

# You Don't Have to Walk to Live!



By Henry Jernigan

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¶ down to earth look at God's plan and  
purpose for every life—regardless of  
circumstances.

## You can believe...

Elizabeth and I sat in a waiting room just outside our doctor's office. An ultrasound had confirmed the doctor's concern that something was wrong with our unborn baby. We were waiting to find out how "wrong" things were. It had only been two days since we'd been in the same office for a seemingly innocent test – a test that would forever change the course of our lives. But looking back on it, it wasn't the "test" that changed our lives. Our lives had changed months before. We were just now learning the truth.

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As Elizabeth and I waited to hear from our doctor, I had already conjured up many possible scenarios, and none of them were appealing. Give my brain something to worry about and some caffeine, and it can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. Thoughts like –

*"I'm scared. What's going to happen? I don't know if I can do this? What could be so wrong this early? Is my baby going to live or die? Why is this happening to me? Who invented foamy soap, and why?"*

Finally, our doctor came out of his office and said, "Well, you're going to have a boy."

"Okay," I responded. So far so good. "And...?"

"And I'm sorry, but your boy has Spina Bifida."

"Spina what?" I asked. I didn't know what it meant, but I knew it didn't sound good either.

He continued, and for the next several minutes his words painted a painful picture of reality, confusion, and unknowns. It was like staring close up at an impressionistic painting, except it hurt real deep – and it wasn't going away.

Basically, our baby's spine failed to close before we knew we were pregnant. His spinal cord would be exposed the duration of the pregnancy greatly affecting its development. And since the spinal cord is the neurological control center for the entire body, it is associated with most all bodily function, including breathing, sleeping, swallowing, kidneys, bladder, going to the bathroom, and so much more. But, the one issue that jumped out at me above all the others was when our doctor looked me in the eyes and said, "You know, your son will probably never walk." I had no response. I mean, how do you process that?

"But, there is an option," he continued.

"*Really?!*" I exclaimed silently to myself. A ray of hope! My heart leaped. An out. Something to fix the problem? He chose his words carefully.

"If it's something you wish to consider, there is the option of terminating your pregnancy. I'm not advocating you do that, but we can have it arranged should you wish to pursue it." Silence.

Over the course of the next several months, I looked long and hard at the impressionistic painting that had been given to me. I didn't ask for it. I didn't deserve it. But, there it was. It was there when I woke up in the morning and there when I went to bed at night. It was in my dreams. And no matter how much I prayed, questioned, or analyzed, it wouldn't come into focus. It

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Life for me was not in perspective, and every day held with it an opportunity to take care of my circumstances.

Every day held with it a choice I could make. I could throw away the painting that was given me and be done with it (theoretically), or I could

choose to keep my painting and believe it was a work of art with purpose and meaning – even if I didn't totally understand it.

Elizabeth and I made our choice early on in the doctor's office. We chose to keep the painting. We chose to believe that the life inside of her was not a mistake. We chose to believe that God had a plan and purpose for our little boy. We chose to believe in what we couldn't see – that God was able to do things beyond our comprehension. As with my brother when I was five years old, I wanted to believe God could foresee what was going to happen, that “in Him” all things were possible, and in Him everything would be okay.

In the movie *The Polar Express*, a young boy goes to sleep on Christmas Eve having doubts about Santa Claus. He no longer knows whether or not to believe. All of a sudden, he's awakened by a train that pulls up and stops right in front of his house. He runs outside to inspect the commotion and learns it's headed for the North Pole. Reluctantly, he gets on board and discovers lots of other children along for the ride. The journey

contains lots of peaks, valleys, and adventures, but they finally arrive at the North Pole. The children soon congregate with thousands of elves at the center of the city to celebrate Christmas and witness Santa's Christmas Eve departure. As the reindeer are pulled together and harnessed to Santa's sleigh, their sleigh bells ring out loud, but the young boy can't hear them. Soon, Santa makes his grand entrance, but the young boy can't see him because the crowd is blocking his view. All of a sudden, a sleigh bell breaks from the sleigh and rolls to the boy's feet. He picks it up and shakes it, but hears nothing. It doesn't make a sound. Suddenly, he realizes that only those who truly believe can hear the bells. Only those who truly believe can experience the joy and spirit of Christmas. Finally the little boy's heart agrees with everything he's seen and he whispers, "I believe." At that very moment, he begins to hear the bells. At that moment, everything is clear. Do you believe? You can.

