
For my own Sam,
that you may always stand up for the truth.

Copyright © 2019, Ruth E. Meyer

www.truthnotespress.com



TruthNotes Press

All rights reserved. Unless specifically notes, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of TruthNotes Press.

ISBN: 978-1-7338075-2-4

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, and events are either products of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events or places is coincidental.

Stock images © Adobe Stock

Cover design by Sunset Rose Books

www.sunsetrosebooks.com

Interior formatting, print and ebook, by Hessler Design

www.hesslerdesign.com

ALL STONES AT THE MOUND

A NOVEL BY RUTH E. MEYER

THE SOLA SERIES



TruthNotes Press

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

—Edward Mote, 1797-1874

CHAPTER**1**

From the very start, the game was neck and neck. The undefeated Franklin Cougars had met their match against the Mapleport Chargers in the football semifinals. Whenever one team scored a touchdown, the other team answered in kind. Grace's stomach was in knots the entire game, especially whenever Jackson had the ball. The stakes were higher for this game than for most, and not just because it was the semifinals. Rumor had it that a few college scouts were in attendance, with their eyes on two players from Franklin as well as the star receiver of the Chargers. It was nerve racking to know they were here to watch her son's performance.

As the final seconds approached, Mapleport was down by three with the ball. There was just enough time left for two plays if they could stop the clock after the first. The center snapped the ball to the quarterback, who faked a long pass before slipping it to Jackson. He snuck around behind the line and made a breakaway, running for all he was worth, two opposing players hot on his heels. He made it to the forty-yard line... the thirty...

“Go, Jackson! You can do it!” Katie cheered for her brother, jumping up and down.

He passed the twenty-yard line. “We’re gonna win!” Freddie shouted next to Katie. “He’s gonna score!”

Jackson had just crossed the ten-yard line when one of his pursuers decided to make a last-ditch effort to stop him. Mid-stride, he leaped at Jackson and managed to grab his leg. Jackson stumbled, and the sudden change caused the other Franklin player to trip as well, stepping on Jackson’s leg as all three of them fell. Jackson’s other leg was stretching out for the next step, and he looked like he was doing the splits as he went down. Before long, the rest of the players on the field reached them and piled on top.

“Did he make it?” yelled a lady near Jackson’s family. Grace realized she was crossing her fingers, willing Jackson across the goal line.

As the players started detangling themselves, they got up one by one until only Jackson was left. The ball was inches from the end zone. He hadn’t scored. The crowd groaned in disappointment.

But Jackson didn’t get up. He rolled into a fetal position, grabbing his leg. Grace clutched David’s arm tightly, the blood draining from her face. “I’m going down to him,” she said, but her husband restrained her.

“Hang on,” he urged. “The coach and athletic trainer are coming out. Let them check on him first. You know Jackson would be humiliated if his mom ran onto the field for a pulled muscle.”

It quickly became apparent that it wasn’t just a pulled muscle, though. Jackson’s cries of pain echoed through the otherwise eerily silent stadium. He wasn’t one to put on a show or fake an injury. This was for real.

Grace's heart all but stopped as the athletic trainer summoned the paramedics on duty. When they brought the stretcher onto the field, Grace turned and fled down the bleacher steps, desperate to reach her son. David didn't stop her this time. He was right behind her.

When they reached the field, they both broke into a jog to follow Jackson as he was wheeled toward the waiting ambulance that attended every game as a precaution. The crowd clapped as a show of support for the wounded player, but Grace barely heard it.

"Jackson!" she shrieked as she approached. He looked over at her, grimacing in pain as the paramedic put a knee immobilizer on him. They had taken off his helmet and his face was deathly white, covered in beads of perspiration.

"Sorry, Mom," he gasped through clenched teeth. "I didn't make it."

Tears sprang to her eyes. "Oh, Jackson," she sniffled, reaching out to grasp his hand. "Don't even worry about the game! What happened?"

"My leg..." groaned Jackson. "I've never been in this much pain before. It's really bad."

