

Grace roused us December 14th, 2023. From her resting place at the foot of our bed, she voiced her characteristic, very polite, soft, short, whine. A new day had dawned. As Grace and I had done thousands of times before, we greeted and prepared for our two-hour morning adventure.

The bright, crisp morning air hovered around 32 degrees that fateful day. Grace waited anxiously at the door to the garage. I prepared her harness and positioned it in front of her. She stepped in as I buckled it up. Her right elbow that plagued her almost her entire life recently had become more troublesome. To protect it, I used the harness as a handle to help her down stairs and up into the passenger seat of my car.

Westpark had a paved walking path around a pond just a mile from home. Typically, we went there on Thursdays. We parked in the adjacent shopping center and headed down toward the pond. Grace turned toward the shopping center. I said “Come on,” directing her to the pond, but she insisted we go the other way. Perhaps she had picked up on a scent.

We walked through the back of the shopping center and down to the intersection of a four-lane highway with the residential street. We stopped momentarily and then proceeded in the crosswalk across the two-lane residential street. Then it happened. Looking to do a right on red, the driver of a late model Volvo watched left for an opening in the traffic and began a right on red. Suddenly, he noticed a man on his hood and an instant later on the road. I was that man.

At the moment of collision, I heard a sound like a rubber band snapping against a table. Unfazed and untouched, Grace proceeded as if nothing had happened. I stood up, led Grace about a hundred yards back to the car, took her home, and drove to the emergency room.

A few days later, an MRI confirmed a left Achilles tendon break (snap). The injury involved no surgery, little pain, and only a few weeks on crutches and in a boot. Yet despite prolonged and extensive physical therapy, my left calf muscles remain compromised. They still have not recovered sufficient size or strength to enable a normal gait (although close) let alone the ability to run. That crisis started an avalanche this year, and the worst was yet to come.

Monday, February 26th, Grace began drinking water excessively. Tuesday, she kissed me. Her hot tongue tipped us off that she had a fever. Wednesday, I took her to the pet emergency doctor. Grace had a very high fever. After receiving IV fluids, she came home with antibiotics. Despite her waning strength, Grace functioned normally. Saturday afternoon, March 2nd, we took her to the animal hospital. She was dying from a liver infection. We said good-bye there to our precious little girl at sunset. We still have not gotten over the loss of her and likely in this life never will.

What have I learned from these difficult times? After all, Scripture says we should count it all joy when we face trials (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3) as God uses these experiences to grow our character. Things in this world, including our bodies, wear out (Matthew 6:19-21; Proverbs 23:5; Psalm 90:10). Life is precious and fragile. Death is bitter, final, cold, and very dark.

But our life and sufficiency are in Christ (Philippians 4:11-13). He will guide us through our darkest hours (Psalm 23:4). And when we like Grace reach our final resting place, our Savior will meet us there to give us new life through His unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15) of Grace.

Merry Christmas!