

**WE HEARD
THE WINGS OF ANGELS
VOLUME I**

**DEVOTIONS WRITTEN BY AND FOR
CANCER PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

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1st printing March, 1999
2nd printing April, 1999

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FOREWORD

Cancer patients and their families feel many emotions.

We feel isolated.

We feel despair.

We feel fear.

We feel hope.

We feel hair loss.

And we ask, "Why me, Lord?"

We forget to treat our loved ones in a loving manner.

We go through different stages ranging from denial to acceptance. For many, it is the first time that we have heard the wings of angels. It is a scary experience.

This booklet cannot solve the problems. But it can share the fact that others feel these emotions. And it can give a little guidance about where others found help in the Bible.

After having cancer in the family, we felt called to collect devotions about cancer and print them in booklet form. Hopefully this is just the first of several booklets. If you wish to contribute to the next volume, please send your devotion to us.

If you feel that you cannot write, just note down the main points and we will try to put your ideas into a devotion and send it to you to see if we have captured your ideas.

DIAGNOSIS

WHEN WILL THE MESSAGE COME?

It is 7:30 AM on a Friday. It seems like I have been sitting in the surgery waiting room forever. The nurse said that the doctor would be out when he was through with the surgery. What will his message be? I cannot change the message. I cannot speed up the delivery of the message. All I can do is wait, pray, and pace the floor. Pacing the floor will only wear the floor out. Knowing that does not stop me from pacing. I do not know what the message will be, but I know that it is important. The only thing that stops my pacing is sitting down to write a few words. The only words that will come from my pen are words of fear.

The children of Israel knew that someday God was going to send a Messiah, but they had already waited for many generations. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and now the Romans ruled over them. Then they heard of a messenger. His name was John. He lived in the desert, dressed in camel's hair, eating wild honey and locusts. (I hope my wife's doctor does not eat locusts. I must ask him if he does.) They went in droves to hear him. They did not know what the message was going to be, but they knew it was going to be important.

The children of Israel heard that the Messiah was coming. I heard that everything went well. I could stop worrying.

Mark 1:7-8 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (NIV)

Lord, thank You for doctors and medical science. Help me be patient while they perform miracles on Your servant. Amen

DIAGNOSIS

A WAKE-UP CALL

I hit the snooze button on God's alarm clock one more time that Monday morning. After all, the doctor had said that my wife's operation on Friday had gone well, and they had not seen any indication of cancer. He had taken biopsies, and the results would be back eventually. That was just a precaution, wasn't it?

At 10:20 Monday morning our world changed. The doctor called. He said that he would normally ask my wife to come into the office to pass the news, but time was of the essence. His voice said the biopsies had come back positive. His voice said my wife needed to come into San Antonio to have tests run. He had scheduled her for surgery on Friday. The tests must be run before the surgery. The message that came through was a wake-up call from God. It came through loud and clear, "My child, wake up."

God, did I really need such a strong wake-up call? Wouldn't a common cold have done just as well? I could handle that. I don't know if I can handle this. I'm supposed to be strong for my wife, but how can I be strong if I am overwhelmed by this wake-up call?

Matt. 24:42-44 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (NIV)

Lord, I know that I forget to depend on You when times are good. Forgive me and help me to lean on You. Amen

DIAGNOSIS

WHAT KIND OF CANCER IS IT?

It was such a simple question, but we got a different answer every time we talked to the doctor. The Pap Smear had shown something was wrong, but the cells were not classical cancer cells, so additional testing was done. A decision was made that it was probably ovarian cancer. A laparoscopy was performed to check it out. No abnormalities were found in the ovaries, but little nodules were found in the lining of the abdominal cavity. But they did not look like typical cancer.

A biopsy found cancer cells in the uterus, so it must be uterine cancer. Then the biopsies from the little nodules came back positive. This indicated that the cancer had spread from the uterus to the peritoneum. But the cells were not the classic uterine cancer cells. Something was wrong, but what was wrong?

Chemotherapy was scheduled, and then an expert in Boston recognized the cells. They were typical cells of a primary peritoneal carcinoma. The scheduled chemotherapy was canceled, and a different set of chemo drugs was selected.

Before treatment can be effective, we need an accurate diagnosis. That's true in all things, isn't it, not just in cancer therapy? When God correctly diagnosed us as sinners, He graciously prescribed the only medicine that could heal us -- a Savior! God sent His Son to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, and by His stripes we are healed.

