

Cloud Of Witnesses

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By Elsa Day



Denise ran up the steps to college as usual; suddenly her legs turned to jelly.

She finished her day and this seventeen-year-old went to bed as normal.

In the morning she woke to find she was paralysed from the waist down.

It was not long before the paralysis had reached her neck. When Joni, another young person also a paraplegic, was sent to the same ward in the hospital as Denise, by then, Denise had become blind and had difficulty with speech.

We know Joni (Earekson Tada), although still paralysed, has used her gift for communication to share her faith with thousands of others. Her life because of her faith has made a difference to so many, but Denise also a Christian, could not do that.

Friends stopped visiting as she could no longer communicate with them. Her only visitor, her mother, who came every day and, in the time spent with her daughter, read the Bible to her, and prayed with her.

How long did she suffer? For eight years as a particularly virulent form of Multiple Sclerosis took everything from her.

The world would judge her life as useless.

How could God allow this?

Joni reflected upon Denise's life and began to view it from a Heavenly perspective: weak and helpless though she was, her Faith never wavered, making no complaint seeking no-one to blame so to all intents and purposes she could not share her faith with anyone. Then Joni was reminded we know we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses in the heavenly realms... and Joni thought it seemed that each one held its breath until finally Denise's soul was Heaven bound, she had stayed the course to the end.^[1]

This story reminded me of the way which we as a Church could feel.

So much loss, so many friends no longer with us, we are left weak. But we are surrounded by thousands of witnesses; some of those very ones we are missing today.

Are they holding their breath to see how we respond? Will we stay the course?

Will we count our losses and continue to grieve, stand still, make excuses as to why we can't do this or that?

Or are we drawing ever closer to our Lord asking for His strength and His power into our lives? Do we keep reading His Word as He guides us in His way? Are we praying faithfully, giving Him praise and honour; trusting Him for what we cannot see but expectant to find what His will is for us, for we serve a mighty God?

The same God who became weak and helpless as He chose to live as one of us. Tested in every way, He too encountered loss and pain, rejection and betrayal, finally deserted by His friends; even His Father turned from Him as Jesus chose to bear our Sins and die abandoned on the Cross.

Then came His cry, "It is finished!"

All of Heaven had watched as the Son died... sinless, He took our sin that we might have Eternal life. That was His purpose, and He stayed the course to the end. Yes, we may be weak but what a Saviour, what a God, is ours! May our cloud of witnesses see Clare Baptist renewed by His Spirit continuing to witness for Him in this place.

^[1] From "Walking with God through Pain and Suffering" by Tim Keller (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015)

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