



Talking about

disability, church and faith

How to walk 2: A Tragedy?

By Elizabeth Starr

So, ask yourself, what counts as a tragedy? When is pity okay? I think as Christians we are encouraged to feel sympathy for others, but we need to be conscious of the power-dynamic that comes with the privileged position of viewing 'suffering'.

I tend to see tragedy in the Greek Drama sense of the word, where everyone dies at the end. I certainly would never apply it to myself. I had a brain haemorrhage, but I didn't die. I don't think becoming disabled is a tragedy. It's a miracle.

I've come to understand wheelchair can mean either illness or mobility. The old-timey word 'invalid' makes no distinction. Just because I use one doesn't mean I'm ill. I don't need to 'get better'. I can put in lots of hard work in rehab, but there's nothing wrong with me as I am. I'm so thankful for my health, for me my wheelchair is a sign of how far I've come.

God doesn't want us to strive to become the perfect human so that we can be good enough for him. He's the perfect one, not us. Being disabled forces you to face this fact head on: you will never be perfect. I feel kind of sorry for all the able-bodied people who are out there trying to be perfect. I remember when I first understood as a teen that God was alongside me, not in front of me, and knowing that was a blessing to me when I became disabled. I knew I was loved before the haemorrhage, and knowing that gave me the reassurance to get through hospital.

I held onto Romans 5:3-4 which says:

'Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.'

The more I suffer, the greater my capacity to hope. My character is refined. But I don't ever see myself as suffering, or the stuff of tragedy. I like to think of myself as persevering in joy.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Does that person want my pity or awe?
- Where are the miracles in your life?