

Rejoicing Comes in the Morning

Amid incredible loss, you can still trust God to bring good out of every situation. I know because he did it for our family.

The start of the year 1999 crackled with excitement. God's blessings and promises to our family seemed so near, we could almost reach out and touch them. In 1998 we had traveled and ministered together in churches around the country—Harry and I preaching as a team and our three children, Harry III, Roman and Gabrielle, singing, laying hands on the sick, and ministering in the services. Many people told us we had the most unique ministry to families they had ever experienced.

Now we were entering a new year and a new level of ministry. Our travel calendar for 1999 was booked solid. We were scheduled to take God's message of love and hope to more people in more places than ever before.

Little did we know that our plans—and our lives—were about to be turned upside down.

AN EVIL REPORT It started when Gabrielle, our 5-year-old, began to have trouble sleeping. Plagued by bad dreams and night terrors, she would wake up screaming at the top of her lungs night after night. No matter what we did, nothing seemed to calm her.

Before long we noticed something else: Gabrielle's eyes had stopped moving properly. She tended to turn her head to look at things instead of simply shifting her gaze. Concerned, we called our family physician, who recommended that we take Gabrielle to an ophthalmologist. We made an appointment for

the following Monday, Jan. 11, 1999. The ophthalmologist examined Gabrielle thoroughly. Then he set up an appointment for an MRI—a procedure that would provide a more detailed picture of her brain than an X-ray—and called in a specialist.

The diagnosis was devastating: Gabrielle had an inoperable tumor in her brain stem—a death sentence.

Harry and I felt as if we'd had all the wind knocked out of us. We listened in stunned silence as doctors explained they could do nothing for our precious baby except put off the inevitable—and that by only a few short months. According to them, Gabrielle would not live to see her sixth birthday.

And so began a spiritual battle more difficult and painful than anything we had ever faced. We knew we could not accept the evil report of the medical experts. Instead, we decided we would do whatever we could to see our precious Gabrielle healed.

The one weapon we knew we could count on was the Word of God. We determined to resist the devil and speak only what we knew to be true in God's Word—not what we were told by doctors or what we saw in Gabrielle's condition. Family, friends and ministry partners joined us as we prayed fervently to keep the spirit of death away from our daughter.

No matter what we asked God in prayer during those months, His answer was always the same: "I am the Lord that heals Gabrielle. I will have no other gods before me." In other words, God alone must get the glory. He is the one who heals. We were to put no faith in anything or anyone other than God, Gabrielle's healer!

Little by little during the course of the following days and weeks, the Lord showed me that I often put my faith in other things—medicines, doctors, treatments, natural remedies. I put faith even in my faith! But God said He would have no other gods before Him. Daily, Harry and I examined ourselves to make

sure that all ego, pride, and faith in anything or anyone other than God was purged from our lives.

That didn't mean we were to do nothing to help Gabrielle get healed. That would have been ludicrous, even disobedient. The Amplified Bible says in Proverbs 18:9, "He who does not use his endeavors to heal himself is brother to him who commits suicide." The Scriptures do not sanction negligence!

We searched for any information that could help our daughter. We read everything we could get our hands on. We prayed, confessed, believed and worked hard to do everything possible to help her. When traditional medicine gave us no hope, we pursued natural and experimental treatments.

GOING HOME Months passed, but we knew that time did not change the Word of God. Each month we believed and expected the report of man to line up with the report of the Lord. And each month our daughter seemed to get worse.

Gabrielle had to go through three blood draws a week and an MRI every month. A port (or catheter) in her chest had to be cleaned and the dressing changed every five days. The impact on our finances of all these procedures was staggering, and the schedule we kept of appointments and treatments was beyond exhausting. Worse, we could see the strain on our little girl, both emotionally and physically.

Yet Gabrielle never wavered; she never doubted. She never questioned or complained. She confessed over and over that she was "the healed of the Lord." She taught us in those days how to delve into that deeper realm that goes beyond faith: trust in God.

Finally, on Nov. 23, 1999, Gabrielle went from this world to her home in heaven. All the day before we could tell she was weakening. She had lost her ability to talk, and her breathing was labored. Harry and I took turns staying by her bedside.

Through the night, angels came to get her. I could see them. When they arrived at midnight I said: "No, go away. I'm not ready for you yet." Politely, they backed down the hallway away from our room. At 3 a.m. they came again, and I sent them away once more. The same thing happened at 6 a.m.

