

The Seventh Request

**The Stunning and Surprising
Story of How Andrea Came to Be.
The Last of Our 7 Year Adventures.**

The Seventh Request

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1

I've always been a person who wants to strive for more, even when it seems that I have all I could possibly need or want. It's just how I am.

I had more than enough blessings to make me happy. I had a fantastic husband, two adorable children, a lovely home, and wonderful friends and family. Envious by any standard. So how could I possibly want something else? It's a normal course we human beings take. We have what we want, so what is our natural reaction? We want more.

What else could I have wanted, though? The answer – another baby, of course.

There was something about a third child that seemed as though it would make our family complete. We already had a girl and a boy, 2 ½ years apart. Perfect, right? But still something inside me wanted that third baby. I had the feeling of not being finished, a feeling that there was one more person who was still meant to be.

Since I had been an only child, I did not want just one child. I wanted several children who would grow up together so they could have that close family element throughout their lives into adulthood. There would be no first cousins for them on either side of the family. My kids would only have each other.

I had it all planned out. Lots of people do that, and that's a good thing. They plan what they want their lives to look like. I did that, too. My childbearing would consist of my first baby being born when I was 27. I got that one in under the wire, because I miscarried my first pregnancy. That baby was due on July 14, 1992, but it was not meant to be. Instead we were blessed with Jacquelyn in December of 1992.

I planned to have my next child at age 30. Right on schedule and as planned, Graham was born in July of 1995. Great! I am right on track. Only one more, to be born when I was 33. That way, I would be finished before age 35, when certain risk factors kicked in. Yep, I had it all planned out.

But God had something different in mind. He always does.

In 1997, my husband and I lived in a beautiful home in Waverly, Tennessee surrounded in the community by some of the most wonderful people I have ever known. We had our 4 year old daughter and our 2 year old son. They were beautiful, and I was happy with our family and our life together. Everything seemed to fit just right. Everyone fit in the vehicles. We had the perfect number of bedrooms for people to live in. Even our breakfast table was the right size. A family of four is what our whole society seems to be designed for.

Still, I felt the need for that third baby nagging away inside of me. I couldn't shake it. It was on my mind constantly.

2

I was a firm believer, and still am, in the benefits of nursing. I nursed my babies until it became evident that it was time to stop, about 15 months for each of the first two. After I stopped nursing my son, I waited patiently for things to return to normal so I would be able to get pregnant again. But things did not return to normal.

Long after Graham stopped nursing, I was still producing milk. That was strange, and warranted several visits to doctors to figure out what was going on. I had to find a new doctor other than the one who delivered my first two babies because we had moved to Waverly.

The first doctor I visited listened hurriedly to the description of my symptoms. He made an on-the-spot diagnosis that I had a “cluster of cells,” as he put it, on my pituitary gland causing me to have this problem. He performed no further tests. He prescribed some medication and told me to come back in 6 weeks or sooner if I became pregnant.

I did, indeed, become pregnant. Great! And right on schedule. My plans were about to be derailed if I didn’t get pregnant soon.

My plans.

I contacted that same doctor’s office to make an appointment since I did confirm that I was pregnant, but they were very difficult to work with and even rude. It was clear that I needed to find another doctor’s office immediately.

After finding a very good doctor in Nashville, Tennessee, someone whom my friends had highly recommended, I visited her office and she also confirmed that I was pregnant. She was, however, shocked at the medication the other doctor had prescribed. She wondered why he did

not do any further testing if he felt those meds were warranted. She ordered me to stop taking them immediately since I had become pregnant.

I made my first prenatal exam appointment with this new doctor, and we were off and running. My due date was April 15, 1998. Yay! A spring baby. Wonderful, and I would be 33 the January before that, so everything was perfect. Right on schedule. Just like I had planned.

3

Isn't it funny how God has other plans that don't even resemble ours? At the time when we are experiencing the tough stuff, we can't really see God working. We get so caught up in our own plans, wishes, and desires, that we lose out on the bigger picture. That is why we have to trust Him. He allows us to experience those trials so our faith in Him will grow and mature. He can also use us to bless other people during our troubled times.

My mother and dad came to visit us, and we told them our wonderful news. We were all thrilled, and had begun to make plans for baby number three.

