



Who is God When Life Stinks?

I Will Praise You in the Storm

"I will praise you in the storm"... These lyrics rang from our hearts through the many months of trials that we had experienced already this year. First, in February, was my diagnosis of "invasive breast cancer". Then I started on the alternative cancer medication and one month later, in May, we received news of Bob's initial blood clot. Then, from the kind hand of God, came many "unkind" circumstances that kept us hiking over obstacles, determined through disappointments and maneuvering many, many mountains of medical complications and crises. By now, we had lots of practice looking for the loving touches from our caring God, even in the middle of the tough journey.

It was October, and after eight months of tightly holding onto God's hand, through the many tumultuous storms, we hoped to hang up our "hiking boots" for a bit.

God said, "NO, not yet." We knew that his HEART of love for us is constant, but sometimes we find his HAND in our lives to be confusing!

The week after our triumphant, Texan-style surprise visit with Bob's family, Bob was able to rest quietly at home. Home health nurses daily came by, checking and bandaging his wound. Twice a week I needed to drive him to a doctor in town who could measure the thickness/thinness of his blood (INR). We knew that Bob's blood balance of not-too-thin, not-too-thick would *always* be life-threatening. We had "been there and done that" so many times in the hospital, as they tried to regulate his blood.

Someone told us about an "at-home version" of the INR machine. Excited about this option, we immediately contacted the insurance company - praying for favor in their eyes to purchase this expensive (over \$2000) machine. In the meantime, Bob's wobbly legs would take him into the germ-filled doctor's office, waiting up to an hour at times, to get his five minute finger prick! Praise God that after 3-4 weeks of negotiations, the insurance was approved. Bob could continue on the medication and carefully monitoring his blood levels at home, with less constant check-ups at the doctor.

At home each day, during the routine cleaning of Bob's wound, his home health nurse used a "super-sized Q-tip" to check the depth of healing in Bob's incision. She poked until the tip reached tissue.

One day, as Bob watched her insert the Q-tip, he also watched her face. The Q-tip went into Bob's incision, then farther, and farther, until all 7 inches of it was deep inside his chest. The nurse's eyes grew big, as she tried to keep a professional, calm demeanor. Pulling out the Q-tip very carefully with her gloved fingers, she said firmly to Bob, "You need to call your doctor about this!"

Bob relayed the story to me when I came home from work. We quickly called the surgeon, but already our nurse had reached him with the news.

"It sounds like possible infection", were the doctor's daunting words to us.

Our hearts when "THUNK". This was not what we anticipated. No, this wasn't part of our recovery plans. Did God really think we had enough strength left in us to climb more obstacles?

MY answer was a resounding "NO". But God has provided HIS strength through each trial so far. And we could continue to rely on the priceless prayer support of so many who faithful prayed for us.

Bob was in the surgeon's clinic office the next day for a "clean-out". The physician's assistant (P.A.) cut around the edges of Bob's incision, removing the damaged skin. He cleared out lots of surface tissue from the wound. And he explained that there was a long, open tunnel running deep inside Bob's chest, across the area of his heart and lungs, created when infection blocked the healing process.

"Watch the wound", we were cautioned. "We hopefully have cleared out all the infection so that this opening may now heal up. But we can't be sure. *It might get worse.*"

Well, by now, we know that NOTHING about this journey is predictable! Bob had been medically dead, and God graciously restored his life, through an "impossible surgery". His kidneys were predicted to need life-time dialysis, but had just been declared "normal" af-

ter only three months. With each miraculous improvement, we had praised God for the miracles. Surely he was worthy of our praise, even in the storms.

Bob now began to experience terrible pain in his back. This puzzled us, because his repeated surgeries were in his chest. The pain was constant, stabbing deeply between his shoulders. In the middle of the night, he would groan in pain. I rubbed the spot, dug in my knuckles for a deep massage, but no relief came.

We asked the nurses, and they were uncertain what it was. Since Bob was still on heavy antibiotics, they were reluctant to suggest infection. However, at this time in our community, a huge scare was going on about the infection called MRSA. The nurses urged us to return to the surgeon for his opinion.

