

oneday, onemiracle



at a time

By Kirk Noonan

The only thing between Dale Miller and a long-deserved week of vacation with his wife and children on the beach in North Carolina was a few hours of painting. To reach the last high peak on the house, he set a ladder on a porch roof and cautiously ascended it.

It had been a good day. The weather was perfect, vacation was looming and Miller, 37 at the time, had decided to retire from the house painting business as soon as the job was done. But as he painted the peak, 10 feet above the porch roof, the ladder slid out from underneath him.

In an instant, he was airborne and falling fast. He hit the roof then bounced like a rag doll and fell another 15 feet to the ground. There, he gasped for air and realized he couldn't move his arms or legs.

Heavenly words

Naturally good with his hands and a jack-of-all-trades, Miller found that painting houses suited him. Plus, it helped his family make ends meet and allowed him to minister as an Assemblies of God home missions pastor. He and his wife, Tammy, had served for five years at Harvest Family Worship Centre AG in Bloomington, a city of nearly 70,000 in the heart of Illinois.

"I felt impressed from the Lord that this would be the last house I'd paint," recalls Miller, now 40. "I also felt impressed that somewhere on this project I would fall. But that never was an issue because I had no idea what the implications would be."

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The Miller family



From top to bottom clockwise: Tammy is Dale's primary caregiver; here she massages his leg shortly after the accident. Dale and Tammy lead worship for their congregation. The Millers' children help their dad do his exercises twice a day.

Shortly after Miller fell, another painter called Tammy at work. Hearing that Dale was en route to the hospital, Tammy rushed to leave, but remembered her son had accidentally taken her keys earlier in the day. Frustrated, scared and not able to get to Dale's side fast enough, she started to cry.

"I didn't really know how serious Dale's condition was," says Tammy, 41, who homeschools the couple's three children. "I was upset because I was stuck at work and couldn't get to the hospital."

While Tammy waited for a friend to bring the keys to her car, Dale was in the emergency room. Because of the agonizing pain he was in, he begged God to take his life.

"I cried out, 'Lord please end this. Take me home,' " he says. "But once again I had a strong impression and felt the Lord say, 'This is not over. I am not done with you.' "

Doctors discovered Dale's C3 and C4 vertebrae — located in his neck — had exploded. They told Dale he would be a quadriplegic the rest of his life. But again Dale felt God's assurance and says God also told him he would

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be completely healed.

The Millers have clung to that promise ever since.

"When they said Dale was paralyzed, I told them I didn't believe it and the Lord had spoken to Dale and said he would be healed," says Tammy. "I gave a strong witness and felt Dale was going to walk out of that hospital."

It was not to be.

A long road

People who suffer C3 spinal cord injuries usually have complete paralysis of their arms, body and legs. Because they are unable to use their chest muscles they become dependant on a ventilator to breathe. As fast as Dale's doctor put him on a ventilator, he decided he would wean himself from it.

"They kept telling me I'd never get off of it," says Dale. "But we began to pray about it."

Two months after asking doctors for strategies to get off the ventilator, Dale





had accomplished his goal.

“The doctor threw up his hands because I kept going beyond the goals that were set for me that day of getting off the ventilator,” says Dale triumphantly. “The Lord got me off the ventilator.”

While at the hospital, Dale led services for many members of his congregation who began coming to the hospital’s chapel for church on Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

Though several victories took place at the hospital, there were also numerous setbacks that shook the Millers’ faith. The worst setback came when Dale was transferred to a rehabilitation center in St. Louis.

“That was the hardest part,” says Dale. “With the promise of healing we thought it would take place before we left the hospital. We didn’t feel like God had deserted us, but we questioned if we had really heard from Him about the healing.”

Tammy agrees.

“Even up to the moment we left the hospital, people were praying for Dale’s complete healing,” she says. “When it didn’t happen, I felt like God had disappointed us and let us down. But after a while I realized this is where we were at and this is what we had to do.”