Turn to Psalm 39 and read about David's anguish.

Lord, I want to pray that the tests show that there is no cancer, but that might be praying for an inaccurate diagnosis. Lord, whatever the diagnosis is, let it be an accurate diagnosis. Amen

FEAR

THE CANCER OF SIN

John preached, "Repent and be baptized." Some, or perhaps many, of those who heard him thought that their sins were not as bad as their neighbors' sins. We know according to James 2:10 that if we break one part of the law, we break it all. There are no little sins for which we do not have to repent. Cancer is like sin. If you have a little, it will grow on you. John the Baptist preached, "Prepare the way for the Lord. Repent. Get rid of sin."

Getting rid of sin may be easy to talk about if we are not really serious; if we are serious and we recognize where it puts us, it is hard to talk about. Worse, we cannot get rid of our sin and earn heaven. The Lord had to do all of the work.

The doctor gave us a similar message, "Get rid of the cancer." Getting rid of cancer is hard to talk about, and we cannot take any physical steps to accomplish the task. The doctor is in charge with a hospital, knives, chemicals, radiation, and all those things we would rather not talk about.

In one case, we are dependent on the Lord; in the other, we are dependent on the Lord and the doctor. Because God sent Jesus, we want to put sin behind us, just like we want God to guide the surgeon's hands. Let us pray for God to strengthen us for the fight against sin and against cancer.

I John 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (NIV)

**Lord, before healing the lame man, You forgave his sins.
Forgive my sins; then maybe I will not be so afraid. Amen**

FEAR

ARE WE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT CANCER?

I read more than fifty get-well cards. Only two mentioned the word cancer. Everyone who wrote knew about the cancer. That is why they were writing, but they did not mention the cancer.

Why did they not mention the cancer? Was it denial?

Were they afraid of the cancer? Were they afraid that if they named the disease it would be contagious?

Was it that they wanted to give a message of good cheer and thought that mentioning the cancer would interfere with the message?

Was it that they just did not know what to say?

Were they hurting as much as we were?

I don't know the answer, but I feel that they were having as much of a problem mentioning the cancer as we were. One just does not mention things like that in polite company.

I feel as alone as David did when he prayed Psalm 38.

Lord, we have many friends who are suffering because of our cancer. Please give them comfort and give them understanding that You are preparing us for service in Your kingdom. Amen

FEAR

HAIR LOSS

Chemotherapy drugs attack cells that are fast-dividing. Hair cells are fast-dividing, so hair loss is a regular side-effect of chemo-therapy. Is it life threatening? No. Is it a big deal? You bet it is.

Look at men who do not otherwise show any signs of vanity. They add preparations to their heads to stimulate hair growth, or they comb their hair to cover bald spots. Caps go on to cover the baldness, and jokes are told that hair loss simply means that they are great lovers. The process is slow, and it gives the men a chance to get used to it.

With chemotherapy, the process is much faster. As one lady said, "I got up one morning, but my hair didn't." If all hair is not lost, it at least thins. Loss of hair on the top of the head can be covered with a wig, but what about eyebrows?

Hair loss is an emotional pain. The American Cancer Society has a program for getting wigs for cancer patients. It is a necessary part of the treatment.

Why did God say in Matt. 10:30, "Even the hairs on your head are numbered," if a head full of hair were not important in some way? God cares about everything about us, and we would do well to care most of all about God.

In Psalm 43 David prays for God's guidance.

Lord, help me to learn that there are more important things than hair in my life -- things like Your kingdom, Your steadfast love, You, period. Thank You, too, for friends and relatives and those whom You would have me reach out to help. Amen

FEAR

A LITTLE GIRL'S HAIR

She was in the 1st grade, but one and a half years of chemo had ravaged her. Her hair was gone as well as her energy. Being bald in the 1st grade is a terrible thing. Before she started school, her teacher explained to the other students that she had been sick, that the treatment had caused her to lose her hair, even her eye lashes, that the treatment had left her susceptible to germs that wouldn't bother other people.

At school, she wore a scarf over her bald head, but she worried that one day it might slip. Every day she worried, and then one day the scarf slipped. The other students saw her bald head. They stared. Then one girl walked up and said, "That looks cool. I wonder if my mama would let me have a haircut like that?" After the ice was broken, she was accepted with or without the scarf. Since it was a lot of trouble to keep the scarf from slipping, she often went without it.

