

To The



BRINK

& BACK AGAIN

A Christian's Journey with God
through cancer and what it is like
to come out the other side!

David P. Dowling

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of

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INTRODUCTION

This book was designed and written to help prepare people facing the struggle of dealing with cancer. Whether you are the patient or a loved one coming alongside that person, these writings are to help you understand the things about cancer that are rarely talked about.

Most things discussed with cancer patients are the different forms of treatment, but what I was never told were the things I could expect emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I was never prepared for the battle that would soon take place in my life, which is why I have penned this book, in order that others that follow behind me would have the opportunity to prepare themselves and their loved ones for the events to follow after a diagnosis of cancer.

As a Christian I will share with you my perspective of hope and how God grew my faith through my experience. You will learn to take cancer for the serious disease it is, but will also see how your reliance on God can provide strength for the journey and grace to come out the other side.

I believe the things I have learned through my battle with cancer that I have placed between the pages of this book can be a powerful tool for you who are going through cancer or for helping a loved one that is. But as you read this book you will hopefully realize my dependency on God not just through my cancer, but in my life as well. That is because I truly believe without His direction and intervention I would not be here to write this book. I have therefore included the truth about my dependency on Him as part of these writings as it would fail to tell you the whole truth about my journey with cancer if I didn't.

Let me start off with a disclosure to this book right from the beginning. I do not claim to have any training specifically for counseling or any medical degree, or practice medicine or offer any medical advice.

Although I believe God can heal anyone, this book is not designed to be a cure-all for any disease or sickness either physically, emotionally, or mentally. Its design is to allow you to

follow my real journey through my struggle of overcoming cancer, and to offer you the steps that I took as I trusted God and His plan for my life.

This is a book of my story and other people's as well. I know firsthand that cancer is a horrible sickness that requires a great deal of energy in order to endure it and to become free from it. Each person's success or failure in beating it is dependant not only on their own efforts, but also their motivation, as well as the grace of God, and host of other things beyond my control or the scope of this book.

With that said, I offer to you my story, a timeline of events as best I remember them happening. May the sickness you struggle with either in yourself or a loved one be replaced with the joy of driving it out of your life forever. I offer the story of my success as a sign to never give up. I believe there is hope right around the next corner when it comes to cancer or any disease for that matter, only it is hard to see because of the darkness in our mind. But I am living proof that God is still performing miracles and still cares about and deeply loves His children.

May this book renew your hope in God and your resolve to free yourself from the worry of cancer and the unknown once and for all. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, my hope is that this book might help you find it

CHAPTER 1 - THE DIAGNOSIS

I had just returned home on a day in early July, 2010 from leading a short term mission trip to Kenya Africa and was feeling on top of the world. My ministry was thriving and my business as a mechanical contractor was as well. I had worked very hard on the trip as I have most of my life, doing construction and even building my own home.

It was mid-October when I started to find some discomfort in swallowing when I ate, and believe me I have always loved to eat, and my six foot tall, 290 pound frame showed it. I also noticed that there were times I had trouble just swallowing my saliva, but this was not all the time and I dismissed it as just a sore throat or something along those lines and fully expected it to go away.

It did go away from time to time but always seemed to come back. My wife and I went away to Washington D.C. for our anniversary and we had an absolute wonderful time. We ate out and I had no problems whatsoever. But soon after returning home the problem came back and this time more and more frequently, so I set up an appointment to see the doctor.

After doing some research from what I could find while waiting for my appointment date, I found that sometimes people's esophagus closes up and that the doctor can go in and slightly expand it and stretch it out again, but as in my case it can also be more serious.

I remember sitting in our church associate pastor's office talking with him about the issue I was experiencing and I asked him to pray for me. I remember telling him, "It might just be that my throat has closed up and they need to stretch it or I could have cancer." Even though I said those words and knew it was a possibility I thought I would face that bridge when we came to it, if ever.

THE PROCEDURE

I arrived at the doctor's office the day of the procedure with my wife. I would be groggy from

the anesthesia I would be receiving so I needed someone to drive me home, plus it was nice to have her as support by my side.

I was taken into a room and prepped for the endoscopy (a procedure where they place a camera down your esophagus to see what is happening) and waited for the doctor to arrive.

Once they started I don't remember anything except waking up in recovery. My wife was there and I was still pretty out of it, but coming around. The doctor then came over to us and told us of his findings. He told me that he had discovered a tumor just above my stomach and told me it was definitely cancerous. He had seen these before and from what he was seeing he was sure it was cancer without ever taking a biopsy.

He then showed me the pictures he had taken with the video camera. It was a large tumor about 2.5 centimeters, and was black and slimy looking, not clear and red like the surrounding tissue. I could see why he didn't bother with a biopsy.

The doctor offered me hope in saying that he knew of people being healed from what I had and then he helped schedule the next steps to take in getting me treated. I drove home that day very positive knowing that I had a chance to beat this, and I also knew I was the type of person to take things head on when I needed to.

AT HOME

Once at home I told each of my kids what my wife and I already knew. I told them that I had esophagus cancer and that we were going to work through it and I would be OK. That was January 14, 2011, six months after returning home from the mission trip.

Life continued, on much as it always did, except for my eating which was becoming more and more difficult. There were only a few things I could eat and not too much of it when I did.

Believe it or not I could eat potato chips without a problem, but softer foods got stuck and I would have to throw them up. I remember going to my wife's uncle's funeral just before my diagnosis and forcing down a wonderful meal, only to gag and throw some of it back up again.

By the beginning of February I was becoming weaker and weaker from not eating. I remember going out on my last service call for my business. There was a well pump in the basement of the

home that needed to be replaced. I parked my truck in the driveway and entered the house. These people were good friends of ours and I knew them well. I went down the basement stairs and looked at the pump. I was feeling really weak at this point and worried that if I tore it all apart I might not have the strength to put it back together again. I went back up stairs and told Mary Ellen that I would have to decline the job and why. She understood and I headed home. That was the last call for work I accepted, knowing I would only grow weaker from this point on.

By this time many people knew I had cancer and many started to pray for me. My older and middle brother Ed had just recovered from lung cancer, and my friend Fred had gone through issues with cancer in his colon three times, both of these men were survivors. So I took notes, so to speak, from each of them hoping my journey would be similar to theirs and that like them, after treatment, would be back on my feet again in six months.

During the same time I developed cancer a dear friend of mine, John who was also a follower of Jesus Christ developed colon cancer and so we shared the hope of each of us getting better. Each of the men I talked to had different cancers yet we were all in the same boat.

THE FIRST ONCOLOGIST

I had an appointment with my first cancer doctor. It was late in the day and I entered his office and waited to be called. Once in his office he told me that I had esophageal cancer and that it was stage 3. I asked him, "So what exactly does that mean?" I found out from others that have had experiences with him that he had a very bad bedside manner, and on top of this it was right before his office closed and I felt like he wanted to just get rid of me instead of having an actual concern for me. So in response to my question he said, "According to the latest review from the assembly that has just met in Europe, the newest report I have here says that I will give you thirty-six months to live."

Now I wasn't quite sure I heard him right, feeling like he forgot to finish the sentence with something like, "But, we found this new drug and treatment and we are looking for a full recovery." So I asked him the same question I had just asked a few minutes before, "So what exactly does that mean?" Looking right in my face with no compassion he said, "Based on our findings I am giving you thirty-six months to live."

I left his office that day thinking more about how uncaring he was rather than the prognosis he had given me. I knew myself as a fighter and therefore I knew that if I was going to be successful I had to surround myself with a team of people who were willing to fight for my life as much as I was. So I remember thinking to myself and saying this word as I made my way to my car, “NEXT!”

MY COMFORT

Now I must tell you that all during this time my faith and walk with Christ was something I was so glad I had, and my God was a comfort to me in every way. If you remember during this time I was no longer able to work. I was just too weak. In fact, shortly after meeting with this doctor I became too weak to even drive myself around.

Because I was unable to work, my business was no longer providing income for us. My wife was working part time as a school secretary and helping teachers with the students, but her income was nowhere near what we needed to survive. I had applied for Social Security disability and was accepted, but there is a five month waiting period before you receive your first check.

Fortunately many people from different churches I knew as well as family and others came to our side as God laid it on their hearts. Just when we needed it, a check would arrive in the mail to buy us food or cover our bills, and this continued for several months. One couple, that I won't mention the names of because I don't want to steal their blessing, paid our mortgage for seven months because God laid it on their heart to do so.

Even with facing cancer, a bad prognosis, and no money, God still provided and offered us not just peace, but emotional and spiritual support as well and His grace to live out every day. In fact, the amount of people that I would later find out who were praying for me was mind blowing, and as you will see later on the only reason I believe I am still alive today.

Cancer can be a very crushing disease, which I would find out first hand, which is why I encourage people to trust Christ in every aspect of it as I did. I knew that if I could trust Christ to remove my sin and grant me salvation that I could trust Him with my cancer as well. Knowing that no matter the outcome I would be in His hands either way was a great comfort to me.

In the book of Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 8 the Bible states:

⁸The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (NIV)

I came to find this verse to be true. In every area of my sickness God was there for me and my family. When I could no longer provide by using my abilities, He did. When I felt like giving up, He didn't. When I needed answers, He gave them. In every way the Lord took care of me so that all my efforts could go into trying to beat this sickness that was trying to beat me, and even in that area God showed up in a big way.

STARTING THE TREATMENTS

By now I was to begin my treatments. I met with the radiation oncologist and he told me that they would perform radiation on my tumor in hopes of shrinking it. The idea was as in most cases to receive radiation first in order to shrink or kill the tumor, making follow up surgery more successful.

My radiation was scheduled to last for twenty-eight treatments and then we would see what other treatment would be needed. I arrived at the local cancer center in preparation for the treatments. The first thing to do was to locate the exact location of my tumor and then place several tattoo marks on me that the technician would use as indicators to line the machine up properly so that I would receive radiation to only those areas that were cancerous, and spare the rest of my body and vital organs from the impact of the treatment.

Radiation was a painless process. I would arrive at the cancer center after being driven there by someone (remember I was pretty weak at this point) and would get changed into a gown and sit in the waiting room. Within a short time they would call my name and I would enter into one of the two radiation rooms. Laying on a support table they would use a laser to line up the machine on the tattoos on my chest in order to lock in on the exact spot. Then they would go into the next room to operate the machine. The machine would then start and rotate 360 degrees around me, bombarding my tumor with radiation and I would be done for the day. The whole process took only a few minutes and then I would go get changed and go home until the next day.

YOU NEED FOOD TO SURVIVE

By now my throat had all but closed off and I could no longer eat anything, except some liquids and I began to lose weight rapidly to the tune of a pound a day. Now I did meet with nurses that shared with me about options of special drinks like Assure that can help sustain my weight, but because of my struggle to get these shakes down I could never supply myself with the needed amount of calories. So in order to prevent excessive weight lost (that happens in many cases of cancer) and to provide the nutrition needed to fight my cancer they decided to place a feeding tube in me.

Now the tube I was to receive is called a “J” tube. It is a small tube with a directional valve on it that is placed right into the small intestine, unlike a “G” tube that is placed into the stomach. Because the tube is small in diameter my type of set up required a pump that would either mount on a pole at home or be carried in a portable bag while traveling. The pump was used to pump this gross looking, and gross smelling liquid that looked like coffee with cream it in into me via the tube, and as if this wasn’t bad enough the tube had to be constantly cleaned because it clogged easily.

I remember several times while sleeping waking up to the feeling of being wet only to find out that my tube had either clogged or the hose feeding it had let go and was pumping my liquid food into my bed. When the tube would clog it required that my wife flush it with Coke a Cola and the small wooden end of a medical Q-tip. Still despite these efforts to keep things moving, my body was failing to accept the liquid in reasonable amounts and I had to turn the pump down to about half way to avoid bloating and feeling sick. This meant that I was still not getting what I needed to maintain my weight and was still losing about a pound a day.

I was noticing some discomfort from time to time, but this one day I noticed my stomach quite distended and swollen and the swelling did not go down as it had in the past. I was scheduled for radiation that day and was told upon entering the radiation room that they could not perform the procedure because of my stomach being so distended. They scheduled an immediate flow study of my intestines to see what was wrong.

A good friend of ours, Ruthann, was driving me that day and so she took me next door to the

hospital to have the flow study done. After a long wait I was finally ushered in to the room, and the study was performed.

Now especially this day I was extremely weak. I was in a wheelchair there at the hospital and found it difficult to walk. Once the results were placed into a report I was told I could go home. I couldn't understand how they could they just send me home with me feeling and looking like I did, but that is what they wanted to do. Then the girl behind the desk said, "I can't really tell you this, but the report says that there is a possible blockage, just so you know."

I was feeling super weak right now so I told Ruthann who called my wife who was working at the local ski area. She told her to drive me to the town close to where she was and that she would take me to the hospital we now go to almost an hour away.

Ruthann and I left and met my wife, who took me to the emergency room at the hospital. They were packed and the wait excessive, in fact I didn't know what to do as I wasn't sure I could wait that long; I was feeling that bad. The nurse took my blood pressure, but could not find a reading even after a couple of tries.

I finally got into the emergency room and was given two full bags of saline intravenously before they could even find a blood pressure reading. After stabilizing me they then admitted me and took me upstairs. The doctor came in and told the nurse to get a stomach pump on me right away as he was afraid that I might rupture because of how bloated I was.

After pumping my stomach I found some relieve, but there was still the fact of a possible intestinal blockage and that would require surgery. I felt like I had already been through so much and was really just getting started. I was really unsure of what the future held, but if this was what I was facing now and there was a whole lot more I was going to go through, then I wanted to be informed. I knew very little about cancer up until this point and I knew I needed to inform myself. I needed answers, so I started looking for them.

CHAPTER 2 - THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION

Now I knew I had a personal relationship with Christ and therefore could trust Him to come through for me in all things, as I already talked about. But I also knew that if I was going to do my part that I had to have the tools and information to do my best in fighting my cancer as well. So I began to look for answers to my question on two fronts:

1. I asked God, “Why would He allow me to go through this and what purpose did it serve.”
2. I needed to know what to expect in my dealings with my cancer on all sides, including treatment, my chances to survive, and what to expect emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially.

Now that was a lot to look for, so I started with God as I figured that would be the easiest answer to discover. I didn’t demand an answer from God crying out “WHY, WHY?” Instead I accepted the fact that I had cancer and I just wanted to try and understand why He would allow it and for what possible reason.

I felt that if I knew the reason why, it would help me endure the journey knowing it had purpose and meaning. Up until this point I knew that I needed to stay healthy because my ability to work depended on it. If I made foolish choices like performing unsafe acts while on the job, I could get hurt and no longer provide an income, with God’s help, for my family. So I made it a practice to think things through before I did them. Making sure I was tied off on a steep roof when I worked on solar panels, or how I handled equipment, and that I wore safety glasses.

Now I will admit that my eating wasn’t the best as far as nutrition goes. I did love vegetables and salads, but I also loved fatty foods, starches and meats. Being a diabetic though, I probably should have watched my diet better than I did, but overall, I probably had a better diet than some other people.

As for other health concerns I never smoked or did drugs (other than what the doctor prescribed and recommended) and as far as drinking goes I only had a few glasses of wine a year, and I had no acid reflux either. The combination of all these things left the doctors puzzled as they couldn't find anything like the things above that lead to my type of cancer. But I had it just the same and now it was my job to figure out why if I could, but more importantly what do I do next?

SEEKING GOD

As I said earlier I was seeking God in the hopes of having Him show me why I had developed cancer and what purpose it served. In seeking the Lord early on, I didn't find much of an answer to those questions. But later on, I did find out that my sickness touched many people's lives. You need to remember that no matter who you are people are watching. They are looking to you for strength and guidance and to see how you fair in the turbulent waters of life. How you perform either gives hope or discouragement to those spectators watching the events unfold. Notice I didn't say, the game unfold, because it's not a game. Life is real and so is cancer, and both need to be treated with respect. When we realize that reality, especially as Christians, we can then draw greater strength from God to go through it because our desire to live and present ourselves worthy in front of others determines how closely we are willing to stay by God's side.

It is easy when things go wrong in our life to blame God and say this relationship thing with God doesn't work. That is the exact time when you get to experience the opportunity to find out that it does.

Right before my cancer struck, I was working a big mold remediation and water damage job requiring a major renovation to a home. My friend Ben was working with me as his business was slow at the time and I needed the extra help.

We were sitting in my truck talking over lunch and he told me that he was concerned about making ends meet because his business was slow. Now I had been in his situation before several times and knew exactly what he was feeling, but I also knew how God had provided for me and my family during those very lean times financially. So I turned to Ben and said, "I know that tomorrow if for some reason God took away my business and I was no longer able to work that He would still take care of me and He will do the same for you as well. So what are you worried

about, YOU SILLY GOOSE?"

Within only a few months, God put that statement to the test, and being Ben and his family attend church where I do he has gotten to watch me live out that statement in my life and watch the truth of what I told him become a reality. So coming to know this has helped answer the question I had for God in asking why I would face such a difficult task. It says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 7-12:

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹²So then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (NIV)

It was on Father's Day that I had heard the news. My pastor pulled me aside before the beginning of church and told me what had happened. A friend of mine, Sean, had a diving accident and had broken his neck, but at this point no details were available. He asked if I would like to go with him to visit him at the hospital tonight. "Sure" I said.

Sean was a big man. Standing about 6' 3" and weighing almost 270 pounds. But as big as he was, his spirit was gentle. I had known Sean for quite a few years. His mother called our church and asked if her boys Sean and his brother could attend. She wanted them to be confirmed. My pastor said to bring them on Sunday and they could meet with me and start things off by being involved in my Sunday School class.

After meeting the boys, a friendship had begun. We had many of the same interests, such as hunting which helped to draw us closer. Sean and his brother began to also attend Youth for Christ, a program I worked with very closely. It was only a short time later that both of them had accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Over time our relationship grew. Sean went off to college but would still call me occasionally to ask me questions about the Christian life. We would talk and share over the phone. When Sean came home, he usually made time to say hi or to drop over the house.

