

Autism / God's Comfort and Strength

June: I didn't know what to do. My husband and I were exhausted; the sun was rising and we had not slept at all that night. My two-year-old son Elijah had been crying for hours. At last he became so tired that he could not cry any longer and finally fell asleep. This was not the only time my son had cried through the night. After I stopped breastfeeding him; he cried every night and often during the day.

Tammy: Welcome to Women of Hope, I'm Tammy, and Carol's here too with a special friend.

Carol: Hello, it's great to be together again. And this is our friend, June. Hello June and Welcome.

June: Thank you.

Tammy: June, I can remember when my children were that age; there were quite a few sleepless nights! But what you've told us sounds like more than an occasional sleepless night; your son cried every night? This must have been very difficult for you...and for your family.

June: It was very difficult.

Carol: He was two years old...is that when you stopped breastfeeding? Or had he been crying a lot before this?

June: He was 15 months old when I stopped breastfeeding him, but it did not take long before I noticed that he'd stopped gaining weight. No matter what foods I gave him, he would vomit...and he suffered from diarrhea every day.

Tammy: Did you go and see the doctor?

June: Yes I did, and they told us to give him plenty of fluids and to try giving him different foods. But nothing seemed to help.

The crying and the sleeping problem was only one part of our troubles. I noticed that Elijah was not talking, and he should have been at least trying to talk by now.

Sometimes he would even have seizures! All I could do was hold him as his little body would shake all over.

Carol: Oh June, that must have been very frightening.

June: It was terrifying.

As the months passed, my son began to get very quiet during the day; though he still cried at night. And sometimes I would call his name, and he would not respond or turn to look at me! I felt very tired, and deeply sad.

Tammy: I've seen you with Elijah not long ago, and he looks so happy, and very energetic; how did you help him to overcome those terrible problems?

June: When he began to have seizures, I knew it was time to find help. I talked with my son's medical doctor again, but since he didn't see my son while he was having a seizure; he couldn't help me. When I explained that Elijah would not talk; he suggested I wait a few months because often boys don't begin to talk as early as girls. This was frustrating for me; because I knew that he needed help.

Tammy: I can only imagine how you felt. Friend, I wonder if *you've* experienced something like this with *your* child... How did you *feel*?... Were you able to get the help you needed?

Carol: On Women of Hope today we're talking with June, whose son was having some problems that made life very difficult for her and for the whole family.

June did you have any other children?

June: Our older son was 7 so it was hard for him too.

Carol: It seems as though the doctor really didn't understand your problem with Elijah. So what did you do then?

June: I began to learn everything I could about how children grow and develop. I went back to the doctor and asked if he knew someone who might be able to help. He told me where I could go to have Elijah tested.

Tammy: That's good – at least you could find out what the problem was.

June: Yes. It was good to have help, but I was not ready for the results of these tests. There were quite a lot of tests...and after a time I learned that my son had a (developmental) disorder called *autism spectrum disorder*. The word 'spectrum' tells us that the disabilities that come with Autism can range from very mild to very severe.

And the doctors also found that he is allergic to many common foods.

Tammy: And that's why he was vomiting and had diarrhea so often?

June: Yes.

Carol: Oh June! I am trying to take this all in. Tell us a bit about Autism.

June: Autism is a disorder that affects the brain; making it hard for a person to communicate and learn. Sometimes people with autism may behave in ways that are harmful to themselves and the people around them. Elijah's disorder causes him to have great difficulty learning new things, and it's very frustrating for him.

Tammy: You said you were not ready to hear the results of the tests; how did you feel when they told you about your son's disorder?

June: I cried for a long time. No mother wants to find out that their child has a disorder that means he has a number of disabilities – that he cannot do basic things, like talking and playing with other children.

The doctors told me that he would need to begin several expensive treatments right away. Speech therapy; to learn how to talk; physical therapy to strengthen his body, and occupational therapy to help him to learn how to write and do other everyday tasks, and I would need to begin learning how to feed him so that he could gain weight.

When I learned about the costs for treatment; I was afraid. I didn't know how we would pay for the services that he needed. I felt very sad and confused. And sometimes I felt angry and lonely. I wondered if I had done something wrong when I was pregnant that could have hurt my child.

Carol: As I listen to your story, June I wonder what you did to make it through...

June: It was very hard in the beginning, but when I looked at Elijah's smile, I knew that I could not let my feelings stop me from doing what was best for him. He needed me to be strong...and even though he could not speak, I would become his voice. I did *not* give up...I kept on asking for help and I learned new ways to help my son, and get him the treatments that were best for him.

Elijah's health care providers gave me information on the help that's available to families who have autistic children. I connected with mothers who had children with autism and we were able to help each other in many good ways.

Tammy: And what about his eating?

June: Once I learned about the foods that were safe for my son to eat; I changed his diet right away. He soon began to gain weight! We were very excited!

Carol: We are talking with our friend June, about her experience with her son's autism. June can you tell us how a *mother* with an autistic child can find help...and encouragement too?

June: The first thing you need to understand is that *you know your child better than anyone else*. You are his or her mother. If you notice that your child is having trouble talking, or perhaps not responding to you when you call out his name, or even turns away from you, talk with your health care worker right away. Or if you notice anything that you think is not right, go and see your health care worker. They may help you to see that your child is within the normal range of development. Or they may help you to know what to do next and who to see to get further help.

