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THERE MUST  
*be*  
SOME MISTAKE



SUN-SOAKED BEACHES, trade winds rustling through coconut palms, brightly colored tropical fish skimming through the coral reef. What could be better than a relaxing vacation in beautiful Hawaii? Lou and Andy had their airline tickets paid for and their bags were almost packed. Just a short list of last minute things left to do.

Unfortunately, one of California's notorious forest fires burned out of control—not near enough to threaten Lou's home but so close that the air hung heavy with smoke. Lou coughed and coughed until in exasperation she made an appointment to see an allergist she had previously consulted. Perhaps he could give her a shot of something or maybe some pills.

"I want you to get a chest X-ray," the allergist told Lou—only as a precaution, he assured her. After all, she had had one just six months earlier, and it had looked great—no reason to worry.

But there *was* a reason worry. The new X-ray showed a shadowy something that hadn't been there before. "Probably nothing," the allergist assured Lou. "But we'll get you in to see a specialist just to make certain."

That shadowy something turned out to be a large tumor.

"Can we still go to Hawaii?" Lou asked the doctor. "We will be gone only two weeks. As soon as we get back, I can start whatever treatment you say."

The doctor shook his head. "Look at this," he said, pointing to a bulge on the side of Lou's neck. "This is your carotid artery."

Lou was amazed. How could it be that she hadn't noticed that?

“Fly now,” the doctor said, “and you will be fortunate if you make it to Hawaii alive.”

## **Everyone Reacts**

Everyone reacts to life-changing news in his or her own way. Some remain distant and removed, as though the matter is not really of that much concern. Others refuse to accept the situation, insisting there has to have been a mistake. Some break down with inconsolable emotion, others determine to remain stoic, and still others are too numb to react at all. Some people lash out at God in anger, demanding an answer or at least an explanation. Others fall on their knees before Him, begging for mercy and a miracle. A few give up in resignation.

Lou is my sister. She is a stalwart Marshall, just like me. Not much lays us low. When illness threatens us, we resolutely push the symptoms aside and get to work on the breakfast dishes. On the rare occasion that sickness actually does lay us low, we stop on our way to bed and put a load of laundry into the washing machine. But this time that old paradigm wasn't going to work for Lou. With shocking suddenness, she had become the patient.

Whether hurtled into action or paralyzed by shock, no one should be criticized for his or her reaction. No one should be judged for not responding the same way someone else does or the way another person thinks he or she should.

Take Justin's family, for instance. When Justin, a successful type-A businessman, was diagnosed with a brain tumor, his doctor warned him that it was very likely malignant. The day before his surgery, his family held an all-day get-together

at his home and a special dinner featuring all his favorite dishes. Although he appreciated having his family around him, he found the day awkward and exhausting. His son, who came home from graduate school in another state to be there, seemed irritable and angry the entire day. Justin's wife, Nancy, acted as though nothing were wrong and insisted on laughing and telling silly stories. All day she chattered on about unimportant things. Justin's daughter kept her distance from her father, burying herself in work in the kitchen.

"I couldn't really talk to any of them," Justin said sadly. "I longed to tell them how scared I was and how much I love them all and what I wanted them to do if I didn't make it, but no one wanted to hear it. So I joined in, trying to pretend nothing was wrong, that my son was just in a bad mood and my daughter in a funk and my wife in a silly mood. But when I went to bed that night, I cried myself to sleep."

## **From Fear . . .**

Wise King Solomon would have this reassurance to offer Justin: "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet" (Proverbs 3:24).

Most of us would respond, *You aren't facing reality, King Solomon. You obviously have no idea what real fear is!*

Actually, he did. So did the apostle Paul when he penned these words to the suffering Christians in Rome: "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

When we face something as fraught with ominous mystery as cancer, we *do* feel afraid—even we who love and trust the Lord. It is our human nature. To deny it forces us to suffer in silence. How much better it is to face the fear, to express it openly, and then to release it to God. The promise in Psalm 46:1—“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”—is not a mere platitude. It is an unshakable truth.