During church this particular Sunday an announcement was made about Sean during our prayer time. Throughout the church you could hear groans of shock and disappointment. At 5:30 that afternoon, I was to meet the pastor at the Church so we could drive down to the hospital together.

As I sat there in the truck waiting for the pastor to arrive, I began to think of what I was going to say to Sean. How could I give comfort to a man who may never walk again? Who may never again know what it's like to play football or run or even walk down the Ocean City Boardwalk like we had done together so many times before.

As the pieces of what had happened were placed together we found out that Sean had been swimming over his girlfriend's house. He had dove into the lake and hit his head on a rock, His girlfriend seeing the whole thing swam over to him and helped pull him with the help of her father safely to shore. A nurse later told us that he had shattered his spine at the C6 vertebrae and although he may have use of his arms it is doubtful he will ever walk again.

After an hour's drive, the pastor and I arrived at the hospital. We made our way up to the Intensive Care Unit and into Sean's room. Sean lay there motionless on the bed. His girlfriend was standing beside him, holding his hand. As we came to his bedside, he recognized the pastor and then seeing me said, "Oh, and Mr. Dowling too." I will never forget the next words from Sean's mouth. As he lay there flat on his back, and looking up at us in a neck brace, with hoses and monitors hooked to his body, he said, "What Word do you have for me?" I think the word that Sean was talking about was God's Word not ours. In the midst of his anguish many of us might have turned from God, but Sean wanted to hear from Him!

After some chit chat, I opened my Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 7 and began to read. I shared with Sean how the real you and I are so precious to God our Father. That who we really are, lies deep inside and that our bodies are only the container for who we are. You see, we are not physical people with a spirit. But as I heard one speaker put it, we are spiritual people within an earth suit, our bodies. God has placed the treasures of who we are in these jars of clay, so that God could show in us mere mortals His unsurpassing power.

Now I don't know why God allowed Sean to suffer from such a life-changing event, especially at such a young age. But I do know that God uses those events to show others how people can

draw strength from God during those times.

The exact reason why people experience tragedy like cancer may never be known, but it really doesn't matter when as Christians we can show God's unsurpassing power lived out in our lives and watch it become real in other people's lives as well as they follow us in our struggle as we cling to Christ.

So as time went on the question of "Why?" soon surrendered itself to the question of "OK God what is it you want me to do?" This became the more important question as I knew the resulting answer of it would be needed to benefit me, my family and those watching my progress. It was an easy question to ask, but not so easy to live out as I soon learned.

ONTO THE INTERNET

Now having my question to God answered, at least for the time being and knowing that He wanted me to just trust Him (as He was making me aware of that through the gifts from people and how He was orchestrating the process of going through my cancer) no matter what the future held, I turned my attention to trying to find the answers I've listed above in conjunction with my cancer.

So turning to the place that I felt would probably hold the most information, I turned to the internet, and the World Wide Web. I began my search by looking up esophageal cancer.

I found out some startling facts about my specific type of cancer. After reading a report from a website whose address I can't recall, I came to the realization according to the statistics given at that time, that I only had a 16% of surviving as a stage 3 carrier of esophageal cancer. Stage 4 carriers only had a 2% chance of survival with stage 2 and stage 1 showing a drastic positive increase in percentages the other way.

Another study I found compiled from about ten years prior to my event showed that out of 263 patients, there was a five year survival rate as follows:

Stage 1 - 81%

Stage 2 - 51%

Stage 3 - 14%

Stage 4 - 0%

(Facts sourced from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/04/060412202928.htm>)

To say these statistics were depressing to me; would be an understatement. I also believe as I was to later find out that these percentages probably are so low because they reflect all the complications involved with this type of cancer. But the first thing I am here to tell you is that statistics are for general use and there are way too many variables pertaining to the type of cancer you might have or for your general make up as a person; your strength, endurance, or your drive, to bracket you into a certain percentages dictating your chance of survival. There is also I believe the spiritual component of your sickness and God's ability to heal you that need to be factored in.

In reality there is a 0% chance of surviving life, unless like Elijah and Enoch in the Bible God miraculously calls us home without facing death, all of us will come to a point in time when we will die. No one has a card in their wallet or purse that says they are excluded from death. We are all in essence on borrowed time, when we look at things from that perspective. Now that thought isn't to depress you, but help you think and know that each day is precious and to be lived to the full, whether you have cancer or not.

Now that I knew my chances to survive (according to statistic and not my will) I tried to move past that point and searched for answers on how I would be treated and how I would recover. I was determined to work through each of those phases, regardless of the outcome and if for whatever reason my life would be expected of me, I placed that in God's hands. But I worked as if everything depended on me and trusted Christ as if everything depended on Him, which it does!

STARTING WITH THE TREATMENT

I expressed to you earlier that I had switched hospitals at a desperate time in my sickness, being that the first had almost sent me home to die. So in switching hospitals I found a new oncologist. I also recommend you do the same unless you have total confidence in the doctor you now have,

and know beyond a doubt that he is someone willing to fight for you as hard as you are. Doctors can sometimes err on the side of caution when treating cancer, which is why you need to talk things over thoroughly with them, asking tons of questions and options and then once informed about your treatment possibilities it is up to you, not just your doctor to decide how you feel you need to proceed.

I can't say it enough how much both you and your doctor need to be on the same page and moving in the same direction. Remember the first doctor I met with? There was no way I would trust a man like that to care for my life and my sickness, and neither should you. No doctor, no matter how good they are will care for you as much as you do, (although I have some really good ones) which is why you need to be the major player in your process to decide and help initiate your treatment possibilities.

So with my new hospital came my new doctor. He was very personable gentleman, and from what I heard from those that worked at the hospital really knew his stuff. I had had a PETSCAN (similar to a CATSCAN but which specifically points out hot spots of cancer cells) done at the previous hospital and the doctor was reviewing it during our appointment together.

He seemed intent scrolling through the cross sections of the images. He then told me all about my cancer and the treatments. He prescribed that we start a chemotherapy process which would last many weeks, and then once the tumor shrunk or was dormant, we should then opt for surgery to remove it and reconstruct my stomach and esophagus.

He compassionately answered any questions I had and then I looked at him and asked the BIG question, "Doc" I said, "What is my prognosis?" He replied, "We are shooting for a full cure!" That was what I was looking to hear and knew then that I had found a doctor that would be a champion for me and fight in my corner with me.

MORE QUESTIONS

I was more than satisfied with what my doctor told me about my prospects and my treatment options. I trusted him and I trusted Christ in leading me to the place I needed to be. But there was still a big unknown to me that needed to be answered, like what it would be like to go through chemotherapy? What side effects would I experience? How long would it be until I recovered

fully? What should I expect in my recovery? Plus there were many more questions.

I again returned to the internet. I searched and searched. I checked youtube, and other websites, but to my surprise I didn't find any of the answers I was looking for. There were so many conflicting reports from people. One person would feel this way, another felt that way. The one thing I did find that held true was that the recovery process was just as much emotional as physical. I didn't understand this fully at the time, but now I do and will talk about it later in this book.

Fortunately for me my older brother Ed, had just gone through a bout with lung cancer, so I went to him for answers. Unfortunately for me was the fact that my cancer was much more complicated than the cancer he faced. That is not to take away that fact that both held the prospect of death, just that my experience would require so much more in treatment of not only my cancer, but complications as well, so it would be hard to weigh my brother's treatment and recovery to mine in knowing what to expect. But I didn't know that at the time, so any information of what to expect and how to prepare was welcome.

Ed had developed cancer a year or two prior to mine. Now I don't remember any of my family prior to us two suffering from cancer except my grandfather who died from lung cancer which we attributed to all his years as a heavy smoker. He started smoking at the age of 12 and lived to be over 80 and smoked all that time.

Ed had been a smoker as well which could have led to his cancer, but of that we will never be sure. I on the other hand couldn't find anything evident to me that I could pinpoint as attributing to my cancer and neither could the doctors.

Ed began to share some of the things he faced while experiencing his journey through cancer. His, as I stated, was a form of lung cancer and it had spread up against his esophagus and mingled around his blood vessels making it inoperable, but treatable.

His treatment consisted of 30 plus treatments of radiation bombardment and a period of chemotherapy. The chemotherapy seemed to have more of an effect on his body than the radiation and he told me that while going through it he lost very little of his hair. But he did suffer other side effects such as feeling extremely cold (this occurred after his treatments

stopped), and his ability to taste things normally. He told me of his desire one day to make a steak and French fries and then sit down to a nice hot meal, only to take one bite and throw it in the garbage. He told me it tasted like it had a metal taste to it. Also there was the fact that the chemotherapy affected his teeth greatly. He had implants done years earlier and the chemotherapy cause them all to rot out, and in order to avoid dentures he had to have them redone to the tune of around \$30,000. Dry mouth I was told by my dentist can have and affect on your teeth and can be caused by chemotherapy.

On top of this, his treatment caused fatigue, making him tired all the time. But throughout his journey with cancer he remained in very good spirits which was a desirable and important trait. As I followed his progress as we talked on the phone I saw that it took him about six months to make a recovery that was comparable to his normal state.

I also have a close friend named Fred that I considered my hero for having suffered through colon cancer not once, but three different times, along with a host of complications to go with it. In talking with Fred I found that the results of his treatment would be even different from that of my brother. For one thing my brother was very tired, and fortunately was retired at the time and didn't have to work. Fred on the other hand although not ideal was still able to work during his bouts with cancer unlike me or my brother. Fred also experienced different symptoms from his chemotherapy. He developed a neuropathy in his hands where things cold to the touch became extremely painful to handle. Just removing a chilled soda from the refrigerator was painful without gloves. On a positive note Fred's hair was unaffected by the chemotherapy process, and like my brother seemed to recover from his sickness once the cancer was in remission in about six months as well.

The one thing I was learning is that there is no sure fire outline for people and how they would heal, or if they ever would. The only common thing I was noticing in both my brother and Fred that seemed to hold true was that it took about six months for the physical part of the recovery to take place.

This was unfortunately not the case with me. As I write this book I am cancer free, but the complications I experienced during my battle with cancer has left my body broken severely and after almost three years from the time of my development with cancer I am still only about 40%

of the man I was. If things continue as they are, it will probably take me an additional year or more to come to a complete recovery. Although I don't know if I will ever recover from the full effects of my cancer that is what I am shooting for. But I know I will need to continue to have the same fighting spirit I had during my struggle with cancer if I am ever going to get there.

TO SUMMARIZE

So to put this all together, probably the best thing you can do is avoid expectations about your cancer and your healing process. I am not saying to not have a positive view, by any stretch of the imagination. But rather, you should set goals for yourself to strive towards, but don't become disappointed if you come up short. Make sure your focus stays on your goal to finally become healthy again and not distracted from how long it will take.

Looking at Fred and my brother I fully expected to be well again, feeling like the man I was at the end of six months. This wasn't the case though. I failed to realize that my cancer was different than what they were going through. I also began to notice commercials on TV for cancer centers advertising their treatment facilities, and that the people they were interviewing were two year recovering patients. This made me realize that these people needed quite a bit of time to get back to the way they were.

My brother would often call me on the phone and we would talk about my struggles. I remember him telling me that in just a few months I would be doing well and that it would all be forgotten. He would also tell me that what I had was just a slight inconvenience. Neither of which held to be true. Now this wasn't his fault. He was basing his expectation for my cancer on his own experience, and only meant to encourage me. But I came to the knowledge early on that my cancer was my cancer and you can't compare it good or bad to anyone else's. The same will hold true for you I am sure.

The other piece of advice I can offer is after arming yourself with all the information from your doctors, to move ahead with a positive attitude and not listen to the statistics. All they will do is bring you and your thinking down. That is not what you need at this point. What you need is an attitude that screams hope. You will probably have to deal with some issues from your treatment, whether radiation, chemotherapy, surgery or other options. So don't be shocked if you do, and

don't let it affect your final goal to get well.

I personally experienced damage to my fingers from the chemotherapy from my second bout with cancer (yes I said second bout, but I will get to that in later chapters). The doctor had warned me that with the type of chemo that we had to use this was a possibility and usually occurred after the ninth straight week of treatment so his goal was to get me off of that type of chemo by week eight. Unfortunately for me it was too late.

My pinky and ring finger on my right hand were especially affected and they felt numb all the time, they also were drawn slightly in, in a curve towards my palms. I went from being able to type about sixty words a minute with a few mistakes to probably ten words a minute, as I was limited to the hunt and peck typing method. But after placing my hands differently on the keyboard and stretching them continually, I have been able to work through that disability and can type almost as fast, if not as fast as I could originally.

There is also that fact that during your sickness it probably goes without saying, but eating for nutrition and eating right will go a long way to equip your body to combat the effects of treatment and to heal faster and more efficiently. I am not a nutritionist by any means and there is so much to discover in the area of eating right in conjunction with your cancer. I unfortunately was unable to eat during much of my battle, but I would have loved to have had the opportunity to eat the foods my body could have used to promote my healing. Since that time I have changed my eating habits (although not drastically) to include drinking far more water than I ever have and all but eliminated soda from my diet. Also vegetables and fruits are very desirable to me again and I take great advantage of that as well. So diet is another thing to question and determine for yourself as you work through your journey with cancer.

So with this said don't let issues or complications from your cancer push you back. When issues come up and they most probably will do two things:

1. Reboot your mind like you do with your computer when you find it working slowly or not properly. Restart your thinking, letting go of the setback and focus on your new redirected goal.
2. Trust in the Lord for your strength. I can't stress this enough, you are facing enough with your cancer, like maybe appetite loss, neuropathy, hair loss, numbness, fatigue, as well as a host of

other issues. So keep your focus on Jesus and His promise to never leave or forsake you. He will provide you with what you need when you need it including, but not limited to the strength you need to endure. He also wants the best for you and trusting in that can help you to have the ability you need for both your body and your mind to fight through an enemy that has become part of your body. Take some time today to reflect on this verse from God's Holy Word as found in Jeremiah 29: 11

⁸ *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (NIV)*

The only direction I can give you in what to expect during your treatment and healing is to just expect the best from yourself and from God. I wish I could tell you that when "A" happens "B" will follow. But that would only mean telling you a lie. There is no possible way of knowing exactly what to expect both physically and mentally through your struggle. So my hope for you is as you read this chapter is to prepare yourself for some things you might not expect, but are probably certainly within your control to deal with.

Again talk with your doctor about the things you might expect from the type of treatment you will be receiving based on what other people have experienced, so that you at least have some idea of what to anticipate and aren't blindsided.

For the things that many people deal with emotionally with cancer we will talk about later on in this book. So let me leave you with a verse from the Bible, and remind you that for the things you have no control over (in reality that is everything), put your trust in Christ. He knows the answer to all your questions as I found out. Below is another verse in Jeremiah chapter 33, verse 3 which I call God's phone number allowing me to call it anytime I need answers:

³ *'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'*(NIV)

CHAPTER 3 - THE JOURNEY

Now one of the things you may have concluded already is that everyone's cancer is different, from the way it affects the body to the type of treatment. But in this chapter I will try to give you a rundown of the events of my particular struggle with both my cancers and what transpired in the process so that it might help in the preparation of what you are dealing with.

As I stated earlier I found a new hospital with new doctors. These were doctors that were willing to fight for me as much as I was and that is super important. If you don't feel comfortable with your doctor or feel he or she isn't willing to go the extra mile in seeing you find healing, then I recommend you find someone who is and find them fast. Cancer is something you don't want to let sit on the back burner for too long, and you need to have a champion in your corner to do battle with. So remember there is no shame in moving from doctor to doctor until you find the right one. After all you wouldn't just marry anybody, and you shouldn't treat your relationship with your cancer doctor that much differently.

So here is the timeline of my journey as best I can remember them from the documentation and my thoughts:

1/14/11 - As you remember my journey started with an endoscopy at my local medical center and progressed to the hospital I now trust and visit. Although this hospital is almost an hour away from where I live it is worth it to me in every aspect. I made an appointment to see a specialist there and so began my switch to the new hospital.

1/30/11 - I met with Thoracic (chest) surgeon about the removal of my tumor and the reconstruction of my stomach and esophagus. I came to find out that he is one of the top specialist in this area of cancer treatment and in fact does about twenty four of these types of surgeries a year (This is the type of doctor you want that is prolific in what they do, so don't be afraid to ask them how long or how many procedures they have done relating to your specific

case), he also teaches this procedure all around the country. This makes him one of the best in the world and someone I definitely wanted on my side.

He explained thoroughly to me about what the procedure was, the possible outcomes, and so forth. He was very complete in this process and I for one was most glad he was. All these types of facts helped me prepare in making a choice in picking the best care I could for myself and my family.

2/11/11 - My first procedure at the new hospital was to have another endoscopy done to see the extent of damage from my tumor and to see if they could stretch my esophagus at all to allow me to eat something. The procedure is pretty straightforward and probably lasts about an hour or less.

As I woke up from in the recovery room the doctor talked with me and told me that his intent was to stretch my esophagus to allow some relief from not being able to eat, but was afraid that it might tear in the process, so he was unable to make that happen, but he did get a good look at everything in the process.

3/7/11 - My first unexpected visit was in reference to my story in the first chapter when my wife drove me to the new hospital, as the local one pretty much left me to die. That sounds harsh, but would probably have been true had I returned home as they suggested.

So having been admitted for my blockage and swelling of my stomach area, they went ahead and pumped my stomach as the doctor was afraid of my intestines rupturing. I was then scheduled for exploratory surgery to see if they could find the source of my blockage.

3/10/11 - I was taken in for surgery for what they termed as partial stomach removal and later brought to recovery and then back to my room. The meal of the day was ice chips and in limited supply. I believe they did find a blockage from my intestines being twisted, this may have been due to the first surgery where they inserted the feeding tube as the surgeon then told me she had my intestines laying all over and just stuffed them all back in. What a nice thought to know that they were handled with care.