“We’re back!” Were they getting tired of us yet at the surgeon’s office? No, they were gracious as we met with the heart surgeon who had done each of Bob’s life-saving surgeries. This man had literally held Bob’s heart in his hand TWICE before, and we valued his wisdom. The doctor looked Bob over carefully and solemnly.

“Perhaps your body is objecting to the sternum wires this time”, our doctor explained. “We’ll need to go in and cut out as much wire as we can.”

Bob’s sternum had been cut/broken twice in two months, once for each emergency embolectomy surgery. We knew the importance of these wires – they pulled the sternum back together to encourage fusing of this very important bone. Our rib bones are connected to the sternum bone, and hold it all together. (I know that you want to start singing right now about hip bones connected to the leg bones here!)

We deeply hoped that Bob’s sternum bone had begun to heal by now.

“Is Bob’s chest strong enough for this?” I pictured my hair when I remove a hair clip – it all tumbles down loosely and out of order. “Please”, I prayed, “don’t let this happen with Bob’s big, strong chest.”

“I’m quite certain that Bob’s sternum bone has begun to heal,” the doctor assured me.

“But this won’t be pretty – we will leave some very messy scars.”

No problem! Bob’s scars were a constant reminder to me of LIFE! Although it looked “ugly”, the long, jagged scar down the center of Bob’s chest was a beautiful reminder that God had chosen LIFE for my man, for now at least. In our broken world, trouble touches all of our lives. Yet, even in the middle of ugly trials, beauty can be found by focusing on the One who travels each step with us.

We would travel back up to the hospital to admit Bob again for a new surgery (so much for that “final discharge” in September!) Very early on that surgery day, special friends came to sit with me in the waiting room – hour, after hour, after hour. Finally, by mid-afternoon, my friends needed to leave for home and we hugged good-bye.

Alone now in the waiting room I had to choose. Would I pace and bite my nails? Should I complain and try to convince God that “enuf’s enuf”?

Or did I believe that when God says “I love you” and “I am with you” it includes these uncomfortable and even disappointing times?

My God is holy and wise. He desires to hear my heart (how amazing is that?), but surely He did not need my advice.

“God, please give me eyes that see”, I prayed, remembering my Grandpa’s words. Grandpa often reminded us to keep our eyes fixed on JESUS, not on the circumstances.

My husband was again in a critical condition – with deep tissue infection and continuing blood issues. I was still carrying an active cancer tumor in my body. Yes, the last test showed no further cancer growth and we were ecstatic about God’s protective hand on me during these stressful times.

But, with these overwhelming circumstances crushing down on us once again, I would need divine help to stay focused.

“Looking unto JESUS, the author and finisher of our faith,

**who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross,
despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.”**

Hebrew 12:2

Date: October 17, 2007
From: Bob & Ruth Bell
Subject: Be strong and courageous!

As God would have it, it seems we're not QUITE done with the updates...

Dear praying Family and Friends,

My big man, Bob, has been such a man of courage during the last three months, through 2 ER trips, 3 ICU stays, repeated surgeries, life support systems, rehab center and an amazing recovery!!

However TODAY BOB RETURNS TO SHANDS HOSPITAL due to inner infection that is causing very severe pain and inflammation. Ten days ago the doctor's office cut out what infection they could find and he has been on antibiotics since then. Yesterday the heart surgeon saw Bob, and he believes that Bob's body is objecting to the wires which usually are just left in the chest after the sternum heals.

So, Bob is being weaned off the blood thinners, back on IV heparin, and scheduled FRIDAY FOR SURGERY to open his chest again to remove the wires and explore for other areas of infection.

I'm thinking of Joshua, the warrior leader in the Bible, whom God told to "be strong and courageous, do not be dismayed, because the Lord your God is WITH YOU!" Joshua 1:9

We KNOW God has been with us during the many challenges of this summer, and we are in need of prayer for our ability to recognize His Hand WITH US again in the cutting, additional pain, and then for quick healing for Bob. There could be any variety of complications in this, so I am praying that my "warrior leader" comes through this battle with infection stronger than ever in his body and his faith! Please pray that my body holds up strong also as I continue on medication for the breast cancer tumor.

We are so VERY GRATEFUL for your love and prayers!!

Ruth (& Bob)

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