



Who is God When Life Stinks?

Going Home

The hospital rooms are almost all empty by Christmas Day. Doctors send home as many patients as possible and most of the medical staff take vacation days. Our grandkids worked with me to make small Christmas gifts for the few staff that would still be working on Christmas Day.

Bob was confined to bed, after his bleeding episode and his repair surgery. By late morning, our family arrived to join Bob and celebrate **Christmas Day at the hospital!** Our whole gang trooped down the long, empty hallway, laden down with gifts, food, and kids. Bob's nurses had been hard at work since early morning, to arranging his room to fit us all in. His wire and IV lines had wisely been tucked carefully out of the reach of little hands. Bob's fragile body did not need and wires pulled or tugged on accidentally!

The grandchildren were so sweet when they saw Grandpop – kissing him on his forehead and being careful not to touch any part of his bandaged body. Their faces showed concern and innocence as they looked around the intimidating hospital facility. My sister and our grown kids were wonderful, keeping positive attitudes and being thoughtful about Bob's needs. They understood the importance of taking breaks from the room to give Bob periods of rest. When Bob looked weary, we headed to the lounge with the children to play with Christmas toys.

But, throughout the late morning and afternoon, everyone worked together to make precious memories of this day. We must focus on what we HAD, instead of what we didn't have.

And we had SO MUCH!

Bob was ALIVE, to enjoy the laughter and smiles of his family. His body was limited, but his brain was still wacky and wonderful!

Our long-distance grandchildren and children were all here, happy for this family time together and supportive to both Bob and me. What a great Christmas gift this

was!

My day-to-day health was incredibly good, despite having cancer and continual stress. The ability to care for my husband day after day was a gift that we both treasured deeply.

My sister, Sue, had been in town helping me – organizing, cleaning and keeping my mind focused. Once again God knew our needs and provided in precious, loving ways.

Nurses, who had become like family to us, were thoughtful and kind as they cared for Bob and welcomed all ten of us into this crowded hospital room for the day!

And the possibility of HEADING HOME was so close, that we could “taste it” – almost as real as the ham and cheese picnic lunch provided to us by a friend on this Christmas day.

Bob’s deep desire was to be discharged “for good” before the beginning of a new year. We were weary, but we would need to wait... and wait... before a final decision could be reached for Bob’s release.

Waiting is NOT a favorite pastime and it carries lots of emotions. Perhaps the following email will best express our thoughts ...

[Jesus said,] "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Date: December 29, 2007
From: the Bells
Subject: WAITING – update on Bob & Ruth

We have not sent an update because we have been waiting to know how the doctors think Bob is doing since the emergency surgery one week ago (when they reopened his full chest incision to stop massive bleeding) We were grateful that the bleeding has stopped, and awaiting news of how long until Bob can get up again to walk, etc.

Yesterday, the bandages were removed from the skin graft and what a sight! The grafted skin is so thin that you can clearly see the muscle that was moved from his ab-

domen to over his sternum. Although it looks "gross" to us, the medical experts feel the skin looks healthy. It will continue to need dressing 2x/day with antibiotics and sterile gauze. The drain tubes were removed, but doctor ordered bed rest for one more day to avoid stirring up any bleeding.

So now we continue to wait for healing and for the blood levels to become appropriate for sending Bob HOME! The risk continues between blood-too-thick that clots can clog his flow of blood, or blood-too-thin to cause internal bleeding. Right now the blood is thick, and an ultrasound determined there is still a blood clot behind his right knee.

WAITING has never been a favorite pastime of mine, but we have had lots of practice this year -- waiting for Ruth's cancer medicine to begin to work, (still waiting for it to reduce the tumor more), waiting for Bob's surgeries over and over, for blood tests, for ambulances, for wounds to heal.

WAITING carries a mixture of many emotions -- anticipation, anxiety, trust, many unknowns, but sometimes weariness and exhaustion just take over. After a busy week we are temporarily at that place! Our children and grandchildren were all here this week, and they joined me for daily trips to the hospital, taking turns with limited ICU visits (no grandchildren allowed to visit there), and meals on the run. They all were flexible as we adapted Christmas to a celebration at Bob's hospital bedside (see photo attached!)

By last night, all the children were back to their jobs and homes, and my sister had returned to NC. It was a quiet night as I stayed in the sleeper chair in Bob's room. Because each morning at 4 a.m. I must take another dose of cancer medicine, we set the cell phone alarm to ring.

This morning the alarm woke both Bob & I and we could not return to sleep. Sometimes exhaustion becomes so overwhelming that the body and emotions hurt too much to rest. Standing by the bed, I laid my head on Bob's shoulder (one of the few spots without bandages or wires!) and wept. We know that Jesus understands weariness and tears -- but we also know these moments can suggest PITY PARTIES that are not healthy. When I weep over the "unfair ordeal" my husband's body has endured, I quickly remember the many, many stories of people in this hospital, or in our acquaintances who have much more severe trials to endure. We remember how many of YOU are lifting us in prayer. We remember that trials on earth cannot compare with the PARTY TIMES OF HEAVEN!

In fact, many have asked "how do you hold up?" in these difficult times. I need to tell you, our praying friends, that whenever I feel my knees begin to buckle from overwhelming sights or events, or from the sheer weight of the circumstances, there is an uncanny sense of someone catching me before I collapse. I like to think that God sends his angels to thrust their arms under my armpits and catch me before I hit the floor. ("Angels in the armpits" sounds encouraging, don't you think?)

Actually, we both continue to be concerned about the stress these circumstances put on my body, during a time when fighting the cancer needs as little stress as possible. So once again, we rely on prayer and God's control of each tiny detail of our lives.

We are eager to have Bob home, for him to get well enough to return to work, for us both to have a healthier 2008. A quote from Jan Frank's book (A Graceful Waiting) states "waiting in hope means that we rest...not in what God will DO for us, but on GOD who is our hope and expectation." So, even if God doesn't answer in our time or way, we are grateful that HE is our hope.

We wish you a NEW YEAR filled with the true HOPE!

Love,

The weary but hope-filled Bells

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