

Penny Silly

LIFE EXPERIENCE:

When I was growing up, my grandmother used to give me and my two younger cousins chewable orange baby aspirin every day in the wintertime. This ritual prevented us from getting sore throats or fevers. The very first time she doled out the little pills, my cousins Debra and Dawanna obediently chewed theirs. I, on the other hand, didn't like that bitter orange taste and chalky texture. I told my grandmother as much.

“Chew it up,” she replied. “It tastes like candy.”

The nasty little thing had already melted in my mouth anyway, so I choked it down my throat. Then I set my five-year-old mind to planning how to avoid taking another one.

When she gave me a baby aspirin the next day, I slyly dropped it in the water while washing my hands. Splashing the water around a little made the small pill dissolve, and no one was the wiser. I was the brightest five-year-old I knew, outsmarting my grandmother and all. In reality, I was the only five-year-old I knew, but that's beside the point.

For a couple of days I did that disappearing trick. On day three, however, I developed a sore throat. My two cousins stayed healthy, while my ailment progressed into chronically swollen tonsils that home remedies couldn't heal. My grandparents had to take me to the doctor, and that was back in the days when folks cured everything at home.

At the clinic, Dr. Knight sat me on the examining table, put that ‘popsicle stick’ on my tongue, and aimed a miniature flashlight at the back of my throat. One moment, I felt weak and hot, then cold and sweaty the next. It hurt when I swallowed.

Putting down his instruments and feeling my neck, he said to the nurse, “Yeah, we need to give her a shot of penicillin.”

Two of his words stood out to me. ‘Penicillin’ because it sounded like ‘penny silly,’ which would have been quite comical to my little ears had I not been so sick. I also heard the word ‘shot’. It wasn’t funny at all because I’d been down that road a time or two and knew some pain was in my near future.

I pleaded for my grandparents to get me out of there. You’ve never seen a thirty-pound human fight so hard. It took both of them plus the nurse to hold me down so the doctor could administer the shot.

Once we got back home, I showed my cousins the bandage over my injection site, and with a pitiful face told them all about the doctor giving me a shot of ‘penny silly.’

GROWTH:

At the time, I was too young to know that this great pain could have been avoided had I endured the lesser unpleasantness of taking that baby aspirin for a little while.

Looking back, many bitter pills—in the form of pains, hardships, challenges, and heartaches—have come my way in sixty years of living. I can’t lie; I spent a lot of time trying to make every one of them vanish. Unfortunately, suffering and trials don’t melt away as easily as my baby aspirin did. There have been situations that did not go away when I prayed, no matter how fervently I expressed to God what I wanted. There have been ordeals that did not end when I commanded them to, no matter how much scripture I quoted.

The reality is that no one is going to live on this earth without some anguish and difficulty. Thankfully, God has a way of causing even our distress to benefit us—if we let Him. Hear what God says.

“I say this because I know what I am planning for you,” says the Lord. “I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future” (Jeremiah 29:11 NCV).

God does not necessarily *cause* every dilemma that comes into our lives, but He can certainly *use* them to make us stronger. He says that He declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). That means that *before* things happen in our lives, God already knows the outcome. And why should this be so difficult to believe? My grandmother was not God, yet she could foresee the end (my great sickness) that would inevitably spring from the beginning (my sore throat and fever). Though she didn't cause it, she certainly saw it coming. How much greater is God's foresight?

Nevertheless, at the ripe old age of five, I discarded my grandmother's insight and relied on my little bit of “wisdom”. In the end, I learned two things. (1) What she had said was correct (take the baby aspirin so you won't get sick). (2) She was concerned about what's best for me.

Those two things apply just as much to God. Everything He says is true and He looks out for my best interest without any speculation or guesswork. As Jeremiah 29:11 makes plain, He knows what He's doing. But how often in my adult life have I let a detestable situation get the best of me because I put trust in my instincts instead of in the omniscient God who knows everything about my circumstance? He promises that He has plans to take care of me. So the question is—will I trust Him? When I'm in a predicament, will I trust the infinite knowledge of the God who knows what He is doing and has it all planned out? Or will I trust my own limited knowledge and beg and plead for Him to make the bitter pill go away? Will I allow God to do what my grandmother tried to do: use something disagreeable to strengthen me to fight off a coming calamity?

Think of it this way: while you're busy asking God to *change the situation*, God is busy asking you to let Him use the situation to *change you*; to make you stronger; to mature you as a Christian.