How can we know? Because we have God’s promise of everlasting protection. Consider these verses of Holy Scripture: “He [God] will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” (Psalm 91:4). “I am the LORD your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).

### **. . . to Peace**

You say it’s not natural to find peace in the midst of a diagnosis of cancer? You’re right. It isn’t. That’s why we must tap into the supernatural peace of God through Jesus Christ. It was Jesus himself who said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

In the face of such news, there is no peace unless it comes from the Lord.

Human nature prompts us to recall the most dramatic and tragic of stories. And it is true that where cancer is concerned, our minds tend to reel with unhappy endings. The perception of the finality of a cancer diagnosis is hard to shake, even

though we're beginning to gain a more realistic understanding of positive possibilities.

My daughter and I took part in a three-day walk to help raise breast cancer awareness. The great thing was—the majority of participants were breast cancer survivors. There is every reason to be hopeful.

Joni Eareckson Tada, internationally acclaimed disability advocate, writer, and artist, knows about balancing struggle with faith. A quadriplegic since a diving accident forty years ago, she was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. Yes, Joni acknowledges that Christians don't always see God's hand in their trials. She says that is because they tend to look at miracles in the way they looked at the movie *The Ten Commandments*. Joni says, "If no miracles are happening—if the floods aren't receding or the cancer is not in remission—then they think God must not be at work. Those plagues on Egypt, now *that* was God up to something big."

That's it! We want to see a great miracle that will *prove* God is at work.

"Certainly, frogs and lice in Pharaoh's bed made for a great film years ago," Joni said. "Ah, but if we could only watch the real movie of how God runs the world from behind the scenes. Now *those* are miracles! The delicately balanced, invisible working of our great God—that's real drama."

But we cannot see that behind-the-scenes movement. So how can we know that God is actually working on our behalf?

Joni's answer: "He wants us to trust Him. As Jesus told skeptical Thomas in John 20:29 right after the Resurrection:

‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

Still, you are stepping into the world of the unknown. How far has your cancer advanced? Will chemotherapy destroy the cancer? What will it do to the rest of your body? And how about those other terrifying sounding treatments? You may not know the answers to any of these questions. But you can know the One who has all the answers.

“So, friend,” Joni says, “why do we still doubt? We *know* God is always shifting and pulling and pushing and making things happen behind the scenes. Why do we doubt Him? Each of us must experience a thousand miracles in our lives every day! Maybe we don’t believe, maybe we don’t trust because in our heads we cannot find mental wrapping paper wide enough to neatly package the powerful truth of His sovereignty. It takes faith to realize that our Almighty God *is* moving miraculously in our lives every day. But our inability to comprehend something doesn’t make it untrue or any less miraculous.”

The secret to peace is the assurance that God is in control—peace in the diagnosis of cancer, peace in the face of treatments prescribed and debated, peace despite all the fearsome stories and dire warnings that come your way, even when everything familiar and secure is gone, even when an unthinkable reality sets in.

We may be taken by surprise, but God never is.

Do you feel helpless? Fall back on God’s unlimited strength. You need to make decisions. You have to decide on treatment options. You must learn a whole new medical lan-

guage. Yet through it all, underneath you, supporting and sustaining you, are God's everlasting arms.

## God Knows You

With the pronouncement of “You have cancer” and the flurry of tests and procedures and doctors that follow the diagnosis, you may begin to feel transformed from an individual with a name and a family and an entire life into a faceless cancer patient. Don't believe it for a single minute. You are still that special, individual person God created you to be. You can say with the psalmist David, *I praise you [God] because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.* (Psalm 139:14-16).

You say you can't help but be worried about the days ahead?

Of course you can't. But know this: God will not forsake you—not ever. He hears your pain and knows your fear. He will be your comfort.