Many of our fears are like this little girl's fears. They are very real, and they terrify us until the worst happens. Then we find that they are not as bad as we thought.

Matt 10:28-32 tells us that each of us is important.

Lord, help me to see that with Your help my worst fears are not all that great. Amen

FEAR

DID SHE DIE?

The operation was over. The doctor said that it had gone well, but that we should be prepared for chemotherapy. I called my mother-in-law to let her know. The phone call went well, until she picked up the phone and said, "Hello." Suddenly, I had no voice. No matter how hard I tried, I could not get any words out. She had never scared me before. Why should I have a panic attack now? The hard part was past -- I had discussed the matter with the doctor.

During this episode I learned that we may appear to be in control, and we may think that we are in control, but suddenly we find that fear exerts its influence and leaves us helpless. I could discuss cancer on a clinical level without a problem, but when I discussed a new aspect of my wife's cancer with someone close to me I would choke up. Why? Probably fear of the unknown. With time, I found a solution. I would tape record a message and have it with me when I talked to someone. When I would choke up, I could hit the play button. I could get past the panic and get the information passed. Then I could answer questions. This was not a perfect solution, but it sure beat my mother-in-law asking, "What's the matter? Did she die?"

The Lord would like to take our cares and our troubles. It is just so hard to let Him do His job without our help.

Psalm 3 is a hymn of praise by David because the Lord has preserved him from many enemies.

Lord, I know why I panic. Help me trust in You and in Your grace. Amen

LONELINESS

CANCER IS A TIME FOR WAITING

Cancer is a waiting game.

With cancer,

we wait for the doctor to diagnose various complaints,

we wait for biopsies to be taken,

we wait for the results of the biopsies,

we wait for God to answer our prayers,

we wait for the surgery,

we wait for the results of additional biopsies and

opinions,

we wait for the chemotherapy to do its thing,

we wait for the nausea from the chemotherapy to be

over,

we wait to recover from the effects of chemotherapy,

we wait for blood tests to tell us we can have more
chemotherapy, and

we continue to wait.

It seems like we are waiting to be waiting. We are dealing with physical life and death. Friends and relatives express concern.

They try to help, but how can we tell them that they don't understand? We are waiting by ourselves with our fears. We are afraid to express our fears and concerns because they might then come true. It is so lonely to wait alone in the middle of the people here to wish us well.

In Psalm 16 David praises the Lord for what He has done.

Lord, I am tired of waiting. Give me work to do so I will forget that I am tired of waiting. Amen

HOPE

WILLARD'S SONG

My husband's friend had moved from Texas to Wisconsin and could not be here to encourage my husband during his last days, so he wrote a paraphrase of the 23rd Psalm and sent it. I read it to Willard 3 days before he died.

WILLARD'S SONG

The Lord is my shepherd, but I'd like to say
I'd rather just see Him in Glorious Day.
I know I won't want as long as I live,
But Heaven is finer. It's His to give.
Beside the still water, I know He will lead
But pastures in Heaven are greener indeed.
The paths that are righteous I'll follow till death
But souls are restored by His Spirit, His Breath.
The valley of death is a shadow, I know,
But I fear no evil when Home I will go.
His rod and His staff are my comfort and test,
But Heaven will show me His Love at its best.
My table's prepared, my cup overflows,
My enemy, Satan, has lost -- and he knows
My head is anointed with heavenly oil,
And nothing can happen to soil or to spoil.
The goodness and mercy of God are at hand,
And now I may dwell in that Heavenly Land
Where angels and saints will sing praises so fine
And welcome me Home to the joy that is mine.
J. Menke

Compare with Psalm 23.

Lord, be my shepherd forever. Amen

HOPE

LISTEN TO GOD

I had never given much thought to cancer ever attacking me, although two of my sisters have had breast cancer. They had lots of health problems, but I had always been in good health.

The cancer I had was not the usual variety of breast cancer. It was a rare kind with very little documentation on it. After the surgery, the doctor was very honest with me. He said that he could not advise me as to whether I should have follow-up treatment. There just was not enough data to make a recommendation. I had to decide.

A dear friend of mine, who had had cancer, came and visited with me. We prayed together and read Scriptures together. He told me, "Listen to God. Make your decision; and once you make your decision, do not look back. Trust God." I will never forget his advice. I made my decision. I elected to take no further treatment, and I was at peace with the decision. That was eight and a half years ago.