"Is it his ACL?" David asked the paramedic, who was prepping things to take Jackson in the ambulance.

The paramedic's face was grim. "Looks like a broken leg," he said quietly. "But until they get x-rays, it's impossible to know exactly what happened."

Grace cried openly as she smoothed back Jackson's sweaty brown hair. "My poor baby," she wailed.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but we need to get him to the hospital," the paramedic said. "Only one of you can ride with him."

"You go," David insisted. "I'll check with Liv and Andy about taking the kids so I can meet you at the hospital. Text or

call with updates.”

Mutely, Grace nodded and followed her son into the ambulance, feeling detached. She was aware of the fact that the coaches were conferring with the refs on the field, but she couldn't care less about the game anymore. Her son was on his way to the hospital.

And Jackson Williams was not coming back.

X-rays at the local community hospital showed that Jackson had a high femoral break. Looking at the images on the film, Grace cringed. The bone had actually been broken in two places, as if a triangular chip had been cut out. Due to the severity of the break, the doctor on duty told Grace that the injury would require surgery. They had already consulted with an orthopedic pediatric surgeon at the children's hospital an hour away, and he recommended they do the surgery as soon as possible. Thus, Grace found herself once more in an ambulance with Jackson, this time on their way to surgery.

David met her at the children's hospital shortly after they arrived, and together they met with the orthopedic surgeon, who explained that he would insert a metal plate along the length of Jackson's femur. There would be two incisions in his leg, and the plate would be screwed to the bone for support.

“Treatment for broken femurs has come a long way,” Dr. Kahn informed them. “When I first started practicing, standard procedure was to put the patient in traction. Imagine having his leg in a big cast and not being able to move it at all for an entire month. It was dreadfully cumbersome. With his metal plate, Jackson will still be able to go to school, provided he can navigate with his wheelchair at first. He should be able to get around with crutches after a week or so. He's much more mobile this way.”

Their consultation over, Grace and David shook the doctor's hand, hugged Jackson, and watched the nurses wheel him toward the operating room. Another nurse led them kindly to the waiting room and left them there with blankets in case they got chilly. When she left, the doors shut behind her with a dull thud that seemed to accentuate the fact that they were completely alone in the deserted waiting room. It was already one thirty in the morning, well past normal hospital hours. Only emergency surgeries took place at this time.

Grace fought waves of panic as the strain of the last number of hours caught up to her. David pulled her into a hug and sank down onto a plastic couch with her.

"He'll be okay," David assured. "He'll be in a lot of pain for a while, but his leg will heal."

"I know," Grace said in a tiny little voice. "But being back here again brings back all the memories of Katie's surgery three years ago. And then Faith's health scare and surgery a few months later. I was hoping we were done with hospital visits."

"I know. Me too."

"Besides, David," continued Grace, "my son is on an operating table in there, and I am completely powerless to do anything to help him."

"Actually, that's not true," David contradicted gently. "We can pray."

Grace looked at him with tears in her eyes, and together they petitioned their Heavenly Father on behalf of Jackson, Dr. Kahn, and the other medical staff in the operating room that night.

The next three hours passed slowly, and Grace dozed off in David's lap a few times, the hospital-issued blanket slung over her shoulders. When the nurse finally came in to inform them that the surgery was over and the doctor would be in shortly,

Grace could see David looked as bleary-eyed as she felt.

Dr. Kahn arrived half an hour later, assuring them that everything went well, and still half an hour later, another nurse came to tell them Jackson was waking from the anesthesia. She led them to the recovery room to see Jackson, who was loopy from the anesthesia and couldn't really carry on a conversation. By the time they got to the hospital room and officially checked in, it was five forty-five in the morning.

Grace knew David was every bit as exhausted as she was, but there was only one tiny couch in the room. It pulled out into a bed of sorts, and David insisted she sleep on it while he piled pillows and blankets on the floor next to her. It was by far one of the least comfortable ways to sleep, but they were so tired they both fell asleep immediately for a few fitful hours of sleep.

