



Who is God When Life Stinks?

Afraid!

It was incredibly intimidating to arrive in the cardiac intensive care unit (CICU) of the university hospital! This was a sterile, sparsely furnished facility where noise seemed to echo off the bare walls—nothing like the large, tastefully decorated rooms of our local hospital. The ICU beds here were squeezed into tiny cubicle areas, six per pod, with flimsy curtains drawn around or bunched in the corners of each area. Nervously looking around the room, it was obvious to us both that these post-surgery patients were in dire medical condition. Bob felt extremely healthy by comparison. “I will certainly not be on the priority list for medical attention in this unit,” Bob commented.

Thankfully, Sandra had told several of her former co-workers that we were coming. They greeted us by name, and started taking Bob’s vitals. It calmed us to remember the advantage of being here—it was a top research facility, with knowledgeable, experienced specialists. We felt far away from home, with many unfamiliar noises and faces surrounding us, but we hoped that in time the doctor would arrive to look over Bob’s case. We were told he was not available at this time, due to being in surgery all night doing a **heart transplant!** Surely, this was evidence of his outstanding knowledge and skill.

Soon after settling in, Bob had to use the portable commode. Once again the hospital offered only a “one size fits all” option. At 6’8” and 300 lbs. Bob was larger than most patients. After using the commode, Bob found he was stuck! Nurses were called over to assist him back to his bed. As Bob’s head touched the pillow, his eyes rolled back into his head and a long, gurgling sound escaped from deep in his throat and chest. Now staff members from all over the pod were racing to his side, but Bob did not respond. All I could see was my lively, joking husband now not breathing! Instantly, the thought occurred that surely this wordless, gurgling noise coming out of his throat must be the dreaded “death gurgle” I’ve often heard about.

The curtains that hung directly around Bob’s bed in the tiny cubicle, dividing his limited space from that of the five other critical care patients had been torn back to allow a

multitude of staff to work on Bob's non-responsive body. As fear of the unknown gripped my heart, I ran to hide behind the column of curtains that hung in one corner. Peering through tears, I watched staff shake Bob, prod and test him. Still no response. Flimsy curtains could no protect me from the forces of life and death. It became obvious that my fear would need to be coupled with trust!

The writer of Psalm 56 says, "when I am afraid", which confirms that life is full of horrors and hurt that will frighten us! But hope and strength can be found in these times by clinging in trust to the One who is greater than all fearful things. I had taught this verse to our children when they were afraid. "It's okay to be afraid", I'd explained to a timid kindergarten. "Just remember that God is the One we can trust!"

I did not know this medical staff—we had only just met. They did not know my husband, had not yet become familiar with his case. Would they know what to do, would they care for him as intensely as I wanted them to?

"When I am afraid," (and right now that certainly applies) "I will trust in you"! As I tearfully and fearfully watch the medical staff at work, I choose to step close to the only One worthy of my trust. "Bob belongs to you, God. Thanks for being in charge here."

Suddenly, my husband opens his big, brown eyes and looks calmly into the face of those leaning intently over him. "I'm sorry, did something happen?!"

I don't know whether to cry, laugh or slap him upside the head! Relief settles over the staff, yet with new determination they move quickly to call the surgeon and give report. Within minutes, Bob has become a top priority, with the full attention of our intensely busy heart specialist. A scan of Bob's heart is ordered and soon a technician arrives to perform it right there at Bob's bedside. With fascination we watch as the tech shows us a blood clot clumped onto the errant filter which sits on the edge of Bob's heart. The large clot is swinging in and out of Bob's heart with every beat!

One false move, and that clot would break off and stop all blood flow into the intricate

system of heart and life operations. We know now that every second and every movement matters towards whether Bob will live or die. Bob lays calmly, **very still in fact**, as we await what decisions will be made. Fear has been replaced by an incredible gratefulness for God's timing by placing us at this critical time in the hands of capable, attentive medical specialists. We continue to trust that God is over all these details!

Yet despite the urgency in everyone's mind, lunch arrives for Bob! With any potential serious medical procedure, the number one criteria is to NOT EAT. (We would become very familiar with the medical jargon of "NPO"—meaning nothing by mouth.) When Bob checks with several nurses, they assure him to go ahead with eating the lunch. Just as he is halfway into a sandwich, and sipping a can of soda, a staff member from another direction rushes into the room and pulls the soda out of his hand. "Stop eating!" they practically yell at him.

Bob pulls a mouthful of food out of his mouth and asks wryly, "So, does this mean surgery is scheduled for me today?"

"We can't say" is the short reply. We laugh out loud at the seemingly obvious fact that **something** is planned, but someone non-authorized is sent to halt the eating. It would be another case of sit and wait... not knowing what would come in the next few hours. But we were certain that Bob would sit very quietly, knowing that with each beat of his heart, the large blood clot was swinging into his heart chamber with the potential of breaking loose, and perhaps bringing the filter with it—clogging circulation and stopping life! These were dangerous times, yet we were choosing to focus away from our fears to the provision of excellent medical care, just in time!

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you!"

Psalm 56:3

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