During that visit, we went out in town for lunch and then stopped at my friend, Miss Rita's, gift shop to look around at the things she had on sale. Lots of people in town were doing the same thing, including Lori, one of my very good friends. She was a devout Christian, one of the godliest women I have ever known.

At this time, no one else knew our little secret. It was so early, we only had time to make the announcement to my parents. Also, I liked to wait a little while before telling others about our pending bundles of joy. Based on the experience with my first pregnancy and miscarriage, it was easier if I didn't have to un-tell people our news later if something bad happened.

I went over to Lori and hugged her. She held onto me a little bit long and whispered in my ear, "I don't want to alarm you, but God laid it on my heart this morning during my devotional time that you are going to need prayer."

She pulled back and we looked at each other for another moment. She apologized and said she didn't want to upset me, and obviously she didn't know why, but she felt God was urging her to tell me that. I thanked her and told her it was okay, and that I was glad she had told me.

At that moment, I knew. In my heart of hearts and in the core of my being, I knew exactly what God was preparing me for. I was going to lose this baby.

I walked away from the store, got into my van with my parents and my two little kids, and drove back home. The whole way I pondered what Lori had told me. I did not mention anything about the incident to anyone else. I couldn't bring myself to believe it or dwell on it anymore, even though I knew why God had spoken to Lori. I certainly couldn't voice it. That would sound crazy, nuts. I tried to dismiss it from my mind, but without success.

How could this be? He knew what my plans were. How could God allow this to happen?

I used to think I liked surprises, but the more I live, the more I realize that I am not so fond of them, unless they involve flowers or chocolate. God knows this about me, of course, and through Lori, He sent me the warning He knew I would need.

A few days later, on a Saturday in late August, I did indeed lose that baby. My husband had gone to his parents' farm to help out that particular day, so it was just me at home with my two little ones. The words of my friend Lori echoed in my ears. "You're going to need prayer." How true that was.

After it was over, I cried as I held onto my babies. Of course I cried, and my little ones had no idea why Mommy was sad.

I contacted my new doctor the following Monday, and explained to her what had happened. She brought me in to do an exam, and we talked. I told her about all the strange things that had been happening, such as the extended lactation, and all the other problems that I was having that were seemingly unrelated. The ridiculous fatigue, the horrible headaches, the weird and almost non-existent menstrual cycles before getting pregnant while on the medication, and other factors.

Based on all the information I shared with her that day, she decided to refer me to an endocrinologist.



Dr. Andrea Hays was very young, as doctors go, and fresh out of residency, just starting her practice. She was actually just a few months older than I was – age 32. She brought me into her office and we sat and talked for a long time. I told her everything, and she listened carefully and made lots of notes. I really felt like she cared about getting to the root of my problem, and I appreciated her kind attention.

She decided I needed an MRI. Having never had anything like that before, I was clueless about what I was in for. My dear friend, Lori, kept my babies for me while I made the trip to Nashville alone to have this test done. I was apprehensive about it, and concerned about what they might find. I was not really sure why she chose to have the MRI done on my head. That was on Monday afternoon, October 13, 1997.

I was getting ready to go to my weekly Bible study group meeting on the following Tuesday morning, October 14, coincidentally the one year anniversary of my Grandma Haynes’ death. As I was fixing my hair, the phone rang. It was Dr. Hays.

She informed me that the radiologist called her about my MRI results because he saw something that called for immediate attention. She did not like to give news like this over the phone, but she was going out of town that morning and would be out for the rest of the week. She felt I should know before she left.

“That’s fine. Go ahead and tell me. I want to know now,” I said. She proceeded to tell me I had a tumor under my brain, growing on my pituitary gland that was 2 cm by 3 cm, which is roughly the size of a ping pong ball.

What? A tumor under my brain? That couldn't be right. I had not even considered such a scenario, and not being terribly familiar with the endocrine system, I was not even sure where the pituitary gland was, let alone why it was important. And how could a tumor there be the root of all the issues I'd been having?

I learned a lot about all of that in the coming days and weeks.

The pituitary gland sits right at the base of the brain, just about in the center of a person's head. It is straight behind the bridge of the nose, and it pretty much governs every hormone secretion in the body. This tumor was sitting right on top of the gland and apparently growing up into my optic nerve chiasm, stretching it, and endangering my eyesight. That explained the excruciating headaches. To make matters worse, it was secreting a large amount of growth hormone into my system, causing my bones, joints, hands, and feet to grow, a condition known as acromegaly. That explained a lot more, like why my ring size and shoe size kept increasing. I was finally able to connect the dots between all those odd symptoms and conclude that they were very related. Dr. Hays was brilliant for figuring all that out.