Prayer, reading of Scriptures, and support from family and friends made my decision much easier than it might have been. Now, I am ready to help others in their time of crisis.

In Psalm 56, David praises the Lord for all that He has done for him. Verse 3 is especially meaningful:

"When I am afraid, I trust in you." (NIV)

Lord, thank You for helping me make a decision, and thank You for helping me not look back and secondguess the decision that I made. Amen

HOPE

DAY BY DAY - THE LITTLE VICTORIES

“Lord, I want you to cure my wife. NOW.” This is not an appropriate way to deal with cancer even though I tried it many times. Surgery should have handled the problem. But it didn’t.

Six months of chemotherapy should have handled the problem. But it didn’t. A special catheter should have handled direct application of the chemo. But it didn’t. One disappointment after another. My wife handled her cancer better than I did. Finally I tried to concentrate on my faith. God could handle the worrying. I would count the little victories.

What were these little victories that I started counting? They were the things that we had taken for granted.

We made it halfway to church before having to return home. We walked from the house to the street and back. We made it to church. She dropped from two pain pills every four hours to one-and-one-half every four hours. Then she dropped to one every four hours. She drove two miles into town and back. She was sore but thrilled. Gradually she drove more. Each step was a little victory for which we rejoiced.

Is the cancer gone? We don’t know, but we can live with it. Until that point I didn’t understand a friend who said, “My wife had cancer for eight years before she died. They were the best years of our marriage.”

David turns to the Lord in his time of need in Psalm 28.

Lord, teach us to celebrate the little victories and let You do the worrying. Amen

HOPE

ONE DAY AT A TIME

I found this letter by a cancer patient who claims that she cannot write.

Dear Richard and Family,

It has taken me a couple of days to come up with what I want to say to you. It's a quote from a little book called "Streams in the Desert" (a daily devotional book loaned to me by a fellow cancer survivor)(originally published in 1925 by Cowman Publishing Co., Inc., LA, Calif.): "God does not open paths for us in advance of our coming. He does not promise help before help is needed. He does not remove obstacles out of our way before we reach them. Yet when we are on the edge of our need, God's hand is stretched out." It is based on Isaiah 43:2: "When thou passest through the waters...they shall not overflow thee".

I have learned that this is true. In hindsight, I wasn't even sure when we moved a little over a year ago how to go about finding a GP. Our old GP referred us to one in San Antonio (they had gone on a medical mission into central Mexico together). Then the old GP also referred us to an oncologist when we found that there might be a need for one. God's plan for us fell into place, but only as we needed it. And there were other signs of God's guiding hand that I have not even mentioned.

So rest assured, GOD IS THERE for all your family members.

Who would turn to Isaiah for comfort? Isaiah 43:1-8 is a wonderful place to go.

Lord, help me to remember that You provide the help I need when I need it. Amen

HOPE

A CHILD-LIKE FAITH AT SIXTY

I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I did not go through a stage where I thought that I might die of the cancer. After all, I had two sisters who did fine after they had breast cancer, and the Lord was on my side. I took it for granted that I would recover, also.

When a decision was made to proceed with a radical mastectomy, I did worry. What would my husband of many years think? Would this change our relationship? My husband said it would not, but I wondered. My husband's support turned out to be wonderful.

I did not have to endure the pain that many people with cancer suffer. Since I did not have any chemotherapy or radiation, I did not have any side-effects from those.

I know God healed me and answered the prayers of many people all around the country who were praying for me. I've always put my faith and trust in God to do what is best for me. I'm just not a worrier--I take things as they come along. Maybe I have the faith of a little child, but I know God is with me no matter what the circumstances.

Mark 11:22-24 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (NIV)

Lord, thank You for giving me a child-like faith and caring for me whether I am sick or well. Amen

GROWTH IN FAITH

HE MADE ME WEAK - NOW I AM STRONG

Life can run along ever so smoothly with no exceptional worries and with no mountaintop experiences to shout about--just a good average day-to-day routine life with God at my side taking care of my needs. Unexpectedly, out of the blue He gives me a scary burden to bear when a biopsy report is positive for cancer. Because God has been a part of my life from my birth, it was not a big step to let Him take charge of me and of the surgeon's hands.