3/22/11 - Several days after this my swelling reoccurred and my wife who had just driven all the

way home in a snow storm was called, only to be told that I would have to go in immediately for emergency surgery. Getting back in the car she made the return trip to the hospital and met me just prior to going in for surgery. As I laid there on the gurney waiting for them to take me to the operating room the doctor available for that night approached me. She said, "I'm going to go inside and see what the problem is but if I find that a section of your intestines has died there is nothing I can do, but just close you up!" I said, "How much do you have to find dead for that to happen?" Her reply was, "About five feet." I then told her that she was to do everything possible to fix whatever the problem was and I would take my chances.

She later came around a day or two later with some medical students and I called her to my side, I then told her, "Thank you for the good job you did putting me back together I appreciate that, but don't ever tell a patient what you told me without knowing the facts. There was no need for you tell me what you did. I would just keep that in mind for the next patient."

To say that I wasn't too happy about the scare she put in me, would be an understatement, and something I felt I needed to tell her about.

After fixing the obstruction in my bowels I was able to receive food again through my "J" tube directly into my intestine. But for whatever reason my body rejected the feedings in a full dose and so I could only receive about half of what is normal. So at best I was only getting about 1200 calories a day and for my body size and my ability to fight off the cancer I needed about 4000.

Steadily I was losing weight to the tune of about a pound a day. Fortunately I started off weighing 293 pounds otherwise I would have died without the extra weight to lose.

3/25/11 - Three days later I again went into surgery to finalize the closure of my past surgery. They put a special elastic band that wove back and forth across my abdomen leaving a deep slot where they closed me from the surgery. This had to be packed and bandaged everyday for weeks in order for it to heal properly. Each of these operations were draining more life from me and forcing me to go through the ice chips meal routine. Even though I couldn't eat it would still have been nice to sip on some flavored broth now and then or juice.

Finally after several operations my bowels were working normally again. The next step besides treatment was to have the operation for my esophagus and stomach resection and reconstruction.

But prior to this happening I would meet with the oncologist and begin my chemotherapy treatments in hopes of shrinking if not killing the tumor.

I was finally discharged from the hospital a day right around my birthday in early April. Upon arriving home I was greeted by a good friend of mine; Ben (remember, SILLY GOOSE?). My wife pulled the car around back as I had built a ramp up to our deck for easy access into the house for my mom as she got older. Little did I know that I would be needing it for myself.

I was extremely weak at this point, as I would be for the next two years. Swinging my legs out the car door I sat there for a while to regroup and then as quickly as I could I moved across the backyard and up the ramp. I had only gone about thirty feet when I realized I was done in. They got a chair for me and I sat in it in the kitchen for a while to gain enough strength to travel the next phase of my journey to the couch. After some effort I finally arrived there. I shared with Ben a short time and then he went home. I didn't find this out until later but once Ben arrived home he told his wife that he had stopped to visit me and then told her, "He doesn't look good, I don't know if he is going to make it."

Now there are other visits and issues that happened during my prolonged sickness that I won't take the time to share about, because there are just too many of them. What I am sharing with you are the highlights to help you better prepare for your journey.

5/5/11 - I met this day with my thoracic surgeon as my wife and I both agreed that we couldn't wait any longer for the chemotherapy to do its job and opted for the surgery to take place. We both came to the conclusion to just cut it out.

Now as I said I was very weak and if this was any normal visit I probably would have requested a wheelchair because of it being so difficult to walk and the energy it took from me. But during this visit I would be requesting to go under the knife again and knew I needed to show the doctor that I was strong enough to do so. I knew if I didn't have this operation my chance for survival would be almost if not completely non-existent.

I sucked it up and entered the office, showing as much strength as I could muster. We told the doctor our wishes and expressed to him the urgency to get the job done before I was no longer healthy enough to do so (as it was I was borderline or just under the wire on the negative side).

5/17/11 - We arrived for early morning surgery, and I was in the preparation room with my wife. A routine I knew all too well. The surgery that would take place was a risky one even for a healthy person, which I was not. The doctor goes in through both the front and the back. They cut the esophagus above the tumor and then cut the top portion of my stomach off below the tumor as well. They then staple the stomach closed and turn it sideways lifting it up to meet the esophagus and reattaching the two together. Being the esophagus is attached at the head there is no play to bring it down, so the stomach must be stretched up to meet it with whatever play is provided by the small intestine. This then meant a couple of things for me: First off that my stomach is now much smaller, only about two thirds its original size, and the second being that my stomach now located up in my chest, makes things a bit cramped and caused me breathing issues as well.

LIFE AT HOME

After a short stay and recovery at the hospital I was allowed to go home again and after about a week and testing to make sure there were no leaks in my system from the surgery, I was allowed to have my first meal in months.

While in the hospital I would dream about food. Of all the things I wanted, the thing I wanted most was a red candy apple. I longed for it and thought about the juice running down my chin and the crackle of the candy coating. I also would spend time on the internet watching people prepare food on youtube. My wife would ask me why I was torturing myself, but I only replied that it was my hope that I would someday be able to eat those things again, But even though I wanted them I wasn't ready to handle any of those things, at least not just yet.

My first meal at home consisted of two Ritz crackers and three small cubes of cheese, and I had trouble getting that down. I would have to learn how to eat all over again. For one thing my body was no longer used to accepting food the normal way and my stomach was much smaller than before as well. Besides all this was the fact that I was still dealing from the complications and still was using my feeding tube to supplement my intake. I also had to struggle through the fact that I had very little or no appetite at all. I had to literally force food down. The thing I loved to enjoy, food, was now turning out to be my enemy.

On top of the surgery to my stomach reconstruction being risky it was also very painful. I would lay upright in our sofa recliner with my legs extended. The drain had been removed from my back prior to leaving the hospital.

In the hospital I had the use of morphine drip medication to ease my pain, but this wasn't the case at home. The doctor did prescribe some strong medications for pain, but they really didn't help. The pain was constant, twenty-four hours a day. I found it hard to sleep or just to get comfortable. It became so unbearable at one point that I prayed to God saying, "Lord I'm in so much pain right now could you PLEASE take this pain away from me for twenty four hours." Miraculously God had heard my prayer and answered it in the affirmative. Within a short time my pain was gone and remained gone until the next day about that same time. Looking back I should have asked God for more time to be pain free, but the time I had was a welcome relief, and I was more than happy and grateful to have had it.

If I can encourage you in anything it is to make sure you include God in your journey through cancer whether you are a patient or a loved one. Plead with Him and talk to Him about your issues and your struggle. Ask the Lord to lead you to the right people to help you. These are not just doctors and nurses, but Godly people willing to pray for you and counsel you as well. God longs to be a part of your life and that includes your sickness. Depend on Him and trust Him to get you through, it is that belief that will make a difference in how you fight your cancer and in how you walk your walk with Christ as well.

TREATMENTS CONTINUE

The healing to my stomach surgery was slow. The extreme pain lasted almost nine days except for the miracle day God gave me. Eating was still a chore with no appetite or when I did have an appetite as the saying goes my eyes were bigger than my stomach (almost).

Even after surgery my chemotherapy treatments continued one day a week just as before my surgery. That meant almost an hour ride each week, both ways, with my chemo treatments lasting sometime five hours in between the drives.

I would receive two different types of chemo drugs and sometime iron supplements as well. I would sit in the recliner in one of the booths provided at the cancer center. There was TV and

internet access if you wanted it. I always needed someone to drive me as I was unable to do it myself.

My first treatment had my good friend John driving me and taking the day to come to my aid. During that first treatment I experienced an odd sensation like my face was closing in on me and I was feeling very uncomfortable, because of it. It was obviously a reaction to the chemo and I called for the nurse. She in turn called for the physician assistant that was on duty at the time and he stopped the dosage. My body responded by going back to feeling normal after about fifteen minutes. He then gave instructions to start the application of the drug again, but to lessen the rate of the dose my body would receive, slowing it down to see if I would be able to tolerate it or if my body was not able to accept it at all. Fortunately the dose held and would be noted for future administration of the drug. My wife felt so bad because she wasn't there for me and so made it a point to be there from now on unless it was absolutely impossible.

IN REMISSION

Once my esophageal tumor was removed I was considered to have my cancer in remission. The surgeon said that the tumor had shrunk considerable and that it was very well contained and easily removed as it had not spread. He also told me that it had caused my esophagus to close almost completely leaving a hole only the diameter of a pencil. No wonder I couldn't eat.

For safety sake and to follow through with what I started, my oncologist said that we should continue chemotherapy treatments just to make sure. This would take us all the way into October before I would be done, or so I thought.

I had great hopes at this point basing my healing process on the course of others going through cancer like Fred and my brother Ed. I figured I'd be back on my feet by the spring of the following year. I calculated a half a year after my last treatment being sufficient for healing, was I ever wrong.

In order to keep a watch that my cancer would not return I was scheduled every three months to receive a PETSCAN. Because of how they work, these scans show any cancerous tumors or cells to appear as a bright white on the viewing screen.

After having my next scheduled scan after my surgery my oncologist told me that they did find something he didn't like. As my wife and I met with him he explained that they had found another tumor that showed to be cancerous that was 2.5 centimeters in diameter and located in my lymph node somewhere around and behind my left kidney.

It seems this tumor grew even during the process of me receiving chemo treatments and was a good size at that. I thought I would be ending my chemo in a month, but evidently that would not be the case. Being that the chemo that they had used to treat my esophageal tumor had no effect on this tumor they would have to switch medications to combat it.

MOVING ON

So instead of ending my chemo treatments and finding hope in the ability to maybe heal over the next six months I would be moving on into my next phase of chemo treatments. Every week I would continue to make the long drive and day a part of my life. By God's grace I had beaten one cancer, but would He give me grace for a second battle?

My chemo treatments continued on into January of 2012 when I would be meeting with my oncologist yet another time. But before the scheduled meeting I received a phone call from the doctor. He was very pleased to tell me that according to the last PETSCAN the tumor had not just shrunk, but was gone all together. In just three short months it was gone. It truly was a miracle, and one that answered my question if God's will was to grant me grace a second time. He not only came through, but did it in a big way.

My treatments continued on though to make sure it would stay gone. I met with the doctor again, and because of the chemo we had switched to he showed concern it might have an adverse effect on my body, causing my fingers to go numb. He expressed that he wanted to take me off that particular chemo while keeping me on the other. He told me that nine weeks was about the time these effects would happen, so he wanted to stop that chemo treatment in eight weeks.

Unfortunately for me it was too late and the two smaller fingers on my right hand as well as my pinky on my left hand went numb and started to curl in towards my palm as I have already shared with you.

I had to keep working them several times a day stretching them back and today they are better,

but still curl in somewhat, and there is some pain when I stretch them back into position. It also made typing almost impossible as I couldn't feel the keys I was hitting. Although I didn't have a desire to type then I was thinking about down the road, and just typing in something to look up on the internet became a hunt and peck game.

In the latter days of my cancer I was interested in writing Christian books based on my own experiences and struggles in order to help other believers in Christ and in order to reinvent myself as I had to close my business. I felt writing these books about the things God had shown me in the hope of helping others face their challenges would be a positive and encouraging form of ministry and a way to serve my God. But not being able to type like I used to would truly complicate things. I considered getting a speak and type program, but preferred typing as I type about as fast as I think through what I am wanting to write, and the two go together well.

As I started writing my first book about my earlier bout with depression and how God healed me from it ([details are at the end of this book](#)) in less than a month, I knew I needed to work my fingers back into shape if that was to happen. I learned that by positioning my hands differently on the keyboard and typing my fingers could find the right keys even without feeling them. I continued to stretch them and work them and today can type about as fast as I ever could. God had once again come through, blessing and giving me victory in yet another way.

Chemo can affect your body in different ways and you need to understand that. You can talk with your doctor and ask the type of side effects that your particular chemo is known to cause in order to help you prepare for it.

My brother Ed didn't experience a major side effect to his treatment until after his last dose. Shortly after his last treatment he was in the grocery store checking out and suddenly felt very cold. There was a police officer there that asked him if he was OK? My brother then told him what he was feeling. The policeman followed my brother all the way home to make sure there were no problems. From that point on it was hard for my brother to get warm, he had an electric blanket on him and still was cold. This symptom lasted for a while until his body was able to fight it off again. During his chemo treatment he did experience an effect on his taste buds as well.

There are also the more common symptoms of chemotherapy treatment like hair loss, loss of appetite, vomiting, and the like. Asking your doctor about your specific type of treatment no matter what it is will help you prepare for it in the best possible way.

4/5/12 - Was my last day of my second run of chemo. I was still very weak but finally making my way to church after a long period of absence. My wife would bring me to the front door and I would again swing my legs out the car door and get myself acclimated then quickly enter inside and find a seat before I was too weak to stand or possibly pass out. It was a good thing that the chairs were padded as I had no natural padding left on my rump and sitting on wooden pews I found to be painful.

I longed to get better. My healing was far slower than even I expected. I could not sleep on my sides at all or my stomach (although I never found laying on my stomach comfortable). The only way I could find comfort was directly on my back and especially with my knees bent up. If I tried to lay on my right side I could tolerate it for only a few minutes and struggled to breathe, if I laid on my left side I would only last a few seconds for the same reason. Fortunately I was able to find some relief on my back or I don't know what I would have done.

I also found myself developing a gagging reflex that would sometimes lead to vomiting. This gagging was also coupled with a cough that developed towards the fall of that year that tasted rancid at times. Even after my chemo stopped and my body had a chance to heal it seemed like it wasn't.

October came and it was again time for my oncology appointment. My original doctor along with my surgeon had both left the hospital to pursue careers as chief of surgery and a position in oncology at a top well known hospital. Although I hated to lose each of them it spoke well of their ability as doctors and I was blessed to have them on my side during some of my toughest times.

During my doctor visit I had a physician's assistant in place of my new oncologist. She was very professional and detailed in her care. During our meeting of questions and answers my wife made the comment about my rancid tasting cough. This didn't set right with the assistant so she called down and set up an immediate appointment for a chest x-ray to see if there was a

problem.

We went next door to the hospital from the cancer center and had the x-ray done. Traveling home we got a phone call that they wanted us to return again to the hospital for further testing. We were almost home so we told them we would be coming back up in two days for another appointment and would have the testing done then.

10/29/12 - Arriving two days later they took a sample of fluid from my side next to my lung. They had discovered from the x-ray that I had a pocket of fluid next to my lung. They sent the sample out and found it full of bacteria. This wasn't a good sign and I continued to remain very weak as well.

10/31/12 - I was admitted back into the hospital for surgery to clean out the contaminated fluid between my left lung and ribs. My new surgeon was top notch just as the old one was and he decided to take a less intrusive form of surgery to spare me a more prolonged healing process. He cut into my side and cleaned out what he could and then inserted a drain line into the hole. The drain would empty into a box I had to carry with me at all times and hook on my bed or couch as I slept.

Several weeks went by and things didn't seem any better. The fluid was ugly looking a sometimes milky. A further visit to the doctor had him suggesting that we do the more extensive surgery to really find out what was going on. I agreed.

12/12/12 - I was brought back into the hospital for the more extensive surgery. This time they had to remove a section of a rib and create a large window to work in. He then vacuumed out all the nasty fluid and cleaned the wound thoroughly.

Although this surgery only required a temporary drain, this wound was about six inches long and four inches deep, and it had to be packed everyday with gauze and bandaged with a dressing. It was extremely painful at first to have the packing put in, and it took quite a while before I was able to tolerate the process without pain.

Although I did get to spend Christmas at home with my family, the doctor was still not happy and actually noticed a piece of what appeared to be a carrot back in the hole he had just cleaned

out. Therefore he performed more tests and procedures sending scopes down my esophagus and into my bronchial area as well. He was looking for a tear or slit where food might have aspirated into the area from my eating.

Even after these tests no conclusive results surfaced and he remained puzzled. Something was continuing to get back up between my ribs and my lungs but how? My wife then suggested to him that sometimes it smelt like baby poop. So after consulting with a gastrointestinal surgeon they decided it might be coming from below. Weakness was now my middle name and a very real reflection of how I always felt. Walking became a difficult task and the weight lost from muscle didn't help.

Yet another surgery was scheduled to explore my abdomen for possible tears and to place an ileostomy bag on me if needed. This is where they sever your small intestine and create a stoma which is a little nipple end of the intestine that sticks slightly outside your body, diverting your feces into the ileostomy bag.

The idea was to use the ileostomy for fear that I was too weak to endure a more prolonged surgery to repair whatever problems they might find. The plan was to divert the flow of my normal operation of my intestines and allow my body to do the repairs naturally over time.

During the exploratory surgery they did find the cause to my issue. My colon as well as my diaphragm had a tear in them and this caused poop to find its way up into my chest. This is why my wife smelled what she did. Since that time I have had no other problems in that area but if it had not been for my wife's question of my rancid cough and the physician's assistant calling for an x-ray I most probably would not be writing these words. My surgeon after finding the root of the problem came in to talk to me and told me that people go septic and die from what I had. This is just another example of God's hand on me and my journey through cancer.

As I write this book I am still recovering from my wound in my side. It has been eight months and it will probably be another six before it is completely healed, and I have a doctor appointment in a few days to see about getting my bag removed and my intestines reconnected. Although I still have these procedures to go I can clearly see the light at the end of the tunnel and now that I am cancer free I see my body finally healing. Right now I consider myself to be at

about 40% in strength from what I use to be. Which is a long way from where I was only a few months ago where I had to have my kids take the lid off of my Tupperware type containers and there was also the fact that I couldn't break a half pound of spaghetti into a pot of boiling water, both because I was just that weak.

Today I still cannot do what I use to do. But I am working towards it and with God's grace the possibilities are endless. As you might recall I only had according to the stats a 14 - 16% chance of living, (no wonder when you see all the complications involved with my type of cancer) yet God caused me to be in that surviving percentage. He has shown me miracle after miracle and has spared my life here on earth several times during my journey through cancer, and I know He can do the same for you. Don't let doctors or statistics frighten you. If you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you will find the strength to go through whatever you need to in order to endure, all you have to do is ask Him and He will provide it for you. He wants to go through this with you, all you have to do is invite Him in and allow Him to direct the process as you follow along for the ride.

Remember to work like everything depends on you and trust God like everything depends on Him, because it does!

