



Who is God When Life Stinks?

“It is More Blessed to Give”

As we faced daily the shock of this unexpected disease and were taking our first wobbly steps into alternative treatments, I was amazed by the support that poured into my shaken world.

Usually, I am a very private person about details of my personal life. But this would NOT be a PRIVATE battle with cancer! Ohhhh, it was very PERSONAL—this was my body, and my breast, but I quickly decided to not ever call it “my cancer”. After all, I wasn’t feeling any “friendship” with this intruder into my life, and I surely didn’t care to develop any long-term relationship!

Over our past years, individually and together in marriage, Bob and I had developed many rich and refreshing relationships—in our families, with friends, at church and even at work. Bob and I love to give of ourselves to our community, church, and work, and God had given back to us many caring friendships. We were experiencing the truth I was taught as a child—“It is better to GIVE than to RECEIVE”. (*In our family of ten children this was probably enforced for the purpose of **sibling survival**, as well as being important truth!*)

Now... Bob and I were on the opening pages of a new chapter in life that might be entitled, “It is more blessed to let others give.” Ugghhh, this was going to be so very hard!

At our school, filled with two year olds through second graders, I serve as director and get to enjoy the most loving and fun families in town! (No bias here, just truth!) Every child is extra precious to me, and each of the more than one hundred families hold a special place in my heart. Now they were flooding me with cards, small gifts, and most precious of all, their prayers. What could be encouraging than knowing that heaven is being flooded with little voices pleading, “Dear God, please help Mrs. Ruth!”? My grateful tears are falling as I write this. Then, the families organized together to run a yard sale, gathering donations (including cash) to raise funds to help with the alternative medicine costs (which are not covered by medical insurance)!

Also in my job, I serve on staff of the church which sponsors our school, and Bob and I together belong to another church of over 800 members. We are “family” to both! When life stinks, and you need focus, nothing works mightier than the prayers of people who are “regulars” in God’s chambers. If only they knew how MUCH these prayers meant to us!

I felt like we needed to find time to say “THANK YOU” to each person individually. Whenever the opportunity came, it brought joy to let someone know how God used their gift, hug, prayers or just a smile to shore up my sometimes sagging spirits.

Although we tried to adequately show appreciation for so many loving touches, cards, and calls, our circle of support quickly fanned out through emails and to out-of-state family and friends. While working full-time at my job and “working full-time” at learning about this disease, I could not respond to every kind-hearted, life-shoring encouragement.

A familiar challenge now rang in my ears. “Let go, and let God.” Not wanting to appear an ungrateful “receiver”, I argued briefly. “It will look like I just TAKE, and expect more, without being able to give anything back.” (Yep, you guessed it, this “control issue” is a lifelong challenge for me!)

Bob and I had met in college, and we both trained in the social work field there. We have experienced people who can “drain you dry” - always taking or demanding help! We were taught that the ultimate goal is to help people become independent, to provide for themselves and their families, to find work and build healthy habits.

Remember that “fiercely independent” description my husband had of me? Yes, I fit well into American culture where “independence” is a virtue. We are told to “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps”. We admire “self-made” business people. Our goal is to be “self-sufficient”.

In contrast, “dependency” is often spoken with disdain—a characteristic of the weak or uneducated. There is a stigma on those who receive “hand-outs”. Often, Christianity is criticized as a “crutch” for those who are unable to face life and must “lean on” a Spiritual Being to get them through the difficulties of life.

My mind is stuck—knowing that in time of crisis we DO need help! I was grasping for a word to describe what my attitude should be...perhaps the idea is to be “interdependent”... defined as “reciprocal or mutual dependency”. Being available for each other brings a strength to all involved, and indicates wisdom instead of weakness.

It always excites us when God uses our meager gifts or words to lift someone up. We love being available to provide encouragement or strength for them. Would we now deprive our precious friends and family from this privilege? (I had initially even asked the

school board leaders to cancel the yard sale, until I was corrected about the selfishness of my “unselfishness”!)

It would take some practice (and boy, would I get LOTS of practice in the months ahead) but my pride started to sit down and behave.

It felt good to let my hurting heart be soothed by these touches of love, and to return a simple, genuine smile, sincere “thank you”, or just a hug.

If God chose to involve others in this cancer journey with us, I would rejoice in the love and companionship. The road ahead looked pretty steep, and we just might need the help to keep on travelling!

You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Acts 20:35

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