That sounds too easy, doesn't it? You are right. God's plans are far too complex for any of us to anticipate. II Cor. 12:10 states:

“That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

When our greatest desire is for Him to take away all pain and agony, He has a greater plan. He does not just want to get us through the present difficulty, but He prepares us for future events in our lives and for service here on earth. By tenderly guiding us through the dark valleys, bringing us into closer contact with our Christian friends, giving us greater confidence in our abilities to endure suffering and pain, and giving us time to contemplate the path He would have us follow, we are gently led to the right path to follow. In so doing He builds in us the faith and strength that will be ours for eternity.

Psalm 46 tells us that God is our help in time of trouble.

Lord, I thank You for Your love and tender care in times of suffering. Help me to bear whatever the future holds for me, and give me the strength and wisdom to accomplish Your plans. Amen

FRIENDSHIP

FUNERALS AND HOSPITAL VISITORS

Funerals are for the living, not for the dead. We go, honoring the dead, but we are going to support the living. We tell ourselves that we are doing something, when there is not much that we can do.

Visiting hospitals is similar. The patient may not realize we are there, or the patient may wish we would leave him in peace. My wife even invited me to go back to work so she could rest. We have to do something to help, but what can we do? The only thing we can do is pray. That does not seem like enough. So we go and put on a cheerful face and tell the patient that he will be up in no time.

Maybe just being there for a few minutes is enough, but can we convince ourselves down deep that it is true?

Jesus took care of our salvation, but we feel that we must do something. We cannot do anything to earn our salvation. Knowing God is enough.

John 14:6-7 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (NIV)

Lord, so many people come because they want to help and to bring support. Help me welcome them and reassure them that I am in Your arms. Amen

FRIENDSHIP

A MATHEMATICAL GET-WELL CARD

When she found that my wife had cancer, she started sending cards. When the phone calls from friends slowed down, the cards from our special friend continued to come. Every week a card with an inspirational message came. We started looking forward to them coming. Then one week, a card came that said:

$$4 \times 6 = 24$$

Look at the 4th book, the 6th chapter, and the 24th verse.

That didn't seem very inspirational. She had sent us a math problem. I opened the Bible to Deut. 6:24 and read:

The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.

That sounded like Law, and it was not very inspirational. My wife reminded me that Deuteronomy was the fifth book of the Bible, so I turned to Numbers, chapter 6, and read verses 24 through 26. Open your Bible and read it with me.

Num. 6:24-26 "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." (NIV)

Thank You, Lord, for all that You have done for us and help us tell others about You. Amen.

FRIENDSHIP

THEY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE CANCER

We were in a Bible Class together for six months. We talked about many things, and then one day my wife was not there. She was in the hospital for another cancer operation. Several members of the class were shocked that she had cancer. They did not realize that she had been on chemotherapy for the previous six months. We thought that the word cancer filled every conversation that we had. We thought that we were boring people with the details, but we found that there were friends who had never heard.

What we see and what others see can be different. We need to communicate our feelings and our needs to our friends. We know the Lord. Are we forgetting to tell those whom we see daily about the Lord, because we think that they already know? They need a reminder that the Lord is here and that the Lord loves them. Unless we tell them, they may never know. My failure to tell my friends about the Lord would not sit very well on my conscience. Would it on yours? If you do not speak up, no one will ever know what you wanted to say.

Matt. 9:27-31 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. (NIV)

Lord, help us tell our friends about You. If we do not tell them, they may never hear. Amen

FRIENDSHIP

YOU ARE LOOKING GRAY

My wife had missed several evening Bible Study sessions. She just could not bounce back from major surgery as fast as she wanted. On her first time back to the evening Bible Study session, several people told her that she was looking good. This really helped her spirits. Just making it to the class had been a major effort. On the way home, she slept in the car.

The next week, several people told her that she was looking better than last week. Again it helped her spirits, but on the way home, she slept in the car.

The third week, people again told her how good she was looking. A nurse in the class told her that she was no longer looking gray, but was getting some color back. This was too much. My wife wanted an explanation. Three weeks in a row they had told her she was looking good.

Well, the answer came:

The first week you looked like death warmed over, but you were here. That was looking good.

The second week you had improved and weren't so gray, so that was looking good.

This week you have some color, so you are looking better.

We are all sinners and we look black with all of our sins, but God sent his Son to pay the price for those sins. When God looks at us through the blood of Jesus Christ, we look white as snow. God does not see the sin.

In Ruth 1:8-18, Ruth pledges her allegiance to Naomi.