Then, at 6:55 a.m., I felt an uncontrollable urge to close my eyes. Harry took over while I rested. And at 7 a.m., Gabrielle left.

Harry said that the angels did not come into the room, and no death spirit entered, either. Instead, Jesus Himself arrived. Gabrielle began to blow kisses, and then she crossed over. "There she goes," Harry said, and he heard Jesus respond, "Here she comes." Before she was even out of her body, she was with Jesus and in His arms.

CUTTING THROUGH THE CHAOS No one can understand the pain of losing a child unless he or she has been through it. Death was not what we had prayed for. It certainly was not the victory we'd sought! But when some people began accusing us of not having enough faith to secure Gabrielle's healing, we knew they were not only insensitive; they were wrong. After all, our faith was in God, not in our faith. We tried not to react to their rude comments, but I have to admit their words hurt.

After Gabrielle left, a million questions ran through my mind: "Why did this happen, God? Why did it have to be Gabrielle? Why, God, why?" But every time I asked "Why?" it seemed that new questions would spin off from the original question, and the cloud of confusion over my head only grew darker and heavier.

Finally, the Lord spoke to my heart.

"Cheryl," He said, "Don't you think I could walk into your kitchen right now, stand face to face with you and share exactly why this happened? I could tell you every detail from the beginning to the end. But when I finished, the explanation

would not satisfy you. You would turn and ask me again, 'Why?'

"And if I then explained it to you in a different way, again leaving out no detail, when I finished you would inevitably ask, 'Why?' There would be no end to that question. No matter how many times or how many ways I told you the entire truth, because it would not be the answer you want, you would always ask me again, 'Why?'"

Then God said, "Does this sound familiar to you?"

"Yes," I answered. "It sounds like me talking to my own children."

"And how do you ultimately answer them when they keep asking, 'Why?'"

I smiled. "I say, 'Because I said so.'"

I could almost feel Him smiling back as He responded, "And that's what I am telling you: Because I said so. I want you to learn to trust Me even when you don't always get the answer you want. I want you to trust that I know best—that I always have your best interest at heart. I want you to get to the place where you can say, 'Even if I never get another thing I pray for, I trust You, God.' Will you go to that place with Me, Cheryl?"

It was amazing. Even though God didn't answer my question, He answered every question I'd ever had.

"Yes, Lord," I said. "I trust You."

Later, I looked up all the "question words" (who, what, when, where, why and how much) in the Hebrew language and discovered they all have a common symbol—a mark that means "chaos." How appropriate, I thought. Asking a lot of questions that ultimately had no satisfying answers had served only to open my heart to a spirit of chaos, confusion and bitterness. It wasn't worth it! As my husband likes to say, "Don't ask,

‘Why?’ when you should be asking, ‘Who?’”

There are never any easy answers when a loved one dies. We can only rest in the assurance that God will never leave us or forsake us (see Heb. 13:5). This hope has to sustain us until we get to heaven to be with the one who has gone ahead.

Certainly, for little Gabrielle to go home first was beyond our worst nightmare. But we knew we could not stop believing God’s Word or His promises just because we did not get what we wanted, the way we wanted it. No one can doubt that Gabrielle is now healed and restored. If going to heaven is losing the battle, then something is wrong with our theology!

FOCUSING ON OTHERS Grieving the loss of a loved one is a natural process. But as Christians, we don’t have to grieve as the world does, as a people with no hope (see 1 Thess. 4:13). Harry and I have the hope and the assurance of a soon-coming King—and of a beautiful reunion with our precious Gabrielle.

We’ve written a book about our experience called *Mourning to Morning*. The homonyms in the title have special significance. Notice, the only way to get from the word “mourning” to the word “morning” is to take out the letter U. And that’s what we learned: The only way to get from mourning to morning—from the painful place of overwhelming sadness and grief to the joyous, hopeful dawn of a new day—is to take out the you.

For our own healing, Harry and I discovered we had to take the focus off ourselves through our hurt and pain. By praying for others to be healed, as God tells us to do in His Word, we were able to heal.

Have you experienced a loss in your own life—the loss of a child, a spouse, a job, a dream? Don’t stop believing God and His Word. Go beyond faith; begin to trust. You may not get the answer you want to the question, “Why?” But God will always be the answer to the question, “Who?”

Read a companion devotional.

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