The good news was that tumors of this sort are historically non-malignant, so my cancer risk was not terribly high, although it was possible. Still, that was pretty good news, considering. I felt there were already enough other things to worry about.

When I hung up the phone with her, it took a few minutes for all of that to sink in. A brain tumor. I did not see that one coming.

5

I had always had a fear of dying and leaving my babies. I had no sisters or brothers, and my parents lived several hours away. My husband's job was very demanding, and he worked constantly. As a result of these circumstances, my worry was that if something happened to me, who would care for my babies? The thought terrified me.

All I could think about after hearing news like I had just heard was what might happen. What would we do? What if it's cancerous? What if I die? How can my babies grow up without their mama? I pulled them close to me and sank down to the floor of my daughter's bedroom on my knees in front of one of the closets. The scene is permanently etched on the window of my soul. I held them for a long time and just cried. They were so sweet, wondering why Mommy was sad – again.

It was a good thing, and a God thing, that Dr. Hays did not make me drive all the way to Nashville (about 70 miles one way) to give me that news. I would never have made it home. It was a blessing that she had to tell me on the phone. A huge blessing.

After sitting on the floor clutching my 4 ½ year old daughter and 2 year old son, I began to pray. I prayed like I had never prayed before. I prayed for strength and healing, and for guidance on what to do next. I felt a peace wash over me, a feeling that my babies were not going to lose their mother before they would even remember who I was. I asked God what I should do, and He told me.

Go on over to your Tuesday morning Bible study. You're going to need it.

Of course I was running late after the eventful morning I'd had. I pulled my car up to the door of the church, and got my babies out to take them

to the nursery. As I walked them into the room, a sweet, perceptive lady working in the nursery that day took one look at me and knew something was very wrong. When she asked what was going on, the flood gates opened.

After I finished my spiel, she took my hand and said, “Come with me.” She led me downstairs to where the Bible study group was meeting. As soon as she told them what I had told her, there was an immediate outpouring of love and support from the group. Those precious ladies gathered around me, each one laying a hand on my shoulder or back, and they all prayed over me.

I gained a first-hand appreciation for the true meaning and significance of James 5:13-16. This passage talks about going to the church elders and having them lay hands on the sick to heal them. Traditionally, we think of those elders as being men. Let me assure you, I have never felt the presence of God more than when I was with those wonderful ladies in my Bible study group. Church elders are also most certainly the women.

What an amazing, transforming experience! I had never felt the power of the Holy Spirit like I did at that moment. I could feel God’s comfort and grace, and a peace came over me, again. I knew He was going to get me through this.

Word spread quickly through the church, and through the community. We told our family and friends across the U.S., and asked them to pray for healing. We had family stretching from Florida to Connecticut, and from North Carolina to California. Even some friends in Hong Kong were praying for me, and my cousin and her husband in Hawaii. I had people praying for me all around the world. It was incredible – and humbling.

6

Every doctor's visit was an education. I went to a neuro-ophthalmologist to have my eyesight checked. He determined that I was, indeed, losing the periphery of my sight. I went to see a neurosurgeon and an ear-nose-throat surgeon because they would work together to perform the surgery I needed. They would go through my sinus cavity to get to the tumor in the center of my head, and it would take the two of them to do it successfully. The surgery was scheduled for Monday, November 3, 1997, just three weeks after the MRI.

So I used that three weeks to pray and read the Bible and pray some more. It was a time of preparation for me, mentally and spiritually. Amazing how God uses situations like this to bring us closer to Him. Every morning I would scour the scriptures for passages that would help me gain more knowledge from Him about how I should proceed; knowledge directly from Jesus himself on how and why I should have unbridled faith in His ability and His desire to heal me. I had the seeds of that faith, and they grew daily.

I spent a lot of time reading the book of Luke. Since Luke was a physician, this made a lot of sense to me. I enjoy his sympathetic writing style, and the fact that he so carefully chronicles the thoughts and feelings of Mary and other women. Coincidentally, we had been doing a study of Luke and Acts in my weekly Bible study group. I actually do not believe it was a coincidence at all. Everything happens for a reason, and I believe God perfectly timed that study for me.

