

**“My Healed Soul”**  
**August 22, 2010**  
**Grove Presbyterian Church**

**Old Testament Lesson**

**I Kings 1: 1-4**

King David was old and advanced in years; and although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. So his servants said to him, ‘Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king, and be his attendant; let her lie in your bosom, so that my lord the king may be warm.’ So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful. She became the king’s attendant and served him, but the king did not know her sexually.

**New Testament Lesson and Reflection**

**James 5: 13-18**

David and Abishag. If you’re sick, if you’re old and cold – you just want a little comfort.

I remember two comments from persons I have helped bury.

The first came from someone who was dying from lung disease. As I left his hospital room, I tossed out, “Be good.”

He replied, “In the condition I’m in I can’t do anything but be good.”

The second was someone near death. The earnest young chaplain arrived and urged him to share his feelings with his loved ones before it was too late. He replied, “We’ve been saying it all our lives, we don’t have to rush to say it.”

**Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.**

**The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.**

**The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.**

**Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.**

**Reflection:**

**“My Healed Soul”**

Well, we've got a promise or two (or three) in this passage from James that I'm a little uncertain if they are true.

***The prayer of faith will save the sick***

Ah ha...

Been doing a lot of praying. Not seeing many of our folks who are suffering getting better. I guess I'm not as faithful or as fervent as Elijah who could pray for a drought and get a drought and then pray for rain and get rain. Outcome based praying.

Or James, the leading presbyter, that is 'elder,' of the Jerusalem church writes:

***The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective***

Promise?

Please define effective. Effective on their body? Or in my soul?

Then again:

***...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another  
so that you may be healed.***

Of course, the issue is: when you pray, are you trying to change God? Are you trying to fix someone else? Or does prayer change the person who prays? Prayer changes the pray-er, bringing us into line with the will of God. Prayer is best appreciated as transformative than transactional. What is changed is me. This is the little secret about prayer we pastors keep to ourselves.

"So that **you** may be healed." Who is this 'you?' The pray-er. What healing does 'me' the pray-er need? How about healing my anger, my doubt, my separateness, my fears, my selfishness?

Never have seen a prayer yet change nature. Have seen it change us.

Who needs healing here today? Does healing depend upon curing?

Oh, maybe when you call upon the Spirit of God with an open soul and mind and heart, you can receive what the Absolute Divine can give: spiritual God-ness things, such as courage, faith, hope, strength, love, forgiveness, acceptance of forgiveness.

Darn. I'd really rather my God were a vending machine. Pop in my prayer. Pull knob. Claim my prize.

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How about we listen to those of our friends who are and have been diagnosed with cancer?

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**1. What are some of the practices (spiritual, physical, mental, or emotional) that you personally do that help you through your diagnosis and treatment?**

Habit of quiet time spent in relationship with God, although during the pain I had to rely on the prayers of others to sustain me.

I think that our job during the good days is to work on our faith. It is like filling a well. We read our Bible, accept the fact that not all the days will be good days, and try to come to terms with that thought. For most of us, we do not live in despair, but know that there will be bad days, and we had better prepare ourselves for them. So we do not sing with Momma Cass that "the good days are coming," but instead know that the bad days will sometime be here. So we know that we puny mortals have to do what we can to shore up our faith. We read our Bible, particularly Job, the Psalms, and the Gospel of John, Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer, and whoever else helps to bind wounds yet to come, and hope that we are prepared. I doubt that it is very easy to handle the bad days if we have not prepared ourselves on the good ones.

You become very intimate with the nurses and Docs.

Strength of others. Without others, can't go through it. More than wife. Neighbors even helping me at the toilet. Don't isolate yourself. Subject is not taboo. Talk about it.

...but overall the full credit goes to Jesus. For over thirty years I've been reading the bible through and praying regularly. It's become a way of life for me. I do pray a lot more now because now I pray as soon as I wake up in the morning, not just when I think to do it!

**2. What were some of the biggest helps you received?**

The biggest helps were the smallest ones. Hospital visits. Food. Prayers. Any kind of acknowledgement that someone understood, or perhaps didn't but wanted to help.

The mail. Cards, messages, sayings, prayers.

Force marching myself to go to church regularly.

Belief system – don't phony it. You don't know how strong you are until you have no other options but to be strong.

Many of the biggest helps were physical – friends cleaning up the bathroom floor, getting the hospital bed, the right kind of sheets, errands, help with the meds, respite care for my wife. Special volunteers to give her a break from the stuff you cannot ask of neighbors.

Biggest helps – member of Grove (no longer in town) brought me a stuffed dog and washed my hair. The dog felt good hugged to my chest and affected arm – I still have the dog.

Friends. Support groups were okay but I didn't want to be pigeon-holed. Friends talk about other things.

Tried to keep things as normal as I could – cook meals, clean house, go out for dinner, tried to dance.

I had a lot of phone buddies that I depended on and they were always there. I had one friend who always insisted I call her after each appointment to tell her how it went. And I did!

Someone here for me. Didn't feel secure being home alone.

### **3. What were some mistakes people made in relating to you?**

You asked me about mistakes the caregivers did. There were never any mistakes, you don't at least I didn't look for any negatives in a situation like that.

Staying too long when visiting or helping

Not coming around, not getting in touch.

Would have liked visits. Not many did. People tend to shy away.