CHAPTER 4 - WHAT I DIDN'T EXPECT

First of all I didn't expect my healing process to take anywhere near this long. But again I was judging my expected results on other people and their recovery. I've since learned that I need to judge my own healing by my own situation. No two people are alike so I never should have figured that cancer for people would be different.

Now besides the physical healing there was something that never crossed my mind until I came upon it through my cancer, and that is the emotional side of the disease. Yes believe it or not there is a whole other dimension to this sickness and it is the emotional journey that parallels the physical one.

As time goes on in your cancer you become not only physically tired, but your body can shut down emotionally as well. As one of my best friends Fred has discovered not just in his struggle with cancer, but in the struggle he saw in others, there is an emotional side of cancer that really is never talked about much, if at all, which is why I am addressing it in this chapter.

As Fred and I were sitting after church one day we were talking about another person that had cancer. Fred offered to talk to them about their sickness having gone through it three separate times himself. But they declined his offer and didn't really want to talk about it. Both Fred and I have found this to be true in many people facing cancer.

Part of the reason is they are still in shock from the news and are trying desperately to sort things out. Cancer waits for no man, so there is in a sense an urgency to figure out not only what has happened, but how do I get out of it as well.

I've known people that have never mentioned a word about their cancer until after their healing and recovery. Only then did they really share with people. I know in my own life for the first year and a half I shut down emotionally. I still knew that God was in charge and still put my trust

in Him, but emotionally I just closed the door on everything.

For that year and a half I didn't really watch TV, or read, or go online much. I just sat on the couch and thought. I tried to figure out how I got here and what was next in the journey. I functioned normally around people, being cordial and all. But inside I was shutting down and really didn't want to bother with anyone. People would talk to me and ask me questions, but my responses were short and to the point. I wasn't up to having long in depth conversations.

Friends told me that I was depressed, but in my mind I had understood what depression was having faced it years earlier, and although I was down, I didn't consider that to be it. I wasn't angry and I wasn't sad, instead I felt more of a numbness than anything else. For hour after hour I would sit and think about nothing really. I had no interest in anything, to be honest I didn't even want to read my Bible. I just wanted to somehow get my head around my disease and understand it. Not in the sense of what cancer is, as far as an intellectual definition, but what my cancer would mean for me and my family.

This may or may not happen to you as well, but if it does don't think of yourself as the oddball or not strong enough to handle what you are facing. Every one of us deals with issues and problems in different ways. Facing cancer is no different. Some people run from problems, while other attack them head on, and yet others hide from them.

Cancer is a big problem that requires a great deal of effort to combat it, both physically and emotionally. So don't sell yourself short, realize that there are many others facing your same type of battle and many that are probably trying to sort it out emotionally as well.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Once you start your treatments you must understand that if you are going through chemotherapy, then in essence you are having poison dumped into your body in order to kill an enemy substance. These treatments can do more than hurt you physically; they can also affect the emotional side of things by upsetting the natural balance of your hormones and body chemistry.

I know that as I battled my cancer and went through my treatments my testosterone levels plummeted and my blood pressure dropped drastically too. This left me with zero sex drive. I

had literally no desire to be intimate. Just the thought of sex was a turnoff to me. Yet I knew that I was letting my wife down as I struggled through it for over two years, and because of the above mentioned items I could not be completely intimate with my wife and fully unite our love for each other.

That was hard on me and it was hard on her as well. It is just one more thing to add to the list of things to work at in preparing for your experience with cancer, and it doesn't matter whether you are the patient or a spouse you need to be prepared to handle it if the issue should ever come about. You also need to realize that it might not even enter into your sickness, but if it does, don't take it as a personal blow. It isn't anyone's fault except the cancer. If you are a spouse on the receiving end of this, be patient with them. They are not trying to hurt you or your relationship. They are only trying to survive.

Make sure to keep the lines of communication open and tell each other how you feel, but do it with respect and out of love for each other. If a person you love is going through cancer and has shut down emotionally, stand by their side like my wife did. Eventually they will begin to open up again as they process the things they need to, so try your best to wait patiently for them, and don't forget to tell them you love them along the way!

I've also noticed this about cancer patients. Once they reach a level of understanding for themselves and come to grips with their disease they become very open to sharing about it. So it can be a normal thing to shut down and then be open again. Have patience with them. I am sure their desire is to love you the same way you love them. So show that love to each other and find a common ground to bring yourselves together on. It may only be for a time, so just trust that it is, and **CHERISH EVERY MOMENT** good or bad, in doing so it will make any wait doable.

HITTING THE WALL

In talking with my friend Fred about writing this book he shared with me a story about his final operation and his recovery. Now realize too that Fred has always recovered much faster than me and though my cancer was probably more severe he experienced cancer three times to my two.

Tina his wife was caring for him in this last recovery where he had surgical mesh implanted around his abdomen from the weakened tissue from all his surgeries prior from colon cancer. As

he sat on the bed with Tina caring for him, he began to cry. He then told his wife, “Tina, I can’t do this anymore. This is the last time I can deal with this.”

Now Fred had come to his wall. It is the point where you just become too tired to go on emotionally or physically. It is that breaking point that says, “I’ve had enough and I just don’t care anymore.”

Experiencing this at the end of a recovery like Fred, would probably have little effect on you finalizing your healing. It is more of a declaration of what you have gone through and the fact you never want to face it again. The truth be told, none of us do! But on the other hand if you hit the wall in the middle of your journey with cancer it can have a whole different affect, so you must safeguard yourself from the desire to quit. It very well could be that your life here on earth will depend upon it.

At this point, as always, you need to seek God for the strength to carry on to the end. If these are your thoughts then you have already relinquished to defeat in your mind to your cancer and given in, extinguishing your drive to fight. God knows that what you are going through is hard, which is why He wants you to take Him with you on the journey. You will need His strength and wisdom as I did to succeed. It is OK to vent and cry and stomp your feet, but don’t ever give up.

Let me share with you an excerpt from another of my books; a devotional called “Real Life Devotions For Real Life,” ([details about this at the end of this book](#)) that will better illustrate what I am trying to say:

Read: James 1: 12

¹²Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (NIV)

Each year for just about seventeen years and as part of our ministry outreach at Youth for Christ I ran and organized a bicycle trip from the Pocono Mountains in northeast Pennsylvania to the southern New Jersey shore. I would take kids from our ministry and challenge them with this riding experience, over the course of two or sometimes three days and have them bike between one hundred and fifty and two hundred and ten miles.

This type of journey required training, and a lot of it. For three months prior to the trip we would have meetings covering bicycle safety, rules of the road, how to ride as a group, bicycle repair, and would also require actual group and individual riding time.

Each person was required to log in four hundred miles of riding time prior to the trip including a fifty mile group ride we called “The Qualifier.” The purpose of all this ride time was to force the kids to not only get used to handling the bike in all situations, but build up their endurance for such a trip, as the first day of the ride required over a hundred miles of travel to reach our evening resting place.

We would leave the first day of the trip on a day late in June at 5:00 AM. After traveling fourteen miles we would come to our greatest obstacle of the day, Bangor Mountain. This mountain has a steep windy road that cuts up through it for 2.4 miles.

As we would leave its base I was always the last person for two reasons: 1. I wanted to make sure I could be there for anyone struggling that fell behind, and 2. I was usually 260 plus pounds which meant I probably had to fight harder than anyone else on the trip to overcome the challenge.

As the incline increased that meant getting off my seat and standing on the pedals to increase the leverage to overcome the resistance. How the metal tubing of my bike frame held up under the strain of my weight and the force from each downward stroke of the pedal was beyond me. To watch me climb that mountain meant a steady slow rhythm. It was often said that it looked like I was walking in slow motion as I cranked the pedals in a circular action.

I had always made it a rule that under no circumstances was anyone allowed to walk their bikes. I wanted each person to earn the right to say that they had been able to accomplish the whole trip riding on their bicycles. Besides on a mountain like this it is much harder to start from a dead stop than to just keep moving forward no matter how slow.

Each pedal crank inched me closer to the top, although it felt like it was taking forever. If I felt I needed to, I would look ahead and pick an object then focus on making it just to that object. Then I would pick another one and repeat the process. In doing this it was a way to eat at the mountain in little bites instead of being overwhelmed by its great size.

Curve after curve, and higher and higher, I and the others would climb. It was easy to want to stop, my body was crying out from the discomfort, but I pressed onward up through a very steep part of the mountain. Then finally around the last curve the hill began to lessen and my speed would pick up and finally the others who had already made it to the top and were resting in the parking lot would come into view.

Once all of us were together, I would gather us all around and we would line up facing back down the mountain we had all just climbed and with a loud voice, we would all shout in unison, "I BEAT YOU MOUNTAIN."

Speeding down the other side of that mountain with the cool air cutting through your helmet and enveloping your body was certainly a welcome reward for all the hard work and preparation it had taken to successfully get to the top.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Sure it would have been easy to just give up half way up that mountain. In fact it would have been easier to just never have decided to take the challenge to ride all the way to the shore in the first place.

For some people they look at their walk with Christ the same way they would look at that bicycle trip. For some they are willing to do what it takes to meet the challenges of knowing God on a personal basis, and for others their choice is to give up shortly after that relationship begins with God, and for some they are even willing to give up on life all together.

I remember meeting a woman one time that was on her way to drop off her two children at someone's house she knew and then was going to commit suicide, ending her life. As I sat across from her I told her about Jesus, but she refused to listen to me, instead her whole focus was on giving up. Finally, after saying some shocking things to her about the reality of what she was going to do, she looked at me and asked me, "Tell me about this Jesus one more time." A short time later she walked out of our meeting with a Bible in her possession and a child in each hand heading back home to her husband, because she accepted Jesus and was willing to trust Him with her life.

Now no one ever said that coming to Christ and truly living for Him would be easy, and you would never face any problems. If they did then they were lying to you. There may be many downhills, but there are certainly a great deal of mountains to climb on our way to reach them, and like the bike trip it requires a great deal of preparation to accomplish those climbs.

The great thing about God though is He is God. He knows it all and therefore knows just how much we can endure and face as we climb with one stroke of the pedal after another. Remember I told you that one of the reasons I was always last was to encourage those that might fall behind and were struggling. I would come alongside of them and keep pace with them talking to them and distracting them from the hurt they were facing. If they needed to stop I would stop with them and encourage them that they could do it and that they could finish the course.

God is even greater at that when it comes to our walk with Him. I don't know what things have transpired in your life that might look like a mountain to you, but God surely does, and He is not only able, but willing to come alongside of you as you deal with it. It can be easy to just give up, but I am reminded of something my grandmother used to say, "Perseverance conquers all things." Even to this day those words hold true for me. Our goal doesn't need to be in how fast we run a race or how strong we are when we finish, but instead that we make sure we finish!

Remember the hardest part of life, facing death, was already dealt with by Jesus dying for our sins on the cross. The hardest part of the journey is already been done through the work of Christ. All we have to do is trust and follow, and with God by our side that can mean that one day we can turn around and face the mountain of life and scream, "I BEAT YOU MOUNTAIN." God freely gives us the strength and encouragement to do what we need to do, and just the thought of that can keep us from giving up and instead can push us on and help us to endure all the way to the end.

CHAPTER 5 - DEVASTATED

When I first developed cancer I remember talking with my children and telling them the news. I also remember telling them that I was going to fight through it and that everything would be OK. As time went on though I learned this battle was not going to be as easy as I thought and it began to take its toll on me in every area of my life.

In the Bible in the Gospel of Luke chapter 2, verse 52 it says this:

⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (NIV)

This verse even though it is short describes Jesus' complete walk with God. Notice how He grew:

Wisdom - that is mentally

Stature - that is physically

Favor with God - that is spiritually

Favor with man - that is socially

Depending on the severity of your cancer it has the potential to affect every one of these four areas of your life. So although I can't speak for others except from what I was told by them I will do my best to share with you my perspective from my own personal experience about the devastation I felt in each of these areas.

WISDOM - MENTALLY

I shared with you earlier about some of the emotional anguish I felt as I went through my sickness and how I shut down for a period of time. I did come to notice that my shut down

emotionally or mentally was directly related to my physical well being. As I began to slowly get better so did my thought process, and my desire to actually want to do things.

I am an avid hunter and fisherman. I love the outdoors in that respect and always have. Even when I was little I loved the adventure of being in the woods and exploring. I would fish for hours on the dock during our family vacations as a young boy, and I started hunting as soon as I was old enough to get a license and venture out on my own. I invested a great deal of time and money in those two hobbies. I spend countless hours both hunting and fishing in order to perfect my techniques, and I dropped a great deal of money into those sports as far as equipment is concerned, building up my accessories over the years to include everything from game calls, to fishing rods, to rifles and boats and outboard and electric motors.

I also spent a great deal of time reading and learning about those sports, learning from other hunters and fisherman in the vast array of periodicals available today. But as I traveled deeper down the road with my sickness I remember having my wife cancel most of my magazine subscription because if I couldn't do those things, then I didn't want to read about them either.

You would think the opposite would be true, that at least reading about them would encourage me to get better. In reality it made me feel less hopeful that I ever would. I was looking at the person I use to be, but was faced with the person I was now.

The only thing that held opposite to this fact was my longing for food and to eat again, which had me searching the internet for new recipes and watching videos of how to cooking them. I guess it was the fact that I needed food to survive, and would very soon be able to enjoy it again. But with hunting and fishing that required a stamina that I just wasn't capable of and even now I am limited in my pursuits of those things I loved to do. This will mark the third year in a row that I have not gone hunting, and though I have fished I do it from a boat or a chair and only for about an hour at a time as I still get tired and the seating is uncomfortable.

But now as I gain strength I am reading about such things again and actually longing to do them more consistently. I especially love to duck hunt and hope that by next fall I will be out in the marsh following my pursuits in full vigor. I have planned with my brother to go on a deep sea fishing trip this November (it was always our annual brother get away day) which I have not

been able to do for the last few years.

All this is to say that it is OK to take a break from your pursuits. It may be that your mind is dealing with so much right now you just don't want to clutter it with other things even things you love to do. This was my case as well, but I am sure that all that will change as your physical healing increases.

Traveling through the four areas of our life you will find that each of them, although we treat them separate, are really totally intertwined with each other and one affects the other a great deal. After all, how you think determines what your body will do as an action, and how your spirit is, controls how you think as well. It is a circle of one facet drawing from the other.

The other thing I discovered about my mental stamina was it was greatly affected by the unknown. We often need to satisfy things in our mind in order to find peace about them and not knowing the result of something causes our brain to shift into overdrive in search for answers. We find it hard to relax and rest and that type of thinking process requires a great deal of energy and can leave us empty and exhausted.

Let me be upfront with you! There will be a great deal about your cancer you can't control, or even know about, so don't sweat it. Yes you should inform yourself as much as you can, but leave the unknown in God's hands and direct those questions to God in prayer. Then focus the energy you would have senselessly lost in worry or concern about those things instead to your loved ones that are standing beside you and need your love and support as much as you need theirs.

Over all though I would suggest to you that you don't follow my example with how I reacted to my cancer mentally. If you must take a break from the things you love to do because you are unable to do them or you are focusing too heavily on your sickness, make the break a short one and push your way through it. I believe that although my physical condition affected my mental status the reverse can hold true as well. Spending less time thinking about your cancer and more time focusing on your present strengths and abilities I believe will help you rebound that much more quickly as you allow your spirit to change your way of thinking and help beat the devastation that your sickness can have on your mind.

Romans chapter 12, verses 1-2 says:

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

Allow God's Holy Word today to drive out your stinking thinking from your mind. Don't worry about things others might worry about, instead take it to God and find refreshment instead of devastation. Don't forget to offer your body as a living sacrifice to Him no matter how broken it may be at the time, God still wants you and your service to Him. Rest in the fact today that He is your God and you are His child, and none of His children have ever had anything to worry about because of it.

STATURE - PHYSICALLY

Devastation is a word I would definitely use to describe my war with cancer and the affect it had on me. Probably more than any other area of my life, my physical body took the worst beating. In my journey above in the prior chapters you can see just how much the human body is designed to take. It is truly a work of wonder how God created us and our bodies to endure what this world can dish out and more.

Yes there are limitations we all know that, but the amount of endurance our bodies have in adjusting to things as well as the God given ability to heal is amazing to say the least. Over the course of two years my body persevered through at least nine surgeries as well as other procedures, yet although I remained weak, through it all my body rebounded back again and again.

Now this is not to say that these surgeries and treatment don't affect the body, they do, and in a big way. So what I am trying to say is that you need to understand that although it may seem you are being put through a meat grinder of sorts, your body can handle a lot unless there was signification damage to it previously.

Now we all must face death at one point and cancer can push your body beyond its capability to

sustain life here on earth. But you should try and keep your focus on the fact that you can face whatever lies ahead knowing that God designed you to endure.

When I first came home from the hospital after several surgeries and treatments I found myself sleeping on the living room couch for several reasons. One was that it was more comfortable. In bed I felt claustrophobic with the covers on and as I said earlier could only sleep directly on my back. On the couch I could swing my leg up on the back and adjust the covers without waking my wife. The other reason was that my schedule became totally messed up and I wouldn't go to sleep until 4 AM some times.

Now my bathroom was only about twenty-five feet from the couch yet because I was so weak and my blood pressure so low I very easily became lightheaded and would pass out trying to make it to the toilet. I would sit upright for several minutes to let my body adjust and then stand and hurry to the toilet and try and sit down so I wouldn't wind up on the floor.

This event didn't just take place in the bathroom. Several times while moving from room to room I could feel myself going and my wife when she saw me would try and hold me up, by pinning me against the wall. Although because of her small size she was not always successful in keeping me up.

I remember one day we were headed out to church I made it to the front door, I opened it, and passed out without really any warning. I fell straight back, my wife tried to catch me but couldn't, and I woke up on the floor with my head on a shoe in front of the foyer closet. Needless to say we skipped church that day.

Some of the other items that devastated my body were my loss of appetite, constipation, fatigue, loss of muscle and strength, nausea, limited consumption of food when I could eat and difficulty walking any distance.

I was a walking (barely walking) wreck. Yet although there were many times when I thought to myself I am just not going to make it, my body responded to the challenge and kept going.