I was particularly drawn to four passages that I used not only to learn how to increase my faith in Jesus' ability and willingness to heal me, but also to understand why this was happening to me.

The first passage was Luke 8:43-48. This is the story of the woman who had suffered with continuous bleeding. For twelve years she endured this awful condition. She had spent all her money on doctors, but none could provide a cure. The ramifications of this condition in Jewish culture were significant for her. This meant she was unclean, and could not go into the synagogue for worship with her friends and family. She was an outcast of society, and Jesus was her last hope.

In this scene, there was a huge crowd, thronging around Jesus and his disciples. People were pressing against Him from all sides, trying to be close to Him. She does her best to fly under the radar, and to get as close to Jesus as she possibly can. Just one touch on the hem of his cloak, she thought, and I can be rid of this dreadful plague.

Sure enough, her faith was well placed. She experienced immediate healing, but Jesus, being God in the flesh, knew everything. He knew someone had touched Him, and He knew who she was and why she did it. But He asked the question, “Who touched Me?”

Terrified of making Him angry, she fell at His feet and told Him and the crowd what she had done and why, and that she had been instantly healed. Jesus showed compassion to that woman, and told her that her faith had healed her. Her faith.

There are numerous times we see in the Bible that people’s faith is rewarded by their requests being fulfilled. I drew strength from a second passage, Luke 7:1-10. This one deals with the faith of the Centurion. His servant was ill, but rather than trouble Jesus to come to him, he asked that Jesus merely speak the word and his servant would be healed.

The Centurion’s faith was so great, Jesus marveled at it. Imagine doing something to make Jesus marvel.

Jesus fulfilled the Centurion’s request, and the servant was indeed healed. Once again, an example of the extreme power of faith in God.

The third passage that served as sort of a revelation to me was Luke 11:9-13, in which Jesus tells us to knock and the door will be opened, seek and we shall find, ask and it shall be done. It goes on to say “¹¹Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.)

That verse hit me right where I lived. I could ask God to send the Holy Spirit to be with me through this whole thing. God promised me He would send that version of Himself to comfort me, heal me, and bring me peace. I only had to ask for it. I clung to that promise, and prayed fervently for the Holy Spirit to dwell with me and get me through the surgery and the healing process. It was an amazing realization for me.

The fourth passage was the one that showed me why bad things happen to us, and why we must weather storms in our lives. Luke 13:6-9 is the parable of the barren fig tree. The owner was annoyed that the tree had not produced fruit for three years. He ordered the caretaker to cut it down. But the caretaker asked for a reprieve for the tree. He wanted to dig around it and fertilize it. This was a necessary process to help it grow and produce fruit.

I realized that we must go through the “fertilization” process sometimes in order to grow and produce fruit for the kingdom of God. Otherwise, we would be stagnant, in the same place our whole lives, never learning, never growing.

I certainly felt like I was being fertilized.

7

So much happened in such a short time. I gained knowledge I never would have gained if I had not gone through that experience. I learned to pray specifically for the outcome I wanted to see, and to pray for God's hand to guide the physicians who would perform the surgery I needed. I determined to have absolute, unwavering faith in God to do what I needed Him to do. I needed to stay here for my babies, and I needed to be healthy.

What next, then? I had learned so much from studying Luke. How could I apply all that I learned to the situation I was in? How was I going to pray specifically? At first, I didn't even know what to pray for, but as I studied and went to my doctor visits, it became clear to me what it was I should ask Him for.

I started by listing the key items I wanted to see happen. I shared this list with my husband and close family, and with our friends who were praying for me. I began to pray earnestly for these 7 outcomes:

1. Not to die (Obvious, but had to be stated)
2. For the tumor to be benign
3. For the surgeons to be able to remove the tumor completely, while leaving the pituitary gland intact
4. To regain any eyesight I might have lost
5. Not to have to be on some kind of medication for this for the rest of my life.
6. Overall and complete healing from the surgery and the awful condition of acromegaly.
7. To be able to get pregnant again and carry the baby to full term.

Number 7 was very closely tied to, and dependent upon, number 3. It was still a top priority for me to have another baby, even though Dr. Hays was not encouraged about the odds. We would see. I had a weapon: prayer, and I was going to use it.

