

When I Should Have Died

I used to be fearful of a lot of things. I worried about money. I agonized over work projects and whether I was competent to perform a job well done. Seeking the approval of others was another fear. Did I offend them? Will they like me or secretly laugh at me?

It's funny the things I let consume my thoughts—such trivial matters in comparison to reality.

Money? I could always make more.

Work? I could always refine my skills.

Approval? People, I've learned, are typically more concerned with themselves, not my little blunders.

But a life-threatening sickness? That's bone-wearying business. That's real fear that trumps a host of nonsense.

You can't control that.

I'm about to share something that can transform your thoughts—something more powerful than disease itself.

At 25 years old and six weeks pregnant, a football-sized tumor blanketed my lungs.

Life changed with one x-ray and an oncologist telling me my odds would improve by terminating my pregnancy—only he couldn't really endorse an abortion since it contradicted his beliefs.

Meeting this physician in the ER the night of my diagnoses was no accident. Any other professional wouldn't have treated me unless I ended my pregnancy. If I ever doubted that God was with me during the coming years of battling illnesses, this should have been clue number one.

But sometimes we don't see God's hand entwined in ours until we look back on our journey.

We never aborted. Kneeling in our apartment, praying for guidance, a supernatural peace confirmed our hunch that this baby was destined to live. I assumed God had a greater miracle to perform, one that surely included healing me from cancer. Why else would He have given me such a peace to keep my child?

But He didn't.

My prayer wasn't answered. Not the way I wanted.

When I started chemotherapy in my second trimester, I again believed God would heal me and spare me the six months more of treatment after my baby was born.

But He didn't.

No matter which prayer position I tried or how many church members petitioned the Lord, God never removed my illness.

My daughter was born early, and I endured more chemo, then radiation.

At 26, my cancer was in remission. Halleluiaah, I thought, until two months later my oncologist found cottage-cheese-looking tumors along the outside sac of my heart and more mushroomed clusters growing along my abdomen.

Not a good sign. Not a good prognosis. Not much hope.

"But why, God?" I sobbed. "Why would you give me such a peace to keep my child, only to kill me with cancer or chemo?"

I endured the recommended stem-cell transplant. By the time I was released from Moffitt Cancer Institute in Tampa five weeks later, I longed to return home to care for my toddler.

Only I couldn't.

Friends and family babysat me and my daughter. They cleaned my house, made my meals, read her books. Resting on my sofa or the floor beside her crib, I watched everyone else live my life for me.

After two weeks at home, I realized I wanted my role back, even though I operated at 40 percent of my energy. My husband agreed and left me to love on my 16-month-old. In less than an hour, I realized my mistake.

I needed to nap. She didn't.

By noon, I hoisted her into the crib and pawed her wall to steady myself on the way out. I panted the 15 steps it took to reach my front porch and lowered myself onto the cement step.

Angry with God, I wiped my face and asked, "Why me? I just want to bake with my daughter, drive her to story time, and laugh like I used to."

I hated my life.

Then my phone rang and my friend Ragan blurted out, "Oh, Dabney, we're so glad you're home from the hospital. We just didn't know what we were going to do when we found out you weren't going to make it!"

"What? What are you talking about?"

I swallowed hard as she told me how I should have died. That's why my whole family unexpectedly visited me early one morning during my transplant and why my daughter, whom I was told I wouldn't see for my five-week hospital stay, was toddling around my sterilized room. Even though her germs could infect my weakened immune system and threaten my life, she was there to say her last goodbyes.

I would die long before sickness would catch up with me.

Turns out, my doctors believed my daughter was the reason I

was hanging on, and they encouraged my husband to bring her in to see me as many days as he could.

She was saving my life.

I always thought that I saved her, but really, God created her to save me.

She gave me something to live for: hope.

By the time I had hung up the phone with Ragan, I was face-forward in my grass-bald head and all-worshipping almighty God and thanking Him for one more day. My neighbors must have thought I was nuts.

For the first time in my life, I didn't care what anybody thought.

My situation hadn't changed. I still felt crummy. My nose still dripped, my head hurt, and I had sticks for legs from losing so much weight, but my perspective shifted.

I wasn't dead.

Not yet.

That's when I realized I needed to stop living as if my disease had won, as if my sickness owned me.

A new thought occurred to me. As long as I was alive, I still had precious moments to raise my baby girl, to invest in her, to share my crazy God-stories that proved the undeniable power of prayer. As it turns out, while I was hospitalized, prayer chains circulated the Internet. And this time, with a room full of doctors and nurses looking on, God performed the unthinkable.

If I've learned one thing from this experience, it is that no one can thwart God's plan (Job 42:2). If His plan for my life wasn't completed, no amount of chemo could do me in.

Not on His watch.

My days are numbered, and they will never be set in stone by my doctor's statistics.

I wish more than anything in the world that I would have believed this sooner.

For me, it took a violent shake of sickness to wake me up to see the glory surrounding my circumstances, even when I felt the crummiest.

I needed hope and encouragement and a reason to go on. I believe that's why the Bible repeats over and over for us to not worry. I believe He penned this command for people like me who, without a reminder, would gravitate toward this world's worrisome situations. But with God on my side, I have another choice. I have a life-giving Book that rewires those negative thoughts. I drank in Scripture during my darkest days because very little things in life brought me peace the way reading my Bible and prayerfully laying down my fears did.

The two go hand in hand.

We have the ultimate tool at our fingertips. Fear is a state of mind that can be released. It starts in our head and flows from our mouth, where life and mental death take shape in what we speak. Because what we say sets the guidelines we live by. I had to relinquish control and repeat, "My God goes before me, and He is with me. He will never leave me or abandon me. I will not be afraid. I will not be discouraged" (Deut. 31:8).

Worrying is meditating on the problem, festering in tangled up thoughts that may never come to pass. Freedom begins by meditating on God's Word. That's where you'll read that God sends his angel to encircle us with protection each time we pray (Ps. 34:7).

This is the message I wish I would have recorded and replayed

every day of my fear-filled life. I let my worries steal time from my friends and family—precious moments I will never get back.

Believing God's in control is the number one step to victory.

Then soak in His Word, bow your head, and unleash your angelic guard waiting to protect you.

Ponder: Do you believe that God is in control of your circumstances?

Pray: *Lord, help me not to worry about anything but to pray about everything.*

Dabney Hedegard is the author of *When God Intervenes*. Visit her at or on Twitter @dabneyland.