in college (he went to Syracuse in NY), he visited India, he (obviously) loves photography. He was also a very friendly fellow. He took some pictures of the family inside the house and then we went outside for some more. We witnessed one of the most striking, fiery Florida sunsets I have ever seen. The pictures turned out okay considering (a) my skinny self was in them, (b) the wind kept blowing Mom's hair into her face, and (c) Dad and Brad won't smile for pictures!

News flash: I am actually beginning to like my short hair. That is all.

Okay, you probably want more details given my prior diatribes against short hair. Well, it is easy to wash, easy to dry, easy to manage. And even when I do something to it (like put product in it) it is easy to do. Love that! Plus, a lot of people have told me they like it (and I refuse to believe you are all liars!). So... Now, that is all!

For those who only read the blog to get an update on my reading list, I regret to inform you that I haven't read a significant amount this week because I've been working on the photography book of my India trip. (I am still reading John Macarthur's compilation of essays on Evangelism, written by pastors and professors from his church and seminary, which is good but it requires more "sipping" than "gulping.") What I have enjoyed most is going through all the pictures I took on the trip, about 2,000 of them. I have been culling through them and selecting about 150-200 for the book.

The sad thing is I lost quite a bit of the memory that includes the stories surrounding these pictures. I know I was there because I'm in the pictures, but there are some things I just don't remember. There are other pictures that elicit very strong emotions though which I had

forgotten about until I saw the picture. For example, there are some pictures of a park near the guest house in which we stayed. The park itself was very quiet and it appeared as though someone was tending and caring for the grounds. It was peaceful and quiet although it was well travelled and fairly heavily used. I only visited the park once and I distinctly remember feeling "calm but restless." In the park were a few makeshift shrines and idols where someone had tried to sanctify that space so that it would either be blessed or protected. I realize that an idol is nothing – it can not speak or hear or act. But behind it stands everything that is antithetical to the one true God. The park was a peaceful place, but in it my heart could not rest. Seeing the pictures brought back a rush of sadness and unrest of spirit that I felt in India. Strange that I don't remember certain events but I remember certain feelings.

I also remember leaving India with no burning desire to return. Perhaps to visit, but definitely a settled sense of having no particular calling there. Now it is weird that I feel some desire to return and it's a desire I don't fully comprehend. I don't know if it is to rekindle the memories first-hand, to see the faces and eyes of those who impacted me to a degree I don't fully understand, or to once again tell those precious big-brown-eyed children that there is a God – one God – who loved them so much that He sent His one and only son to bear their sins on the cross. God approved that perfect sacrifice by raising His son from the grave and seating Him at His right hand where He ever lives to make intercession to the Father on our behalf, and He saves to the uttermost all those who come to God through Him. If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died and more than that was raised to life, He is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us!

I guess I've written enough for now. Thank you for reading what I've written. Also thanks to all of you who have written responses on the Guestbook. I read every single one of them and thank God for all of them. Hopefully we'll be able to transfer this to our website soon so I can respond to comments because they are so encouraging to me. I have so much to give thanks for, especially all of you!

Lauren.

Day 140: A Grateful Heart

Lauren Graham Waller, October 23, 2011

It seems like the weeks of my life are divided up into themes and the events of each week follow a new theme or topic. Last week it was God's faithfulness. This week it's gratefulness. A lot of these themes overlap because I know God isn't just faithful one week or praiseworthy another week. However it's like He's been using some of these short term memory techniques to help me learn attributes of His character that I need to meditate on or develop in myself to help deal with the different issues I've had to face during this recovery process.

This week I've been learning that a grateful heart is the cure for complaining and self pity. If you've ever had to face any kind of hardship you know how tempting it is to complain. It's easy for us to focus on what we don't have rather than on what we do, or wonder why we've been singled out for suffering (or so it seems). We overlook all the good things and the blessings and we magnify what is bad and grumble about how "unfair" life is. But I have been reminded that if we just stop and think about it, none of us really wants fairness. Thankfully, God was not fair with us. Instead, He was gracious! He "has not dealt with us according to our sins nor punished us according to our iniquities" (which would be fair) but was "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love" (see Psalm 103:8-12). Thinking about that replaces complaining with gratitude.

Another way God has taught me gratefulness this past week is by reminding me of the body of Christ. That imagery has been totally brought to life for our whole family. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." This morning I was reading in Galatians 6:2 where it says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Our family has recently been through the roughest time any of us has ever faced but the Body of Christ has rushed in to support us and help us heal and bear our burdens. Every Sunday is a small picture of those who have been there with us through all of this. Even during the week the Lord uses someone from His Body to visit or send a check or write a note or comment on this site to show us He loves us and cares for us. This week He has sent those sweet reminders just when I've been tempted to complain.

Another very interesting moment of gratitude came on Thursday morning. Something I do when it comes to mind is when I see someone

who captures my attention I focus on them for just a minute and say a short prayer for them. After Mom and I worked out we went into town to do some grocery shopping. In the process we stopped to get gas. While we were there I saw a woman in front of us and it crossed my mind that I should pray for her. As I did that it also prompted a memory of a similar situation that occurred in India. As I saw a bus go by I saw a man on the bus wearing an orange shirt and I said a prayer for him. I don't know who he was, what he was doing, or where he was going but I felt like I should pray for him. That memory came back to me at the gas station Thursday, along with something Mark Kaprive said while I was in India: "You could be the only follower of Jesus that is moved enough to lift up a prayer to the one true God for that person." I know that prayer is not magical but it is powerful and effective (James 5:16). Whether God changes the hearts of those people or not only He knows, but in the process He is changing my heart. I am grateful He is making me sensitive to the needs and the souls of people around me. I am also grateful He gave me back another one of my memories.

Someone very kindly gave us a gift card for Subway so we went there and I ordered a pizza-style sub. I surprisingly ate the whole thing! Now that may not be that impressive to you but it occurred to me as I swallowed the last tasty morsel that I had just accomplished a feat of Olympic proportions. (If "Olympic proportions" is a "Five Dollar Foot-Long.") I have hardly had any appetite at all lately (which explains why I've lost some weight I can ill afford to lose). I did the first couple weeks after I woke up from the coma and gobbled up everything that wasn't hidden from sight! So having my appetite return somewhat is something I'm grateful for. Side note: Now that I've cursed you by putting that stupid jingle back in your head, you may as well hear it done right by a cool acapella group that features Brad Doerzbacher's doppelganger. Presenting the Five Dollar Footlong Jingle (acapella). Eat fresh, my friends!

On Friday night we went to a craft night with some college-aged girls from our church. It was fun to make crafts. I enjoy crafting and did better than I thought I would, but still not nearly as good as I used to before the Accident. There were some things the rest of the group made that I didn't even have the confidence to try because it required too much use of fine motor skills (which are about a 5 on scale from 1 to 10,with 1 being the delicate artistic touch of a hippo and 10 being metaphysical dexterity exceeding the rest of all creation). I just stuck with one thing, so now I don't have to ask for a journal for Christmas

now because I got one and decorated it!

We got some good news on the therapy front this week. The Brain & Spinal Cord Injury program for Florida received a little more funding after they ran out by the end of September. They called us and told us they can now pay for eight therapy sessions. So that's something to be thankful for! They are also paying for neuropsychological testing, which is a comprehensive test that lets me know how I compare cognitively with other people in my age group. It is something I need to have done before I can consider going back to school or work or attempting to drive again. (Some people take it several times.) It measures different categories of cognition like intelligence, memory, speaking, reading and writing, and executive function (problem solving, planning, organizing, and the ability to control impulses and inhibitions). I will be able to tell you more about it after I've actually had it.

One other bit of "bad news" is that I was denied once again for temporary disability for medical assistance because I am not disabled or blind under their rules. They agreed that I was disabled after the Accident and am still disabled now but will not be disabled for 12 months in a row based on how I am recovering. So it's one of those "good news, bad news" things. The bad news is it doesn't help pay the bills. The good news is based on the five latest doctor reports they used in evaluating the claim that none of my doctors believe after 12 months I will be able to have a pretty "normal" life. The other good news is that it leaves more room for God to provide for our needs in ways we don't understand right now but will be able to praise Him for when it happens!

Yesterday was Brad's birthday and we went to the beach to see the sunrise. There is nothing like the sun creeping over the eastern horizon and reflecting its morning rays across the Atlantic Ocean to remind us of God's glory and His faithfulness. Psalm 148 says the waters and the heavens give praise to God. Lamentations 3:22-23 reminds us that just as faithful as the sun is to rise in the morning, that's how faithful God is to daily show us His mercy. If you ever doubt God's faithfulness or mercy just look at a sunrise. (I think enjoying sunrises and sunsets are what make me a "sky junkie.") Getting to celebrate Brad's birthday reminded me of how grateful I am for a great brother. Well, he has one weakness. I told you he got me the Wii for therapii and one of the games is called "Just Dance," which uses some funky moves that help with balance and coordination. So far all efforts at getting him to have

a Dance-Off with me have failed. I think deep down he is a little frightened of my killer dancing moves. Or else he secretly doesn't want his tough-guy reputation to be ruined by how nimble and buoyant he is on his toes.

It is a tradition in our family that whenever anyone goes to bed (I am usually first) there is a chorus of everyone saying "G'Night, I love you!" Lately it's turned into a competition between my parents as to who loves us more. It's gotten to the point where there's a miniature argument. "I love you," "I love you more," "No, I love you more!" and so on. It's all in good fun and makes everyone laugh, but among the things to be grateful for is the blessing of having a family that loves me and even "argues" over who loves me more.

Two more things I'm grateful for and then I'll quit.

When researching and reading (or hearing) about people with TBIs, the ones that are not in a permanent vegetative state almost always suffer from depression, dramatic mood swings, outbursts of anger, and hypersensitive irritability. Some become belligerent and violent and even threaten to kill others or themselves. Thanks be to God that I haven't experienced or struggled with any of that so far. I have to attribute all of this to the work of God in my life because it has nothing to do with me. By nature I am a moody and irritable person, which is just a manifestation of what Romans 3:23 says I am by nature – a sinner who falls short of God's glory. A TBI certainly doesn't help with that. In fact, it usually leaves a lot of unrighteousness unchecked and makes sin more apparent because to the extent we lose our cognitive abilities we lose one of the primary channels (our mind) though which the Spirit of God applies His sanctifying word to our hearts (John 15:3, 17:17).

Speaking of which, I'm also grateful for the work of the Spirit in my life. Yesterday I was reading part of John MacArthur's commentary on Galatians 5:22 that says that patience is "the ability to endure injuries inflicted by others and the willingness to accept irritating or painful situations." By His grace I'm enduring and accepting. Due to His constant reminders this week, I'm actually learning to be grateful for the irritating and painful situations. I'm most grateful that God sent His Son to die in my place so that His righteousness could be mine. I'm also grateful for His sanctifying work in my life that is making me each day a little more like His Son.

GRATEFULNESSE
George Herbert (1593-1633)

Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.
...
Wherefore I cry, and cry again;
And in no quiet canst thou be,
Till I a thankful heart obtain
Of Thee:
Not thankful when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.

Lauren

Day 148: Lauren Has a Little Bit of Heaven

Lauren Graham Waller, October 31, 2011

'Cause heaven is here now
He's all around us
Heaven is Jesus
It's the moments we need
—Jesus Culture, "Heaven is Here"

This song reminds me of what I was thinking about around the time I actually got saved. I realized heaven isn't just pearly gates and golden streets and white-robed angels with harps and halos and wings (which it is). Heaven is much more. Heaven is Jesus, and that is the essence of eternity.

The light of heaven is the face of Jesus
The joy of heaven is the presence of Jesus
The melody of heaven is the name of Jesus
The harmony of heaven is the praise of Jesus
The theme of heaven is the work of Jesus
The employment of heaven is the service of Jesus
The duration of heaven is the eternity of Jesus
The fullness of heaven is Jesus Himself.

I didn't understand that at first, which provoked me to question a lot of things I believed about God and eternity. But God, patiently and

kindly, showed me the beauty of Christ and the ugliness of my selfishness and sin. Romans 2:4 says, "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Thinking back across the events that led to my repentance, there is no doubt that I can trace specific instances where God in His kindness changed my thinking, convicted me of my sin and convinced me that my only hope for life – especially eternal life – was to be found in His Son. The kindness of God was re-emphasized over and over this past week, beginning with Pastor Jerry's sermon from Romans 9, which I didn't really get to thinking about it until I was in the shower Monday morning. Surprisingly, I remembered the big idea of the sermon and the main points without even having to review my notes! Mom and I went to the water aerobics class and, while I'm not that much into water aerobics, I realized that because of God's kindness I can still move, let alone exercise!

Speaking of exercise and activities with Mom, when we got back to the house I got her to play Just Dance with me on the Wii. She beat me pretty soundly because little did I know, but she's a dancing queen! All she needed was a hair dryer for a microphone! (To all of you who survived the Disco Era and just had a flashback, I'm very, very sorry!)

My brother Brad had his final court appearance on Monday to see if he would have to face any charges because of the accident. Guess what? Neither the police officer who wrote the report nor the person who hit us showed up. So Brad's attorney made a motion for the case to be dismissed and the Judge dismissed it. Praise God for His kindness there! There were several scenarios that could have played out that would have been messy but thankfully that chapter in this whole ordeal is over.

On Tuesday I received another design project for the church (for Pastor Appreciation) and I was able to work on that. That's actually an answer to prayer. I have been asking God for opportunities to serve the church because they've been serving me and ministering to me in so many ways but my ability to serve has been severely limited, not only because of physical reasons, but distance and transportation reasons. So this gets around both issues and also gives me an opportunity to practice some of the stuff that I've forgotten. I shouldn't be surprised that God answers prayers that involve opportunities to serve Him and His bride, but that just shows His kindness.

On Tuesday, when Mom and I went to the fitness center I was again amazed at how much mobility I have compared with what I've been able to do recently. I also had speech therapy on Tuesday. It seems like every time we do it my memory shows improvement on one level or another. I not only did well on the exercises but I was able to remember some of the stories we did last week and retell them to her. Funny thing: she actually didn't remember she was going to ask me about them but I (unintentionally) reminded her by making an off-hand comment about one. It's not every day I remember something she doesn't so I'm pretty pleased with myself!

After the accident they shaved a portion of the front of my head to put the ICP bolt in my head. When I was released from the hospital I got the rest of my hair cut off so it would be the same length all over and I wouldn't look like I had a reverse Mohawk. The hair cutting place gave me my hair because I had never had it all cut off and it was pretty long [see picture]. We decided to mail it in to Locks of Love, which creates wigs for children who have lost their hair because of a medical problem. I was sorry to see it go but I'm glad some other girl will get to wear my hair.

On Wednesday, Mom and I went on a photography expedition around part of the golf course surrounding our house (pictures on Facebook). That was a real treat. It was a nice day, plus I got to keep up my photography skills, PLUS we also live in a very beautiful, photographable area. Just the story of how we ended up in this house is another example of God's kindness. When I was in St. Mary's rehab they told me I would be discharged in 48 hours and had to go home. At that point I couldn't walk or even think about navigating stairs and didn't know if I'd be able to anytime in the near future. At the house in Hobe Sound there was no bedroom downstairs and only a half a bath (with no shower or tub). We had to find a single-story house to rent and fast, but how to do that – and move too – in under 2 days? It "just so happens" that one of the parents of one of my India team members came to visit me that night. They live in Ohio but have two houses in Florida. One is a one story house in Palm City that they were willing to rent us for the same rent we were paying, and it was fully furnished so we could move right in. All these "coincidences" are pretty amazing, huh?

I also spent a large part of Wednesday preparing for a short speech I was to give on Thursday night at the College & Career Bible Study. Pastor Jon asked me to talk for 10-15 minutes about what God has been

teaching me lately. I decided I wanted to talk about God's faithfulness and my mind kept going back to the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." As I read the words of the third stanza I realized that verse summarized the areas of my life God has proven Himself faithful to me. So I wrote an outline, then my Mom and Dad and I got together and talked about each of the points. We talked about different things over the past four months where God was faithful to me and put some of those stories in the speech. Then my Dad and I worked on it to polish it up and make sure it didn't wander around Robin Hood's barn too much, and also to make sure we only used words I could actually say! I practiced and edited, practiced and edited over and over till I think everyone was sick of me speechifying! I was getting more and more nervous as the hour approached.

On the way to church, and even after I got there, I was preaching to myself because my nerves were starting to get the better of me. Believe it or not, I usually don't get too nervous before speaking. This was the first time I've spoken publicly (in front of a crowd) since the accident, and while my speech is getting much better, it still isn't so smooth! Also, my memory isn't so great so I can't really memorize a speech so I would be using my notes much, much more than I ever had in the past. As I was thinking through the speech, the Lord brought to mind a promise I read in Isaiah while looking for verses to memorize this week for Speech Therapy. Isaiah 49:10 says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Another little "coincidence." It "just so happened" that when my mind was all aflutter, the God of all comfort comforted me with His own words which He had faithfully shown to me during the week.

The speech ended up going without a hitch. Well, there were a few hitches, but some of the misspeaks and corrections ended up being quite funny! What was even more cool was, when I was done, Dave Magdales read Galatians 2:19-20, which is a current favorite verse (as I've mentioned before). It says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The fact that I got so nervous was all the more reason to boast in Christ. If I had tried to go through that on my own I would have crashed and burned. God knows it was my desire to glorify Him and in His kindness He gave me the help (before) and the encouragement (after) to know He was with me. I believe He was honored Thursday night. I'm glad I got to be a part of it.

The highlight Friday was going to the Canfield Coffeehouse in the evening. (See some of Michelle's sweet pics here.) It is such a blessing to be with friends any time. But that night was special. Not only was I with friends, we got to share songs and poetry and sundry variations of each. I am not a coffee drinker, but the rest of the evening was a little bit of heaven. Pastor Jerry and Michelle sang "Great is thy Faithfulness," and the group ended up singing two of my favorite songs: "Glorious and Mighty" and "Abide With Me." Every promise God makes He keeps. Every word He says is true. And all of these little "coincidences" may seem like miscellaneous details to most people, but to me they are all sweet reminders that Jesus is abiding with me and our faithful and glorious God is also good and kind.

Oh, Michigan beat Purdue at their homecoming Saturday, 36-14! Their record is 7-1, which is sweet! But not quite as sweet as what God has given me in Christ. Jonathan Edwards said:

They that have Christ, they have a soul-satisfying portion. They have the truest pleasures and comforts. Here is to be found the proper happiness of the soul. Least liable to accidents and change... The joys are more exquisitely delighting than ever was enjoyed by the greatest epicure [a person who is dedicated to sensual pleasures and luxurious living]. [There are] no pleasures like those that are by the enlightenings of the Spirit of Christ, the discoveries of the beauty of Christ and the manifestations of his love.

This week has been a little bit of heaven on earth because heaven is Jesus and Jesus is here, in me and with me. "Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness" (Ps. 31:21).

Lauren

Day 150: A Psalm

Lauren Graham Waller, November 2, 2011

Praise the LORD!
Praise Him inside the bleak walls of a hospital;
Praise Him outside on the green grass of home!
Praise Him for healing my broken body;
Praise Him for saving my sinful soul!
Praise Him with a wheelchair and a walker;
Praise Him with a hobbled gait;
Praise Him by Just
Dancing with my brother and mother!

Praise Him with four chords on the guitar (A, E, G – and sometimes Y);

Praise Him with a feeble voice;
Praise Him with camera, with pencil, with paint, with Photoshop.
Praise Him with website and blog and Facebook status;
Praise Him with the busted vuvuzela? No! Praise Him that the vuvuzela is busted!
Praise Him I have heard no sounding brass or clashing cymbals;
Praise Him for friends that have been shown the more excellent way!
Let everyone whom God has given life – and new life! – praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD!

Day 154: "Prelude to a Smiting in Bb Major"

Lauren Graham Waller, November 6, 2011

Well, I thought I had some great news on Wednesday. As we were about to head down to the fitness center, my Mom and Dad said I could actually drive the golf cart by myself and they would ride their bikes! Wow! Independence! Freedom! Trust! The wind blowing through my hair (or what's left of it)! I could hardly believe my good fortune! However, little did I know Mom and Dad were going to surround me on their bikes: one in front of me and one behind. I guess they thought I was either going to injure myself from risky driving behavior and lose control and wind up in a swamp and get gobbled up by gators. Either that or they thought I might go rogue and try to escape to Canada now that I had wheels. Now lest you think I am a little ingrate I do appreciate their concern for me since the accident but I thought this took it to a whole new level. What kind of harm can a person do to themselves with a golf cart after all? Of course, they got the affirmation they needed when I was reporting this sad news to the doctor on Friday. He sided with them and against me. (My Dad said I had to put that last sentence in there so I wasn't instrumental in enlisting a chorus of commiseraters and thereby creating a Sympathy Orchestra.)

This past week I've had my nose buried in books quite a bit. I finished all the books in The Hunger Games trilogy. The story takes place in the future after the US has been destroyed and is now known as Panem. There is one rich capitol district and twelve poor districts. There were 13 but during a failed uprising against the Capitol, District 13 was destroyed. The punishment for the other Districts was that every year one boy and one girl from each District was selected by a lottery and required to participate in the Hunger Games, a survival game in which

the winner was the last person to survive. The whole thing is televised (watching is mandatory) and instead of voting someone off the island, audience members can send money and gifts like food and supplies to their favorite tributes (the representatives from the Districts). Even though it was fiction there were a lot of lessons to be learned.

I am now re-reading Let the Nations be Glad by John Piper, which was the book I didn't return on time to the PBA library because of the accident. When I did return it God had another one available for me at the women's conference we recently went to so I could purchase it with my voucher. So far, it's a great book and I would highly recommend it. It's not really a textbook on how to "do" missions but is a good treatment on why missions is so important, and why we must all be involved in missions as either "senders" or "goers". He really talks about the damage that the "Prosperity Gospel" is doing in Africa and South America. People are not being converted to Christ because of who He is and what He did for them on the cross, but because of the "stuff" they are promised they'll get from God if they convert to "Christianity." That is not the gospel. That is idolatry and it gets me angry just reading about it.

I love me some John Piper. He is one of my all-time favorite writers on biblical and theological subjects. But there's one thing you need to know when reading Piper (which some reviewer on Amazon noticed as well). If you look on your keyboard and find out there is no hyphen key, it's because Piper stole it. He hyphenates ALL of his adjectives and I'm sure he wore out the dash button on at least 30 computers writing just this one book. Here's just some of the words in his preface:

My passion is to see people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, soul-satisfied, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, soul-winning, and justice-pursuing ... Where do such God-centered, Christ-exalting, missions-driven people come from? ... There is a God-enthralled, Christ-treasuring, all-enduring love... There is a distinct God-magnifying, Christ-exalting mindset ... It cannot make peace with God-ignoring, God-neglecting...

On Wednesday I felt I should celebrate Day 150 since the accident by writing a Psalm. I decided to model it after Psalm 150. I think if you have read it you may have some questions about the mysterious Verse 6 of the Psalm. This may give you some background.

Sometime last year when the world was all abuzz with World Cup fever, my Dad felt moved by the spirit (of what we still aren't sure) to go on eBay and purchase a genuine plastic maize-colored vuvuzela. He played it on many an occasion, even taking it out in public and smuggling it in to sporting events and blasting it at strategic moments. Despite the threats of our family to divorce him from all love and attention he was unflappable and drew inspiration from Psalm 150 about adding his instrument in praise with those listed in the inspired canon. He also figured if he became skilled in the classical repertoire for the instrument – which has one piece, the "Vuvuzela Concerto in Bb Major" – that would make this a "legit" pursuit. (Click here if you want to see the sheet music and hear the otherworldly sound of 30,000 vuvuzelists playing the piece in unison.)

On the opening day of the college football season this year, we had a houseful of Michigan fans over to join us in enjoying a Wolverine beatdown of the mighty Broncos of Western Michigan. Of course, Dad's vuvuzela had to make an appearance. Mysteriously, magically, or (I believe) miraculously, as he was mixing the sacred and the profane (attempting to play "The Victors" on the vile vuvuzela), we heard a snap followed by a sound I can only describe as the fading bleat of a goat on the way to slaughter. As all eyes turned to my Dad, whereupon we saw the unsurpressed pain of a man who looked like Smeagol when he lost his "precious." Somewhere between the words "champions" and "of the west" God smote the vuvuzela and it gave up the ghost, breathed its last and expired.

Since then I'm not sure my Dad has totally emerged from this "dark period" of prolonged melancholy. However, more praises have been lifted heavenward in the demise of the vuvuzela than there ever were by the foul instrument itself. I'm pretty sure this was not the event that inspired Piper to write Let the Nations Be Glad, but I do agree with him when he says that truly God will get glory for Himself out of all things. So, as verse 6 of the "Psalm for Day 150" says:

Praise Him with the busted vuvuzela? No! Praise Him that the vuvuzela is busted!

Thursday we got to do something really cool. One of the women at our church works for a man who also had a TBI (traumatic brain injury) and we had a long lunch with him (me, my Mom and my Dad). His name is Rob and about 5 years ago he was driving to work in Colorado when he drove off the side of a mountain road that didn't

have a guardrail. His car tumbled 100 feet down the side of the mountain and the impact threw him out and he fell down another 100 feet and split his skull from one side to the other. He was totally unconscious and because it was early in the morning (before daylight I think) nobody saw it happen or knew he was there. He was found by a dog that somebody let out of their house and wouldn't stop barking until his owner went to see what was happening.

God was very gracious and spared him, but it has been a long recovery. Like I said that was almost 5 years ago and he still hasn't been able to go back to work because he said nobody will hire him. He was a brilliant man (and still is in many ways), had an Ivy League business school education in finance. It was very interesting to hear the issues he still deals with. He is getting involved in legislation in his home state of New York and has educated himself quite a bit on this subject and speaks very passionately about it. I think we will meet with him again. He really enjoyed the opportunity to get out of the house and it was good to hear the story of someone who knows what this is about and the struggles I have been through – and still have to face. If you think about it pray for him. His name is Rob and he said he might come to church today but I didn't see him.

My Dad was in touch with Mrs. Dyben this week about me possibly returning to PBA to take some classes this winter. Because of my injury they have to come up with a Student Success plan that takes into account all the recommendations of my doctors and my family and the administrators at the college. Come to find out Mrs. Dyben's daughter just died two weeks ago from Cystic Fibrosis. She was my age (actually one year older) and her name was Christina Dyben . I didn't know her except by name and face but I feel really badly for her family.

I also feel badly for the family of John Doerr who was killed last week in a motorcycle accident. I was a teacher's assistant in his FYE (first year experience) class. Dr. Wes Jamison, who also goes to our church, is a professor of communications at PBA. He was 20 feet up in the air on a ladder with a chainsaw trimming a palm tree. The wind blew him over and his son was standing below him. He threw the chainsaw on the way down so it wouldn't hurt his son, but when he hit the ground he shattered his foot and ankle and it was so bad they thought they would have to amputate it. PBA has really been affected by tragedies recently and it just proves that suffering and death are no respecter of persons or age. Please pray for all these families as they need the comfort of Christ and his people to help them.

On Friday my Mom and Dad and I spent the whole day at Pinecrest Rehab in Delray Beach. I started neuropsych testing, which I need to have done before I can consider going back to school. First we did a group interview where the psychiatrist, Dr. Bukstel, wanted to find out what I was like before the accident and how it affected me. Then he started in on the first of four days of testing to see how much I've recovered cognitively and behaviorally and how much more improvement we can expect. Basically, when compared with a test group of my peers (20-24 year olds) I was above average in every category before the accident. (I think they only have three categories: below average, average, and above average.) Part of it is problem solving for accuracy and part is for speed. Some involves motor skills and language and intelligence, and some is mood and memory and sensory processing.

It will be a total of 12-15 hours of testing and we've only done the first couple "official" hours so I have quite a bit left to do over the next couple of weeks. He was reluctant to give us many results until he is finished. He did say I was average or above average on everything tested so far except for two things: complex sequencing and word fluency. For example, I can do things with pencil and paper but can't do things in my head like I used to. I also don't write in long sentences or paragraphs. [Note from Dad: The rough draft of the blog content that Lauren sends to me is usually in short paragraphs and bullet points; we talk through it to flesh out the content.] I also have trouble putting things in order or repeating lists, especially if I have to say them backwards. My brain just doesn't work like that right now. Verbal fluency is the ability to say a lot of words in a certain category in like 30 or 60 seconds (like, say all the animals you can think of that begin with the letter "C"). This tests the function of the right frontal lobe, which is where I had most of the damage and have the largest lesion.

One good thing we've learned so far is that in many areas I have recovered to about normal (which for me was above average). In a lot of other areas I am not where I used to be but I am still "average." I will have to keep adjusting to living without some of the abilities I used to have and will have to compensate some other way. It still is remarkable how God spared me and has allowed me to heal so much so fast. Even this doctor, who is a Jewish man, listened as we told the story and told us when we were finished: "In my worldview, what has happened to you is not an accident or didn't happened by chance." He has been practicing over 30 years and believes I am a miracle. Because I'm still only a few months into the recovery there is still room for a lot more

improvement. He said he is optimistic for three main reasons: I was pretty smart to start with, I have good family and friend support, and I am a person of faith. Those three things he said were the most important to achieve the best outcomes and God has given me all three, which is a huge blessing!

This update has turned into an Epistle (which may be appropriate since the last one was a Psalm) but I have to give a shout out to all the people who participated in the garage sale Saturday. The College & Career class put it on to for my benefit and the whole church participated. It was H-U-G-E! We got there early to help set up and it was already pretty much ready to go. There was so much stuff it spanned a couple of houses and there were tons of people there. It was almost like going to church except it was held in a couple of garages! I can not believe all the people who are doing so much when there is nothing in it for them except the love of God that has been poured out in their hearts through the Holy Spirit! God must have blessed the sale because He sent all the right people along and they sold all the big stuff and the rest they took to Good Will. They raised over $3,000 in four hours. God is amazing, our church is amazing, and seeing so many people living out the love of Christ is amazing. I love these people!!! Also Mom got two bread pans for $5. So, as John Piper might say, we can expect steaming-hot, mouth-watering, oven-baked, Florida- fresh, tummy-teasing, sensory-overloading yum-yum-yumminess to be visiting the Graham house soon!

I hope we can transfer this blog over to the website soon so I can post more pictures and video clips. Thanks to all of you who still keep reading. I wish I could express how good God has been, but if you know Him then I'm not telling you anything you don't know! God bless you all. And if you have a vuvuzela, please repent before it's too late and God smites it dead.

Lauren

Day 162: Altars, Epics and Faith

Lauren Graham Waller, November 14, 2011

This week the Lord has been teaching me about trusting Him in times of difficulty. So last night we went to church again, which is only the second time I've been up to going on a Sunday night, and wouldn't you know we heard a sermon on how God sends trials to see if we will trust Him or ourselves in times of difficulty. It's good news that I'm getting

enough back to normal that long Sundays are becoming easier to handle. Although, I must confess, I took a super long nap during the afternoon. (Felt like several hours to me but Mom said it was only like an hour and a half.) I still didn't have any trouble falling asleep last night, which I would have before the accident if I took a nap that long.

The payoff for the long nap was an excellent sermon by Pastor Jerry on Abraham. In Genesis 12, God sent a famine to the promised land and Abraham had to leave Canaan and go to Egypt for a while to find food. While they were there, the Egyptians saw Abraham's wife and noticed she was pretty beautiful (for a 65 year old woman!) and Abraham thought they would kill him if they found out she was his wife. He had a chat with her and convinced her to say she was his sister. This was partially true (they had the same father but different mothers) but as they say a half-truth is a whole-lie if the intent is to deceive. So Abraham flunked the first test and trusted in himself instead of God. The rest of the story was about how Abraham's lie got a lot of people in trouble. It also created conflict with his wife and set a bad example for his nephew Lot. The good part was that God did not abandon Abraham and he learned an important lesson. He repented of his sin and went back to the altar he originally created and called out to God and confessed his sin. God forgave him but immediately put him in another test where he had to choose where to locate. He gave the best area to Lot instead of taking it for himself and settled in Mamre and built another alter to God and worshipped him there.

When God allows us to go through trials he is weaning us away from ourselves and teaching us not to lean on our own understanding. If we fear the Lord and shun evil and acknowledge Him in all our ways He will make our paths straight. It was a very good sermon and a good reminder of how even the Father of the Faithful wasn't perfect and needed God to help him die to himself and totally trust God.