Lord, thank You for friends who can bring us words of encouragement. Amen

FRIENDSHIP

THEY CAME OUT OF THE WOODWORK

On October 6, we learned about the cancer. At that point, we knew few people who had recovered from cancer, but we knew of a lot more who had died from it. There was a cousin's son, a grandfather, and a grandmother. There was a boy I had gone to school with.

Within a week, we had cancer survivors contacting us. They offered to bring food. They offered to take us to the American Cancer Society office to select a wig. They suggested a visit to the dentist before the chemotherapy started. But more than anything else, they were there to say, "We beat the cancer, and you can, too."

We developed new friends. They didn't ask for anything except that they be allowed to help. It was hard to accept help from such unselfish people. Our first response tended to be - can we repay you? They just wanted to help.

Acts 20:34-38 "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. (NIV)

Lord, help me to accept help when I need it. Help me to freely give help when I can, without any anticipation of reward. Amen

HELPING OTHERS

A KEY TO MY HOUSE

It was such a little gesture, and then I forgot about it. My cousin's husband was in the hospital in serious condition. She had been driving into the city each day to be with her husband, but there was so little that she could do besides sitting, waiting, and praying. I could not do anything to ease her sufferings, so I gave her a key to my house and said, "Use it as if it were yours. The sofa makes into an uncomfortable bed, but feel free to call it home."

She never used the key, and I forgot all about lending the key. Six weeks later my cousin's husband died. Months later, she returned the key and said, "Thank you. When you gave it to me, it helped so much because I knew that someone cared."

I did not understand the significance of the action until my spouse was diagnosed with cancer and a friend said, "I'm going to give you a key to my house."

God cares even more. He sent his Son to die for our sins. Let us thank God for what He has done for us.

In Psalm 71 David asks the Lord to rescue him.

Lord, help us see the little things that we can do to help others. Amen

HELPING OTHERS

THE GIFT OF TICKLING FEET

The wise men brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. A carol tells of a drummer boy who beat his drum. Often it is the little things that we do for others that mean so much.

Twelve years ago, my 5-year-old niece was at Santa Rosa Hospital in the cancer ward. When I could, I drove into San Antonio and sat with her. There wasn't much I could do but keep a log, call the nurse if anything went wrong, and tickle her feet. She wouldn't let anyone else tickle her feet, but she insisted that I do it. Why? I have no idea. Since she wanted her feet tickled, I complied. For hours I tickled her feet. As one hand would wear out, I would switch to the other.

I tried to read to her, but she was not interested. She just wanted her feet tickled.

We need to do little things for people when they hurt. The little things often help them more than the big things. When sick, we expect others to know what we want, but maybe we don't even know what we want. If we suspect that we know what we want, we need to tell them. We need to tell them that we need our feet tickled.

Heb. 6:9-10 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case -- things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. (NIV)

Lord, show us the feet that need to be tickled. Help us to help those who do not know what they need. Amen

HELPING OTHERS

A PRESCRIPTION TO NOT WASH DISHES

It was December, 1997, and we were sitting in the doctor's office after the latest exam prior to chemotherapy. As the doctor talked, I took notes on the pad that I carry with me whenever we go to see him. The doctor looked at my wife and winked at her as he said, "I don't want you washing dishes for the next three years." I continued to write what I heard while the two of them stopped to see if I would respond. When I didn't, he repeated the prescription. While keeping a straight face, I tried to figure out why he was prescribing this desperate act. Alternatives included:

Dishwater would react with the chemo drugs.

He wanted to give my wife a goal to reach.

He wanted to improve my wife's attitude.

After searching the Internet, I concluded that dishwater would not react with the chemo drugs. My wife has greatly enjoyed this prescription and with her stubborn streak, she will be here to enjoy all three years of not having to wash dishes. When acquaintances, who do not know about the cancer, hear about the prescription, they often say, "I want to go to that doctor." We wonder if they know what it takes to go to an oncologist. Close friends never want to go to my wife's doctor.

Matt 20:22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. (NIV)

Lord, help our doctor prescribe in a manner that will stimulate my wife to want to get well. Amen

YOUR MINISTRY

YOU CAN LIE DOWN AND DIE, OR GET UP AND FIGHT

We have known her for only a few years. She is younger than I am but some days she looks older than I do. Cancer has assaulted her body. She comes to church even when she would prefer to stay in bed. Sometimes, I think the descriptive word is that she drags herself to church. One day she told me, "You can lie down and die, or you can get up and fight. I'm not going to lie down."

