

HELP!

**SOMEONE I LOVE
HAS CANCER**



LIFELINE
mini-books

deborah howard

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HAS CANCER

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INTRODUCTION

This volume will not answer all your questions about cancer. It is intended to be a primer—providing the basic information you, the loved one of a newly diagnosed patient, want and need to know. At the end of the book is a list of suggested materials and websites for more detailed information.

In this book, you'll find a definition of cancer and the way it forms, grows, and spreads, as well as descriptions of some of the more common treatment options. Since I am a certified hospice and palliative nurse and have worked with cancer patients for almost two decades, I can't resist the opportunity to also talk about the benefits hospice provides for terminally ill patients.

You'll find this book directed primarily to Christians—believers and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though the *medical* information given applies to all, the *spiritual* reminders of the *promises of God* do not. The promises of Scripture to which I frequently refer are given to God's people alone.

With a heart that yearns for all to come to salvation in

Jesus Christ, let me say a few words to non-Christian readers. Perhaps you've never seen the need for salvation. But the situation which has caused you to pick up this book may have made this a more relevant issue. To you I want to say that salvation doesn't depend on doing good works—or having our good deeds outweigh the bad. Romans 9:16 says,

*It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire
or effort, but on God's mercy.*

(NIV)

Salvation is completely dependent on God!

You see, God is so holy that he cannot excuse sin. Even though, left to our own devices, we can come up with excuses that satisfy us, they will never satisfy his requirements. That's where Jesus comes in. He is our Sin-Bearer, our Savior. Though he had no sin, he took upon himself all the wretched sinfulness of all his people—past, present, and future. Then he died on the cross to pay the penalty for those sins so that his people could be considered righteous. In essence, he traded his “goodness” for our “badness,” and our penalty was paid in full.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses

... God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(Colossians 2:13-14)

When he died on that cross, he did so as our substitute, taking upon himself the judgment we deserved. First Peter 3:18 reinforces this teaching:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

So Christ didn't remain on that cross forever, nor is he still in the tomb in which they laid him. Though we remember the cross and are eternally grateful for it, when we think of Christ, we need to understand that he defeated death, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God the Father. He secured victory for every one of his people, and it is because of his mercy that we can rest in that promised hope. And you could be one of those people for whom he died.

So the news is good! If we acknowledge our own sinfulness and inability to merit heaven, and cast ourselves on the mercy of God, he will redeem us through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christ trades his perfect righteousness for our sinfulness. It's only then that we can enter the kingdom free from the taint of sin—because he has removed our sinfulness and paid the penalty which belonged to us.

So I'm asking you, if you haven't done so already, to throw yourself on God's mercy. Ask him to deliver you. And he will! Romans 10:9 says,

... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It's a promise! It is my prayer that you will turn to him. Going through cancer is hard. Going through it without the hope that results from a relationship with Jesus Christ is horrible.

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Let Me Walk with You

“I’m sorry, I don’t think I caught that. I have what?”

“I said the tests are conclusive. You have cancer. I’m very sorry.”

It doesn’t matter what has transpired before we or our loved ones hear these words, or what happens after. In that first frozen moment, we tend to go completely numb. The impact is so great it paralyzes us emotionally—perhaps for months!

Our first response to disaster is disbelief: *No, that just can’t be. Surely the tests are wrong. Maybe we need to see another doctor! This can’t be happening to us.*

Maybe we’re the ones receiving this diagnosis ourselves, or maybe those hateful words are directed

instead to someone we love. Maybe that's worse.

A Page from My Own Story

I remember the day my brother, John, and I drove out to the neighborhood park. He wanted a beautiful, quiet place where we could talk.

John was forty-seven when he learned he had cancer. Through the next few years, he had chemo and radiation, remissions and recurrences. Each time the scans were repeated, we all prayed they would be clear.

However, on this day, almost four years after his original diagnosis, he quietly told me the results of his latest scans. They showed that not only had the tumors returned to his lungs, but more had appeared in other parts of his body. He simply said, "This is it, Deb."

Struggling to maintain my composure, I turned my gaze to my brother's face and saw an expression of total, quiet serenity.

I asked, "Are you really OK with this, John? Or are you just being brave for me? You don't have to put on an act. Not with me. Not ever."