The highlight last Monday was watching two movies: Star Trek and Braveheart. I have enjoyed, for quite some time, epic movies like Braveheart because I am an epic person myself, if by epic you mean non-epic. (Actually the most epic thing in the movie was everybody's hair! That and even the men wore skirts!) But I have thought that movies like Braveheart, though they just involve acting, represent real wars and real death. I have wondered what goes through people's minds when they sign up to fight a war, knowing that it involves killing and death. It has to be hard to kill someone, but also hard to know at any minute your own life could be over, or even if you don't get killed

you may be crippled or maimed for the rest of your life. I wonder if the military prepares soldiers for the psychological trauma and spiritual realities of war as much as they train them for the physical and tactical parts of war? Braveheart was inspiring in once sense but also sad and depressing in another way. War is hell, but it is also a reality until Jesus returns to win the final battle over His enemies and establish Himself as the Prince of Peace.

I was reminded again about how sobering the last few months have been as far as deaths and injuries go, especially for PBA (as I wrote about last week). But as Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind and the living will take it to heart." It is better sometimes to think about death and dying because this is how it ends for all of us. So these movies that show the reality of war and death show us there are some things worth fighting for and some character traits that are only revealed in times of extreme conflict, but they also remind us what we all must face. It forces us to heed 2 Peter 1:10 which says, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure."

One Tuesday our community had a party at the patio by the pool so all the neighbors could meet and greet one another. It's a very nice thing as we got to meet people we've never met before, or only when we are walking or go to get the mail. Plus a lot of people in our neighborhood have just returned

to Florida from their homes up north. I guess I put a little damper on the party because of a little mishap I inadvertently caused. [Details omitted to protect the innocent!] When we got back home I finally coerced Dad into playing Just Dance with me. He held out for the longest time because he didn't believe it was "manly." Also, now that I have seen him dance I understand the real reason! I will not divulge all the (hilarious) details but he is the first person I've beat at this game. I'll let you guess which one of these dancers he most resembles (though there are several good candidates)!

This week I have been reading a book that Brad got me out of the kindness of his heart! It is called Moonwalking With Einstein. It's about a guy who was researching memory improvement techniques and stumbled across the U.S. Memory Championships in his search for the countries "memory master." He is super impressed with them and when he is interviewing the contestants in the competition they all tell him anyone can do it. He practices all the image and loci techniques and

hires a memory coach and what do you know, the next year he wins the entire competition! He makes the point that the reason why our memory gets poor when we're older is because we treat them like our bodies: we let them waste away. That reminded me that the Bible tells us our bodies are temples, and not just our physical bodies. The book is very good. It is not only helpful but interesting, and now I've memorized his crazy memory palace complete with dancing wine bottles and talking socks.

On Thursday Uncle Tim and Aunt Renee came to see us. This is my Mom's sister and husband. They live in Alabama near Jasper (which coincidentally is the name of my guitar!). They have a daughter Esther who is about my age and in her second year of college in Illinois so we have a lot in common, but she didn't get to come. They came to see us because they were in Florida because he had to preach at a church in Zephyr Hills, so they drove down to see us. It was nice to see them. We went for a walk along the river and took pictures and they had a nice time. Plus we got to have some of my Mom's super scrumptious blueberry dump cake. We also had Chicken and Dumplings. It wasn't Chick-Fil-A but it was still pretty good, which her cooking often is!

Saturday was full of win because of three things. First, my Dad took me to the storage unit and dug around in there for about an hour and found a pair of shoes for me I was really missing. (He also found my box which has my inhalers in it.) Second, Brad and I went to a birthday party for my friends Melissa and Morgan. They both go to my church and turned 21 the month after I did so we're practically sisters! They are very sweet ladies and I'm glad they're my friends. Third, Michigan resumed its winning ways by putting an old fashioned whipping on the Illini of Illinois: 31-14. Michigan's football team is finally starting to develop a defense. We're not mistaking anyone for Charles Woodson or Lamarr Woodley yet, but I'm loving me some Ryan Van Bergen and Mike Martin! The Game is approaching... less than two weeks away! If you still haven't found anybody to hang out with to watch The Game, you're welcome to come watch it with us!

To close I have included a good passage about faith and trust from Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book, Spiritual Depression in the chapter on "Trials":

We walk by faith, the whole of our life is a matter of faith, and you see, says the apostle [Peter], this is so precious in the sight of God, it is so marvelous, it is so wonderful that God wants it to be absolutely pure. You purify your gold by

means of fire. You get rid of alloy and all the impurities by putting gold in the crucible and applying great heat to it and so these other things are removed and the gold remains. His argument, therefore, is that if you do that with gold that perishes, how much more does it need to be done with faith. Faith is this extraordinary principle which links man to God; faith is this thing that keeps a man from hell and puts him in heaven; it is the connection between this world and the world to come; faith is this mystic astounding thing that can take a man dead in trespasses and sins and make him live as a new being, a new man in Christ Jesus. That is why it is so precious. It is so precious that God wants it to be absolutely perfect. That is the apostle's argument. So you are in these [many trials] because of the character of faith.

But let me put that in a slightly different form. Our faith, we see, needs to be perfected. There must therefore be degrees of faith. There are differences in the quality of faith. Faith is many-sided. There is generally at the beginning a good deal of the admixture in what we call our faith; there is a good deal of the flesh that we are not aware of. And as we begin to learn these things, and as we go on with the process, God puts us through His testing times. He tests us by trials as if by fire in order that the things which do not belong to the essence of faith may fall off. We may think that our faith is perfect and that we can stand up against anything. Then suddenly a trial comes and we find that we fail. Why? Well that is just an indication that the trust element in our faith needs to be developed; and God develops the trust element in our faith by trying us in this way. The more we experience these things, the more we learn to trust God.

We naturally trust Him when He is smiling on us, but a day comes when the clouds are blackening the heavens and we begin to wonder whether God loves us any longer and whether the Christian life is what we thought it to be. Ah, our faith had not developed the element of trust, and God so deals with us in this life as to bring us to trust Him in the dark when we can see no light at all... That is true faith, that is real trust. .. And that needs to be developed in us.

We do not start like that, but as we go through these experiences we find that 'behind a frowning providence He hides a Father's face', and the next time the trials come we remain calm and collected. We can say: "Yes, I know, I do not see the sun but I know it is there. I know that behind the clouds the Face of God is looking upon me'. It is by means of these trials that that element of trust is developed.

Lord increase my faith.

Lauren

Day 165: Now, For News and Weather

Lauren Graham Waller, November 17, 2011

Monday morning dawned bright and beautiful and we awoke to a crisp and cool Florida fall day. It only got up to 82 degrees – and got down to 68. Last week it got down to 55 one night and we saw people outside dressed up in fur-lined parkas and winter coats! Fall in Florida is nice and disappointing all at the same time. I enjoy the warmth but miss the color changes of the maples and oaks when the frost hits, as well as the crisp coolness that hits your skin when you step outside into the weather. (Mom misses the apple orchards and cider and cinnamon and pumpkins and soaking up the warmth of a mug through your hands, but only about one-day's worth. I asked her if she missed the colors and she said it just means the leaves are dying.) Fall in Michigan is glorious! Especially in Ann Arbor! The things I don't miss are the dread of a long winter and slippery, icy, freezing coldness at all – or the dryness inside the house from having the heat on all the time, or the static in my hair from wearing a hat.

To celebrate this Fall day, Mom and I went to the pool and got our daily dose of Vitamin D. While we were at the pool we met a gentleman who lives in Maine during the summer and in our development during the winter. He was a friendly soul. Since we were there during the day when most people are working, he thought Mom might be retired. I think she would have been offended except there are a lot of young people down here who retire early. She told him she wasn't working now because she was keeping me company after the Accident. While we were chatting about that he mentioned that he used to be a neurosurgeon. He said he could tell I had a brain injury by my speech and actions, and from the scars. He then went on to say that dealing with traumatic brain injury patients all his career really took a toll on him because there weren't many good results, and even the "good" results weren't usually so good. He said he still has nightmares and wakes up in the middle of the night thinking about patients he had.

When I think of someone being a doctor I imagine it being a very rewarding and fulfilling career. You are helping extend or save people's lives. I guess I never really thought about how hopeless a doctor would feel if you were in a practice that is always life and death and you're not allowed to have a bad day at the office. Plus you're dealing with families in distress and sorrow all day long every day. I'm glad there are people who have dedicated all their waking hours to those who have tumors and strokes and aneurysms and gunshot wounds and

paraplegia and shearing from a car accident, but it almost gives me nightmares just thinking about it. If you haven't yet you should just stop reading this for one minute to thank God for people like my neurosurgeons and my neighbor Mr. Wilson.

That night we watched an ABC special on Gabrielle Giffords, the congress woman from Arizona who is recovering from a traumatic brain injury after being shot in the head. It has been ten months since she was injured – five months before I was. It was easy to see from the show that she still has trouble speaking and walking. She had no trouble smiling though and it was great to see her finding some joy in the midst of so much struggle. Some people have said I remind them of her but I am not so sure. I think the things we have in common are our injuries, our short hair, our glasses, our thinness, and our natural radiance and uncommon beauty. [That last part was inserted by Dad.] She was injured on the opposite side of her brain than I was which affects the movement on her right side and hand to eye coordination. It also had more affect on her speech and reading than mine has. Her story is inspirational to a lot of people for understandable reasons but more than anything for me it hits close to home about all she's going through and how tragic it all was.

What was actually more inspirational to me is how her husband has really stood by her and kept his vows: "In sickness and in health." These days that kind of man is rare and guys seem to walk out on their wives and children for no reason. If God has blessed you with a man who sticks by you for better or worse, you should probably stop reading this for another minute and thank God for him!

Yesterday was a busy day that started with a bang. Mom got a call from one of her friends at Mangrove Bay who told her there was an article in the Palm Beach Post about my story. We knew it would be run sometime but didn't know the date exactly. I am praying that people who read it will focus on God because He is really the story. If you haven't read it yet, you can see the online version (which is basically the same as the print version but without all the pictures). We are going to try to copy and scan the print version so you can see the photography. Thank you to Kevin Thompson for writing a nice story!

I had a busy day with therapy and doctors visit. Speech therapy started at 8:30am and I did alright. The therapist looked over my homework then quizzed me on how much I could remember about an article on Aspertame, which is the artificial sugar known as NutraSweet. Did you

know it loses its sweetness when it is heated? Did you also know that it is responsible for 3/4 of all reports to the FDA for reactions to food additives, ranging from headaches and rashes to memory loss and joint pain? Maybe that's the reason my hip and pelvis have been aching so much lately! Probably not, I guess, because I did have some pretty severe trauma to that part of my body too. The doctor told me if it lasts for a year we can be pretty sure I have arthritis in my injured joints and will have chronic pain the rest of my life. The best thing I can do, he said, is stay fit and flexible and not get fat.

So, the next morning Mom and I went to go work out at the fitness center. I use a lot of arm bands for resistance, as well as the elliptical and bicycle. I do some free weights too, with exercise ball and bosu ball (which is like a half of a rubber ball you stand on to work on balance). Afterward my Dad and I went to have lunch with Rob Ryan who also had a TBI. He wants me to do some work on a website for the company his dad founded called RJR Associates, which is an investment management firm. They are starting an office here in Florida so if you (or your company) want some very smart people to help you manage your investments you should call these guys!

Last night was a real treat. I got a text from Mark Kaprive asking if he and Marty could come by in the evening. Marty was the gentleman we saw in England on the way to India [see picture (L-R): Marty, Me, Mark]. Marty is actually from Australia and has a pretty thick Aussie brogue so it's confusing when he says he's from England! They stopped over to visit and we had a grand time. (As you probably guessed we talked about alligators! I'm just glad he didn't suggest we go midnight croc-hunting!) In talking to Marty I found out that his church organization in England has a prayer chain that goes around the world. When they found out about the Accident, he said people around the entire globe were praying for me, which is very cool! He also said people were using Dad's updates as devotionals which is cool, but kind of weird too! (Not that his writing isn't devotional some times, but there's a lot of needless hospital stuff in there that's not so devotional!)

I learned something new about myself. I'm a soundtrack composer nerd! While watching a movie I knew I recognized the style of music as Hans Zimmer. As the closing credits scrolled by (it was The Gladiator if you must know!) I saw the name of the composer. Sure enough: Hans Zimmer. We did a little exercise and I can almost name more movie soundtrack composers than I can leading actors. That's just weird, but

it's kind of cool if I do say so myself. So if you want to know which movies were scored by John Williams, Howard Shore, JJ Abrams, Leonard Rosenman, Danny Elfman, James Newton Howard or Klaus Badelt, then I'm your girl!

One more thing: During the Accident in Hobe Sound, Brad's car was knocked into the parking lot of Harry and the Natives, where the car stayed until it was towed away the next day. While my Mom and Dad and Brad (and me!) were waiting for the ambulance and Trauma Hawk, Harry and his crew came out and brought bottles of water and were very kind. Sorry I don't remember a bit of it! Harry's is a fixture in Hobe Sound and Harry is a local legend and has a heart as big as all of Florida. He's having a fundraiser for us on this Saturday night from 6-9 PM. They are having the Whistling Moon Travelers come play. So if you're in the area and hungry, or want to hear some good rockabilly, classic rock and blues from a local band (Jupiter), then come on out and support www.LaurenIsMySister.com and Harry's!

Happy Fall Y'all!

Lauren

Day 173: Food, Fellowship, Thanks (To Whom?) and Trivia (About Food)

Lauren Graham Waller, November 25, 2011

To those of you who follow this journal, we are still trying to convert everything over to the www.LaurenIsMySister.com website. There is a lot more flexibility there. We can add images and videos Also, it gives us a way to respond to your comments - which we really appreciate!

To read the latest update you can go there: http://laurenismysister.com/#lblog

Please forgive the technical errors and formatting issues. We will get them worked out soon!

Love, Lauren

"The Sacrifice of Praise" - Thanksgiving Testimony

Lauren Graham Waller, November 28, 2011

Please visit http://laurenismysister.com/#lblog to hear it.

Thanks!

Lauren

Day 182: Wonderful Works

Lauren Graham Waller, December 4, 2011

To see the latest update posted today, please visit the website: http://laurenismysister.com/#lblog

Thank you!

Day 189: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Lauren Graham Waller, December 12, 2011

Some days I can really tell I'm making improvement. But usually, even in the progress there are reminders that not only is there a long ways yet to go, but it's going to be a pretty grueling process.

On Monday night last week Mom and I went for a walk. I still don't walk super well yet, but I was doing well enough that I thought I would try and run a little bit. The funny thing is, whenever I ran before the Accident I always felt like I could go faster if I just pushed myself harder.

[Read the rest of the update here: http://laurenismysister.com/#lblog]

Day 196: 'Twas the Week Before Christmas

Lauren Graham Waller, December 19, 2011

[Please Note: You can always get the latest blog updates at http://laurenismysister.com/]

'Twas the week before Christmas, no hint of a blizzard,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a lizard.
The stockings were still in the dirty clothes hamper,
When all of the sudden we detected a scamper.
The sound overhead and the time of the year
Invoked visions of Santa, his sleigh, and reindeer.
Alas! All our visions must take a deferral,

Turns out in the attic we had a pet squirrel!

Actually, we think it was a mouse. And it wasn't a pet. But that's just some of the joy you would have experienced at our house the week before Christmas!

On Monday I spend a good part of the day trying to finish my India Photobook. I thought back on the trip and between pictures and journal entries. I wanted to order the book around the main events instead of chronologically, so I created pages or sections around the highlights of the trip (visiting the Taj Mahal, doing the Kid's Camps, etc.). Because of technical difficulties I didn't quite get it finished on Monday but made good headway. I finished it on Tuesday and it wrapped up at 40 pages. I ordered one copy to see how it turns out. (We'll put up the link after it arrives to you can see a 15-page preview online!)

As it turns out Christmas came early for me on Tuesday! I ordered myself a gift: an 800+ page book by Christopher Paolini entitled Inheritance. It's the fourth and concluding book in the Inheritance Cycle that started with Eragon. The series is about a young man named Eragon who lives in rural village called Carvahall in the country of Alagaesia. One day he goes hunting in the Spine mountain range behind his house and discovers what he would find out later was a dragon egg. The series is about the adventures and exploits of him and dragon Saphira (which I pronounce Suh-FEER-uh and not Suh-FIRE-uh so I don't read all the baggage of Ananias' wife onto a very noble and good dragon...as far as dragons go, I guess.) If you like fantasy, you'll love this series. If you don't, you probably don't like the Lord of the Rings trilogy either – and that's just wrong! (The official Inheritance Cycle site is HERE if you're interested, and I know you are!)

On Wednesday I went out to dinner at the Old Key Lime House in Lantana to say good bye to a friend who also went to India with me – Ashley Trow. (Which is her current name; she just got engaged – congratulations Ashley!! – and will be changing names soon.) She is moving to Missouri which I believe is where her fiance lives. I'll miss her here. I didn't know her at all before the trip to India but she became a very sweet friend. Good luck and God bless you Ashley!

On Thursday we didn't have Bible Study at GIBC since we are on hiatus until after New Years. However, my Mom and I were invited to join a few other young ladies for dinner at Tiffany Borgstrom's house. I

didn't know her really well before this but I got to know her better. She has the cutest two little girls! Adorable actually! The dinner was good and the social time with everyone was fantastic! Mom even had a blast mothering the little girls, which were 2 years old and 9 months old. I don't know what Mom's secret is but babies love her. They usually just throw up on me or cry at the sight of me!

Friday I spent most of the day reading. (Remember, I had 800+ pages to read; I didn't finish the book until Sunday.) That night our family went to see a movie together; I think it's the second movie we've seen together since the Accident. The first was Courageous. It was about fatherhood and faith in Christ and we all really enjoyed it, especially since it shared the gospel. The movie we saw this time was Sherlock Holmes 2: A Game of Shadows. I thought it had a good plot and the acting was very good, especially by the Holmes and Watson characters. The music was excellent. (No surprise since it was composed by Hans Zimmer.) My Dad liked the movie too but said it really wasn't very faithful to the Arthur Conan Doyle stories at all. The focus in the books was more on sleuthing and piecing clues together that nobody else even noticed. The movie had a little of that too, but he said it was more of an action/adventure movie with bombs and shooting than it was a detective story. He thought the music was good too because he couldn't get the theme song ("Discombobulate") out of his head all the next day! Ha... the Zimmer worm will get you! Extra points if you can guess what the featured instrument is – to be revealed in the next blog! Hint: None of you – or your kids – played it in high school band!

Saturday night we went to hear the Christmas Cantata at our church. They did a performance on Friday night and Sunday night too. It was really good. A lot of the songs were written by Joshua Spacht and most of the rest (or all of the rest?) were arranged by him. He is our music pastor and is a very good arranger and composer and pianist. (Here is an arrangement he did where he does all the playing and singing.) The Cantata was titled "For to Us a Child is Born" and it focused on the pre-incarnation of Jesus when He was in heaven with God in the beginning. The lyrics were really rich. I guess if there's a critique it would be what a friend of ours said. He doesn't go to church much and is only used to traditional Christmas music and he didn't know the songs and couldn't make out the words so as good as they were they didn't help him much :-(. He liked the music though, so thumbs up for that! Also, Pastor Jerry gave a good devotional.

Sunday was a special day. My Dad had the opportunity to speak about the last six months and what God has been teaching our family. He actually talked about how God had prepared us for the trials that came with the Accident and how God wants to prepare everyone who will face severe hardships and times of testing. Mom's reflection of the time he spoke was that it was very emotional to go through the events that occurred in the past six months. She was pretty emotional during the entire talk and even Dad said that seeing Mom get all teary made it hard for him to not get all teary too.

Other than the fact that he covered the events concerning the Accident, so it was generally about me, Dad was very kind in that he did not say too much about me specifically so that cut down on potentially embarrassing revelations. For that I'm grateful! All-in-all it was a very edifying time because our family (through Dad) was able to boast in Christ for all the work He's done, not only in my life, but also in sustaining and strengthening - and even preparing - our family.

One other thing that was very nice was we got to publicly thank at least part of our church family for their comfort and kindness and for helping to "bear our burdens." In a way I was the one who had it "easy" because I wasn't even conscious for three weeks and I don't remember a large part of the ordeal. I didn't have to deal with hardly any of the emotional trauma that my family experienced, and for that I'm very grateful too!

Sunday night we didn't go to church since it was a repeat of the Cantata. So we did the next most spiritual thing we could have done. We decorated a Christmas tree! Well, actually it was Dad and Mom. I tried but even with my advanced elegance and grace I still managed to break the first bulb I picked up to put on! I'm not sure if it's my fine motor skills aren't that fine or if I'm just a natural-born klutz. I'd say my mind was engaged in higher level pursuits like contemplating the profound mystery of the Incarnation, but ... well, you wouldn't buy it, would you?

So, this week before Christmas in 2011,
Let's remember that Christ left His home up in Heaven;
Abandoned its splendor by coming to earth
As a babe in a manger – to give US new birth.

Merry Christmas to all, and to all of you who have prayed for me and my family and supported us so wonderfully – God bless you every one!

Lauren

Day 202: Christmas and the Sovereignty of God

Lauren Graham Waller, December 24, 2011

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).

"God is in control!"

We all claim to believe in God's sovereignty, especially whenever something bad happens. But how many of us really mean it?

- Of course, we know there is too much biblical evidence to deny it: The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all (Psalm 103:19).

- But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3).

- For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps (Psalm 135:5-6).

A. W. Pink writes:

Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. As His own Word expressly declares: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10).

We have no problem believing this – until God permits or plans something that includes chaos, change, pain or loss... for us! A financial setback, a catastrophic accident, the loss of a loved one. Our confidence is shaken and we quickly abandon hope and lose faith. In a crisis, sovereignty is hard to accept. How can God be working for good when things are so bad?

Two thousand years ago an unwed teenage girl – a virgin, in fact – found herself unexpectedly pregnant and facing abandonment by her fiancé and the shame of her community (Matt 1:18-23). She likely wondered: Where is God now? As we know, He was working all things for good, hers and ours! On the appointed day, at the appointed place,

and in the appointed way, according to God's appointed plan and purpose, Mary gave birth to Jesus.

This season is a celebration of Christ's birth. Let it also be a celebration of the truth that whenever God ordains a season of setbacks or struggles, He is – even then – in total and complete control, working all things for our good according to His purpose.

Just ask Mary.

Lauren

P.S. You can read my daily-ish blog posts (which include more than just recovery updates) at laurenismysister.com! Merry Christmas!

Day 210: 2012 and Two-Faced Gods

Lauren Graham Waller, January 1, 2012

Today is the first day of 2012. You already knew that. But that means today is the first day of January. Okay, so you already knew that too... Well, what you may not have known is that January got its name from the Roman god Janus, the god of doorways, transitions, and new beginnings. He was a two-faced god - literally! He had one face so that he could look back and see the past and another face so he could look forward and see the future.

Interesting that the first month of the new year is named after the two-faced god. But that's kind of what people have always done at the beginning of a new year. We look back on the year that has passed while trying to look forward to the year ahead.

Looking back on 2011, did it turn out anything like you thought it would? Not for me! Apparently not for much of the rest of the world either. According to the Associated Press, these were the Top 10 news stories of 2011:

1. The death of Osama Bin Laden, the world's number 1 terrorist.

2. The 9.0-magnitude earthquake in Japan, creating a tsumani that triggered a nuclear crisis.

3. The Arab Spring starting in Tunisia, then expanding to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.

4. The EU fiscal crisis starting in Greece, then affecting Italy, France, Germany and Britain.

5. The sustained U.S. economic misery with 9% unemployment and foreclosures, along with benefit, wage, and hour cuts of the employed.

6. The Penn State sexual molestation scandal.

7. The fall of Moammar Gadhafi after 42 years of brutal rule in Libya, toppled by his own people – and assisted by NATO and the U.S.

8. The U.S. Congress' fight over the debt ceiling, the first-time-ever loss of our country's AAA credit rating, and failure to reach agreement on debt reduction.

9. The Occupy protests which have now spread across the country, and nobody still knows what their demands are (except for the 1% to give them free stuff).

10. Congresswoman Giffords being shot along with 18 others, six of whom died.

Even the experts would not have predicted 8 out of 10 of those things happening, but they all happened. If you were to write down your predictions for 2012, it's very likely the top 10 events compiled on the first day of next January won't include any of your predictions. That's how life goes. Man proposes but God disposes.

Obviously, the one event that overshadowed all the others for our family in 2011 was The Accident. However, there were several other memorable things that happened. Here's The Graham Family's Top 10 news stories of 2011:

1. The Accident. (A lot of other big things happened as a result of The Accident, but they will not be mentioned in 2-10.)

2. Mom and Dad celebrated their 25th anniversary this year! Which is quite a feat! They went on a 7-day cruise around the Caribbean and now Mom is so totally addicted to cruise ships and turquoise water she can't even imagine any other kind of vacation again! Poor Dad has to manage her expectations a little better from now on!

3. I took a missions trip to India. God was so kind to protect me while I travelled abroad and gave me many opportunities to share Christ – and to learn to trust Him more completely!

4. Brad got a good job in the IT department at the Treasure Coast Hospice. He's in the field he loves working for a great company.

5. 2011 was the first full year all the Grahams were residents of Florida together. Which is kind of weird because we all pretty much consider ourselves Michiganders (except Dad, who thinks of himself as an Arkansan), but I think the transition to Floridians is now complete for all of us.

6. Dad got a new blue(!) pBone (iPhone?) for Christmas! (Dad thinks this should be rated at least number 2 but when averaged with our ratings it didn't make the list at all! That it's mentioned in the Top 10 at all is a concession to his Royal Dadness!)

7. We moved to Palm City. (This was a result of the Accident so probably shouldn't be mentioned, but it was a pretty life-shifting thing, Accident or not.) I don't think we'll be here long term because it was a decision we made to accommodate my rehab and recovery, but it has altered our lives quite a bit.

8. I was appointed to co-director of Point 58 at PBA (the campus Bible study ministry, which is now called Oikos). I never got to assume leadership because of The Accident, but God knew that would happen.

9. Dad's work situation. He transitioned from doing consulting work mostly for one company to consulting for several companies. It's been a change for him and our family.

10. Michigan football and basketball are back! The football team won 10 games and is playing in a BCS game, and the basketball team is ranked in the top 15. And what's this I hear – the Detroit Lions in the playoffs?!?

Looking ahead to 2012 we can't predict what will happen. Here are a few things we are planning to do if the Lord wills:

- I hope to be able to start doing again some of the things I took for granted - like driving (something besides a golf cart!) and go back to

school (at least part time). I also may do a graphics design internship.

- Brad is looking to start his graduate work this year.

- After much coercion from MANY people, Dad is going to start writing a book about The Accident. He is also going to be getting back to his manufacturing roots more and will be doing more work in the Midwest. That will require him to be traveling more but it should free him up some in the evenings to write.

- All of us are planning to run a 5k race together. (It seems ambitious for me right now but I walked down 5 steps on Friday without using the hand rails so I'm making progress! Also, down is harder than up, believe it or not!)

- Mom has never read the Bible through in one year so she is going to try to do that this year.

- The big highlight for 2012 was Mom and Dad planning to visit Israel for a couple weeks. They were really looking forward to that but it doesn't look like they will get to go because of the medical bills. Dad said maybe the Lord will come back before then and the Passover prayer will come true: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

Whether 2011 for you was a year of trials or thanksgivings or both, and whatever 2012 holds for you, I hope you will remember – along with all of the Grahams – that we do not serve a God who has to have two faces to see all things. He is not powerless over what has past and He's not unaware of what's ahead in the future. He is great, He is good, and the promise of Psalm 31:15 is true: Our times are in His hand.

Lauren

Day 225: Now I Can See!

Lauren Graham Waller, January 15, 2012

We have not put any updates on CaringBridge in the last two weeks because there has been no real recovery news to write about. (However, I do write semi-regularly – almost daily – on the http://laurenismysister.com/#lblog site if you want to know what I'm thinking, reading, or doing as I adjust to my new "self.") We have had a couple recovery-related developments though that you might be interested in

knowing.

As you probably remember, I thought I was ready to go back to school this semester and at least able to take a class or two. After all, my major is graphic design and it's supposedly easier than almost every other major. However, in order to re-enroll after missing a semester for medical reasons – especially since my fine motor skills are not quite as fine as they were, and I still have some hiccups in my memory – PBA has to develop an Accommodation Plan based on the release of the medical persons who treated and evaluated me, and the recommendation of the medical people, my parents, and my academic advisors. None of this could take place until I received the release from the medical people.

Due to the nature of my injury, that assignment pretty much fell to Dr. Bukstel, the neuropsychologist who gave me the long test I wrote about in another blog. The testing was completed and I was approved to take a class or two as long as they fell into the category of what the doctor called "non academic" classes. However, the doctor had to file his report with the hospital doctors (neurosurgeons and physiatrists) and with the college. This had to be done prior to the end of the enrollment period and before classes started. As the day got closer, we got more anxious about the report being filed. Soon the enrollment period passed, then the first day of school arrived. We still had no report. In the meantime we had been trying to reach Dr. Buckstel and track him down, leaving messages, but we heard nothing. Neither had the college when we asked them if they had heard anything.

Finally, as classes were about ready to start, Mom and Dad both called again and left messages and he called them both back. As it turns out he had been in the hospital for the better part of a week and had to take a time out from his work schedule. Part of the work that got caught in his recuperation period was the writing of my report. There was no way he would get it done in time. So, I guess God wanted me to spend more time with my Parents than my Friends because I missed the enrollment. Or else He has more lessons He wants me to learn at home first. I must say I am pretty disappointed. I'm sorry Dr. Buckstel had to go to the hospital though and I hope he recovers.

I got some good news though. Since the Accident, I have been wearing glasses and not contacts. I used to wear contacts almost 100% of the time before the Accident. Since then, I haven't even tried them – for a couple of reasons. First, my fine motor skills were not good enough to

even put them in my eyes without risking poking my eye out or scratching my cornea with a fingernail. (Even if I were to miss my face while putting on my glasses, at least the risk of poking out my eye is less!) Second, my eyes changed during the Accident. Because of the force of the impact hitting my head, my left eye turned outward so that when I tried to look straight ahead, my right eye would but my left eye looked about 20 degrees to the left. The neurosurgeons said that it was caused by the injury to my brain and as my brain healed it should come back closer – or maybe even all the way – to normal.

Well, I'm normal! Or at least my eyes are. I went to see the eye doctor and she checked my eyes. Not only is the exotropia back to normal, I am back to my normal bad eyesight! Ha... I can now wear my old contact prescription, so while the Accident didn't cure my eyes it didn't harm them permanently! So the next time you see me, you might be seeing me without glasses! (I will wear my glasses sometimes because they are really chic and they complement my short hair! But sometimes it's nice to not have to worry about pushing them up on my nose.. .although I attempted to do that out of habit today, even though I wasn't even wearing glasses! So my memory remembers me wearing glasses, even though I'm not wearing them. Weird!)

Speaking of contacts, my Dad was looking for me after church today. He said he was scanning the room for "a good looking young woman with cute short hair and stylish frames." The whole time he was standing about 5 feet from me but I didn't register to him because I look different without glasses! When I wore contacts before the Accident I had long hair, so my look has changed again.

Speaking of my Dad, he is now able to join with me in the fellowship of my sufferings and empathize with me on the travail of being forced to eat hospital chicken! It's true! While he was up in Indiana on business this last week he had chest pains and numbness in his arm and leg and blacked out. He went to the hospital to get it checked out and they kept him overnight for a bunch of tests. He is okay; his heart is good but he may have a pinched nerve in his neck, and he also has high blood sugar and was dehydrated. So that's good that's all that's wrong! Poor Mom though... she was freaking out when she found out he was in the hospital and was thinking, "Here we go again!" Plus she can't mother him from 1000 miles away, and every man needs a good woman in his life when he's going through troubles! Because he was admitted as a cardiac case he had to eat all "bland food" with no sodium (which means salt). So not only did he get rubber chicken, he didn't get to

doctor it up with any Chick-Fil-A sauce, which is quite sad! I'm glad he's okay though. Hopefully this experience will cause him to be my ally when I protest about too much chicken on the menu!

