I'm going to tell you a little about my Faith and the Strength I draw from it.

For most of my spiritual life the one verse of scripture that I have lived by is Philippians 4:13 – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I've had a crisis of Faith in the past, and so did Lee. But not this time. When both of us needed our faith, and the strength that comes from it, we had it. And we had each other and our love for each other – a source of strength in itself.

Four years ago, when my husband, Lee's symptoms of what we suspected by then were ALS started to get worse, I lived that verse every day. When he couldn't drive anymore, I did all the driving. When he started falling more and more, doing damage to himself and whatever was around him when he fell, I helped him up and got things fixed. I took over the finances when he couldn't focus anymore. I got him to church, to doctor appointments, to social events – whatever he needed.

When his ALS diagnosis came in Feb 2023, we both lost it – even though we weren't surprised. We cried together, and then together we made the decision to live life to the fullest for as long as we could, and to give it all to God – that we'd get through it with God's help. The greatest thing you learn is that you go through ALS together – he had the disease, and we knew he was terminal, but it affected both of us, and our extended family. I doubt I will ever stop asking, "Why?" "Why him?"

We did a lot of research, connected with ALS groups online and on Facebook, and applied for every VA benefit we could get. While he started getting disability benefits right away, the caregiver support didn't start until the end of 2023. I found myself fighting with the VA medical staff constantly – they don't have much, if any, understanding of ALS – and they're mostly former military – so they didn't take well to talking to me instead of Lee, and they didn't like it when I told them they weren't doing anything without explaining completely and then WE would decide if he was having any treatments or meds or whatever. Then there were the caregivers – again, we found that the agency that provided the caregivers had very little experience with ALS and basically hired anyone who met the most basic of job skills. So I was fighting

with them too. Whatever it took to get Lee what he needed – what he deserved.

Now, a little sidebar here. I have OCD. Most of the time, it's very mild – just being very organized, doing things the same way every time…things like that. But when Lee was diagnosed, that OCD became a monster inside me – all focused on making sure he got the best care possible. I was afraid I was failing him – that what I did wasn't enough, that my care wasn't good enough. I was hard on the doctors and nurses, the caregivers and the agency, and extremely hard on myself. I had to be the strong one, no matter what, and I was the full-time caregiver, plus coordinating all the other caregivers, and managing all our personal business – paying bills, making appointments, grocery shopping and making our meals. I didn't sleep well – my brain wouldn't shut down. I had no choice, there wasn't anyone else. And I felt it was my job as Lee's wife. He was my soulmate – the other half of myself – and I figured it was what I was supposed to do. What else was I supposed to do? Having always been the ones who helped others, it was hard to ask for help.

"You don't know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have." It's a statement frequently used for ALS awareness and, along with Phil 4:13, became the words I lived by. And everyone tells you how strong you are, how amazing you are, that it shows how much you love him. But they don't know what's going on inside of you – what's behind the front you put on in public in order to be able to make it through each day.

I'm a Daughter of the King – have been for 21 years now, and I have a very strong prayer life. I prayed constantly for God to help me, to help Lee. Then in Nov 2024, I got sick for about a week, and my OCD spiraled out of control. I couldn't do anything – I couldn't supervise the new caregivers we had at that time. And then a substitute caregiver hurt Lee one night. Because I was sick, he didn't tell me about it until a couple days later. That did me in – I was so upset. I crashed and burned – told Mother Nina I wasn't just at rock-bottom, I was in the primordial ooze underneath rock-bottom – and if one more person told me how strong I was, I was going to punch them in the face. I frightened Lee, and worried him terribly. And that day I crashed, I left him alone in bed all day

until the caregiver got there. I knew he was safe, and if he needed me, he'd call for me. I still can't forgive myself for that, even though I knew he was safe. Mother Nina, Father Jacob, and my closest friends got me through that time. I couldn't face church – I didn't want questions or unsolicited advice – I just wanted to be left alone to regain my strength. I did, but it wasn't overnight. Prayer and God, and Lee's love for me got me through it.

In September 2025, I started my final year of EfM – something Lee had encouraged me to do and was proud of me for doing. He was experiencing a lot of progression and was often scared. We had lost one of our greyhounds in June, and both of us were grieving her loss. But we cried together, and then I would tell him that we were going to make it through the latest crisis – that God was with us. And I prayed.

Then, a month later, without warning, he was gone. I had to be strong that night – a house full of police and paramedics, and family. I barely got a moment alone with him before he was on the way to the mortuary. Everyone was looking to me for comfort – and strength. The grief was – sometimes still is – shattering, especially the first 4 months. My daughter helped me with every decision – even the most basic – and even through her own grief. I had enough strength to get through what I absolutely had to do, nothing more. The first week after he passed, I couldn't even pray. Now, 9 months later, I've made it through the big stuff – the funeral, the committal at Miramar, buying a new car, finding a new place to live, the loss of another greyhound, and most of the "firsts" – first Christmas, New Year, other holidays, our anniversary, my birthday, completing EfM … somehow, my faith gives me the strength to keep going, even on the still too frequent days when the grief and accompanying depression derails me. And I have a huge support system here at St Bart's.

Preparing for this talk, I started seeing the words "strength" and "courage" a great deal in the Bible, and in the formal prayers of our church. The post-communion prayer asks for "strength and courage to love and serve you," the birthday blessing asks to "strengthen them where they stand" and "raise them up if they fall." A quick google search revealed that the word "strength" and its related forms appears over 360 times, and in 39 different books in the Bible –

70 time in Psalms alone. I still find Philippians 4:13 to be the verse that speaks to my heart.

Since Lee died, I've felt adrift – without a purpose – there's nothing to fill up my days anymore, especially since those big changes are behind me now. The good news is my OCD is quiet now. The bad news is my OCD is quiet now. Now I have to find the strength to rebuild my life in a very different direction than I expected – and do it alone. I am discerning what path God is calling me to follow next. And now when someone tells me how strong I am, I just smile. It's the only choice I have.