



TAMMY ALEXANDER

BOUND BY A PURPOSE THAT IS GREATER THAN MY CIRCUMSTANCE

It started three years ago; the day Bodybuilding found me. I was taking one of my daughters to the gym because she was training for the Olympics, and the trainer said to me one day, "Since you're here, why don't we just work you out, too?" What I didn't know then, is that this would be my first step. That's how I started training. It was by circumstance that later became my purpose.

As I continued to workout, I began noticing changes in my body. The trainers noticed, too and suggested, "Maybe you should consider bodybuilding." Of course, I was shocked. I never considered such a thing. Even though I was very athletic, the thought just never crossed my mind. But I remember clearly one morning, the Lord said to me, "I want you to get back into the gym because when I bring you forth in the next season of your life, I want you to have a different look." So it was settled. I got the green light from my Father and, though I didn't really understand it completely, I started training to be a bodybuilder. Little did I know just how much my life was about to change... drastically! Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." As I've mentioned before, I've always been athletic. Growing up, I ran track and played basketball; and then my girls grew up to dance and run track and I was fortunate enough to be one of their track coaches. I learned a lot from those experiences; how to take care of an athlete and how to be an athlete because I was always around it; it was always a part of my life and I enjoyed it.

Shortly after I started working out at the gym where my daughter and I trained, a personal training position opened up. I got a certification and began working at the gym, thus beginning my career as a personal trainer. I suddenly had my own clientele, training them while in training myself. It was wild and I was loving every moment of it! As my training progressed, and as I learned more about the industry I was entering, I discovered that the next level would allow me the opportunity to earn professional status. I believed this would open up many opportunities and once learning that, earning a Pro Card became my goal.

I was in my zone! I worked hard; everything my trainers told me to do, I did that and more. I always did above and beyond. Even my trainers would say I was the hardest working woman they've ever seen. All of that work paid off! On March 18, 2018, I won my first competition at the age of 52! I was stunned and so overwhelmed with it all! But, just as soon as it began, it would soon be halted. Two weeks after winning my first competition, my eldest daughter, Eden, was diagnosed with Stage 3 Ovarian Cancer. In an instant, I became her full-time caregiver. I gave up my personal training job, and I didn't mind it because I did it for my baby. The day I found out she had Cancer, we arrived at the emergency room 9am, we were in a room by 11am, and she was rushed off to emergency surgery by 2pm. It was a whirlwind. Everything that I had been working on up to that point came to a screeching halt. To say that my emotions were everywhere was an understatement. I was just numb at the circumstance that both me and my daughter were suddenly in... Ovarian Cancer. Her 1 1/2 hour surgery turned into 4 hours; and I was there alone waiting for someone to tell me that she was still alive. But from that point on, I was with her, every step of the way. I was her full time caregiver, working with the doctors, case workers, and everyone else to make sure she received the best medical care. I really didn't know what was about to happen. It was a world that I wasn't familiar with and I often thought to myself, "how did I not see this coming?"

My daughter and I would go on to spend the next 8 weeks in and out of hospitals and outpatient clinics as she underwent fertility treatments and egg harvesting as doctors reported that chemotherapy could eliminate her ability to have children. The following 6 months we would endure the long chemotherapy process. However, I kept working on my cardio. Bodybuilding became my sanctuary. And the hospital was my gym. Because I could no longer go to the gym, I made the hospital my workout area. I would lunge up and down the halls. I would walk around the hospital or go outside and walk. I kept up with my workouts while being my daughter's advocate. It was really important to me that I be there for her, in whatever capacity she needed me. It was just the two of us; one devastating blow after another.

Life just wasn't normal anymore after that. Fighting for my daughter's medical care was trying, not to mention the reaction I received from close family and friends, and the church. Everyone kept saying, "Stop being mom and be the Apostle." How can anyone say that? There were a lot of opinions being tossed around, but at the end of the day, it was me who was making daily hospital trips with Eden. It was I that was fighting to get her medical insurance. It was my bed that she was sleeping in nightly, because I had to watch her around the clock. At the end of the day, I was Mom, and many nights I had to sneak away and cry so she wouldn't be worried about me. Many times I would walk out of the room to cry, wipe my face, then come back in and do what I needed to do for her.

Six months of going through the healing process with Eden, she says to me, "Mom, I really want you to get back in the gym because it's going to make me feel like we are getting some type of control back. I need you to get back in the gym." As fate would have it, the next week, we were rear ended in a car accident. One night, Eden and I were laying in the bed and she asked, "Mom, I just have one question. Why?" I responded, "I'm not going to preach to you because I don't want anybody preaching to me. To be honest, the only answer I can give you is, "I don't know. But what I do know is, after this is over, there's got to be a recompense."

Eden and I would return to the hospital for round 3 of chemotherapy. I would take my 20 pound weights, all of my bands, my mat and everything; and work out while she was sleeping or during lunch. I would walk two miles, then come back and feed her or whatever she needed for the rest of the night. There I was again, in the gym, my sanctuary, my place of escape for just an hour out of the day. At the beginning of her final round of chemotherapy, I contacted Coach Jermaine Johnson at Body Etch Fitness and expressed my interest in training for another bodybuilding competition. I asked him to create a workout plan for me while I was at the hospital and I did everything he told me to do, with a little extra. I always did the extra because I was that determined to succeed. I wasn't going to let this Cancer consume everything about our lives.

When it was time to compete, I hit the stage for both myself and my daughter. I won first place again. It was such an accomplishment and Eden was there in her wheelchair, all smiles and all tears. That was a win for the both of us.