Finally, speaking of chickens: Doesn't a chicken farmer whose entire flock escapes through a hole in the fence have to find some way to recoop his losses? At least he fares better than the optometrist who fell into a lens grinder and ended up making a spectacle of himself.

I hope you are all having a happy new year! Love, Lauren

Day 233: ...But I Can't Run

Lauren Graham Waller, January 23, 2012

A little health and wellness update.

Most of the focus of my recovery and therapy has been on my brain. This has been for a couple reasons. One of our advocates told my parents early on that there is a systemic focus on physical therapy more than cognitive therapy. The progress is more quick and more visible. He warned us that this is backwards; if we have a limited number of resources we should spend as much as possible on cognitive therapy and recovery. That's what we've tried to do. So, although I'm not as elegant and graceful as I used to be (ha!) at least my brain is recovering pretty well.

One thing about my brain injury though is that it's hard to tell how much healing I still need by measuring pain. My head actually hurts less now than it did before the Accident (because I got headaches quite a bit). The same is not true with my body. The right side of my hip/pelvis especially has been hurting for quite a while. Some activities really make it hurt, and some leg positions too. If I twist or do squats or even just sit for a while it really causes general pain and discomfort. One time it was so bad it was impossible to sleep. We talked to the physical therapist about it and we really relaxed the exercises but the problem didn't go away. It has been bothering me so much that we finally made an appointment with Dr. Saslow, the Ex-Fix doctor who did the original surgery and pinned all my bones back together.

Today at Dr. Saslow's office he took an x-ray today and looked it over. He said all things considered it actually looks okay. He ruled out arthritis at this point because it's too early because of my age and it's a fresh injury. So the pain has to be caused by something else. He said

the bones are basically set well so that's not the problem. He did say there is a lot of scar tissue, and there are a lot of muscles surrounding the bones that were damaged that have not healed yet. There was also nerve damage that is not totally healed. So apparently I have been too aggressive in trying to rehabilitate it.

I told him I wanted to try to run a 5k by the end of the year and he told me that was way too optimistic. He said it might be two years before all the injuries are healed because the damage was so comprehensive. He said I shouldn't even be trying to run at all yet because my body can't handle the pounding. I am only supposed to be using an elliptical machine and not a treadmill (except to walk). Oh well... I guess if he saw my attempts at "running" he wouldn't be as concerned. I may start doing Tai Chi if for no other reason it reminds me of one of my favorite beverages...Chai Tea!

Praise! We went to the ophthalmologist again today to see if neurological damage was affecting my eyes and the way they receive signals from my brain. The good news is there is no neuropathy or nerve damage. She also dilated my pupils with eye drops so she could inspect the retina and tissue at the back of my eye. It was really weird because I couldn't see very well for several hours and I was starting to freak out. But after about four hours or so my eyes were about back to normal. So all is well on the eyesight front!

I will be blogging more on the Lauren Is My Sister site soon. It has been down because they were making some changes but we should be back up and running soon. Well, except the 5k...

Maybe I'll have to take up origami.

Lauren

Day 249: "Love Letters to Lauren"

Lauren Graham Waller, February 8, 2012

Last night was the first night I read "Love Letters to Lauren" — the journal that visitors to the hospital used to write notes to me while I was staying there. The reason I didn't read it until now was that, even though I'm significantly less emotional that I was pre-Accident, I thought I would break down sobbing and I didn't know if I could handle it emotionally. Good news! I didn't start weeping profusely. Instead, what I felt more than anything was humbled. Extremely

humbled.

I guess you really never know how some people think or feel about you until there's an occasion for those thoughts to be made public. Since the chapters of my story were unfolding one at a time and nobody knew how the story would end, it makes sense that you would want to express those thoughts if for no other reason than to comfort my family. On their behalf I thank you.

In fact, this note is really my love letter to all of you. I really can not thank you enough for keeping me in your prayers those months I was in the hospital. I know from the emails and Facebook posts and stories that some of you have told me that there were literally thousands of people who took time to talk to God on my behalf.

But for today I want to say a special thank you to those of you who came to visit me. Regrettably, I never knew you were there. The only memory I will ever have of your visit is the giant banner you signed on the wall or the "love note" you left behind. Because you did that, I feel your love now even though I couldn't feel it then. These beautiful expressions from your hearts make me feel so incredibly humbled — and encouraged!

God used you to help me heal. Not just while I was in the hospital, but today.

Lauren

P.S. I love you too.

Day 273: Fundraiser Update (Cut-A-Thon)

Lauren Graham Waller, March 3, 2012

This past weekend, Veronica Tranchina and the crew at the Salon Labrea hosted a Cut-A- Thon to support me and help with the huge pile of medical bills we owe. It was scheduled to last from 1 to 5 in the afternoon. I was told they were still cutting hair at 6:30. We visited for a couple hours (until my hip could not handle any more) and it was packed the whole time and people were still coming in when we left around 4 PM. If you were one of the people who came, thank you! You helped turn that into a really special day!

My family and I want to thank Veronica and Michael and Erin and the entire staff of stylists at LaBrea for their kindness and generosity to us. These guys took half a day of their own time on a weekend to work hard on our behalf. (And I am not the only person they have done benefits for!) The only compensation they get is the satisfaction of knowing they are obeying the words of our Lord Jesus. They raised over $1,500 to help cover some of the cost of my summer stay at St. Mary's.

These are some good people and they do excellent work. I heard nothing but raves from those who had them do their hair. You know what that means, don't you? If you live within shouting distance of Jupiter, FL and go somewhere else to get your hair done...well, it's a free country I guess. But you're using your freedom all wrong! :)

"By working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). God bless Salon LaBrea! You should bless them too!

Lauren

Day 330: Walk Before You Run

Lauren Graham Waller, April 30, 2012

If you were to ask my family (especially my Mom and Dad) how I am doing physically, they would say I am doing good and getting better every day. But they would also tell you that I am not very strong yet, I don't have much endurance, I don't walk super smoothly and there's still a hitch in my gait. They would be correct! During therapy, I

asked the Andrea, my physical therapist (see picture), what causes my gimpy-limpyness. You may find her explanation helpful. I did.

One thing that contributes to my slightly unsightly style is my brain is still not totally rewired. It is not telling my legs and feet exactly what to do. Or, if it is, something is getting scrambled in translation. Also, whatever signals do get sent to my legs and feet are slower than they used to be. Part of what Andrea is trying to do is retrain my brain by getting me to do exercises correctly and repetitively so that the proper signals get sent accurately and quickly whenever I tell myself to "rise up and walk!"

Another thing that contributes is my nerve sensors being off. Whenever Andrea moves my foot forward or backward, I can generally feel that okay and gauge what is happening. However, when my foot is moved to the left or right or side-to-side, I have no neurological perception of that until the range of movement is pretty extreme. Because my muscles were so atrophied due to the long stay in the hospital and the inactivity after I was released, it took quite a while to get enough strength back to ambulate at all. Because I was so weak, my knees would collapse inward and my glutes would not activate. (Large motor function travels downward from the glutes [butt] to the quads [thighs] to the knees to the feet.) Because my glutes weren't firing, my feet would really kick out and almost look spastic when I tried to walk. It was functional but certainly not pretty!

I'm getting enough stronger now that I actually have a fair bit of control over my large muscle movement. (I know... "large muscle" is a relative term in my case!) That is mostly a strength and conditioning function. However, I still have the brain and nerve issues to deal with. One of the most significant things I'm dealing with is the fact that when my foot is extended, I can not sense where it is in space. That means I subconsciously overcompensate a lot of my movements. For example, I kick my feet outward when I stride so they will clear the other leg while I'm walking. (It's not quite as ugly as it sounds. But if you watch when I walk, I don't look super elegant or graceful.)

If you care much about this sort of thing, there are some videos I posted on my Dad's Youtube account. These are a couple of short clips from one of the therapy sessions last week. (I think they are all under a minute in length).

1. Step "up" exercise for strength & orientation

2. Step "down" exercise for balance

3. Wall/ball squats for stability

You can see a few things from the videos:

- I still have a lot of trouble with balance. I'm still not allowed to ride a bicycle, and I still have a hard time walking downward on steps without using support. (Going up is not as much of a problem.) Trying to stand on one leg is almost impossible. I am very wobbly and can't do it very long.

- I still have a problem sensing where my body parts are in space. (Not in orbit, just when they are not on the ground.) We're working on resensitizing nerve endings; part of that is through balance exercises. My balance is better than it used to be but it's still pretty bad. For example: Putting one foot in front of the other without looking (heel to toe). I'm getting better at it but still it's a lot harder for me than it would be for any of you!

- My hair is growing back! Maybe as my hair grows, so grows my strength!

I am doing SO MUCH better though. Thank the Lord I can walk! And I'm also optimistic that with a lot of work and diligence, I can gain a lot more functionality back. If you didn't know I was in the Accident and saw me walking, you might not think there's much wrong... just that I'm not super agile. But if you hung out with me every day you would realize I still have a long way to go, I still move pretty slowly, and I look half drunk sometimes! God has been faithful though, so faithful! And my family and therapists have been super patient with me!

Thank you all for your continued prayers and notes to me. It's a daily struggle but it is true that "as your days, so shall your strength be." His mercy endures, His compassion never fails, His faithfulness is great, and His grace is sufficient!

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Lauren

Day 343: Unexpected Places

Lauren Graham Waller, May 13, 2012

Last weekend, my journey on the road to recovery took me to an unexpected place: graduation at PBA. I've only completed two years of my education, but there I was: walking across the platform, shaking President Fleming's hand, and receiving... an introduction. It wasn't quite the same thing as a diploma, but all in God's own time!

Here's the story. On the Tuesday before graduation, I got a call from PBA's President Fleming. He said he was so moved by my story that he wanted me to address the graduates at the commencement on the upcoming Saturday (last weekend). PBA has been touched by a lot of tragedy and death this past year. It's obvious President Fleming feels the burden of this and wants the students to commit their ways to the Lord and make their days count. He had previously asked me to speak at a Trustees luncheon (last December) and I shared with the faculty and trustees a bit of my story. I think most of them were aware of it anyway; a lot of them wear "Lauren Is My Sister" wristbands (including Fleming) and quite a few have written sweet and encouraging comments to me here on CaringBridge. President Fleming also asked PBA's softball coach, Kimmy Carter Bloemers, to speak as well since her father, Gary Carter (the hall-of-fame baseball catcher for the New York Mets and Montreal Expos, and also PBA's baseball coach) passed away earlier in the year from brain cancer. He asked us to speak to the graduates about the importance of being people of prayer.

Saying "yes" meant I had a tight schedule to prepare, especially since my calendar is already pretty full – and I'm completely unable to do anything like this unscripted and with little preparation. When I told my Dad that night about the invitation (and acceptance), he was happy for me. But then he told me what I was already starting to figure out: "I'm not sure you fully understood how challenging it would be when you accepted this opportunity." But... since President Fleming had given me the topic to speak about, I didn't have to spend time coming up with speech ideas! I immediately thought of a passage of Scripture that related to the topic. Over the next 72 hours, Dad and I worked back and forth on crafting a speech that would hopefully challenge the largest graduating class in PBA's history – as well as their family and friends in the audience – to be people of prayer.

When Mom and I walked into the Palm Beach Convention Center that afternoon, it struck me just how big a deal it was. The place was cavernous and it slowly began to fill. There were eventually, according to a news article, about 4,000 people in the room. Believe it or not, I didn't really get nervous about speaking in front of that many people. I

was more nervous that my iPad wouldn't work! My Mom has a deep mistrust in technology, so that morning she begged(!!!) me to print out my speech so that I had a hard copy. To my chagrin, I left that copy with my Mom where she was sitting out in the audience. So all the while I was on the dais waiting for my turn to speak, all I could think about was Mom's prophesies coming true about how the iPad was going to self-destruct and I'd have no notes. Then I thought about how it would be for me to have to call her up and bring me my notes and how she'd be so publicly humiliated SHE would self-destruct. Since the subject of the speech was about prayer, I got to put my own preaching into practice before I ever said a word.

When President Fleming introduced me and I stood up and walked to the podium, I was pleased to see that God answered that simple (but fervent!) prayer. The iPad worked and the speech went okay under the circumstances. It was a big venue and I have a small voice... smaller than usual after the Accident, so it wasn't real clear to hear for some people. But to the degree that the graduates could hear what I said and they accepted it as true, for that God deserves the credit.

If you listen to the speech (you can hear it >>> here <<< [thanks Mrs. Kearney!]), it's not hard to tell that my speech has been seriously affected. If you knew me before the Accident and interact with me now, that is something of which you are quite aware. I am still regularly going to speech therapy and I am constantly told that my speech is improving... and I know it is. But it's still not great. However, God has providentially arranged speaking engagements for me which make sure I have to continually devote myself to practice. That provides motivation I might not have any other way.

Another ongoing issue is the matter of my memory. You may wonder what memory has to do with public speaking, especially if one can just read his or her speech from a manuscript. But, as I learned in Mrs. Averill's 8th grade speech class, a speaker needs to establish rapport. That means making a connection with the audience. To do that requires that one look at people in the audience and not be so bound to notes. You'd think quickly memorizing a sentence or so in the cause of rapport wouldn't be so hard. Well, it is. For me to look up and establish connection and not lose my train of thought or suffer through an awkward pause or get words and phrases and thoughts twisted around... well, that is quite a feat. Thanks be to God my memory has not only gotten a lot better, but I have gotten to the point where I can look up from my notes and actually remember the next few

words I'm getting ready to say.

As I've reflected on this, I have become cognizant of the fact that my recovery has not just been physical. There's a spiritual aspect as well. There's a lot of baggage that comes with an Accident as severe as the one I had, not the least of which is battling the tendency to cling to retribution theology (e.g. "what did I do wrong?" and "why is God punishing me for it?") But after some good teaching on God's sovereignty and His providence, and the Spirit of God renewing my mind and helping me by faith to embrace His word, my priorities have become more and more realigned (although not perfectly). My focus has shifted away from what happened and how it happened, and is now more on what purpose God might have for making this a part of my life. I don't have much of a grasp on "big picture" stuff He might have for my life. But in the everyday stuff, I've started journaling again and recording some of the lessons that God is teaching me about myself and about Him throughout this whole incident.

Rather than go through my notes, I would rather refer you to an article a friend told me about that was written by John Piper: "Don't Waste Your Cancer." If God has sovereignly ordained for any one of us to go through a serious ordeal with our health, He has reasons which we may never know. But even amid that hardship, He has given us that opportunity to seek Him, focus on eternal realities, cling to Christ, deepen relationships, mortify sin, minister to others, and show the world a "different way." God is teaching these things to me as I grow stronger in my faith and my relationship with Him.

I am fortunate because I have been invited to publicly recount the deeds of the Lord in acting so strongly on my behalf.

I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds. Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. (Psalm 77:11-14)

If you haven't been in a bad Accident – or even if you have – but God has shown Himself strong to you, tell your story. Even if you don't get to speak at a graduation, you can speak to your family or your friends. Or you can keep sending your notes to me! I love hear your stories of God's faithfulness and they have been a great encouragement to me. I hope my story, even when it takes me to unexpected places, continues

to be a testimony of God's grace and faithfulness and is an encouragement to you.

Lauren

P.S. An article about the ceremonies, including Kimmy's and my remarks: http://www.pba.edu/PBA-spring- commencement-12

And, since I'm not the only speaker in our family, an article about the PBA chapel service my Dad spoke at: http://www.pba.edu/Sherwood-Graham-speaks-in-chapel-12

Day 364: Goodness & Mercy

Lauren Graham Waller, June 4, 2012

Believe it or not, tomorrow is the one-year anniversary since the Accident. It marks the day when (1) I was almost gone forever from this world, (2) my life here changed forever, and (3) God's goodness and mercy were poured out on our family – and specifically on me – in ways we would otherwise have never known.

Interesting how God's goodness and mercy takes on many forms, isn't it? I suppose most people would think that God's mercy was manifest most clearly in my recovery. That in itself is indeed miraculous. You know the story. The doctors said I very well might not live through the night. Then they said I may never wake up. Then they said I may be in a permanent vegetative state. Then they said I may not be able to care for myself. Then they said... I don't even remember, but they were all wrong. Because here I am – walking, talking, and living quite a bit like a normal human being, thank you very much! However you define a "miracle," I don't see how you can say my recovery has been anything less than supernatural.

God's goodness and mercy has also taken the form of helping me become thankful for many things I used to consider such a basic part of my life that I never even thought about them. Since the afternoon of June 5, one year ago, I've had to relearn almost every basic function that I took for granted. Some have come back pretty quickly. Some have required more work and effort than I've ever exerted in my life. All of them have caused me to be thankful all the more for what God has given so liberally to all of us.

Just imagine if you, at age 20, could not...

- See. Or maybe just see out of one eye.
- Hear. Or only hear 50%.
- Speak.
- Feed yourself.
- Sing.
- Experience feeling in one (or more) of your limbs.
- Walk.
- Take a shower by yourself.
- Stay awake for more than a few hours.
- Fix a meal without getting exhausted.
- Write.
- Draw.
- Go to the restroom on your own.
- Type (without using the backspace key after every other letter).
- Remember what you had for breakfast (or if you even ate breakfast!)

I've had to relearn all of these things with varying degrees of success. Not only did God mercifully give these gifts back to me in some measure, but He allowed me to see in a way I never did before just how precious they all are. I don't even know how to give you a frame of reference except to try to imagine putting cotton in both ears, a patch over one eye, taping several of your fingers together and putting one leg in a splint, then going three days without sleep... Let me know if that hampers the way you go about your business. And that's after all the bad stuff has healed!

There are other things I lost which are slowly coming back but I still can't do very well, which also gives me an added appreciation for what I used to have but don't have back yet. Things like doing basic math, handwriting, being creative (coming up with original ideas), thinking and composing complex thoughts, or even being social like I used to be. If I learn to do these things again, I will not (by His grace) take them for granted again.

I've gained a new appreciation for this verse, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17, NASB.) Truly, every talent and ability and sense and thought and feeling and relationship (and the ability even to relate) is a gift. If God chooses to take that away, that is solely His divine prerogative. If He chooses to give it back, that's His right as well, but how thankless we are – me included – to not continually thank the Giver for these gifts.

God's goodness and mercy have also given me a new appreciation for my family. People my age usually are so focused on their independence and self-expression and new-found freedom that they rarely consider what a tremendous gift God has given us in our family. Our family is where we find our key relationships, nurture, and support. Our family is made up of those people who will stand by us through thick and through thin.

My family has been all of that and more and God has really opened my eyes to how perfectly God chose the parents and sibling I would have for life. They've been my central relationships. I didn't go to school this past year so my social interaction was pretty much restricted to a couple hours at church during the week, and even most of that was spent passively listening to sermons. So as far as relational interaction, it's been almost exclusively my family. (And my doctors, but that doesn't count, does it?) My family has also been my nurture and support. In the hospital, they were with me every single day even though I was unresponsive and unaware. Since then, they've helped me, driven me (literally), coached me, encouraged me, played games with me, reminded me of all the things I keep forgetting, just sat with me, been v-e-r-y patient with me, and simply been there... with me and for me. They know what I've gone through better than anyone else, and they've felt my frustrations even deeper than I have at times. I thank God for my family, more now than I ever have, because there's no way I could have come this far without God graciously giving me their particular care and love.

Before the Accident, I was in India for three weeks, and one thing that we experienced in India was that God's Word took on new life. One example: All the biblical passages that talk about other gods seem to be more vivid there because in that country they actually deal with a multiplicity of gods as part of their everyday life and worship. I was sickened and heartbroken at how it must grieve God because I could actually see the images and idols in their country. It also helped me envision our own "invisible" western idols more clearly as well, idols like success, career, sensuality, political clout.

I have always loved the book of James (as if you couldn't tell) and one passage that God was bringing alive in my heart was in chapter 4: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'" (4:13-15). It is true that on June 4, a year ago, I had no idea of the significance of that verse: "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." Even now, I am learning whatever might happen in this life is truly if the Lord wills. Nothing happens without His being part of His purpose or plan.

How many times before the Accident did I quote my favorite verses from James 1:2-6: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." Who knew but God that I would be tested to see if I really believed that verse and have my very own custom-made trial in which to "count it all joy."

So far I have only gotten brief glimpses of the mercies that God has ordained for me through this situation. If He wills, I look forward to seeing even more. So far, these are just a few of the things I've learned. There are more and there are certainly going to be more that I have yet to realize. But the words of the 23rd Psalm are true:

Even though I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, I did not have to fear any evil, for He was with me; His rod and His staff have comforted

me. He prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies (including my final enemy); He anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows! Surely goodness and mercy have followed me, are following me, and will continually follow me all the days of my life, until the day I dwell forever in the house of the Lord.

Thank you for your prayers and for walking with me on this journey. Thanks be to God for His goodness and mercy in letting me celebrate this happy anniversary!

Lauren

Day 394: Freedom (on Wheels)

Lauren Graham Waller, July 3, 2012

This past Thursday night I created some fireworks. Not real fireworks. But certainly more than a small spark of excitement – at least to Julie Marchi. On the Excite-O-Meter her enthusiasm level was apparently about to peg out at "Boil" because it spilled over into the Leadership Meeting of the GIBC College & Career class, just prior to our Thursday evening class meeting.

"I just saw Lauren driving!" she exclaimed to the group.

Indeed, she did. So, that entire evening I fielded questions from person after person who caught her contagion. I felt almost like a celebrity being surrounded by paparazzi (minus the flash bulbs). I had just driven my Parents' car to church in Jupiter from Palm City – almost 45 whole minutes behind the wheel, only assisted by the backseat driver (who sat in the passenger's seat next to me, and who is mi madre.) I got a lot of questions that night, one of which I heard numerous times: "Is this your first time driving since the Accident?" To which I'd reply: "No, I've been driving about a month." (And to which mi madre would reply: "See how behind you are in updating people on the blog?")

So, to dutifully apprise all my friends, and to keep collective Excite-O-Meters at safe and manageable levels should you see me behind the wheel of a car coming soon to a city near you, I offer this update.

The update actually goes back more than a month. June 5, of course, was the anniversary of the Accident. But it was also the day that marked a new era of Dependence in which I'd have to rely on others for things most normal 20-year-olds are doing for themselves: driving, eating, drinking, dressing, showering, cooking, walking, etc. You know the story.

As part of my recovery, we have celebrated different milestones every time I'd regain some area of Independence that I had lost in the Accident. To date I have recovered many (perhaps most?) of the functions I had lost to at least serviceable levels. There were still a few biggies outstanding, however, with driving being one of the biggest.

For the longest time my desire to drive was not matched by my ability. I started driving a golf cart around our development and gradually reached a point where animals, small children, and little old ladies didn't run for cover every time they saw me coming. My parents then, with precious little masking of their unease, agreed to let me start driving a real live car up to the parking lot at the entrance of our development (about 2 miles away). After doing that a few times, they let me advance to driving up to the grocery store about 5 miles away. Not a long distance. Only two lanes of traffic.

Before being allowed to drive alone again, my doctors told me I'd have to pass a state-approved driving evaluation that specialized in brain injury patients. My parents didn't think I was ready for it. I did! Which meant we were at something of an impasse. We negotiated a compromise: My parents agreed to pay for the evaluation whenever I believed I was ready. However, if I had to take it again, I would be responsible for the cost.

I believed I was ready.

My Mom (aka mi madre) contacted the Florida Brain Injury Disability Driving Agency (I totally made that up, but it's something official-sounding like that) and scheduled the appointment. Again, there was very little Parental unease-masking going on! I think my Parents were hoping and praying that whoever did the test would use a pretty strict grading scale as they weren't convinced I should be out navigating the open roads! I don't know for sure, but they may have even been hoping that I flunked!

The day arrived with pretty much zero pomp and fanfare, but I was both nervous and a little bit excited. Mostly nervous. The Evaluator showed up an hour late, which did nothing to calm the nerves, and told us he was the Primary Evaluator for Brain Injured Driving Students for the State of Florida – PEBIDS if you prefer abbreviations. (Again, I made that up.)

I thought it would be mostly a driving test, but that was only a small part of it. There were six parts in all. Here they are, and here's how I did.

1. Cognitive and perception questions (in an interview format). The PEBIDS asked questions about the Accident. He asked if I had driven much and I told him mostly the golf cart. My memory served me well enough to know the answers to all his questions, although I messed up the name of one of my doctors. In my defense though, I was unconscious while most of my doctors did their doctoring.

He asked: If someone wanted to know if I was disabled, what would I say? I said, "I'd tell them I was in a bad accident. I wouldn't say I was disabled necessarily." (How would you answer that question?) He also checked the strength in my hands and the flexibility in my ankles.

2. Visual test. The PEBIDS had me identity road signs by their shape. I completely forgot there were different categories of signs, like "information signs" and "warning signs." To be honest, I don't even know if they told me up in Michigan, where I learned to drive, that different types of signs fit into different categories. Did you know that? I could identify the stop sign or yield sign by shape but had trouble with the others.

3 Written test. I had to connect the answers with the questions, sequence events, and identify what was out-of- place in certain scenes. I was allowed a minute on one test, but I did it in 21 seconds. The next time I was allowed 2 minutes and I did it in 1:25.

4. Vision test. The PEBIDS checked my eyesight and vision. I did fine in the vision clarity portion. However, he discovered I had trouble with depth perception and peripheral vision. (This would come up later.)

5. Reaction time. The PEBIDS came into our house carrying some kind of contraption that looked like either a safe, or a mechanism to blow one up! However, this is when we discovered what it really was: it measured my foot response time from the moment my eyes saw a light turn red. I got a high of 0.50 seconds, and a low of 0.34 seconds. I don't know what Olympic-class reaction-time people get, but he said mine was acceptable.

6. Driving test. The first five parts (done "inside" the house) took the better part of an hour. Since I did well enough on the "inside" parts of the test, he let me go "outside" for the road test. The PEBIDS sat in the

passenger seat and had what he called a "chicken stick." It was a long, pole-looking device that he attached to the brake so he could stop the car from his seat if he had to.

He asked me to go to a place that I normally go. Since we moved to our current location after the Accident, and since I hadn't really driven anywhere significant since the Accident, I didn't have any "normal" places to take him. I told him we go to church every week and asked him if he wanted me to take him there. He was good with that until I told him it's almost a 45-minute drive each way! He kindly asked me if I went anywhere else – like the mall? I told him I did occasionally, so he asked me to drive there.

Great plan! But I'd never driven to the mall from where we live so I missed the turn. Next thing I know, I am actually on my way to church! The PEBIDS said we could continue, get on the interstate, go down one exit and come back. Which we did. Except I was unfamiliar with the route to the mall even from there! This was a part of the world I'd never seen from the driver's seat of a car. So, he directed me to get back on the interstate and head back toward home. All told we drove about half an hour going nowhere. It was all pretty uneventful – except for that one time when I went to hit the turn signal and turned on the windshield wipers simultaneously. I'm talented like that.

We came back inside, where my parents acted like Rhoda at the prayer meeting when Peter showed up. (Read about it here if this makes no sense to you!) I couldn't tell if they didn't believe I really made it home or whether they thought they were seeing an angel that just looked like me! We all had a seat and the PEBIDS asked my Mom and Dad if they thought I was ready to drive. Mom said she was nervous and didn't know if I was. Dad said he was more okay as long as I wasn't in the city (like West Palm Beach or Orlando, someplace with several lanes of traffic) but didn't know if I was able to negotiate much traffic, especially if any of the drivers acted crazy and required me to react quickly.

The PEBIDS then asked me if I thought I was ready to drive. I didn't know what to say but I felt pretty good about my performance. Either way, that's the last moment of happiness I was to have that day. :-(The PEBIDS then underwent an instantaneous transformation from Mr. Nice Guy to the Captain of the Bad News Bearers.

"She's not ready to drive alone yet."

With that concise proclamation, then the PEBIDS proceeded to go through the list of things I didn't even know I did wrong (none of which involved a turn signal, windshield wipers, or missed exits).

- I had trouble multi-tasking (processing multiple streams of information) and when I had to do so, I either swerved too much or slowed way down

- Because of the vision problem –especially depth perception – I took turns too wide (mostly, though some were too close), I stopped past stop signs, and wasn't able to well judge how close oncoming cars were. (Some of this was due to being rusty and out of practice too.)

- When waiting for traffic to make a left-hand turn, I had a hard time judging how far away the cars were coming toward where I was.

- I apparently got up to speed on the interstate too fast and actually went over the speed limit which (oops!) I don't even remember checking.

- He said I swerved too much between the lines of my lane and got too close to going over them.

- He had to use the Chicken Stick twice, but I don't remember when, and they weren't too obvious.

So, needless to say my own Excite-O-Meter was fluctuating somewhere between "tepid" and "glacial" at this point. In fact, when the PEBIDS' appraisal was finished I didn't know if I'd even be allowed to drive again at all. But, he reassured me and my Parents that I could drive as long as I had adult supervision. He then said that the best way for my Parents to imagine how I was seeing the road was to close one eye (or put a patch over one eye) and try to drive with only one eye. He said it's something that is difficult but can be compensated for with practice. Also, it was good to hear the specific things I needed to work on, the specific things he was looking for, and the fact that all I have to re-take is the road portion of the test (about 1/3 of the total cost).

So, for the past month I've been practicing my driving with one of the Parentals present and I've gotten quite a bit better, even by their reckoning! Although they still get a little nervous and crack a lot of lighthearted jokes at my expense (and Mom uses her invisible Chicken Stick with much pomp and fanfare). This past week was the first time

I've driven to church and, as you know, the news spread like wildfire! I must agree with the reaction, although my driving may not be greeted with cheers by animals and small children (especially if they have the poor judgment of using the sidewalk when I'm in the area). But it is good news nonetheless because it means I'm steadily on the march toward Independence!

So, this July 4th I shall celebrate my progression toward this next freedom milestone: the one whereby I can transport myself alone in an automobile! And, just for giggles, I may even light a bottle rocket in a group of people and see if they scatter as fast as the little ladies at Harbour Ridge do whenever they see me driving in their direction!

Lauren

Day 444: Human Again!

Lauren Graham Waller, August 24, 2012

All around we see the signs that Summer is almost over. Friends on Facebook are talking about it. Back-to-School commercials are playing. The sun is setting earlier. College bands are learning their halftime shows. The football teams are in camp (GameDay kicks off with Michigan vs. Alabama at Jerry World in 8 days?!). And today is move-in day.

Today? Move-in day?

Yep! Mom and I are getting read to head to West Palm Beach and I'm going back to PBA after the world's longest summer vacation! My transformation has progressed to the point where I'm almost "normal." Truth be told, I feel like Mrs. Potts and the dishes in my favorite musical of all time, "Beauty and the Beast," when they sang:

I'll be floating again! I'll be gliding again!
Stepping, striding as fine as you please
Like a real human does, I'll be all that I was
On that glorious morn when I'm fin'lly reborn
And I'm – all of me – human again!

It feels good to be resuming my "long lost joie de vivre" and being "all that I was" before the Accident. Well, most of what I was...

One way I know I'm becoming "human" again is that I actually feel a little like a schoolgirl: excited, but nervous. I'm excited to be getting back to working toward graduation and seeing old friends and professors. I'm pretty nervous though for several reasons. All my classmates are now a year ahead of me – in their senior year – and will be graduating next Spring so this is a special year for them that I won't be getting to join in on (yet.) I also feeling self-conscious because I am no longer "Lauren," but instead I'm "The Girl Who Was In the Accident." I look a little different, walk and act differently, and (truth be told) I am a very different person (I feel ten years older). I really hope nobody feels too awkward toward me or I toward them. I'm also a teensy bit nervous about how I'll handle the classes, the schedule and the work-load since I'm still working on regaining confidence in myself and knowing my limitations and abilities.

Just so you know, I am optimistic! I think I have some reason to be. Last week I finished a worldview class (online) on Christian Values & Biblical Faith. That was a pretty helpful benchmark for me because it showed me how I have to approach classwork differently now than I used to, especially by putting into practice the compensation techniques I've been learning. I have to be a lot more structured than I was before and work very carefully off of written outlines and calendars instead of relying so much on scheduling and working things out in my head. (To use a chess analogy, I can strategize pretty well but I can't abstractly see 10 moves ahead in my head; I have to write everything down so I can visualize on paper how everything fits together.) My memory is still suspect, which is not a good thing when a lot of memory work is required (or when writing a paper and I can't recall whether a thought is my from my own memory or from something I just read or was told to me.) The good news is I got a 95% in the class! If there's any bad news, it is that I now have to do a similar thing (with hopefully not as much writing) in multiple classes – three in fact. (My neuropsych doc only approved me for 9 hours to start so that I don't "experience failure").