8

A funny thing happened on our Sunday afternoon drive to the hospital. You will recall the passage in Luke 7 about the Centurion. I pondered that story every day, and determined that I was going to have the faith of the Centurion.

So on that trip, I was talking with Don, who was driving, and we were discussing the surgery that would take place the following morning. I was understandably apprehensive, and beginning to feel a little scared and overwhelmed. I needed a faith booster. We were driving east on I-40 and had just gotten into the busy Nashville traffic. There were multiple lanes at this point, and we were in one of the middle lanes.

At that moment, I looked up and saw a gleaming white, very clean, dual-wheeled pickup truck zoom past us in the lane to our left. Behind each set of dual tires on the rear of the truck was a set of shiny, clean, silver mud flaps. What word do you suppose was written on those mud flaps?

You guessed it. Centurion.

I pointed and exclaimed to Don, and we both laughed out loud. I guess you could call that a Tennessee redneck miracle! But I loved it. It was just what I needed.

November 3, 1997 was a Monday morning. I have never minded Mondays too much, but this one I dreaded. I had a tiny glimpse of how Jesus might have felt when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane to let this cup pass from Him. It was stressful, but still I felt God going with me every step of the way.

I am not sure how many hours I was under. Maybe three or four. I do remember waking to see my husband standing anxiously over me. Obviously, I was really groggy. My breathing was labored, and he was

watching me closely. I just remember that and wanting to get a good, deep breath. It was over. The surgery I had dreaded and prayed over and fasted over was just that. Over. What a relief. Now it was time to recuperate.

While I was still in the hospital, they took me to have another MRI done. This time, my sweet husband was right there with me, and waiting when I came out of that awful tunnel.

So far, the specific prayer list was looking good. I was still alive, number one on the list, and word had come back that the tumor was indeed benign. Whew! Thank God for a yes on item number two.

Over the next few days and weeks, we would learn more about how God was answering our prayers.

A post-op visit with the neurosurgeon revealed that he was able to get all of the tumor out of there and leave the pituitary gland completely intact. He said it looked really good, and he saw no reason why normal function could not return. We were thanking God for item number three on the list. That was a big one.

Next was a second visit to the neuro-ophthalmologist to recheck my eyesight. In the first visit, it was clear that I was losing my peripheral vision. It was eventually going to become more tunnel-like if the tumor were allowed to stay. During the second visit, after the surgery, the tests showed my vision to be completely restored! God was so good! Did I dare ask for more?

He told us in His word to ask. It would be disobedient not to, so ask I did.

Number five on the list may seem petty to some people, especially people who do have to be on medication permanently. But I knew if I wanted to become pregnant and carry a healthy baby full term, I would not need to have extra meds or chemicals in my body. Also, normal,

natural pituitary function would be necessary to support a healthy pregnancy, and that would best be accomplished if the gland were in place and there were no meds involved.

I consulted with Dr. Hays. She ran several blood tests to be sure the growth hormone levels were dropping. They were, and because I was doing so well, she saw no reason to put me on any medication other than the temporary stuff right after the surgery. Number five was another “Yes” from God.

I will never forget the day, not long after that, when I had another follow-up visit with Dr. Hays. She had been studying my MRI, my blood test results, my eye test results, and my accounts of how much better I was feeling. It was all so surprising to her. Patients with this kind of problem traditionally don’t do so well.

She looked at me, and the look on her face was a mixture of surprise, bewilderment, disbelief, and even delight. Her words were music to my ears. “It appears that...you’re cured.”

Item six was knocked out of the park.

9

It was August of 2000. A Bible study group was in the process of starting at our church, and I was anxious to join. We had left Waverly and moved to Franklin, KY in 1998 because my husband had taken a job there. I missed my Tuesday morning Bible study group in Waverly.

A group at our current church was planning to do the Beth Moore study, A Woman's Heart – God's Dwelling Place. I had heard great things about Beth Moore studies, and it seemed like a good opportunity to become involved in a meaningful study with the ladies at our church in Franklin.

It had been nearly three years since my tumor surgery. I thanked God every day for answering all those prayers, and for showing me what to pray for, and how to pray specifically for the outcomes that I needed.

