

Widowed Cancer Survivor Shares Secrets to Overcoming

Our lives can be a lot like that freefall, but we can survive whatever challenges God puts in front of us if we just get back up. *In Get Back Up: Trusting God When Life Knocks You Down*, Sheryl Giesbrecht shares her story of triumph over tragedy and helps readers understand that, in the midst of their adversities, they can not only survive, but thrive.

Q: For most authors, one defining experience drives them to write their book. You've actually faced many obstacles that would have kept most people down for the count. Can you share with us about a difficult time in your life when you had to trust in God and get back up?

SG: Several years ago, I found a lump under my left eye; months later, the lump had tripled in size, blocking my vision. I was afraid and skeptical when I went to the doctor. I could see the concern in the physician's eyes when sent me to another doctor, a specialist, who sent me to get further tests. You can imagine my surprise when two months later, after no warning signs, such as being tired or sick, I was told I had stage-four non-Hodgkins lymphoma, a type of blood cancer.

As a cancer patient, I felt out of control. My life was scheduled for tests, surgeries, doctor's appointments, chemotherapy, side-effects—everything changed. For a control freak like me, this was very difficult. I chose to trust God, to place myself in His control every day. Psalm 73:26 says, "My mind and my body may grow weak, but God is my strength; He is all I ever need" (GNT). This was a daily choice for me. On days I was tired or sick from the medication, I chose God's way and not my past methods of dealing with adversity.

Q: Why do you think we tend to want to handle things ourselves rather than hand our struggles over to God in times of doubt, despair and disappointment?

SG: Many men and women are wounded. They mourn in silence, yearning for freedom, yet they remain unable to acknowledge the love of God. They can't bring themselves to reach out for the hand of God. Disabling circumstances sap their strength, often beyond their control, yet they don't respond to God's invitation to get back up.

Why do some choose to live life in a state of numbness? Because they believe renewal is for friends, husband, parents, even children—anyone but them. Some think their damaged emotions are too ruined for God to heal. They don't trust him with their pain. They need to see that the power to get back up begins when the believing starts. That's what trusting God is all about.

Q: How does forgiveness and letting go of grudges play into us being able to get back up?

SG: God wants to release us from our frozen state of bitterness to a graceful walk in the freedom of forgiveness. God asks us to forgive, but He also gives us the ability to do it. Consider Matthew 18:33: "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (NIV).

Remember, forgiveness is giving ourselves a gift, not giving a gift to the person we've forgiven. In fact, the person we forgive may not ever know we've forgiven him, but God will. Forgiveness is between God and us. Confessing our forgiveness to someone who has not first asked for it can cause more problems than it solves. Forgiving others should actually begin at the time we are offended, but it can still be accomplished even if the hurt occurred years ago—even if the offender is now deceased. Forgiveness is good for us!

Letting go of a grudge is good for your health. Grudges increase tension and stress, deplete energy, cause isolation and prevent old wounds from healing. Grudges steal joy, disrupt sleep and harden hearts and arteries. Such bitter emotions can even get in the way of prayers. Resentment keeps us in chains unless we recognize it as bitterness. Give up the grudge and our right to get even, and we will gain peace, sound mind and restful sleep. We can train our minds to refuse to keep score of the wrongs others have committed against us through the power of God's Word. Remember that 1 Corinthians 13:5 says love "keeps no record of wrongs" (NIV).

Q: Survival during a physical fall is dependent more on how you land than how you fall. How can we prepare to land on our feet when we fall figuratively?

SG: We can prepare and plan ahead because we know it's not *if* but *when* we will "fall." We can spend time with God in prayer and in His word every day. In times of peace and prosperity, we might want to take a vacation from spending time with God. If, instead, we choose to put down our roots, we will invest in a huge spiritual return.

So when we do "fall down" in the changes and challenges of life, we sense God is near. We believe God is just a prayer away and waits for us to ask Him to help us get back up when we are knocked down by life. God wants us to reach out to Him in times of difficulty, doubt, despair, depression, disappointment, disease, destruction, divorce, discouragement, domestic violence or death. God's hand is extended to us.

His will for us when we are down and out is to turn to Him and ask for a hand up. He asks us to lace our fingers into His. "God gives a hand to those down on their luck, gives a fresh start to those ready to quit" (Ps. 145:14, MSG).

Q: Why do we feel we have to clean up our messy lives before turning to God? Isn't the whole point that we can come to Him

as we are?

SG: We are afraid of being vulnerable before God. Some of us can hardly stand ourselves, so we wonder why God would love or how he could possibly love someone like us. We forget the church should be a hospital for the sick. We measure ourselves against others around us, masking our pain and hiding our true feelings.

This belief system is an addiction; it's called perfectionism. If we read our Bible regularly, we find the testimony of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:12-16 is also extended to us. It reads, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (NIV).

Now that's a great example of God's unconditional love!

Leilani Haywood is a Kansas City, Mo. based award-winning writer and columnist. Her work has been published in the Kansas City Star, Metro Voice and other publications. When she's not updating her status on Facebook or Twitter, she's driving her three kids to school or their next rehearsal. Follow her on Twitter @leilanihaywood.