Another way I know I'm well on my way to becoming "human" again is that as of 2:00 yesterday afternoon I officially finished with all my therapies. Yay! I have zero recollection of those very first therapy sessions while I was still in Saint Mary's for rehab. I've seen the pictures [one is attached above] of what it was like when I had no memory, no mind or muscle control, and it took several people just to keep me sitting upright for five minutes! It's not pretty! So it has been a long journey from Day 44 to Day 444.

I actually finished physical therapy on Tuesday. Although I started out the day being happy because it was the final session, it ended up being very bittersweet. I've had such great therapists and when Andrea left for Chicago earlier in the Summer, Linda stepped in and took over for her. She has been so sweet to my Mom and me. When we wrapped up she gave me a card and an orchid and we all almost start crying. There have been so many sweet people God has brought into my life that have been just who I needed. I really feel like I've been treated as more than a patient but as a daughter or sister or friend.

Yesterday was my final speech/cognitive therapy session. The time before when I went I felt like I had gained a pretty high level of mastery, but yesterday I came crashing back to earth and saw pretty clearly that I'm still not where I was or where I want to be (or where I'm going to be). The biggest problem with my speech, my memory, and even my physical fitness is that I'm slower and much more deliberate in processing things. Physically, for example, running for the phone when it rings or going quickly up and down stairs isn't going to happen for me.

On Lumosity (a "brain exercise program that improves core cognitive abilities") I am in the 90th (or higher) percentile on everything – cognitive, problem-solving, intelligence, etc. – except in two areas: speed and memory. Practically that means timed assignments will still present a problem, but I'll eventually complete them! My personal mascot as of today is going to be the tortoise!

I have also been learning how to read my "new" body better. Just one instance: how essential it is for me to be drinking water regularly. My body seems to be hyper-sensitive to that now, as I found out the other day in the gym when I almost blacked out. No harm done. But the tendency for me is to not drink enough water. Where most people think water is tasteless, I actually don't like the taste of water. So I have to get past that!

Another area where I'm starting to regain my "humanness" is in creativity. There are a lot of myths about creativity, but it's really just the ability to take your experiences and put them together in new and interesting ways. I really enjoy exposing myself to a lot of new ideas and concepts and experiences, and even have no trouble remembering them to a large degree. But my brain just gets "stuck" when it comes to the abstract part of imagination and it's still not like it used to be for me. However, I have been doing some design work over the summer and I've seen the quality improve. My Dad has also told me I have

gotten a lot better and since he's right about almost everything, it must be true! If the tortoise is now my team mascot, "slowly but surely" is my team slogan! My plan is to continue studying graphic design and hope it all converges again at some point for me.

If there's any aspect being "human" again that has become clear to me it is that we are not God and therefore not in control of our lives as much as most of us think. We have to trust in a sovereign (but good!) God. My family has really learned to trust God more. One specific thing we've been praying and trusting God for is that things would work out for me to go back to school, not just in terms of my recovery, but financially as well. Even then, I will require some accommodations for it to work out (housing arrangements, extended time for tests, etc.). While we're waiting for God to work it all out as He wills, we've been doing all we can on our end. I've been doing the therapy stuff to get better. Dad has been working on financial and housing stuff with the school. And Mom and Brad have been praying (along with Dad and me).

A week ago on Wednesday I received a surprise phone call from PBA. The lady who called said she had good news. She was calling to confirm that all the housing and accommodation issues had been worked out. I called Dad to tell him the good news and let him know all we needed now was the finances. He then told me he had some good news of his own for me. He had been talking that morning to the PBA financial people and all of the financial issues had been worked out! I called Brad to tell him ALL the good news, and he told me he had some good news too! He said the night before at a Bible study, without us knowing about it, he had publicly requested that everyone pray especially that the housing and finances would work out for school this year, so God very specifically answered a pointed prayer. When he told me that I felt like dancing and twirling and "waltzing those old one-two-threes!" I am just astounded and thankful at how God has seen fit to answer specific prayers and that these desires of mine fit into His will and His plan.

Even if God hadn't opened the door for me to go back to school, I would be disappointed, but I still know that He withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly. I've been encouraged and edified by a small book called Disability and the Sovereign Goodness of God by John Piper and Tony Reinke. Two of the sections are from a sermon series that Piper preached on John 9. The third section of the book is a compilation of interviews with a father who has a son who was not just born blind, but was actually born without eyes. So it was edifying to

read how a godly family struggles with the challenges of disability. As someone who is living with the after-effects of a traumatic injury which I'll carry with me all my days, this book has been helpful in understanding that God is redeeming all things and working them out in such a way that when we finally understand it better by-and-by, we'll not wish it to have been one bit different.

I told you my favorite musical is "Beauty and the Beast." I think I love it so much because it is the power of Beauty's love that transforms the Beast back into a real human being again. In her condescension she loves – and kisses – the Beast, even while he is still beastly. That is what breaks the curse, saves him from eternal death, and restores him back to who he was created to be: truly human. It reminds me of our Savior who also condescended to love us when were in a shameful, ugly state. And yet, while we were still sinners,

Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above. Heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

In condescending love, Beauty kissed the Beast. And all who have experienced that love have become truly human again!

For me now, it's farewell to Summer and hello to Fall, football (Go Blue!), PBA, friends new and old, and my "almost like new" human self! I am so deeply thankful to all of you who have supported and prayed for me and my family – and who still continue to pray! When I come to your mind, please keep praying: that I will overcome my anxieties, that I will persevere when it gets difficult, that my family and I will not squander and waste this Accident on foolish or fleeting things, and that the transforming work God has been doing on my body and in our souls these past 444 days will reveal that we're a little more like our beautiful Savior.

Lauren (and the Grahams)

Day 555: Home for the Holidays

Lauren Graham Waller, December 14, 2012

Well, last time I wrote it was my first day back to school. Today I'm back home and my first semester is officially over. It's been so humbling, but it has been so good. The students and professors have been good. God has been good—so good.

This semester I was restricted to three classes, so I took Photography, Typography, and Art History I. I thought from the very beginning that Art History would be the biggest challenge, Photography wouldn't be much of a problem at all, and Typography was the mystery card, the X factor—it could well determine whether I'd be able to continue pursuing a degree in graphic design or not.

I was correct in my assumption that Art History would be the biggest challenge because of the memory work required, especially in test-taking. It was a challenge! But, surprisingly, it was a lot of fun and I learned a great deal. (Ask me sometime about the Paleolithic "Venus of Willendorf" and the 19th-century "Bacchante and the Infant Faun" by Frederick W. MacMonnies and how both of these idealized sculptures of women reflect how each of their respective cultures viewed and valued women.)

Although not difficult, Photography proved to be more challenging than I expected. I had already taken several photography classes at Indian River State College, so this was supposedly re-covering old territory. Or so I thought. Also, I did very well in the classes and photography has always been a love of mine, so I just knew this would be a breeze. However, the classes I took at IRSC taught us film photography. The PBA course was a digital photography class. Much of the information was similar but there are distinctions between them. We also learned more about digitally editing photos using Photoshop, Bridge, and Camera Raw. Between learning several new software programs, and being exposed to things I hadn't learned before at IRSC, this class was a bit more of a challenge than I anticipated.

Typography was the surprise class—in some good ways!—and became my favorite of the three. The course description is as follows: "Introduction to typography, including letterforms, nomenclature, type classifications and the creation of graphic design solely with type." We started with a typographic self-portrait: creating a self-portrait solely with the use of letters, numbers, and symbols. (You can see typography projects and other artwork I created at my new Design & Photography Facebook Community Page.)

As much as I enjoyed the assignments in this class, it wasn't very long before I discovered that I was struggling with some of the course requirements. I enjoyed the assignments, but as day after day went by, things began to snowball and I realized that I needed help if I were to succeed.

I found help from a very surprising source: my brother Brad. (You can see him in the choir to the left of Pastor Jerry and just above the cellos.) From the very beginning he kept encouraging me to take advantage of the fact that professors have office hours: "times when you can meet with your professors and teaching assistants to discuss the material being presented in class or other related interests you have. Course-related discussions include asking for extra help, seeking clarification of material presented in class and following up on aspects of the class you find compelling." Brad told me his prodding was so that I would "learn from [his] mistakes." Come to find out he had been bailed out more than once by actually talking to his professors who (surprise, surprise!) are actually human and want their students to succeed!

And eventually I did. But I think this whole semester, what could have been the biggest barrier to my success was nothing more than my own stubborn pride. Asking for help actually means admitting you need help. Finally I decided to set up an appointment with my professor to seek assistance. He was not just helpful on the assignments, but in helping me overcome so many of the misgivings I had about my (lack of) creativity. In addition he was incredibly encouraging to me personally. I'm so glad Brad prodded me to go, and I'm so thankful for the help from all my professors that I wonder now why in the world I didn't do this before.

But that's an issue that has reared its ugly head before. In fact, I had the same problem in coming to Christ. Receiving His salvation required me to come to the end of my self—to admit that I couldn't make it on my own and expect to meet the standard required to earn His approval. Heaven requires perfection.

But I have a big problem: I'm a sinner—just like all of you. If you look back upon your life (or even the last five minutes), you'll see that you haven't lived perfectly in thought, word, and/or deed. You've missed the mark. But that's why Christ came—to be born of a virgin, live a perfect life, die in our place for our sins, and for His atoning work on our behalf to be ratified by God when He raised Jesus from the dead. That's Christmas!

Which leads me to an invitation. This weekend our church is holding our annual Christmas cantata. (The picture I posted is from Opening Night tonight; we have two more performances over the weekend.) If you would like to come hear about the matchless riches of God's grace

proclaimed in song, please consider coming. I will be there. :-) And I will be singing in the choir (back row, just to the left of the cross)!! And Simona will amaze you with her violin solo, but I digress...

For the past few months I have been rehearsing with our choir and the repertoire for the concert has gotten stuck in my head. One song has in particular which is called, "This is Love" taken from 1 John 4.

This is love
Not that we loved God
But that He loved us
And sent His Son
As an atoning sacrifice for our sins

I hope and pray that you—and anybody who visits the concert—will really consider the words of the songs that we sing and reckon with the fact that makes God's love so glorious: not that we were so worth loving, but that even while we were sinners, Jesus died for us.

Also, pray that God will use this concert series for His glory and that He will bring more people to Himself. And please continue to pray that I will use the life and breath He has re-given me will be used to give Him the honor that is due His name and worship Him in the beauty of His holiness.

Merry Christmas! Lauren

Day 578: Trusting God when Accidents Happen

Lauren Graham Waller, January 6, 2013

Over the Christmas holiday I've been reading Trusting God by Jerry Bridges. It's a book some of the women at my church are studying. I was barely into the book before the author confronted the reader with this most basic question: "Can you trust God?"

As a Christian I claim to believe what the Bible says about God, especially what it says about His infinite wisdom, knowledge, goodness and power. But Bridges immediately pressed us to test that claim. Do we believe what the Bible says about God's involvement in every aspect of life: good and bad, success and failure, just and unjust, noble and criminal? Do we believe God has His unseen hand in everything? That He is presently, actively working in and through and with all things to accomplish His good purposes on behalf of those who love Him?

If so, the question is not really, "Can I trust God?" but "Do I trust God?" It means that when things turn topsy-turvy the issue is not as much about God's character but ours. Bridges says, "When we fail to trust God, we doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness." He says "God does not exercise His sovereignty capriciously, but only in such a way as His infinite love deems best for us... God's sovereignty is also exercised in infinite wisdom, far beyond our ability to comprehend... We must learn to trust [especially] when we don't understand" (emphasis mine).

Bridges advances his argument about why we can – and should, and must – trust God by reminding us that God is not only absolutely sovereign; He is wholeheartedly good. Bridges points out that "[God] has designed His eternal purpose so that His glory and our good are inextricably bound together." That is to say He will do nothing at the expense of the other. God's glory and goodness "are never antithetical; they are always in harmony with each other." Which means we must consider: whenever we face accidents, tragedies, and other adverse circumstances we must continually ask ourselves, "For what good purpose might God be ordaining this? How might this operate to bring Him glory and bring about my eternal and ultimate good?"

This was helpful to read. But, like most truth, it has been so much harder to put into practice. For me, whenever God tries to teach me a thing, He tests me on what He's taught me. Except His tests are not pen and paper; they are flesh and bone, road and rubber, real-life tests.

In the middle of the holiday break, Mom and I planned a Girls-Only Post-Christmas Spectacular Shopping Extravaganza. (Actually, we were returning and exchanging things, but sometimes the adventure is greater when accompanied by hype.) Our first stop was at Sports Authority in Jensen Beach, which is directly across from the Treasure Coast Mall where we would be heading next. We did our business at Sports Authority and got into my car (the grey Mustang named Vladimir – not after Putin or the Impaler, but Emilien, a former Michigan linebacker). Mom turned out of the parking lot, entered the flow of traffic, and began to cross Federal Highway to get to the mall. As she was proceeding through the intersection, an elderly gentleman leaving the mall apparently didn't see us coming. He turned left right in front of us. We didn't have time to stop. It was "déjà vu all over again" except this time we slammed into the passenger's side of the other car. We ended up t-boning the poor guy and ruining his beautiful car.

We made sure our bodies and bones were intact, saw that the other gentleman was moving around okay, then called 911 to report the accident. Thankfully there was nobody in his car except him; then he, Mom, and I emerged from the wreckage "hard-pressed but not crushed...struck but not destroyed." As you can imagine, as with any Girls-Only adventure, emotions ran high (as did anxieties) and it was quite surreal for a while. Our heads gradually began to clear and we could start to process things again. As I was left alone with my thoughts, the questions began to come: "How was God involved in this?" "How was He possibly using this for His glory?" "Does this kind of event, so reminiscent of the Accident that reshaped my body and mind and altered the entire direction of life, is this in any way consistent with a good God, a God I can trust, a God who is using everything not just for His glory but for my ultimate benefit?"

The noted theologian, Thomas the Tank Engine, says: "Accidents happen now and again." And, according to Thomas, if we "ignore the danger signs Fate can surprise you with no reason or rhyme." Even if we do obey the signs, we'll sometimes "slip and slide if that's Lady Luck's intent." I think Thomas is partly right. Accidents do happen. Or, at the very least, bad "stuff" happens that we can't explain. But I don't believe Thomas is correct when he says Fate is in control of the good and bad events of life and Lady Luck is sovereign. Randomness and chance do not provide a bedrock for belief solid enough to help us face life's "accidents" with any sense of purpose. Only a faith rooted in a good and gracious God who is providentially working through all of history to bring about His ultimate purpose is sufficient to get us through the "here and now" when we wonder "how and why."

One of the mysteries of God's sovereignty is that He doesn't very often give us explanations. Of course, His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways, and as high as the heavens are above the earth, so far are His ways and thoughts above ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). So if He were to tell us why He allows and arranges what He does, we'd probably understand His ways about as well as a Tank Engine comprehends the intricacies and complexities of tank engineering.

But sometimes, in grace, God gives us a glimpse of His goodness even in the midst of accidents. Lately I have developed a reputation for cajoling Mom into letting me drive every time I can. Over the holiday break I've had several opportunities to get behind the wheel again and work on recovering lost driving skills. Ironically, because I'd gone to the fitness center the day before the Shopping Extravaganza, my neck was

so sore I could barely turn my head. Which is NOT a good thing when one must look both ways for traffic. Especially on high-traffic roads. And busy intersections. And in a part of the world where half of the drivers learned from the School of Jehu the Madman and the average age (and average speed) of the other half is roughly the same as Harriet the Tortoise. So, surprisingly to one and all, even though I had driven to the Sports Authority, I actually asked Mom to take over the driving duties. Who'da thunk that a providentially-arranged stiff neck would put Mom behind the wheel of my car just in time for my next "accident." Because she was driving, and her reflexes were much more alert than mine, she slammed the brakes quicker than I would have. No doubt we weren't going as fast at impact as we might have been if I'd been the driver, or as fast as the other car that hit us in the Accident in which I was injured. Also, God graciously ordained that nobody was in the passenger's seat and spared them.

Graciously. And in other ways as well:

- I was dinking around with a picture frame and had my head down so I didn't see the impact and won't have flashbacks of the collision.

- Mom and the other gentleman were spared so I won't have bad memories of having witnessed that like my family has when they remember seeing me after the Accident.

- It was a "head on" collision for us so I didn't have a recurrence of the "shearing" effect on my brain that comes with a side impact.

Also, God was graciously working His sovereign will for our good (and Vladimir's) in a more humorous way. Because Vlad is now getting advanced in age, he's starting to show signs of wear. There are nicks and dings and scratches on both bumpers especially. When I was in the hospital after the Accident in 2011, my parents drove Vlad to the hospital one day. While they were inside a young woman drove into Vlad's back bumper with her dad's car. Her dad's insurance paid to replace my back bumper, so while I was in La-La Land my car's body was being upgraded. Though this accident was ugly and the other driver's car took the brunt of the blow, it appears Vlad's frame and major components are okay and the front end body – including the bumper – will be replaced at no charge to us or our insurance. So, because of these two wrecks, God has not only kept Vlad's miles low but almost entirely upgraded and replaced his body. Miraculously, Vlad is actually better off now than he was before his accidents!

At the beginning of the Christmas break, my Dad re-assigned me a task I haven't had the courage to do yet: Go back, read all the posts and comments from the CaringBridge site, then copy and paste them into a document so that I have them in chronological order as a record of God's faithfulness to me – and to all of YOU – through my Accident (Colossians 1:24-27). So far all I've been able to read is some personal "love notes" that were presented to me at a Coffee House event on my behalf. I haven't been able to read the CaringBridge posts because every time I start, I wither under the raw emotion of it all and turn into a blubbering, emotional wreck. True confession: I had completely forgotten about that assignment until this accident. I told Mom and she said, "I'm sure there's a reason you didn't remember that assignment until now." I confided in Mom about my fears of now "living" through what God let me sleep through before and she encouraged to embrace my hesitations and "be a wreck then!"

God has seen fit for me to go through a couple wrecks recently. And each time it seems He reminds me: that's really what I am and what my life would be without Him. These accidents – and these reminders – are a grace. Doesn't the song say:

Amazing grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a "wreck" like me!

God has been so kind to let me see some of the good that He has brought out of the Accident, although I'm sure that in this life I can never fully comprehend all that God purposed from it. Slowly He's giving me the courage to go back and read the CaringBridge posts that my family posted while I was in the hospital and the Guestbook comments you have so kindly made. Already I am amazed and wonder, like David, "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18).

Can we trust God when accidents happen? How can we not? I was nothing but a wreck. Yet He interposed His strong and gracious hand to save me – twice: body and soul. I have done nothing to deserve His grace (absolutely nothing!). And yet: In lovingkindness Jesus came/ My soul in mercy to reclaim/ And from the depths of sin and shame/ Through grace He lifted me. Which is why I resonate with this song sung by Steve Green and Michael English:

Your grace still amazes me
Your love is still a mystery
Each day I fall on my knees

Your grace still amazes me
'Cause Your grace still amazes me
It's deeper, it's wider
It's stronger, it's higher
It's deeper it's wider
It's stronger, it's higher
Than anything my eyes can see

Because God has shown the immeasurable riches of His grace in His kindness toward us, I know I can trust Him without having to lean on my own understanding (or misunderstanding) of things. I don't have to leave my life in the hands of Fate or Lady Luck, but can trust the Unseen Hand that makes no mistakes. God knows what He's doing. I'll ultimately be better – much better – than I was before my accidents. And He will complete the work He has begun in me until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6).

Lauren

P.S. Thanks to Dad, who supplied the Thomas the Tank Engine reference (as well as some fun memories of how much Brad used to love that show), and who helps me to continually refine my writing and my theology.

Day 640: I Believe I Can Fly

Lauren Graham Waller, March 9, 2013

One of the questions I get asked a lot is, "when can you drive again by yourself?"

I took a driving test last June, a year after the Accident. I passed all of the inside stuff: the "what's wrong with this picture?" test, the reaction test, the depth perception test. (I did have trouble with depth perception, but not enough that it caused me to fail).

The testing guy (Dave) said that when he returned I wouldn't need to do any of that again. All I'd have to do was the "practical." And since I didn't do anything super dangerous last time, when he showed up, he didn't bring along his "chicken stick" (the long device he attached to my brake so that he could stop the car or slow me down if I veered across too many lanes of oncoming traffic). He certainly had more confidence in me than my Mom did. She was more nervous than I was – and she has the chewed off fingernails to prove it!

As we were leaving the house Dave asked me: "Ready to get some independence back?" I'm not even sure if I responded because my thoughts were scrambled and my nerves were going haywire. I felt like if I flunked this, I may never get to drive again. And I could hardly bear the thought of not getting back my wings.

Before we left, Dave reviewed our previous route and reminded me of what I did wrong. I asked him where he wanted me to go this time and if he'd like me to follow the same route. He said, "sure." I was relieved. Last time he had me drive down the interstate to the next exit and then come back. It is somewhat familiar since I've gotten to drive more since the last test than I did before.

When I got on the highway Dave said, "you are going way too fast." When we got back he told Mom I was going too fast because I was keeping up with the guy in front of me. Besides that, I didn't make any mistakes that would cause panic, yelling, or reporting to my second grade teacher.

When we got back, he said I did a good job. I wasn't sure if that was good enough, especially when he started reporting all of the things I did wrong and needed to improve on. But then he told Mom, "Congratulations! You did a good job training her." And he told me I had passed. With "flying colors"! Which is only apropos, because how else would you want to retrieve your wings?

So, friends and countrymen: buckle up! I'm back, and coming soon to a fast lane near you! If you see me, honk and wave! (And if you happen to see a woman whimpering in the passenger seat, don't worry about it; that's just my Mom.)

Lauren

Day 708: A Doxology

Lauren Graham Waller, May 13, 2013

Wow! Where has the semester gone? I've now officially completed my first year as a returning student. The semester I finished. The students have gone home. And most of the class I was originally in (the class of 2013) has graduated. Even though I did not graduate with them, I feel like this year I completed an intense course in Christian Growth & Development. Of Jesus, as a young man, it was said, He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Like

Him, this year I have seen growth in those same areas: intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. Unlike Him, however, I still have such a long way to go. But as the old saying goes, "Ain't where I wanna be, ain't where I'm gonna be, but thank God I ain't where I was."

Academically, most of my growth happened through four classes this semester: Humanities III, Graphic Design II, Label and Package Design, and Stained Glass. I thought Humanities III might be a challenge because I have never been especially good at history-type classes. It was really a blessing though because our professor was pretty specific in what we needed to know and she focused more on literature than on history. We had some very interesting discussions on some of the issues humanity faced in the past as compared to those we now face. And I think history became more interesting to me as I realized human nature is the same and the underlying issues remain the same, even though the times and technology are different.

When Graphic Design II began, I was actually dreading it. (True confession: At the beginning of the semester I was simply hoping to finish the class with a passing grade.) The class itself consisted of three projects: a set of ads (and new logo) for Sports Authority, an annual report (and new logo) for the Flagler Museum, and a set of eight phone app icons. There's no denying it was definitely tough trying to think conceptually. But as the end of the semester rolled around, I think I was definitely doing better. It was a very helpful class because I learned how to design effective ads, I learned the basics of publication design, and I learned the logic – the "rules" – of how to design app icons (both conceptually and creatively).

I was successful in landing a job as the Art Director for our student publication, The Beacon. I thought since I was responsible for designing and laying out a newspaper, that that might help with with the annual report/publication stuff. Not true. That project actually caused some of the most frustration and crying out to the Lord the entire semester. But the Lord was ever present and His grace was truly sufficient. The class helped me because I was also able to overcome one of my greatest mental hurdles and get thrown back into graphic design. Though the class was intensely challenging, I learned a lot, including how to depend on the Lord in every day, ordinary trials that are more mental and emotional than physical.

Label & Package Design was a class I decided to take because it was an elective that looked interesting (and I need electives); I also thought it

could be practical. It was neat to see how my designs look on real-life packages and not just on a computer screen. The two most important take-aways from that class were developing concepts and turning them into usable, commercial art, as well as learning the importance of research.

The final class that I took this semester was Stained Glass, also an elective. I didn't even know the class was offered when I went into my advising session. My advisor (who happens to be the teacher) told me that they were offering Stained Glass for the first time this semester and that I might consider it. He then expressed concern about how I might fare in the class considering my fine motor skills (or lack thereof). I didn't worry as much as he did because I kind of figured it would be like most things in my post-Accident life: I'd be really terrible at it in the beginning and then improve to something workable as the semester progressed.

My assessment was correct. However, I misunderestimated (salute to George W. Bush) just how bad I'd be in the beginning. I was sooo bad and sooo frustrated that by the second class I was ready to do something I have never even thought about doing in my entire life. Quit. Maybe it's my stubborn, carnal pride but quitting is not in my vocabulary. But now that vile word was not only present and accounted for, it was clamoring for release. For some reason which I'll never know (although it may have been that I just didn't know what else to take and knew I needed an elective), I didn't quit – even after I got my first grade back. And even though there were almost more cuts on my hands than on the glass.

When I got to design the second project, I figured if we got to choose what we designed, why not make it as easy on myself as possible? I designed a flower with more than the minimum number of pieces required, but I kept the cuts simple and fairly straight, with a minimal chance of messing up. Success! Which, in this case, simply meant improvement – and not causing any permanent physical harm to my person!

I have to admit I was concerned about taking the extra class (especially with a job) because it was quite a bit more of a load than I was used to. I was so bad and so slow at the beginning that I wanted to make sure I had plenty of time to do things over if I needed (as I surely would). Through this process though, working on stained glass actually became quite fun and a time to unwind. Because I worked on projects

a lot outside of class, I was able to get pretty far ahead. After my final class project (which you can see in my Facebook profile) I was able to complete two smaller projects with some of my extra glass.

Aside from the three projects, our professor required us to write a paper on any topic relating to stained glass. I ended up researching and writing on the history and origin of stained glass. I found that through the ages stained glass has really only been consistently popular in churches. As I began to discover the reasons why, I developed a new appreciation for the art form, which really increased my enjoyment of that class. This entire semester I have thoroughly enjoyed contemplating and writing about the connections between art and Christianity. Our Creator God is the first artist and He defines art; He defines beauty. In the opening verses of the Bible, we see the incredible, explosive power of God. But that's not the focus. Instead, the Bible – and God – seem to revel in the goodness and beauty of creation. The Creation account shows us God as an artist, calling beauty out of chaos, creating incomparable art, then turning it over to us, the apex of His creation. I want to be a good steward of His creation, and I want my art to reflect Him.

Socially, I have had quite an adjustment. My parents were at my side through my entire recovery and I really leaned on them heavily. Even when I went back to school, I knew they were close by, but the Lord gently pushed me away from the nest, then pushed the nest away from me.

The first semester my Dad began working mostly out of town, then the second semester my Mom began spending a lot of time away from me and with him. Through this process I have not only had to become more independent, but I have also really seen just how blessed I am to have the family I have. Even though my parents are away now, my brother is still nearby to help me out however possible. I have also begun to develop new friendships that are very meaningful and encouraging.

I also am learning to adapt physically to my new body. I have gotten better at balance but it is definitely not as good as it used to be. I used to go to COSI in Toledo and stand on that Balance See-Saw thing for ten seconds. Now, if I had to do it, I probably wouldn't last even a second! I have gotten to where I don't topple over when I put my shoes on standing up, so that's progress!

My back pain is mostly gone. Although I'm not sure how to measure pain, because my tolerance level is different – higher – than it used to be. I still have a lot of discomfort in my hips and pelvis from time to time. I lived on the third floor and I walked up and down the stairs three or four times a day. Plus I walked all over campus, so I definitely have gotten stronger this past year. Still not where I wanna be, but thankful I ain't where I was!

So ends another semester with quite a lot of personal growth. And throughout all of the challenges and successes of this semester, God has and will remain faithful. He continually gives us far better than we deserve. I'm excited about new opportunities and privileges (many of which I'm just beginning), including a great intern opportunity which I will tell you about later!

For the end, I'll leave you with a quote by Francis Schaeffer from his book, "Art and the Bible":

"A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in itself."

Just as I want my art to glorify God, I also want His workmanship in me to be a doxology.

Lauren

P.S. I got three A's (even in Humanities III and Stained Glass!) and a B (in Graphic Design II).

P.P.S. Please pray for my friends Rob and Lindsey Sylcox. Rob now is in the CaringBridge family. He's such an encouragement about how to be faithful and remain through trials. :-)

Day 730: Accident Report

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2013

In those early days after the Accident, when I had passed the critical point and the issue was not whether I'd live but what kind of life I'd have, my family and I were told that the two-year anniversary was a landmark plateau—a point where, theoretically, as someone who's suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) of some severity, I'd not make any more meaningful functional improvement. Of course, there are

some who do not subscribe to this view. (My parents and I talked to one man who said, "Don't buy that. It's been 5 years for me, and I'm still improving.") Generally speaking, however, it seems the two-year mark is a good indicator of what "normal" will look like.

Today is the two-year anniversary of the Accident. As I attempt to assess how "normal" for me is different now than it used to be, I can tell that intellectually I will never be as sharp or quick as I once was. I struggle often putting thoughts and concepts together, and even when I succeed – for example, although I don't think I've lost any of my vocabulary – it still takes me longer than it used to to access it. Often I'll go through more bad ideas and wrong answers before I reach the correct or the best one.

Cognitively, my memory is the biggest issue. To use a golf analogy, it's probably at a double-bogey. It's not so horrendous that it totally ruins the game or I have to keep asking for mulligans, but it's definitely not up to par.

In so many ways, though, although it's not what it used to be, I've found ways to compensate. You may remember depth perception has been an issue for me, at first when I was learning to walk again, then when I began doing things like pouring water or juice into a glass and judging where to pour, and most significantly when I began learning to drive again. It's still an issue with intricate tasks (trying to thread a needle) or certain sports (trying to judge distance and speed of moving objects—but that's always been an issue). But the brain is amazing, and by proceeding slowly and cautiously, I've been able to become pretty "normal" even though I've had to adjust. (The closest thing I could suggest that might give you a sense of what it's like is to do your regularly daily activities with one eye closed.)

Pertaining to my speech, I can enunciate about as well as I could prior to the Accident, but I still occasionally get words and sentences jumbled up and sometimes struggle to express my thoughts correctly. It's annoying – and humbling – for me, but I think most people get what I'm trying to say eventually. The reasoning aspect of cognitive processing is different now in that I definitely think things through more thoroughly post-Accident than I did pre-Accident. I never really was one to spontaneously fly by the seat of my pants, but I definitely ponder and consider a course of action longer now than I used to before taking action.

One interesting cognitive process that has changed for me is my sense of humor. I used to be pretty punny and enjoy wordplay, but it takes a lot more effort now and sometimes I miss things I used to catch. Wordplay is mental gymnastics because in order to get the meaning of puns, for example, you have to deconstruct the component syllables of a word or quickly catch a word's phonetic similarity (and semantic dissimilarity) to another almost-identical word (like the mobility health supply business called "Cane and Able").

One thing I've noticed that is returning (even within the last week) is sarcasm. Sarcasm requires two skills really: one is perceiving what someone is thinking, the other is then expressing a snarky barb via the ironic twist (for example, seeing that my Mom is depressed because she has planned to go to the beach but it's raining then asking her, "Isn't this a beautiful day we're having?"). I have to be careful with my sarcasm though because it can be hurtful if the person doesn't know you and your heart, or that you're still trying to get the skill back.

