

Burdened
To Tell

Burdened *To* Tell

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DEDICATED TO

Everyone who prayed for my healing,
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The Holy Spirit for guiding me!

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IT'S CANCER!

On August 28, 2001, an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) surgeon removed a tumor located high in my ethmoid sinuses, the area behind the eyes at the base of the frontal lobe of the brain. Only the usual anxiety that surrounds any surgery was there, since ninety percent of growths in this area are benign. Unfortunately, there are ten percent that have to make up the remainder.

When I received information that I fell in the latter group, there was the usual fear and trauma that goes with the word cancer. The physician was extremely attentive. He called me personally to let me know what was going on. Additionally, he told me that the hospital where the surgery had taken place identified the tumor as “spindle cell,” but they were unable to further specify the type. Therefore, the frozen sections of the tumor were sent to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for confirmation. It was indeed a spindle cell tumor, further identified as a synovial sarcoma. This diagnosis was not good. This is an extremely rare form of cancer in the head region, particularly in the sinuses. It appeared a death knell had sounded.

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Great interest arose as a result of the unusual location of this tumor. The surgeon referred me to a well-known medical school in a nearby city since they were close and had a large staff to investigate the situation. A cancer center about 250 miles away also expressed interest in the investigation and wanted some of its staff involved as well because of the rarity of the tumor and its location. Tests, tests, and more tests followed. MRI machines became more familiar than my home. I saw more doctors and technicians over the period of a few days' time than I had seen in many years. I had never heard of a "tumor board." However, I learned that this was a group of physicians (in my case, neurosurgeons, ENT physicians, oncologists, etc.) who set aside a half day to discuss all test results and determine their best assessment for treatment.

One of the medical school surgeons had told me about proton beam radiation. He suggested the possibility that it might be a recommended treatment for me. He would know more after meeting with others on the tumor board when all tests were completed. Two locations in the U.S. provided this radiation treatment. One was located in the northeastern U.S. and the other in southern California. Having cancer was a bummer, but southern California in the winter was not the worst thing to think about. As bad as cancer is, perhaps mixing the pleasure of a warm winter with treatment could provide some comfort.

Only a few days after the cancer diagnosis, I felt comfortable with my prayer life, relative to the matter and told family and friends that the Lord would let me know what course I was to take. So many tests! I was still recuperating from surgery. Then, interestingly, the school counselor who had worked with me more than twenty years earlier when I had once been a school principal, called me the evening before the tumor board was to meet. We had worked together many years before, and it was quite a coincidence that she called since our lives had moved in far different directions. In fact, I was retired and living in a city seventy miles away. During the

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course of our conversation, she informed me that only a year earlier her daughter-in-law had a malignant tumor removed that was located somewhere near her throat area. She had received radiation therapy after removal of the tumor. She was young, in her twenties. The counselor told me that radiation therapy in and around the face can have devastating results. Her daughter-in-law carried a bottle of water around at all times in order to get enough moisture to speak since her salivary glands no longer produced saliva. She had a feeding tube in order to get nourishment. Through it all, the daughter-in-law was grateful that she was alive to rear her children.

I had felt so positive that I would know what I should do when the doctor called the following morning, but worry crept in when I considered the information I received about radiation and that a definite answer had not come from the Lord! On the morning that the tumor board was to meet, I asked the Lord why there had not been an answer. His timing is always perfect—where was He? I never considered the phone call the night before being anything other than coincidence.

The phone rang: it was the physician with information from the “think tank.” When I heard the recommendation, the answer from the Lord was there. It was as if He said “No way!” It was on a Thursday, and the doctor asked me to wait until after the weekend and to think it over. He would call again on Monday. I attempted to assure him that my decision was in response to prayer and my belief that the Lord had given me this answer when I heard his recommendation.

This physician informed me that my cancer was a type that moves very rapidly once disturbed. Its nature is to crumble into many pieces when touched. The surgeon who had removed it had provided me with information that it had indeed crumbled during removal. He informed me that he had scraped it off the bone that lies beneath the frontal lobe of my brain. Additionally, it had grown

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against my spinal cord, Eustachian tube, and right optic nerve. He had also been most aggressive with my olfactory organs as he performed the surgery. To have completely removed all pieces of the tumor would have been virtually impossible.

