

When You're Diagnosed With Cancer

There is a haze that one enters when one is first diagnosed with cancer. I call it "the grace fog." I believe God was gracious to let us enter into a kind of stupor where we lived from one moment to the next. So many offers for help come in right at the start, but truly, our heads were spinning. There was no way we could clearly articulate our needs. All we really knew was we were broken and needy.

It really took us weeks to understand what we needed. During this time, many people just did what they sensed they needed to do. One friend brought fruit often, another brought flowers and placed them throughout our house. One friend brought me beautiful Burt's Bees lotions; another spent hours rubbing my feet (a wonderful distraction from nausea). I never asked for these things, but these friends took the initiative and loved us sweetly in these ways.

After hours of discussing with Jason, we arrived at these thoughts. First, our main concern was the kids. We wanted their hearts gently cared for in our home. We didn't want the older children to grow bitter by being asked to do too much, and we wanted the needs of our little ones to be carefully attended to in our home. So Jason and I prayed through a list of people we felt would love our children well through this difficult time. And in a totally new direction for us, we decided to ask/invite people to live with us.

With someone living here, Jason felt he could continue working. Plus, the kids would have a sense that the house was still functioning as it needed to, even with the mama down. Those first days in and around chemo were the critical ones. I could often be down for the count for five to seven days, so the people we asked to help us *really* helped us. At the end of

their stint, they all left physically exhausted. I'm sure the emotional drain was there too. Countless times, the person would fall fast asleep as Jason took them back to the airport.

We also identified local families that were safe for our kids. I had chemo on Wednesdays, and typically Fridays were my worst days. We tried hard to have our older girls go to a sleepover that night. We didn't want them to see me in such bad shape. We are a very open family, but even open families can practice discretion at times.

However, there are always those things the kids only want Mama and Daddy to do. Those things, in our house, were bedtime and discipline. Jason is the master of bedtime, so that was easy. Discipline was a little harder. I'd describe it as a dance, and not an easy one to be sure. But it was important that it come from Jason and me. I remember when Mickey first came, she said, "Kara, I don't care how sick you are, you will be doing the discipline. I'm here to bring the love."

I'll try to articulate this. If you have the opportunity to love a sick family, please don't be shocked by bad behavior on the part of the kids. Push into that behavior and love them creatively when you see the ugly sides of their day. The kids are hurting, and they've not developed the communication skills to process all that's going on. It's hard for us as adults to try to talk about these things. Try hard not to expect adult things from those who are still so very young.

In my absence, our kids have been loved and mothered by so many. I remember a Moms & Muffins event scheduled for Lake's class. It was to take place two days after my chemo. I couldn't do it, and I cried that I couldn't do it. I cry now thinking of it. My seester (how Kara referred to her sister) had come to town, and so Lake invited her to go in my place. That was such a gift to Lake, and to me. I'll never be able to repay her for that. I simply said, "Thank you."

After a year of people coming in and out of our house, our children have learned to welcome all kinds of new people into their lives. I've seen an openness develop in the kids that a year ago was not there. And that's the goal, isn't it, to keep an open heart? I never in a million years would have wished for my kids to have to learn that lesson in this way, but that is some of the beautiful fruit of the ugly. And it is truly beautiful.

*An excerpt from And It Was Beautiful by **Kara Tippetts** © 2016 Kara Tippetts. And It Was Beautiful is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved. Kara Tippetts' life was dramatically changed in 2012 when she was first diagnosed with breast cancer. She shared her journey on her popular blog, . She was the author of The Hardest Peace and the co-author of Just Show Up. Since her death in March 2015, her husband, Jason, is parenting their four children and leading the church they founded in Colorado Springs, Colorado.*