All this to say that knowing what I had to go through then and if the fact ever came up that I had to face cancer again, I would! Even though it would be difficult and put my body right back in

the same position I was in a couple of years ago. I would face it knowing that God would give me the strength I needed when I needed it and that He gave me a body that so far, by His grace, has beat the odds.

So although your cancer may be devastating on your body, God has also built into it the ability for it to repair itself. Trust then in the fact that God designed it and made it to last 70 years or more under normal circumstances as it states in Psalms chapter 90, verse 10:

¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and fly away. (NIV)

That thought should help build your faith to face what you need to face, and if you do hit a wall in the process trust God to carry you through where you can't. He is more than willing to carry you!

FAVOR WITH GOD - SPIRITUALLY

This was one area where I can say that my disease didn't affect me negatively to any great degree. If anything, cancer drove me closer to God and forced me to live in where my friend Chip calls the MIRACLE ZONE.

Losing my business, my strength, my finances, and more, instead of driving me from God, caused me to cling ever closer to God. I had no choice but to seek Him as my strength and I have never regretted that decision. Trusting God with all I could to not only save my life, but provide for our family was wonderful to watch; seeing God truly working in my life. Yes it was very scary, but exciting as well.

During this time when I could no longer work we applied for Social Security Disability benefits to help sustain our income. My business up until this point brought in enough income where my wife only worked seasonally and because she wanted to. Now that my income was gone she was forced to try and find full time work to help cover our bills.

Fortunately we were accepted for Social Security Disability the first time, but there is a five month waiting period before you receive any checks. What were we to do in the meantime? Bills

continued to pile up and our income was minimal, that is where God showed up in a big way.

Envelopes were delivered to our mailbox containing checks and cards from different people. Checks ranged from different amounts all the way up to \$1,000. Although these gifts helped greatly it wasn't enough to cover our food and general bills and our mortgage too. That is where a couple we have developed a friendship with in ministry came through. They contacted us and told us that God had laid it on their heart to cover our mortgage for the next seven months.

I was overwhelmed and knew that God is a God that sustains His children. For the next several months those gifts continued to be a part of our life. One church Sunday School class even took us on in their support for us both financially and prayerfully. Another church brought food for us and even had fuel oil delivered for our heating system.

I have a metal can much bigger than a coffee can size stuffed to overflowing with letters and cards from people that sent us messages of hope and told us they were praying for us. I know without a doubt that the prayers of those people are what kept me alive and without them I would not be writing these words to you right now.

Let me share with you an excerpt from my devotional book I wrote that helps show what I felt as God carried me and my family through not just my disease, but life as well:

Read: Deuteronomy 30: 19-20

¹⁹This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (NIV)

As we pulled into the parking lot of the amusement park, I could see the huge clown that hung above its entrance, and excitement began to flow through me. Mom and Dad, decided to take me for a day to Dorney Park. Entering in, there was just so much that a kid could do, it was overwhelming. But there was one ride that really caught my eye, because of the mystery of what was inside. It was the old fun house.

After the usual harassment given to a father by his child, my dad conceded and decided to take me inside. Being only about ten years old, and having little fear, I ventured a slight bit ahead of my father, but close enough to know I could comfort him should he become a little afraid.

Down the first hallway we went. About halfway down, compressed air exploded from small air guns in the floor, scaring me half to death. As we rounded the next bend, I found myself now standing by my father's side, and peering front and back, looking for the next thing that would try and take me by surprise. Slightly down the next hall, we encountered them, the OGA BOOGERS (at least that is what I called them). Ugly beasts, hairy, with eyes that hung from their head, and claws six inches long (or there about, I didn't take the time to measure them). I think they were lunging back and forth at us, going oga booger, oga booger! Ten years old and my life was already going to be over.

By now my hand was tightly clenched onto my dad's pant leg, and feeling a little safer we pressed on. Each dark corridor held something even more frightening than the last, and each hall brought me clinging closer to my father. Within a short time, both my arms were wrapped around my dad's leg as we traveled the gauntlet of fear together. Somehow the fact of knowing my dad was there with me, made me feel safe, even when it seemed I wasn't. Again the OGA BOOGERS attacked, this time in full force. There were more of them and they were coming more often, and boy were they ugghhhggglyyyyy!

The barrage of monsters was so overwhelming, that I noticed I was no longer moving under my own power. During the last onslaught of creatures, I had somehow now wrapped both my legs and arms around my father's leg and slid down until I was sitting on his foot, facing his knee. Onward we continued, my father now carrying me on his foot. With each step, he would carry me forward, and that much closer to the safety that lie outside, and he did it without one complaint. Throughout the entire ordeal it was as if he took joy in seeing me cling to him, in knowing how very much I needed him! He was happy to just be there for me, and to comfort me as each and every monster made his attack.

Riding along on my father's leg I no longer felt afraid as I had when I was traveling by myself or just standing by his side. No, it seemed that now I was in the midst of his protection, and if anything wanted to get me they would have to go through my dad first and that would be no easy

task. After all, my dad was fearless throughout the whole course of events. So as we finally made our way safely out of the fun house, from my lowly perch upon my father's foot I realized that day just how strong and powerful my father really was, and how fortunate I was to have him to cling to!

A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

I find that fear is one of the greatest things that stop us as Christians from being all we can be for our Lord. Think about it. Many of us don't share the good news about Jesus with others for a lot of fearful reasons. We begin to rationalize our fears, and make up excuses why we shouldn't do what God Himself through the Holy Spirit has laid on our hearts to do. Maybe we say in our thoughts, I don't want to offend someone by telling them about Jesus, or I just don't have the talent to do that, or I am afraid that the right words won't come out, or I might lose my job, or my status of who I am!

Maybe there are other things that frighten you, like the fact that in your heart you know that God is leading you to go someplace, maybe to a new job, maybe to move your family to the other side of the country or the world. Maybe God has called you to go into the ministry, or the mission field, or maybe a thousand other things. You and I know what they are and only you and I can make the decision as to whether or not those leadings will ever become reality!

In this life we live in, there are an awful lot of OGA BOOGERS. Monsters that represent fear around every dark hallway and corridor we travel. But along with those monsters and creatures of fear, there is one greater than our fear of all those monsters combined, and that is our DAD! Our heavenly Father and He stands by our side ready at all times to give His comfort, as we cling to Him.

Fear has tremendous ominous stopping power when we travel ahead of our Father and confront it face to face on our own. But from our lowly perch on our Father's foot, and with our arms wrapped tightly around His leg, fear has no more stopping power, than a butterfly has against a charging rhino. Because we are no longer resting in our strength and in our mortal imperfect selves, but we are resting on the foot of the most high, on the power of the living God, and we no longer are traveling under our own power but under His!

In order for you and I to experience the awesome safety of riding on the foot of our Father, there is one thing that needs to happen. We need to replace the fear in our life, with the faith in our God.

In order for me to experience the safety of my father years ago in that fun house, one thing needed to happen, I needed to trust him to get me through, it was that simple and it still is today. That is what faith is, a trust that says yes, when logic says no! Remember this, that no matter what monster or creature of fear has raised its ugly head in your life, that if you place that faith of yours in your Father instead of in yourself, then as you exit the next ride of fear in your life, you can look up from your lowly perch upon your Father's foot and realize just how strong and powerful your heavenly Father really is, and how fortunate you are to have Him to cling to!

That story that happened so long ago with my earthly father helped me to identify with my Heavenly Father and what I was going through. In your cancer, trust God to handle every aspect of your journey through your sickness, and allow your sickness if it does nothing positive for you, let it at least draw you into a deeper relationship with your Heavenly Father.

FAVOR WITH MAN - SOCIALLY

Now cancer and most major problems can have a way of isolating you from others and cutting off your social connections. I think the largest reason is that when faced with a huge problem like cancer we feel that nobody including our spouse could understand what we are going through on every facet of our being.

That may be true, but that shouldn't keep us isolated from people. People are our life blood in a way, and what God often uses to inspire us and push us on to greatness. So it is important that we not only remain open to people, but also make sure we surround ourselves with the right ones.

Our family should never be excluded from our social network and in fact should be our go to source when facing difficult times. I know that not everybody comes from a good family life. Many of you may have even come from homes where you faced abuse both verbally and physically, and I am sorry for that. But that doesn't mean that family need be narrowed down to just your blood relations, family can also incorporate your church family as well.

I have been blessed to have a good family life growing up and people that cared for each other. Regardless of whether we annoyed one another at times, we still loved each other and wanted the best for each other and still do.

With my surgeries I did require some wound care, and this care would be needed for several months. Fortunately my sister-in-law Franny is a registered nurse and because our insurance does not cover in home nursing she volunteered to care for me until the wounds were small enough for my wife to take over.

Each day, for months, she would come to my aid and pack and rebandage my wounds. Something I couldn't do as I wasn't good working on myself or I couldn't reach it and something my wife couldn't do because it made her queasy. Franny became a big part of my social network of people and for that I am ever grateful.

My brothers were another example, each one calling or visiting me often, sometimes weekly to check up on me, with each helping financially from time to time. My wife especially stood by my side, going to my doctor visits, my chemo treatments and driving me when I couldn't. My children also cared for me cooking me lunch and breakfast from time to time and bringing in the firewood, and even buying firewood for the whole winter, as well as helping out with things like cutting the grass and such.

I came to realize early on that I needed people to surround me and support me so that I could rest and try and get better. People were more than willing to help in so many ways with bringing meals and firewood and so much more.

I am reminded of a story of a soldier that had been captured and isolated in a cell without personal contact. At first his imprisonment was bearable, but as time went on his need to connect with another human being was strong. One day another prisoner was sweeping the floor outside his cell and swept the dirt under the large gap beneath his door and into his compartment. Out of dislike the soldier swept the dirt back out again into the hall. Again the dirt came in back under the door and into the cell. Soon a vicious battle of dust and dirt began with both men finally reaching under the door to get at the other. As their hands grasped, the feeling of unity and personal touch overwhelmed them and they held onto each other for the longest time.

I would encourage you as you face cancer to surround yourself with as many friends and family as you can for several reasons: One is you will need their help. This may feel awkward at first, but trust me they want to help and you need to let them. The second reason is because you need people to connect with. Our bodies need rest and food, and you and your soul need people to connect to and encourage you and love you, and for you to love them back.

Your tendency may be to close off your social network during your time you are battling with your sickness. Don't do it! Instead embrace those people and let God show you how much He cares for you and loves you through them.

CHAPTER 6 - WORKING TO RECOVER

Even as I sit and write this, I am still in the process of recovering. Although I am out of the woods and cancer free, I still have some distance to go to approach the area I would call normal.

Now a good weight for me with my bone structure is probably between 210 and 220 pounds. Yet right now I only weigh about 165 pounds and believe me it shows. I look like a POW victim from World War Two. Even at that weight though people come up to me and tell me I look good, to which I reply, "That is what they say about dead people isn't it?" Which usually draws a chuckle, or if people ask me how I feel I often tell them, "I went from horrible, to poor, and hopefully I will get to average."

It actually feels good to joke about my recovery, as there were several times that I thought I would never have one. There were many times I would tell God, "I don't think I'm going to make it." But He knew the outcome regardless of the statistic and no matter what I thought either. That is what makes Him God and not me.

I will tell you though that recovering from cancer isn't as easy as I envisioned it to be. There are times when it can be downright frustrating. My mind says I can do things, but my body still balks at the idea.

After leaving full time ministry several years ago I went back into business installing heating and air conditioning systems for about two years and then got sick. So I had to close my business down due to the fact that I could not perform the work anymore, and I came to grips with that and I understood it.

Just a week ago I purchased a Nissan Xterra SUV with the money I received from selling my construction vehicle from the business. But these cars have a timing belt in them that need to be changed every 105,000 miles. The car had 113,000 miles on it when I purchased it. So I figured I

would save money and change it myself. This job is not a small one and can take anywhere from 4 - 6 hours for most skilled people, but being I am still only about 40% of what I was, I figured two full days to be safe.

Just this morning I crawled under the car and drained the radiator fluid, dropped the splash guard and started to remove the coolant hoses to the transmission. It wasn't long before I started getting light headed and made my way to my chair. I rested a while and went back at it. My first warning signs came when I had a difficult time just taking the hose clamp off of the one hose. If that was the case how was I to finish the whole job feeling like I did? I was realizing that with all I had to do to accomplish this job I had better stop before I get in over my head and can't finish it.

I replaced the parts I removed, and strained the fluid back into the radiator and tightened everything back up. My brain said I could do it, my knowledge said I had the skill to do it, but my body said, "NO." I have to come to respect that and listen to my body. It has been through a war and back and it just isn't ready to do the things I would like to do, and I have to accept that.

I love to tie my own trout flies for fishing and noticed a few years back that I was having trouble seeing the tiny flies clearly. I didn't think much of it at first but soon realized that I was having a harder and harder time seeing what I was doing. So I broke down and bought a pair of reading glasses, you know the kind that just magnify and aren't prescription. They worked great and I could see everything super clear again, but there is one thing I noticed over the last few years and that is that I have needed to get even stronger reading glasses to compensate for my weakening eyes. It is just something I need to deal with and I will probably eventually need real glasses.

My recovery and yours as well is no different. You have to come to grips with what your body is telling you, and live in that moment accordingly. I said that moment because there will be change, some good and some bad, but there will be change over time. So learn to accept your limitations and enjoy what you have in the moment.

I was just talking to a friend of mine who was also a customer. Clem called to see how I was as he was thinking about me. Now Clem is a workhorse of a man although he is small in stature only about five foot five and 140 pounds.

I remember doing some work for him and we needed to get at the adapter on his well casing that

was buried down about three feet in Pennsylvania's rocky soil. I thought he would hire a backhoe to excavate the trench, but not Clem, he got some tools and I showed up a day or so later and at around the age of 80 years old he had the ditch dug.

As we talked on the phone, Clem told me that now at 84 he had to give up gardening as it was just too painful with his joints. This is something he loved to do, but his body just said, "NO." But he still fishes and loves it.

CHANGING YOUR FOCUS

Your recovery is all about focusing on your strengths and not your weaknesses. Even before I was sick I found the best way to minister to people was to focus on their strengths and encourage them in them. Focusing on your weaknesses provides no positive gain, and the only time we need to focus on our weaknesses is so we can learn from them and our shortcomings in order to avoid certain pitfalls in our life.

Even now when I realize I can't do the things I could, I don't dwell on it, but change my focus to the things I can. Realizing I couldn't do the work on the car was disappointing as it is a job that needs to be done before the timing belt breaks and wrecks the engine and for the other fact that it would save us money we don't really have to spend. But instead I came back upstairs and called my mechanic who I had already gotten a price from earlier and set up a day to have the work done, and then I picked up my laptop computer and started working on this chapter.

Focus on your strengths not your weaknesses, that is a powerful thought whether you are sick or not. You will find yourself more positive in your attitude and thanking God more for the things you have and your abilities rather than dwelling on the things and abilities you don't possess.

MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

When my friend John developed cancer a short while after me I remember sharing with him to jot down some of the advancements he made during his struggle in order to measure his progress. It can be discouraging to look at yourself day after day and not notice any change although you really are changing, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

I was sitting on the couch last night working on this book when my wife sitting across from me

in the rocking chair said to me, “Have you noticed that you are sitting up a lot more as opposed to laying down?” I told her that I hadn’t realized it but that she was right.

In the early part of my cancer I was not only very weak but had difficulty in a lot of areas, how I could sleep, where I could sleep, going to the bathroom, and others. Sitting up believe it or not was extremely hard.

My wife would encourage me to sit up for a half hour a day. Most days I would lay on my back on the couch as it was my most comfortable position. Sitting up made my breathing labored. It was hard to take a breath and I had to work at it. In trying to sit up, I would actually break the half hour down into two fifteen minute periods.

Sitting up I would prop myself against the back and arm of the couch at the same time as this put me not quite upright, and took some of the edge off my difficult breathing. I would sit there watching the clock tick by. It seemed like I was like that for hours, but it had only been a few minutes, and at first I couldn’t even make the full fifteen minutes. Eventually, over time, I made it to the fifteen minute mark. It never felt so good to lay down again and be able to breathe. Working at it I found myself finally sitting upright all the way as my breathing got better, and as time passed I was able to last the whole half hour.

These were baby steps that unless remembered keep us from seeing just how far we have come. There was so much wrong with me during my cancer that it all seemed like a blur to me. Included in my symptoms were coughing, gagging, breathing difficulties, loss of appetite, nausea, and the list goes on, but sitting here writing this I realize that most all of them have disappeared. Yes, I still have some of them, but today my worst day is far better than my best day ever was back then.

As you work through your healing, journal if you like. Write and document your progress so that in times of discouragement you can look back and have something to compare it to. It can be hard looking at yourself and comparing your strength or how you feel to someone else who is healthy. Instead always compare yourself to yourself and not to others, and use your notes to show yourself just how far you have come and allow yourself to be pleased by your progress.

LOOKING AHEAD

In order to look ahead to your future you need to take a good look back to where you have been. If you would go through my dresser drawer somewhere in there you will probably find my high school varsity football letter. You know the one you sew on your varsity jacket, for playing a sport. This is representative of a trophy. For my children as well, I believe most of them have trophies for playing soccer. Each of us have trophies in our life, they mark our life with successes.

These things haven't changed since the times of the Old Testament, they are still just as important today. In the book of 1 Samuel chapter 7, the story goes on to describe how the Israelites (God's people) were attacked by the Philistines. They asked Samuel to cry out to the Lord for help and God heard him.

As they battled the Philistines, God acted on their behalf and thundered a loud thunder, it was so great that it threw the Philistines into such a panic that they were forced to retreat in disorder before the Israelites. The men of Israel then pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a place below Beth Kar.

1 Samuel chapter 7, verse 12 goes on to say:

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." (NIV)

Samuel in essence set up a trophy as a remembrance to the success God granted His people. In fact he called it Ebenezer meaning *"Thus far the LORD has helped us."* (NIV) It was a reminder to the people that God had delivered them from Egypt, through the Red Sea, from Pharaoh's army, from famine and thirst for years in the desert, and now He had delivered them again.

