



Parents, children, siblings. Big and small. Close-knit or spread across the miles. We are family, attached to one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We are held together by God's mercy and grace at the center of our lives. We celebrate milestones, we create traditions, and we share memories. My husband, Ben, and I have been married for 17 years, and are raising three children, so we've celebrated, created, and shared some of life's most cherished moments together.

Two years ago, we made the decision to demolish our 140-year-old home and rebuild on the same property. We were completely out of our comfort zone taking on such a large project, but we knew it was in the best interest of our family. We prayed for God's guidance, and we were thankful the process went basically according to plan and budget.

What I wasn't prepared for was the homesick feeling in my new home, or the desire and longing for the familiar of our old house. During all this change, we tried to keep some of our family traditions alive. Slowly the bare walls were filled with family photos and special artwork. The beds were covered with handmade quilts from grandmothers and aunts. We took camping trips, we planted our garden, we went fishing and hiking, and hit the bike trails — all things our family enjoys doing together.

Less than two months after moving into our new home, we were hiking a trail we'd been on numerous times when our 8-year-old daughter, Marta, fell approximately 60 feet from a rocky ledge. She suffered a traumatic head injury with three skull fractures. She was air lifted to a Level 1 pediatric trauma center 60 miles from our home. She underwent emergency surgery where they removed a third of her skull to allow her brain to swell. She was heavily sedated and in a medically induced coma for eight days.

The doctors were optimistic because of her age and overall health, but no one honestly knew if, when, or how she would wake up. Remarkably, there were no other injuries to her body. The surgeons were baffled, and searched and scanned for internal damage. Ben and I prayed words of thanksgiving that God had kept the rest of her body safe from harm. But we also thought God had possibly spared her other organs to donate if her brain was no longer functioning. We asked God for His mercy and guidance.

Almost immediately, I began an online journal to keep others informed of Marta's condition and our prayer requests. It quickly spread around the country and world.



May 28, 2017

We know so many of you are holding our sweet baby girl in prayer, and we are so very grateful for that. Please, please keep praying. God has blessed us with so many friends and family who love our sweet girl as much as we do. We know that God's holy angels are watching over her. We know she is a child of God, and He is mighty and powerful.

During this time, we waited and prayed and were overwhelmed by the support from our friends, family, and extended community of strangers. We learned medical jargon and increased our vocabulary ten-fold. We held vigil at Marta's bed nearly around the clock, praying for God to spare her life and allow her to remain with us on Earth.

May 30, 2017

Psalm 118:1 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! We are in another day of waiting — but Marta's levels continue to remain stable for the most part. The doctors and nurses have been fabulous, and we are so thankful for their wonderful love and care for our sweet Marta. Her EEG has shown no signs of seizure — praise God! She had a follow-up CT scan early this morning that was basically unchanged from the scan post-surgery — praise God!

We witnessed firsthand how God brings people to just the right place at the right time, never by coincidence. God's perfect timing was evident to us from the very beginning. There were trained medical personnel on the hiking trail. Our family friends who were hiking with us provided help in ways we couldn't even have imagined. Our pastor was already headed in the direction of the hospital when his wife received our plea for prayers. He was there before Marta arrived on the helicopter, and he stayed with us that day and night until the surgeon had given us the report after Marta's 5-hour surgery. We were never left alone.



June 2, 2017

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. This is a very moment-by-moment time right now, and we know that the road to recovery will be slow, long, and difficult. But we also know God already has the path laid out for us and He is guiding each of us every step along the way. It is all done in God's time. He is in control. I am humbled to be Marta's mom and to walk this rocky road with her. She is my precious, sweet baby girl on this earth, but she is God's Own child forever.

Our family came from near and far — just five days prior to the accident, my parents had moved from Champaign, Illinois, to Grinnell, Iowa — now they were an hour away instead of five. Family members from California, Georgia, and Texas came to be with us. We benefited from the generous donations of others for food, a place to stay, and a safe place to welcome guests through the Ronald McDonald House. We had pastors from our district visit us. God provided for all our needs. We called upon Him in fervent prayer — pleas of mercy and healing, of a miracle for our precious daughter.