She is performing a valuable ministry, though she would deny it if it were pointed out to her. She is an example to all of the cancer patients she knows. She shows them that they have to fight the disease and to keep God foremost in their lives.

She is an example to all of us. If she can come to church feeling as bad as she feels, do I have an excuse to stay away? Maybe the ministry that God has given her is to get me to church Sunday mornings.

We cannot earn our way into heaven, but we should witness to others as a thank offering for all that He has done for us.

I Tim. 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (NIV)

Lord, I'm not ready to lie down and die, but it is so hard to get up and fight. Give me the strength to be an example to others. Amen

YOUR MINISTRY

WHAT MINISTRY IS GOD PREPARING YOU FOR?

When my wife was diagnosed with cancer, an old friend called.

This friend had been a roommate in college thirty or so years ago. They kept in contact by mail and with a couple of short visits over the years. After saying how shocked she was to hear that my wife had cancer, she asked, "What ministry is God preparing you for?" My wife did not correct her bad grammar.

We each have a ministry. Our individual ministry, in some way, prepares the way for the Lord. It may be preaching the gospel, it may be folding bulletins, or it may be cutting the grass so the church looks better. Our ministries change as we travel through life. Maybe one of my ministries is writing this devotion.

When we feel that life is not being fair to us, maybe it is time to ask, "What is God preparing me to do in His kingdom?" Then we should pray, "Thank you, Lord, for preparing me to serve You better."

In Psalm 9 David praises God.

Lord, thank You for preparing me to serve You. Now tell me what You want me to do. Amen

SELFISHNESS

IT WOULD BE EASIER IF YOU TOOK IT EASY

She had cancer. There was a laparoscopy procedure. Then there was major surgery. Then there was the chemotherapy. The chemotherapy was a poison. I suspected that they figured out how much it would take to kill her and then they backed off just a little. Each time they gave it to her, I worried. Could she take as much as she took last time? Would the doctor recognize this?

The process drained her and kept her at home for days at a time. Whenever she felt a little better, she wanted to go places. We would go somewhere. She would feel bad, so we would turn around and go home. Sometimes we would not even get where we were going before we turned around and went home.

I pitched in and helped where I could, but there was so little that I could do. It would have been so much easier if she had just stayed home a little more, but she would not. When she could drive herself, she drove herself, but still, I worried. Would she run out of energy while on the expressway, or in rush-hour traffic? But then I felt guilty because I wanted her to take it easy. Maybe that was not what was best for her. How could I know what was best for her?

In Psalm 31 David proclaims that God is his rock and his fortress.

**Lord, give me the energy and the will to keep up with my wife both when she feels good and when she feels poorly.
Amen**

INDEPENDENCE

A SPORTY WIG

He was diagnosed with cancer and started chemotherapy. Our daughter was planning on getting married in six months. He said he wanted to make it to her wedding. He went out and planted flowers to beautify the yard for her wedding, and they died.

He lost his hair, but it didn't seem to bother him. He was more concerned about me. Did the hair loss bother me? Of course not. He went out and replanted the flowers, and they died.

One day, as a surprise for me, he came home wearing a wig. This just wasn't Willard. I knew how his hair had looked before he lost it and I knew how he looked bald, but this just wasn't my Willard. I tried to hide my feelings about the wig, but I couldn't.

He went back to the wig maker and said, "I don't want to see that look in my wife's eyes ever again." He came home with another wig. A wig that looked more like the Willard that I knew. He went out and replanted the flowers that had died yet again.

He made it to our daughter's wedding and gave her away. He went out and replanted the flowers.

Matt. 6:27-33 tells us not to worry, because God knows our needs.

Lord, give me the strength to go out and plant flowers in Your world and to continue replanting them every time they die. Amen

INDEPENDENCE

THE SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX KEY

When death is near, sometimes we forget our priorities. One incident, which in retrospect appears funny, was not funny at the time. We had a safety deposit box, and my husband had the key. It contained all of our important papers, so my daughters and I felt that we needed to know where the key was located. We did not want to ask my husband, because that would communicate to him that we had given up on his recovery.

I went into the bedroom and looked around on the dresser. It became obvious that he knew I was searching for something, so I left.

Later that day, one of my daughters went into the bedroom to hunt for the key. My husband was awake. He watched her for a while and finally said, "What are you hunting for?" She replied, "Mother needs money for groceries." He responded, "There's \$1,600. in my billfold. Do you think that will take care of groceries for a few weeks?" My daughter took the billfold and left. Later we found the key in the billfold.