As you know when I was working at Youth for Christ one of the things I used to do with kids was plan a two or sometimes three day bicycle ride from the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania where I lived, to the either Ocean City or Wildwood, New Jersey. The trip totaled just over either 150 or 200 miles depending on which site we were biking to. The trip itself took a lot of training and planning in order to get ready, and regardless of the destination sought we would travel over 100 miles the first day. 100 mile ride in cycling is known as a century and is a feat to celebrate,

because you feel that old once you're done doing it.

With cycle computers on our bikes we could track every mile we pedaled throughout the day, and when we reached 100 miles I would stop the entire team and gather them together. I would ask each of them to go find a rock of some sort and gather back at this spot again. After a few minutes of searching the team reassembled and I asked each of them to pile their rocks there on the shoulder of the road. Then I would read the story above and ask them to remember all the ways in which God had helped them that day to get here, where they were now. It was our Ebenezer, our trophy declaring "*Thus far the LORD has helped us.*" (NIV) It was a time of celebration and made the 16 or so miles left to finish that day that much easier.

In my recovery I have to constantly remind myself where I have been and what God has brought me through. I have to measure all my successes against my failures and rejoice in the difference between the two. If you remember even just four months ago I couldn't even entertain the thought of crawling under a car let alone do it. That is a success and a trophy I need to place on my God shelf in my heart and remember how far God has brought me. I may not seem like much to most people, but it is the equivalent of running a marathon to me.

If you are feeling discouraged in your recovery, DON'T. I know this is easy to say and hard to do, but changing your focus and making your goals smaller will help. Remember my story about climbing Bangor Mountain on my bicycle? How I would pick one thing just ahead of me and say to myself, "Make that your goal. Just get to that one thing Dave." In this way I was able to conquer something much bigger than myself. Remember the old question "How do you eat an elephant?" The reply, "One bite at a time!"

TAKE YOUR TIME

If there is one thing my sickness has taught me it is to be patient. Now I will admit that although my patience has improved dramatically I still am not where I want or need to be, and God is using my recovery to fill in some of the missing gaps.

My wife is so good for me. She is constantly reminding me that I am doing too much and that I have to slow down. Do you know what? She is right! Although I am patient in waiting for my recovery in the areas I can't change, I am impatient in the areas I think I can, like changing the

timing belt in my car.

This is why in any recovery you need to take your time. Your mind as well as your body have been through a lot and both need to heal, and it is sad to say but only time can do that. I so want to go hunting and hiking, and hopefully that will come, but for right now I need to be patient and let time do its thing.

As I eluded to earlier I can really see, looking back, that I have turned a corner in my progress, and other people have noticed it as well. But for some reason, I guess it is human nature, I still want to push the envelope and rush this along. But in doing so it is almost like I would be missing out on the experience of seeing myself transformed by the hand of God.

Journeying through my cancer and my recovery has allowed me to see the hand of God in a way few others ever do. For one thing I feel God spared me for a reason and that He has much more for me to do. For another, He has shown me that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and provides for my every need, not necessarily granting me what I want, but always what I need. If I would rush through all that, I would never get to receive the full knowledge of what He is showing me.

It would be like you reading the first chapter of this book and then the last chapter and skipping all the rest. You would be missing out on the rest of the story and in rushing your recovery you and I are doing the same thing.

It is easy to be anxious about things during our recovery and our sickness because we just want it over with, so we can get back to who we were. Maybe because we need the finances or we are afraid of losing our house, or afraid we will get too weak to survive, or a host of other things. So we figure if we can get to the end everything will be all better. WRONG! When we get to the end guess what? There are a whole new set of problems facing us, and we get to do it all over again. Which is why God offers us a solution for the here and now, it's called prayer. Listen to what it says in Philippians chapter 4, verses 6-7:

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

As you and I work through our recovery we need to embrace the fact that God is there for us right now and that He wants to hear our cries as He works us through our problems and anxieties, worries and fears.

BUILD YOUR FAITH

Those problems are what make you strong, and it takes time coupled with your faith to achieve that strength and trust in the Lord. There is a video I saw on the internet of a police officer who is also a bodybuilder. In one of his short videos (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhGcuwSvNAs>) it shows him using dumbbells to bench press 200 pounds. Now that is a feat that would be hard for many people to accomplish, but what I didn't mention is that this man does 200 pounds alright, but in each arm making it a total of 400 pounds and he bench presses it multiple times. Very impressive to say the least!

Now you and I would never be so gullible as to believe that this man just one day decided to grab two 200 pound dumbbells off the rack and lift them into the air twelve times and then just throw them like they were paper weights. No, it took him years to build his muscles over TIME. There is that word again. It took struggling and waiting for the soreness to go away and then to push through a little farther and a little harder, but all with the idea of getting to a goal and enjoying the process along the way.

It must have been a great sense of accomplishment for him to stand in the mirror and see his muscles developing over time as he worked them. I guarantee you will feel the same way as you allow God to exercise your faith as you take the time to allow Him to develop it through your adversity and your recovery.

Romans chapter 12, verses 3 says:

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (NIV)

In that verse it declares that God has given to each of us a measure of faith and it is up to us to exercise that faith in such a way that it grows. That growth can only come like lifting weights

from constantly being torn down and built up again over time. It also has to be consistent as well. Just exercising your faith and then taking time off will cause you to lose that growth just like a weightlifter working for months on end and then taking a year off would never expect to go back to the gym and pick up where they left off.

Your sickness or the sickness of a loved one is a great opportunity to grow deeper in the things of Christ and to build your faith in preparation to conquer maybe even greater challenges than the one you face now. You may think that there is nothing harder than what you have faced or what you are facing now, but I am sure that every bodybuilder had that same thought the day they struggle to do just a few more pounds. The only difference is that they were willing to push through to the end. Are you?

In my ministry I have led mission trips to as far away as Africa. Taking and organizing for a team consisting of as many as 39 people. This meant planning the air travel, food and its preparation, lodging, building supplies, preparing the team for ministry and what to expect on the trip, organizing all the fundraising, printing all the materials, planning the work and ministry schedules, buying supplies, overseeing packing, having duffle bags and tee shirts printed, and the list goes on.

If you think for a minute that these trips are a big project you would be right, with some of these trips having budgets of over \$100,000 that the team works to raise as a whole. So how did I get started doing such complicated ministry projects? It started by going on my first trip as a participant. From there I learned to help as a leader on other trips and eventually led my first trip to Washington D.C. where I partnered with other teams. Then I took a team of almost 40 people to Honduras twice and then from there I have taken other teams totaling over 30 people to both Ghana and Kenya Africa for a combined construction and ministry mission.

Each trip from the first one to the last has grown my faith. Challenging me to believe and trust deeper in my God that He would come through for me, with each time and each extension of my faith being proved out in God's faithfulness to provide once again.

Let me share this with you about trusting God. There are only two ways you trust God! Either you trust Him or you don't. It is like a married woman proclaiming that she is sort of pregnant.

Either you are, or you aren't, there is no middle ground, and that is because trusting God really requires an action. So if you put action to your faith you are trusting, but if you don't supply the action you aren't.

Let me explain, I am sure at one point today or last night you either sat on something or laid down on something. Either way you trusted it to hold your weight without breaking. You believed and you put action to it and released all your weight to it. Trusting God is the same way, and it all starts with a belief and ends in surrender.

Faith is this: **Faith** is a **belief** that is so strong that it leads to **trust** that leads to **action**, specifically **surrender**. If you didn't totally understand that go back and read it over again.

The good news is that learning to rest in God can also be a form of surrender and a great way to exercise your faith in the process. Because resting (which is what most of us need during recovery) is saying to God that you are putting all your hope in Him to provide and to heal and to grant you grace and that ALL of it comes from Him and none of it from you!

Let God use your sickness then to grow your faith for even greater things, and when God comes to you and asks you "Do you trust me, or don't you?" You can change your focus, look ahead, take your time, build your faith and say the word He has been longing to hear, "YES."

CHAPTER 7 - FINDING HOPE

Hope to me doesn't mean anything. That's right! You heard me! It doesn't mean anything, unless it is connected to your faith, and not a false faith but the trusting, living and active faith that I talked about in the last chapter. So why do we need to have faith if our hope is to be real? Because faith is the basis for every relationship we have, including the one we have with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To prove that, you just need to think about the term of being "unfaithful" in a relationship, you know what that means and what it can do to that relationship as well.

Hope is something people all over this globe hold on to with the tightest grip. Whether you are struggling through cancer, divorce, financial hardship, or what have you, hope that things will turn out all right is what we all long for.

When I first was diagnosed with my cancer I had hope and believed that everything would turn out all right. Remember the definition of faith that I gave in the last chapter? **Faith** is a **belief** that is so strong that it leads to **trust** that leads to **action**, specifically **surrender**. Well hope is the match that brings that faith to flame, but without the faith the match eventually burns up and burns out.

I had a choice when it came to dealing with my cancer. I could either run to God or run from Him. I remember sitting after church one day as I always do in order to talk with people and catch up. One guy I knew came up to me and sat down in the chair in front of me and turned back so he could speak with me. Then he said something along these lines, "Dave, I don't know how you do it, I would be so angry at God if I were in your shoes!"

But how could I be angry at God? After all He has taken me through, and all the ways He has provided for me and my family, how could I be angry at Him? Was I to accept the good He gave me and not the bad or what appeared to be the bad? That didn't make sense to me, but maybe I

am at a different place and therefore God has granted me a different perspective of how I believe things to be.

Just recently I spoke at a youth group meeting at church. I have to tell you I love to preach and teach about God's Word and it felt good to be able to do that after not being able to for so long. The topic that the leader wanted me to talk about was hope and so I started off with the following illustration:

I asked Pastor Rob the youth pastor, to give me a hand and come up front. I then asked the kids who they thought was stronger by our appearances. Being I had just come through two bouts of cancer and only weighed what I did, it was no contest that Rob was clearly stronger. Then I bent over and asked Pastor Rob to put me in a headlock, which he did. Now it was not very comfortable from my position, but I endured it. I then told the teens that there probably wasn't much hope in me escaping, to which they all agreed. So I asked Rob, "Is there any chance you would be willing to let me go?" To which he replied, "NO!" I then asked the teens being that didn't work if they thought I could get out of this situation with just my pinky finger. Only one boy raised his hand and thought I could.

I then took my pinky finger and gently poked Rob in the stomach and asked him to let me go, that didn't work either. But you see I had great hope in my pinky freeing me because I knew of a technique that had worked in the past for me. So reaching around with my arm closest to Rob's side and up and over his back I placed my pinky finger sideways just under his nose and gently pulled up and back. Instantly I was free, as Rob quickly evaluated that the increasing pain to his nose wasn't worth the price of keeping his hold on me. You see I had hope in my pinky, but only when it was coupled to the movement from the action of my hand and arm.

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

I believe I never would have made it through my cancer had it not been for two things: One was the prayers of all my friends and family, and the other was my hope in a God that I believe still performs miracles. But it isn't just important we have hope, it also depends on what we put our hope in that makes the difference.

We have to remember that for everything we face and fight in the tangible areas of our lives,

there is a war taking place behind the curtain spiritually for you and me as well.

Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10-17 says:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. (NIV)

Notice that the Bible says that even though we think we are fighting in the physical realm our battle is really against the evil powers of the heavenly realms. Which again is why we need to put out hope for a cure in our struggle with our sickness in the hands of the only one who can offer grace and healing to us, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Learning this and understanding the bigger picture provided not only a true way to fight my sickness through prayer and faith in God, but also caused me to never become angry with God for allowing this into my life.

I firmly believe that nothing and I mean nothing enters into my life without first passing across God's desk for approval. That means every good thing and every bad thing is allowed to become integrated into our life in order to work out the eventual transformation of us looking more and more like Christ (Romans 8: 29), as we become conformed to the image of His Son.

Tragedy has followed me much of my life, but then again so has blessings, with the latter I am sure outweighing the first. There was a time not too many years prior to my sickness where I learned a lesson in hope that has helped sustain me through my personal journey with cancer.

It was a day in August when I received the call from my wife on the phone. She was crying on

the other end of the line. She had taken my eleven year old son Caleb to the eye doctor and the doctor had found something wrong in the back of his eye and sent him for an emergency MRI. I told her I was on my way to meet them both, and hung up the phone.

Arriving at the MRI center we were taken in right away even though it was almost closing time. The three of us sat in the doctor's office as he shared with us the results of the scan. I'll never forget the words he spoke, he said, "Your son has an abnormality in his brain." "You mean a tumor" I said. He replied "Yes, but I have even seen people healed from this." Listening to those words from where I was sitting he wasn't offering much hope.

We spent the night with the whole family watching a movie and sharing Kentucky Fried Chicken. Sleep was a commodity that was hard to come by that night. So I worked my way out to the living room couch. It was about 4:00 AM. I opened my Bible to the book of Job being I could probably identify with him the most right now. I started reading from the first chapter and when I got to chapter 13, verse 15 the words just jumped out at me:

¹⁵ *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him, I will surely defend my ways to his face.* (NIV)

I sat there feeling hopeless, unable to do anything about the situation. There was nothing I could do but pray. Closing my Bible I laid it next to me and out of desperation spoke these words to God: "Lord you know my heart and you know that I trust you, but Lord if you need to take my son from me, then I am OK with that." I couldn't believe the words I shared, but it was what was on my heart. I knew there was nothing I could do for my son and I knew that God's plan was always bigger and better. So I surrendered the one I loved more than anything in all the world to my God. It wasn't that I didn't love my son, in fact it was the exact opposite, I wanted God to know that I was willing to face whatever He knew I and my family needed to face, and that He was still my God no matter what the outcome. I wanted Him to work on our behalf, and I stepped out to trust Him the only way I knew how.

I can't explain it but at that very minute peace filled my whole house, even my wife in our bedroom felt it. The next day my wife called the brain surgeon at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital to set an appointment. The secretary told my wife that there was an appointment scheduled for him for Thursday, but asked her "How did you do that?" "Do what?" my wife

replied. “How did you get the doctor to take you on Thursday, he never has appointments on Thursdays?” This is just one of the many miracles that would follow, and even though the tumor was not cancerous it has been a long haul and a tough road for my son who is now driving his car, attending college and growing up. All this is because God was gracious in answering not only my prayer but the prayers of many others as well.

Now if you are wondering in your mind, thinking that I didn’t ask God to heal my son, I really did. I just didn’t speak those words with my mouth, but I did speak them with my heart. God knew my desire above all else was for Him to heal my son, and fortunately He not only heard my prayer but also answered it with a “YES.”

That experience has helped me to realize that in my own sickness there was really nothing I could do but go through it, and trust God. In the same way I trusted Him with the life of my son I knew I had to trust Him with my life as well.

After all if God is big enough to trust for your salvation, then He is certainly big enough to trust with everything else in life no matter how ominous it may seem.

As followers of Christ we need to keep our focus on the spiritual side of things. As scripture clearly shares in Ephesians chapter 6, our battle is with the spiritual which is affecting the physical which is why we need to attack and fight it at the root.

Did you know that looking at the whole of chapter 6 in Ephesians that there appears to me to be only two real offensive weapons to fight the evil forces in the heavenly realms? If you didn’t know what they are, I will tell you, they are the Word of God (the sword) and Prayer. All other armament is designed for protection and to stand defensively. Read the whole chapter and notice too that when the armor of God is described it never refers to anything covering the back, which tells me that we should always be facing our problem and never running from it.

THE END RESULT

Now looking at the big picture of life granted me the same peace from God I felt when dealing with Caleb’s tumor. I knew that no matter the outcome whether I lived or died I would be God’s child and safe in His arms.

In that same talk I did with the youth at church I shared that same thought with them as well. I told them that, “My having cancer was a win-win situation for me. If I died from it then I would be with God in glory, and if I lived I would still be here to share with you.” In my mind there is no possible way to lose if you have Christ as your Savior.

Remember hope is the match that lights the fuel of faith eventually leading to you and I surrendering to Jesus, and no matter what anyone says, there is no safer place to be than in the center of God’s will for your life.

FEELING HOPELESS

Hopeless, even mention of the word triggers thoughts of depression. So how does one become hopeless? It is simple they just follow the backward progression of hope. First they stop surrendering to God, then they stop all action that might lead them to take that chance to surrender, then they stop trusting, then they stop believing and when no faith is left there is nothing for hope to ignite and the match eventually goes out.

It is a place no one ever wants to be, yet many find themselves there and once there, they find it very difficult to reverse. But hope has to have a reason to survive so let me give you a few:

Family - God has given to each of us a story to tell to others a legacy to build and leave behind as we eventually go to be with Him in glory. Family is a big part of that legacy. Our children are given to us as a homework assignment, to raise, to build into and to release back out into the world in the HOPE of them making a difference for God and bringing Him praise and glory. Our spouses are our soul mates, brought into our life as God orchestrated the plan for our unity. They not only need us, but complete us as we should them. We are one flesh with them, with God’s plan for us to be joined to them for as long as we live, with us loving them deeper each day! Then there are still other family members that make up our life that we love and who love us. So knowing what we do about family, and how they love us and want us always be by their side, should alone be reason to hope and to fight our cancer. But I will give you yet more.

Others - People, whether you realize it or not are watching you, and how you live your life. You can either be an inspiration or a disappointment to people. But why should it matter how people view you? Because if you truly love God, you will truly love people, and if that is true than you

will only want the best for them no matter who they are.

You have a profound effect on people whether you know you do or not. The longer you are around someone the more character traits you absorb from that person and the more you will begin to act like them. This is natural and even scripture acknowledges it in 1 Corinthians 15:33 which says:

³³ *Do not be misled. "Bad company corrupts good character."* (NIV)

Although this is true the opposite may also hold some merit by allowing us to impact the life of others with positive change. This brings up another reason to show people your hope, even as you go through a difficult time. By doing so and showing the right example you demonstrate the power of God to everyone around you, building their faith. As they see you thriving in your walk with Christ even in the midst of hardship they think to themselves, "If they can do it, so can I." Realize that when you exhibit your hope and faith in front of others through difficulty it becomes magnified in its power towards others, and how they embrace hope and live out faith in their own walk with Christ.

