



Season 4 | Episode 4

Persevering in Faith When Illness Remains

Dr. Andy Laurie

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and you're listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship... and sharing practical ways that you can include people with disability in your church and community.

Dr. Andy Laurie suffers from POTS, which is a devastating disease of the autonomic nervous system. He shared the story of his diagnosis on our last episode, so be sure to listen back if you missed it. And he joins us again today to talk about his journey of faith that was pushed to the brink when his circumstances became overwhelming.

Thanks so much for joining us on the podcast again.

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Crystal, thank you. So glad to be here again.

Crystal Keating:

Dr. Andy, you shared that you were really living the dream before your diagnosis. You were strong and healthy, happily married, enjoying your lovely family with four young children. You were practicing medicine and even starting a second career as a pastor, but everything changed as you faced the ups and downs of a chronic condition.

So, after living with this debilitating illness for 19 years, what does your life look like now?

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Red dots and green dots. If you were here when we talked about this before I talked about something out of James chapter one. I encourage listeners to make sure they go back and listen to that.

But the idea is red dots and green dots. Good and bad. Red dots are still there. Every morning I wake up with what feels like the stomach flu. I'm sick to my stomach. Every day it is a challenge to be able to be upright without my heart going into bad rhythms or blood pressure plummeting or losing consciousness, whatever it may be.

And that's to varying degrees. Some days it's miserable and I don't really even get off the couch, and some days I'm more functional and I'm able to do a little bit more. So, it really is greatly a lot of variability, which kind of goes along with autonomic disease. So, the red dots are there and they're very real, but gosh, some wonderful, wonderful green dots.



Family couldn't be any better. I'm now at the point, my wife and I are moving into the empty nest phase of life. Our kids are now kind of moving on doing their own thing. But I would say this: while the nest is empty, wonderful, wonderful memories. And in a lot of ways, the disease kind of forced that to happen.

It really caused me to focus on some things that are more foundationally important, so just wonderful memories with the kids and the family and all that. We got a grandkid and we're enjoying; we're enjoying him as well. As far as the career side of things going, I was able at least to get, I wasn't, God was through some wonderful physicians, at least get me to the point where I was able to work a few hours a night as a radiologist. Technology just so happened - I love the just so happened - but technology just so happened, right when I got sick, it was making a transition in radiology to the digital world.

So, instead of a doctor having to go into the hospitals to read all the x-rays. It just so happened, right when I got sick was the same time things went digital. So, they were able to send it to me on my computer. And so, I could read this yeah. Wow, thank you, God. That would have been awful to have to give that career up.

So, I was able to practice in that limited capacity for almost 30 years before a couple of years ago, my health just got to the point where I just couldn't do it anymore. But I had a wonderful career doing that. As far as the ministry goes, still pastoring the church. Last week we talked about it. It was very rough at the start, but God has done amazing things through that church. And now we got other pastors and ministers carrying the load there and I just kind of get to be the old, seasoned pastor now to kind of minister to those, especially minister to those that are suffering with chronic illness.

I could be real helpful there. I got to admit as sick as I have been, and I'm being real upfront with you, I am content with my life. I really am.

Crystal Keating:
That's of God.

Dr. Andy Laurie:
That is of God. I am at peace. I'm content with my life. And I know for a number, probably a number of your listeners that are out there, they're saying I'm struggling with that one. I'm going through this awful debilitating thing. I'm struggling to find peace and contentment. I really want to encourage them. Again, the book may be tremendously helpful. There's people out there that could be helpful. God can and God will bring peace and contentment, even in the ugliest thing the enemy throws at us. But God's got to take us through that process and that's a big reason why I wrote the book. So, all in all, red dots, and green dots, that's how my life is now.

Crystal Keating:
That's so good. Well, as you reflect on your life, how have you let go of the picture you once held?



I mean, you were talking about basically the refining purposes in suffering, that they cause us to focus on the things that really matter. So how did you let go of what you had and how have you embraced what God has before you now?