Six out of the seven items on my list had been fulfilled. It was really more than I ever deserved. I was truly thankful to God for all the ways He had blessed me.

Still, that nagging desire to become pregnant again was strong. There was another baby who was supposed to be. There had to be. I could picture her in my mind. It was what I wanted most. I was unwilling to let go of that vision.

For two years and nine months I prayed for God to answer that seventh request. But the answer was No. I refused to give in to what seemed to be unfolding as God's will. Why could I not have what I wanted? I was cured. It should happen.

“Won't you be happy and content with what I have given you already?” He would ask me. “Of course I will,” was my reply. But nothing

changed in my heart. He knew I did not mean it, and God knows the heart of each individual. I couldn't fool God. He knew I was still gripped by my own stubborn will.

Then one of our Beth Moore Bible study lessons (no coincidence, I'm sure) hit me between the eyes. It was about struggling with your role in God's kingdom, something I do frequently. Beth stated in her text that only God's chosen task for you will ultimately satisfy, and that you should not wait until it is too late to realize the privilege of serving Him in His chosen position for you.

I realized that I was approaching my requests to God all wrong. It was based on what I wanted, rather than seeking God's true will for me and our family. My will and my desires had to take a back seat to God's will. If I were truly His child, I would defer to His judgment, and accept what His future held for me, because God knows the position He has for me.

That's it, then. I was tired of swimming upstream. I was so emotionally exhausted from worrying and obsessing about what I wanted, and I was blind to the things God was trying to show me. He wanted me to know how important it was to appreciate the family that I had, and to completely trust Him with our future.

Once I came to that realization, I finally, genuinely let go and trusted Him to be the author of my future. Whether I became pregnant again or not, I told God I would be happy. It was fully in His hands now. This time I meant it.

10

September 29, 2000 was a Friday. It happened to be the Friday before my kids' fall break from school, and we had planned a beach trip with my mother and dad. I couldn't wait to get down there. We all loved the beach, and Don needed a vacation from his job. Lately it had been particularly hectic and stressful. We planned to load everything up and hit the road as soon as the kids were home from school.

I had been feeling a little funny for a couple of days. I was familiar with that feeling, and I decided to run to the store to pick up a pregnancy test. Since we were leaving on a trip, I wanted to find out what was going on for sure.

I got home from the store and wasted no time. I took the test. To my shock and delight, it was positive!

I was astounded and amazed at God's grace and kindness, and I dropped to my knees and thanked Him for His willingness to allow the beginning of a Yes to my seventh request.

The crazy realization hit me. All that time I was bent on having things my own way. My stubborn will, my plan. Instead, I just needed to let go and put God in the driver's seat.

I called Don, and told him to come home because I needed to talk with him. This was very important. With our plans to get on the road immediately after school, I did not know when else I would be able to tell him the news in a private setting. Besides, I was about to pop with joy and I wanted to tell him right then.

It was about 10:00 in the morning when he got home. Fortunately, we only lived about a mile from his work. I met him at the door, and shared

the news with him. He was thrilled, and we hugged each other for a long time. We enjoyed a short conversation and a prayer of thanks together before he had to head on back to work. If we were going to get away on time that afternoon, he had to get back to work.

For the next 2 or 3 hours, I continued with packing and getting everything ready to go on our trip. That was when I got the call.

Don's brother, David, was on the other end. I remember being so confused when he started talking. I could scarcely take in what he was saying. Something about his mother calling him and being hysterical, and something else about his dad - and a gunshot. He did not have all the details yet, and he would call me back when he did.

All I could think was, "It's probably all right. There is just some misunderstanding. He will call back soon and tell me everything is okay." I tried to stay calm and not worry.

But when he called again, I knew everything was not going to be okay. In fact, everything was about to fall completely apart. Don's sweet father had turned a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

I've never spent another day in my life like that one, and I hope I never do again. I went from elation to agony in just a few hours. It was hard to believe we had been so ecstatically happy just that morning. Now the happiness was gone.

My brain was on overload. What should I do next? Obviously, I needed to get hold of Don again and tell him to come back home. This was before he had a cell phone, and contacting him was difficult when he was out of his office. Of course, he was out of his office. I sent him a message through the switchboard operator to call home as soon as possible. I also had people in the plant out looking for him. There was a definite emergency.