Even if they tell you that everything is fine, if you think that your child needs help; you *must* keep asking for help.

Carol: That's very important. The doctor or health care worker only sees them for a very short while, but you are with them most, or all of the time. So don't give up if you think your child has a problem.

June: And when you find out what the problem is, remember that every child is different. So when you learn new things about your child's disorder, you must also learn how the treatments will best work for your child's unique needs and disabilities.

And finally, my friend, do not focus only on the things your child finds difficult! Encourage your child and praise him for things that he does well. Always remember that the one thing that your child needs more than any medical treatment is your love and encouragement.

Tammy: Even when life is hard; there's always hope.

June: Oh yes Tammy. When Elijah was first diagnosed with autism; I was heartbroken. But there was one song that I listened to over and over again and it brought me such comfort.

Tammy: What was the song about?

June: It was called "If You Want Me To" and the words of the song reminded me that even though I couldn't understand why God allowed my son to have autism; we would make it through because of His love for me, and my family.

It reminds me of a very special song that's found in God's word, the Bible...in Psalm 147. Verse 1 says: "How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!" It always helps me to sing praises to God. It lifts up my spirit.

Then verse 3 says: “He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.” God knows that my heart was broken and he is ready to heal me and bind up the wounds in my heart.

And verse 5 says: “Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.” He always understands how I feel and is ready to comfort me.

I still read this special song from God’s word from time to time when I don’t know how to help Elijah, or I feel discouraged.

Carol: What a beautiful thought! June, you’ve often spoken of how your faith has helped you to take better care of your son. Will you tell us how you find strength and encouragement through your relationship with God?

June: Of course, Carol. The Bible says that if we ask God for wisdom, He will provide it (James 1:5). I believed that God would lead me to the right health care providers for Elijah. The Bible also tells us that God works all things out for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). When I remembered words from God like these, I was comforted. I knew that Jesus was with me, and that He would never leave me alone to take care of things by myself.

Carol: Friend, I wonder if you’ve ever felt so heartbroken that it doesn’t feel like God can hear your prayers?

Did you ever feel that way as you prayed for your son June?

June: Oh yes. There were many days when I could not stop crying! It was very difficult watching Elijah go through his speech therapy treatments in the next room. He was trying so hard to say even short simple words. Many times he cried through his therapy sessions. I would call out to the Lord for help and healing; but sometimes I *did* feel as if God was not listening.

But I’ve always loved to pray and read my Bible. I just kept on praying and spending time with God whenever I could; and soon I realized that He was giving me the strength and wisdom that I needed. One of the most important lessons I’ve learned is that faith is not a feeling; it’s *knowing and believing* that God is with you, even when your feelings tell you that you are all alone.

Carol: June, that is worth repeating. Faith is not a feeling. It is knowing and believing that God is with you even when your feelings tell you that you are alone.

Tammy: On Women of Hope today, June has been sharing her journey with her son who has autism. June, you were telling us how you learned to depend upon God by praying and reading the Bible. You

said that spending time with God whenever you could helped you to realize that He was giving you the strength and wisdom that you needed.

June: That's right Tammy. One of my favorite parts of the Bible that I read when I'm feeling heartbroken is another Psalm. This special song says that God is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit (Psalm 34:18).

I still read that Psalm over and over again when I'm tired, and I'm wondering what to do to help Elijah. When the doctors first told me that my son had autism, it *did* feel as though my spirit and my heart were crushed. I thank God every day for His gift of faith; because it's my faith that helps me to be strong for my son and my family. Because I have faith that the Word of God is true, I know that God is with me and that with His help there is nothing that I cannot do.

Carol: What you've just shared sounds like one of my favorite Bible promises! God says in His word: "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13)."

June: Oh yes, I've memorized those words from the Bible; and I find myself repeating them out loud just about every day!

Carol: June, how old is Elijah now?

June: He's seven years old.

Tammy: Did you ever pray and ask God to heal him of autism?

June: I always pray for healing; because I know that nothing is impossible for God. Praying to God has helped me to be strong every day for my son. I know that God does not ever make mistakes and Elijah is a blessing to me...and to everyone that he meets. He is such a sweet child. He loves to laugh and sing; and He's a very good artist. I've learned to praise God each day for the chance to take care of such a wonderful son.

Tammy: June, you said, 'God doesn't make mistakes'. Tell us how you can be sure that this is true...

June: There's another special song in the Bible that's been a great comfort to me; it tells of how my son was wonderfully made by God in my womb It says: 'You watched me as I was being formed...as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.' (Psalm 139:15 NLT).

When I read those words, I know that God loves my son even more than I do; and by praising him each day; I see more blessings than trouble. A wonderful part of having a son with autism is that now I have many new friends who also have children with disabilities and we can all encourage each

other. I praise God because I would have never met such wonderful women if it were not for my son. I love the Lord and I know that even when I don't understand why things happen; He loves me and never leaves me. This is why I have great peace, and can find reasons to rejoice every day.

Carol: June, thank you for sharing your story with us. I hope you'll come back again real soon and let us know how your son is doing.

June: I sure will! Thank you for having me here today on Women of Hope.

Tammy: Friend, we would love to hear *your* story. And you can do that by contacting us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope. The email address is TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. That's TWRWomenofHope@twr.org.

If you have missed a program or would like to hear one again visit our website TWRWomenofHope.org. or visit our Facebook page.

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings May you find comfort and peace from God as you pray and ask him to help you too.

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