What do you say to people who don't understand how someone of your stature can go through something so traumatic and not question Who you serve? Oh, but you DO question God. You question everything about yourself, about your life. All the "would haves" "could haves" "should haves" turn into regrets. But we serve a God that allows questions. People see God and His deity and think that it was bigger than His humanity. When in fact, His humanity is bigger than His deity. Whenever Jesus healed people in the Bible, the first thing He always said was "son or daughter, be healed." It was relational. He's a relational God, which means He knows how you feel. And He allowed me to talk to him from the place I was in, and I was hurt, confused, and lonely. There were periods where God wouldn't say anything, but I always kind of went back to different scriptures that kept me going. And when my coaches or others would question me about how I was able to workout and care for my daughter, I responded the same every time: I am bound by a purpose that is greater than my circumstance. And there's something deep within me that says, "Thank You Father." Even when I don't feel like saying "thank You" or I don't feel like it's going to be okay... deep down, I know it will be okay. I can't shake it. It is what it is. I move by that inexplicable strength that lies within me. I lean on that, not the circumstance. It is by His grace, and by His grace alone. That's all I can really say.

Two years after my daughter's diagnosis, I competed again in my third competition and not only won first place in Master's Figure at 55 years old but also won first in the Open category for my height class; meaning I won regardless of age. I was blown away and, of course, Eden was there to support me, dosed up and all, but she was there. My coaches drove down to support me as well: Coach Jermaine Johnson at Body Edge Fitness; my nutrition coaches, Steve and Rachel Payne; and Coach Serena who accompanied me backstage. After the competition, we celebrated. I was still in disbelief at how God was just taking over. On the high of my second win, I set my sights on once again earning a Pro Card.

January and COVID-19 hit and caused the whole world to go silent. Gyms shut down, no one was going anywhere. So I took my gym equipment that I purchased years ago out of storage and brought it home. I was still determined to work out and train with the goal of winning a Pro Card. The pandemic meant I had to rely on all I had learned from my trainers as well as relying heavily on the Holy Spirit to guide me. If there was something I didn't know how to do, I would ask God and He would show me. I would do it and keep on moving forward. At that point, it was me and God training for Masters Nationals.

In June of this year, I went to my doctor for a routine mammogram. I expected everything to be perfectly fine, but to my surprise, they saw something that needed more testing. I kept training for Masters Nationals because my eyes were set on that Pro Card. But life had another plan. On August 14, 2020, I had my first biopsy. I told my coach that I would be back to training in a week, and I did just that. Seriously, a week later, I was back in the gym training, bandages and all. On August 21, 2020, I went in to the doctors to remove the bandages from the surgery, and that is when I was hit with the next devastating blow: I was diagnosed with Stage 1 Breast Cancer! Again, I was numb. The doctor had to tell me several times before it clicked, and I just burst into tears. I was scheduled for my second surgery within a 10 day span to remove the tumors they found, and what was even crazier, Eden would also have to have another surgery of her own, literally the week after mine. I missed the show I had been so focused on doing, my daughter was still having health challenges, and my other daughter was not in the most favorable situation, most of my family wasn't really there, and now I have cancer. I asked God just how many levels to this are there?! I didn't know how much more I could take!

Refusing to give in to my circumstance, I needed something to focus on. My coach, Steve Payne suggested a show at the end of October in Alabama. So I set my sights on that. For the 30 days leading up to the show, I went to chemo in the morning, home to rest for a couple of hours, then trained for bodybuilding. It became a spiritual thing at that point. And I was determined to win this fight; I was not going to let Cancer stop me! Eden would go with me to radiation. Between the treatments, training, and contest prep diet I was extremely fatigued and in pain. I prayed the whole way for the Lord to give me the strength because I knew that I was still bound by a purpose that is greater than my circumstance. Looking back, I don't know how I did it, but for those 30 days, that's what I did.

I approached the last 7 days before competition; affectionately called 'peak week' or 'hell week'. My doctors and I were concerned about how this would affect me because of the radiation treatments, but again, by His grace, I made it through. My last day of radiation was Friday, October 30th. I again awoke at 6am, did my cardio and went to radiation by 9am. This was the most intense session to date, as I could actually feel it going into my body for the first time. I left there, returned home to finish packing. Eden, my friend and Coach Serena and I, got on the road to drive the six hours to Alabama. I had all my food; I was eating cold fish and asparagus all the way down. I just kept thinking I've got to do all I can to bring forth my best efforts. Nothing was going to beat me!

I won 2nd place, for both women's Masters Figure 50+ and Figure Open, Class D! But the grandest moment for me was when I was presented with a special award: a sword. I was deemed Warrior of the Competition for my fight against Cancer. To say I was humbled and so thankful doesn't begin to touch the depth of what I felt in that moment! As I walked off the stage, I lifted my hand and pointed to the sky and gave God all of the glory! I knew it was by His grace that I was able to withstand everything that I had gone through with my own Cancer journey; as well as my daughter's. At that moment, I realized that it was my desire to inspire people. It wasn't about me and my process. It was about inspiring people and letting someone else know that Cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence! That there is a light at the end of this tunnel.

What do I want the readers to take away from my journey? Life is not always fair. Life has its definite challenges, but our perspective of those challenges can determine a great outcome and understanding; that the good days and not-so-good days are all a part of your testimony. If I can inspire one person to live one more day, or do one more workout, or to just get out of bed, I've done my job. I've done what I'm supposed to do. Because I am bound by a purpose that is greater than my circumstance.



www.tammyalexander.com



Glory and Dominion Ministries



@_teamata_, #itsstillministry



LiquidSunRayz.com

SouthernMuscleGuide.com