## **Focusing on the truth...**

Pierce was born on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and he looked just like me. I apologized to Elizabeth.

He had two immediate surgeries, one to repair the hole in his back, and the other to place a shunt in his head to drain his spinal fluid – something his body can't do on its own. The initial days of Pierce's life were spent in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in Nashville. After two weeks, we were able to go home.

Arriving at home was kind of a starting point for me. I had about five months to get ready for Pierce's arrival. Five months to laugh, cry, question, argue, mourn, and celebrate. I was kind of schizophrenic. But I had resolved in my heart that God had a plan in all of this and, for me, coming home was the beginning of finding out what it was.

**Your dad's been diagnosed with lung cancer. It's very aggressive and we need to make some decisions.**

Finding yourself at home with an infant for the very first time is kind of like your first day in school – without a teacher. We put Pierce on our bed and just kind of looked at him. We looked at each

other, and then we looked at him. This went on for several minutes till the phone rang. It was my mom. My mom and dad had been to Nashville for Pierce's birth, but had since gone home. I answered and said, "Hey, I was about to call you. We're home! They let us out of the hospital today."

"That's great," my mom replied, "but I need to tell you something."

"Okay," I said. She continued, "Your dad's been diagnosed with lung cancer. It's very aggressive and we need to make some decisions." Silence.

Over the course of the next several months, Pierce had two more surgeries. In between surgeries, and whenever possible, we made the trip up to my parent's home in Kentucky to visit. And two months to the day we brought Pierce home from the hospital – my dad died.

Sometime in the middle all of that—in between the cancer, Spina Bifida, and baby poop—Elizabeth and I found ourselves one day in our kitchen hugging, crying, and just kind of holding onto each other for emotional support. I said, “You know that part in the Bible where God says that He won’t give you more than you can handle – you know that part?” And she said, “Yes.” I continued, “I wonder if we’re close to that ‘more than you can handle’ because it really feels like it.”

Maybe, you feel like that right now. Maybe you feel like I did that day in the kitchen with my wife. Overwhelmed. It’s there when you wake up in the morning and it’s there when you go to bed at night. It’s scary and unclear and a voice keeps whispering in your ear that “you can fix the problem.” It may whisper, “I’m too young to be a mommy,” “I don’t deserve this,” or “I can’t do this on my own.”

Don’t listen to that voice. It’s telling you lies. Let me give you the truth.

Lie: “You can fix the problem.”

Truth: Again, there is no problem. God has a plan and purpose for your child.

Lie: “I’m too young to be a mommy.”

Truth: No, you’re not. If you were too young, there would not be a baby inside of you. You can be a remarkable parent, but that’s another choice for you to make.

Lie: “I don’t deserve this.”

Truth: Actually, that statement is true. You don’t deserve

it. Life is a gift from God and it's not reserved for those who "deserve" it. Don't throw away the gift God's given you.

Lie: "I can't do this on my own."

Truth: Another true statement. You can't. But, there's a God in heaven who can help you and He's placed you among a group of people in the form of a "Pregnancy Center" or church who desperately want to help. Let them. They will hold your hand through the process.

I sometimes think God created pregnancies to last nine months just to give us some of the time we need to figure things out—as opposed to ten days which would freak everyone out.

Focusing on the truth puts life in perspective. Focusing on the truth will place the life of your baby in perspective. Simply focus on the truth and your circumstances will begin to lose their significance. Before Pierce was born, my biggest concern was the thought of him not being able to walk. Your biggest concern may simply be that you're pregnant. Two years after he was born, his life and the whole "walking" thing was put into complete perspective for me through an experience that is still emotional for me to even think about.