Dr. Andy Laurie:

This is such a vitally important concept. That if we ever, for those that suffer with chronic illness, chronic pain, and maybe chronic grieving of the loss of a loved one or a failed relationship, whatever it may be if those things are causing us not to be able to do the things that we can no longer do, it is vitally important that we're willing to let go of that old life and embrace the new one. Because if we don't, that specter, that ghost of the old life will continue to haunt us and our skies - they'll never turn blue. They will remain dark. I had to go through a very real process. I actually dedicated a whole chapter to this in the book, sharing my story on how I went through that process of doing that.

But what ended up happening is the first year or two of this illness, it was just a whirlwind of activity. It was doctors and specialists and procedures and medications and try this, try that and, and all the things to try to regain my health. And some of the things helped and some of the things didn't, but after a couple years of it, it became clear this wasn't going away.

It became clear I was going to be limited and severely limited from the life I used to have. And when it became clear this wasn't going away, I went into a very dark place. I remember I used to just go into my room, close the door, shut the shades, lay in the darkness, and just stare at the ceiling.

Total blackness, just stare at it for hours and hours and hours on end. I was just miserable. Like I was in this dark tunnel, but there's no light at the end of the tunnel. There's nothing but darkness. And I was there not so much because I was feeling miserable health-wise. I was, I felt lousy. But I was there because I was grieving over my life that was lost. I was grieving over that I'm not going to be able to run around on the sports fields with my kids anymore. I can't do all the things in the church I used to do. I can't run all the emergency room radiology stuff in the hospital anymore. Sometimes I can't even get out of bed I feel so miserable.

I can't do this thing. And it was this grieving over the life lost and I was in a very, very dark place. And I needed someone to pull me out of this. And that's a real important point. I mentioned in the book when we find ourselves there to try to pull ourselves out of it on our own, that's really tough to do.

There's a reason God gave us other people and other Christians. They're there to help us out of this. It was my friend, my pastor, my mentor David McAllister, who founded the church. We've been friends for 30 years now. He's the one that baptized me, to begin with, and it was him. He's the one that said, Andy, we need to talk.

And he just went over all the things that I knew. I mean, all the things I have taught on, and I have taught other people about understanding, letting the old life go, embracing the new life, trusting God in the new life, making sure you're making the most of every day. This is the life



that God has given us so let's rejoice in gladness. He just went over so many things with me and I had to go through that process of letting it go. And I legitimately did.

It was painful. Again, I talked a lot about that in the book. That's easily the most emotional part of the book when I had to, I had to relive that whole thing. And then it's, it's painful memories. But there simply is no way that we're going to be able to move on and move forward until we let that old life go and embrace the new one. Because when we do, then God could take us where we need to go. Then God could say, you've let go of the past. I'm now your God of the now, I'm now your God of the future. I will take you through this thing, but you got to let the old life go. And, and I did, and that was critical.

Crystal Keating:

And you didn't do it on your own. And I think you bring up such a good point that we talk about in every episode, that God's way, generally, of giving us hope is through his spirit, but through the church, for people to speak truth into our lives when we are just buried under the lies of our circumstances: that this will never change, there's no purpose, there's no hope. It's exactly where the enemy would want us to stay, is in bed with the shades closed. God bless that pastor. And for all who are listening, who are the helpers, who are the ones who are God's hands, and feet and voices, that they would be the ones to come in and be that for you.

Because I think you can easily fear, at least for a helper, I don't want to say the wrong thing. I want to be sensitive. But it sounded like you really needed some hard truths to come right at you again and again. And that's what brought you out.

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I got hit with the spiritual two by four, and I needed that.

Crystal Keating:

That's what you needed. All in the right time too. You know, you've shared a really interesting aspect that you came to understand, your pain breaks God's heart. So how did you learn this and how does this awareness change your prayer life?

Dr. Andy Laurie:

I'd say at least a few years into this, my prayers with God were pretty much desperate pleas. I mean, that was how I prayed when this illness hit for most of it. It was this desperate plea: God, please, please take it. Take it completely, take it totally. I don't want it and I don't want it anymore. I don't want any more suffering. I don't want any more nausea. I don't want to just take it completely and totally away from it. And it was day after day that crying out, pleading. And that was pretty much the nature of my prayers. Then something hit me one day.

