

How Thankfulness Helped This Woman Process Her Pain

In November 2017, I started doing what I call a Thankful Thursday. Like clockwork every week, I prepare a big meal, usually some soup and salad. Anyone who walks by is invited to attend. As we sit and eat together, we talk about and celebrate the many things we have to be thankful to God for. Sometimes we even play a game of cards or do karaoke. Each time, I am amazed at the vast assortment of different people from different phases of my life who have stopped by. These simple dinners have connected people who would have never met and become good friends. Connecting people was something my late husband, Greg, was so good at.

Since the beginning of our marriage, Greg and I always hosted missionaries or people in need of a bed. Our extra rooms were almost always full. After Greg passed away this past summer after a long battle with colon cancer, I knew he would want me to continue on our tradition of hosting people in any way possible—thus, Thankful Thursday was born. Through this dinner, we are able to take care of other needs—perhaps a physical need of hunger, but I suspect we are also helping some souls as well.

Continuing with this has continued to bring me joy, even when going through some hard stages of grief after Greg went home to heaven. The amazing thing is my son and I haven't just created a new tradition, but we have seen the Lord expand the old one of welcoming people in need of a place to stay. Now, in addition to missionaries or family friends, we welcome patients from out of town who come to Vanderbilt for a treatment, the same place Greg was treated. Depending on what they need, I go to doctor's appointments with them, sit at chemo infusions, offer prayer, prepare meals, go on walks with them and even research traditional as well as alternative

treatments that could bring them healing.

Knowing what they have gone through from my own experience with Greg allows me to connect with these patients and their families on a new level. One day I met a man who was battling stage 4 colon cancer, just as my husband did. He passed away recently, but I was able to encourage and love his wife because I know the pain she was feeling. I knew the suffering, turmoil and sacrifices she went through watching her husband fight this awful disease. I know the grief she is working through, because I myself am still walking through it. I have to smile, because it seems even from heaven, Greg is bringing people together.

Whether it is making a meal for Thankful Thursday or just visiting someone at Vanderbilt, these moments have helped me on my own journey of discovering what God has in store for me and using my experience and gifts to help Him reach others. Sure, we are helping people, but the truth is, these things have been a real blessing for Jackson and me; they have brought a renewal of life and purpose into our home. {eoa}

Tracey Murtha *is wife of Greg Murtha, the author of Out of The Blue: The Unexpected Adventure of Life Interrupted, which released posthumously from Clear Day Media on Sept. 1, 2017. The Audio Version featuring an intro from Bob Goff and a special message from Greg at the end of the book released in February 2018.*