

# HEARTPRINTS

Recently a friend loaned me the book, "SCARRED BY STRUGGLE, TRANSFORMED BY HOPE", by Joan Chittister. The title really resonated with my own heart as I continue to struggle with pain in both hands. My brother, Albert, has been suffering with excruciating pain in his hands and recently, as a last resort, had a "Deep Brain Stimulation Implant" hoping that it would help reduce the pain. So far it has not seemed to make any difference.

Albert and I both struggle with dystonia, although his is much worse than mine, and his first symptoms showed up at age seven, while mine didn't show up till in my forties. But the last few years his dystonia has gotten so severe that they have deeply depleted his functioning abilities and left him suffering with almost unbearable pain in his hands. Sometimes I struggle, wondering if my hands will become increasingly debilitated like his. So my heart was so encouraged in my difficult time by this timely book a friend loaned me.

These words on the inside of the front cover capture the essence of the book, "Building on the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with God and on her own battle with life-changing disappointment, Sister Joan Chittister deftly explores the landscape of suffering and hope."

"We struggle" she says, "against change, isolation, darkness, fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, exhaustion, and scarring; and while these struggles sometimes seem insurmountable, we can emerge from them with the gifts of conversion, surrender, limitations, endurance, transformation, and (perhaps most importantly) hope. Each of these struggles and gifts is discussed in a chapter of its own."

I was especially ministered to by her chapters on "The Struggle of Powerlessness" and "The Gift of Surrender." Few of us find the loss of control that leaves us feeling powerless, easy to accept in life. That is when the gift of surrender is the most freeing thing we can do. "Surrender" she says, "is the crossover point of life." Surrender is not passive or giving up. Surrender is actively choosing to accept God's will in the midst of our powerlessness.

She shares the story of Suzanne, who had been fighting cancer courageously and valiantly for years. But as the years progressed, the cancer worsened and the treatments were less and less effective. One day she told Joan that she wanted to quit chemotherapy. She shared with her that Christmas was coming and the whole family was coming home and she wanted to take this opportunity to say goodbye to everyone while they were all together. Joan encouraged her to think it over and come back in two weeks. "Let's see how you feel about this then." When she came back she felt very confident and peaceful about her earlier decision. "I have learned everything I can from these years" she said. "I'm ready." She died five months later, on Joan's birthday. Joan took the lesson Suzanne taught her as a gift from God.

*Sister Joan Chittister*  
*Feb 2010*