

4 Lasting Lessons God Has Taught Me Through My Battle With Cancer

My journey through my battle with leukemia and colorectal cancer has been a tough one. When the cancer metastasized to my left lung and the doctor had to remove most of that lung, the emotional and physical toll became heavy. Yet in the midst of this journey God has taught me much. What He has and is teaching me is priceless. I call these truths “treasures.” My relationship with God would never have deepened without the challenge of cancer. Here are four treasures I have learned.

1. The value of my prayers meeting my confusion.

Far too often, we let the questions lie dormant. We do not reflect on them. We avoid wrestling with them. The result is we neglect an avenue of growth in our inner world.

In my life there is a tendency to feel ashamed that I have questions and doubts. You and I can erroneously conclude that to have questions about and for God along the way is evidence of a lack of faith. This mindset is detrimental to spiritual maturity.

I remember the feeling of loneliness in an ambulance ride to Mayo Clinic. I knew there were a driver and paramedic in the ambulance, but I felt very alone. In reality, I knew God was there but He seemed so removed from me at that moment. In the ambulance, my prayer consisted not of flowery words, but instead ignorant and desperate words. But I prayed. And I was honest. I believe God heard those prayers. At that moment, that was all I knew.

I am learning in my walk with God, certain experiences will bring us to places where our prayers meet our fears and

desperation. I am finding, more and more, this type of honest prayer is the avenue to real change.

2. God gives a miraculous peace.

What I am discovering, in increasing measure, is that what actually changes in my life is out of my control. Though I long for good health, the only certainty God promises is peace. Peace in my heart and mind. When everything around me is uncertain, fearful, painful and confusing, there is God's peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:6-7). It is perhaps the greatest miracle we can experience in our journey.

It is the incredible peace of God, this miracle from God, that calms any storm.

Facing the questions takes us deeper experientially in our relationship with God and is where we discover His peace. We won't know that peace if our prayers are shallow and dishonest at the heart level.

3. Cancer is not my orientation.

It is pretty easy to let cancer be the center of my day and life. After all, I take daily meds for it. It renders me sick quite often and has affected my family in significant ways. First and foremost, I am a child of God. Cancer does not define me. Jesus is the Lord of my life and has the final say in my life. My life orients around Him, not my cancer.

When we look only at our trials, we miss the overriding orientation our lives are meant to have. When we face the difficulties in life, ourselves turns inward out of preservation and safety. Our focus can stay on self. For the Christian, our orientation is outside ourselves and on God. I am continually learning all my life is to point to Jesus Christ. The way I face cancer is to honor Christ. That is my orientation.

4. The indispensable value of family and friends.

We were not created to and never meant to travel alone. When it comes to enduring and overcoming trials, the need for support is even more pronounced. I tend to try to protect my family and friends from the hard stuff. It wasn't until the cancer hit that I realized I missed out on needed support over the years. God has blessed me with a loving wife and compassionate children. God has given me a mom who has such a loving heart, and amazing siblings. My in-laws are a blessing. I took for granted the value of these relationships. God allowed me to see these precious relationships anew.

I have also found my friends to be an indispensable resource. I agreed with Henry Nouwen:

"The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing ... not healing, not curing ... that is a friend who cares."

I know God is able to deliver me from trials should He choose. I need to resolve to intentionally apply what God has and is teaching me. It takes resolve to journey well. I encourage you to embrace the treasures in your trials, and you'll find sure footing and strength to journey well.

Matthew Miklasz is a pastor and co-author with his wife, Cyndy, of the book *Joy for the Journey: How to Walk Through Life's Trials in a Healthy Way*. He studied theology at Trinity College of the Bible and was ordained with the EFCA in 2003. He and Cyndy are raising their four children on their hobby farm in Minnesota. For more information, visit .

For more from Pastor Matt on his cancer journey as well as other "Hope Through Cancer" interviews, listen to the podcasts included with this article!