Physically, I can now perform all the activities I need to take care of myself. I never was very strong, so that fact that I'm not engaging in feats of strength is not surprising. Well, maybe it is a little. My hair is now almost the length it was two years ago, so I'm holding out hope that soon I'll experience the Samson Effect. I did used to be a pretty decent runner, but any races I might run are definitely in the future. If I ever do race again, I'm pretty certain I'll never be as "fast" as I once was. Going from "tortoise" to "sloth" though isn't much of decline, so I suppose I can deal with it! I think the big difference for my physically post-Accident is that my coordination is much poorer and I always feel a little off-balance. Truth be told, I'm a little frightened to try any group athletic activities for the fear of tripping over or hurting myself (or others). This is one reason I'm not to eager to try anything that involves moving quickly. One other physical difference in my new "normal" is that I need quite a bit more sleep and even need a nap most days to make it functionally through the day.

The social area is probably the area where I think I've seen the least progress. When I am around people and they ask me questions, it seems like much of the time most of my memory suddenly becomes off-limits and inaccessible to me. This is one reason I don't mind sitting behind a computer and writing about my life; I'm not under any pressure—real or perceived—to remember anything on the spot. I can stop and start, I can come back and fill in the blanks, I can correct, I can think more, I can make myself sound smarter than I really am :-),

etc. Although I sometimes get tongue-tied when I'm talking one-on-one, I am generally better in small groups than large groups, especially if I'm joining a conversation I wasn't part of in the first place. I seem to have forgotten how to approach people, especially when they're already involved in a conversation. Also, I still perceive that I am viewed differently by people who knew me before the Accident. Maybe that's more perception than reality because I know I'm self-conscious about it. I know I'm not doing myself any favors because I still bring it up quite a bit. God is helping renew my mind in this area so I don't feel compelled to give people a reason to feel like they have to pity me. As I was reading Future Grace by John Piper, I realized that this reaction on my part does not give God glory that He deserves. Piper writes, Ordinarily weaknesses and insults are an occasion for shame. But for Paul they are occasions for exaltation. Paul thinks that shame in his weakness and shame at his persecutions would be misplaced shame. Why? Because the power of Christ is perfected in Paul's weakness.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul writes, "*But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" My weaknesses certainly have not come from persecution, but I think the principle still applies. The Accident has provided many opportunities to boast in my weakness and, consequently, the power of Christ—both for me and for others. Pretending it never happened takes away the glory that Christ should receive for my recovery which, by all accounts, is nothing short of remarkable. When I think about it, what a joy it is to know that "[God's] power is made perfect in weakness." God is using even the ugliness of this Accident for His glory!

These awkward moments when I'm less than stellar are also reminders to "take every thought captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is all too natural to surrender to self-pity and be tempted to think "well I didn't have a problem with that before the Accident."

But I also didn't have the same opportunities to boast in Christ. Boldness has always been a struggle for me, but before the Accident I didn't have the same ready-made reason to talk about Christ. For a person who's an introvert and not super outspoken, this is a blessing I never expected! Day by day I am realizing how the Accident is a blessing. Over and over the Bible talks about how trials and suffering are blessings and they wean us away from the comforts of this world. I now have first-hand experience with this. Piper writes that

God uses our suffering to wean us from self-reliance and cast us on himself alone... This is God's universal purpose for all Christian suffering: more contentment in God and less satisfaction in self and the world... Suffering clearly is designed by God not only as a way to wean Christians off of self and onto grace, but also as a way to spotlight that grace and make it shine. That is precisely what faith does; it magnifies Christ's future grace.

In a conversation I had with my Dad this week, I was telling him that I feel like the Accident has caused me to grow more mature and less mature at the same time. I feel like I've gained more maturity because I have more hard-knock life experience. (As one person mentioned, it's like God pressed fast-forward on the maturity button in that regard). I see much more clearly than ever before the brevity of life, the seductiveness of sin, the end of the wicked, the temporal rewards of hard work and diligence, the blessing of good parents and godly leaders and a loving and supportive church family. I also am learning to live by faith and trust God's promises, even those that are future, and I really can sing, "Come, my Lord, no longer tarry, / Bring Thy promises to pass." I really do look forward to Christ's return, and the deepness of my thought-life as I contemplate the beauty of Christ and the wonders of God (past, present and future) has really grown. But I feel as if I'm less mature because I don't handle stress or adversity or people as well. And yet, even in being more aware of my shortcomings, find myself agreeing with Jeremiah Burroughs in The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment, "You do not find one godly [person] who came out of an affliction worse than he went into it, though for a while he was shaken, yet at last he was better for the affliction." The Accident is something I never would have chosen. And yet I have to say that in appraising the new "normal," there is no way I would not give up the life-experience and the lessons I've learned (and continue to learn) throughout this affliction in exchange for the old "normal." I remember the "old" Lauren. I don't care for her quite as much :-)

As I look over these past two years, I am amazed at the perfect, sovereign wisdom of God. He knew the lesser loves I was pursuing instead of Him. And He knew exactly the trial and affliction that would topple my idols, break my hard heart and send me running to find my strength and satisfaction in the One who gave His all for me.

You have ordained every breath we take
In pleasure or pain there is no mistake
Gladness and grief, both are in your hand

Sufferings brief carry out your plan
And our fleeting sorrows will yield an endless prize
When some bright tomorrow we'll see you with our eyes, and
Grace upon grace flows down, flows down
Grace upon grace flows down, flows down
Through the precious blood of Christ

Love, The "new" Lauren

Dad's Surgery

Lauren Graham Waller, June 15, 2013

I do not need to tell you the Lord has been so very kind to our family. But that does not mean there has not been difficulty. Ever since my family moved to Florida in 2006, my Dad has had problems with diverticulitis. The first major attack was on New Year's Eve of 2006. Since then, he has been in the hospital with it at least four times. This year alone he was in the hospital twice within 90 days of each other, the latter time being the week before Easter, and they told him that surgery was not a matter of if, but when. When he was in the hospital this past Spring, his colon had a micro-perforation (bad) but they were able to keep it contained (good). So he spoke with the doctors at the hospital in Richmond, Indiana where he was when he got admitted. When Dr. French in Richmond found out my Dad was from Florida he said, "if you have the chance to have surgery in Florida, you need to go to Dr. Weiss at the Cleveland Clinic. He's the best." Well, we found out that this doctor was scarcely exaggerating. After we did our research we found out Dr. Weiss is actually one of the best in the world for the type of procedure Dad needed done. We also spoke to some people in our church who had gone to him and they said the same thing. One man had gone into septic shock twice from perforated diverticuli, which should have killed him, but Dr. Weiss is the surgeon who saved him.

So my parents went to visit Dr. Weiss and the Cleveland Clinic over Easter. They got an appointment to see him, but it was on the day they were to fly out of Florida. Even though they got in early, the consultation went long and they missed their flight. The good news was that Dr. Weiss agreed to take Dad as a patient and perform the operation. He told him for optimum results he needed to schedule it after all the infection and antibiotics had cleared his system from the prior hospitalization, but not schedule it so far out that there was too much risk of the infection coming back. The soonest date that met all

those requirements, and that Dr. Weiss had open on his surgery calendar, was June 11.

The Prep for the surgery actually started Thursday June 6 with cardio-pulmonary testing, blood testing and blood typing for a transfusion (in case one was necessary). They also banded my Dad so he was technically admitted although he wasn't confined to the hospital campus. Pre-op planning & prep was Friday June 7, and purging started 24 hours prior to the surgery on Monday. To hear him describe it, I think Dad almost preferred the surgery to the purging! (You can ask him for the details if you really care that much!) He was up until almost 4 AM answering the call. He and Mom left at 8 AM for the hospital where they checked in. Dad was rolled back at 11:30 to get ready for the operations which was scheduled at 1. Complications with the doctor's patient prior to Dad kept him waiting so he didn't get into surgery until 4:15. We were hoping that was not a harbinger of things to come and that the doctor was having an off day!

Before the surgery, many people from our church (including three of our pastors) were able to stop by, say hello and encourage our family. Before Dad went into surgery, Doc Zemek (a theological doctor, not a medical one) prayed for Dad and read Psalm 103 to us. Verses 13-14 were such an encouragement. They say, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." The Lord is perfect; utterly, totally perfect. But He so loved the world that He became like us in His incarnation and entered this world in the limitations of human skin. He is not unacquainted with our weaknesses. He knows how nervous we get in stressful situations and how feeble our faith is. But our weak faith is in a strong and sovereign God who felt toward His Son in His struggles just as I know my Dad felt toward me during mine. From my perspective (not as the patient this time around, but observing the patient) it was so encouraging to see my Dad lock into those promises and take them with him into the operating room. It was also awesome to see the body of Christ come around him - and us - to remind us of God's strength and His compassion, and to help bear and share our burdens.

At 4:15, Dad finally went under the knife. After being in surgery for 2.5 hours (which was on the low end of the estimated time), the doctor came out to inform Mom and I that "the surgery was pretty straightforward." Dad says that his last conscious memory was at about 4:15 pm seeing the bright lights and all the people in the

operating room. He said his first conscious memory was of seeing a clock on the wall in the post-op recovery room saying 8:40, then thinking he was too groggy to be awake and falling back asleep. They let Mom go back to see him at 9:30 then Brad and Ashley soon after. When he saw that he survived the surgery and that it had been successful, even after a long delay, Dad said, "I see the Lord doesn't put an expiration time on Dr. Zemek's prayers!"

Dad is still in the hospital. Brad, Ash and I went to see him last night and he said some days are better and some days are more painful. But as far as recovery goes, he's definitely improving. The surgery resulted in 5 incisions on his tummy—four smaller cuts (each about 1") and one larger (about 5") that is like a C-section. Which is impressive, I guess, but I still have more scars! He had to have his entire sigmoid colon removed (which Mom somehow refers to as the Sigmund Freud colon; Dad says that there are probably parallels that can be drawn out there but he's not sure if they can be talked about in public). The only real complication was that part of the colon had fused to the abdominal wall and they had to get it "unstuck." They left some of the diverticularized portion in but removed all of the colon where the wall had thickened/hardened due to simmering affect of acute diverticulitis over time.

The first 24 hours were pretty brutal. Dad had his own personal morphine pain pump which he was pressing every 10 minutes. It was also extremely painful for him to move. He said the only way he could explain it was as if he had given birth to a bowling ball. He is starting to move a little better but he's still in obvious pain. He's also dealing with the side effects of anesthesia and pain meds. The Dr. said he will be in hospital until all bowel function returns. His bladder and bowels all completely shut down due to the trauma of the surgery and the anesthesia and we were told it usually takes 4-7 days to return. After 4 days he has some bladder function, but nothing yet in his bowels. If all goes well he will be released by Sunday for bed-rest and recovery for a month or so.

We'll keep you updated as the situation progresses, especially if there are any significant developments. In the meantime, just as you prayed for me, if my Dad comes to mind please pray for him. Also keep my Mom in your thoughts. She has been there by his side staying at the hospital the entire time. Dad said she is a God-send and she's his favorite "nurse." She said she's just fulfilling her calling; she has a gift for taking care of the elderly. ;-)

Happy Father's Day, Dad. I love you and I'm glad you're mending. :-)

Release

Lauren Graham Waller, June 16, 2013

After a long day of waiting to make sure the concerns of the doctors were adequately resolved, Dad has been released from the hospital! Thank you to so many of you that have expressed your care, your concern, and your prayers. We are deeply humbled and greatly encouraged and blown away by the intimately sovereign care of our Lord.

Thank you to so many for asking how Dad is doing and if he had been released from the hospital. We can't express how much of an encouragement it is just to respond to questions knowing they are prompted by hearts that care. So thank you for the visits, phone calls, texts, questions, and prayers. Our family is deeply indebted to the body of believers that we call "family."

Know of our love and appreciation!

Lauren

Day 881: About Next Weekend

Lauren Graham Waller, November 2, 2013

I have some happy news to share. Many of you are my friends and you already know this anyway, but happy news is always worth re-telling, isn't it?

One week from today is a big day for our family. I am finally getting a sister. And my brother is getting a wife. I'm not sure who's happier: Brad or me. (Or Ashley!)

My earliest memories of Brad were not good! He was almost four when I was born. He used his "big brother" status to his advantage and lorded it over me. I remember us playing sports together on his closet basketball hoop. He would volunteer to teach me basketball and posterize me by throwing down thunder dunks (as much as a 60-pound 9-year-old can thunder dunk a nerf ball on a 6-foot rim.) I would start crying and run to Mom while lamenting the gross injustice. He would follow behind promising to let me win. I'd get sucked in and go back and score 20 points to his 4, then he'd come back and beat me 21-20. Off

we'd go to Mom again, me crying, him promising to be kinder to me. It was hard, he'd protest, to keep such prodigious talent bottled up.

Since I didn't have a chance of dominance against such an obvious physical specimen as Brad, we'd take our talents to video games. Sometimes he'd let me select the game (I preferred Fusion Frenzy or the Magic School Bus on Nintendo) but I would occasionally win. So he quickly learned to bargain. "If I play one game of Fusion Frenzy with you, will you play Halo three times with me?" It wouldn't take long before our joint efforts to eliminate the enemy (the Covenant) would take a turn and we'd end up shooting each other, or planting grenades on one another. Most of the time, as you can guess, I ended up dead. (To be fair to Brad, a lot of those times I accidentally eliminated myself. I'd try to blow him up with a rocket launcher and it would kill me instead.) You can probably guess why Brad loved to play Halo with me. The games often ended the same: The tears would start, off we'd go to Mom, and he'd bat his big eyes and pledge to let me win again. I can remember thinking: I can't wait until my mean big brother grows up and moves out of the house!

Despite his despotic ways, I always admired him. I wanted the same things he wanted, and I wanted to do the same things he did. I even wanted to have the same teachers he had, even from the very beginning. (Deep down I think I always wanted to beat him at something, so I tried taking all the same classes so I could get better grades than he did. Because he was a little braniac that was an almost impossible task but it didn't stop me from trying. I did have some success too!)

When Brad turned 16 he got his driver's license and wanted to drive to school. (We lived about 25 minutes away.) One of the stipulations my parents gave him was if he drove, he had to take me with him. We started bargaining about what music he'd play on the radio: I'd get one Jump 5 or Three Doors Down for three screamo selections that he'd choose. By this time I wasn't running to Mom. We actually started talking and negotiating and we became very close. I knew our relationship was changing when it was time for him to go to college and I realized I would actually miss him.

When Brad moved out and went off to the University of Michigan, the whole family dynamic really changed. There were no baseball games during the week or tournaments on the weekends. And there was more focus on me and my school and extra-curricular activities. I began

driving by myself and didn't have him to talk to. (I did get to listen to my own music though!) When Brad would come home to visit our conversations were much more grown-up. He also came to watch me compete in track and cross-country and it was nice to see his face in the cheering section.

Between my Sophomore and Junior year, our family moved to Florida. (This whole period is fuzzy in my memory.) Brad stayed in Michigan and we didn't get to see him as often. I do remember having fun showing Brad around West Palm Beach whenever he came down. We were encouraging him to move down upon graduation but he wasn't convinced right away even though he enjoyed it here. That winter he had an accident going down an icy hill in Ann Arbor and he couldn't stop the car going through an intersection. He didn't admit it, but I think he knew at that point he didn't want to go through any more Michigan winters if he didn't have to!

When Brad graduated from college he got a job in Florida and moved here. (This period is super fuzzy in my memory.) I do remember we enjoyed getting together and talking, not just as brother and sister but as adults with a shared history and common interests.

By this point our relationship was such that when I returned from the three-week trip to India, I was really looking forward to seeing him and sharing the whole experience with him. During the car ride from church to our home in Hobe Sound on June 5, 2011, I got to share 15 minutes worth with him. As it turns out, I had to wait a while to finish telling him the story.

While I was in the hospital, I had no idea of who was coming in and out of the room to see me and support my family. Unbeknownst to me, there was a girl from our church who stopped in many times just to show her care and concern. We only knew each other by name and face but she came anyway, day after day. Our family took notice. Apparently, as it turns out, so did Brad.

I don't really want to get into Brad and Ashley's story because I know I'll miss important details – and I know he'll want to tell it. (I am going to try to get him to write it down!) You can get the highlights of the proposal story here.

Which brings us to next weekend.

I'm gaining a sister. I couldn't be more thrilled that my brother is marrying an amazing girl. God has providentially arranged for our paths to cross and she is now going to be apart of the Graham family. She is such a sweet girl who loves Jesus Christ, loves people, and loves my brother Brad. Plus, she has asked me to stand up with her as a bridesmaid! I have a hard time imagining how I could be more pleased!

So to Brad and Ashley: Best wishes to the both of you! I love you both :-) And to all of my friends: If you're in Jupiter, Florida on day 888 (Saturday, November 9) at 3:00p.m., you're invited to a wedding!

Love, Lauren

P.S. Dear Ashley: If you ever find yourself playing basketball or some other game with Brad, don't believe him when he says he'll let you win!

Day 933: God Rest Ye Merry

Lauren Graham Waller, December 24, 2013

Have you ever noticed how peculiar some of the lyrics are to our favorite Christmas carols? A lot of the tunes and words are so familiar we don't even realize how oddly some of these phrases fall on our modern ears. For example, what do these expressions actually mean:

- What the gladsome tidings be?
- With the poor and mean and lowly?
- To gain his everlasting hall?
- Hither, page, and stand by me if thou know it telling?

One of the strangest Christmas carols begin this way: "God rest ye merry gentlemen." Catchy tune and all. But seriously? Did there used to be a problem with too many male carolers out late on Christmas Eve a-wassailing through the city streets? And was the only solution having the local composer craft a Christmas carol urging them (and God) to get their overly merry selves to bed at a decent hour?

Dan Kreider, our worship pastor, recently led our congregation in singing this carol and his explanation was helpful. One thing he said

was the placement of the comma was key. It is, "God rest ye merry, gentlemen" and not "God rest ye, merry gentlemen." So the emphasis is on merriness and not on rest. And the word "rest" did not mean what one does at sleepytime. It meant to preserve or keep, like we use it in the phrase "rest assured" or "rest easy." So the song is actually a prayer for God to preserve or keep joy in our hearts at Christmas time. And the truth that is to anchor our hearts and secure our joy is this:

God rest ye merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay:
Remember Christ our Savior,
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we had gone astray.

These, the chorus says, are tidings of comfort and joy, and they do indeed help keep our heart merry whenever they are brought to mind!

The Lord really blessed me with a lot of time to read these past few weeks. This usually doesn't happen because I am busy with school, but with not much to do during exam week I was able to resort to one of my favorite pastimes. Back in July some friends invited me to celebrate Christmas. In July. (These are the kinds of friends I have! And if you're fortunate you'll have friends like them too.) Our celebration involved a white elephant gift exchange. Half the fun is that you don't know whether you'll get something really nice, really funny, or so ridiculous that you're not sure what to do with it. The other half of the fun is seeing the gifts others get and how they respond as well.

At the Christmas in July gift exchange my friend opened a gift and there was the book The Man Christ Jesus by Dr. Bruce Ware from Southern Seminary in Louisville. He spoke at our church's missions conference this year and I thoroughly enjoyed his teaching, so I promptly stole that book. (In the variation of the game we play, "stealing" is not only acceptable, it's integral to the game itself.) I figured I would just as swiftly get the book stolen from me, but I never did. (I was quite curious why someone would wander so far from the faith that they would even consider getting rid of such a treasure but I found out later they had multiple copies, so... conscience appeased, Judas returns.)

I'm not going to give you a book report but there can hardly be a better book to read at Christmas time than this one. I think we are so used to

focusing more on the deity of Christ and his "supermanly" qualities that we forget he was 100% human– fully man, and in no way did he cheat in his human experience by appealing to his divine prerogatives when things got tough. If anything, just the opposite was true. Temptation was, for example, much worse for him because he never experienced the temporary release of yielding to temptation. This little book is so packed with the depth and splendor of the brilliance of God that you have to stop—and marvel—and wonder at the majesty and holiness of our God in the act of his becoming fully man.

From the wonder of focusing on the character of God in Christ I did a 180 and got a good dose of the character of my own depraved self in Idols of the Heart by Elyse Fitzpatrick. This book is a call to self-examination through the lens of the Word of God. Fitzpatrick reminds us that "If God is the top priority in our lives, everything else will fall into place" (23). This is an important truth to remember. I think part of this truth is having the right theology, or knowing the right information, about God and about ourselves. If we understand that God is trustworthy, and He always works for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28), then we will understand that all of our anxiety is for naught. It ultimately shows a lack of trust in God, and alack of faith in God.

Through reading good books and also through the circumstances of life, God has continually been showing me how completely and utterly dependent I am upon Him. Effects of the Accident still show up in some way every day. As far as physical pain, my hip still bothers me occasionally. Aside from that, the main issue is probably my memory. My memory isn't really that bad, but it just frustrates me not being able to remember things that used to be no problem. Ironically, if someone is very specific in what they want me to remember, and they specifically ask me about that, I can usually remember without a problem. I have gotten quite good at being able to find creative ways to remember data and facts (which is helpful in studying for tests), but if you ask me about a conversation that we had the day before yesterday, it's often hit or miss. I may or may not remember we even had the conversation, and the chances that I remember the details or a specific part of that specific conversation are rather spotty.

But here I am, alive and well, celebrating another Christmas and glad to be able to recall the many evidences of the Lord's grace and kindness to me! That I, a sinner deserving of eternal death (Rom 6:23) have been made alive in Christ (1 Cor 15:22) and saved by His grace (Eph 2:5-8) – that is good tidings of great joy! And if this great, good

news is also true of you, then may God indeed rest ye merry, ladies and gentlemen!

Merry Christmas!

Lauren

Day 1095: Lessons Learned

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2014

Today is June 5. It's been three years since the Accident. It hardly seem like that much time has passed but I guess the calendar doesn't lie – and neither does the alarm clock that doesn't go off at 6:05 AM each morning. It just so happens that this Anniversary corresponds with the opening of a whole new chapter of life for me. As many of you already know, I am now a Palm Beach Atlantic University alumnus! I graduated two weeks ago with a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design.

During my time at Palm Beach Atlantic University, I learned many things. I learned the usual useful lessons one is taught as a university student—creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, writing and communication, social networking, and especially certain skills I will need to succeed in my chosen profession. But while those things are important, I also learned other valuable life lessons these past three years. Even during the 12 months I had to miss college, God still had me in His school, teaching me and training me in things I would not have learned in the same way, even at a good school like PBA.

As I enter this new chapter, here are just a few of the lessons I will be taking with me.

1. Nothing of any value comes without hard work. This is a lesson I had always been taught by my parents. My Dad was from the mid-south and my Mom from the mid- west and they both came from hard-working, middle class families.The message was communicated more by their example than their words but it was still embedded in my psyche from an early age: hard work is a way of life – at least it was for them. To be honest, I always thought I was a pretty hard worker, but looking back I realize a lot of things came pretty easily for me and I had rarely ever pushed myself to my limits. I was also the beneficiary of the fruit of the hard work of others and very little of my own.

It wasn't until after the Accident that I understood life doesn't start at 9 AM and stop at 5 PM. Lunch doesn't automatically appear at noon and tea isn't served at 10 and 2. Every day has 24 hours and some things are only going to come to pass if you work a lot more than you sleep. I really started to learn this with my physical recovery, having to set schedules and discipline myself and press through what I thought were my physical and emotional limits. It extended into the learning process, having to battle frustration, vexation, exasperation and a trail of tears just to make an inch of headway. I have received a lot of kind comments about the miracle of my recovery – and in so many ways it has been, a blessing for which I give thanks daily! But it's also been the hardest, most grueling work I've ever done in my life. That's not intended to credit myself because 1 Corinthians 4:6 reminds me, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" God graciously placed much of the miracle within my reach, but He didn't just hand it all to me. I had to work very hard, and it's work that produced results of lasting value.

2. There's hardly a greater gift from God than a church family. I am blessed to have a close family. They are a blessing in ways I neither dreamed possible nor could I have ever seen prior to the events over the past three years. Yet when I committed my life to Christ I became the beneficiary of a greater, richer family. During the Accident and aftermath I've been privileged to get a glimpse of how the church works in a way few people ever realize. In addition to the kindness of my family of faith across the country and around the world, I am blessed to attend a local church that takes the "one another" commandments very seriously. One of the metaphors Scripture uses to describe the relationship of Christ's followers to Him and to one another is that of a body. "Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ...we are members of [Christ's] body" (Ephesians 5:23,30). As I see others go through terrible trials, I wonder how they do it apart from Christ and His body. Scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that as part of a body, "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (12:26). All along the way my Christian brothers and sisters, and especially my local GIBC church family, suffered with me – and during my recovery they rejoiced with me. When our family had burdens we could not bear on our own, they comforted us, encouraged us, showed kindness to us, counseled us, prayed with us, sang with us, and fervently loved us from their hearts. I will never again view the church the same. And because of the love of His body toward me and my family, I will never again view Christ the same.

3. Mom is there after everybody else leaves. As much as our church stepped in to help, there were limits to what they could effectively do and how long they could do it. But God had someone incredible lined up to step right in and fill the gap. I am sorry to say I always took my Mom for granted. She was a SAHM – a Stay-At-Home-Mom – during my entire childhood. I always thought it was a pretty comfy gig until I started to understand what all she did. She was an early riser, breakfast fixer, lunch packer, clothes launderer, dish washer, child waker, cookie maker, bread baker, supper maker, birthday caker, leaf raker, picture taker, housekeeper, coffee brewer, grocery buyer, sports supporter, card sender, letter writer, boo-boo kisser, tear wiper, motivational speaker, advice giver, faith builder, mess cleaner, floor scrubber, toilet plunger, spider killer, car driver, appointment setter, schedule keeper, doctor visiter, family lover... the list goes on. She was the one who freed up Dad and the rest of us to do what we needed to do to succeed at school and a career. It wasn't until my brother and I went off to college that she picked up her career again and started working. When the Accident happened, I see now that she just couldn't help herself. After all, she was a Mom. So she instantly shut down her business, cancelled all work for everybody else and made me and my recovery her full-time job. There is no living person who knows me better than she does or who loves me more. I don't always understand immediately why she says or does some of the things she does, but I've learned a hundred times over that it not only comes from the deepest part of her heart, but she knows and understands my strengths and deficits and feels my joys and sorrows at a more profound level than even I do. One of the lessons God has taught me these last three years is how my Mom didn't just invest in my life. She literally poured her life into me. The wise man says there are some virtuous women whose children will rise up and bless them (Proverbs 31:28). My Mom is at the very top of that list.

That is just three! There are so many other lessons I've learned:

4. Life is short.

5. Life isn't fair.

6. Friends are precious and rare.

7. Patience is a virtue.

8. Courage is not the absence of fear.

9. Take care of your body.

10. There is a God and I'm not Him.

11. He is in control and He doesn't make mistakes.

The more grateful we are the more we find to be grateful for. 13. The only good way to accept a compliment is to say "thank you"

I could probably write a book (but only if my Dad co-authors it with me!). But far and away the most important lesson I learned is how absolutely necessary it is to rely on Christ. It is easy for me to forget that God is the One who makes it possible for me to do anything. So often I had lived my life with little conscious thought to how essential it is to rely on Christ. Being in the Accident was a merciful gift tome because it gave me just a glimpse of how desperately I need Him for anything and everything. The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal. 2:20). Apart from Him I can do nothing (John 15:5).

I was privileged to be invited to speak for PBA's Senior Chapel and I got to talk about what it meant practically for me to rely on Christ during these past five years, and especially the last three. I won't give you the outline since you can see the video of the 12-minute talk here: PBA Senior Chapel | 04.25.2014. (Two of us spoke and my part starts at the 8-minute mark.) Hopefully you will understand why I lean so heavily on Him and why the words of this song never grow old:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

Graduation day was a blur. For something that I'd worked so long and so hard it seemed to come and pass so fast. I have to confess I won't miss school, but I'm not totally sure I'm ready to leave. There's so much I still don't know, so many lessons still unlearned, so many experiences and people I'm leaving behind that I don't know how or who will replace them. I will never forget the smiles, the laughs, hugging and being hugged. I will always picture the long row of people who came

especially to support me and share the joy in what that day represented. And I will always remember when I stepped up to accept my diploma, President Fleming stopping the ceremony to tell me personally what I mean to him and to the university, reminding me how he wore his "Lauren Is My Sister" bracelet for a year and a half and praying for me every day, and letting me know what a blessing it was to him and his wife the day the Lord let me walk up on another stage and cut it off his wrist. (He had the bracelet in his pocket at the graduation and tried to give it back but I couldn't accept it.) That day went so fast but it was indeed a celebration.

Speaking of which, you are invited to a graduation gathering to commemorate this milestone. It will be a low-key affair this coming Saturday, June 7, no bells or whistles or dancing bears, just an opportunity for me to say thank you personally to everyone who comes and let you know how incredibly grateful I am for your love, prayers and encouragement. It will be at Carlin Park in Jupiter, FL at one of the beachside pavilions at the south end ofthe park (look for the white tent!). We will serve a beach breakfast from 9 to noon: crepes, sweetbreads, fruit, breakfast beverages. If you can, please stop and say hello! (If you're on Facebook, RSVP here.)

As for my future, I have plans but I'm also trusting the Lord. "Many are the plans in a man's heart but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21). I've been blessed to be able to do some freelance graphic design work while I'm engaged in the perennial graduate's pursuit: looking for a full-time job. (If you know anybody who's looking for a good designer, please have them get in touch with me!) I do wake up some mornings and feel a little like I'm stepping over a threshold into the unknown, from a predictable schedule to something unfamiliar and still undiscovered. And yet, although the road ahead of me is a little hazy and still untraveled, it's not totally unfamiliar. There's the same unseen hand painstakingly working out God's good purposes in the everyday details of this ordinary person's very average life.

As I turn the page on this new chapter, I'll take with me a shiny new diploma from PBA and a handful of lessons I've learned in the process of earning it: The journey will require determination, perseverance and hard work – and it may involve a bump or crash along the way. I can always count on the love and support of my family, my friends and my church. There's a certain young man who seems pretty smitten with me. And even if he and they and everybody else gets tired and goes home, I can always call my Mom.

I love you all.

Lauren

Comments

Congratulations, Lauren!! I can't believe it's been three years since the accident. You are such a strong young lady and I know the Lord has guided you along the way and your Mother has certainly played a large part in your recovery! I know there are so many people, family, friends and strangers who love you and prayed for you along your journey and the Lord listened to their prayers. God Bless you and your family, I wish we lived closer so we could come celebrate with you on Saturday! Best of luck to you in the future!

—Paul, June 5, 2014

Oh, Lauren, I am so happy for you and Congratulations on your graduation. You have inspired me and blessed me through these three years since your accident. I loved your blog today. What an amazing journey you have taken...and what a beautiful girl you are. I feel like I know you (though we have never met). Your great- Uncle Frank (my uncle by marriage) would have been so concerned for you and proud of you now. He passed away right before your accident. It will be exciting to see what God has planned for you in the future. You are a testimony to HIS power at work through the miracle of your healing, the strength he provided to make the journey back through re-hab.... .and I know HIS power will continue to lead you on. God bless you.

—Marla Pennick, June 5, 2014

Congratulations Lauren,

You don't know me but you know my wife Deanna (Plemons) and I've had the pleasure of meeting with your dad on two separate occasions.

When we heard about the accident our hearts dropped at the news but we prayed and have prayed since for your journey.

You have a wonderful family and a new journey ahead, I am sure you'll do well.

Take care & God Bless Steven and Deanna De Booy

—Steven De Booy, June 5, 2014

As always, thank you for your transparency and for your desire to display Christ in your life.

—Virginia Morris, June 6, 2014

Day 1182: My First Real Job

Lauren Graham Waller, September 5, 2014

Graduation is a time of new beginnings. Along with the excitement of closing one chapter and turning the page on another, comes the apprehension of entering the "real world." Even though the struggles of college were real, the environment and challenges were somewhat artificial. I have to enter the real world with real responsibilities and find a real job – eight hours a day, five days a week, no summers off or three week breaks at Christmas.

I found myself looking for one of those soon after I graduated. As a graphic arts major, I obviously preferred a job in graphic design. But after applying for many and not hearing from anyone, I soon found myself applying to pretty much everything for which I might be qualified. This included "visual associate" in a retail store, a copy writer, a copy and print specialist, a design assistant at an interior design firm, an office coordinator, a part- time scheduler, a babysitter – even a "line cook" at restaurant.

