



Who is God When Life Stinks?

Our Thanksgiving Wish

Our hearts ached to be with our family. Yes, Bob's kind and appreciative attitude toward his nurses and staff had endeared him to them all – *almost* like family. NO ONE left Bob's room, regardless of their task, without Bob telling them "thank you". I could hear moans, groans and complaints from the patients in other hospital rooms, but Bob continued to show a quiet concern toward every person that cared for him. His attitude of gratitude persisted in the middle of repeated health complications and alongside of continuing pain. I saw a depth of character unearthed in this environment of solitude and pain. It made my heart swell with admiration each time I listened to Bob's quiet and consistent words of thanks.

Even the trash people and linen guys knew him by name. One day I was stepping off the elevator and bumped into the laundry attendant pushing his big cart of dirty linens ahead of him. Seeing me, his face broke into a smile. "Hello", he commented as we passed in the hall. "Mr. Bell looks good today".

One of Bob's nurses, Melinda, was chatting with Bob during a few quiet moments about his ability to accept so much pain and so many complications. Bob's response was, "When I start to pray, as I lay in bed, I begin FIRST with all that I have to be thankful for! The list is so long, that I fall asleep before I get to the requests!"

WOW! Later Bob learned that Melinda and her husband helped with the teen group at their church. In typical teenager manner, that week some of the teens were griping about an issue. Melinda began to tell them the story of a man in the hospital where she worked, who had died twice. It was a miracle that he survived, she explained. Then she told how this man had spent the next 5 months in the hospital with many new surgeries and enduring much pain. She went on to explain Bob's comments about always focusing first on the gift of life and other things to be thankful for. You can imagine the incredible encouragement Bob felt when Melinda reported back to him that his attitude and his story had made a huge impact on a group of teenagers he would probably never meet!

Yes, we'd grown to love and appreciate those who work so hard, in so many ways, to care every day for the several thousand patients in this trauma hospital. But our own kids and grandkids were hurting. They, too, needed to see their Daddy and Grandpop. They needed to see for themselves that he was doing better. They, too, needed to hear his kind voice and feel his touch.

But how could we possibly get the family together? Our son and his family had travelled to Florida just before Bob's collapse in July, and could not bring the whole family back so soon. If we did think of a reunion plan, we wondered how the kids and grandkids would react to the weak, gaunt face and body of their usually big and strong father and grandfather. But, we HAD to find a way – both for their sakes and for ours.

One week before Thanksgiving, Bob was discharged to home health care, and his wound vac was down-sized to a portable version. Bob called it his "man-purse". The vacuum machine was contained in a purse-like bag, with a long strap. A huge open wound still filled his chest, and hoses ran from the foam-packed wound into this smaller vacuum housing. Home health care nurses came every other day to carefully change the foam pieces that filled his chest cavity. They made great effort to keep everything sterile and contained. It was painful, but the wound was beginning to shrink. The doctors were hopeful that this meant the infection was gone!

We prayed, "God, please open the door for us to travel for Thanksgiving." What a ridiculous wish! Bob could hardly walk. His wound vac would not travel well. I definitely could not (would not?) be able to provide services like the home health nurses did.

But... we kept hoping and praying.

We also went on-line and purchased airline tickets from Southwest – fully refundable if cancelled. We thought that if we flew on Thanksgiving Day, this would allow maximum time for Bob to recover, and perhaps the crowds would be less.

We bought a third ticket for Crystal to travel with us from her home in Orlando. Then, without making any promises, we told our daughter in Connecticut and our son and family

in New Hampshire of our plans and hopes.

Oh, we desperately needed this get-away! Even more, we needed to be with our FAMILY! Bob was terribly weak, and his appearance had aged 20 years in the past six months. He was seventy pounds lighter, and his clothes hung baggy and wrinkled as he lay weakly on the bed.

Could we dare hope for another miracle? Was it possible that Bob would be released from the wound vac and cleared for travel in time for our plane tickets on Thanksgiving Day?

We had discovered through the on-going alternative cancer treatment for Ruth and the many complications for Bob, that life OFTEN does NOT go as planned. But we were also reminded daily that the One who plans each day of our lives, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, loves us. Surely He was capable of making a way.

We were looking to Him and calling "HELP! We need to see our family"...

Psalm 121:1 & 2

**"I lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and of earth."**

From: Bells

Date: November 14

Subject: Bob - happy to be home, but still being vacuumed!

Dear All,

We are HAPPY to have Bob back in his own house and bed today! The infection was cut out of his chest FOUR WEEKS ago, but it has taken this long to begin to heal the deep incision, to rid the area of infection with antibiotics, and once again it took a long time for his blood levels to reach a safe level for leaving the hospital.

Bob states that he now carries a "man-purse" with his "play at home version" of the wound vac. It is AMAZING to see the wound begin to heal - still a very large opening, stuffed with foam, and taped onto his chest, attached to a vacuum pump. (It's also amazing to see that after 6 months of surgeries, complications, oxygen

deprivation and hospital confinement, Bob still has his sense of HUMOR! That's a definite answer to prayer!)

Today's home health nurse did the dressing change and Bob discovered that without the aid of morphine, it is definitely toe-curling painful!! Prayer is that the wound continues to heal, the blood levels stabilize, and for NO NEW INFECTION!

Another prayer request is that after Thanksgiving Ruth will be getting another PET scan to see if the cancer tumor is shrinking from this medication, which is taken every 6 hours. Exhaustion has set in from 4 weeks of commuting to the hospital after work, but basically it has been a time of unexplainable strength and health for Ruth. (This is another specific answer to prayer).

We have SO MUCH to be thankful for this year. Yes, it has been LOTS of uphill climbing. But, ohh, how we have appreciated all those who keep helping "push us up the mountain"!

As you give THANKS to an awesome God for His blessings, please know that we are counting our blessings in YOU - our friends, family and prayer-pushers!

MUCH LOVE and GRATITUDE,
Ruth & Bob Bell

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