



Who is God When Life Stinks?

A Walk on the Beach!

It was still hard to accept the diagnosis of cancer—not because I didn't believe the reports, but because I was feeling so well!

Five years prior to this diagnosis, my health had been horrible! Severe anemia sapped every ounce of strength. My brain, which usually thrives on multi-tasking, sometimes felt smothered and grasped to hold onto just ONE idea! My body ached so badly that I could not drive home at the end of the day. When students left the school in early afternoon, I had to lay down on the office floor to regain strength enough to get to my car.

During this time, no medical professional fully explained to me how these symptoms were related to my lack of red blood cells. It never occurred to me how important they are for transporting oxygen to all parts of the body, including the brain. No wonder my mind was too fuzzy to think of what questions to ask!!

I went to the family doctor and then to specialists (hematology/oncology). Looking back now, how I wish that I could have done research on options for treatment of anemia. Instead, because my energy was so drained, I simply submitted to a terrible, painful ordeal of IV iron therapy. This involved frequent treatments. Each time required three or more long hours with intravenous tubing attached to my arm, as a vile-looking black liquid filled my veins. It was a synthetic iron mixture—and it made me break out in allergic hives all over my body! Pain crept into my back and joints as the cold liquid travelled through, and the pain would remain for days.

Following each treatment, my red blood cell count would temporarily increase, although the wild, allergic itching remained continuously for the whole two year length of these treatments!! Soon, my energy would start waning again, my body would be dragging, but I would put off returning for the IV treatment as long as possible, knowing how horrible these treatments could be.

Finally, crawling back into the large hematology/oncology office, I would submit again to the IV. It was always difficult for the nurses to get their needles into my veins. For some reason, the vein would collapse and after applying heat, and then cold, they still would have to slap the back of my hand to make the vein stand up. Hardly something I enjoyed! In fact, in my hurting, exhausted state, most visits brought hot, embarrassed tears.

My tears embarrassed me because all around me, in this large open room, were rows of chairs with patients who were receiving their chemotherapy treatments. Many were older patients, many without hair, and often there was conversation about who was “missing” from the group—meaning that another chemo patient had died. How could I possibly cry for my own pain, when I was surrounded by these courageous people who were facing life and death each day?

This was my first encounter with “chemotherapy crowds”. The room was very large, with rows and rows of identical, vinyl recliner chairs. It seemed so impersonal, although some “long-timers” were known by name to the nurses. Some of the nurses were attentive, others seemed very hardened. My body was in too much pain, and my mind too weak, to be sociable but my heart and admiration went out to each patient there. If I could hear their stories, surely they would include incredible courage as well as obvious heartbreak. I silently prayed for God’s love to wrap around those seated in this awful place. It was not just the presence of cancer that made it awful, to me it resembled a “hall of torture”. (Since then, I’ve encountered other medical professionals who handle chemo experiences with much more compassion and personal touches.)

“Surely,” I thought, “someone needs to come up with another plan to help people with this disease! If cancer is so prevalent in our time, why are there not more options??” But my thoughts were always interrupted by the pain of the cold, black iron fluid as it pushed into my veins, or by the hurt in my brain because thinking brought too much strain.

After two years of this torture, I finally learned of a procedure that would reduce my monthly blood loss (although no one really could explain if that was the cause of my anemia). After the medical procedure was done, it took another 2 years to rebuild my strength through gradual exercise, rest and healthy eating.

Now, at the start of another year, I had been delighted to reflect on how wonderful my health was! My iron levels were good, the red cell count finally normal. My energy was back and there was “pep in my step”!

It was GREAT to feel so healthy—OOPS! What about all those tests that say I am SICK with a life threatening disease?! But this time, my body wasn’t hurting, and my mind was clear—so the call to learn more became very personal. With the internet bringing so many resources to my fingertips, plus materials from many friends and family, I spent afternoons, evenings (and sometimes late nights) pouring over anything that might explain HOW my body caught cancer, and WHAT might help it heal.

It seemed almost “sacrilegious” to take time to study... Most often, when the medical profession rushes in with a cancer diagnosis, the patient feels pressured to act immediately. Yes, all cancer is defined as “fast growing, abnormal cells”, and some cancers progress at tremendously fast rates. So ACTION is important.

I’m a “take action” kind of person—but this time I planned to LOOK FIRST, before I jumped into a treatment plan! My study led to the discovery of a tremendous dialogue around the world about other “successful treatments” for cancer. Many were performed out of the country, many were tremendously expensive. Most had some similarities, but all had their own unique ingredients. To make things more confusing, it seemed that often the ideas conflicted or contradicted each other.

Also in the mix of information was a wealth of ideas about our culture, diets and environment which contribute to the growth of cancer cells. (Did you know—and this is a well-agreed fact—that we ALL have cancer cells that travel through our bodies?! Usually, they are single cells that are “eaten” by our immune systems. A cancer tumor appears after one cell has reproduced into BILLIONS of cells). I was flabbergasted to think that somehow my body had reproduced cancer to the billions of cells! What could I choose as the best “action plan” for stopping this invasion??

It was like standing at the edge of an ocean — the beach full of an assortment of shells. As I bend down to examine one particular shell more closely, the waves wash in and scramble everything that was front of me. If I venture to step into the deeper water, the “undertow” of swirling, contradicting ideas will pull me under, and threaten to keep me from seeing the light of day!

Then I remembered. It wasn’t about knowing it all. My responsibility is to choose what will be best for my situation. I feel alone, knowing that it is my decision to make. Bob will support whatever I choose. The advice and stories from others are great, the resources plentiful, but I need to make ONE choice.

What will it be?

God is with her, she will not fail. God will help her at the break of day.

Psalm 46:5

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