

## The Great Hiking Boot Debacle

I filled my suitcase with shorts, flip-flops, three swimsuits, and one pair of hiking boots. My husband Wayne and I planned to do nothing but hike, snorkel, and soak up the sun during our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary trip to the Caribbean island of St. John. The week would be easy, fun, and relaxing. And it was, all except for one small incident involving a steep, rocky trail and a worn out pair of hiking boots.

Once dominated by sugar plantations, today more than half of the island falls within the borders of the Virgin Islands National Park. Therefore, dozens of trails crisscross the island – some follow the coast, some snake through plantation ruins, and others delve deep into the tropical forest. We wanted to explore them all.

According to our travel guide, the Ram Head Trail was the most challenging. That's where we began. The Ram Head Trail switches it's way back and forth up a saddleback hill to the high, southern-most point of the island. Our book described it as a "steep, narrow, and slippery path, which can be tricky."

However, since Wayne and I are seasoned hikers, we felt confident we could manage this trail without a problem. We had plenty of water, snacks, and sunscreen. We both had sturdy hiking boots - at least we thought we did.

That last sentence needs a bit of explanation. Even though we have done lots of hiking, it had been quite a few years since my last hike. My good hiking boots had been sitting unused in the closet. Wayne encouraged me to buy some new ones. But mine still fit and felt great. "No need," I had insisted.

Big mistake.

Just before we started up the steep part of the trail, my right boot began to feel strange. When I examined it, I discovered the sole had come loose from the boot at the heel. With every step the sole flopped against the ground.

Wayne pulled a small bungee cord out of his backpack and we used it to keep the sole tight against my heel. And it worked! For about 50 yards. Then the front of the sole released its grip on the toe of my boot.

Wayne didn't have any more cords in his pack, but he did find a piece of thin nylon rope right on the trail. We fastened that around my toe and started back up the trail. Although the sole slipped around a bit, it allowed me to walk without any trouble.

Then about 30 yards from the summit, the inevitable happened. The sole on my left boot released completely. I picked it up and carried it the rest of the way to the top. Only a thin layer of fabric remained between the sole of my foot and the rocky trail. I felt every pebble on the last few yards to the top.

When I arrived, I plopped down on a large rock. Wayne wandered around taking photos. How I was going to get back down the trail?

“Wish I hadn’t left my sport sandals in the jeep,” I complained out loud.

“I’ve got mine,” Wayne offered. “Do you think you could wear them?”

Of course his sandals didn’t fit my *feet*, but they did fit nicely over what was left of my *boots*. I tightened the Velcro straps as snug as possible and down the trail we went. The lug soles gave me the grip I needed on the rocky path. And they stayed put! Wayne to the rescue yet again! I wouldn’t be surprised if he had a kitchen sink in his pack.

My feet did look pretty strange. The few hikers we passed on the way down gave me weird looks. And it wasn’t my imagination. But Wayne’s sandals protected my feet and got me safely to the bottom.

Sometimes our lives are like that trail. The going gets steep and things start falling apart. We may even wonder how we’ll go on. In those times of struggle, God wraps His strength around our weakness. He graciously protects our tender places.

*Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 2 Corinthians 12:9, NLT*

When we cannot go on, He carries us. When difficulty overwhelms us, His grace rushes in. His strength. The greater the trial, the greater the grace. His protection. His love and grace. Lavishly poured out.

***When was the last time God gave you His strength? Do you need His strength today?***

*This post is adapted from Kathy Howard’s new Bible study Lavish Grace: Poured Out, Poured Through, and Overflowing. Lavish Grace is a 9-week journey with the apostle Paul that helps readers discover God’s abundant grace for their daily lives and relationships. You can find out more about Kathy, her speaking and writing, and find free resources at [www.KathyHoward.org](http://www.KathyHoward.org).*