



BY DOLORES PFEUFFER-SCHERER, PH.D

I was 25 years old and at the end of my rope — physically, mentally, and emotionally broken. Since being diagnosed with a chronic autoimmune disease, scleroderma, at age 16, I had seen numerous doctors, taken many medications, and suffered personal struggles and fears. I felt I had endured more than enough.

old ones worsened. Slowly, my exterior began to resemble that of a burn victim. Mobility was a challenge, and I felt despondent about my future. Every doctor I saw only offered bad news. I felt trapped in a nightmare from which I could not escape. I was beyond frightened.

At 25, I realized I had not accomplished anything I had intended: college, traveling, living in New York City, visiting museums and galleries, and writing for newspapers and magazines. I desperately wanted to get out and live! Instead,

Scleroderma harms the body's exterior as well as its internal organs. My illness had spread across my body as new lesions developed and

I was living with the crushing, debilitating weight of my illness. I had just ended a six-year series of medications, and I was exhausted. Every one of them caused side effects — effects often as terrible as the ravages of my illness. Going on a course of medicine and experiencing physical and mental effects is a journey of both hope and despair. You endure the problems the medications cause because you hope and pray the treatment is successful. I reached some of my lowest moments during this time, but I refused to give up.

Yet, every single medication failed; standard treatments, experimental treatments — nothing stopped the progression of my illness. My last doctor's visit was to a specialist to review the results of an experimental treatment. The visit ended with him shrugging his shoulders as he told me it had not worked. I felt so alone ... so bereft ... hopeless. While still in my 20s, I had lived what I felt was a lifetime, and it had not been exactly wonderful.

... we rejoice  
in our  
sufferings,  
knowing  
that suffering  
produces  
endurance,  
and endurance  
produces  
character,  
and character  
produces hope,  
and hope does  
not put us to  
shame, because  
God's love has  
been poured  
into our hearts  
through the  
Holy Spirit  
who has been  
given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

I realized the only place I would find help was from God. I learned that my darkest moments are when God's love comes shining through. I had grown up attending Sunday school and church. That foundation equipped me for this battle. I could not continue as I was — with no way for my life to flourish. I knew in my heart that God was my Hope and had a plan for me. *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope* (Jeremiah 29:11).

I prayed, asking God for His help and placing my life entirely in His hands. I walked away from all medications. I knew God had designed my life and path. He knew how my story would end, and I promised Him I would accept whatever His will dictated, without fear or complaint, but with full trust and hope. In that moment I felt a peace that had eluded me for almost a decade. I cried as I prayed — for the pain of my present, as well as hope for my future.

I knew this had to be my course going forward. I wanted to feel like myself again — to live without fear and dread. Doctors failed, medications failed, and my body would not cooperate, but God could work miracles in my life. In the quiet moments of absolute despair, only God could offer hope and healing.

Now, 32 years later, I have not only endured my entire adult life living with scleroderma, but, with God's help, I have done my best to flourish. Each year brings new challenges for my mobility, my eyesight, or other internal complications. While I do not like having to alter my life to accommodate various issues, I am also filled with gratitude. *For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content* (Philippians 4:11b).

I have strength in Christ. Because His love for me endures, I have endured. He has given me joy in accomplishing what I set out to do: I have lived, I have traveled, I graduated from college, and I hold a doctorate in history. I have a son, and I am loved by those close to me. Most importantly, I know our ever-loving God and Savior has showered His grace on me. He is my Hope.

... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5). Q

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