

Four things God has taught me through my Battle with Cancer

My journey through my battle with Leukemia and colorectal cancer has been a tough one. When the cancer metastasized to my lung and the doctor had to remove most of my left lung the emotional and physical toll became heavy. Yet amid this journey God has taught me much. What He has and is teaching me is priceless. I call these truths – treasures. I would never have learned these and have my relationship with God deepened without the challenges.

1. The value of my prayers meeting my confusion

Far too often, we let the questions lie dormant. We do not reflect on them. We avoid wrestling with them. The result is we neglect an avenue of growth in our inner world.

In the life of a Christian there is a tendency to feel ashamed that we have questions and doubts. We erroneously conclude that to have questions about and for God along the way is evidence of a lack of faith. This mindset is detrimental to spiritual maturity.

I remember the feeling of loneliness in an ambulance ride to Mayo Clinic. I knew there were a driver and paramedic in the ambulance, but I felt very alone. In reality, I knew God was there but seemed so removed from me at that moment. In the ambulance my prayer consisted not of flowery words, but instead ignorant and desperate words. But I prayed. And I was honest. I believe God heard those prayers. At that moment, that was all I knew.

I am learning in my walk with God, certain experiences will bring us to places where our prayers meet our fears and desperation. I am finding more and more; this type of honest prayer is the avenue to real change.

2. God gives a miraculous peace

What I am discovering, in increasing measure, is that what changes in my life is out of my control. Though I long for good health, the only certainty God promises is peace. Peace in my heart and mind. When everything around me is uncertain, fearful, painful, and confusing, there is God's peace that passes all understanding. (Philippians 4:6-7) It is perhaps the greatest miracle we can experience in our journey.

It is the incredible peace of God, this miracle from God, that calms any storm.

Facing the questions takes us deeper experientially in our relationship with God and is where we discover His peace. We will not know that peace if our prayers are shallow and dishonest at the heart level. I am learning that getting to the place where I live with a deep peace often involves wrestling in prayer with the questions.

3. Cancer is not my orientation

It is easy to let cancer be the center of my day and life. After all I take daily meds for it. It renders me sick quite often and has affected my family in significant ways. First and foremost, I am a child of God. Cancer does not define me. Jesus is the Lord of my life and has the final say in my life. My life orients around Him not my cancer.

When we look only at our trials, we miss the overriding orientation our lives are meant to have. When we face the difficulties in life, our selves turn inward out of preservation and safety. Our focus can stay on self. For the Christian, our orientation is outside ourselves and on God. I am continually learning all my life is to point to Jesus Christ. The way I face cancer is to honor Christ. That is my orientation.

4. The indispensable value of family and friends

We were not created to and never meant to travel alone. When it comes to enduring and overcoming trials, the need for support is even more pronounced. I tend to try to protect my family and friends from the hard stuff. It was not until the cancer hit that I realized I missed out on needed support over the years. God has blessed me with a loving wife and compassionate children. God has given me a mom who has such a loving heart and amazing siblings. My in-laws are a blessing. I took for granted the value of these relationships.

I have also found my friends to be an indispensable resource.

“The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.”¹

Henri Nouwen

I know God is able to deliver me from trials should He choose I needed to resolve to intentionality apply what God has and is teaching me. It takes resolve to journey well. Embrace the treasures in your trials and you will find sure footing and strength to journey well.