I have to confess the lack of response, either positive or negative, was discouraging. The one thing that I was trying to encourage myself with was the truth that God is sovereign and He is working in all things for good. I knew that God would open the door to the place He wanted me at the time He wanted me to be there. My boyfriend, Shawn, suggested I keep a spreadsheet with all the jobs I applied to – the company, the position, when I applied, if/when I heard back and what kind of reply I got. I soon discovered this was a good idea as it created some sense of order out of the job-search chaos. I even did a few "practice" interviews – one with Don Mitchell, a retired executive with General Motors who is a good friend of Shawn's and mine from Naples, and another with the owner of a graphic design firm in Palm Beach county. I really felt prepared, but needed a company to give me a chance.

After several weeks, because I hadn't heard back from any of the companies to which I initially applied, I assumed those opportunities had passed. I figured that if I hadn't heard from them by now, I wouldn't. But I was wrong. I received a phone call from the third company to which I applied – a medical firm about 10 minutes from home. They had the need for a Junior Graphic Designer and wondered if I could interview on a moment's notice. Their Marketing Communications & Brand Manager was heading out of town in two days and it was either tomorrow or never. I was there the next day and thought the interview went fairly well, even though I blanked when she asked, "Describe yourself in one word." I finally just said, "blessed."

I debriefed my parents and remember my dad saying, "It sounds to me like if you don't get considered for the job, it's probably not because of how the interview went." I sent a follow-up thank you to the person who interviewed me and knew I wouldn't hear back for a while – if ever.

Meanwhile, the next week I started to see a small flurry of activity. I got a text from a college friend who told me the web design company she works for had an opening and she encouraged me to apply. I did and had an interview shortly thereafter. The retail company looking for a visual associate also wanted to interview me the same week. It was definitely encouraging to start hearing back from some companies. All the interviews went reasonably well.

A week after the interview at the medical company, I sent a follow-up because I thought my interviewer would have returned from out of town. Surprisingly she emailed me and said she would get back with me in a few days. I thought the fact that she hadn't given me a straight up "no" was a good sign but was reluctant to get my hopes up.

Several days later I heard back from her and she asked me to give her a call. She told me that the company would like to present me an offer. She told me at present, until the budget is approved, it is a temporary full-time position. I received the offer letter, which laid out the terms of employment, some of the eligibility requirements (i.e. drug test), and an anticipated start date – ironically the same date school started for returning students. So I guess I did get another summer off, didn't I?

"So this is real," I was thinking. "My first full-time job."And that's when the anxieties surrounding all the unknowns began setting in.There was definitely stress involved, and a lot of renewing the mind that was absolutely necessary. I had pretty well worked myself into a frenzy by

the first day, but adrenaline – and a conscious daily reliance on the Lord's strength – carried me through. As one of our pastors told Shawn and I recently "give the Lord an inch of humility and He'll take it twenty miles." Boy, does He.

I'm now at the end of week three, and as each week passes my stamina builds. This third week has definitely been better than the first; at the end of the first my body totally crashed from sheer exhaustion. I'm getting used to the hours, the work (and the workload), the company, and my coworkers. I thoroughly enjoy the assignments and my coworkers all seem to have embraced me. One of my colleagues told me the candidating process was long and exhaustive and they went through several interviews. So how did I make it through the gauntlet and get chosen? And how did I end up with a job that is such a perfect fit for where I am at in this time in my life? Is it not the kindness of the Lord? When talking about this job, I was mentioning to someone how the Lord knew exactly what I needed. Because, well, obviously. He always gives us what is best for us. But isn't it nice when we can see it too?

Thank you to all of you that have prayed and continue to pray for me. Your prayers do not go unheard or unanswered. I am now gainfully employed and am contributing to the economy! I'm a real adult now and have a real job to prove it! And there is no explanation for how well I'm doing apart from the lavish grace of God and His answers to prayer.

Lauren

Comments

I was editing and updating a 30 Days of Thanksgiving devotional that we will use this year at Freedom Church. It's first edition included a summary of your accident and recovery. I'll have to go back and edit again, with this update. Love and pray for you and your family, often. God continues to use your life and a renewed testimony of His faithfulness.

—James St. John, September 5, 2014

ConGLADulations! They are "blessed" to have "Christ in you" among them :)

—Auntie Em, September 5, 2014

Congratulations, Lauren. I knew you could do it! Another opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness in your life.

Keep in touch. :)

—Prof. Eichner, September 5, 2014

Lauren, I'm thrilled for you, and I'd have to say your company and coworkers got the best end of this deal in gaining you. I'm praying that you'll be a pulsing, shining heartbeat of His grace in that office, and that people will be drawn to Christ in you.

Blessed for sure--and also, such a blessing.

—nicki owens, September 5, 2014

So glad, and so excited to hear! Will continue to pray that God strengthens and uses you daily.

—John Sizemore, September 6, 2014

Fantastic!!! God is so good!!

—Gene Merillat, September 6, 2014

Our Lord is amazing and gracious, and makes this from His word so true... Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart Ps. 37:4. This is such a sweet example of continually allowing the Lord to be our all in all :). And essentially isn't that what he did with you removed everything to make Himself your all in all, then fulfilled one desire of your heart after another :)

How many stunning wonders have come from where you were until now. By Gods hand He...made you completely dependent on Him, touched countless people from everywhere to see the Sovereignty of God at work, drew me into a relationship with and loving you, worked in Brad and Ashley's lives, drew Shawn into your life, and now has provided such purpose to continue to bring Him glory in the lives of those around you as He continues to purpose greater progress in your recovery, we can only rejoice alongside you dear one, to the praise of His glory!

—Karen Stokesbury, September 6, 2014

Lauren, congratulations on your new job, and praise the Lord! I am leaving your update open on my computer so Ethan can read it when he gets home. He just started classes at Jackson College in their accelerated business program but is still unsure of what he wants to eventually do. He is also looking for a part to full-time job in the meantime, and it can get discouraging. Thank you for sharing an example of God's faithfulness.

Natalie is going to Ferris to pursue a career in pharmacy. Spencer graduated from Cornerstone last year, lives in Grand Rapids and works for State Farm Insurance. As I'm sure you know, Wade just got married and works in Ann Arbor. Quinten is in 6th grade at Sand Creek Schools.

Please say "hello" to your parents for us.

—Lisa Perry, September 6, 2014

Lauren, it was a joy to read about this new milestone in your life and another tribute to the Lord's grace and faithfulness. May God continue to give you strength, grace, and peace in all of your undertakings!

—Paul and Jacqueline Copan, September 6, 2014

I am very excited for you! I remember my first job and thought it would never happen but it did and I loved it! You are amazing.

—Beth Banks, September 7, 2014

How great is our God! My heart is warmed and encouraged after reading your update. He is never late...in His time. Keep trusting Him! I wish you the best in your new job.

—Nadine Snodgrass, September 12, 2014

Day 1208: The News

Lauren Graham Waller, September 25, 2014

The past year has been newsworthy. The negative headlines certainly seemed to dominate. ISIS, Ebola, Ukraine, Hamas, downed airliners and kidnapped Nigerian schoolgirls. But there's been plenty of positive things too. The real estate market is finally rebounding. Bill Gates donated $50 million to help fight Ebola. A math teacher won $1 million

on Wheel of Fortune. And closer to home Brad and Ashley got married, then pregnant. I graduated from college, then got a "big girl" job. The Detroit Lions even won a game – on Monday Night Football, no less.

I also met a boy.

It happened last August on a visit to Naples. Brad and Ashleywent to see some friends at a sister church of ours and, since I wasn't busy, they invited me to come along for the ride. Little did I know that the single gentleman I met that weekend would become a very good friend whom I'd soon be dating.

Despite the distance between us – about 160 miles – the relationship continued to grow. We began to find ourselves waiting and anticipating and looking forward to the times when we could see each other. We got to do that once or twice a month. We'd talk on the phone almost daily. We discussed life, love, our Lord. Before we knew it a year had passed.

I knew Shawn was planning to attend the annual Ekklesia Conference this year, which is hosted by our church the second weekend of September – two weeks ago. Because I fatigue so quickly during the day and virtually shut down every night after work, Shawn encouraged me to try and take half a day on Friday. That way I'd not be as exhausted that evening for the beginning of the conference. I spoke to my boss on Monday about taking a halfday on Friday and she said yes without even asking why.

And then I got a strange request. Shawn asked me if I would try and take another half day on Thursday too. His explanation was that because the conference days would be so full, he didn't know how much time we'd get to be alone together. Since he's the most scheduled guy I know, I was surprised he hadn't raised this earlier. He knew I'd already talked to my boss once requesting personal time and I didn't want to go back and ask for another half day the following day – bad form for a new employee. But between my mom and Shawn, both of whom were rather insistent, I finally agreed to ask her. She kindly said, "Yeah...I think that would be okay." She bid me a good weekend and, breathing a sigh of relief, I left the office at noon. I knew Shawn had left Naples earlier in the morning and would be awaiting me at the house.

And there he was!

As I walked inside the front door I was confronted with a wonderful aroma. Before I even got the chance to inquire, my mom made a comment about the scent of a candle she was burning. I went over to smell the candle and, while it wasn't what I thought I smelled when I first came in, it was close enough that I didn't think anything more about it when the conversation was shifted to another topic.

My dad was working out of his home office that day and I was soon animatedly telling him about my work day. Shawn dispatched himself to the kitchen to make some sandwiches for lunch (he makes a mean sandwich). While we were eating he mentioned that we could potentially go on a date and have dinner out that night, and perhaps I should go rest first. I was all in favor. Rest, dinner and a date with my man? Plans rarely come any finer than that!

I didn't sleep long, but after I got up Shawn mentioned that he had purchased some sky lanterns for us to launch. During a surprise visit to a Japanese lantern festival last October we were told that notes launched on a lantern could deliver a message to our ancestors. While we didn't harbor much hope for the successful delivery of such notes, we thought it might be a fun, if not unique, experience. Instead of post-mortem messages to dead grandparents, we took the opportunity instead to write a meaningful Scripture verse on the lantern. Since then, lanterns have been "our thing."

Shawn also suggested we go up to the board walk under the Roosevelt Bridge in Stuart to launch the lanterns – a stunning spot that I've photographed many times, especially at sunset. He told me to dress for indoors as well as out since he wanted to take me to my favorite restaurant for dinner: Carabba's. After we got changed and got in his truck to leave, it began sprinkling. I wondered if we had a soggy night ahead of us and how that might affect the lantern launch, but the sky looked a little more clear to the north and that's the direction we were heading. While we were driving, Shawn said that because the weather was looking more ominous, perhaps we should release the lanterns before dinner instead of after. As the sky got darker he said, "You know, I'm really not liking the look of those dark clouds up there." Thinking his fisherman eyes saw something that mine didn't, I didn't question it. At this point, we were nearing Hobe Sound, halfway between Jupiter and Stuart.

Several months ago I introduced him to a charming, little-known islet in Hobe Sound called Harbor Island, which you can only access off of

Jupiter Island. I love it so much I had my high school senior pictures taken there. In fact, the picture that hung in my hospital room at St. Mary's – and the profile picture on the CaringBridge site – is a picture of me taken on that island. So I quickly said yes when he asked me if we could go there instead of the bridge. He seemed a little lost as to its location so I helped guide him to the correct turning lane on the right road – Bridge Road.

If you know anything about my story, you know about Bridge Road. The intersection where we turned to head to the island is the exact place where the Accident happened. We reflected on the significance of that spot for amoment, as we often do. As we continued down Bridge Road I pointed to another place. "This is where Brad proposed to Ashley." We turned at Hobe Sound beach to head south on Jupiter Island, then turned into the parking lot. As we started walking toward the bridge to Harbor Island, Shawn, being his typical self, was pointing out all the critters along the way and the unique aspects of God's creativity in each.

As we got near the red bridge to the little garden island, the conversation took a more serious turn. Shawn began talking about our original lantern experience and the message we wrote on our first lantern, a Bible verse – "our verse." He asked me, "Lauren, do you remember our verse?" I said yes. "Can you tell it to me?" I quoted Psalm 34:3, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" He responded, "I'd like to make that a more permanent thing."

(!)

"Lauren, we both have faults and foibles and flaws. But with the Lord's help, we can overcome those, serve one another and serve Him together. We will both be tempted to make one another our portion, but we cannot do that. The Lord is our portion." He says a few other things that were meaningful to me and then began to say "I've grown a bit since the first time I asked you this, but..." then repeating the line from the movie Elf that he used to ask me out on our first date, he said, "'Will you go eat food with me – forever?'" Then as he got down on one knee, he asked, "Will you marry me?"

I don't even know what I was thinking at this moment, but I do remember responding, "I'd love to!" Apparently, that wasn't precisely the answer he wanted to hear, so after saying something else he asked more pointedly, "Will you marry me?" I responded, "Of course! Yes!" I

found out later he wasn't getting off his knee until he got an unqualified "yes."

We went to the end of the island and he asked me to write our verse on the lantern. By this time, it had started sprinkling a bit harder and he opened up a big, polka-dotted umbrella. By the time I got finished writing on the lantern, he thought it might actually be too wet and heavy to rise up high enough to not set the whole island on fire. Since my (now) fiancé(!) prepares for every conceivable contingency, he had brought along a second lantern in case just in case something happened to the first. (We also noticed that there was a small rip we had caused in the first lantern) We also moved locations because, his thoughts were, "I just got a 'yes,' I don't want to go to jail for setting the island on fire!" But precisely before the wind and rain become even more intense we get the lantern in the air. Moments later a the monsoon hit.

After the events on the island, we get back in his truck and head to Carabba's to celebrate and have some time alone to just talk. We agreed to not do any significant wedding planning over the weekend because of the conference. We also just wanted to enjoy our new status of being betrothed. Engaged. Affiancéd.

After dinner we went back to Jupiter and pulled up to the house where mom and dad were sitting on the porch. We sat down to join them and told them the whole story.

Soon Brad and Ashley come walking up to the porch. We all went inside and began telling them the story. Then another couple appeared. And another. And another. Soon the living room was full of people. We'd told the first few minutes of the story numerous times! Shawn had invited some of the people who had meant the most to us in our growing relationship to come celebrate with us. The celebration was complete with coffee and the home-made, three-layer German chocolate cake that mom had finished baking and frosting prior to my arrival home from work, and which she had attempted to covertly cover with a candle.

The evening was perfect.

But that's not how it was shaping up back at the house. While we were at the island, mom was watching the weather on WPBF.com like a hawk. We were on the edge of a tropical disturbance, and mom and

dad watched the animated radar online as the Lord sovereignly redirected the rain around Harbor Island until the moment we began to leave. (Seriously. She has the screen shots.) The cloud burst erupted as we were leaving.

Shawn had the ring exquisitely designed especially to fit my personality. He chose the location to be one that was meaningful to us. He secretly called my boss ahead of time to let her in on the plan and guarantee I'd get a "yes" from her when I asked for an additional half day. He did his best to arrange the evening he thought I would appreciate and be most meaningful. And the Lord saw fit to sovereignly grace the occasion in a way that literally only He could (Job 28:25-26).

The story of my life is one of day by day, the Lord demonstrating His faithfulness, kindness, and unfailing love to me – allowing me to drink deeply from the river of His delights. Sometimes His mercies are severe. But other times they are oh so sweet. That shouldn't surprise me anymore. And yet, every day his mercies as new as the headlines in the Palm Beach Post.

Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep.
O Lord, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.

—Psalm 36:5-9

Please pray for Shawn and me as we begin preparing for this new season of life—that we would love others, serve one another and, above all, honor the Lord. It will be a busy, stressful time, but we know that His lovingkindness extends to the heavens, His faithfulness reaches the skies, and under His wings is our refuge.

Love, Lauren (but not for long!) Graham

Comments

Congratulations! May God continue to bless you as you continue your adventure with Him!

—Carri Cooper, September 25, 2014

wow, Lauren, John Sizemore shared this with me and I must say I have tears of joy in my eyes and heart. What a blessing, congrats to you and Shawn. Praise the Lord they together you praise Him first. You two are living proof that God still performs miracles. Your story also gives me hope that one day the Lord will bless me with rewriting my (His) story with a new last name. :) Blessings, health and abundance every day.

—Autumn Raab, September 25, 2014

Congratulations, Lauren! I am so happy for you and Shawn. He sounds like a really great guy! May God Bless!

—Paul Conlin, September 25, 2014

Wonderful. Your writing Lauren---really enjoyed. Love you and praying for you all. Donnie&Becky

—donald plemons, September 25, 2014

Sincere best wishes to you and Shawn! God's mercies are continually new.... Love,

Becky and Rick Hoffpauir

—Rebecca Hoffpauir, September 25, 2014

Thanking God for loading you with His benefits! Your life is such a testimony of His Grace and Mercy! Praying that your marriage will continue to honor Him. Thank you for sharing these blessings through your writings!

—Peggy Bruce, September 26, 2014

Day 1399: Here Comes the Bride

Lauren Graham Waller, April 4, 2015

After 1399 days of post-Accident life, 394 days of dating, and 212 days of engagement, the day for which I've prayed and planned is almost here.

Shawn Kirtland Waller and I will begin our lives together next Saturday, April 11, at one o'clock in the afternoon. Each of you – my family, my friends, classmates, partners in prayer, and well-wishers all – are sincerely invited to join us at Grace Immanuel Baptist Church in Jupiter, Florida.

For those of you who are unable to attend the ceremony, we will be live streaming the ceremony just for you. You can view it here – and we hope you will!

Marriage was instituted and ordained by God and when it is entered into rightly it is honorable in the sight of God and men (Hebrews 13:4). That's what Shawn and I have been preparing for – two different but complementary people coming together before God and a company of witnesses to join our lives together in covenant to reflect the glory of Christ. Please pray for us. And not just for our wedding – which lasts an hour and then lives only in memories and photographs. Please pray for our marriage – that both of us, imperfect as we are, will mirror Christ's relationship with His bride, the church, until the day we are separated by death.

For proposal and engagement photos, as well as other information, please view our wedding website.

We really hope you will join us, whether in-person or online

Lauren Graham <– soon-to-be-Waller

Comments

we are rejoicing with you and Shawn and both of your families in God's unmerited favor, mercy and loving kindness! so awesome to have been a part of this journey with you and to see His faithfulness and his character displayed throughout and then rejoicing in knowing the final destination will be in glory with his Son our Lord and Savior

—Nancy Kearney, April 6, 2015

Day 1429: Post-Wedding Thanks

Lauren Graham Waller, May 1, 2015

The wedding has come and gone and married life is wonderful. The wedding itself was marvelous and the honeymoon unforgettable; it truly was a week to remember. Everyone said the wedding day itself would be a blur, and parts of it are, but I actually remember several things about it. I especially remember how gorgeous the flowers and decorations were, how perfect and professional the music and musicians were, and how poignant and practical Todd's charge was.

Pastor, counselor and friend, Todd Murray, called Shawn and me (and every married couple in the congregation) to look to Christ as our example for our respective roles in marriage. He reminded Shawn of Christ's leadership of the church as shown in Ephesians 5, that Christ loved the church so much that He died for her, and that Shawn is to follow that example in being willing to do so for his bride (me). Todd reminded me that Christ is also my example in submission as described in Philippians 2. Just as Christ is co-equal with the Father, yet did not consider it beneath Him to submit to His Father's will to become like man to die for our sins and accomplish salvation, so am I called to submit myself to Shawn's leadership for the greater glory of the gospel.

The other thing that really etched itself into my mind about that day (aside from being wedded to the love of my life) was the church itself. Not the church building but the church body—the members that make up Grace Immanuel Bible Church. God's purpose for the church—pointing people toward the person and the gospel of Jesus Christ—was really on display April 11, 2015. It was incredible. From the decorating to the music, to the pastors up front and the servers behind the scenes, to the food and photographers (Michelle Kristine).

The comment I heard most was there was something different about this day—that it was not so much a traditional wedding (although it was) as much as it was a worship service. The "something" was the joy of Spirit-filled believers witnessing and joining us together in the exaltation of Christ.

And so, we would like to sincerely thank all who helped for your attendance, your encouraging words, your service and your prayers. All of your contributions, great and small, were honoring to the Lord and an unforgettable gift to us.

Although these simple words of thanks are so utterly insufficient, they are all I have. Please accept them with Shawn's and my love.

Mrs. Lauren Waller

Comments

what a sweet grace to read this post and reflect on God's loving kindness and faithfulness in your life and the blessings that come from submitting your will to his . Also to see lives lived out to His glory in the way that he ordained was good! rejoicing with both of you in Gods providential love and his faithfulness

—Nancy Kearney, May 1, 2015

So happy, pleased & blessed with what God has done in your lives. Congratulations to you both.

—Terry Plummer, June 8, 2015

Day 1633: Gratitude and Thanksgiving

Lauren Graham Waller, November 24, 2015

Gratitude abounds in my heart as I reflect on my life. As I specifically contemplate thanksgiving this week, there is so much for which I am thankful! Time, space, and attention span limit my ability to cover much length of time, but believe me, the possibilities are endless. So I'll start with the some of the most recent events in my life for which I am grateful.

I am thankful for the daily reminders the Lord gives us that He is continually at work. I am also grateful to the Lord for showing us small ways of how He is at work. One way that the Lord shows His kindness and grace is by allowing us glimpses of how He is working in other believers' lives. That grace is especially vivid when you have seen someone go through a trial, and then you see them in the difficult aftermath of that trial praising the Lord. To see a young, recently widowed friend of mine proclaim to the church through song, "I trust in your love everlasting; I cling to your unfailing grace. In seasons of sorrow and blessing, I give you my pain and my praise; your undying mercy awaits" is a heart-rending testimony of the fact that the Lord works in even the toughest of circumstances. It is also a memorable and much-needed reminder that God continues to shed His undeserved, boundless grace on sinners like you and I. This is a reminder for which we should be utterly grateful. It is also an example to the world of the Lord's boundless grace and something for which we should be thankful daily. Spurgeon summarizes well when he says,

Thirst makes a person pant for water, and pain reminds man of the physician. Let your needs likewise lead you to Jesus...be glad that you have constant needs that perpetually compel you to have fellowship with your Redeemer.

To see believers suffer well and to trust the Lord amidst their pain is both an encouragement and an admonition to other believers to look to the redeemer, the great physician Himself. Gratitude abounds in my heart as I reflect on my life.

Something else for which I am gratefully astounded every day is the love that God has shown me through my husband. The last seven months of marriage have been an increasing joy. No, we're not perfect, and yes, we have experienced relational tension, but yes, the Lord's grace abounds here as well. God's undeserved favor is made known in that He is using every circumstance, positive and negative, to grow and mature us to be more like His Son. Along the same lines, God has shown His love to me in that He has given me a husband who is a strong leader—Shawn tries to understand me, challenge me, provide for me, and protect me. God has given me a husband that is patient with me and is quick to ask forgiveness when he sees wrong he has done. He has given me a husband who is quick to remind me that any good in him is solely because of the Lord.

My husband desires my growth in Christ, and is prompt in reminding me what should be at the top of my priority list. God has given us this opportunity of covenant-oneness to put His glory on display. He could (and does) use other circumstances to sanctify us, but He uses this wonderful gift of marriage to have a primary role in our day-to-day sanctification.

Among the blessings of marriage, I am grateful that the Lord has allowed us to get involved serving the church together. Shawn really had a desire to serve with me, and he thought that a role teaching children would be a great way to do that. As we were talking this through, the Lord in His providence opened up a need with the 4-5 year old boy's class that we were able to fill. It has been a wonderful opportunity to not only get to know some families in the church better, but also to grow us, conform us to the image of His Son, to learn better communication, and to get an introduction to what parenting is like. This has been a huge blessing, a great learning experience, and something for which we can be thankful to our Lord. If you also would like to learn about theology proper, camel mobiles, and pizza plants, feel free to join us!

As global violence worsens and hostility towards Christianity increases, we may begin to struggle finding more than a few things for which to be thankful. As a Christian, I can assure you that gratitude should still abound. I have given only a few things in my life for which I am grateful, and time will fail me if I tell of health, living, finances, family, and everything else the Lord is doing. As John Piper has said, "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them." Of those that I am aware of, I am thankful.

As we think about family, friends, and food this week, and as we see the political, cultural, ethical, and international climates continue to darken, we should remember that one thing will remain the same, and that is the character of our God and the hope and light He provides (Malachi 3:6; 1 John 1:5). He will always remain good (Psalm 100:5). He will always be slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6). He will never, no never, leave or forsake His own (Hebrew 13:5). We can also remember that as He promised, things will get worse before they get better; as the "birth pains" get stronger, our Savior, Jesus Christ, is that much closer to coming back (Matthew 3:3-27). These are things for which we can be profoundly grateful—things for which I am forever grateful. For all the wrongs we see in the world today, even if justice is not served on this earth, we can be reminded that it will be served in eternity (Romans 12:19). The justice that will not be served in hell, the justice that all believers deserve for sinning against a holy God, that justice has already been served—at the cross of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-26).

This is something for which to be profusely, abundantly, inexhaustibly, eternally grateful. Lauren [now] Waller

Comments

A thankful heart is a happy heart. (That morsel of wisdom comes courtesy of Veggie Tales.) :) You really do have one of the happiest hearts I know. LOVE stopping by here and getting glimpses into your heart. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving.

—nicki owens, November 24, 2015

You are a beautiful person inside and out! Thank you for sharing your journey with us. You are a true inspiration! May God continue to Bless you and your husband! Happy THANKS giving!

—Lisa Love, November 25, 2015

Lauren, enjoyed you post. I continue to pray for you and your husband as I think of you. I also continue to learn and marvel as I learn things about God. I'm 67 years old, I've walked with God for about 48 years, and I occasionally have these break throughs in understanding who God is. He is infinite, we will continue to learn things about Him through eternity.

Blessings on you!

—Terry Plummer, April 7, 2016

Day 1826: Five years!

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2016

Five years. Five important years have passed since that not insignificant day, June 5th, 2011. Sixty months have come and gone since the Lord turned my life upside-down and made me function in a new and completely different way. Eighteen hundred and twenty- six days have gone by since that day when the Lord began teaching me to rely on Him in a way utterly unlike anything with which I was familiar. My pride was crushed, my dependence was made clear.

Christianity is unique among the world's many religions, and one of those ways is how we view God as being intimately involved in every event in our lives (Romans 8:28). Another way it is distinct is that we have a book claiming to be the very words of God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16-17). And this book addresses every area of life. This book tells us and shows us what we can learn from each of our unique life circumstances and how our circumstances relate to the workings of our sovereign God. Specifically, the book of 2 Corinthians shows us that the Lord brings trials into our lives for two main purposes: to display His power and to demonstrate our weakness – which in turn destroys our pride.1

The first objective of the Lord in bringing trials in to our lives is to display His power. That was clearly demonstrated June 5th, 2011. After being intubated at the scene of the Accident and trauma-hawked to St. Mary's, seeing my condition, the doctors gave a very slim chance of my survival. Yet "somehow," I pulled through. This was beyond anything the doctors could explain. My very survival from the Accident, through the immediate aftermath, throughout my recovery, up until now, has been a very clear display of God's power. God's power was (and is) unquestionably put on display. This is one reason the Lord brings His own through trials.

The second reason that the Lord brings trials into believers' lives is to show us our weakness and destroy our pride. Believers repeatedly come to recognize that the battle with pride is one that will rage throughout our temporal existence. Many believers implore the Lord for humility. When God chooses to answer prayers for humility, it often comes with a price – trials. This isn't necessarily something for which we bargain; we want the virtue without the sacrifice. Nonetheless, our hardships are gifts from the Lord. Trials are a gift because they crush our pride and teach us of our complete and absolute dependence on our Lord. Recognizing dependence is a quick way to mortify pride. And it is here again where five years ago, on a Sunday like today, comes in.

This providential collision between God's sovereignty and my life trajectory has been teaching me dependence in three main areas. The first way I am realizing that the Lord is teaching me dependence is primarily psychological and emotional. Five years after the Accident occurred, even though I look and act like a typical twenty-five year old female, I am very conscious of the fact that I have had a brain injury that still affects my daily living. I have the tendency to wonder at the "what might have beens" and think about the "I used to be able tos." In these moments it is absolutely necessary to speak truth to myself, such as that of which a friend recently reminded me: "God has you at this specific place at this specific time doing this specific thing for a very specific reason." I may not know particularly what that reason is, but it is such a comfort that our Lord is sovereign – has total control – over everything. This, again, is an opportunity to rely on the Lord to help me think about "whatever is true," (Phil 4:8) not whatever might have been true. It does us no good to view things any different than what they are.

Emotionally, I am still learning how the Accident has affected me for the better and for the worse. Some things that have changed for the better involve my personality. I am told I am easier to get along with, and I have a new patience with and understanding of others when they are struggling with something. In some areas, I have a tendency to be a lot more sensitive of peculiar needs and difficulties. Completely separate from that, although still relating to my personality, one personal asked me, "were you this funny before the Accident?" I guess I never really thought myself funny, but I suppose it's usually a good thing when you can make others laugh for a legitimate reason. These are a few areas where the Lord is teaching me emotional and psychological lessons and blessings as a result of the Accident.

The Lord has also been teaching me many lessons in simple physical dependence. As a twenty year old when the Accident occurred, I was living a pretty active, independent lifestyle. I was midway through college, living on my own at the dorms, running occasionally, driving everywhere, and working for a little extra cash. To go from that lifestyle to a life of dependence like that of a child – someone feeding you, someone helping you walk, someone driving you, someone even helping you shower – is pretty humbling. Thankfully, the Lord was gracious enough to where that much dependency wasn't required for long, but there are still areas where I'm not where I used to be (although "athletic specimen" was never a phrase you would have used to describe me).

Some of the main physical effects of the Accident are what you might expect after having a pelvis broken and laying in bed for a few months: balance issues and hip pain/discomfort. The Lord was abundantly gracious to me when, in His sovereignty, He brought me a physical therapist to marry. Shawn has been an abundant blessing to me in so many ways, but definitely in the realm of hip pain. Specifically in this area, he has helped me to release scar tissue and gain more flexibility. (He has also graciously encouraged me and shown me ways to practice balance.) I could go on with more blessings the Lord has given me through my husband, but this will have to do for now.

One more, perhaps unexpected, physical result of the Accident was an increased tiredness and fatigue. Throughout the past five years, the Lord has brought me to recognize that fatigue is another area wherein we recognize our dependence upon the Lord - He alone does not need sleep (Psalm 121:3-4). Every night when we lie down to rest, whether knowingly or not, we recognize that He is the one sustaining us and we must rely on Him for strength (Psalm 4:8). Thankfully though, He has brought me through many situations that have helped increase my stamina. I will not say that fatigue is no longer an issue, but my energy level is definitely not as easily depleted, and I am learning what contributes to increased fatigue.

Another unforeseen blessing of the Lord came as a result of the physical effects of the Accident. It occurred a few weeks ago at my current job at a print shop. A man dressed in scrubs walked in our store to pick up his completed business cards. As I was helping him out, this surgeon noticed the scar from my tracheotomy. He pointed it out and delicately inquired if he could ask more about it. As providence would have it, it was just before this that I was petitioning the Lord for

opportunities to proclaim His name. And this very morning an opportunity came wandering across my path. I was able to share a little about what happened and boast in the Lord's kindness and sovereignty. As one more familiar with this type of injury, the man was amazed at my physical functionality, my speech, and God's power clearly put on display. Please pray that he recognizes that it is the true power of God at work and that this event would cause him to wonder at and find out more about the God of the Bible.

Relating to the physical effects of the Accident, let me quickly tell you about a five-year milestone: I do not remember having actually played any sport involving a group of people or participating in any group physical activities since the Accident occurred. But yesterday, 1825 days after the Accident occurred, I actually found myself playing Frisbee with a large group of friends. (No harm was done to animals or humans as a result of this activity.) It was actually quite fun and not too embarrassing.

Many more blessings have also come as a result of the Accident. One of which I previously mentioned - my amazing husband whom I might not have met had the Accident not occurred. He is an unbelievable blessing in my life in so many ways. He is not only able to help out when my hip is giving me trouble, but he is also my companion and best friend who gives me wisdom, advice, and spiritual guidance. (He is also able to answer most of my various health questions- of which there are many.) He is my partner and my helpmate – the man whom the Lord made uniquely for me. It is in these moments of gratefulness that we cannot forget from whence all blessings come – from our heavenly Father who does not change (James 1:17). It is He whom we must rely upon. It is He from whom all blessings flow.