It was probably a couple of years into it, and I was getting ready to go do my prayer time. But prior to that, I don't even remember what the issue is now, but I was dealing with an issue with one of my kids and they were going through a really difficult time. And it, it just, it broke my heart.



It broke my heart, what they were going through, what they were struggling with. And so, I went into that prayer time with God that kind of weighing on my heart what my, what my kid was going through. And then I started the usual desperate plea to God, take this completely and totally away from me. I don't want to suffer anymore and all of that.

And then it just floored me. And I realized that if I feel this way about my kid and his suffering and what he was going through, and it breaks my heart, how much more does God feel? That I'm his kid and I'm going through this awful thing and the suffering, and I started crying and I'm out there. I was outside doing my prayer time and I'm just wailing and wailing because I almost felt in a way, I was being so selfish.

I was, I was just thinking about how this illness affected me. Without even for a moment thinking about how it affected dad and how he felt about this and how it broke his heart. And it changed everything. I, I think a little bit about Jesus. Remember when Lazarus had died and there was all this sadness and grieving and hurt everywhere, and Jesus is watching this play out and it just said he wept.

He wept for the brokenness that was out there. And from that moment on my prayers have changed. It was no longer this desperate pleading; God, please take this completely and totally away. Now don't get me wrong, I still pray for healing. I will never stop that. But it now becomes God, we're in this thing together.

You're my dad. You love me. You're fighting tooth and nails behind the scene. You're putting these wonderful green dot blessings into my life, even in the midst of this disaster that the enemy has thrown at me. So, God, thank you. I love you. You're the best dad ever, and the prayers are awesome now. They are awesome. And they're powerful because I understood this breaks God's heart too. And that's, that really is a game-changer for our prayer life when we're suffering.

Crystal Keating:

It is because it reconnects you with God the Father, rather than has him be the force that's not healing you, or not responding the way that we think is best. It really restores that relationship. You know, in our previous conversation when you're talking about your desire as a man to provide for your wife to accomplish as much as you could. You touched a little bit on redefining victory in order to win each day. So maybe we can talk a little bit more about that.

What does that look like to you now?

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Sure. That's a, that's a great question there. Redefining victory basically means, as a man, and as anybody that's going through the reality of this illness, this situation. I can't do the things I used to do. And so, we have an issue here and the issue is this: God tells us very clearly. Psalm, I think it's 118:24. He says, this is the day he has made, so let us rejoice and be glad in it. Or this is the day God has provided for us. Come on, let's, let's go make the most of it. Let's rejoice and be glad



in it. But how can we rejoice and be glad in it? How can we make the most of it when we feel so lousy?

Crystal Keating:
Yeah.

Dr. Andy Laurie:
That's a fair question. How can we have victory over the day, which God wants us to? God wants us to have victory over the day. How can we have victory over the day when we feel so crummy? And the answer is we have to redefine victory. And for me, I had to redefine what victory was.

Victory was no longer, you know, Andy, you're going to run out there and you're going to cover all four hospitals as emergency radiologist. You're gonna read many, many studies a night and all - nope. Victory is going to be, when your health is up to it, you're going to sit in front of your computer. And if you can do it for an hour or two and read some studies, good for you. If you can just make your way to church and minister to a few people, good for you. You can't run around on the sports fields with your kids anymore, but you know what?

You can watch them play. You can encourage them. You can talk to them about life lessons. Good for you. You could spend some quality time with your wife. You could pray, you could, there are so many of these things, I'm going to call them small victories as I would have defined them. But for me, those were big deals.

And honestly, I think that's heroic. You know, for people that are healthy and strong and do these things, no big deal. But when those of us who struggle and do them, that's heroic and the book is called, *When Skies Aren't Blue*. Our skies will never turn blue if we don't redefine victory. God created us to do. God wants us to have victory over the day.

So, we need to redefine victory. And when we do that, it can be tremendously satisfying and so helpful to getting those skies blue again.

Crystal Keating:
Oh yeah. Well, you talked about it a little earlier, readjusting our expectations in order to prevent against bitterness. But that goes back to seeing the blessings, seeing the blessings of the ways God's working in and through you with your family and your church.