June 6, 2017

John 14:13–14 "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." God has given us a great gift in His command to pray. He wants us to pray with confidence and trust. A friend's daughter recently asked her mom how long Marta would have to be in the hospital. Her mom answered that it might take most of the summer for Marta to heal enough to come home. During her prayers that night the little girl asked God to make Marta better in one week! May we all have that trust and confidence that God CAN do all things — all we need to do is ask!

For eight years, we were a family of five. We suddenly became part of a hospital family, especially in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) with our nurses, doctors, and other care team members. Additional support, prayers, and kindnesses began immediately from our church family, our Lutheran school family, my LWML family, and our community. We covered the white board in her hospital room with Bible passages. We hung cards and pictures sent by friends and strangers on her window. We sang songs and hymns around her bed. We became part of a bigger family of God through the prayer chains of countless congregations around the United States and the world. Our Lutheran school held a prayer vigil. God opened doors of communication between family members who hadn't spoken to each other in several years. It was a time of deep emotional heartache, but also a time of healing and immersion in God's Word.

June 7, 2017

Proverbs 3:5–6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Our morning began very somberly. I sent out a plea for continued prayers, and within minutes

your messages began to flood my phone and Facebook. It was an amazing calm knowing so many were continuing to keep our family upheld in prayer. I knew in my mind that God was taking good care of us, but my trust had turned to earthly things — things I could see and hold and measure. And then on rounds we were given a new hope. The team was ready to pull Marta's breathing tube. She's passed her tests with flying colors, and the doctor felt this was the appropriate next step instead of going back to more sedation. Praise God! What a difference a few hours and some plastic tubing makes! There were still bumps in the road this afternoon, but we feel like a giant hurdle has been crossed. She made improvements today we didn't think we could expect to see for weeks. God has answered so many prayers, and we are forever grateful for each of you who are walking this road with us.



And then, we were suddenly part of a family of “survivors” as we heard stories and details of others who had suffered similar head injuries and recovered. God provided hope for us amid our darkness when those stories were shared, encouraging us to trust in Him for healing and recovery.

June 10, 2017

Colossians 3:15–17 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. I am so very grateful for all those friends and family members who are showering us with prayer, and those who are sharing their favorite Bible passages with us. It is of great comfort to rely on God's Word for all that we need — for those reminders of His unending love and promises of His perfect will. We are given the opportunity to teach and admonish one another, to sing praises together, to pray together — all with thanksgiving and glory to God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Being able to share this journey with family, friends, and strangers has had a tremendous impact on me, as a mom, and on our family. We know we are not in this journey alone — God has placed each of you to travel with us, to pray for us, to uphold and sustain us.

During the third week in the PICU, Marta made steady improvements. She went from sitting on the edge of the bed with four adults' help to riding in a wheelchair to walking in the hallways with assistance in a matter of days. That week brought a new rollercoaster ride — decisions about the next steps in Marta's care, including follow-up surgery to replace her bone flap, and deciding where she would receive in-patient rehabilitation. We prayed fervently and asked others around us to do so as well.

June 16, 2017

Isaiah 55:6–9 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. We are certain God has been — and continues to be — in control of every situation. Nothing could have ever prepared me for what we've faced the past three

weeks. And even as I write that, I know that God has prepared our family 'for such a time as this' by giving us the faith we have and for putting us in a community full of the exact kind of support we need. All along, He knows what is coming next, even when it seems so out of control to me and the rest of the world. So many times in the past three weeks, I've felt completely in the dark — dark moments of despair and sorrow, darkness of the unknown, darkness at whatever hurdle is placed in front of us or of Marta. Thankfully, those dark times don't last too long, as friends and family members have reached out to be lights to us — showing us the blessings of love and friendship, holding us up in prayer, bringing gifts and donations to make sure our daily needs are met.

