

My name is Joanna Linn. I am thirteen years old and am finishing seventh grade. I want to share my testimony of how I've found joy in a difficult time. As some of you may already know, I have a vision disability. Last year in January I was having trouble seeing. For example, when I would look at someone's face, I could only see one of their eyes at a time. Or, if I were looking at a street sign, although I could see part of it, another part was missing. In order to find out the problem, we visited a pediatric eye doctor assuming it was time for glasses. She informed us that my eyes were very healthy and sent us to see a neurologist. He performed several tests, but also couldn't find anything wrong. After much prayer and consideration, we were advised by my pediatrician to get a second opinion at Johns Hopkins. It was there that a doctor was able to diagnose my situation. I had Stargardt's disease.

Because of this disease, I am losing my central vision. My peripheral vision, which is my side vision, is great. However, right in the middle of my vision I have a blind spot that is slowly enlarging. I have a hard time reading or seeing detail without a magnifier. In order to view anything, I have to look above the object that I want to see to get my blind spot out of my way. If you want to try to see the way I do, the next time you are in a car, try looking in the sky to see the road. You can tell why I will probably not be able to drive. One side effect of having this disease is that I am light sensitive. Most unnatural lighting causes me to get headaches. Therefore, I wear sunglasses to minimize the amount of headaches. This disease is medically incurable, but God can do miracles.

When I first found out that I had this disease God gave me an amazing amount of faith and trust in him. Through the teaching I have received in this church and from my

parents, I knew that God was sovereign, and that his plan for my life was perfect.

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” I don’t have to worry that the way my life is going is a mistake. I believe that God is going to do something for his glory through my vision disability. I believe that God is going to use me to minister to my unsaved relatives and friends. As I share my problem and weave the gospel into my story I will be showing to them that my greatest joy comes from knowing God and that my sins are forgiven.

Since I first found out that I have Stargardt’s disease, several things have helped me to maintain joy in the midst of my circumstances. These include laughter, gratefulness and prayer.

Laughter has helped me be joyful during this season of my life. At home, we often joke at different times about the “blind girl”. I love the way my family is able to tease me. I like teasing too. I will say to my mom when I find something she was looking for, “the blind girl can find things better than the one who can see!” We laugh and tease each other all the time.

When I am in church I can’t tell who the people are that are waving. I can’t tell if they are waving to me, or the person next to me! I usually wave back and just hope that they were waving to me. These different incidents keep me laughing and I love it.

Another thing that brings me joy is being grateful for what I have. For instance, God cares for me even down to the house that I live in. Because of my sensitivity to light we try to keep the lights off in the house. The sun provides the right amount of natural

light from all angles all day long. Even my bedroom, where I do my schoolwork, gets the morning sun. God is so amazing that he would even think of the right house for me.

Praying is an amazing source of joy. When I wake up in the morning and pray, I feel joyful and am reminded that God is in control and has the perfect plan for my life. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." I need to keep my eyes on his path and not stray from God's plan for me. Remembering this helps me to find joy. I am very grateful for the Bible and the way it comforts me in hard times. Sometimes in the middle of the day I have been tempted to complain because I get behind in my schoolwork if I have to stop and rest my eyes. Praying helps me to realize that I am dependent on God for everything.

God sent his perfect son to die on the cross to take away my sins so that I could live with him eternally. I can find joy in knowing that I'll be able to see him when I go to heaven. I hope that my testimony encourages all of you to trust God in everything.