

Is the Cancer Back?

It started when the police officer knocked on my door. That's when I knew my week had finally culminated into crazy.

Just an hour earlier my sister's power had blown, making it impossible for her industrial-sized printer to produce the last of the merchandise for my "Get Well" baskets we created for that afternoon's event.

I laughed at her text. How could I not? I'd been in bed fighting some upper respiratory cough for the last three weeks, and the day before I had rushed to the Urgent Care, then the hospital for a CT because my X-ray they'd taken to rule out broken ribs from coughing so much came back abnormal.

Craziness, I tell you.

I opened the door, and turns out, the cop was looking for the residents who lived here before us. Breathing a little easier, I scurried to dress and prep, because in two hours I'd be speaking at the Palm Beach Women's Network luncheon, an event I attend quarterly, but this time I was slated to speak. Mind you, I've spoken for years and entered Toastmasters competitions just for the fun, but this event's previous speakers were Pam Tebow, Jackie Kendall, Dr. Chauncey Crandall—you know, high-profile presenters.

I'm just little ol' Dabney.

Thoughts of inadequacy filled my mind. My brain does this from time to time. Likes to repeat destructive thoughts of how unworthy I am.

Praise **God** for my husband who knows me so well and offers a pep talk before I walk out the door. Of course, he makes me cry happy tears. He'd also stayed up most of the night organizing and cleaning the house so I'd spend my morning

stress-free while getting ready for this event.

Love that man.

Friends had texted most of the morning. I'd asked them to **pray** for **God's Spirit** to **revive** my energy and calm my mind. Pulling up to the valet at the Frenchman's Reserve, my fears dissipate. Looking into the main dining hall, I see all that God is doing. All the merchants who surround the venue selling their wares, most of them to benefit a faith-based charity, and I know this is God. All of this.

There is no place like **His presence**. No place. I spoke, signed, laughed and cried with these beautiful women, then drove home to rest.

The next morning I called my oncologist and asked him if he received the results of my last CT scans, thinking that was odd since the CT tech at the hospital had repeated a few times that I follow up with my doctor, but nobody from Urgent Care had called me back. Before I know it, I'm on the phone with my oncologist's assistant. My doctor wants to see me within the hour.

"How soon can you get to the cancer center?" she asks.

"Is this serious? Should I be concerned?"

"I can't say. All I know is that he said he wanted to see you within the next hour and if you can't make it in, Monday would work too."

I rushed to the hospital with my four kids.

Why else would he want to see me so quickly? If it was this upper respiratory problem or bronchitis and it was serious, that couldn't wait until Monday, right?

Tears slip down my cheeks as I call Jason with the news, then my pastor's wife for prayer. This is crazy. Just yesterday I

was telling a roomful of ladies of the **miracles** God had allowed in my life and encouraged them to share their stories, and now this?

The kids are concerned now. I don't know what to say, and I certainly don't want to scare them, but all I can muster is an "I don't know" to all of their questions.

In the waiting area, the kids explore the large saltwater fish tank, and I still can't believe I'm here. Just then the billing department calls me into a room. They've never done this before, but they needed to verify my coverage for this visit and any testing they need to do today, the woman explains.

My heart sinks.

I watch Sabal, my 5-year-old, play tag with her 8-year-old brother. Her long blonde hair flows behind her and she's giggling.

I just want to watch them grow up.

I walk back to the waiting area where the kids realize mommy's face has changed. Sabal crawls under my chair, Madison, 14, kneels down at my feet, and Ansley, 10, slips in beside me, her almond-shaped eyes squinting further as she asks, "Are you scared?"

I nod.

She can sniff out deceit better than anyone I know. She's crying now, too, and hugging on me gently, trying not to squeeze my bruised, sore ribs.

My name is called, and I walk back, leaving the kids with Maddie to watch—Jason will be here soon.

I sit to have my blood drawn, wiping my face with my free hand when the nurse says, "How are you doing? I know this is tough,

but you've been through this before. You're in good hands. The doctor will take good care of you." She smiles.

Following her down the hall, I'm left to sit alone in the exam room.

Why would she say that? She must have looked at my chart.

I can't wipe my cheeks fast enough.

It's back. I know it's back. Can my veins take more chemo? Can my heart? I don't think so. Do I even want to go for more treatment? A third occurrence—that's a death-sentence, right? I wonder what the stats are for surviving Hodgkin's three times. Not good, I assume. I'll research that.

I'll have to cancel my upcoming speaking engagements at the Grace Place Church in Bradenton, and probably the Seasons event too. I can't speak now, not with this news. I'll be too tired and sick.

All I've ever wanted was to live long enough to see Madison marry. She's 14—can they prolong my life long enough? Who will teach them? They'll have to go to public school, Lord help me. And Jason, he'll be so alone, doing this by himself. He works so hard. And I have no life insurance; no one would sell me any with my history.

I dropped my head a little lower. The way I've been feeling, so fatigued and cruddy lately, heaven does sound glorious. I'll get to see my dad, and it would be the ultimate answer to Jason's promise from so many years ago—that the second half of my life would be better than the first, because I would be in paradise.

The door opens wider and Jason walks in. I tell him what the nurse just told me, about "I know this is tough ... "

He says he's scared too, but he'd just got done talking to the

kids and asked them all the times that God had shown up. The answered prayer with our house and his job and mom's book, and just after he told the kids that he believed I'd be OK, his phone vibrated. It was his boss announcing to the staff that Jason had just received a promotion at work. The kids don't know this yet. He's waiting to surprise them with a nice dinner out when everything officially clears.

As he's telling me all of this, the doctor walks in.

"So, how are you feeling?" My oncologist sits and crosses his leg over his knee.

I explain how I've been to the ER for a CT scan and then back to his office to see his partner for antibiotics for this cough since he was out of town, and then I told him how I thought I broke a rib from coughing and the whole ordeal with Urgent Care and a second CT.

"Well, you have pneumonia," he says. "It's gathered on the left side of your lung, right where you're feeling the most pain." He proceeds to ask what meds I'm on and adds a few more days of antibiotics.

And I finally can't take it anymore. "Do I have cancer?" I blurt.

He brow creases and he shakes his head. "No. Your scan looks the same from 2005. You'll always have radiation scars show up, but nothing too unusual."

"Uh," I sigh and then tell him I thought that's why he called me in to see him so quickly. "Don't do that."

"You called me," he says. "I was just trying to squeeze you in. And because when you have pneumonia, your health decreases rapidly, especially with your compromised lungs."

"Oh," is all I can get out.

“And stop going to Urgent Cares and always come see me from now on, all right? I’ll fit you in every time.”

“Not if you go on vacation.” I tried a joke, my emotions finally settling down. He laughs at this but makes me promise to always see him first. My health depends on it.

Praise You, God, this was just pneumonia. Praise You for this reminder to enjoy my kids and my days for as long as I can. You’ve given me the gift of a little more time. I pray I don’t waste it. Help me to know what I can do to further Your kingdom.

Jason tells me later, “You know what Madison said to me in the waiting area?”

I shook my head.

“She told me that she prayed and asked God, ‘If mom has cancer, will you take it from her and give it to me?’”

My mouth opens a little and I crushed my body into his. Lord, help me to at least live long enough to make it to her wedding day. This child is such a gift. Praise You for all of my precious children. They are the ultimate blessing in my life.

OK, I guess my husband is too.

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