When he got the news, he rushed back home. He called his brother and talked with him for several minutes. Bit by bit, we began to piece together what had happened that afternoon. It was more than we could comprehend.

His father was still alive, and had been taken to the hospital in Memphis. Their mother had also been taken to the same hospital, after suffering what appeared to be a light heart attack. Some other family members were with them until we could all get down there.

The whole scenario was what nightmares are made of. I kept thinking, “I am going to wake up and find that this is all just some horrid dream.” But I did not wake up.

We were already packed for our trip, so we loaded up the children and all our luggage. Instead of heading southeast to the beach, we headed southwest to Memphis. It was a long drive.

11

Over the course of the next many weeks, Don was on the road to Memphis and back constantly to help out and to spend time by his dad's side. We did not know how long he could hang on like he was. I stayed home and took care of our children, all the while feeling miserable and sick, both physically and emotionally.

On the Saturday night preceding the morning of Jacquelyn's birthday in December, Don had been in Memphis to visit his dad. He drove back home to be there for her special day. The phone rang the next morning and it was the phone call we had been dreading. Early that morning, the morning of Jacquelyn's 8th birthday, Don's dad passed away.

He had developed a staph infection in his wound, and it was too much for him to fight off. For 2 ½ months he held on. I don't see how. He was a strong person, but sometimes strong people get to the end of their strength, and he had gotten to the end of his.

Apparently, he had been depressed. He was a World War II veteran, he had survived the Battle of the Bulge, and he had PTSD. We knew this, but did not know exactly the extent of his problems. He also had suffered a terrible accident a few years before which took away most of the use of his left arm. Many things contributed to his fragile state of mind, and he finally reached a breaking point.

Needless to say, stress like what we had experienced over the past couple of months is very bad for a pregnant woman, especially in the very early stages of pregnancy. I was upset all the time. With all that was happening with my father-in-law and the stress my husband was under, I felt guilty for worrying about myself.

Actually, I was not worried about me at all. I was worried about our baby. I was terrified of having a third miscarriage, especially after everything I had gone through to bring this baby into existence. I could not lose this baby! I also felt guilty for resenting the fact that our happiness over this pregnancy had been ripped away from us before we even had a chance to blink. I thought about Don's poor dad and all that he had suffered, and I felt even worse.

The passage from Luke 13 about the fig tree came flooding back to me again. This was clearly more fertilizer being thrown onto us, and I felt like I had been dug around and fertilized enough by now.

12

My December prenatal doctor visit took place very shortly after Don's father's funeral. When she examined me, she asked me if I had been experiencing any pain. Actually, I had noticed some recently, and I told her about it. She said, "You've been contracting. You need to stay off your feet until the end of your pregnancy."

What? What do you mean I have to stay off my feet? I have an 8 year old daughter and a 5 ½ year old son. My husband works half the time and is gone the other half of the time dealing with the aftermath of the past 2 ½ months. How on earth am I supposed to stay off my feet until the end of May? It seemed impossible, but the doctor told me if I wanted to carry this child full term, then I was going to have to stay off my feet as much as I possibly could.

Jesus tells us in the Bible in Matthew 19:26 that with God, all things are possible. I was feeling massively overwhelmed, so I decided it was time to dump all of this at the Lord's feet – again. I had become so burdened with everything, that I had gotten away from the peace I had experienced three years before. It was time to get down on my fluid-retentive knees and start praying.

I needed a new specific prayer list. God had knocked out the old one in superior fashion, and according to His Word, I should bring my new set of petitions to Him. So I did.

I made a new list of requests to pray for. I guess you could call this the addendum or sub-list for my seventh request on the earlier list. This one wasn't as long, but equally important. Instead of praying for my own life, this time I was petitioning Him on behalf of my unborn child. I felt even more passionate about this round of specific prayer.

My new specific prayer list:

1. That my stress level would go down and that I could remain calm and happy for the remainder of my pregnancy – for my baby’s sake and for the sake of my other two children.
2. That the baby would be healthy and have no problems. Since I was turning 36, I was worried about all kinds of issues.
3. That I carry this baby to full term. Her being born prematurely would add even more risks to an already tenuous and stressful situation. I just wanted this pregnancy to become as normal as possible.

Each passing day marked progress. Every time I spoke with my mother and dad on the phone, my dad would exclaim, “Another week down! Only ____ more to go!” Fill in the blank with wherever we were at that point. We were really happy to reach the half way mark at 20 weeks.