In Gen. 42 we see Joseph deceiving his brothers, and we see the pain it causes his father.

Lord, You know that I use deception to try to ease the pain of others, but it is still deception. Help me ease the pain of others without resorting to deception. Amen

INDEPENDENCE

I CAN STILL STAND

After a time, we knew that he would not recover. He probably knew it before we did. He said that he wanted to die at home, not in the hospital, so we started making all of the arrangements. He then had to go into the hospital for a spinal tap. That was hard on all of us. The procedure could not be done at home, and complications from it could have killed him.

We weathered that storm and had him home again. Each day he would stand up and walk a little. As his strength fled, I had to help him to stand. But each day he stood. Each day he achieved one more victory over the cancer that was taking his strength.

With time, he lost more muscle, and my son and I had to help him to stand. But each day he stood. He had achieved one more victory over the cancer.

Finally, it was all my son and I could do to get him on his feet for a few moments. But each day he stood and proved to himself that he had won another victory over the cancer.

The day came when we could not get him up on his feet. The spirit was willing, but there was no flesh left to obey his will. He faded fast after that, because he could not achieve that daily victory over the cancer.

Job 5 tells us that God is in control.

Lord, give me the strength to help my loved ones remain strong. Amen

INDEPENDENCE

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

The movies depict dying of cancer or any other disease as being a beautiful and uplifting experience. The movies do not show all of our fleas, ticks, warts, and moles. If they did, people might not go to the movies.

While my husband was still able, he liked to get out. It was hard on him and it was hard on us, but he needed to prove to himself that he was still independent.

One day he went to Builder's Square. He left at 5:00 PM and I expected him back by 6:00 PM or a little later. 6:30 PM came and he was not home, so I started to worry but I did not act. If I went looking for him, it might shatter the feeling of independence which he needed.

7:00 PM came, and then 7:30 PM. Still I did not go looking for him.

By 8:00 PM I was very worried, but made it until 8:30 PM before getting in my car and driving down to Builder's Square to look for him. His car was not in the parking lot, so I drove home.

He was home, and as I walked in the door he asked, "WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?"

Prov. 12:25 An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. (NIV)

**Lord, give me the strength to support my loved ones and not answer back in a manner that would hurt them.
Amen**

DEATH

I DON'T WANT TO DIE, BUT I'M READY

He was diagnosed with cancer, but he never used the word "cancer". He spoke of his illness, but for some reason he never named it. Why?

During the early months of his illness, we spoke of recovery and of hope. We didn't speak of death. I can't say why **he** didn't speak of death, but **I** never mentioned it because I needed to be there to give him encouragement. There are some things that even husbands and wives have trouble speaking about.

Finally it became clear that he was not going to make it, but we still didn't discuss death. It was there in the room with us, but we just did not speak of it. One day he said, "I don't want to die, but I'm ready." He told me that he was ready to die, and in doing so, he was reaching out to me to comfort me. He knew that when his suffering ceased, mine would continue.

The years have passed and I grieved, but with time I worked through my grief. After what I have been through, I can see the sufferings of others. At every opportunity I reach out to offer comfort to those suffering because I know what they are facing.

Psalm 23 is a favorite Psalm. The Lord is the good shepherd.

Lord, You have prepared me to help others who are suffering. Show me the way. Amen

GRIEF

I WAS MAD AT THE LORD

Three years ago this Christmas my mom died of cancer. I had a hard time dealing with this. I just couldn't understand how it could happen, especially at Christmas. This was supposed to be the happiest time of year. I had always loved Christmas: the music, the lights, and the sense of giving that seemed to fill the air.

How could a God who loved me take my mom away? I just couldn't understand. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't read my Bible. I was angry. I needed God so much, but I felt let down and couldn't ask Him for help. I was afraid that He wouldn't help. I had asked for Him to save my mom, but He didn't. I have never been so alone in my life, or so I thought.

It took over two years for me to return to church. I continue to deal with the loss of my best friend -- my Mom. But I am so grateful that the Lord sent me his Spirit to comfort and pray for me when I was in too much pain to do it myself. If it had not been for this, I don't know when or if I could have returned to church.

Romans 8:26-27 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (NIV)

Lord, I have been mad at You. Thank You for not being mad at me. Amen