

when she gave up her life for him. Indeed, only by accepting God's grace were she and Perpetua able to be such strong witnesses.

In the Company of Martyrs.

Far from being the unapproachable figures I once thought them, Perpetua and Felicity have become role models who help me see the supernatural in my everyday life. Their response to their imprisonment and death puts my own challenges in perspective. It also gives me courage and hope.

When I worry about my children's future, do I wrestle with my fears, like Perpetua, and look to the Lord? When I suffer physically—whether with a cold or the possibility of a disabling medical diagnosis—do I hold onto my faith as Felicity did, trusting that Jesus is with me? When I come to a situation that makes me want to turn away—a dreaded conversation, a tiring task—can I find the grace to go forward out of love for Jesus?

Though I may never be called to give my life for my faith, I am still called and empowered to be a martyr of sorts. After all, the word “martyr” comes from the Greek word for witness. The same Holy Spirit who sustained Felicity and Perpetua and gave them joy lives in me. He helped

them hand themselves over to executioners; he can help me put aside my self-centeredness and find the freedom to care for my family and other people.

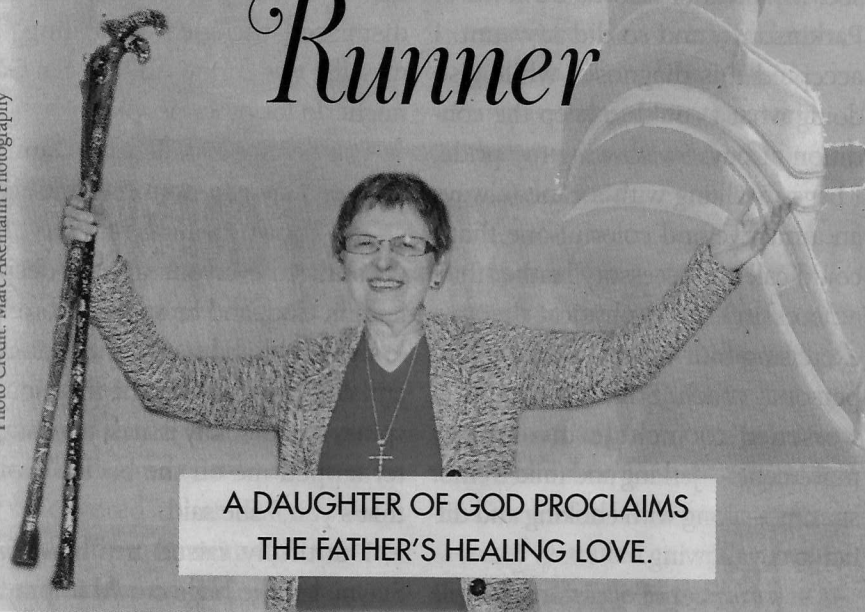
Every day provides opportunities to witness to the life of Christ in me and to die to myself. Either I can pardon the person who cuts ahead of me at the supermarket, or I can glare. When my children ask why they can't watch certain movies or have every toy their friends have, I can make an effort to explain why purity and contentment are important. When my husband comes home after a long day's work, I can greet him with a smile rather than a list of chores and complaints. I can get to know my neighbors and share about my faith, or I can choose to not get involved.

I know that as I exercise my faith in these small daily “martyrdoms,” the Lord is deepening his work in my heart. He is teaching me how to face life's uncertainties with joyful trust in him. May the example and the intercession of Perpetua, Felicity, and all the martyrs help each of us—including this weary wife and mother—to press on in faith! ■

Hallie Riedel is an editor with The Word Among Us.

God's Joyful Runner

Photo Credit: Marc Akemann Photography



A DAUGHTER OF GOD PROCLAIMS
THE FATHER'S HEALING LOVE.

BY NYLA LEIPOLD

Recently I caught up with a friend I hadn't seen for awhile. “So, are you still running around like a teenager?” he asked me.

“I certainly am,” I answered.

This question, or some variation on it, is put to me quite often. At eighty-three, I'm no teenager. And the fact that I can run—or simply walk unassisted—is nothing short of a miracle.

In God's Hands. About fifteen years ago, I developed balance problems that caused me to have a number of falls, some of them serious. After many medical tests, I was finally diagnosed with Parkinsonism, a debilitating disorder of the central nervous system that is related to Parkinson's disease.

I wasn't too surprised. You see, my brother also had a form of Parkinson's, and so did my aunt. I accepted this diagnosis, while also doing what I could to keep the condition at bay. Swallowing my pride, I began walking with a cane (always an attractive and colorful one that I could call an "accessory" rather than a necessity). I did physical therapy, exercising four times a week with a personal coach. Still, my condition worsened to include involuntary movements—jerking and mild tremor spasms—along with choking and difficulty swallowing.

