

Revivalist Has 'Incredible Peace' Since Daughter's Death

Rodney Howard-Browne has vowed to win 100 million souls in memory of his teenage daughter, Kelly

A month after his 18-year-old daughter's death on Christmas morning, revivalist Rodney Howard-Browne said God has given him "an indescribable, incredible peace, beyond anything I have ever seen."

As an infant Kelly Howard-Browne was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, a terminal genetic disease of the mucus glands. Sufferers have an average life expectancy of 30 years, but Kelly's doctors in South Africa didn't expect her to live beyond the age of 4.

"We had seen God heal her many times," her mother, Adonica Howard-Browne, said. "It wasn't the doctors [or] the medicine."

The couple say Kelly loved worship and recorded a song on the church's Christmas album despite a failing lung. She also wanted to preach, travel, plant churches and get married someday, her father said. "Kelly never lived with an idea that death was imminent," he said. "She lived life to the fullest."

But in late 2001, with her respiratory system weakened, Kelly needed to receive oxygen. She suffered serious bouts with her illness at least once each year, but her father says he realized she might not recover this time. On Christmas Eve 2002, Kelly refused to be put on a ventilator. Her parents

said it was the first time in her life that she began to consider she might die of the disease.

Her body began to shake violently, Rodney Howard-Browne recalled, as she told him that her spirit wasn't afraid of death, but her body was. The couple prayed and sang to her, and rocked her until she died at 4:37 Christmas morning.

"It's kind of like you go numb," Adonica Howard-Browne said. "At the time there was a peace, [but] it's not the easiest thing, to let go of your child. We cry, we grieve. It's more for us than for [Kelly]."

Known for his "holy laughter" revival meetings that began in Lakeland, Fla., in the 1990s, Rodney Howard-Browne said he felt overwhelmed by the peace of God after Kelly's death, and his wife said she felt bathed in the love of God.

"God doesn't see death the way we do," she said. "We see it as an end. For Kelly, she just stepped over into the fullness of the presence of God."

Despite their daughter's death, the Howard-Brownes believe that God heals, and they pray for the sick and continue to see miracles in their ministry. They said they believed God would heal their daughter until the end.

"But ultimately, it was His plan for her [that prevailed], not ours," Adonica Howard-Browne said.

Kelly's siblings, Kirsten Bendixen, 20, and Kenneth, 15, were surprised by her death, Adonica Howard-Browne said. "She had

been hospitalized so many times before and got better.”

But the family says they have been overwhelmed by the prayers, calls, flowers and e-mails they have received from Christians around the world. Rodney Howard-Browne said the outpouring of prayer and love from the body of Christ, along with the peace of God was “more than I could bear.”

A memorial service was held Dec. 29 at Revival Ministries International in Tampa, Fla., where the couple are pastors, and a smaller, graveside funeral was held Dec. 31. “We miss her, but it’s not grief,” Rodney Howard-Browne said. “We think of her, we’ll have tears come to our eyes, but it’s not despair. This is a hope, which I believe only the Lord could have given.”

Some 30,000 Americans, 3,000 Canadians and 20,000 Europeans are living with cystic fibrosis, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation reports. The Howard-Brownes say parents with terminally ill children should ensure that they know Jesus as Lord, get rid of all fear because the child will sense it and trust God for a complete miracle.

“Stand with them,” Rodney Howard-Browne said. “Don’t try to pretend it’s not there, but really stand with them.”

Howard-Browne said Kelly’s illness helped make the ministry strong because it kept them in constant prayer. “Kelly caused us to fight,” he said. “The more she suffered, the more we attacked the enemy. Right up until she went home, I just wouldn’t quit.

“Kelly is totally healed now,” he added. “She’s better off

than any other Christian on the planet. Whether it be 10, 20, 40, 50 years [until we see her again], it's not long."

But Howard-Browne is turning his grief into action. "My daughter dying is the worst career move the devil could have made. We're going after 100 million souls, and he will pay."

Adrienne S. Gaines