God - God calls us to strive in everything up to the very end of our lives. He has no retirement plan for us and wants us to live our life in such a way that it honors Him always. God has designed us with a dependency on Him. Like a child needs their mom or dad so we need God. Yes there are times we walk away from Him and for many reasons. But He always longs to have us back and loves us beyond measure. Also when we place our hope and faith in God it pleases Him. Listen to what Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6 says:

⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* (NIV)

Did you catch that? It says it is impossible to please God without faith, and you can't have faith unless hope is present to start with. Look at the Biblical definition of faith in that same chapter in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1:

¹¹ *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* (NIV)

Faith then is what we hope for. Which it is why it is so important to find it in our journey and to hold fast to it.

Now, the three reasons above should give anybody a cause to hold onto hope in their life. But if in your struggle you find yourself losing hope, run as quickly as you can into the arms of Christ and cry out to Him that you need to find it again. Through His love for you and His power He can light again the match of hope for you. But make sure the fuel of faith is there to carry you through and create a blaze that is bright enough that the family you love, as well as others that watch and especially the God you live for can see it!

CHAPTER 8 - DEALING WITH SURVIVOR'S SYNDROME

The older I get in life the less answers I think I have, or maybe the questions don't seem as important as they once did. But no matter which holds more true I seem to often rack my brain in my attempt to understand things.

Many people suffer from what is called "Survivor's Syndrome" which is a feeling of guilt for having survived an event in which others around you have perished in. Cancer can be one of those events.

Patti was a good friend of mine and helped run a Christian camp not far from where I live. I have worked both with her and her husband Steve in ministry quite successfully. They are great people, but several years before me, Patti developed cancer that later spread to her lymph nodes and throughout her body. As hard as she tried to fight it and regardless of the many prayers sent to the throne of God on her behalf, God called her home leaving behind a loving husband and children.

Karen attended my church and I witnessed her grow from a babe in Christ to a true servant that wanted so badly to live out her life for Him. Karen went on in her walk with the Lord to become a counselor in order to give Godly counsel to people and further serve Christ. Karen too developed leukemia and after a long battle and despite many prayers was called home to be with Jesus.

Jeff was a friend, and a husband and a father that I had come to know and who I had attended church with and spent time with on our annual men's retreat each fall. Jeff played guitar in a praise band and loved to play and sing for Christ. Many prayers went up for Jeff when cancer established itself in his body. It was a long haul for Jeff and it looked like he was out of the woods when he was suddenly and unexpectedly taken back to God.

John seemed to be in the best of health. We had done many long distance bicycle ministry rides

together and I watched him grow up from his infancy in the Lord. I was good friends with him and his wife I call Shelly. John was training for a one day bike ride to the shore, over 200 miles when something wasn't right. With only a week or two left to go before his trip he was diagnosed with colon cancer and although his cancer was discovered after mine and for most of his journey with cancer he seemed much stronger than me, he died about ten months later, even with treatments and people praying for him from all across the globe.

Heather was a youth worker colleague of mine. We had done considerable ministry together and often talked and ministered to one another pushing each other on in the fight. Heather was young when cancer crept into her life, and although she had an effective ministry and was a great example of Christ's love, God called her to be with Him in just about a year's time.

Now why am I sharing these stories with you? Because in reflecting back on these people that I loved and admired that were taken before me it would be easy to say, "God why did you take them and spare me?"

All of these people were believers in Christ and served Him diligently. I can't think of one reason why God would call them home, but He did. Which would make it is easy to address God asking "Why me?" in questioning my survival.

Now that question is usually reserved for times when we go through great difficulty and we are seeking answers from God as to why he would allow that tragedy to enter our lives. But it can also be used in the opposite direction referring to a question of why someone was spared while others were not.

Let me just say this, instead of questioning God with the phrase "Why me?" maybe God is saying to us, "Why not?" Now this question is expressed in no way to diminish the life or the purpose of those people listed above. Each of them were my close personal friends who I loved dearly and whose presence I cherished. All of them lived God honoring lives and who will be deeply missed. So the question last asked is not to downplay their existence but instead to point us to the sovereignty of God.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Years ago there was a movie based on a true story called “Patch Adams.” It is a story of a man who winds up in a center for the mentally unstable and who later goes on to be a doctor in an attempt to help other people.

In a scene depicting his time in the center and before his time in medical school Patch encounters another patient who attempts to offer Patch a new perspective on reality. The older man teaches him to look past the problem and learn to see what others choose not to see.

(<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/patch-adams/what-do-you-see>)

Understanding why God would pick one person to take home (especially at a young age) and leave another here is just not within our comprehension as we can never see the big picture, but we can look a little past our thoughts and the way we are used to viewing things and into the workings of God to learn to trust His sovereignty.

Let us look for a minute at a passage in Psalms chapter 139, verses 13-18 which says:

¹³ For you created my inmost being you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body, all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. ¹⁷ How precious are your thoughts, God! How vast the sum of them! ¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand - when I awake, I am still with you. (NIV)

Look at how thought out God’s design for who you are was to Him. You were knitted together in your mother’s womb. This is a time consuming process taking nine months to complete and during that time God built your complex being, complete with a soul and spirit. But notice especially verse 16, where it says that all your days were ordained before one of them came to be. That means that God saw your life completely, every mistake, every victory and every choice you would make and the day you would die as well, all before you even entered this world.

Our human perspective is limited in how we view things. There are a few man-made structures that can be seen from space without magnification like highways, dams and cities, but the most

noted of these structures is probably the Great Wall of China.

SEEING OUR LIFE LIKE THE WALL

The Great Wall of China travels along the Northern section of China and was built as a means to defend its borders, it spans 3,889 miles of actual wall with additional miles made up of natural abutments and trenches, with all its branches its total expanse equals 13,171 miles. (facts sourced from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Wall_of_China)

Now standing on just one section of that wall is what it is like for us to live in the moment as human beings. God on the other hand sees our life as someone sees the wall from space. All at once with a defined beginning and a defined end, He can see every detour it takes, every twist and turn every up and down, just like He sees and knows our life.

Because He can view all our lives that way and at the same time He knows how to orchestrate each one of our lives to intertwine with the others. Catch this verse found in Acts chapter 17, verse 24-27:

²⁴“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any of us.”
(NIV)

Notice what God’s Word says in verse 26 about the fact that in making each of us He determined where we would be born, at what time in history we would be created. He also determined who we would have as parents, He also knew who we would marry or if we would marry, who our children would be and their appointed times as well. Because God is God and God is sovereign, exercising supreme authority and knowing all things and being everywhere at once, including across time and history, He can write the part each of us will play in life perfectly.

Therefore, His choice for each of our time to depart this world is in His hands as it should be and

that alone should give us the comfort to no longer question “WHY?” Instead that thought should bring us to acceptance of God’s ordination for each of our lives.

COMING TO GRIPS

Now I must be honest with you, I have never experienced survivor’s syndrome per say, only the grief of missing my friends as they were no longer in my life, but I do know it is a strong and troubling issue for some people. It is natural to not only grieve for people, but to feel guilty that you survived and they didn’t. Maybe it is because I choose to look past the obvious and tried to see things the way God might that I was spared that feeling. That is not to say that I didn’t love those people that I was close to; and I never thought of myself as being more deserving of an opportunity to prolong my life. Instead I just rested in the fact that God knows what He is doing even if I don’t.

Isaiah chapter 55, verse 9 it states:

⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (NIV)*

I know that because God’s ways are higher than I could ever comprehend I must relinquish running the universe to Him as He is the one that holds all things together as it states in Colossians chapter 1, verse 16-17:

¹⁶ *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (NIV)*

If you do feel guilt for being the one to have survived, give it to God. He knows why you are still here, and only He holds the answer to your questions. I may not know much about running the universe and orchestrating people’s lives, but then again I don’t have to because I know the one who does!

CHAPTER 9 - WALKING WITH THOSE THAT HAVE CANCER

It doesn't matter whether you are a person who has developed cancer or a loved one coming along side someone that does, we can all share the responsibility to support another person in their struggle with this debilitating disease.

If the fact is that you have cancer or have ever gone through it, then you are at an advantage in helping others trying to work their way through on their own journey with it. You know how they feel and can honestly say you know what they are going through. You can identify with their pain and frustration as well as offer sound advice learned from your dealings and your own experience with cancer.

Although I had a few people in my life that experienced a bout with cancer I wish I would have had more people available to me that dealt with the exact cancer I had, so as to compare notes in a way, as there really was nothing that I could find on the internet or from other people, even those that had dealt with cancer that would prepare me for what I was about to face.

I did have one friend though whose husband died of esophageal cancer and she was a great help to me in helping me know some things to expect. But I still lacked the understanding and depth of what I was about to go through, probably because I didn't know how to address the right questions to her at the time, and even with our cancers being similar there was still much about them that was different like our feeding tubes and our treatments.

Now I realize that my type of cancer was hard and my experience with it extreme compared to many others facing cancer. So I would be hard pressed to find someone that had a journey similar to mine and survived. This is the reason for me writing this book, in the hopes that I could answer difficult questions that not too many people talk about when it comes to cancer, such as the emotional and spiritual side of the coin.

Nobody knows everything about cancer, including the doctors or even those that have gone through it. But I want to encourage you to offer what you do know about it and who you are as a person to someone who might need direction finding their way home in their own battle. This chapter is designed to offer you some suggestions to help make that possible, so let's take a look at some of them.

LISTENING

By far one of the greatest skills lacking in the world today is the art of listening to someone else. Most people are too interested in sharing about themselves that they don't take the time to listen to others. For many people there is no dialogue, only a monologue. You know the type I mean, the person that acts like they are listening, but are really formulating their next sentence for when it becomes their turn to speak. In fact if you and I were really honest I am sure we could find ourselves in that category without too much trouble.

The one thing we have to remember is that dealing with cancer is serious stuff and people needing real answers not only need, but want our undivided attention. They are going through a lot emotionally, and in every way really. Their world has been brought to a stop and turned upside down, as many of you can attest to. Many are angry and many need to vent, which is why even if you feel you do have the answers you need to listen.

First off you need to remember you can't give directions to someone unless you know where they are. Listening helps you pinpoint where people are in their life and their thoughts and their needs and allows you to offer applicable advice to the people that need it.

So I challenge you to not have all the answers for someone, at least not right away. First take the time to let them express themselves and listen to their cries in the meantime, it will tell you a lot about where they are at, and what they need for the moment.

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

Opportunity comes and goes quickly, and this especially seems to hold true with cancer patients. There are many appointments to keep, sickness can cause them to not feel up to visitors, the emotional side of things can cause them to shut down and not want to talk to anyone and there

are more contributing factors that can keep us disconnected with people going through cancer.

This is why you and I need to jump at any opportunity open to answering questions that might come up or the chance to reach out to meet the needs of these types of people. That may mean changing plans you might have or driving a little bit farther or talking on the phone at a time that isn't convenient.

So far in this section I've really just been relating to making yourself available to people going through cancer in the realm of just talking and listening to them, and it may be that you can and should provide all the information you have learned to help them prepare for their battle, but there are many more things you can do to minister to them and their spirits and their needs. Remember I shared with you that many times in the beginning when someone develops cancer they can shut down and really might not want to talk, but there are other ways you can make yourself available to them, with many of them speaking louder than words.

Meals - This is a great way to provide for someone that is facing their giants, but can also take a great deal of stress off the spouse of someone with cancer as well. With all their energy focused on appointments, treatment, and travel, it can many times be a chore just to figure out what to eat, let alone make it after a long day.

Providing a meal or even bringing by several meals that you have prepared that you have frozen can give people a real boost in their stress level as well as help them greatly financially.

Cards and Gifts - I know that cards brought a great deal of joy to me during the time I was laid up. I looked forward to receiving them and the handwritten notes inside of them. Many of them contained checks as well which went a long way to not only providing for me and my family, but taking away some of the concern as to how bills would get paid.

To this day I have a good sized can stuffed full of those cards as they meant so much to me. It helped me realize that people really did love me and cared for me and it was also a big reminder that they were lifting me up before the Father in prayer, and prayer is the main thing I believe that has kept me alive.

Drivers - When you are sick you can't drive yourself many times for safety reasons. So having

someone to drive you is a huge blessing. I had friends and family run me to treatments, appointments and the like and this was also a benefit to my wife as it gave her a break and also allowed her to not have to take off a day from work as well. Not to mention the fact that I think almost all of the people that drove me refused gas money, which then doubly blessed us with not only their time and vehicle use, but also by saving us the cost of gas.

Work days - These can be either an individual or team effort. Our neighbor and good friend coordinated their church youth group and some other caring people to come to our house one day and do clean up and yard work, hook up the mower on our farm tractor and more. They were a huge blessing doing what I couldn't do, being in a sense that I was chained to the couch because of my sickness.

Other men from my church spent a day cutting firewood and bringing it to my house and stacking it in our woodshed, not just once but several times during my illness. Being that we heat 90% of our house during the winter time with wood this was a big savings and a big help as well.

Organizing a group to come and help is a great idea but that doesn't exclude the fact that you could be a big blessing by yourself. Maybe there is a specific thing you are good at that you could offer to make a difference. We have a friend Jeff who was actually asked by a friend at an area church we sometimes attend to help us out by bleeding and checking out our hot water boiler we use for heat as a supplement to our woodstove. Now I used to install and service these for a living, but being in the condition I was in, the best I could do was talk my wife through how to do things. She was successful in changing the fuel filter, but fortunately Jeff came by to bleed the gun and purge the air from the system to provide heat to my boy's rooms on the second floor.

But remember you don't have to be a master technician to contribute. Just stopping by to clean or change the oil in one of the cars or paint a room, offer to grocery shop for them or even make a few meals with someone, all can be a tremendous help to someone who is on the verge of frustration because they have been robbed of their ability to do anything anymore.

Be an organizer - It may be that your time is limited or that you are all thumbs when it comes to cooking or cleaning or whatever or maybe that just isn't your way of helping out. Maybe you are skilled at organizing and even if you aren't an administrative genius you can still put together a

group to help out.

Just talking to your pastor or the ladies group at church or the youth group or the men's fellowship can provide a group of people that can offer and do so much for someone going through cancer. With a little brainstorming and detective work (just a phone call to the cancer patient or their spouse) you can find out what their greatest needs are and help fill them.

We have had people organize a Sunday School class to help us financially, another person just shared with the care group at their church and they helped by paying our electric bill for the month. Still another rallied some men at our church to supply us with a good supply of firewood and they all had a great time doing it. Someone else organized Jeff coming to our house to fix our boiler.

All it took was people with a heart to care and a little effort and a phone call or two and they provided for us a blessing that was too big for us to take in. So making yourself available shouldn't mean just being available to talk to someone, as there is a whole list of other ways including ones I haven't mentioned or even thought of that you could bring about in blessing someone's life and the life of a family!

BE PATIENT WITH THEM

This is especially true if the person you are trying to reach out to is your spouse. Because spouses come to know each other better than anyone else and they get to see each other at their worst, so you need to be patient with your wife or husband as they go through their struggle.

Opposition from the enemy in their body and the constant demand for their body to endure the torture of what they can potentially be facing can leave them frustrated, angry and not themselves in many areas emotionally. They may fly off the handle easily, lose the ability to fight, or act like someone you don't even know.

Realize that that it isn't them, but the cancer having an effect on them. I am sure it is not their desire to change into that type of person, it could be that they are just at a point where everything is weighing on them and they feel like they just can't escape.

Now I am not condoning their behavior at all. I am just saying that at this time if you can see

your way clear to offer grace to them it will go a long way in helping them cope and endure. In the times when the pressure cooker dies down feel free to share with them and make sure you communicate you hurts and your needs, as well as finding out what theirs are also.

Lovingly correct them and encourage them if you find them drifting away from the person they used to be, and especially if they find themselves drifting away from God by isolating themselves from the Lord and others.

Another area where they need your patience is in their healing. There may be some part of them that is hurting or causing them issues like a gag reflex or vomiting, or losing their hair that they may complain about. This can be depressing for both parties involved so take the time to be patient with them and encourage them to look at the positive sides of their healing. Remind them of where they were and where they are now or maybe just hold their hand or give them a hug and tell them it's alright. Remind them too of the fact that being negative about such things doesn't help their cause or offer them strength for the day, instead it only strips them of the energy they need to stay positive and fight. Offer patience where you can, but also combine it with love and gentle correction in order to keep them pointed to God and to their goal of getting better.

PERSONAL CARE

This is an area that most people never venture into but can mean all the difference in someone's life, and meet a real need as well. What I am talking about means to go the extra mile for sure.

I have a friend Johnny that had a work related accident, and had some construction supplies fall on him off the back of a truck. It pinned him underneath all its weight and left his body broken and severely damaged, so much so that it took two years for him to get back to a semi healthy state again. Today he is much better but still at a place in his life where he is unable to go back to work.

His accident left him pretty much unable to do most anything. Especially in the beginning of his ordeal he had to have people carry him to the bathroom and wash him, as he was unable to even do that.

I also have a friend whose father-in-law has gotten up in years and needs special attention and

although he has children, my friend is the only one that he allows to bath him. This might seem awkward for some people, but for those willing to love others enough to carry out these tasks it is a service that speaks volumes to the people in need.

Now in my personal situation I had and still do have a pretty good size hole in my side from my surgery almost eight months ago. This wound requires it be packed every day with gauze and bandaged over for it to heal properly.

For me my insurance does not provide in home nursing care which is what I needed to have my wound properly cared for, and I could not reach it to do it myself as it was under my left arm and towards my back some.

Fortunately my sister-in-law Franny who is a registered nurse as I shared with you, volunteered to care for me. For months she came to the house every day seven days a week and took care of my wound until it was small enough for my wife to take over the task.

People like Franny, my friend, and those that helped Johnny are the special servants willing to go the extra mile in serving others and making a remarkable difference as they do. You may not be in the health care industry or may feel awkward providing a service of personal care for cancer patients, but if you do, you will make an impact on those lives and fill a need that is greatly needed in the process.

