

Shattered

By Ted Cederblom



Sitting in the small office, my wife, Robbin, and I waited anxiously. The words the doctor spoke no parent would ever want to hear: “Your child has autism and brain damage.”

I tried to think of something to say, but I was numb. After years of wondering why Brian was different, and dreading what the answer might be, finally a diagnosis was given. It felt like a death sentence.

Our story is a story of heartache, and of God’s grace and love. Over the years we have learned to draw comfort from God’s Word, and during the worst times the 23rd Psalm in particular has stood out as a promise from God to our family. It can be your psalm, too.

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dreams,
green pastures
A psalm for the special-needs family

Shattered dreams, green pastures



The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (NIV)

I grew up in Latin America as an Assemblies of God missionary kid and knew that pain was part of life. But our family had been blessed. I could not have had better parents than Larry and Dorothy Cederblom, and I truly loved growing up in the Republic of Panama.

College and several years of youth pastoring flew by. After God gave me my beautiful wife and ministry partner, Robbin and I pastored a small church in Los Angeles for five years. We lived in a trailer behind the church, learning to trust God for provision from week to week. We were having the time of our lives shepherding our congregation.

Our oldest son, Brandon, was born, followed by Brian, our second. Though our church was in a gang-ridden community and our trailer became more crowded with each new child, we knew we were in God's will.

Robbin noticed right away that something was wrong with Brian. From the beginning, he was late in meeting the benchmarks for a developing child. Whenever we asked our physician, the reply was always: "Don't compare him to your oldest son. Each is different. He'll be fine." But as the years went by, dread started to replace hope. Brian fell further and further behind. He was not speaking, nor could he accomplish basic skills.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

When times are difficult, God sometimes has to "make" us lie down in His

pastures. Our tendency is to struggle against our difficulties and give up our peace.

Robbin and I continued pursuing ministry opportunities. We moved to Bakersfield, Calif., to minister in a wonderful church. Our third son, Matthew, was born. We tried our best to put any concerns out of our minds.

Like so many in our situation, the dilemma we faced with Brian was trying to get an accurate and official diagnosis. We saw neurologists, specialists, and every diagnostic center we could afford, with every type of testing possible, but each time the results were inconclusive. As long as no diagnosis was given, we were free to hope that Brian would pop out of it, that he would simply begin speaking one day and catch up.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

The day arrived when the doctor labeled Brian. Robbin and I drove home in silence. We found ourselves in Brian's bedroom, sitting among his little stuffed animals. We hugged and wept over our boy. That day it seemed that our dreams for Brian had been shattered. His future we had hoped for — marriage, a career, perhaps being called into ministry — vanished with the realization that he may never live alone or care for himself.

Our faith in God never wavered, but at times the load seemed overwhelming. This was truly a valley, as the Psalmist said. We prayed that God would work a miracle in Brian's brain. Because Matthew was two years younger than Brian, at least there was someone in the family

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From left: Brian, Brandon and Matthew Cederblom



Shattered dream green

who was developmentally behind Brian. But the day came when our third son surpassed our second. Two years ago we moved to Springfield, Mo., to pastor Park Crest Assembly of God, and family roles have solidified. Brian now has two brothers who take the role of older siblings, speaking for him and looking after him as big brothers do.

Through it all God has been there comforting us.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Brian has Pervasive Developmental Delay, which is an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and brain damage. He has slowly developed. He is now able to talk. But life is a constant, daily challenge in our home. This

disorder and brain damage is our family's enemy, and it is constantly before us every time we sit down to eat a meal or ride in the car. My heart still aches each time I see my Brian alone, not interacting in the social circles of his age group. We live each day in the presence of an enemy that impacts each member of the family.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

From our shattered dream God has given a hope and a future. Prospects are still clouded for Brian, but through the years God has taught our family some precious truths. I am confident one of God's purposes for Brian in this life has been to make me more compassionate and

Autism **FACTS**

- **Autism is a developmental disorder marked by disturbances in physical, social and language skills, abnormal responses to sensations and difficulty relating to people, objects and events. The autism spectrum of disorders includes wide-ranging degrees of capability. Autism occurs by itself or in association with other disorders that affect the function of the brain, such as viral infections, metabolic disturbances and epilepsy. The severe form of the syndrome may include extreme self-injurious, repetitive, highly unusual and aggressive behavior. While early diagnosis and intervention are vital to the future development of the child, children do not outgrow autism.**
- **One of every 250 children born in the United States has autism.**
- **A new case of autism is diagnosed every 20 minutes, with 24,000 new cases diagnosed per year.**
- **The economic impact of autism is more than \$90 billion per year and expected to more than double in the next decade.**
- **Autism is roughly four times more common in boys.**

— National Institutes of Health (2001), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2001), California Department of Developmental Services and Autism Society of America

ms, pastures



Brian and special
education teacher
Paula Allison



loving as a pastor, husband and father. Brian has taught me more about patience and longsuffering than all my trials in ministry. My heart as a pastor for the church family and for our community is directly linked to my little boy. God has anointed my ministry through my son; my cup truly overflows.

I have learned to look beyond the surface and see the hurt within people. Brian has no outward sign of the trouble within. His facial and physical features give no hint of the severity of his problems. The truth is, many in church look fine on the outside, but below the surface lurk hurts and pains. God knew this pastor needed greater love and patience, and Brian has been God's tool to achieve this goal. God entrusted me with this burden, and increased my capacity and desire to love others.

Brian has helped me to be passionate about making a difference in every member of my church and my community. I am determined to love enough to fill not just my lifetime of ministry, but the lifetime of ministry that might have been Brian's. For every dream that has been taken away from our family, we believe countless more are being fulfilled for the hurting families around us.

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

If you have a child who has special needs, perhaps you have seen your dreams for your child shattered, and you've wondered why this has happened to you. My friend, God never leads us where His grace cannot carry us. He knew you were strong enough for the task of caring for your child. He knew He could trust you with this task. In your vulnerable state, God is able to manifest His power. Take joy in Jesus' words: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Each day presents new challenges in our home. We let go of the bad days and cling tightly to the good days. But every challenge refines us, as God prepares us for greater ministry. In your family and mine, there will be barren and dry times, but God has promised you: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19). I absolutely believe that your future is filled with hope and joy, that goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

This is a promise in God's Word you can stand on: "For I know the

plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11). That future is as big as eternity.

Now is not the time to pity yourself or your child or give up in despair. Yes, you have an incredible challenge ahead. But you are not only going to survive, you and your family will thrive. God's vision for you is one of blessing throughout this life. And His eternal purposes intimately connect with whatever struggle you face today. Take hold of His promises. He truly is your Good Shepherd. ■

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