The Accident has also taught me to rely on the Lord intellectually. Before the Accident, for my age group, I was kind of a brainiac and very much took pride in that. Struggling intellectually with something was not typical for me. As you can imagine, the injury was the Lord's way of mortifying my pride in this area. It is very humbling to make the sometimes necessary approach to someone to explain why I do not remember something that was just spoken about. The Lord is certainly showing me many ways that I can compensate for this memory loss, but they cannot always be performed. Through this, the Lord is teaching me to rely on Him to help me remember what needs to be remembered and to trust Him when I forget. Through the aforementioned aspects in which I am learning dependence, I am

realizing that having dependence upon the Lord often works itself out by petitioning the Lord in prayer, acknowledging His involvement and His sovereignty, and trusting Him with the outcome. It is knowing that however the Lord answers a prayer, it is what is best (Romans 8:28); it is trusting in the Lord that a prayer will be answered even when we can't foresee how.

On Sunday nights as our church, was going through the book of Genesis we began learning from the life of Joseph. From Joseph we learn many things, but one of the chief lessons we can learn from his life is that if trials are handled correctly, they will produce wisdom, discernment, and great faith. Though my trials are vastly different from Joseph's, the Lord is kindly using the Accident to show me how these lessons are true. As Joseph did, I can see that spiritual hindsight is a sanctifying grace 2–an undeserved blessing that refines us to become more like our Lord. I can look back and see how the Lord used the Accident to set a "precedence for trust" in my life. It is much easier to have faith that God is going to sustain one during a trial when support has already been provided through something much more difficult. When looking at past events through eyes of faith, we catch sight of how the Lord uses every event for His redemptive purposes.

Charles H. Spurgeon tells us the story of a shepherd on Salisbury Plain and he encourages us to be like him. Because of the Accident,the Lord is teaching me to see life that way.

When [the shepherd] was asked, "Is it good weather?" he answered, "Yes, it is all good weather that God sends.""But does this weather please you? "If it pleases God, it pleases me," was his reply. That is the point to get to—may God bring us there by His Grace!

Would I have initially chosen for the Accident to occur? By no means! However, five years later, I would not trade the lessons that I have since learned. These lessons have been a cause for me to greatly rejoice in the perfect wisdom of our God, and they have taught me in a way that nothing else could. The allowed occurrence of the Accident pleased the Lord, and so it pleases me.

Comments

Great is Thy faithfulness o God my Father! Rejoicing with you and Shawn in this very special anniversary, and how God answered prayers beyond what we could ever imagine or hope for. It has been a huge grace in our lives to be a part of this journey with you and to be able to

see God's Sovereign hand of Grace, mercy and loving kindness in each step. We rejoice in your physical renewal, but all the more in your manifestation of the Glory of God and the excellencies of Christ Jesus. The perfect Wisdom of Our God...Your perfect Will in Your perfect way. We love you and your family!

—Nancy Kearney, June 5, 2016

Still thanking God for you and for His work in your life, and still praying for continued blessings.

—John Sizemore, June 5, 2016

Praising God with you today! I wonder how He will continue to use your story to comfort others with the comfort you have received. A book, maybe? You could design it! :)

—Tim Eichner, June 5, 2016

Blessings Lauren! To God be the Glory!

—Eric Lowdermilk, June 5, 2016

So nice to hear that you are getting on with your life - and so happy for you in your new married life - may you have many happy years together! We love you! Bob and Audrey Sprague

—Bob and Audrey Sprague, June 5, 2016

Yes,To God be the glory! Hallelujah!

—donald plemons, June 5, 2016

Lauren, Your on-going experience and life for Christ is an outstanding testament of God's providence. We love you and are proud of you!

Thanks for sharing!

—Uncle Gene, June 6, 2016

Lauren,

I read the whole thing and I am so blessed by the journey you have been on these past 5 years. We count it all joy when we face various trials. God is so good. Love you bunches.

—Jennifer Foster, June 8, 2016

My husband [John] and I are so glad Lauren has become part of our family. I have prayed that God would bring a life mate to our son Shawn since he was very young. Lauren is that perfect match. Truly a match made in heaven. We love them both very much. We look forward to many happy family events for years to come.

—Penny Waller, June 16, 2016

Day 2192: Changes

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2017

Wow.

I will start this blog off with what I said when I started writing it and I saw how many days it has been since the Accident.

Two thousand, one hundred ninety-two days. Six years. Wow.

A quick aside: Someone recently told me, "I refuse to call it an Accident." They gave the explanation that it was not actually an Accident, but a providentially planned Crash – and this by an all-knowing, abundantly-wise, sovereign God (Romans 8:28 – "all things"). Knowing that that this is true and taking this wisdom to heart, "the Accident" is hereby "the Crash." (Whether practically an "Accident" or theologically a "Crash," know that there is far too much to discuss thoroughly on this blog.)

In some ways, the last six years have passed by in mere seconds. In a lot of ways, by God's astonishing grace, the Crash is a distant memory. Medically speaking, the greatest return to normalcy often occurs within the first five years. Though recovery does continue after five years, the most recovery takes place within that time frame.

Health professionals informed us of some of what may happen at or by the five year mark. We were told that the constant fatigue most TBI patients experience may severely diminish and that many memory issues may disappear. We were also told that, while they wouldn't

totally vanish, many other challenges related to the brain injury may significantly lessen. While no one ever hinted that all of this would happen at once, it is almost what I had come to expect.

So, I went to bed June 4th, woke up June 5th and...guess what?

Everything felt exactly the same. Except now I had one more day under my belt and the knowledge that the five year mark since a life-altering, bone-shattering, brain-shearing event had passed. Though my recovery was by many accounts miraculous and something for which to be extremely grateful, I didn't notice the drastic change for which I had come to hope. I still had (and have) discouraging memory lapses, I still get randomly fatigued at the strangest times (9 o'clock in the morning as an example), and I still have a very hard time doing multiple things at once. (I have to be extremely careful in the kitchen – my gracious husband is the best!) While I realize that these are issues that people who haven't had a TBI struggle with, for me, they are exacerbated. Rather than an occasional lapse, they occur all too frequently.

Though changes didn't occur overnight as I almost expected them to, the fifth year has been pretty dramatic. Over the past year I have experienced a significant increase in stamina – seen by a reduction in fatigue. The Lord has brought trials into my life that required alertness and consistently strengthened my endurance. Although I still cannot sit and read without battling what feels like extreme exhaustion, my need for the mid- day slumber has greatly declined. By the grace of God, I have also developed an increase in muscular strength, which in many cases surpasses pre-Crash capabilities.

As my husband is a physical therapist, he has been helping me with exercises to not only build muscle but also gain flexibility (his manual therapy skills have been immensely beneficial). Since the Crash and the resulting broken pelvis, I experience what I fondly call "the hip pop" withalmost every step I take. This generally does not hurt, is not extraordinarily loud, and does not cause pain, it just has me concerned that it could cause issues later on. Earlier this year, I was thinking to myself, "Self, you are married to Shawn – a physical therapist. This man is fully capable of helping you with this. It may not be easy and probably will not happen overnight, but there really is no reason for this popping to continue, especially when it could cause further problems later on." So, once again, I entreated him for guidance.

From my youth, I have been a fairly flexible person, but as Shawn was stretching the aforementioned hip, he noticed some severe musculoskeletal inflexibility. This was due in part to the scar tissue still present in my hip. (I was unable to stretch my hip to certain point considered normal.) Because of this, he gave me exercises to perform three times a day. He was also able to demonstrate the improvement that would occur if these exercises were done consistently. I am hoping that with regular stretching and his skilled hands, when all is quiet a room in which I am entering, people will no longer be able to say "it was so quiet in the room youcould hear a hip pop."

Over year five, I have not only seen a demonstrable improvement in strength, I have also seen improvement in my memory. I have not only noticed an increased ability to recall information I learned in high school (and nerdy information most people would have no reasonto remember – like what ATP in our body stands for), but I have also seen an improvement in remembering things like people's names (although, like most people, this area still needs a great deal of work).

Because of simple things like a constant need to ascertain and recall people's names, the saying "learning is lifelong" rings true. And it certainly does for us – in far more than people's names. Learning new things is definitely a large area of intellectual growth for both me and my husband. Between the two of us (but Shawn especially), weare learning a lot, especially when it comes to diet/lifestyle, health, business, and missions. Because he has a home health job, he takes advantage of his hours of time in the car to listen to sermons, books, and various podcasts. He is then able to share some of that information with me.

We now both have websites (DrShawnWaller.com and InklingCreative.ink– a very time consuming effort; props to web designers!), and have been able to put some of this information he has learned into practice. Besides building a website, he has been able to write a book on Parkinson's disease, (for which I gladly volunteered to create the cover. In addition, I opened an Etsy shop selling "printables." (Printables are items like cards that you can print from home – instead of going to the store every time a card is needed. I even sell some printable organizational tools and printable art. Lord willing, I will soon be pursuing some more fun ideas).

As far as intellectual growth goes, or growth in general,the last two years specifically have been a major turning point for me - especially in

life experience, with marriage being a major catalyst. Along with marriage and all of the responsibility that comes with being a wife and keeper of a home, I had my second “big girl” job. While my memory lapses and difficulty multi-tasking didn’t jive with this job, it was an excellent job in teaching me to learn how to work with people, instructing me in the importance of hardwork, and preparing me to do business on my own.

Through the past six years, by the Lord’s kindness, much improvement has occurred since the day of the Crash. However, the effects of the Crash are and will be a trial (or thorn in the flesh) for the rest of my life. Like Paul, I am learning to see the effects ofthe Crash as meant to keep me from becoming conceited; they serve as a reminder of the Lord’s words to Paul, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” (1 Corinthians 12:9). Also like Paul, I wish to say, “therefore, I am well content with weaknesses...for when I am weak, than I am strong” (1 Corinthians 12:10). Please pray with me to that end.

Comments

Oh Lauren what a powerful update post. You are a beautiful woman and it is encoruaging hearing you live out the plan He crafted for this season of your life together. So glad you are my friend. All the best. Love and prayers. Keren

—keren wheeler, June 5, 2017

I have never met you in person but your life and story have been and still are a real encouragement to me. Today I needed to be reeminded that God is a very present help in the time of trouble. Circumstances had clouded that promise and your blog reminded me to trust God for strength and wisdom for what i am facing. May God continue to bless you as you bless others.

—debby mahan, June 5, 2017

Dear Lauren, You continue to amaze! I can't believe it's been six years since "the crash". You have accomplished so much in that time period! I'm sure you are grateful and I know all of your friends and family must be so proud of you and your progress! Please don't be discouraged when things take longer than you anticipate, just know that the Lord is on your side and He knows what is best for your recovery! Remember he sent Shawn to you knowing that he will be there for you always as a loving husband and on call physical therapist! God Bless you and your

family! Sending you love and prayers for continued success!

—Paul Conlin, June 5, 2017

Thank you so much for posting this update. It is amazing all that the Lord will teach us and the many ways He grows us THROUGH our trials. I am thankful for your great testimony and for the great things He is doing in and through you. I also can appreciate that the struggles with memory and fatigue have been challenging and will continue to be, but I am so glad they are improving!

—Tina Reed, June 5, 2017

what an amazing six years it has been for you. I so appreciate this update and look forward to seeing what happens in the future.

—Cora Barnhart, June 5, 2017

And you are strong in His strength, my friend. You are submissive and kind to your husband, you care for others despite your own challenges that could consume, and you have joy in the Lord :) That's enormous strength. I am thankful to call you my friend. So encouraging to hear your recount of God's kindness in your great improvements in health. Will be fun to see that hip pop be overcome too with Shawn's expertise and your diligence ;) love you!❤

—Amanda Rodriguez, June 5, 2017

Lauren, You are one of the loveliest people on planet earth. I stand amazed at what GOD has done and is doing in & through you. William Blake wrote, "Think not thou canst sigh a sigh and thy Maker is not by." (Paraphrasing the next verse). Think not you can cheer a cheer and thy Maker is not near! :)

—Auntie Em, June 5, 2017

Very thankful, and still praying for you.

—John Sizemore, June 6, 2017

Dearest Lauren Girl :)

What a sweet grace to look back over these years and to see God's sovereign hand of Grace, mercy, loving kindness, providence and faithfulness. I think back over that time frame and remember (not as well as I used to :) the path of God's perfect guidance in every aspect of this event. It has been a great privilege and honor in my family's life and in the lives of those at GIBC and beyond, to be on this journey with you and Shawn and your families....Oh the places you will go! Thankfully through Christ Jesus we know that our ultimate home is in heaven, and our citizenship awaits us.

It has been a huge encouragement for us to see the Lord's faithfulness through all of this; and how He has worked it all together for good because you love Him and are called according to His purposes.

We are privileged and blessed to be your family in Christ, and to see how you and Shawn and your families have rested in God's faithfulness and His provision. It has given us hope for the trials we all know are apart of this life.

We love you dearly and we rejoice with you in God's providence and faithfulness.

Nancy Girl and Jim Kearney (greetings to Shawn :)

—Nancy Kearney, June 6, 2017

How fortunate we are to have (Lauren) this wonderful addition to our family. We agree that the "crash" as devastating as it was became the catalyst (and blessing) that brought Shawn & Lauren together. They really were So meant for each other! A true "match made in heaven". God always has a plan. Many times it does not make sense to us but we have to trust him. He will provide the path (and not necessarily of least resistance) for us to travel if we listen. Lauren we love you and are again are so happy you are part of our family!

—Penny Waller, June 6, 2017

Beloved Lauren and her Beloved husband Shawn,

What lovingkindness of our ever Faithful Lord is glimpsed through your lives. How perfect He is in knowing exactly what will draw each of us into ever deeper intimate walks with Him. How purposed He has been in the lives of so many around your "Crash" (I'll add of grace) Your

dad and mom in all those days of provision, nursing, care, encouragement, and all in dwelling upon and resting in the Word, and sharing the glimpses of trust in the battleground of it that ministered to many. Your beloved brother's salvation and marriage to another dear sister in Christ from meeting in those early days around your bedside. The thoughts and prayers from multitudes around the world and one so specific that was studying and training, in physical therapy of all things, who one day became your friend, husband, and the godly shepherd of your home... and the story goes on and on of how God so vastly and purposely used a "Crash of Grace" to draw so many closer to him! In so many ways Psalm 131 rings of these last 6 years in your life.. .

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever. (Psalms 131, NASB).

We treasure Christ all the more as we treasure the nuances of His faithfulness to and through you and your family!

We love you both, The Stokesbury's

—Karen Stokesbury, June 11, 2017

Day 2363 Thankful for the Common

Lauren Graham Waller, November 23, 2017

Thankfulness. It is not something we express once a year at the end of November. Or at least, it shouldn't be. It is an attitude that should characterize every Christian's life.

Christian's are to be imitators of Christ, and thankfulness describes Christ's life (John 11:41, Luke 22:19-20, Luke 10:21). We all have many things - often overlooked things - for which to be thankful.

The Lord's lovingkindness is a common theme in my life, and I am so grateful to have been given eyes to see how prevalent it is. There are some things for which we should be thankful regularly (i.e. food and shelter), but then there are other "common graces" for which we don't even think to be appreciative.

:: Side note, and this is where you get a glimpse into my brain and the strangeness that actually is Lauren ::

I was thinking a few months back about how grateful I am that, in His wisdom, God created human beings with nostrils facing down.

But seriously.

Think about it. If nostrils faced up, we would

- Almost drown every time it rained.
- Risk our lives every time we sweat.
- Sneezes would become like rainfall.
- Showers? Wouldn't work.
- Smelling the sweet aroma coming from the stove? Not so easy.
- Something caught in your nose? Getting it out becomes not-so-sneaky.

And the list continues.

Aren't you thankful your nostrils face down?

That's one common grace, albeit eccentric, that we don't think about for which we should be extremely thankful.

The Crash helped me think through a lot of the things we often take for granted for which we should give thanks more often: walking, talking, learning, reading, writing, memory, eating, drinking, thinking, driving and so on.

Below are some other common graces – specific to my life – that I am extremely thankful for in 2017.

Teaching

When Shawn and I were driving up to Jacksonville last month, I wanted to listen to the sermon Doc Z preached from Esther on the day of the Crash. Others told me that it was a good sermon, but I since obviously couldn't remember anything about it, we listened to it.

Boy, was it good. Boy, was it fitting.

Doc Z starts out by talking about the meticulous providences of God in the life of Esther. Though His name is never mentioned in the book, God's fingerprints are very clearly spread throughout.

Many of the ways God showed His hand in Esther's story were many of the same ways He showed His hand in mine.

I am thankful for technology that allows me to listen to good teaching from 6 and a half years ago. I am even more grateful for faithful teachers that bring timeless applications from God's Word that apply every day.

Travel

Twenty seventeen is a big year for me, because in August, I hit the ten year mark. Ten years of what? Ten years of living in Florida.

In only eight years, I will have lived more of my life in Florida than I will have in Michigan.

It is in Florida that I...

- Finished high school
- Completed college
- Met my best friend
- Tied the knot, and
- Started a business

It is in Florida that the Lord showered His lavish grace upon me and saved me from eternal punishment.

It is in Florida that He brought me through the biggest trial of my life and showed me that His grace is enough.

Fun fact: I have lived more of my life in Florida post-Crash than pre-Crash. If it wasn't for travel, we would not be down here.

Trade

Earlier this year I was working at AlphaGraphics. Though I learned so much at this job, because of various circumstances, we decided that I would no longer work there.

I applied to several other jobs, but none of those worked out. And so, as Chief Thinker and Chief Inker, Shawn and I decided to give my company Inkling Creative more of a chance.

Inkling Creative is a freelance graphic design company whose focus is primarily print design. Since I have been working on this company full time, Inkling Creative has a few other things going on.

Inkling Apparel is now a part of Inkling Creative. Inkling Apparel actually started out as "Little Inklings Children's Clothing" but has since grown into adult clothing as well.

Our Etsy division, ThinkingInkling, sells printables, art, and apparel. (P.S. There are sales at both sites this week – at Inkling Creative use the code BLKFRIDAY for 10% off and visit ThinkingInkling for up to 40% off.)

All of this to say, I am extraordinarily thankful for the opportunity to work from home. I have learned so much, and I look forward to learning more.

Working for myself serves as another opportunity to exercise creativity and to wholeheartedly trust in the Lord.

Progress

Not only has it been 2363 days since the Crash, it has been 2363 days of learning, relearning, and improvements. This year has been a year of goal setting, goal accomplishing, and improvement.

At the end of last year Shawn and I set up S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals for what we wanted to accomplish in 2017 – and thusly, how we would accomplish them.

I am sad to say that a few of them haven't happened (and most likely won't), but most of them have, and we are better for it. Not only have I made significant gains in strength, some things that were damaged in the Crash have improved.

One of the few things I actually remember from the hospital is that someone brought my favorite meal of Carrabba's lobster ravioli. After being fed many months of *cough* "delicious" hospital food, I am told that I scarfed that ravioli down so fast many were scared for my life.

I would like to say that this was because I was hungry, but I don't think that that's the case. This is because that from as early as I can remember post-Crash, I didn't get hungry. If I waited an extremely long time between meals, I might start feeling a twinge of hunger, but generally, I did not get hungry.

I ate because I knew the necessity of nutrients, not because I felt like it. My daily hunger range went from "really-full" to "really not hungry" to "not hungry, but I could eat something if I had to."

Well, I am happy to say that 6 or so years after the Crash, that changed. I get hungry now. :+) This is one more of those common graces that we don't give much thought until it's not there.

Believe me when I say that food is MUCH more enjoyable when you're hungry.

This year, as any year, as much as I am thankful for many common graces including teaching, travel, trade, and progress, I am much more grateful for the free gift of salvation.

God sent His own Son to live a perfect life and die a cruel, undeserved death by crucifixion at the hands of His enemies. Jesus did this so that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life (John 3:16).

A verse that summarizes this - and the heart of this message of Thanksgiving - is Psalm 119:68. This verse quickly became one of Shawn and I's favorites.

In it, the Psalmist prays, "You are good and do good. Teach me your statutes." "Good" is who God is and what He does. It's that simple. We are thankful that no matter what happens, we can always go back to this truth.

What about you? What are some of the common graces for which you are thankful? Are you thankful that God is good and doing good, even when we don't always understand what He's doing and why?

Comments

Lauren, I am so happy for you and I know God will continue to shower you with his blessings! Best of luck with your business! You are so talented. May God Bless you and your family as we prepare to enter the Christmas season. You will always be in my thoughts and prayers!

—Paul Conlin, November 23, 2017

Grateful to GOD for you both & for your faithful testimony & for sharing your love of hedgehogs with me 🐔

—Auntie Em, November 24, 2017

Day 2557 Dependence

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2018

"Writers are the custodians of memory, and memories have a way of dying with their owner." Sage words from author and writer William Zinsser take on new meaning when it comes to writing in my own life. Unless I write, memories I've made and lessons I've learned die with me.

Writing also brings another benefit. When I write, I find myself able to gather memories, consolidate experiences, and catch sight of overarching lessons the Lord is teaching me. I desire that these shared memories help readers reflect on the work of God in their own lives.

One of the things that I'm coming to grips with lately is that many things that once came naturally to me, such as writing, now take significantly more time and effort (and are completed with varying degrees of skill). Reflecting on these "momentary, light afflictions" causes me to identify a little bit with the Apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh."

Paul says himself in 2 Corinthians 12 that the purpose for his thorn was "to keep him from becoming conceited" (v7). In the same way, as time passes, the Lord uses the Crash to continue to reveal pride and humble me. (I still have a very long way to go.) Also like Paul, I am learning that God's grace is sufficient in my weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9) and He chooses to use me despite my weaknesses. That is one lesson I have learned this year. Below are some other lessons in three main areas that the Lord is teaching me.

Lessons in Marriage

The Lord is so kind in granting me marriage to a wonderful man who fits me perfectly. No, our marriage is not perfect, nor are we perfect, but God ordained us for one another. And that is perfect.

When God gave humans the gift of marriage, He knew what He was doing. I mean, He always knows what He's doing, but to be able to catch glimpses of marriage and its purpose for the gift that it is, is really quite spectacular. Whatever the word for genius is, times infinity times infinity, that's what marriage is.

But in my marriage, the Lord not only gifted me a spouse who uniquely knows me and helps me, He granted me a "safe space" within our marriage to try and [often] fail.

Quick story: when Shawn and I were married, I knew I needed to be a homemaker – and that involves cooking. Thankfully, my mom faithfully taught me the kitchen basics very well. She also tried to get me to help her in the kitchen more, but that didn't go so well. So as one who rarely cooked before marriage, I had a lot of learning to do.

But thankfully, I like to call Shawn an "appreciative eater." If I make something that's good, it's very good. And he makes it very apparent. Fortunately, that has happened way more often than not. Apparently I have only had one very bad cooking effort – and that while we were dating (he still married me - yay!). While I have had recipes that definitely aren't winners, on our five star scale, they only fall into the 2 or 3 - "this isn't worth making again" - category.

But marriage as a whole, and cooking in particular, has significantly helped me in multitasking. This is especially true when I am trying to maximize the use of time - i.e. starting/finishing laundry while making breakfast and starting to crock-pot dinner. Mercifully, I haven't done anything devastating yet while attempting this.

Lessons in Work

Thankfully, working at home allows me more time to take care of our home. But soon after the Lord gave humans the gift of marriage, he gave the gift of work (yes, work was instituted before the fall, so it is a gift Genesis 2:15). It's helpful to remind ourselves of that perspective sometimes.

While working from home is often considered better for some in many ways, I am learning that in a lot of ways, working from home is harder. "Being told what to do" gets bad rap. When it comes to making money, most people actually enjoy being told what to do – to a certain degree. Let me explain [this is one of those things you discover while running a business]. In most jobs, there is a hierarchy of employment. With each promotion comes the ability to make more (and weightier) decisions.

At a job, each position comes with its own responsibilities. And unless you're the owner of the company, you are told what to do. (In large, publicly held companies, even the owner is told what to do.) When you're the owner of a company (read "very small business"), you're also wearing all the hats and have all sorts of responsibilities. First of all, you're in management. You are responsible for everything – and this leads to the success or failure of the company. Here, management includes all executive level tasks. The basics of these tasks involve executive functions along with accounting and marketing. Then you've got the actual operation of the business (the completion of the actual work – and the continuing education necessary to learn – and stay on top of – everything you need to know).

Being an employee means that other people make the decisions. You are simply told what to do and you merely complete what you're asked. In turn, you get a consistent paycheck.

Owning a business is not for the faint of heart. I now understand why most startups don't make it five years. But the Lord is definitely teaching me through this. He is teaching me contentment (where I am is where He wants me), dependence (He provides work - and wisdom), humility (my needs are not the most important), and the continued necessity to trust in Him (what I think I need may not be what is best). Even though we may put in the work, ultimately, it is He is one who allows success.

I am also coming to grips with the fact that I am now not the quickest kid on the block. It takes me time to do a lot of things. I don't talk the fastest and need time to process. Neither are ideal traits when operating in the "I-need-everything-yesterday-and-I-wasted- time-even-saying-this" twenty-first century.

But even this is another opportunity to trust in the Lord, depend on Him, and lean "not on my own understanding" of how quickly things need to be done (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Lessons at Home

Not only has the Lord been using this year to teach me the skills of managing a business, He has also been teaching me the skill of managing a household (Proverbs 31:27).

During engagement, Shawn began teaching me about money matters. Soon after we said "I do," we began tackling our my debt. Between the Lord's kindness, hard work and saying no to things we really wanted to do, we knocked it out. Following that KO, we began saving for a house.

We know that the Lord is sovereign over everything, and His will will be accomplished (Isaiah 46:10). Knowing this was such a comfort in the "home buying" process. Our job is to simply trust in the Lord and depend on His timing and His wisdom (while doing our due diligence). While we were casually looking for a house for over a year, when we finally had a down payment and were staring down another year lease, we became more serious.

Just as it was when we moved from our first apartment, the Lord's timing was perfect. Our realtor, Tom Blythe (we highly recommend him), consistently sent us homes to look at. Right before we had planned to look at one, he mentioned another. Though the second one he mentioned was a little out of our budget, when we arrived at the first home and saw that it was going to the highest bidder, we decided to take a look at the second.

When we visited this house, we immediately loved it. When we told Tom what we could afford, He said it wouldn't hurt to put in an offer for that amount. Through quite a bit of back and forth, we eventually came to an agreement with the owners, and it was sold.

The house actually became ours.

With the help of some very kind people, we were able to take down some a lot of wallpaper, paint, decorate, and make our house our home.

Now we are settled in Hobe Sound in a little place we like to call home. It has such a nice ring to it, doesn't it?

More Lessons at Home

Now that we have a house, the question we get pretty often is, "so, are kids next?" Well, we weren't exactly waiting for a house, but you can be praying about that.

Because of the Crash, bearing children has always been a big question. A lot of people ask me if my ability to bear children was affected by my broken pelvis/traumatic brain injury. The good news is, my pelvis healed in such a way that natural childbearing should be no problem. (If I needed to have a plate put in, a c-section would be necessary. But by the Lord's grace, I did not.) Theoretically, yes, I can bear children naturally.

But therein lies the difficulty. To bear children, a woman must first get pregnant, and to get pregnant both conception and implantation must occur. I will save you the long, technical explanation, but for all Shawn and I know, we could unknowingly be populating heaven. So please pray with us that we would conceive and that I would carry a healthy baby full-term.

Our difficulty bearing children is yet another reminder of this ever constant theme of dependence.

Because I am constantly being taught this lesson, it is easy for me to think that I've learned it. I'm there. I've got this thing. But since the Lord continues teaching and showing me areas I need to depend on Him, I obviously don't. I have a lot to learn.

But thankfully, the scriptures teach in Psalm 119:68,

"The Lord is good and does good, teach me your statutes."

A recent favorite verse of ours, this verse reminds is that everything the Lord does is good, because He is good. It is good to trust the Lord. It is good to depend on Him. This is a broad-spectrum verse that applies to every area of life. All circumstances. And because this is true, I must seek to learn His statutes, because those are good.

Because I know the Lord is good, the Lord withholding a child from us right now is good. Do I know why? No.

But I can trust that God does.

Because of verses like this and Psalm 84:11, I know that learning constant dependence, though not always the most pleasant lesson, is a good thing. Constant dependence also causes an ever-growing longing for Christ's return in the heart of a Christian. We long for the day when our faith will be made sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

As each day goes by, the Lord continues to teach me what is truly important – Him, His Word, and His kingdom. Even though life is now a little more difficult due to the Crash, I must always remember that it is because of Christ that I have hope in this life and the next. Even if my memories do die with me, the hope I have does not. Because of His perfect life, undeserved death, and glorious resurrection, I have power over sin and the promise of His coming.

That gives me hope.

But I want to hear from you. How often would you guys like to hear from me? And what would you like to hear? Would you like more frequent updates? Less frequent updates? Please let me know.

Also, if you would like to learn more about what I do for a living, I write about art, graphic design, branding, and print here. (I also sell a few inklings I've created in my shop.)

Please share your thoughts.

Comments

I always learn some thing(s) when you post. Thank you so much for sharing.

—Cora Barnhart, June 5, 2018

Thank you, Cora!

—The Grahams, June 5, 2018

Thank you for sharing your continuing journey, I always enjoy them.

—debby mahan, June 5, 2018

Thank you, Debby!

—The Grahams, June 5, 2018

I LOVE reading any updates you choose to give or writing you choose to do. I also love knowing how to pray for you all!

—Keli Schwert, June 5, 2018

Thanks, Keli! We miss you guys! Hope you're doing well!

—The Grahams, June 5, 2018

When I first came to GIBC (approx 6 years ago) somehow I came across your caring bridge. 😃 I think I stayed up an entire night just reading what the Lord has done in and through your life. I would love to see how the Lord continues to work through your life and will be praying for you. We serve a mighty God and you're a sweet reminder of that truth.

—Leydi McLean, June 5, 2018

Thank you, Leydi, that means a lot :+)

—The Grahams, June 5, 2018

I have decided to refer to the fall as the CRASH from now on. Seems more appropriate. Always love to hear from you. Here's a new favorite verse: "Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in Him, for He shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between His shoulders." Deut 33:12 Love, Auntie Em (Crosby)

—Emily Crosby, June 5, 2018

Thanks for the encouragement, Emily! Love you!

—The Grahams, June 5, 2018

Hi Lauren! You won't remember me, but I am Sara Sebul's mom(now Sara Mayo💕💕) but I was thrilled to hear of your blessed, wonderful life! The last time I saw you, was at PBA, after you all returned from India. I have the. beautiful picture of you girls. in my bedroom

I was and am so happy for all Gods done and will do for you. You are such a lovely , intelligent , God loving individual. Will keep you and Shawn in my prayers. 💕💕💕

—Debbie Donelson, June 5, 2018

Thanks for the encouragement, Debbie!

—The Grahams, June 6, 2018

Loved reading this update Lauren! I had been thinking about you last week knowing the annniverary of the crash was coming up and couldn't believe it had been 7 years! It's sweet to recount the faithfulness of the Lord to you and your family each year!

—Megan Summerville, June 8, 2018

Thanks Megan!

—The Grahams, June 10, 2018

Lauren, I so enjoy your humor and outlook on life. I've followed your 'adventure' through the past years, with prayers for your recovery. I know you wouldn't have chosen this 'adventure', but it's been a joy to hear of your victories. I continue in prayer for you as life continues to happen.

Joni Earickson Tada had an 'accident' happen to her when she was 17 or 18, that left her a quadriplegic. But she has been instrumental in organizing a 'ministry' that delivers wheelchairs to people around the world. Only God knows how He will use you in this world.

I appreciate your explanations, honesty, and vulnerability, as you explain where you are in your recovery. I'm sure that will help a lot of people who travel a similar road. Have you thought of putting your 'blogs' into a book?

—Terry Plummer, June 9, 2018

Thanks, Terry! I have considered it and am still contemplating that possibility :+)

—The Grahams, June 10, 2018

Day 2922 Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2019

"The reality is, the more we study it the more fascinating it gets. For a pregnancy to succeed, so many things have to go right" says PhD Dr. Zev Williams (21:15). Throughout this year, I have seen how every aspect of this statement is gloriously true. It's an expensive education, but I wouldn't have experienced this aspect of God's character if we didn't go through this trial of infertility.