PRAY FOR THEM

This is something we can all do and is what I consider the greatest and most effective act of service we can perform in helping someone deal with cancer. Yes there are times I am sure when you have prayed for people and those prayers were not answered in an affirmative way, but there are also many other times when they have been.

Pray is not just words, it is also an attitude of the heart and I am convinced makes a difference. As a believer in Christ your prayers are powerful and effective according to the Word of God in James chapter 5, verse 16. which says:

¹⁶ *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (NIV)*

Prayer does make a difference which is why we need to be laying our requests before the throne of God and not just requests for healing, but also requests for finances, emotional peace, safety in travel, and other areas.

As long as I have been a Christian and even with the fact that I have taught seminars on prayer, I can't tell you for the life of me just how it works, but only that it does work. I believe prayer aligns our heart with the heart of God, and is an opportunity to commune our spirit and what we are feeling with the living God.

But can our prayers really have an influence on God and how He works in the life of others? Let's take a look at a several examples and you decide.

Let's look at the book of Isaiah chapter 38, verses 1-6, and the story of King Hezekiah; his sickness and his prayer:

¹ In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die, you will not recover. ² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ "Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah; ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶ And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city. (NIV)

Here is a passage of the Bible that depicts the story of Hezekiah and how God sends Isaiah to tell him that he is about to die. Hezekiah then out of his brokenness cries out to God and God then changes his decision to require Hezekiah's life and instead not only heals him but extends his life and provides for him supernatural protection.

Now you might say that Hezekiah never specifically prayed to be healed or for God to spare his

life and you would be right. But do you remember the story about my son Caleb and my prayer to God? Although I never spoke those words as well God knew my heart, and knew I wanted for my son to be spared more than anything, and I believe Hezekiah's heart communed with God the same way.

In another life changing event God expresses to Moses His intent to wipe out the people of Israel as His anger is heavy against them. Take a look at what transpires as Moses prays to God on their behalf in Exodus chapter 32, verses 9-14:

⁹ *"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."* ¹¹ *But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with the great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from you fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendents all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'*" ¹⁴ *Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (NIV)*

This is another example of God relenting from a direction and an action that He has made known that He was going to do. The only indication in this passage of why God relented from His anger is found as a direct result of Moses' prayer to God on behalf of the people.

Yet another example of God changing his mind because of prayer takes place in Jonah chapter 3, verses 1-10:

¹ *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."*

³ *Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city,*

proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. (NIV)

Here too because of the people's change of heart and their desire to connect with God by calling out to Him, God relented and spared both the people and the city He had all intentions of destroying.

So as it appears from these scriptures even as God makes a pronouncement He is often willing to change His mind and decide differently as earnest and true prayers are laid before His throne. So prayer is a powerful tool when used to communicate with the all powerful God we call our Father, and it can not only change people's lives, but also can affect the course of events as God alters and redirects His actions, prolongs lives and extends His grace because of our prayers.

I do know that because of God's sovereignty, He knows what we are going to pray before that communion of our spirits ever takes place. So the fact that God of changing His mind as we think of someone changing their mind may not hold completely true, but we do know from these scriptures that prayer does make a difference in the outcome of how God does things. Just because God knows what we are going to pray before we pray it, should never take away from our desire to come before the very presence of God and communicate our needs, our thanks, and our desires, not only for ourselves, but also for those around us.

So the next time you find yourself on your knees humbled in the presence of God lift up those around you that need your support and prayers. Bring them all before the throne of God and lay them gently at His feet, pleading on their behalf, because from what I can see from scripture, it can be the greatest life changer not just for us, but for the whole world as well.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It has been a pleasure to write this book and to hopefully offer to you some tools and knowledge you might use on your journey through cancer or in helping someone who is. I know first-hand what a horrible disease this can be, but I also know the joy of finding God more deeply through it.

God shares with us His Holy Word in Romans chapter 8, verse 28 saying:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

Therefore everything in life can be used for good no matter the final outcome, and my cancer and what I went through hopefully is an example of that to you. I hope and pray that the words between the pages of this book help you find answers to some of the questions you might be seeking about cancer, what it is like to travel that journey and what it is like to come out the other side as well.

That is my desire for you, but even more than that my prayer is that you might find yourself drawn ever closer to the God that loves you and gave His son to give you life. Stay close to Him. He can offer not only the answers you seek, but life as well.

There is one other thing I must share with you before I let you go. It may be that even while reading this book you may never have experience the joy of coming to the Lord by coming to know Him personally as your Savior. Whether or not that is the case I want to share with you my personal testimony to encourage you and to point you in that direction if that is a decision you have never made.

Up until 1978, I had always been a loner, and the class clown. Fact of the matter was I was always seeking acceptance and love. But felt I never really got any, except from my own family.

That is until May of "78", that is when a guy I meet in welding school, shared with me about the greatest gift, anyone ever gave.

Over lunch one day he told me how he was looking for the same things I was, acceptance, joy, and love, but his longing led him a different direction. He had been doing some heavy drugs, and his life was totally messed up, and getting worse.

But he seemed to have his life in order now. What made the difference? He told me, that one day, someone shared with him how Jesus Christ could heal his life. How Jesus, could make him whole again, and restore him to the kind of person that he was meant to be.

He told me how God loved me, and how He sent his Son Jesus to die for my sins on the cross. At first I thought that he was from some kind of cult or something. But I later found out that everything he told me was in the Bible, and it was true. He told me that God wanted me to have a personal relationship with me. He then asked me if I had ever been saved? I wasn't sure what he meant by that so he explained to me that God sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins, to actually die in our place, so that we could have forgiveness by saving me from my sins, and restoring us in a right relationship with God.

That night driving home I asked Jesus to forgive my sins, and to come into my life. That was thirty plus years ago, and God has totally changed my life because of my prayer that night. He has given me the love and acceptance that I was always longing for, and His Word, the Bible tells me that because I received God's free gift of Jesus I now have eternal life (1 John 5: 11-13), and can live forever with Him in heaven.

If you're not sure what I am telling you is true, then find a Bible, and look up that popular scripture verse. You know the one that you see on banners at football games all the time. John 3:16. It says:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NIV)

Since God has come into my life, that spring day in 1978. I have had joy in living that I cannot describe. He has been my strength in the good times, and the bad, and He has given me the kind

of life I always wanted to live, but didn't know how.

I knew that if God was big enough for me to trust Him with my salvation from sin, then He was big enough to trust Him with my life and I could turn it over to God for Him to run.

I now try to live and do things the way I feel He would have me do them, and I believe and know that it is Him who gives me the strength and the courage to keep striving.

So if you ever find yourself looking for answers. My advice to you is to look to Jesus. Trust Him. He alone has given me life, and life abundantly, and I know that He can do the same for you, and if you have never accepted Him as your Savior I would encourage you to pray as I did and ask Him to forgive your sins and invite Him into your heart and make Him Lord of your life.

If you want to know more, about how you can know God in a personal way. Start by reading the Bible in the Gospel of John, or visit a Bible believing church in your area, or call any Youth for Christ chapter listed in the phone book.

If you should still have questions, or you have decided to put your trust in Jesus and are not sure what to do next. I would encourage you to download my FREE book "Growing Deep" by going to the link on our website at (<http://www.inheritancewm.x10.mx/Ministry%20Items.html>) it will help you in your next steps in your new walk with Christ or to help you refocus the walk you already have with Him.

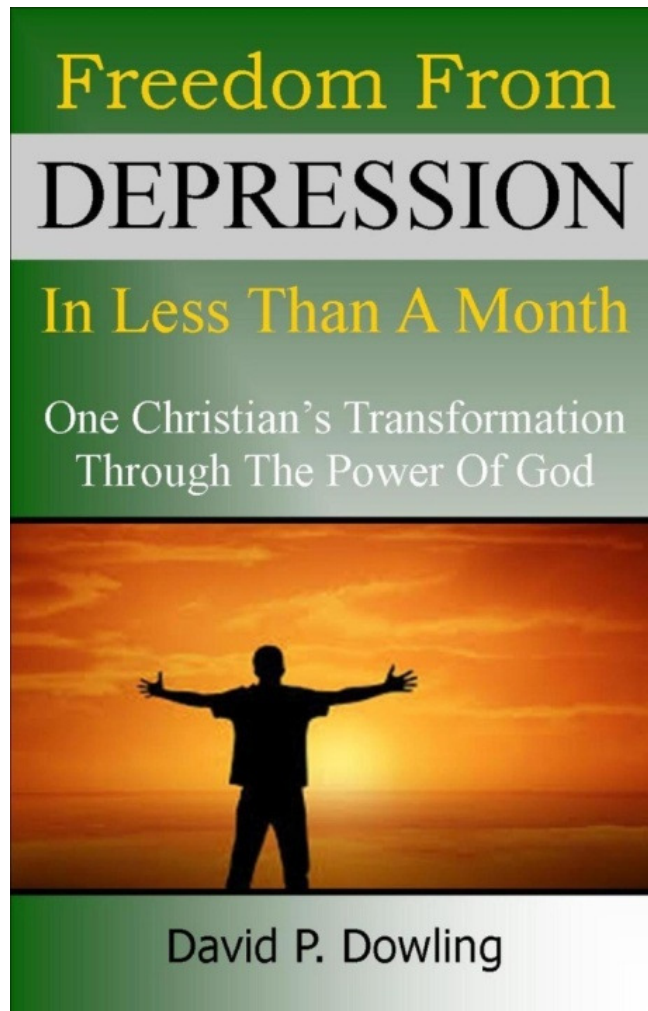
God bless you richly on your journey! - Dave Dowling

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OTHER WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR

"Freedom From Depression In Less Than A Month: One Christian's

transformation through the power of God”



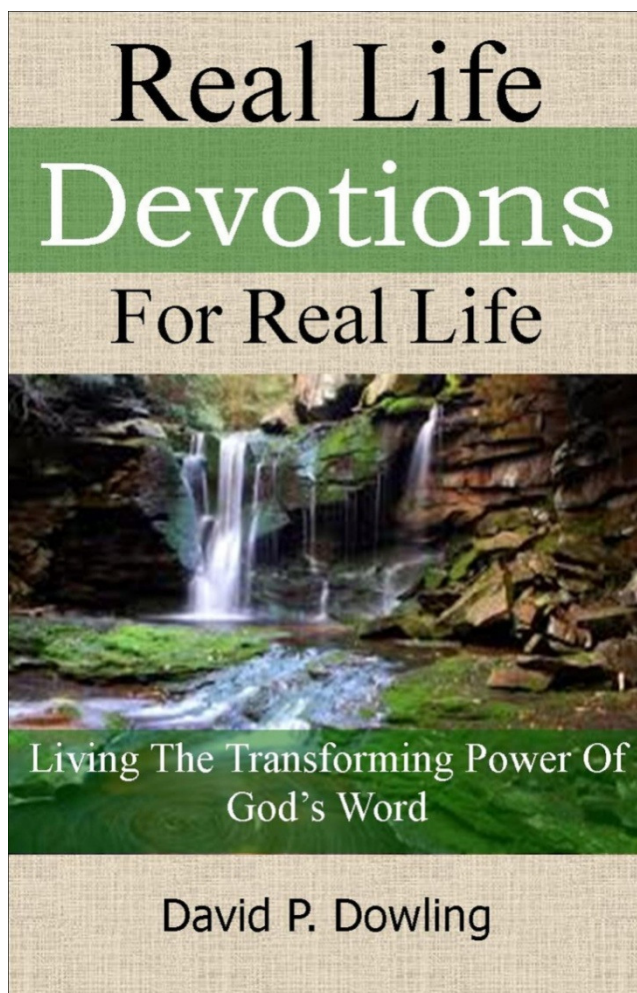
Book Description:

Depression is a real and controlling part of many people's lives, Christians and great men of the Bible being no exception. Struggling with severe depression for over two years, this Christian author found his life broken and shattered. Even after counseling and medication he found himself being pulled down deeper and deeper, and held strongly captive by the beast of depression until he felt all hope was gone. In desperation he cried out to God to somehow rescue him, and He did.

This book is a story of his journey of how God revealed to him a plan of healing and health and how God restored him in less than a month to the healthy person he once was. In it he reveals the step by step process God laid out for him in overcoming depression. A process he has shared successfully with many youth and adults as he ministered to them through their own depression and who have found healing on the other side in the same way he did.

This book guides you through the four boxes of anger, finding the root of depression, building a life filter, understanding forgiveness, finalizing forgiveness, how to use God's Word to find true healing, celebrating your recovery, building a beachhead, how to reach out to others in depression, and much more. Filled with Scripture this book with its eleven chapters is a powerful transforming tool for anyone going through depression or for someone who wants to reach out to somebody they know who is.

**“Real Life Devotions For Real Life: Living the transforming power of
God's Word”**



Book Description:

Devotionals can be a powerful tool to help deepen your walk with Christ. Uniquely designed this Christian devotional guide is far different from any other you have ever read before. “Real Life Devotions For Real Life,” is a fifty two week devotional and is compiled of real life stories from the author’s friends, family and his own personal experiences.

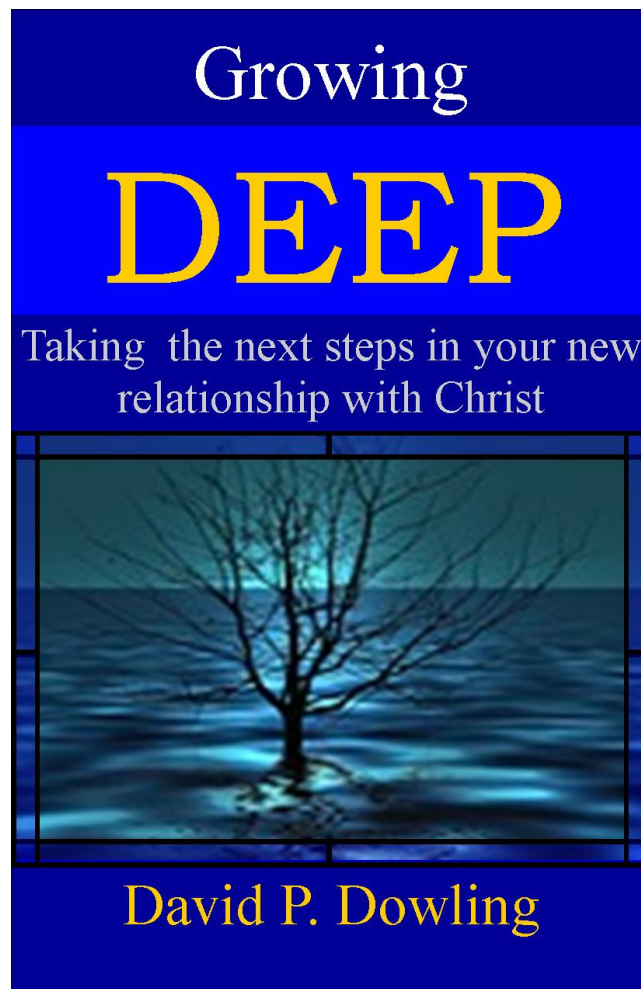
Each story will challenge your heart and your thinking. Some funny and some tragic, but all of them touching. Coupled with each story is a thought for the week offering an enhanced view of how to look at life, by highlighting and magnifying each narrative with a Godly perspective.

In order to engage each reader and bring them deeper into their journey with God, each

devotional story concludes with a checklist challenge for the week. Each challenge is made up of seven action steps in order to saturate your heart with the scripture passage for that week helping you to not only apply it, but to make it an intricate part of your life.

Filled with scripture this book is designed in such a way to allow the Word of God to permeate into your heart and your life as you work through the stories, thoughts and checklist challenge for the week. A must read for anyone wanting to discover intimacy with Christ while trying to learn to apply scripture into their daily living for the Lord in the REAL world.

“Growing Deep: Taking your next steps in your new relationship with Christ”



Book Description:

In our ministry over the years we have seen many people make a decision to follow Christ and we have also seen many people who have made a commitment to follow Jesus not know what to do with this new relationship.

So seeing the need, we developed this FREE book for both new believers and also for those struggling in their faith in order to help them grow closer to God as they grow in understanding what it is like to walk with God. Thus we have named it "GROWING DEEP"

Please feel free to download and print out as many copies as you need for your church youth group, church outreach, or to just give to a friend that is struggling. The only thing we ask is that you don't distribute them for financial gain in any way! The love of God is Free and so we feel this booklet should be as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David P. Dowling has been ministering to teenagers and adults for over two decades. He served as a volunteer staff person with Youth for Christ in the Pocono/Slate Belt area of Pennsylvania starting in 1980 with Dave serving as the Executive Director from 2001 to 2008.

It was during his time at Youth for Christ that Dave had his first experience in short term missions, traveling to Jamaica to work on an addition for a school. Through that trip and others Dave gained the experience to go on to lead short term mission teams in the U.S. and to Honduras, and both Ghana and Kenya, Africa.

He is presently the Executive Director of [Inheritance World Ministries inc.](#) a ministry that trains and equips God's people to perform various types of ministry, as well as lead short term mission trips. He and his wife Gail have also come along side of [Through the Storm Ministries](#) to help in

the building and support of their ministry of an orphanage in Kenya East Africa. Dave plans on continuing to lead short term mission teams there to help both physically and financially.

Dave struggled for over two years with severe depression. It was only when he hit rock bottom that he turned back to God and found the answers that led him back out of his sickness into healing. As Dave sought after God, God revealed to him not only the steps that led to his depression, but also the path that would lead him back to health in a period of just a couple of weeks. It was what he learned on that journey that he decided to place between the pages of a book in order that others might find the same freedom he now has.

Dave has the ability to make God's Word real to people, and feels right at home whether he is speaking to 20 Junior High teenagers at a winter retreat or closing with a Gospel presentation at a Michael Card concert to hundreds.

Dave is extremely professional in engaging people, both from the stage and one on one. His desire is to see people understand God's Word so they can apply it to the way they live, and live a life in a way that brings glory to God.

Dave lives with his wife Gail in the Pocono Mountains of northeast Pennsylvania. They have one daughter Sarah, and three sons, Jeremiah, Joshua, and Caleb.

You can also connect with Dave online on [Facebook.com](#) or through [Inheritance World Ministries Inc.](#)