

How to Stand With God Through the Storms of Life

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13).

I never once thought my life would go the direction did a few years ago. I once had no reason to fear having to face a disease such as cancer, particularly since I knew of no major history of it in my family. And yet for more than eight years I fought a grueling battle against non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Prayer was always been my first weapon, though I have sought input and treatment along the way from as many sources as possible. I endured dozens of treatments, had some amazing God encounters, and was pronounced clear and free of cancer at least three times—only to find it return in a different region of my body.

But to be completely transparent, I’m not sure even my own bout with cancer prepared me for the degree of loss I faced in almost every area of life and ministry in recent years.

Suffering Times Two

Shortly after I began fighting for my own life, my dear wife of 32 years, Michal Ann Goll, discovered she had colon cancer. After having her entire colon removed one Christmas, we had great hopes of her conquering this beast and we were believing the Lord for new body parts. She was relentless in her pursuit of healing and wholeness and, in my opinion, fought harder than I ever did. Yet her cancer continued to spread to several other organ systems.

Despite this, Michal Ann never lost her smile, she never let one negative word be echoed in her midst, and she loved God through every moment. She was devoted to the Word of God,

lived a hidden life of prayer and was fearless in the face of the enemy.

Together we fought hard. We prayed, fasted, declared Scripture, praised the Lord, took communion, were committed to the local church, were properly aligned with apostolic authority, continued to believe in the supernatural ... and on and on. We'd experienced miracles several times before and had seen every gift of the Holy Spirit flow through our own lives into the lives of others around the world. We were desperate and did everything we knew to come out on the other side victorious. We made sure to identify and shut every generational door that might have been jarred even a little bit.

And yet the battle raged on.

We took an integrated approach the entire time—and I still do to this day. We brought together the best of many healing streams. We received counsel from the best and intensive prayer from those who move extraordinarily in the gifts of healings and working of miracles today. We combined the very best of alternative and traditional medicine with nutritional understandings, soaking worship and high praise. We had hands laid on us by the elders of the city, were interceded for by the global prayer movement and extended forgiveness wherever needed.

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We were faithful in our marriage covenant and faithful to the Lord. I'm not saying we were perfect. I am not perfect. I stand by grace in faith in the finished work of Calvary, as every believer does. But I do know Michal Ann and I did everything we could, and we trusted in God to do what we could not.

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The result of our fight? On Sept. 15, 2008, after four years of warring against cancer, my dear wife moved on to a great eternal realm called heaven. Thank God for heaven! We are only separated for a short time.

Still, it's perplexing to say the least why I made it and she did not. Michal Ann was an amazing champion for the Lord. My kids and I greatly miss her to this day.

Adding Salt to My Wounds

Losing my wife was hard enough. Yet in the midst of my grieving—and while still fighting my own battle with cancer—I received another blow.

Financial hits to both my personal and ministerial life left me almost drained. Within a short time, I lost three-fourths of my monthly donor base funding our global ministry. Due to medical expenses not covered by insurance and other unforeseen complications, I ended up with a massive amount of accumulated debt. Prior to this, I had paid every bill on time and had a great credit history.

As the bills piled up, my fight against cancer continued as I used every means possible to win. On Oct. 7, 2009, I finally received news that the 3½-by-2½-inch cancerous growth close to my stomach had melted and that every cancer cell advancing in my body was eradicated. Praise the Lord! I thank God for my second chance in life and declare that the cancer will not return again.

 I am not alone in my journey. Some of you have been there as well in recent days. We have been enduring seasons of storms. And for many of us, these seasons have ushered us into times of severe questioning.

The Questions Come

What did I do to deserve all of this? This was one of the most

prominent thoughts ringing in my head during the storms of this last decade. After all, I'd walked with the Lord every day of life since youth. Jesus has been my closest friend and companion through all my 58 years. I had been in full-time vocational ministry since I graduated from college in 1974. I had been true to the light given me and never backed away from the progressive truths as an ambassador of Christ. Why me? Why my family?

At times I felt like Job. I became acquainted with some of his well-meaning friends, each of whom gave me frequent input on the reasons why we were incurring such difficulties. It was supposedly because we prayed wrongly against some power of darkness or didn't have enough faith. Some chided that I must have been ignorant of God's Word concerning healing, while others reasoned that we were encountering such difficulties because we took a stand for Israel. Still others said it was because we had hidden sin, and if we would only bring it to the light the circumstances would end. A few acquaintances even claimed my suffering was because I wasn't a vegan.

