

# Our Journey Through Cancer

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June 25, 2010

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Serious diseases and tragedies are things that we hear about frequently. But those things always happen to “them” ~ other people ~ not us. So, when something does strike our family, it comes as a shock. Sometimes the signs have been there, but they come on so slowly or in such a way that we don’t realize their significance. That’s the way it happened in our family.

My husband, Steve, had been working a job in which he was on the road for long hours. There was stress, not enough sleep, and even though I cooked healthy meals at home the snacks on the road were not. At one point his boss expressed concern about the effect the stress and fatigue were having on him. But he kept going. A few months later, he had the opportunity to leave this job and embark on a new endeavor. We were excited, as the long hours on the road and short nights were past.

He continued losing weight, but we were pleased because he had been working on that, although it was a puzzle at how quickly it was starting to come off. With getting more sleep, we really didn’t stop to think about the fact that he was still dragging and quite run down. Certainly as he got into his new routine, he would get his energy back, we thought.

One evening we were leaving a home where we had been part of a prayer meeting, the conclusion of a three-day church-wide fast which our assembly had done. As we left, Steve asked me to drive home, as he was not feeling well. He was sure it was the flu, that he would sleep it off and feel better in the morning. But the next morning he was not better; in fact, he was worse. In the evening he developed a slight fever. This pattern continued. Each day he felt worse and each evening his fever went up ~ each night a little higher than the evening before.

We were sure that this was an attack of the enemy after the prayer and fasting of which we had been part. We prayed and I anointed him with oil. We called upon some close friends and asked them to pray with us.

After several days, he noticed a slight swelling in a lymph node of his upper right arm. That was strange. The swelling increased, and soon he noticed swelling in a lymph node below his right armpit. He became weaker and his fever kept going higher each evening. He reached the point where he could not even sit up in a chair at the computer for an hour. He spent his days spread out on the couch covered with an afghan, saying he was cold. Hmmm. He was right next to the woodburner and the thermometer I set right next to him read over 80 degrees. Since he was too weak to go to the table to eat, I brought his meals to him in the living room, although his appetite was very small. I was still fervently praying, but some fear was starting to creep in. Since we had relocated to our current state, we had not had need for a doctor. If the need arose, I had no idea where to go.

During this time, a dear friend sent us several articles on lymph problems and treatments to do. We read them and began a few things, but I was feeling overwhelmed. Finally we contacted another friend in a distant state who is a nurse, describing his symptoms. She advised us to get to a doctor immediately. The next day, two weeks to the day from when he had gotten sick, he saw a nurse practitioner who gave a tentative diagnosis of cat scratch fever (we had never even heard of cat scratch fever!), but decided he should see a doctor. Within a couple hours he had seen a surgeon who gave him an antibiotic and told him to come back in a week. We looked up cat scratch fever online where we learned that it could take as long as thirty days for the victim to regain his full strength. Thirty days! Steve declared he couldn’t be sick that long!

We had a trip planned to visit family in another state, so we took off with me driving most of the way. Neither of us was about to miss this visit with our precious little grandson! Of course, our son and daughter-in-law were duly alarmed when they saw how he was. It was a good visit, though, and we didn’t regret the effort we made to get there. By this time he was starting to regain a little strength, but the lymph swellings were continuing to increase.

Back in the surgeon’s office the next week, it was apparent that the antibiotic had accomplished nothing. The surgeon did a biopsy. A week later we sat in his office with the biopsy report. The surgeon was reluctant to say much other than he needed a bigger tissue sample to determine exactly what the problem was, although cancer was a possibility. He offered to set us up with an appointment with a surgeon friend of his for a second opinion. We

declined. We left the office in a fog. Cancer? How could that be? We ate healthy. We had a grain mill, and I ground all of our own whole wheat flour. We didn't eat junk food. I didn't use sugar in my cooking. We had tossed green salads for almost every meal. We took care of ourselves. We were too young for this. Cancer happens to other people, not us. We needed to seek God for direction.

At home, we both got on our computers, searching lymph problems, desperately looking for symptoms which matched his. It will be a very long time before I forget the moment when Steve announced, "Now these are my symptoms." I turned around in my chair and asked, "What is that?" "Lymphoma." My world fell apart with that one word. The only response I could come up with was, "No! Don't say that!" But as I looked at the list of symptoms, they fit him to a "T." I kept looking, sure I would find something else less serious that had those same symptoms. That was not to be. We made a list of questions to ask the surgeon before approving the second biopsy. We also discussed the possibility that God was preparing to take Steve home to be with Him and that I would be left here by myself. That thought was not the least bit appealing to me, but it was out of my control.

We are heavily involved in ministry to home schoolers and were organizing a conference soon. My first thought was to forget the conference and let others working with us take care of it. If my husband only had a few months left, I wanted us to spend them alone together, not ministering to others. God very quickly slapped me to my senses. How could I expect Him to heal Steve if we weren't continuing to do His work. It also became a salvation issue for me. If I was willing to turn my back on His work for a few months alone with my husband, where were my priorities? Did I really love God? I quickly realized that no matter what the future held, Steve and I must continue God's work that we loved so much. We could never be satisfied doing anything else. I had to say, "not my will but thine," knowing that if this was to be the end of the road on earth for my husband, my God would supply all my needs according to His riches in glory, which are endless. We were still praying.

A number of years ago, Steve and I had had some "What if...?" conversations. We had agreed that if either of us were ever faced with cancer, we would not go the chemo and radiation route. The question we had never answered, though, was what would we do?

During this time I was voraciously reading everything I could about cancer. Steve was also reading as he felt up to it. We quickly purchased Ty Bollinger's book, *Cancer, Step Outside the Box* which we highly recommend.

