

FAITH AT A CROSSROADS

When I first became disabled with Chronic Chemical Injury in June 1987, there were many, many adjustments I had to go through. I went from being independent and leading an active lifestyle to being completely dependent on my parents and leading a quiet, isolated lifestyle. Yet these were not all the adjustments that I had to make.

On top of all of this, there was the huge adjustment of going from a lifestyle dependent on many consumer products that contain toxic chemicals to a lifestyle completely void of many of these same products. Although I really enjoyed using these items, my body became very ill whenever I was exposed to them. Since I reacted to the toxic chemicals in the consumer products that I was using, I had to make radical changes in my possessions, my clothes, my diet and my lifestyle. For the first few years, I was confronted continuously with something else that I must change. I was so very ill that my choice was simply to either make these changes or die.

All of these adjustments were very, very difficult for me to make. The first four years of my disability were the hardest. As a result, this disability was not only causing me to change my lifestyle; it was also causing me to change my relationship with God. Many times during those early years, I told my parents that this disability was either going to make me or break me as a Christian. Either what the Bible says about God is true or it's not true. Either God can help me or He can't help me. This disability brought my faith in God to a crossroads. My faith was either going to be built stronger by it or my faith was going to be destroyed by it.

What I confronted was a difference in my intellectual knowledge and my experiential knowledge of the question: "Who is my God?" Since childhood, I had learned a lot of things about God, from reading the Bible and studying the Bible. I knew that He is all-powerful, all-loving, compassionate, and forgiving. I knew the verses that tell us that He is our strength, our rock, and our deliverer; and that He is the God of all comfort, and the God of encouragement; and that He is the God of hope and He can give a peace that passes all understanding.

I knew what the Bible taught about God, but did I really know Him? Did my life reflect what my mouth claimed to believe? The hard reality that I was forced to face was that I knew many things about God intellectually, but only a fraction of those things had been translated into experiential knowledge. Much of what I believed about God, I had not proven in the hard reality of the difficulties of life.

Now, more than 39 years later, I can truly say God has been faithful to His promises. When I have leaned on God, God has always been there for me. My experience has been that the God described in the Bible can be depended on to do exactly what He has promised to do. I have learned that often the trials of life are a vehicle to help us get to know God better, to take what we know intellectually about God and make it practical in an experiential way. My disability became an instrument to teach me experientially who my God really is. So, as I continue in the school of life, I'm learning more and more to rely on God's nature, God's character and God's promises.

The motto for my life has become, "To know God and to make Him known".