He chuckled quietly, his blue eyes matching the sky's steel blue. Though my eyes brimmed with tears,

his were clear and bright and even mirthful. Taking my hand, he said, “Let me explain something. If this news were about you, I don’t know if I could handle it. But since it’s about me, I’m fine with it. I’m in a win-win situation. If God grants me more time here, I win. But if he doesn’t grant me that time, I still win. I know I’ll be with Christ in heaven. That’s the real victory. So I don’t need to cry and scream and throw things. I really am fine with it. And the nearer I get, the more excited I am!”

That was the first time I realized that sometimes it’s harder to walk this road with someone you love than it is to walk it yourself. If you are a believer, you have everything to look forward to after death!

That certainly doesn’t mean that you won’t grieve your own death. Some have a harder time with this than others. We need time to reflect upon our lives and ultimately to let them go. But the Christian facing death has nothing but marvelous joy and wonder ahead.

The perspective for the one who must find a way to say goodbye is a little different. To John, it ultimately meant being united with Christ, “going home.” To me, it meant losing my brother. It meant going through life without him.

Besides, for millions, having cancer is *not* a death sentence. It's a time when their lives necessarily focus on treatment—their energies and efforts are directed to getting better. Their experience with cancer becomes a significant interlude in their lives. For those who beat the disease, life goes on.

My husband is an example of this. Diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2007, he opted for a prostatectomy. And, by the grace of God, he is now cancer-free. He suffered some slight discomfort, had a brief recovery period, and experienced some minor changes from the surgery, but it's basically back to life as usual for him.

However, as a hospice nurse, I haven't had many patients with such favorable outcomes. Instead, I've witnessed hundreds of families walking with their loved ones down the tortuous road toward the end of their lives, the same road I walked with John.

I've repeatedly witnessed the ways he and others triumphed over the disease. I've also seen the grace families have displayed while journeying with a loved one through the minefield cancer presents.

I pray this book will be relevant to the one who hears the diagnosis. But even more, I believe it to be relevant to their loved ones, the brave souls to whom I particularly write this book.

Is There No Escape in Sight?

The first step in this journey is to progress beyond denial. Denial is a monstrous foe that prevents constructive movement. It puts a barrier between you and God when that's the last thing you want! There should be nothing in your life or attitude to hinder your prayers to him.

When we're in denial, we deny the *providence of God*. We must remember that God is the divine Master-Planner of our lives. Nothing happens to us that is not brought about by his sovereignty and intended for his purposes. Death, sickness, heartbreak—all products of man's original fall in the Garden of Eden—are parts of his plan for us.

These elements of life are not given to us capriciously. They have nothing to do with chance or fate, but everything to do with the careful plan of a righteous and holy Father, who brings these things into our lives for a divine purpose.

It's natural for us to try to run from disaster. This is not new to our generation. King David eloquently described this particular kind of anguish in Psalm 55:4-7 when he wrote,

*My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.
And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest."*

Most of us tend to try to escape pressure. We have other unattractive tendencies as well. We may want to whine, complain, lash out, or give up. However, the Scriptures tell us,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

(James 1:2-4, emphasis added)

Meditate upon these truths. It's important for us to understand them, and to take them into our hearts and minds so we can apply them to the pressures we experience.

Another verse worthy of meditation in tough times is Isaiah 26:3, which says,

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you (emphasis added).

Does “perfect peace” mean we’re never tried or tested? No; but it means that we can be at peace in the midst of the trial.

Our earthly struggles should not come as a surprise to us. Remember 1 Peter 4:12:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Scripture shows that the Christian’s life is typically peppered with suffering. In fact, we’re promised hardship! Jesus tells us,

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

(John 16:33)

Thus, the Bible doesn’t tell us that believers will not

suffer; instead, it assures us that we will! But it urges us to remain *steadfast* under the pressures of this earthly realm. What does it mean to be *steadfast*? We're told that when we remain steadfast, we will be made perfect and complete, spiritually mature and lacking nothing! Trials produce staying power and life transformation! Through trial, God molds us into the people he wants us to be:

... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

(Romans 5:3-5)

Suffering takes its toll on us, sometimes emotionally, sometimes spiritually—and sometimes physically. Sickness and death are a part of life. It is important that we look at our suffering through the lens of Scripture.

Thus, a cancer diagnosis doesn't mean that God has abandoned us. Cancer is not out of God's hands or bigger than he is; it is but another tool in his divine

toolbox. Therefore, when we go through this kind of painful trial, it is important to constantly remind ourselves that our pain and suffering have a purpose!

We may not be able to see these results with our earthly eyes or conceive of them with our finite minds, but there is an overarching purpose to our lives—God’s will, which is “good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

Our suffering will always produce two results—good for us and glory for God. Always!