



## Who is God When Life Stinks?

### Test Results: Who's in Charge Here?

Somehow, for some reason, it seems I usually get put “in charge”. As a child it was the group project in school, as an adult it's to head up committees or projects. This is true of my siblings too, and perhaps it is because in a family of ten children we learned to take responsibility seriously, to make careful, independent decisions and to be thoughtful of others. It might also be just the challenge and love of problem solving, and a desire to be in control?!?!

With my tendency to take charge, imagine how difficult it was to know that a possible intruder was in my body, doing serious damage, and I could do was nothing but WAIT – day after day – not knowing when I would hear if the biopsy revealed CANCER!

I had been surprised when, during my annual well-woman exam, the physician's assistant at the OB/GYN office told me that she felt a lump. Although her tiny fingers were able to discern its location, I had difficulty doing the same. Just one year earlier, everything had been fine! How had something so serious occurred without me noticing it? I felt both embarrassed for not being more aware of my own body, and anxious at how quickly danger can sneak up!

The thorough mammogram that followed, plus an ultrasound-guided biopsy, all made it very clear that the lump was a reality, and perhaps a serious problem.

Waiting... for news of any kind, is a test of our confidence that GOD is in charge. All the “*if*”s ring through our minds. If the news is one way, what will I do? If it is bad news, how will that affect the rest of our lives? If I'm not strong enough to persevere who will be there to help me? Waiting for pregnancy test results, job promotions, a college acceptance letter, a marriage proposal - these are some of life challenges that rock our equilibrium and shake our sense of control.

What do we do when life is frightening and uncertain? Crying can help! (but only temporarily!) When life brings “out of control” times, most people seek out something or someone to help through the challenge. Bob and I have weathered many “out of control” times in our marriage. Some of these involved dire financial need (like the time when two large tiger barbs in our fish tank were in jeopardy of becoming our dinner!), job changes, or house hunting on a budget that afforded only very unsuitable living conditions. Perhaps the most remarkable time was when our last baby arrived -

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born unexpected and hurriedly in the bathroom of our own HOME! We had found then, and many times over, that events often occur which are definitely beyond our control or our abilities. But we had also discovered the presence of a mighty God—right there with us and always totally in charge!

Bob had returned by now from his previous week business travels. We were both purposely keeping busy with our jobs this week, to keep distracted from the tension of waiting. We had resolved together to not worry about the tests results but to focus on each day's challenges.

It was now Wednesday afternoon and I was heading into the chiropractor's office after work. Weekly treatments of adjustment and traction seemed to be helping my tendency for migraines. Today, I reached back into the car for my cell phone – just in case a call with the test results would be coming today. “Should I be worried NOW?” I thought, as I tucked the cell phone into my jeans' pocket. I love the fact that when I spend frequent time in prayer and quiet Bible reading, heart-conversations with God become a way of life. So I was not surprised to recognize a heart-answer immediately that spoke “No”. But that was not all... resounding into my being and spreading calm throughout all my body came the further reply. “It will be okay.”

“Yeah!” I thought. I am feeling pretty confident that when the biopsy news comes, it will be benign. A smile broke out, and I cheerfully entered the office. It was a cheerful place to be, and already I had come to love the people who worked there. Despite the pain of my migraines and the adjustments done on my spine, these visits were usually upbeat, and I determined today would be no different.

Once inside the chiropractor's office, I lay on a hard flat bed, with belts strapped on my head and hips to keep my body rigid for the traction treatments. It wasn't fun, but my initial objections to this procedure had turned into acceptance, as it was the only relief I seemed to get from recurring painful migraines. I apologized for keeping my cell phone on, but explained there could be an important call coming today, and left it at that. The attendant left the room, turned off the light, and I tried to rest through the 15 minute treatment.

There were only two or three minutes left of the treatment when my cell phone rang. Wiggling a bit, while still strapped down, I was able to free the phone from my hip pocket to answer it. Yes, it was the report I was waiting for. “Are you at home?”

was the first comment I heard. “Can you come in to talk with us?”

“No” and “not right now” were my answers. Feeling ready for good news, I mentioned that they might as well just tell me the details over the phone.

As the news of malignant, invasive breast cancer reached my ears, I could not stop the hot, slow tears that silently trickled out of the corner of my eyes. Alone on the flat, traction bed, with the traction belts holding me down, I was not able to sit up and the tears travelled across my face, spilling into my ears. As the tears rolled across my cheeks, a quiet confidence crept into my heart. I thought how odd it was that I was not panicking or distraught. How was it possible that my ears had just heard the message of a malignant, invasive tumor while my heart had earlier heard the words “it will be okay”? Didn’t these contradict each other? Was God tricking me by saying “okay” just before sending a life-threatening diagnosis?

### **Or does God’s definition of “okay” differ from ours?**

My culture has taught me that the goal with problems is to take charge of the situation, fix whatever we can, and make the problems go away!! But the historical stories and biblical examples show differently. In times of calamity and crises, these heroic examples looked straight at their problems, facing their giants, and recognizing GOD to be bigger and stronger than the most formidable situations.

**Would I be okay, if God allowed disease in my body?** This wasn’t what I wanted, not at all what I had imagined! For all these years it has been important to me to care for my body the best I could, and I took seriously that responsibility – exercising, eating right. Now, it seemed I had failed.

Or perhaps, was this a reminder that so many things are NOT in my control? Life is so much more complex than managing a committee, a project or even my health. My tendency to direct the show, to be in charge, was not needed here. Thinking back quickly through my life and marriage, I realized that almost all of our most precious memories had grown out of the very bumpiest sections of our journey here on earth! It was in the catastrophes of life that we were desperate to welcome the powerful presence of God. We found survival possible only when we let HIM direct each turn in the uncertain path.

It became immediately obvious to me that trying to be “in charge” right now would only frustrate me and those around me. I would surrender to the direction of

One who knew so much more than I ever could.

Eagerly, and anxiously, I began to anticipate what that surrender might look like as God directed each coming step...

**I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own;  
it is not for man to direct his steps.**

**Jeremiah 10:23**

[Next Chapter](#)