The doctor scheduled an ultrasound at this point, in mid to late January. I had been exercising that specific prayer list, and I was anxious to see how everything looked, and to find out whether the baby was a boy or a girl. We always wanted to find out. I couldn’t stand not knowing, especially if it was possible to know. Remember how I don’t like surprises, unless it’s flowers or chocolate. Also, I had to know what color afghan to crochet.

We got to see the monitor as the ultrasound technician ran the probe over my bulging belly. There SHE was! It was a girl, and she looked perfect! Her little features were so distinct, and I gazed at her in amazement, pondering how far this little one had come, and she had no idea.

The next milestone was reaching the 24 week mark. That was particularly huge. I read a lot during that time because it was about all I could do. The 24 week point in the pregnancy was important, according to the reading, because the statistical odds of a baby surviving outside

the womb increased dramatically at that point. But I had been praying, and I had peace that the Lord would answer my prayer to let her be full term.

Staying off her feet for months on end is difficult for any pregnant woman, but it's especially true if she already has a family. My husband helped whenever he could, but there were some things that I just had to do. I would take my kids to school and pick them up, cook, do very limited grocery shopping, and I taught Sunday School. It was easy for me to prepare the lessons. I had lots of down time. The worst part was climbing the stairs at church, a prospect I dreaded each week. I knew EXACTLY how many stairs there were, and I counted each one. I came to a very sobering conclusion during this part of my pregnancy – inactivity will kill a person.

13

Item one on the new specific prayer request sub-list, the stress level, was certainly a tough one for us to overcome, but I knew God was helping us through it. It was a daily struggle. It seemed for weeks as though there was a new challenge or obstacle to tackle. My poor husband was under a tremendous amount of stress with his job, our pregnancy situation, and personal matters stemming from his dad, and I prayed for him to be able to handle it all without losing his health.

Item two on the sub-list had been covered at the 20 week ultrasound. Thankfully, that was one worry that had been put to rest. By all appearances, she was a healthy, thriving little baby girl, and for that we were most grateful. Our other two children were also getting excited about the prospect of having a baby sister in the house. They were so sweet, and as helpful as a 2nd grader and a kindergartner could be.

The second part of my seventh prayer request, carrying her to full term, was looking brighter all the time. My stress level went down a little more every time another week came off our count. I had even been formulating names in my head and running them past Don. Lying in bed one night, it came to me that I should name her Andrea, after the doctor that helped make her possible.

By week 30, I was feeling tremendous relief, and looking forward to the big day. I finally allowed myself to feel happy and excited about Andrea's pending arrival. Instead of praying so desperately for her to stay in, I began to relax, and prepare for having another little person in our home.

The prenatal visit for week 39 rolled around. We were getting to the end of May, and I was ready for Andrea to make her appearance. We all

were. The doctor checked me out and said, “How do you feel about coming to the hospital to be induced tomorrow?”

Tomorrow! I felt wonderful about it! I was finally going to meet my Andrea, my Seventh Request, the person I had waited over three and a half years to meet. I felt fantastic about tomorrow.

14

Andrea's entrance into this world was no more significant than the birth of my first two children. Each one has a special, unique story that stems from the days surrounding their birth. Each one was prayed for fervently, and wanted desperately. My prayer now is that each one knows how special he or she is to me, and how much their mom and dad adore them.

The circumstances that preceded Andrea's life were unusual, and for a long time, her existence was in question. For many years, I could not bring myself to sit down and write out the events that preceded Andrea, mostly because some of them were too painful to relive. But I felt an urge, a compelling drive, to finally write down the events I have recorded in the previous chapters. Perhaps I can inspire someone, even one person, to get through a seemingly impossible situation. Perhaps by reading this story, someone else can gain comfort after experiencing a miscarriage. Perhaps God wants me to teach others what I learned about how to pray specifically. I don't know what you as the reader will gain from it, but you know. And above all, God knows.

May you have His blessings and peace in your life.

Anna Scates is a former Mechanical Engineer, current blogger, mom of three, and wife of one. Check out her website at 7yearadventure.com where she writes articles to encourage and guide parents of teens to enjoy and make the most of their kids' teen years.

She can be contacted by email at annascates@7yearadventure.com.