Day to day

Though the Millers still believe God will heal Dale and allow him to walk one day, they are also moving forward

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SPEED THE LIGHT

ONE LIFE
ONE CHANCE



Left: Dale's daughter, Kristen, gives him a kiss. Right: Congregation members have stepped up and supported their leaders.



with life — no matter how different or difficult it is.

“The accident really changed the way our marriage works and functions,” admits Dale. “Not only is Tammy my wife, she is my primary caregiver.”

Each morning Tammy helps Dale out of bed, dresses him, then she and their children — Kristen, 15, Kyle, 12, and Kody, 10, — spend at least half an hour in the morning and evening stretching him as a form of physical therapy he hopes will preserve his muscles. After moving Dale into a chair, he usually rides a stimulation bike. The device uses electrical charges to artificially flex his muscles.

The family's new life is not an easy one. At every meal Tammy feeds Dale. If his face itches, she scratches it. If he needs something to drink, she gets it.

“My wife is the hero in all of this,” he says. “She is the only one who could have walked through something like this with me.”

Each afternoon Dale typically retreats to his computer where voice-activated software allows him to study and write his sermons, read the Bible and surf the Internet.

Because Dale has an incomplete spinal cord injury, he can move — with much time and assistance — his wrist, shoulder and some fingers and toes. But if doctors poke him with a hundred needles he won't feel them, as he has no soft-touch senses anymore.

His physical condition is challenging, and the emotional toll his disability has exacted is taxing. He regrets not being able to play with his sons or teach his daughter how to drive. Before the injury he used to take the children on dates. Now he can't.

“We're still trying to find what we can do as a family,” says Tammy.

“We just recently started going out on walks together on a bike trail where Dale used to run. It's been hard, it really has.”

Dale agrees.

“I have down days,” he admits.

“There are days when I wake up and I have to make a decision — am I going to lie here or am I going to get up?”

Immeasurable growth

Dale says there is no way — even when the healing he is believing for happens — that things are ever going to go back the way they were. He says there has just been too much good change in him mentally and spiritually to retreat.

“This was a physical stripping, but there has also been a spiritual stripping,” he says. “After the accident I was in a place where I had to hear from God and He exposed to me who I really was.”

Realizing he was not exactly where he wanted to be regarding his relationship with God, Dale has taken time to get to know God better. While praying and studying the Bible have provided some powerful times of worship and intimacy, Dale has also seen God through the love and generosity of others.

During Dale's stay in the hospital, members from his congregation were constantly at his side supporting him and his family with encouraging words and prayer. Local pastors volunteered to lead his Sunday services. One congregation donated \$50,000 so an elevator lift could be installed at the church.

A local woman helped buy and outfit a special van for the Miller family. Christians from around the nation sent financial gifts to help cover the

more than \$150,000 worth of personal medical bills the Millers incurred.

“Their congregation and other pastors in the area have responded tremendously,” says Larry Griswold, district superintendent for Illinois.

“We still have plans and visions for our church just like any other pastor would,” says Dale.

These days, Dale can be found preaching at his church on Sunday mornings. He and Tammy also have become involved with Special Touch Ministry, which serves people with disabilities. To get around, Dale uses a sip and puff mouth-controlled wheelchair that was purchased by Medicaid.

“Everything from beginning to end has been taken care of,” he says. “And I don't deserve any of it.”

Tammy says she, too, has grown closer to the Lord in unexpected ways. “I've had more opportunity to share my faith with other people than I've had since I was a child,” she says. “And I feel like I hear His voice better.”

The road ahead

Before the accident, Dale used to run on the bike trail near their home each day to stay in shape. Now Dale makes his way down the path in a wheelchair as Tammy and the children stroll beside him. For Dale it's bittersweet. He enjoys the outdoors, but can't get out of his mind the memories of how he used to run the trail.

“Sometimes I look at all the things I am missing,” he admits. “But we're going to keep moving forward and making the best of this. I have to keep believing God for a miracle.” ■

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E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.