

# “God Is Good —All the Time”

One Covenant  
family’s story of  
God’s faithfulness  
despite their  
struggles

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ORVILLE ROEN IS NO STRANGER to overcoming challenges. When he was just twelve years old, Roen was diagnosed with cancer in his arm. “The doctors told my dad that I’d only live to twenty,” Orville says. “I’m getting ready to celebrate my eighty-second birthday.”

Despite a lifelong battle with cancer in his arm, including many rounds of radiation treatment, Roen, a longtime member of Broadway Covenant Church in Rockford, Illinois, was able to have a career as a repairman in a machine shop. His cancer was controlled until 1994, when his right arm had to be amputated.

Orville admits it was quite difficult at first to adapt to life without his arm. He was right-handed, so he was forced to become left-handed. But he decided that he would not let his handicap slow down his life.

Shortly after his operation, Orville read an article in a woodworking magazine about making mosaics. “It’s really quite beautiful,” Orville says. “You use different colors of wood and cut them into pieces and then put them back together.”

Orville decided to try making a mosaic. His first attempt was a success—he made a mosaic of raccoons peeking out from behind a tree. Since then he’s made about forty different birds and animals.

It’s more than just a hobby for Orville. He says these mosaics allow him to be a living example of God’s grace even through life’s challenges. “My calling is to talk to the elderly or people who are handicapped,” says Orville, who spends much of his time tooling around in his workshop. “I show them that even though

you have a handicap you can still be fruitful.”

“It gives him a wonderful opportunity to show how God has been good,” says Orville’s wife, Ginny. “We have this saying that God is good all the time.”

Orville and Ginny are no strangers to relying on God for support when living with a handicap. Their son, David, was born with cerebral palsy, a disabling condition caused by brain damage. David has trouble coordinating his muscles and tends to make involuntary, jerky movements. It also affected the left side of his brain, which is responsible for fine learning skills. In fact, when David was younger his doctors said he was incapable of learning.

The Roens knew raising David would prove to be a challenge. Many doctors and even some well-meaning friends encouraged the Roens to place David in a home for people with disabilities. After praying about it, they decided to keep David at home. “I’m sure God just gave us the strength and the patience and the love to raise him,” Ginny says.

Ginny also did not believe that David was incapable of learning. She worked on teaching him to walk, and by the time he was three-years-old David took his first step. Ginny believed that if David was only given the chance he could learn basic skills like reading and writing. But no school would admit him. So Ginny took matters into her own hands. She home-schooled him and hired a tutor to help. Ginny has made a life-long commitment to teaching David.

Even though David is now fifty-three years old, Ginny still helps him hone his

reading skills. Last Christmas, David surprised his other three siblings by reading the Christmas story. "I worked with him for a long time," Ginny says. "That night I sat next to him, but he read it."

The Roens unwavering love and patience was evident to many people in the church. Stuart Nelson, who now lives in Destin, Florida, is originally from the Rockford area. He has known David since they were children together at Broadway Covenant Church. When Stuart became a chaplain for the Rockford police, he would take David to work with him once a month.

"He was my right hand man," Stuart says.

The Roens' parenting skills deeply influenced Stuart Nelson. Almost twenty-four years ago, Nelson and his wife, Lorraine, had a little boy named Paul. When Paul was only sixteen months old, he suffered a stroke.

Just like the Roens, the Nelsons were encouraged to place their son in an institution. "Our neurologist told us that Paul would never be able to learn," Nelson says. Largely because of the Roens' example, they decided to keep their son at home.

The Nelsons also relied on the Roens for prayer and guidance. "Ginny was a special person to me," Lorraine says. "She was an example by how she mothered and fought against all odds. She was my mentor when I needed somebody."

According to the Nelsons, Paul does have some significant learning disabilities. But they showered him with love and support and even encouraged him to attend community college.

Today, largely in part to his parents' care and guidance, Paul is a graduate of Clark Community College in Vancouver, Washington. He is married and has a full-time job as a custodian in a church in Destin, Florida.

Unlike Paul, David will never be able to live on his own, but he has exceeded many expectations. He lives with his parents, relying on them for care. But he plays a vital role in their home, especially since Orville isn't physically capable of main-

taining the house. David tends to the yard and helps Orville in his woodshop.

Broadway Covenant Church has also played a significant role in David's development. "David is very much accepted and included around here," says Sally Gill, minister of pastoral care at Broadway Covenant. "We've always been there to encourage and try to discover what he could do and what he'd like to be doing. He contributes to our community and is a valuable part of our congregation."

Every Tuesday afternoon David goes to church and straightens up the pews. He puts the Bibles and hymnals back in the proper places and sharpens all the pew pencils. David is also the head usher and oversees all the duties of getting the sanctuary ready for Sunday morning worship. He lights all the candles and gets water for the pastor. According to Gill, he's very thorough and methodical. "When he's not here, I know immediately," Gill says, "because there's always something missing."

David and Stuart have continued to stay in contact over the years. Stuart now runs the International Conference of Police Chaplains in Florida. He trains pastors, priests, and rabbis to work in the local law enforcement community.

While David can no longer spend days in the office with Stuart, he continues to contribute in a very important way. "David is a prayer warrior," Stuart says. "He prays for me and my work."

David will never be able to drive, live alone, or hold down a full-time job. But what he has experienced is something that many people yearn for—a home strongly rooted in Christ and two parents who encourage and love him unconditionally.

"The Roens are wonderful examples," Lorraine Nelson says. "They have a steadfast walk with the Lord through good times and bad." □

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David, Ginny, and Orville Roen