

Ten Things Parkinson's Disease Has Taught Me

Bob Harris ♦ July 13, 2016

10. I'm on the way to becoming irresistible to women.

They say women are attracted to men who are tall, dark, handsome, and soft spoken. Everyone keeps asking me to speak louder. Even when I'm only three feet away. So, that must mean I am indeed soft spoken. And that's already one-fourth of irresistibility. All I need now is elevator shoes, hair dye, and a little plastic surgery. Then again, I guess I'll pass, because I'm already happily married.

9. Even with a blunted affect, I still can't play poker.

A blank facial expression might be good for poker, but for me, it makes people think I'm uninterested or bored, when the fact is, at best, I'm quite interested and at worst, I'm usually only thinking. And I don't even know how to play poker. I just have the same poker face all the time. Except when I laugh. I need to laugh more often.

8. I am not my body.

The person I'm talking about when I use the word *I* is not the same as my decrepitating body. I have to live inside it, and let me say it used to be a much more fun and comfortable home than it is today. Not only is the house showing wear from 65 plus years of weather and neglect, but Dr. Parkinson has come in and is in the process of smashing up the place. But I'm still sitting by a warm fire in spite of a drafty house.

To change metaphors, my body is a car and I am the driver. The car is an older model, so that today, the radiator leaks, the engine isn't running on all eight anymore, and the tires are going flat, but the driver is still fine. The driver just can't go as fast as he used to. Sometimes he can barely get out of the driveway.

7. Feeling frustrated doesn't make anything better.

You know, it's kind of aggravating when my mind tells my legs to lift me up and all they can say is, "That's above my pay grade. Let the arms do it." I tell my legs that they are very muscled, but they say, "What's it to

ya?" And that chronic back pain; that gets old after a while. And then there's my diminishing ability to use my beloved tools. My right hand is getting increasingly uncooperative, so now I can't seem to make a pair of pliers do what I used to do with them. And the left hand has to help the right hand just to screw in a light bulb. But getting upset over all this doesn't make a difference, so why bother to get upset? Besides, not many people like a grump.

6. I don't take anything for granted.

My handwriting is already comical. Maybe I'm writing in secret code and I just don't know it. I dare you to try to decipher it. But how much longer will I be able to type, even with my clumsy, disobedient fingers that insist on leaving out some letters and doubling others—even in the same word. But I can still type, sort of. This is a blessing. And then there are those rebellious buttons that fight me every buttonhole. True, they no longer cooperate the way they did years ago, but, eventually, I can still button a shirt. This, too, is a blessing. In fact, I see every good thing as a distinct blessing, and not as an entitlement. Life is good—increasingly awkward, but good. Whether I eat a 99-cent taco or a prime steak, I'm content—no, make that happy. Grateful and happy. Some people take their health for granted. Big mistake.

5. I have a lot more compassion for the handicapped.

I've learned that we shouldn't judge others by using ourselves as the standard of measure. We can't fully understand what others are going through unless we ourselves have the same situation. I feel as if I've been put into a body that doesn't belong to me. I ask, "Why is my body stumbling around?" and "Why does my tongue stumble, too?" and "Why is my handwriting so small? Is there a paper shortage only my hand knows about?" Yes, I feel awkward and conspicuous when I walk around. Slight stoop, uneven small steps. Now I know how other people feel who aren't young and agile and "normal." God bless

them. So, less judgment, more empathy.

4. There's no "Why me?" here.

When something bad happens to some people, they ask, "Why me?" when the real question is, "Why not me?" We're told that in this world we will have tribulation. And while we're quick to ask, "Why me?" when we get sick or hurt ourselves, how come we never ask, "Why me?" when we're eating lobster on a vacation cruise or even licking an ice cream cone at home?

3. We can't predict the future.

Seems as if every time we expect a high fast ball, we get a low curve ball instead. Here we are, afraid of a future that probably will never come, and completely unaware of what is really going to happen. The fact is, only God can see around corners; we can barely see in a straight line. Maybe we should take the hint and trust God for our future instead of trying to outguess him.

2. I am now more aware of my mortality, and that's a good thing.

Yep, we're all gonna die. But we don't think about it that much until the Lord calls our attention to it in a quite personal way. Gonna die. Check. Got it. Getting ready.

1. I still have hope.

I have hope—not that I will be cured, but hope for the kingdom of God. And hope for strength during the remainder of my stay here. It is said that instead of asking God to remove the mountain in front of us, we should ask him to teach us to climb mountains. And in the meantime, put our hope in the peace and rest we'll find at the top.

The Bible is a good place to find out about our hope. Isaiah tells us:

Do not fear for I am with you;
do not be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will hold onto you with My righteous right hand.

—Isaiah 41:10 (HCSB)