

Alarmed, but not alarmed.

By Maria Houston

I wake up to the sound of my five-year-old daughter's glucose monitor alerting me that her blood sugar is low. I look over at the clock. It's 12:01 am.

This is the third time the alarm has gone off since I put her to bed. The first time was at 8:45 pm. Her blood sugar was low. I woke her up and forced her to drink a juice box.

The second time was at 10:30 pm. Her blood sugar was high. I had to give her insulin. Now her blood sugar is low again. I will have to wake this sleepy child once more.

It's a juggling act. High blood sugar puts the child at risk for future health complications. Low blood sugar can cause fainting, a seizure or even death. You spend every moment of your 24-hour day trying to balance a nice healthy blood sugar number. It seems daunting some days and impossible others.

Emily was only two years old when she was diagnosed. She had lost weight quickly. She looked like a skeleton; pale and too weak to walk. I was told she had been near death. I watched her hooked up to machines and IVs, wondering how this ever happened. I understood for the first time the fragility of human life.

It was overwhelming to think that at any moment this child could be taken from me. I told the Lord I would love, serve and cherish her for as many days as He saw fit. With a surrendered heart and an opened hand I felt a sense of freedom I never expected. I no longer was responsible for this child—He was.

I was determined to view the rest of her life not as a battle between life and death but as a victory of life over death. I viewed her diagnosis day as the day she would have died had she lived a few generations ago, but because of the invention of manmade insulin, and the goodness of God, my daughter would continue to live. She has been granted a second life.

I prick her finger and check her blood sugar. The meter reads 67. This low number indicates that I need to stay awake for a while. I give her a few gummies hoping her blood sugar will slowly rise, but not too much like it did earlier.

I wait the prescribed 15 minutes and recheck her blood sugar. It reads 63. I wake her again and give her five more gummies, crossing my fingers while hoping that with the sugar in her system they will not catapult her into the 400s.



Twenty minutes later I look over at her monitor. It's only up to 76. I grab my iPad and look for something on YouTube that will entertain me. Every twenty minutes the alarm goes off, hovering over safe numbers but lower than I need it to be in order to have uninterrupted sleep.

Finally, the arrow on her monitor points up. Her sugar is beginning to rise. When it finally reaches 115, I close my eyes without looking at the clock. I don't want to know how many minutes of sleep Type 1 diabetes has robbed me of tonight.

Anything can affect a Type 1 diabetic's blood sugar. What they ate, how much they exercised, if it was cold or hot outside, how much stress they encountered, the order in which they did activities, and in my child's case, even how much she laughs.

How do I filter this daily struggle through the Gospel? How do I take this incredible burden I carry daily and instead experience joy? Forget joy—how do I just be content? How can I be like Paul and say, “not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (Phil 4:11 NASB)? Could I really be content with something this oppressing?

Questions can keep coming: How could a God who loves me allow this to happen to me? How could He allow this to happen to a child? How can I ever trust a God who would allow this to pass through his sovereign hand? What is the point of trusting God if this happens? Why am I trusting Him?

It is imperative when struggling with these questions to go straight to the Lord Himself. I have seen mothers who have lost faith, fathers who no longer smile, and families torn apart because of chronic illness. If you do not bring these questions to the Father, the exhaustion, anger, bitterness, and grief will be too much to face.

It is very easy to stop pursuing the Lord when you are in the midst of emotional despair. Before you know it, angry days turn to bitter weeks, which turn into apathetic months turning into faithless years. You must view chronic illness as a fork in the road. You can pursue the Lord in it and watch your faith grow stronger, or you can allow it to burden your heart so much that you no longer want anything to do with Him.

You must fight for your faith, ask the Lord to show himself at this time, and commit to not let go of God no matter how much the enemy tempts you. If you cling to the Lord, you will feel Him gripping you tighter than you can possibly imagine, reminding you that above all else you are His.

I truly believe that trials are the only way we can begin to understand that the joy in our lives is not based on health, wealth, or a happy living environment. When James says in Chapter 1 verses 2-4, “consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let the endurance have its perfect result so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing,” he is describing the process it takes to be at peace in all life's situations.

Perhaps my newest aim should be following Colossians 1:10 “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Instead of praying for chronic illness to go away, maybe I need to pray that I will walk through this trial in a way that pleases Him.

Maybe being a faithful daughter to my God and mother to my daughter in this hardship is the good works being referred to in Ephesians 2:10. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so we would walk in them.” What if these trials were orchestrated beforehand so that I could know God more intimately than if they never occurred? What if being obedient through these hardships is the only way I can have the faith described in Hebrews 11? Perhaps these hardships serve a joyful purpose that is greater than the pain they often bring.

Type 1 diabetes will likely be the “thorn in our flesh” that continues to affect our family for decades to come. We stand with other families that suffer with this disease praying for a cure. But if, like Paul, we are denied the thorn to be removed, I pray that I can rest in the words the Lord gave him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” May I respond like Paul and say “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Maria Houston lives in Maryland with her husband, daughter and the old dog her daughter faithfully asked God for. She is a former first grade teacher but currently stays home so she can care for her child's chronic illness and health conditions. Maria is learning to see God in situations she once thought were impossible.