Nineteen days after arriving at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital, Marta was released to an in-patient rehabilitation center just 15 miles from our home. Her doctors estimated she could be there for two months. Her therapy was rigorous, but there was also time for some fun. We got to meet the three flight crew members who air lifted her to Iowa City. We met Gracie Comfort Dog when she and her handler came for a visit. Our first outing outside of hospital walls was to a mini golf course where Marta did a great job navigating her new self in public. Just two weeks after our arrival — five weeks after her accident — she and I were on our way home.



June 28, 2017

Isaiah 43:1–2, 4–5 But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from

the west I will gather you. These verses from Isaiah were sent to me less than 24 hours after Marta's accident by a dear LWML sister in New York. Ben and I have known all along — even before the accident — that each of our children is a gift from God. We are all God's children, created in His image, He has called us by name, we belong to Him. I pleaded with Him in fervent prayer to spare her life here on Earth, for at least a little while longer. And for a reason I do not know or understand, God heard my prayers and the prayers of thousands others, and He did spare her life. I am thankful that God has entrusted Ben and me to continue raising our daughter here. He has given us a special gift in Marta — He has called us out of the fire, He has been with us every step of the way — just as He promised — and has given us new hope as His children. We belong to Him.

After returning home, at the encouragement from several friends and family members, we began family counseling through Lutheran Family Services. It was an opportunity for us to talk about what happened and each of our roles in the event — and in the healing process. We've met several times as a family, and as individuals, and Ben and I as a couple. We are each working through the trauma of the accident, the five weeks of being separated from one another and our home, and the after-effects of all that has happened.

June 29, 2017

Isaiah 40:30-31 *Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* I have been weary. I have been faint. I have felt very weak. I have been exhausted. Thankfully, I have not had to rely on my own strength to get through the past five weeks. Waiting on the Lord is not easy, certainly not when we are already feeling weary and exhausted. But being submissive to His will has taught me so many things about being a wife, mom, friend — and most especially a child of God. He gives me all that I need, when I need it. He supplies me with His good and gracious gifts — everything I have is from Him. He has showered us with blessing after blessing. Now we can have the strength and endurance to run the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

The fear, anger, and pain sometimes still surface — some days it's more than I can bear. Other days have a more normal feeling to them. My heart aches for the life we used to have — the accident and aftermath will be a part of our lives forever — but making decisions to move forward is to everyone's benefit. We have

encountered great change in the past year. Even so, our loving heavenly Father reminds us the *word of the Lord stands forever* (Isaiah 40:8).

We are now several months post-accident. Marta continues to heal. She had surgery in August to replace the piece of skull with an implant. She returned to school in September and is doing well in third grade. She completed physical and occupational therapy in late November, and receives speech therapy once a week, working on multi-tasking skills and developing tools to help increase her focus and concentration. She is a miracle.

And while I didn't make it to the LWML Convention in Albuquerque, so many of my LWML brothers and sisters brought the convention to me — through live-stream video, texts and phone calls, and most especially through the pictures from our *Quarterly* booth of so many holding us in prayer. God provided a means for me to be filled through His Word and Spirit, thousands of miles from my LWML family.



July 14, 2017

An open letter to my dear, faithful readers — Many of you have told me that you think of Marta or our family many times a day. I want you to know that so many times in the past several weeks, I think about you: who you are, where you are from, how you heard about Marta and our family, who you have shared her story with, why you keep coming back to read the updates, and the list goes on. There are thousands of you and only one of me — and yet, I feel like we are all friends here; family even. I have shared some of our most personal struggles with you, and you have seen us at probably the absolute worst. But you continue to pray, you continue to offer hope and encouragement, you share our story and ask others to pray too. I am grateful for your prayers and for your genuine love and care for our daughter. God bless all of you! Q

Becky Wehrspann and her family are members of Grace Lutheran Church in Jesup, Iowa. She has served in her local LWML society, on the LWML Iowa East District board, and as Features Editor for the Quarterly. The full story of Marta's injury, care, and recovery can be found at www.caringbridge.org/visit/martawehrspann.