Okay, time for some back story :+)

When Shawn and I first started trying for children — unsuccessfully — we did what a lot of couples do and had him tested first. After discovering a small, but important, issue (that wouldn't inhibit us from getting pregnant, it would just take longer), he completely changed his diet to try and turn it around.

After several more months of trying with no success, we decided to open a can of worms and see a doctor about me.

Following testing the male for three main things, the testing for the female is almost endless. The anatomical testing is pretty straightforward and there are two main tests.

Though the anatomical testing is fairly "easy" the blood work is anything but. When you go in for fertility testing, the doctor first gets to know you to discover potential underlying issues. Mine were obvious - the Crash. While Shawn and I were thinking an anatomical issue was probably the culprit, she seemed more concerned with my prior blood transfusions.

She then gave us a list of 50+ tests that can be administered — all done at different times during a typical female monthly cycle — that can determine the issue. After giving us that list, she highlighted the ones she thought we needed.

As an aside: this whole process (testing/different methods of assisted reproductive technology — ART) requires much wisdom and dependence on the Lord as there are many issues that arise. Some are moral: is there anything about this test that wouldn't uphold the value and dignity of a human life? Some are fiscal: how can we best steward the resources the Lord has given us? Some are time-related: how long should we wait for this?

Following the initial anatomical testing where — praise the Lord! — everything looked great, we needed to recover from sticker shock before proceeding with anything else. Several months after that testing and considering our options, we finally decided that we would go forward with one particular method. Shawn then emailed the doctor to see which of the recommended blood tests were necessary before moving forward.

So we embarked on the journey of completing those. After the blood tests I typically would not hear from the doctor's office except for reminders for my next appointment. When they called following my final test, I was not quite sure of the reason.

Well, it turns out, this was a big deal. The reason Dr. McCarthy wanted this particular hormone checked was to see if it was high enough that we could try a less invasive procedure without medication. As it turns out, not only was this hormone not high enough, it wasn't there at all.

Whoa. Big news.

Each of these developments requires a back story which just shows us — with new wonder — how amazing the miracle (I don't use that word lightly) of life is; how amazing God is. And I've only learned everything I'm describing here in the past few months so it's complicated, wondrous learning for all of us :+).

This "missing" hormone is what the female body automatically produces after egg- release. It helps build and sustain the uterine lining an embryo needs for a successful pregnancy. The fact that my body did not produce it means that I did not actually release an egg. This is a big deal.

We know that it takes both a man and a woman to achieve pregnancy. When one of the variables from the man or the woman is not there the equation cannot complete. However, when an egg is not released from the woman there are usually several other indicating factors. I had none.

Another Aside: when Shawn asked my dad's permission to marry me, dad told Shawn that I was weird. This year has proven it beyond doubt. (Shawn edited to add "he wouldn't have me any other way" *grin*).

The "mystery of the missing hormone" took us down an entirely new path. Medically, there is a typical protocol followed when a female doesn't release an egg. This protocol involves quite a few ultrasounds and blood work. (I'm getting pretty good at this :+P).

So this is the route we're on now. We've decided we will try this for about six months and, if we're still not pregnant, then the Lord has other plans (at least for now). We have looked into and considered adoption. While this is definitely not a last resort, a lot of adoption agencies don't want couples to move forward if they're going through infertility treatment. Even if we do have biological children, the Lord has definitely opened our minds up to adoption as another way of growing our family.

With all of our modern technology — as amazing as it is — we can only help pregnancy happen; we cannot cause it to happen. Conception, gestation, and birth are always, and ever will be, up to the Lord. He is still sovereign and He is still good (Romans 8:28-29, Psalm 119:68). For that we can most assuredly praise Him.

This is an extremely short summary of what the Lord has been teaching us this year. The intricacy of the whole conception process before pregnancy even happens (we're not even talking about sustaining a pregnancy or giving birth to a child) has really emphasized what a treasure every human life is — and how morally abhorrent abortion is.

I hope you see this too. No child is ever an accident. Like the Psalmist, I can say with more intimate knowledge that every human being truly is "fearfully and wonderfully made." I can rejoice with the Psalmist when he declares "wonderful are Your works." And because of what has transpired this year, I can say with deeper understanding "my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14).

So this year, I am thankful for infertility. Though this was something I never expected, it was something I had no reason not to expect. It has taught me so much about myself (how much I really don't know, how I have the tendency to depend on myself, and how my thoughts of God are far too small) and about the wondrous, vast, and incomprehensible character and complexity of our God.

So, think about it. What trial are you going through or have you recently been through? What is it teaching you about yourself? What is

it showing you about God? The education God gives us through trials teaches us very important lessons about ourselves — and about Him.

P.S. I was going to write about some other things but I wanted to share what was most pressing on my heart. The Lord has been kind in so many areas and in so many ways. Business has been busy, but great. While working at an insurance agency and freelancing for several people, I am now starting and offering a course for realtors, entrepreneurs, and anyone else who wants to design for themselves called Learn Affinity Publisher: Take Control of Your Marketing. Shawn also started filming for his course on physical therapy. Exciting days ahead! Please pray for us! We definitely need it—for wisdom, grace, and time management.

And thank you to those of you who have been praying and to those of you who've told us that you are. It is incredible humbling and such an encouragement. This year has obviously been an eventful year full of new challenges and opportunities. If you would like to know more, please ask away!

Comments

This is a wonderful, God-glorifying update, Lauren. Trudy and I have walked some of the same road (absent The Crash, most notably) and we know the truth you're conveying. Your mature, wise perspective is a testimony of the Lord's work in your life. We'll pray and await learning what He determines to be the best path for your future.

—Brian Fluck, June 5, 2019

Thank you so much for continuing to share your story! It is a wonderful story and gives such glory to God. Our family has walked the infertility path too. We are so grateful for God's abundant grace and most of all, for the 3 answers to prayer that now call me "Nana". Asking God to continue to bless you and your husband.

—Debbie Irvine, June 5, 2019

Trusting with you in my beloved Jehovah-Timex, the LORD whose timing is perfect :)

—Emily Crosby, June 5, 2019

Dear Lauren, You have surely been going through a lot since your last post here! I don't think you're weird!! I want you to know that you and Shawn are in my thoughts and prayers!! Hoping you will be able to give birth to a beautiful, bouncing boy or girl but if not as you said there is always the possibility of adoption. I know God has a plan for you!! Take care my friend and may God shine His Light upon you!

My best, Paul

—Paul Conlin, June 5, 2019

So touched by your amazing post. The perspective you shared so beautifully in your writing is an inspiration to me.

—Linda Shields, June 5, 2019

I am a friend of your parents from my brief days at BMI many years ago. I have followed your story and miraculous healing. I will continue to pray for you during this time.

—Susan LeBlanc, June 6, 2019

Continued prayers for God's blessing in your lives -- whatever direction that takes you!

395 / 424

—Theresa Stowell, June 6, 2019

Dear Lauren and Shawn, Thank you for sharing the story of your journey. The Lord is so gracious in how He afflicts us for our good and reveals Himself to us in greater ways through our suffering. Will keep you in prayer as you continue to wait on Him and pursue all that He has for you. 💗

—Patricia Whitney, June 6, 2019

Dear Lauren & Shawn,

Thanks for your update. It's been so interesting to follow your journey, and the spiritual enlightenings that you and your family have learned, AND EXPRESSED, through this journey. I'll be praying for you concerning your desire to start a family, whatever way the Lord desires

that to happen. I know trying to become 'pregnant' can be stressful, it was for us back in the day. It's encouraging to see how you've fought through 'THE CRASH', blessings on the both of you, your parents and brother.

—Terry Plummer, June 8, 2019

Thankful for your lives and example of trusting the Lord in ALL things!! Glad tou are a part of our study.

—Giselle Ritchie, June 9, 2019

Day 3098 Anaya

Lauren Graham Waller, November 28, 2019

We have so much to be thankful for, don't we?

I love everything that Thanksgiving represents. After surviving their harrowing and treacherous Atlantic crossing, after coming through their first brutal winter, and after their first successful corn harvest when only half of the original passengers survived, the pilgrims celebrated what is now known as the "First Thanksgiving" (History.com).

The holiday of Thanksgiving was borne out of hardship. All too often, it takes coming out of trials and suffering for us to count our blessings and be thankful. Let us not wait for those trials to occur to give thanks, for we have so much to be thankful for.

As hard as life may (or may not) be, we can look around and find even little blessings for which to be thankful. Christians can look to God's Word to find the depths that our gratitude should plumb — for the bountiful and abundant graces of God given to us in Christ (1 Cor 1:4). We are forgiven of our sins and don't have to fear the wrath of God (Romans 8:1)!

Thankfulness should define the life of a Christian. In scripture, we see commands to "give thanks" (1 These 5:18). We also see how Thanksgiving characterized Jesus' and other godly men's lives (Mt 15:36; 26:26; Mk 14:23 ; 1 Cor 1:4; 1 These 1:2) and how every action of our lives should be characterized as done "with Thanksgiving" (Phil 4:6,

Col 4:1-3; 1 Tim 4:1-5).

We also see how serious the sin of ungratefulness is when we see that ingratitude is a characteristic of those upon whom judgment is coming (Romans 1:18-21). Jerry Bridges, in his book The Practice of Godliness, makes the point when he writes,

"To fail to be thankful to God is a most grievous sin. When Paul recounts the tragic moral downfall of mankind in Romans 1, he begins with the statement, 'Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him'" (p.98).

So this upcoming year, intentionally make an effort to count your blessings and be grateful on more than just one day. Make it a habit of your daily life. Along with all of those things, I'll share some of what I am grateful for this year.

I am grateful for glimpses of grace that God gives through trials.

Many of you know we have been trying to have a child for a few years now, and this year we decided to go the medical route for a deeper investigation (day 2922). That has been a wonderful, although trying, experience.

Why wonderful? Psalm 139:14 shares with us that every single human being is "fearfully and wonderfully made." We can look at and think about humanity and recognize that. But fertility testing and treatment makes that oh so abundantly clear.

When the doctor gives you a sheet with 30 blood tests that can be done to discover a potential problem, and you realize that if just one of those is off, it could cause a problem, you begin to see how amazing God's creation of humanity is.

And then you realize that up until recently, nobody had half of this knowledge. And humanity "just" keeps happening — babies are just born — without any medical intervention. That's amazing.

I'm thankful for this glimpse into God's character.

I'm thankful for God's sustaining grace through trials.

On August 13, we found out that I was pregnant after multiple years of trying — and almost a year of medical assistance. Excitement hardly begins to describe our feelings.

But within the first trimester, there were concerns with our little one — the hormone HCG was not rising as rapidly as it should. Shortly thereafter, we got the deeply saddening news that baby Waller didn't make it (we named our little one Anaya - which means, "God answered"). With this news came a host of questions, thoughts, and emotions.

I think our greatest emotions are probably deep sadness and grief. A life lost quickly is still a life lost. Immediately mixed in with our grief though is thankfulness. Thankfulness, why?

Well, as I previously wrote, after we started the medical route, we finally gained some clarity about the issues and some hope for a solution. We're thankful for that.

And though we received hope, we still do not know the mind of the Lord. We still don't know if the Lord wants us to have biological children, and we were unaware of whether pregnancy was even possible with my medical history.

And so, thankfulness. We still don't know what the Lord wants. We still don't know if He wants us to conceive, but what He has given us is a clear reminder that He is sovereign — He is the one who opens and closes the womb (Genesis 30:22, Isaiah 66:9, 1 Samuel 1:19-27).

This past August it pleased the Lord to remind us that He is in control. He is the one who does what He pleases — not us (Psalm 115:3). And even though we don't know what the Lord ultimately wants in this situation, what we do know is that the Lord wants us to remain faithful and thankful where He has us. And we are thankful for those lessons.

We're also thankful for the experience. Though difficult, 2 Corinthians 1 tells us that God comforts us in our afflictions so that we are able to comfort others in the same way. Going through this, I can say words of encouragement mean a lot, but they mean even more coming from someone who has been there. Now I am one of those who has been there.

We don't know why this happened. And that's okay (Deut 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9). God is God and we are not. We rest our hearts and anchor our minds on Psalm 119:68 — that God is good and does good. He is incapable of not being good or doing anything that is not good. And as difficult as circumstances may be, we can trust in the character of our God. We don't know what he's doing, but He does, and it's for our good (Romans 8:28).

In previous generations at this stage of pregnancy, women may not have even known they were pregnant. But the Lord not only opened my womb, He gave us the ability to know that pregnancy is possible for me — if He pleases. And we're thankful for that.

I'm thankful for physical changes.

When I became pregnant, things started changing pretty rapidly. Fatigue is one of the most common pregnancy symptoms, but it was already a natural part of everyday life for me. When thinking about pregnancy and hearing that fatigue is extremely prevalent, I was concerned about becoming pregnant to begin with. Would I even be able to function if that's already a part of my every day life? But within a few days of conception, I actually became more energized. The lethargy that normally follows like a shadow was further away. (Granted, that's not to say that that would last, but it's encouraging that that was there.)

And ironically, that seems to have continued. I still get tired, but not nearly as often (or as severely) as before the pregnancy. My memory has also improved (albeit only slightly, but any improvement is wonderful).

I also thankful I gained a few pounds — that have stayed. The weight gain that is usually so elusive proved that it can be caught if I try hard enough (pregnancy slowing down the metabolism also assists). It also demonstrates that it wasn't my weight that was keeping me from becoming pregnant to begin with. I'm grateful for that. (And my blood pressure is actually normal now instead of extremely low!)

We're thankful for you, and for your prayers.

It has been so humbling to hear of so many that have come to me asking how we're doing and saying "we're still praying for you guys."

A grace in the life of any believer is the body of Christ, and we clearly see that in our lives right now. The Lord has heard (and answered!) the prayers of His people — that's why we named our little one Anaya. And the Lord has graciously shown us His kindness and His sovereignty in every aspect of this.

It has taken my body a long time to even be ready to try again, but it looks like we can soon. We continue to covet your prayers for a healthy pregnancy, a healthy baby, and continued clarity and direction — but more than that, that we would be grateful and display God's glory through whatever happens.

We are sincerely thankful to the Lord for you,

Lauren - for the Wallers

Photos

Comments

This is another of your awesome testimonies, Lauren, from someone who's one of the most skillful conveyors of them! Thank you for encouraging us in Christ and allowing us to continue praying specifically for you!

—Brian Fluck, November 28, 2019

Thank you, Brian! That was very kind :+)

—Lauren Graham Waller, November 28, 2019

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. - Psalm 9:1

—Emily Crosby, November 28, 2019

Dear Shawn and Lauren,

This Caring Bridge update was the perfect ending to Thanksgiving Day 2019. I saw your e-mail earlier in the day, but didn't have a chance to open it until now.

I was amazed to see the number of days that have passed since your accident. I was also mightily encouraged to be reminded of our great

God's hand of merciful loving kindness in your life, and of answered prayers.

I think of your precious daughter Anaya, and the joy in knowing that you will see her in heaven and will be able to worship yours and her Creator together.

I am humbled by the testimony that you both have given and continue to give of God's sovereign rule and care in your lives. To see His power perfected in your weakness is such a huge encouragement, but also a great rebuke as I reflect on my lack of faith and lack of thanksgiving in many areas.

I am so thankful that you both know and love and trust our Sovereign God. I am thankful that you know He is an ever present help in time of trouble.

I will be praying for grace for you both in the days ahead, as you wait upon the Lord.

I am thankful for the fellowship we share in Christ Jesus, and all that we have shared together through Him.

I am praying that you will continue to run with endurance the race that God has set out before you, as you keep your eyes of Christ Jesus the author and the perfector of your your faith.

with all my love in Christ, Nancy for the K's

—Nancy Kearney, November 28, 2019

Just read this...your journey is amazing and still an inspiration..thanks for continuing to share!

—The Kaprive Family, December 2, 2019

Nice to hear from you! I'm glad it's still an encouragement, the Lord is definitely using in in my life. I only hope the Lord will use some of the lessons in other's lives.

—Lauren Graham Waller, December 4, 2019

Day 3233 Covid-19 and Where We're at Now

Lauren Graham Waller, April 11, 2020

Amid the trash heaps, the rubble, the slums, the heat, and the death-defying traffic we made our way to Purani Khondii. This is where we foreigners were going to share the matchless treasure of Christ with children we had never met.

Our Story—Separately

Initially, I (Lauren) was not a huge fan of the weather, or of children. I didn't know what to expect. But I knew that we had a priceless opportunity. The treasure carried within these jars of clay changes lives (2 Corinthians 4:7).

What we encountered far surpassed any of my expectations. It was clear that the Lord didn't only bring us there to work on others' lives — He had work to do in ours. At these children's camps is where the Lord really started teaching me of the value of children and the value every human life. Each child is made in the image of God and is a life worth loving (Genesis 1:27). And those gorgeous, eager brown eyes begging for more melt even the hardest of hearts. For the first time, I began to have the desire of having my own children.

Fast forward three weeks, unconscious in a hospital bed, life was fleeting and the thought of children further.

Fast forward three years, and I was married to the love of my life, Shawn, with a bright future ahead of us.

Shawn's story begins in 2004. In his freshman year of college, the Lord brought him to repentance and salvation when confronted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While attending college to become a physical therapist like his dad, the Lord gave him a heart to see others come to know Christ, both in this country and abroad.

As he was considering medical missions as a means to do that, the Lord directed his heart to take a short trip to Brazil. During his time there, he was brought to the favelas, or slums, where he saw many children living in the streets suffering from malnutrition, starvation, and poor health. It seemed a dark place with no hope. While he couldn't physically bring the children back to the States, he brought their faces and their stories home with him in his heart. This was the first seed that God planted deep inside him prior to meeting me.

Our Story—Together

Fast forward to one year into our marriage, when the trial of infertility begins. At first, it wasn't hard (for me). The traumatic brain injury made infertility a strong possibility. It also made the recent memories made in India dim, unclear, and a distant, faded, partial- memory. After all, the desire for biological children had only just recently appeared on my radar, even though Shawn desired children strongly from the beginning of our marriage. But, with infertility front-and-center, the strong desire for children, and India still on the mind — however dimly — adoption quickly became an option.

And then, in the Lord's sovereign will, and with medical intervention, I became pregnant. I was shocked at how quickly attached I became to this life growing inside of me. Before this happened, I was trusting that the Lord would change my heart and my attitude towards children. He certainly did.

But it wasn't to last. As we continued to monitor the pregnancy through bloodwork, we found that hormone levels weren't rising as they should. Heartbreakingly, early within the first trimester, we lost our Anaya.

After the miscarriage, during my recovery, adoption took front and center. If the miscarriage showed me anything, it was that I did want children — biological AND adopted. But we aren't the ones who make the decision about which comes first. Shawn began researching agencies and asking questions. So after three months of physically recovering from the miscarriage, we decided on two more months of medically-assisted attempts. But since we don't decide whether life begins or not, they were to no avail.

In my heart I can sometimes wonder, "why would the Lord give me my own child and soften my heart towards the idea of having children, only to take mine away?"

I think the answer lies in what we named the baby we lost — Anaya, or "God answered." God answered so many prayers with the fleeting life of Anaya. He answered our prayer for a child — however brief. He answered the prayers for the desire of a child. He calmed my fears of "will I have a desire for my children? Will God change my heart?"

God answered.

Our Story—Looking Ahead

He answered a lot. And now that we have answers to some of these questions, we want to adopt — from India, where the longing first began. And we ask for your help in making this happen.

When we found out that India has the largest orphan populations in the world — 30 million (more people than the entire state of Texas), baby girls are buried alive for being born female, and children are abandoned on the street and put in orphanages for the smallest things (as well as financial strains and things families can't control), India was really the only country we considered. Each child should be given the same opportunities and privileges no matter their station in life. And a child's gender shouldn't determine whether they live or die.

When the Lord saves individuals, they are adopted into His family. They have no worth of their own (Phil 3:9), and yet they receive all the same rights and privileges as God's only Son — Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14-17). We want to give a little girl the same opportunities that we have. Only the Lord knows the identity of our child, but we are hoping and praying for a little Indian girl.

We believe the Lord has uniquely equipped us to care for a little girl who has some form of physical special need. The Lord has given us both hearts and unique skill sets — as a physical therapist and one who has walked through the difficulties of recovery. We are trusting that the Lord will uniquely use our stories in the life of a little girl. We hope to call her Jubilee as a reminder that the Israelites waited eagerly for the year of Jubilee, the year of redemption and liberation. It also reminds us of our excitement as we watch the Lord continue to unfold His plan. Our hearts are rejoicing in the anticipation of seeing how God will unfold the details of that plan.

Our Story—Where You Come In

We realize that we are living in unprecedented times with so much uncertainty. But, as believers, we know the One who is certain (Numbers 23:19,Hebrews 13:8,James 1:17) and who holds all things in His hands (Colossians 1:15-17).

We also know the heart of our Lord. We know that even though our times shift and change, He does not, and that He still cares for the orphan and the widow (James 1:27; Psalm 34:18; 68:5). If you would like to help, please consider partnering with us by praying for us.

Partner With Us Through Prayer

As to our future adoption plans, Lifeline (our adoption agency) has estimated that our adoption will be anywhere from $39,000-$42,000. Shawn has been taking on additional clients as a physical therapist, and we have been doing as much as we can to set aside as much as possible for Jubilee's adoption.

In addition to trimming our budget, we have also done a good deal of grant research. Lifesong kindly found us a matching grant of $4,000, and through God's abundant grace, we were almost simultaneously awarded another grant of $1,000 to help with the finalization of our home study. (It's so humbling to see this — this first major hurdle crossed.)

We don't know what kind of special needs our Jubilee will have or what the financial needs will be when she arrives home, but we are trusting in the Lord for His provision and care. Would you please consider praying that the Lord would continue to provide for us (and for her) in the meticulous, sovereign, and good ways that He cares for the needs — and desires — of His children?

We are at the beginning of a long journey. Because we're working with a lot of unknowns (and two governments), Lifeline has estimated that adoption from India will take 2-3 years (only time will tell how Covid-19 will impact this estimate).

For a little picture of what has to take place in that time (and where we are in the process), you can view or download our "India Adoption Timeline" (the download may not accurately reflect where we're at, but it will help you read the descriptions better). We will also try and post any major updates on here (but all adoption updates will be on this website as well, please subscribe here for the latest updates).

While this page represents only a snippet of our story, we welcome any questions and the opportunity to boast in the Lord's work in our lives in so many other ways. If we can offer any additional information about our story, our desires, or our plan, please do not hesitate to reach out or comment and let us know! It would be our pleasure to provide that to you.

Thank you for your time!

(If you would like to check out our first adoption journey video, please visit here.) Photos

Comments

Jubilee! What a wonderful name!! Can't wait to meet her. Hope she likes hedgehogs!!! Trusting in the prefect timing of Jehovah-Timex...

Auntie Em

—Emily Crosby, April 11, 2020

💗 Will be praying for you and for the process... God's perfect will in His perfect way. Love you both!

—Patricia Whitney, April 11, 2020

Day 3247 Great News! And a Neat Idea

Lauren Graham Waller, April 25, 2020

Good morning!

This week we received the excellent news that our home study was "officially" completed April 13, and yesterday we received our digital copy! Thank you for your prayers!

Home studies are usually the first requirement for adoption or foster care in the United States. If you have anything to hide, a home study will uncover it. If you have a grip on your personal privacy, a home study forces you to either lessen that grip (a lot) or it won't get done.

A home study involves an in-depth medical history, bloodwork, a psychological evaluation, a home visit, financial history research, local and federal criminal background checks, reference requests, and so on (just to name a few).

Shawn facetiously describes it like this: "Basically, someone filets open your heart, examines it, passes it along to the next person to look at, and so on."

So praise the Lord we're done with that part, and we "passed"! The next step in international adoption is to apply for our I-800A and to CARINGS simultaneously. To learn a little more about that, how you can continue praying, and what our neat idea is, just head to

walleradoption.com and scroll down to the updates section. [Hint: our idea involves a $4000 matching grant.]

We will be updating that site regularly with mini progress updates. (You can sign up there to get updates from that site at the megaphone icon "receive story updates" button at the top right side of the page on your computer.)

Thank you for your support!

Photos

Day 3288 Making Connections

Lauren Graham Waller, June 5, 2020

One more year down begets new reflections of thankfulness. I am indeed thankful for another year of new lessons the Lord has taught.

I was about to say nothing much new has happened this year, but that's because the emotional memories of events have significantly faded — which I have noticed is something that is different since the Crash. For me to really remember something, it needs to make a serious, emotional impression. But while that helps engrave a memory into my brain, after time passes, the only things that remain as that memory are simply the facts of the event.

The closest analogy I can think of plays out like this: it's the year 1850, and you visit the grand canyon (I've always wanted to go, so this is what I imagine its like - I may be totally wrong). You behold the vast expanse of sky, the magnitude of the rock formations, and the sheer jaw-dropping beauty of the whole panorama. God's glory is on display to a degree that brings you to your knees. But alas, your time at the canyon must end, and you must return home.

You desire to bring memories back with you so that you can more clearly remember the beauty and return to those soul-searching moments. But color photography is just being developed (punintended), and hasn't come very far. The memories you bring back in picture form display only a glimpse of the glory that you experienced. The images give others an idea of the magnificence you saw, but the stills show nothing of the real majesty of the canyon.

That's kind of what I picture my memory as. When I do remember something, I remember the basic facts of what happened. Just as a photo shows the "facts" of the experience but not the full impact, I remember the facts of how I felt, but I don't experience the emotional impact of those events any longer. Which, in a lot of ways, can be a huge blessing. And for a lot of other things (like conversations), something has to simply "trigger" the memory.

So I guess all of that describes how I can start the blog off with "nothing much has happened," when in reality, a whole lot has happened — which I can recall if I give it more than 2 seconds of thought (also a common occurrence for me — not a good one, but a common one).

I've already written about the two largest events of this year — the miscarriage (Day 3098) and the beginning of the adoption (Day 3233; 223 pieces in our puzzle so far - almost half way!) — so I don't believe I need to elaborate any more on those.

Other than those two events, I think the biggest things for me this year revolve around learning the way that I operate. I've previously written about how going through the Crash was almost like being born twice — after the Crash I had to learn how to eat again, breathe again, write again, walk again, and talk again. But in a way, it's almost like I'm "growing up" again because I'm learning how I process things and how I operate — how I accomplish tasks and how I compensate for abilities I no longer have.

Making Connections

I've been learning this since 2011, and I'm sure I will be learning this for the rest of my life, but this year it really seems like I'm putting pen to paper for a lot of these things.

Something I'm learning about me (and about memories in general) is the importance of making connections.

For example, I was reading an Indian Instantpot cookbook. (Yes, I will occasionally read — and enjoy — a cookbook.) The author's tips were not only helpful, but engaging. And normally, I'm rather hard pressed to tell you what I read immediately after I read it — unless you give me a topic covered in the book/article (a trigger) — then I can tell you what the author said about it. (This is true for sermons, books, podcasts, conversations, etc. It's rather disheartening when someone asks you

about the content of a conversation you literally just had, and you have to say "uhh...hold on. Let me think...long and hard...about that." My impatience plus our fast-paced culture make this especially difficult.)

The author of this cookbook (Ms. Pitre) is known as "the butter chicken lady" in her Facebook group — because she makes the most incredible, easily repeatable, butter chicken. She mentions that some people who made her recipe only thought it was "okay" and not "amazing." In her investigations, she discovered that this was because of the kind of garam masala people were using. A single spice turned this dish from "meh" to "Amazing."

Now I thought that this story was very interesting, but really didn't think further into it. I checked the ingredients in my garam masala and after adding some cayenne, I thought it was pretty similar to hers. But I made this recipe several times, and every time I made it, it was pretty good. Definitely not amazing. I thought I was just doing something wrong and I simply needed to try again.

Until I ran out of the garam masala we bought at Fresh Market.

Now, in my kitchen, you can't make much Indian food without garam masala. So knowing we had to remedy this problem quickly (during a quarantine), I decided to check her recipe to see if I could make it myself. And I could. So I did.

You probably already know where this is going, but the next time I made Butter Chicken, it was really good. It definitely got the Shawn seal of approval :+) So he, being curious, asked what I did different. In the process of recounting what I did differently (which was pretty much nothing), we realized that the garam masala I used was different.

Boom.

Because of that "trigger," I then proceeded to tell him the whole story from the cookbook.

Connection made.

When Shawn asked me in surprise how I remembered all of that, I told him "I thought it was interesting" — intellectually stimulating in a way — and that it was relevant to the situation. Now I am realizing that this

story “connected” with me on an emotional level, recounting what happened triggered it, and that’s why I remembered the story.

Something the doctors told my parents and I in the hospital is that because of the diffuse axonal shearing, many connections, or “neural pathways,” in my brain were broken. Because of this, I would need to learn how to compensate — these nerve signals would need to find a detour. (These “detours” are why it takes me longer than the average person to do certain tasks.)

Shawn is really trying to help me nail down these moments and help me replicate these connections in other areas of life.

In the process of writing this, I have "made some connections" and realized a few things. Last night I told Shawn about realizing that I need "triggers," and he told me that he learned (from Jim Kwik - survivor of a childhood head injury - who speaks on this all the time) that I need to make my own triggers.

This is so humbling in so many ways. Please pray for me (and Shawn).

Trusting the Lord

And this goes back to the lesson that repeats itself every year in my personal life curriculum: I need to trust the Lord. What I remember and don’t remember and the neural pathways that are made and not made, are all in the hands of a sovereign, omnipotent God. Yes, there is definitely human responsibility (and a lot of it - it's very humbling), but when there’s nothing left for us to do, it’s all in the Lord’s hands we need to trust Him (Proverbs 3:5-6). And when there are things to do that we feel inadequate for or incapable of, the result should be the same: we need to, as Shawn says, “do our best and trust the Lord with the rest.”

This is a lesson that I have come to believe is foundational to the Christian life. One of the lessons that has been strongly impressed on my heart lately is that, to one degree or another, almost every sin at its core can be battled by trusting the Lord. A lack of trust in the Lord demonstrates unbelief. (Here, find the infographic — adapted from pastor Todd Murray — showing what this looks like.)

It seems so trite and elementary, but the Lord has been teaching me how foundational trusting in His sovereignty and goodness are to the Christian life.

Realizing how I operate, and the weaknesses in how I operate, are yet another reason to battle sin and trust the Lord (if you want to listen to me talk about this in my story and specifically in the battle against discontentment, you can do so here; notes are here).

This blog was not intended to end up here (I wasn't really writing with a clear end goal — a no-no in content creation), but I guess when the Lord is really teaching you something, that's what you'll go back to. You know it because you've lived it (and are constantly learning it). Rereading this this morning is an encouragement to my heart of what attitude I need to have.

So I hope that that's encouraging to you. Whatever challenges you're going through, whether it's related to infertility, racism, joblessness, COVID-19, or something else entirely, the Lord calls us to trust Him and bring everything to Him (Phil 4:4-6). Trusting Him may not make the problem go away, but it will give us proper perspective in eternity.

In other news, I've [obviously] also been thinking a lot about adoption, and specifically about The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption and how it relates to the gospel. It's been such a sweet, encouraging, rich study so far and I look forward to its continuation. You can most likely expect a post about that sometime within the next 2-3 years ;+)

And, if you're curious, we have met our matching grant! But we still have over half of our puzzle left. (It's definitely coming along though!) If you would like to read more about where we're at along our journey to Jubilee (another update coming tomorrow), just scroll down to the "updates" section of our adoption blog.

Thank you guys so much for your love and support. They mean the world to us. If you have any questions for us, please ask. We love hearing from you guys.

We love you!

Comments

Love you sis! Thankful for you, Shawn, and the Lord's work in all our lives. Let's get together for some "amazing" Butter Chicken soon :)

—Brad Graham, June 5, 2020

Heh love you too! Sounds good! We would love too! :+D (Butter chicken is actually the dish some on our team ordered repeatedly because of the FAR lower spice content *smiles*)

—Lauren Graham Waller, June 6, 2020

I don't know where I originally got it from, but I used to tell my kids, "Do your best, pray that it's blessed and

God will take care of the rest." :)

—Emily Crosby, June 5, 2020

I like that! That's a good motto. Thanks!

—Lauren Graham Waller, June 6, 2020