

## CHAPTER 2

# Practicing Acceptance and Seeing Burdens as Blessings

Many years ago, one Sunday after Mass, one of our priests asked me and my wife how he could pray for our family. We asked him to pray, as we frequently did, for our oldest son's future and that he be healed of his autism. He looked at us thoughtfully for a moment and then shared some guidance with us that has been the ongoing catalyst for a great deal of conversation and reflection in our home since that time. He encouraged us to stop praying for healing and pray instead for *acceptance*.

Let me explain.

He said there was nothing wrong with asking God to heal our son. But we first needed to ask for the ability to fully accept the beautiful gift of our child *exactly as God created him*. By asking for healing first, we were in essence asking God to improve on His creation without first understanding the lessons and blessings His gift has provided our family. We have always viewed our oldest son as a blessing and know we could not possibly love him more than we do now. But we may have mistaken love for acceptance as we continued to

## BEING FULLY PRESENT

pray over the years for God to remake him into our vision of a well-formed and healthy child. We had somewhat selfishly asked God to redo His handiwork when we should have been accepting of God's plan for his life and trusting that the Father who loves us wants only what is best for him.

If you follow the will of God, you know that in spite of all the terrible things that happen to you, you will never lose a final refuge. You know that the foundation of the world is love, so that even when no human being can or will help you, you may go on, trusting in the One that loves you.

—Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*

Acknowledging this has been both humbling and illuminating as I think about how to apply “acceptance” into other areas of my life. This period of reflection has made me realize how often without thinking I ask God for His help in improving situations and solving problems. Instead of praying for acceptance and discernment about what lessons God wants to teach me or the blessings hidden in these challenges, I seek to reshape the issues into something more pleasing to me instead of pleasing to Him.

- Do you ever fall into the “acceptance trap” as well?
- Do you see career setbacks as learning opportunities to help you grow and learn?
- Do you see opportunities for spiritual growth in our emotional struggles and financial setbacks?
- Does illness (yours or others) offer opportunities to turn suffering into a blessing?

## PRACTICING ACCEPTANCE AND SEEING BURDENS AS BLESSINGS

As St. Paul says, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Romans 8:18). It is often difficult to see the blessings and good in any kind of suffering, yet we know from Church teaching there is redemptive power in suffering if we learn to give it up to God. Practicing acceptance may require a radical recalibration of our mindsets as well as complete trust and faith in God’s plan for our lives. We must be faithful, humble, patient, obedient and prayerful if we are to learn the lessons and blessings God has in store for us in our daily trials. We must also seek to glorify Him and not ourselves through the way we deal with challenges and always express our gratitude for the good *and* bad that comes our way.

We always find that those who walked closest to Christ were those who had to bear the greatest trials.

—St. Teresa of Avila

I can look back now and see the tremendous positive influence our oldest son has had on our family. His diagnosis with autism more than twenty-four years ago and the challenges this presented began the long and often difficult process of lowering the wall around my closed-off heart. In the summer of 2005, we moved into the area in which we now live to be closer to his school and therapists. This move began a chain of events that eventually led to our family joining the Catholic Church the following year. The opening of my heart which began at his diagnosis allowed me to experience a profound conversion experience in September

## BEING FULLY PRESENT

2005 when I finally surrendered to Christ and put aside the pride and stubbornness that had dominated my life for so long. Without a doubt, our gifted child and his presence in our lives was a significant catalyst behind our joining the Catholic Church and the strong faith our family has today.

Maybe this was God's plan all along for our son, and I know my wife and I were specifically chosen out of all the parents in the world to be his parents. I am just grateful that I can see it now and accept him, not only as one of my wonderful children who I love, but also as a child of God who was given to us for His divine purpose.

Perhaps in this crazy world in which we live, we can all more thoughtfully practice acceptance of God's will and see the challenges in our lives as blessings, not burdens.

Heavenly Father, I humbly ask that you grant me the gift of acceptance today. Please help me to understand the lessons and blessings hidden within the challenges my family and I will face and know that I am grateful to you for our lives and the incredible gift and sacrifice of your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

*How does this idea of acceptance speak to you? In your own life, do you possibly have an opportunity to accept and appreciate your own difficult circumstances and challenges as blessings and learning experiences instead of burdens?*