So, Dr. Andy, on your really difficult days, you make a habit of looking in the mirror and telling yourself that it's not you. Why has this become helpful to you?

Dr. Andy Laurie:
I know that sounds weird. So let me, let me qualify that.

Crystal Keating:
I'm picturing it. Okay. What's happening here?



Dr. Andy Laurie:

On my phone I regularly have, I think it's every day at noon it comes up, but it's 2 Corinthians 4:16. It just comes up on my phone. It reminds me. It says, therefore, we don't lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. So, our outer man decaying, or inner man is being renewed day by day. That comes up every day 'cause it reminds me of something really critical. And so now I'll get to the the mirror thing when I'm feeling horrible, just awful. It just, I can't even stand up. The nausea is overwhelming. I see myself in the mirror. I see this very sick-looking guy, this very uncomfortable-looking guy. And I will actually say it.

I'm not strange, but I will actually look at that guy in the mirror and say you're not me. Because what's me is not what I see. God just told us that. God just told us these bodies are destined to fail. Again, it's accurate expectations. God just said our outer bodies, they're decaying. They're destined to fail, but God says, what is us is on the inside.

And it's beautiful. It's made in his image and it's not decaying, but it's revving up and it's getting stronger and stronger every day until that amazing day that we're going to be with him forever. And that is Andy. Andy is not that body that is decaying. And I know it sounds odd, but it is so incredibly comforting for me to go through that process to recognize, that's not you. This body is not you, Andy. What's you is amazing and it's created in the image of God. And that is what is you, and that is strong and it's healthy and it's vibrant. And every day that you spend more time with God and connecting with God, it's getting stronger and stronger. Until that amazing day that this body will no longer be impeding things and it could just be you and God, as you were originally designed to. And wow, that could be helpful.

Crystal Keating:

Oh yeah. So, encouraging, so comforting. Well, and we do long for that final day. You know, you wrote that "When the nausea is overwhelming, I remind myself that there will come a time when I am feasting in heaven," because as Christians, our hope in Christ is the promise of eternity with him.

Dr. Andy, would you be able to enter your illness without knowing that God has a plan to heal you completely in heaven?

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Yeah, that eternal perspective is so important. You mentioned about, I wrote about feasting in heaven. There's kind of a backstory to that. Prior to getting sick, I loved to eat. I was a very, what people would say, a very adventuresome eater. And Crystal, you know, this cause you were a Tucsonian. Tucson is famous for these, I'll just say it nicely, taco dives. I mean, yes, there are those less than, uh, we'll just say taco dives, and but wow, are they good. They are so, so good, and I loved it. And the divey-er the better. I was just such an adventuresome eater. And I can't do that anymore. It's one of those joys that are no longer there.

I get violently ill if I attempted to do that. And so, this idea of feasting in heaven, it's just a joke I have with people at the church and in the house and my kids where I just say, when I get to



heaven, the first thing we're going to do is I'm sitting down with Jesus, and we are having a carne asada burrito with guacamole and pico de gallo. So that's...

Crystal Keating:

Oh, can I join you? That's right up my alley.

Dr. Andy Laurie:

We will be enjoying that. So, but it is a reminder that this world is temporary. And honestly, I am regularly reminded by this illness that I'm not home. I've heard Joni talk about this a lot that chronic illness and suffering has this incredible way to lead us and guide us away from this world and into the eternal one because we're constantly reminded by the suffering. This isn't home, this isn't where we're meant to be. These bodies are not our bodies. And you know, what, if our bodies are healthy or strong, we may not feel that, but I am daily, daily reminded of that. This is temporary and because of that, I can endure. I really can step back and see the big picture and say, yeah, I feel lousy today. But this day will pass and there's going to come a day, it's going to be perfect forever. And I keep my focus there, especially on those really bad days. And it is tremendously powerful to help us kind of brighten those dark skies.

Crystal Keating:

The hope of heaven is one of the greatest treasures and promises for our life to endure the hardship. Dr. Andy Laurie is the author of *When Skies Aren't Blue*. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast again today.

Dr. Andy Laurie:

Thank you.

Crystal Keating:

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