The mistakes: over-reassurance. I was told that my lung cancer had a 75% chance of cure- for lung cancer that's phenomenal. A couple of days later it was 60%. Then I heard 40%. Then I found out that it had spread both to a local vein and to a lymph node. At that point I just decided to retire so that I'd had a few days to myself before I died. Each figure came from a different person, but the optimism faded as more information came from studying the biopsy. I think that I could have done without the initial optimism. Yes it looked good at the time, but the subsequent pathology information did nothing to confirm it. I didn't feel lied to but felt that people were trying too hard to make me feel good under circumstances when it wouldn't be confirmed.

Mistake: all the focus on the sick person forgetting the care-giver.

### **4. What helps you the most through these times?**

My oncologist told me to keep walking – it helps the moods and ward off depression.

I appreciated any concerns from people. My husband was majorly important. He heard all of my groans and was constantly called on to comfort me. And also I depended on [my pastor when he was] at the hospital for most of my chemo treatments. Can't say enough about Geisinger either. I mean everyone at Geisinger. Geisinger and God.

A great spouse and good friends who let you know they care.

Laugh a lot. Fight it with all I have.

Cancer support groups, occasionally, mostly to help others. Really tried hard to keep smiling and reach out to others who looked down.

Prayer. The Lord doesn't take sides. But what kind of prayer? Pray for strength and for the people who are helping, for those who treat you. Praying for you can be selfish.

### **5. What lessons have you learnt from your illness?**

A lot of people don't know how to react. They don't know how to cope with tears.

Everybody's experience is different.

Need reassurances. Can get nutsy over it, panic attacks.

Don't give up but be realistic.

Once make the decision, don't want people pushing you back.

Don't take everything the Doc says at face value. Question a lot of things. Can get overload of information and you can range from being an ostrich versus obsession.

When they insert the urinary catheter, just expect someone different each time.

I wasn't cured. Be as active a part of your health care as you can. Don't accept what you are told. Ask questions. Know how to get people to answer your questions. Need a medical advocate and advisor. Draw on people's experience.

Some Docs can explain, some can't. Can't be worried about hurting the Doctors feelings – he never gave us a straight answer. We were worried about alienating him.

Discuss how do you fight with your health care provider – how to press your point and get answers. Write it down. Write down your talking points.

Know the difference between remission and cure.

Keep working if you can – takes your mind off it.

When those days come we can only throw the bucket into the well and hope that what we get out will strengthen us. We hope that the quotes, poems, and passages that we once thought gave us insight and strength flow back into us and give strength to our faith in the days that we need them more than anything. I can say that when we are prepared they are a great solace. When we are not prepared, as I learned during my divorce, we can only hear ourselves saying, "How could this happen to me?" But with my other illnesses, I could only hope that the well was deep enough to carry me through, and it was.

My mother and grandmother were both strong Christian types that I've always tried to imitate from my memories of them. I would say my reaction to cancer was from my memories of how my mother faced cancer as a young woman. She was only 41 when she died and I helped to take care of her. But the cancer never stopped ravaging her body. My cancer was removed with surgery so I never had to deal with that aspect, like Steve K. or David H. Can't honestly say how I'd do that.(one thing for sure, I'd pray more!) The chemo wasn't a piece of cake, it was done as an added precaution with me.

Live well in relationship with God and others, appreciate each day, and nurture an attitude of gratefulness.

Networking. Networking. Networking. Don't wait till hospice. Build up your resources. Be active in the community. Reach out to others. Can't go into a shell. Don't turn people away.

## **6. What suggestions do you have to those who will be diagnosed with cancer?**

Many will support you – you are not alone.

Be available for others – such as being on the list for newly diagnosed patients to call.

Do it when you can.

Lessons? Be open with people and they'll be open with you.

Enjoy yourself because you don't know for how long. This is my celebration of life.

## **7. What suggestions do you have to care-givers of those who will be diagnosed with cancer?**

Patience! Allow them to express their feelings and just listen! You don't have to fix everything.

First meeting with the oncologist blew me apart. But once I made my decision on treatment, a weight was off. After third treatment, I told my oncologist: "I feel you are killing me." His answer: "You're kind of right."

I will conclude by telling you how all this started. And I know God was with me from the beginning. I fell in the house and when I hit the floor my head was on a pillow. I was cleaning out a cupboard and there were small pillows around. Very small pillows, but somehow one of them was right under my head. That accident was meant to happen and I know it. My ribs were broken, which led to a cat-scan, which led to doctors seeing the mass on my left ovary. I know God was in all of this and I believe caring for my mother so many years ago was preparation for how I faced the cancer. I love you.

**8. What does the person going through the diagnosis and treatment need to know about what the care-giver is going through?**

The caregiver goes through an extreme gamut of emotions. These are the fear of the unknown, compassion for the person going through treatment, tolerance for the person going through treatment, and love for the person. The person going through treatment needs to know and understand all the emotions that the caregiver is going through and conversely the caregiver must know and understand what the person going through the treatment is going through.

My care givers were all family. They were there. That's all that counts. I'm not sure I wanted to know what my care givers were going through. I had enough to handle.

Caregiver needs help, support, respect. Very stressful for her.

Help in knowing what the care-giver is going through. Like the person with cancer, the caregiver is going through a mixture of emotions – grief, hurt, impatience, love, and sometimes helplessness

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1,500 Americans die from cancer every day.

11.4 million Americans cancer patients are alive today.

1 in 2 men face a lifetime risk of developing cancer.

Women? 1 in 3.

That is a whole lot of us. Amen.