

By the Hand of God

Wendi Landis-Talkington

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The memoir By the Hand of God graduates from health crises to spiritual realizations in a moving way.

Wendi Landis-Talkington's inspiring memoir *By the Hand of God* is about battling illness and pain through faith.

Just before Thanksgiving of 2000, Landis-Talkington was treated for a bladder infection, the ramifications of which changed her whole life. The treatment for that infection included a drug that made her sick: unknown to all, she was allergic to the medication. But a nurse said "That's what the doctor ordered, that's what you're going to get;" more of the medicine was pumped into her veins. Her allergic reaction devastated her liver, leading her to need a transplant. Following her illness and recovery, which is studied through the lens of Christian faith, the book argues for the power of prayer and the importance of family.

For Landis-Talkington, it got much worse before it got better. The text covers ice baths, ICU stays, and organ rejection, all punctuated by life and death struggles. Heartbreaking moments, including a nurse asking her "please don't die on my watch," and three late-night phone calls to family members sharing that Landis-Talkington was not expected to make it through the night, are incorporated, as is Landis-Talkington's realization that, at just thirty-five years old, her life might be ending, and that her four young children would be left to grow up without her. Each new detail builds on the drama of the crisis, which plays out over several years.

Moments are captured in brief, diary-like entries; they are organized chronologically. Each section covers both the physical challenges that Landis-Talkington faced and her faith experiences, including the belief that prayers matter and that God is listening. In the days before the crisis, Landis-Talkington wondered "How do I know there is a God? There is no proof so maybe the Bible is just a story." She asserts that she got her answer when she was struggling to live, and found solace in the voice of a dead friend who urged her to fight. Earnest, familiar messages are included, such as that everyone has a purpose. Landis-Talkington determines that her purpose is to love her family.

This humble and personal work is compelling in its willingness to explore how faith can change following traumatic circumstances. Some extraneous details impede it, though. The text is at its best when it focuses on the lived reality and spiritual experiences of Landis-Talkington's traumatic medical experiences.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (January 4, 2021)

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