On a number of occasions, people prayed over me for healing. I believed that God could do this. I had prayed with people myself and had seen his transforming power in other areas of my life and other people's lives. But when my healing didn't happen, I accepted the situation without begging God to change my lot. This was not grim resignation. I knew that Jesus

had not abandoned me. I trusted that he was with me and that he would continue to take care of me. Plus, I was surrounded by a loving husband, family, and many friends.

"Mom, That's You." On March 16, 2013, my husband, Gordon, and I, along with other family members, attended a special healing service hosted by our parish. Though I had dismissed the idea of healing for myself, I was curious to see what God might do for other people.

The service was led by Damian Stayne, a layman from England with a well-known healing ministry. He encouraged everyone to have deeper faith in God, and he spoke "words of knowledge" about specific illnesses and conditions. When he mentioned spines and mobility issues, my daughter tapped me on the back. "Mom, that's you," she said.

I dutifully raised my hand. As Stayne led the huge crowd in prayer, my family placed their hands on me and joined in. Almost immediately, I felt jolted by something powerful, like lightning or electricity. In astonishment, I laid down my cane, stood up straight for the first time in years, and walked with no problem.

It took some time to grasp the full extent of my healing. One



Nyla Leipold no longer needs her colorful walking canes, but she keeps them by the door as a reminder of what God has done for her.

by the closing prayer for that day in *The Word Among Us*:

Come, Holy Spirit, and touch me with the fire of your love. Show me what a tremendous gift you have given me—the invitation to show the world that you are still working your miracles today.

day, feeling an urge to run, I elatedly raced up and down the hall of our long, ranch-style home. For months, I was almost giddy with excitement, awe, and joy, as I discovered other new abilities: genuflecting, running up a flight of stairs, and even hiking over rough terrain. The spasms and jerking have disappeared. I eat without choking. My handwriting is legible again. Now able to hold a brush, I've resumed painting landscapes and still lifes.

See Me Run! On March 22, the week after my healing, I was struck

Realizing that this was God's message to me, I took it both as an explanation for why I was healed and as a mission. So I began trying to live that prayer by sharing my story with everyone who would listen. I told the clerk in the grocery store. I've talked to strangers, to friends and acquaintances who wonder where my cane is. I've talked to parishioners who know about my healing but want assurance that it was truly a miracle. "Do you want to see me run?" I ask everyone. And then I do—so readily that my family has taken that question and turned it into a nickname. They call me Nyla Do-You-Want-to-See-Me-Run!

I even ran for my neurologist. Walking into his office for my regular checkup, I told him I had been healed. He put me through various tests and found no signs of my previous illness. Finally, with a big smile on his face, he watched me run down the hall, stop on a dime, turn, and run back. "I usually don't get to see things like this," he told me. "My patients never get better."

He acknowledged the importance of faith, thanked me for coming in, and then marked my chart *Dismissed*. The receptionist looked at me with surprise as I left. "Dismissed? We never dismiss patients!"

Beloved. That little meditation prayer still moves me. I still witness to the fact that God works miracles today. But my message isn't mainly "See Nyla run." Above all, I want each person who hears my story to experience in their own way that God is a loving and merciful Father who delights in them. As I've come to see, this, too, is a healing miracle.

Not long ago, I found myself facing some unexpected challenges that replaced my joy and giddy excitement with fear and anxiety for the future. As I desperately begged God for help, I sensed a quiet voice:

Nyla, if I can reach down and, in an instant, set you free from a debilitating illness—and for no reason whatsoever except my love for you—don't you think I can handle this situation as well? Lay it down, and watch me. Trust me with this and with the rest of your life.

God seemed so close to me at that moment that it almost felt as if I could touch him. He was my Father, and he was looking at me with love and kindness, gently reassuring me that he had me in the palm of his hand. And in a flash, he gave me a fresh new perspective of myself as his beloved daughter. This insight is still sinking in.

When Jesus walked the earth, every miracle he worked was an invitation to faith. The same is true today. And so I pray that my healing story will turn people's eyes to the loving Father who delights in them. May we all experience his tender gaze and his presence in our lives. May we hear him say, *You are my beloved daughter . . . my beloved son. I am with you. Trust me.* ■

Nyla Leopold and her husband live in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"God, If You're Real . . ."

I HAD NO IDEA JESUS COULD BE MY FRIEND

BY JEANNIE DANG

When I was in my early twenties, I would have laughed at the idea that God could be my *friend*. I treated religion like a jigsaw puzzle, piecing together new beliefs as I found them. German philosophy, Eastern mysticism, pantheism—all of these held greater appeal for me than my parents' Catholic faith. But none of them spoke to me of a personal friendship with God.

I brought this "build-your-own-religion" mind-set into my marriage in 1970. My husband was in the Air Force, and we were stationed in southern Japan. I could not speak Japanese, and there were few people in whom I could confide. Pretty quickly, the novelty of being in a new country wore off, and I felt waves of loneliness.