People gave us every lotion, potion and natural remedy under the sun. I finally had to come to the conclusion that they cared for us and merely wanted us fixed. Yet the truth was, I wanted our situation fixed more than they did. As a result, I had to learn to love these well-meaning people while maintaining my personal convictions and my consecration and devotion to Jesus. The culmination of my trials and others' unsolicited input gave me the opportunity to trust the Lord with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding (see Prov. 3:5).

Lessons Learned

If I had to do it all over again, there is little I would change in the approach Michal Ann and I took. Of all things, I would have sat more on my southern front porch with my Annie, quietly drinking green tea in our rocking chairs, enjoying God

and nature. Just being. Resting. Enjoying. I learned from my oncologist that every day we have is a gift from God.

And so I am left with today—for which I am truly grateful. I don't take it for granted, nor do I want to ignore the pain endured through these past storms. I am yet a work in progress. I'm still leaning in upon my beloved Jesus and learning more each day. But I know I can at least share with you some basic practical concepts that have been anchors in my life along the way. Here are a few.

1. God is good—all the time! This is at the top of my list on purpose. I believe and declare loudly, “The Lord is good to all,

and His compassion is over all His works” (Ps. 145:9). If you want to be an overcomer in any area of life, you must have this foundational truth in place. Everything else hinges on this one truth! Always remember, Jesus “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever,” and He is always going about doing good (Heb. 13:8)!

2. All things work together for good. I hang my hat on this belief system. Romans 8:28 uncompromisingly declares: “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” That verse isn't for some generic person “out there”; it's for me and for you! Note that the verse doesn't say “everything is good” or that “God causes everything.” Yet somehow in the great majesty of who He is, God takes even our failures, temporary disappointments and messed up circumstances and, when we are yielded to Him, He reconfigures them to work together for good. That is the Jesus I know dearly.

3. Keep your expectations high. Just because I haven't seen every person get healed does not mean I will stop praying for the sick. I won't stop declaring the good news of the gospel

of the kingdom just because not everyone will be saved. Don't doubt in times of darkness what has been revealed in the light. Don't lower your theological bar to match temporary setbacks. Press on. Keep your expectations high and on God. Keep on believing!

4. Rely on a trusted community of believers. I am so grateful for the body of Christ. Some of you have walked with my family and me through our dark night of the soul. I need God, and I also need you. The second part of 1 John 5:4 says: "And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith." It doesn't say "my faith"; it says "our faith." We need each other. Sometimes we just need the body of Christ—Jesus with flesh on. Be a committed part of the community of believers called the church.

5. Be open to change. This has been one of the hardest lessons for me during the last decade. I love consistency and stability. But to make it through to the other side you have to be flexible in the hands of the master potter. You must learn to recalibrate, adjust and understand that change is not your enemy; it is good. To help cut my monthly budget, I had to move out of my ministry center and into a set of small offices. I didn't like it at first, but I knew it was good. The truth is, whether we embrace it or not, things will change. To transition more smoothly, we must be open to new things, new revelations, new places and even new connections.

6. Fear not! Renounce fear—be delivered from it. Get whatever cleansing is needed, because what you fear will come upon you. Fear is not your friend. Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear paralyzes you, while faith propels you. Doubt your doubts and trust your dreams. Fear not! He is with you, beside you and in you. And as 1 John 4:4 says, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

7. Never, never, never, *never* give up. I carry a card in my

Bible. On the outside cover it reads, "Never, never, never, never give up." And on the inside are these words: "I will never, never, never, never quit cheering for you." These were my dear wife's last words to me and our four kids. It was her last prophetic statement to the body of Christ. Jesus is our dread champion! As you press on in life, put your hand to the plow and don't look over your shoulder (Luke 9:62). Keep looking straight ahead. God is not finished with you yet. He who began a good work in you will complete it (Phil. 1:6).

8. You are not a victim; you are a victor! We must engraft this truth into our souls. At one of my low points, one of my kids lovingly got in my face and said something like: "Dad, you've got to rise above this. Trauma happens in life, but you must not be its victim." I am here to tell you I am a victor in Christ Jesus, and so are you! Jesus always leads us into a triumphant procession: "Now thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in Christ and through us reveals the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2 Cor. 2:14). You are not a victim; you are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus!

Let me re-emphasize, I am still a work in progress. My journey—pain and all—is still being walked out. But I pray that you can benefit from the lessons I am learning in the process of becoming. I have lived an amazing life and am so grateful that I have been given a second chance in life. I pray that whatever season of life you are in, you will cling as I have to the truth of Ephesians 6:10: "Finally, my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." And when you have done all ... stand!

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