With the seven o'clock shift change, the new nurse on duty came into the room cheerfully to check Jackson's vitals and meet her charge. Grace was groggy as her eyes adjusted to the light the nurse turned on. She had a terrible headache, her eyes felt like they had sand in them, and she was feeling pretty sorry for herself and her son, who would now require help for even the most basic functions like making it to the bathroom. The last thing she needed was one more dependent person in the household.

Once the nurse left, David suggested, "Why don't you go down to the cafeteria and get some coffee and breakfast? The coffee will help put you in a better frame of mind. Bring me a cup too. I'll stay here with Jackson in case the doctor comes to discuss things with us."

Nodding weakly, she kissed him on the forehead, squeezed Jackson's hand, and grabbed her purse before she left the room. For once, she was grateful for her thick, curly hair, which

generally looked the same whether she combed it or not. She ran her fingers through her dark locks a few times and decided it was good enough.

Upon reaching the cafeteria, she got in line behind a drawn-looking man at the grill. He ordered an omelet, and the cook asked, "How is she today?" The man shrugged and smiled a sad smile, at which the cook nodded sympathetically. He busied himself with the omelet, and when he handed it to the stranger ahead of Grace, he said, "God be with you."

Wondering slightly at the exchange, Grace placed an order for an omelet as well, and four minutes later she was pulling out a chair in the cafeteria, a hot breakfast and two cups of coffee on her tray. While she ate, she answered texts and updated her sister and mom about Jackson's situation. Setting down her phone at last, she took a swallow of her coffee.

And that's when she saw them.

The man who had been ahead of her in line was sitting in the corner with a little girl. The girl was in a wheelchair, hooked up to a rolling IV cart. Even from the back, Grace could tell she was quite sick. Grace's eyes clouded with tears as she watched the man feed his daughter small bites, smiling and encouraging her. He snapped a picture of her on his phone, pride and love showing on his face.

Feeling as though she were intruding on a private moment, Grace looked away, trying desperately to blink back her tears. As she glanced around the cafeteria, she saw children with bald heads, children pushing IV carts, and others being pulled in wagons, propped up with pillows. Grace knew that some of those children would never go home.

Suddenly her own situation seemed very insignificant. A broken femur was nothing to sneeze at, but Jackson's leg would heal. He would miss basketball season, but he would be okay in

time for baseball. Her son would live.

Abruptly, Grace stood and walked to a small courtyard to be alone. Once there, she broke down. She cried for all the children who suffered from terminal illnesses. She cried for their families. She wept for the doctors and nurses who had to deal with these situations on a daily basis. As she wept, she prayed for them. When her tears were spent, she wiped her face and took a cleansing breath. She needed to get back to Jackson.

Walking back to her table in the cafeteria, she saved the two cups of coffee and disposed of everything else before walking to the elevators. When she got there, she was surprised to see the father and daughter who had been eating in the corner. The stranger looked at her with compassion in his eyes, perceiving she had been crying.

“How are you holding up?” he asked quietly as they boarded the elevator.

That did it. Grace’s tears started anew as she sobbed, “I’m not crying for me. I’m crying for you. My son is only here for a broken femur.” The words sounded ludicrous, but he seemed to understand what she meant.

“She is dying,” he replied with his sad smile. There was no time to mince words.

“I know,” she whispered.

“Cystic fibrosis. Her older brother already died from it. My wife and I are both carriers. I don’t know if our youngest will get it or not. I don’t think we can take it if she does.”

Grace could only nod. She felt sick to her stomach.

By now they had reached his floor, and as he pushed his daughter off the elevator, he said, “God be with you, ma’am. Go give your son a hug.”

“I’m praying for you,” she called, just as the doors shut

behind him. Her words fell flat even to her own ears. A complete stranger had just shared his heartbreaking story in less than a minute, and she gave a stock, pithy answer?

As the elevator rose to her floor, Grace had an overwhelming urge to do just what the man had suggested—give her son a hug. She'd never thought she would be grateful for a broken femur.