



## Who is God When Life Stinks?

### Ohhh! I'm so Claustrophobic!

Today is the day—my doctor had ordered an extensive MRI to check for the location and possible spread of the cancer, and I am panicked about it! Tight spaces make me gasp for air! Nothing I can do or think will back down the panic that crawls through every corner of my mind and body. Perhaps it stems from a near-drowning accident as a child, but if anything begins to constrict my breathing, my body immediately tenses up and my mind shuts down.

Normally, I like to rise to the challenge of difficult situations. I like to problem solve, and if the problem is overwhelming, a confidence comes from the belief that God's power will be best seen when I feel my weakest! Challenges force me to look beyond myself and discover that God has plans and ideas far bigger than I could ever imagine!

But... this was different! Claustrophobia causes such panic inside me, and freezes my mind, that only someone I trust completely can talk me through it. Even an open MRI that I had years ago was stopped before it started, because I could not make myself breathe until Bob could arrive.

But Bob had just recently started a new job, 60 miles away, and it was not possible for him to take a few hours off in the middle of the day. I knew and respected his loyalty to a strong work ethic, as did his employers. Already he was committed to some important projects at the new job. Because it is out of character for me to need help or act like a "wimp", I was embarrassed to so desperately need him to miss a whole day of work for my hour long procedure.

Bob always hesitated to take any time off for his own health— and we were concerned this winter over his frequent respiratory problems. It seemed worse than his usual allergies, and the doctor had ordered antibiotics and even several chest x-rays. Yet, Bob's chest was still congested and he had a persistent cough. We felt perhaps the x-rays had missed something or had been improperly handled. Our unsuccessful efforts to understand his health issues so far were frustrating.

Yet, at my request for his help, Bob easily responded to spend the day with me for whatever I needed! His ready willingness to be my strong, brave warrior reminded me again of how grateful I am for this gentle giant God brought into my life! His presence and protective nature would reassure me that if I panicked, and could not think, he would be

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there to explain and attend to any need.

But this morning, I woke early and lay listening to Bob's rough breathing as he sleeps deeply next to me. He has been flat in bed for the past two days, alternating between high fever and drenching, heavy sweats. Although he had been on several antibiotics from his general practitioner over the past couple months, I was disappointed with the doctor's lack of resourcefulness to care for my hurting husband through these breathing difficulties and now a fever. But with our current preoccupation over the crisis with my diagnosis of cancer, Bob decided we should just let this fever run its course to burn out whatever infection was in his body.

During the past two days, I could tell from Bob's eyes, through the glassy fever film, that he felt horrible about being in bed when I needed him. He seemed determined to recover in time, and was dutifully taking lots of fluid, bed rest and ibuprofen. Yet each time the fever dropped, it soon spiked again.

In the same way, my emotions were fluctuating often. It would be so easy to get frustrated, feel cheated or mad at this timing of events! Wasn't it enough that cancer had appeared uninvited and unwelcome, despite all my efforts to keep a healthy body? Why was my big, strong man, who is so loyal to work but even more committed to his wife, flat in bed and burning up? Surely my lifelong resolve to do "anything, anywhere, anytime" for God was being pushed to the cracking point!

As dawn was breaking this morning, I thought about this monster that I dreaded and would need to face today. All night, as I lay near the heat of my husband's tossing, feverish body, I too tossed with the realization that somehow my fear was coming true ... I would be heading ALONE to the MRI and to somehow endure the predictable panic. Names of other possible companions came and went through my mind— it was too last minute, too embarrassing and I felt too discouraged to ask. I had to choose—will I despair, believing life to be unfair to me? Yes, we already knew that often LIFE IS UNFAIR, yet we've seen God's perfect will displayed in amazing grandeur against the bleakness of life's disappointments. Today, God was granting me another day of life—that alone is enough proof of His love and care. As I dressed for the appointment, I asked God to dress my mind with courage and joy.

With just fifteen minutes before needing to leave, I gently bent over the bed to kiss Bob good-bye. I was so grateful that he was resting deeply after many fitful nights and

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days, but knew he would want to know that I was gone. His cheek smelled of sweat from broken fever, and to me it held a sweetness of relief, however temporary that might be. Bob's eyes opened and he looked surprised. "You rest", I said. "It's time for me to go." The panic of my own dreaded claustrophobia was masked for now with a firm resolve.

Even more resolved, however, was the protective character of my husband as he pulled out of bed, showered and dressed in the remaining fifteen minutes. "We're doing this together", he declared.

Now I lay face down, undressed in a cold stark room, and ready to be transported through the MRI tunnel. As a blanket was placed over my lower body, a tenuous peace settled over my heart. My face was being forced downward into the small opening that threatened to close me in, and at the moment my breath begins to disappear I notice a mirror placed in the opening by thoughtful technicians. It is angled to reflect the corner chair in the room where my pale husband appears as my dazzling knight in shining armor!

My heart is pounding in my ears as the procedure begins, and I try to quiet it enough to hear the technician's words of explanation. Following her directions, I close my eyes, lay still and try to relax. As panic continues its efforts to strike at my breathing and my mind, I sneak glimpses into the mirror to see my love still in the corner chair, and the hope of surviving this hour returns.

Headphones play relaxing music to compensate for the enormously loud sounds of the MRI. As the minutes move on, and different tests are completed, my body begins to relax. A smile even breaks into the isolation of that tiny facial compartment, as I sneak one more glimpse at the mirror and see Bob's head propped against the wall and eyes closed. Although he later denies that he was sleeping, his weary body was obviously drooping and yet his love and commitment to his "damsel in distress" overwhelms me with joy!

But that is not all! As we leave the lab, Bob is handed a DVD to present to my doctor with over 2000 images taken from all angles of the breast and upper body. We quietly head to the car, with this crisis behind us, and I wonder how best to express my thanks for Bob's unselfish love and companionship. But before I can talk, he looks at me with a twinkle in his eyes (no longer glassy or feverish) and says, "What more could I want? In my hands, I hold a DVD with 2000 pictures of my wife's breasts!"

We look at each other and burst out laughing! I shake my head in pure delight at this treasure of laughter and love that fills our lives for one more day!

**“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”**

**Psalm 118:24**

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