I was informed by the medical school doctor that the physicians who comprised the tumor board had determined the best course of treatment to be further surgery first, followed by radiation. Surgery was to consist of removing my “skull cap,” then lifting the frontal lobe of my brain out while removing the bone that lies beneath it, then graft new bone in its place. After this was completed, the frontal lobe would be replaced and my skull sewn back on. This surgery would then be followed by several radiation treatments. The prognosis would be a forty percent chance of total cure and a sixty percent chance of buying five to seven years in remission.

As I listened, I was in shock, I think. From the moment I recovered originally after being told that the tumor was malignant, I had envisioned a recommendation of chemotherapy, radiation, or both. Additionally, I had prayed without ceasing about what I should do were I given options. Surgery of the magnitude he proposed could not have entered my mind. Actually, I had not thought about further surgery at all!

On Monday, the call came and my response was the same. The doctor seemed shocked that I refused treatment. He suggested that since my concern was for the surgery, perhaps chemotherapy followed by radiation would be more acceptable to me. That would be far better than accepting a death sentence. (He did not use these latter words, but they were obvious.) His final words were to let me know that he and all those involved were certainly interested in my well-being. Further, if at any time I had any need, to feel free to call. I almost wanted to be on the other end of the phone to console this wonderful person. Although I was confident the Lord was in charge of my refusal for treatment, it was difficult to close the door

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to these wonderful and caring health professionals. In this day when we are so often reminded that doctors are overburdened with paperwork and other pressures from insurance companies that their patients receive inferior attention, the opposite was represented in this situation. Indeed it is a medical school, indeed they conduct research and write papers, but in and through it all, they were kind, loving and empathetic.

The original ENT who had operated on me continued with follow-up care. He seemed to understand my position. It was appointed that I return for a six-month checkup for him to perform an endoscopy (an instrument was inserted through my nose into my ethmoid sinuses located behind and between my eyes) to see if there was anything growing in the area where the tumor had been removed. As I sat while this procedure was taking place, it seemed that the physician was taking forever to make a comment as he looked around inside my head. At long last he said, "Humph!" I waited for more. Nothing came. I could not stand it. I asked, "Was that a good humph, or a bad humph?" After another long pause, he responded "It's clean as a whistle." This is a busy physician, but he was very kind and talked with me for several minutes without the appearance that he needed to move on. Before I left, he said, "It will be interesting if nothing else shows up and I wanted to take your body apart." He did inform me that the only definitive way to know whether anything was there was to see an MRI of my head. He said the greatest worries were for the bone beneath the brain (where he had scraped tumor pieces) and the optic nerve of my right eye. I requested that we wait for six months to complete the MRI. He seemed hesitant but complied (The hesitance may have been a response of surprise for not visibly finding anything growing, since most accounts point out that synovial sarcoma "hosts" die within seven or eight months of removal of an untreated tumor.). Being a good physician, he wanted to be sure nothing was there.

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One of the concerns had been recurrence in my right optic nerve. The day after the appointment with the surgeon, I had an appointment with my ophthalmologist. When I went for the ophthalmologist visit, I told her about the tumor removal six months before. She was most interested and took pains to look at my right optic nerve. After what again seemed a very long time, she said, "Your optic nerve is pink, pulsating, and very healthy looking." Wow, what news!

Six months down, everything was positive. All information on the Internet relative to this cancer gave a dismal prognosis. In every case, death came in seven or eight months time, treated or untreated. It would be untrue to say there had been no anxiety during the past six months, but actually, it had been the best six months of my life. When I would tell someone it was the best six months of my life, he would respond with either disbelief or think me a saint. As you will learn later, sainthood was not anywhere in the equation. All through my life, the Lord had played a vital though sometimes distant role, but my relationship grew so much closer during this six months that His nearness and position of Lord were definite.

During the next six months there were times I thought about the MRI to come, but for the most part, I believed God had healed me. After the six months had passed, and it was time for the MRI, I felt wonderful physically, and emotionally, there was only a little anxiety. There was a two-week wait between the actual test and my review with the doctor. However, a few days after the MRI, there was a message on the recorder when I returned home one day. It said, "This is Cindy from the doctor's office. Your MRI is normal. The doctor wants to see you anyway." Wow, a normal MRI! Now what?