

SOPHIE MEINHARDT MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP 2012

HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD?

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OUR LADY OF VISITATION

God is a great impact in my life and I am so happy to be writing about this question of how great is our God? I am only 13 and so far in my life I have come across difficulties and amazing things. I have one thing that really proves God is great that I would like to explain.

When three of my cousins were very little they were diagnosed with the disease autism. I am telling you about this because having three cousins with autism really helps me to understand what kind of life I should live and what kind of person to be. My cousin Mary with autism just turned 10. She is always so happy and she loves to be with everyone. I have fourteen cousins and everyone is always so accepting to the way Caden, Mary and Andrew are. Caden is very happy he enjoys being with everyone and he is so loving. Andrew is only five days older than me and he is very active and even though they have autism it makes no difference to me about who they are. They are just like us but struggle with what they do.

Having three cousins with this shows me how to be accepting of others and the way to live your life to the fullest. I know that for their brothers, sisters, and parents it is a struggle for them to have a family member like this. They can question God all they want about why God did this to them and their child or brother or sister. But for me...I find it to be a blessing. Yes it is so hard to have this disease and they just want them to have a normal life and be like a regular kid and get to have tons of friends and live a normal life, but I myself am so grateful for this experience to know what it is like to go through this. It's teaching me so many life lessons I can't even name. For example, I saw a kid that was handicapped and my friends laughed at him but for me I smiled to him instead of laughing. I realized

just because you're not like me it doesn't give me the right to judge people. Also it helps me know that you have to be patient because there are some people that don't get life like I do.

My cousin Caden can't speak well, he said yes, no, that, this, and please. A couple of days ago for the first time he said "Hi Mommy". Now to some people this may not be an accomplishment but to his parents and our family it was a huge deal. It almost made me, his cousin emotional. I don't think people realize how significant this life God gave us is. I know that if I didn't have these three cousins with autism I wouldn't understand how amazing life is. To me it is amazing that something that is such a tragedy now can be a life lesson in the long run.

Something that stuck in my head while you were telling my grade about your experience is that you said "we could either cry about the loss of Sophie for the rest of life, or we can try to make a difference." It stuck in my head because I am trying to take this difficult challenge in my family's life and I'm trying to make it positive and learn from it. I hear the saying "live life with no regrets" a lot and I always take time to reflect on that. I spend a lot of time with my cousins and I like to tell myself all the time, "be accepting because life is to be lived to the fullest." Just because they have autism doesn't mean anything to me, it just shows me that even if you aren't perfect there is always someone who will accept you and love you for who you are. Yes it truly is a very sad tragedy that they have this disability but I like to make it a positive. I do get frustrated with them sometimes but the fact that I have them to makes me remember that I'm not perfect and neither are you or my cousins, or friends. Life is a mystery and you never know what will happen next.

Someday they might find a cure for autism or find out what causes it but until then I know that I should be accepting. I trust that God has a plan for everyone and you might not like it but it's what God has planned and that's all you need in your life, God. You can go around crying saying my cousins have autism and I hate it, or you can find a way to change and benefit from it. I love my cousins so much, autism or not they're still normal people that just have a disability. For all we know I could've had a

mental disorder, I could've been paralyzed, or been like Sophie and had a brain tumor, but what I know is that if I did have that I would want people to love and be accepting of me. Having cousins with autism has shown me how much of a struggle life is for some people and that you should make it better for them. I know that Mary, Caden, and Andrew can hear me, they know what people say. Sometimes people will laugh and make fun of them and it really hurts me because I know that they can comprehend what they're saying. I know that Caden can speak, he tries so hard but the words just don't come out. Mary has so many emotions and she can't handle them and it's so hard for her. Andrew is always so active and he just can't stop. It's so hard to accept their differences but I know that I have to even if I can't.

One thing that really hits me hard in the heart is Mary's brother. Her brother's name is Will and he is in the 5th grade at Visitation. Will is one of the most amazing people I've met. He is so nice to Mary he doesn't care what people say about his sister, someone can go up to him and say we look at that girls she's weird, and Will would look at them and say you know what you can say all you want about my sister but I love her and that's the way she is. He gives up time with his friends just so he can spend time with Mary. His friends are so accepting of her. She loves to be with them he'll have them over to play and they will let her play too, they even let her go to their house sometimes. It is so surprising to me that a 5th grader could make such an impact on the way his sister's life is. It truly is so hard to have cousins like this but for the benefit of the doubt, it changed me as a person, it changed who I am, how I act, how I live my life, and so much more. God has very greatly changed my life through three kids close to my age. You can never spend too much time with them because all they make you do is smile. We all have our times where we have a hard time in life but think of the positive. They're making so much progress from when they first started out. I almost feel as if they know right from wrong, they know love and hate, they can tell when someone is talking about them. I know for a fact when they get upset because you said something and you think they don't know but they really do. They have feeling just like us, when they're sad it makes me sad and when they're happy it makes me so happy.

I realize it is such a struggle for their parents and even for us the cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles but I think that everyone is learning from this difficulty. It is a terrible thing to go through but all I can do is try to make it better. That is one way that I can prove how great our God is.