Throughout all of this, we were in close contact with a couple close friends. One of them, the one who had already sent us the information mentioned above, asked us how much the surgeon had explained about the biopsy report and how much of the medical terminology we understood. She is not a medical professional, but having studied much on her own, she knew the language and explained to us what the report actually said. In her reading of it, there was no question. Steve had cancer. The only question was exactly what name to put on the cancer. She sent us a care package with essential oils and various natural items to start treating the cancer. My world fell even farther apart as she was confirming what we had seen online. But God had also put a burden in our friend's heart for me and had given her two verses of Scripture for me:

**John 14:27** ~ *Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

**Isaiah 30:15** ~ *In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.*

She also gave us the name of an alternative medicine specialist about whom she had heard glowing reports. Steve and I prayed together with her over the phone, asking God to lead us and to heal him. Within hours of getting the doctor's contact information, we had an appointment for the following week. I soon had those two Scriptures typed on a pretty flowered page, printed off, and strategically placed on my desk, on the refrigerator, and in both of my Bibles which I use for study.

We had a phone consultation with the surgeon with less than satisfactory results. By this time, we were armed with a quite a long list of questions. He was obviously feeling the urgency of getting the second biopsy done and starting to treat whatever it was. We asked about what the treatment would be for different cancers. His response, depending on the cancer we were asking about, was "surgery, chemo, and radiation" or a veiled statement that nothing would be able to be done. It became apparent as we quizzed him that he wanted to remove the entire lymph nodes, not just get a "bigger tissue sample." He informed us that the lymph nodes were too large to heal on their own. One had grown to the size of a tennis ball, and the other to the size of a ping pong ball in less than one month. The surgeon said

they had to be removed. Steve was not his average patient who was going to do what he said just because he said it. This professional on the other end of the telephone line was getting more than a little impatient with us. Finally we began asking him detailed questions about the medical terminology in the lab report. At that point he became very agitated and cut off the conversation, saying we were trying to “micro-manage the report.” We thanked him for his time and told him that we would contact him if we needed his services.

We hung up the phone understanding that it was indeed cancer, but the surgeon was just not willing to come out with the “C” word yet. Although we did not know exactly what was lying on the road ahead, we hung up the phone knowing that we were embarking on a different path. We have never looked back. We continued praying, knowing that God was in control and asking Him to heal and to make us sensitive to His leading and speaking to us.

During this time I was massaging the rapidly-growing tumors with essential oils. I would pray as I did it, asking for healing and a calming of my spirit. I was concerned that the cancer would take his life before we ever made it to the doctor.

Finally the long awaited time to leave for the doctor came. Well, it was only a week, but it seemed like a lifetime. Since the trip to the doctor was over seven hours, we had made plans to spend the night before the appointment with friends. Our trip was interrupted by a tire blow-out on the turnpike in the Chicago metro area at rush hour. That was a petrifying incident which is a story in itself of God’s provision. By the time we got a new tire, it was late, so we ended up staying with relatives of our friends who were closer.

If I had not done a little reading on alternative medicine in the past, I would have been quite shocked by our first experience. This was not a medical doctor who did the normal routine of an office call. A key thing I remember, though, as we left his office after spending nearly three hours with him, is that the doctor told us he had never lost a lymphoma patient. That was assurance I needed to hear. We left his office with Steve on a one week fast other than some supplements and some additional things about his regimen. After that he was to eat only raw fruits and raw veggies. Raw nuts and raw seeds were added a couple weeks later.

We stopped on the long drive home from that first visit and bought a juicer. It has gotten nearly daily use, as we still go through at least a bag of apples a day.

There was much I did not comprehend about the medical route we had chosen. As we drove home that first time, I envisioned us making this long journey weekly. In my mind, I saw my husband becoming extremely weak such that I would have to drive the entire round-trip single handedly. I didn’t understand that our mental picture of a cancer patient is actually the mental picture of a chemo patient.

The first few weeks were a time of major adjustments. After thirty-five years of marriage, I found myself having to relearn how to cook. Or rather ~ prepare meals without cooking. For a while, I could not bear to eat anything cooked in front of him, so I would eat my salad with him, then after he went into another room, I would sometimes cook a piece of meat and eat it quietly by myself. I wondered if we would ever eat a full meal together again. Oh ye of little faith!

Once we got started on his treatment, his 45 pound weight loss stopped and stabilized. He began to get his strength back. Steve gained the admiration of many people as they saw him stick to his raw foods diet for 11 months. A side benefit of all this was that when we had doctor appointments, we were able to spend weekends with friends whom we otherwise would not have seen. We’ve solidified old friendships and made new friends. God has been good.

Although we have always been ones to take food with us when we travel and avoid restaurants, we have not done that when we’ve stayed with friends. Now, though, we found ourselves having to pack up our juicer and take a cooler full of raw foods which I could prepare for him on the road. Gradually, we began to establish a system and it became a new normal.

Steve took a blood test which tests for cancer three times over the course of the year. The most recent test showed him to be back to normal with no evidence of cancer. Even the doctor in the cancer lab was amazed at how rapidly he improved. That is the work of our LORD Jesus Christ and we give Him all the glory!

We are currently rethinking our diet. No, he’s not staying totally raw. But salads will always be part of our daily meal (as they were before cancer). I’ve done an incredible amount of studying on health and diet over the past year. Although I had read labels some in the past, I read them now with a new understanding. My cooking is definitely changing as we find an even healthier normal than what we had in the past.

God is good. We praise Him for the added years He has given Steve and me to continue doing His work together.