



Living with Illness

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INTRODUCTION



The Fellowship of Suffering

An uncommon bond comes through shared pain.

As a preschool child, I had a serious illness. Recurring fevers brought me to many doctors who finally determined that my kidneys weren't functioning properly. Surgery was required to try to correct the problem. So I took up residency in the local hospital.

Though I'm told it was difficult and painful, my memories of the time only involve faces. There was my mother, always next to me. She sat in the chair beside my bed each day—the same one she slept in at night. My father, who comforted me with his presence. And there were my sisters—happy visitors who fluffed pillows and fetched candy. There were my aunts—one of whom danced like a hooligan in front of the entire ward just to make me laugh (and I'm still laughing).

There were the other children who shared the same floor. A little boy with an eye patch, whom we prayed for daily. And the shy little girl I met in the hospital's playroom. But whether parents, siblings, patients, or professionals—we all shared one thing in common: our sufferings.

In Philippians 3:10–11, the apostle Paul exclaims, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection *and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings*, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (italics added).

Paul's words point out that when we share in suffering, we enter into a unique fellowship. We can enter this fellowship whether we suffer in our own body or



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alongside someone else's. We are bound by knowledge, experience, emotion, and spirit, as God transforms us through his allowance of difficult times. If you're suffering, you've entered that fellowship, led by Christ, who "took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). Truly, we are not alone.

As you read through the following collection of articles, you'll find the encouragement you and your loved ones need from those who have been there and know what you're going through. Let them help encourage and strengthen your heart with the encouragement they have received from God during some of life's most difficult times. May you learn, like Paul, to rejoice in the fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings.

Blessings,

Janine Petry
Managing Editor, Women's and Family Issues
Christianity Today International



LEADER'S GUIDE



How to use “Living with Illness” for a group study.

“Living with Illness” can be used for individual or group study, but if you intend to lead a group study on this, some simple suggestions follow:

- 1 Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
- 2 Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
- 3 Alternatively, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
- 4 Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
- 5 When working through the “Thought Provokers” be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experience. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 6 End the session in prayer.



FEATURES



I'm Living with MS

Multiple sclerosis may slow me down—
but it won't stop me.

by Elaine Powers

As I watched the actors at a local church passion play depict the scene of Jesus freeing a woman from her crutches, long-repressed feelings of anger surfaced. *Why doesn't God heal me?* I wondered, looking down at the cane that lay on the floor at my feet.

I was unprepared for what happened next. A tidal wave of peace washed over me, completely flushing away my anger. Then the words *Rejoice, my good and faithful servant. I affirm you—just as you are*, rang through my head. I began to weep quietly—this time for joy—as I realized how far I'd come in seven years.

In 1990, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a disabling auto-immune disease of the central nervous system. A former fitness instructor, I'd suffered periodic bouts of pain and weakness for years, but I passed them off as the result of my stressed-out life as a single mom of two. I'd begin each day with an early morning run, rush home to get my son and daughter off to school, dash to my job as a credit assistant for a major oil company, play "Super Mom" to my children's needs in the evenings, then crash wearily into bed at midnight.

But sometimes when I ran, my legs almost buckled underneath my body. Other times, my entire right side tingled, then went limp. These sensations came and went—a typical symptom, I learned later, of MS.

Then one day, while feeding a stray cat who got spooked and ran under my feet, I fell. Although a doctor's visit confirmed no broken bones or internal injuries, I started experiencing sharp pain in my back and increasing weakness. I got progressively worse.



Finally, one weekend, while my daughter was away at camp and my son was living with his dad, I couldn't walk unassisted from my bedroom to the bathroom. Alone and terrified, I cried out in anguish, "God, why have you forsaken me?"

His answer was clear: *I haven't forsaken you, but I am trying to get your attention. Ask for help.*

I reached out to my brother, who lived in nearby Houston. He took me to the hospital, where I underwent extensive testing, including a myelogram, MRI, and visual field test. There I learned, to my shock, that I had MS. The difficulty I experienced in walking, the tingling, weakness, and extreme fatigue, were due to the gradual deterioration of the myelin sheath that protected my spinal column and brain, forming lesions that were interrupting the signals my brain sent to various parts of my body. I could gradually lose my ability to walk, and my speech and bladder control could one day be affected. Lesions on the optic nerve could cause blurred vision or partial blindness.

My first reaction to the doctor's news was anger. How could God let this happen to me—a single parent with heavy responsibilities who loved and served him?

While recuperating at home, I found just making my bed and washing my hair provoked complete physical collapse. My mother and sister stayed with me in the beginning, but when they returned to their home in North Texas, I found myself quite alone. I tried to protect myself from feeling hopeless by clinging to the "old me"—the aerobics instructor—and denied the reality of my diagnosis.

But soon denial gave way to fear. As a stubbornly independent person, I feared becoming dependent on others. One lonely afternoon, I felt overpowered by helplessness, and my fear turned to despair. I stared at a bottle of pills I'd purchased earlier, wondering, *What would life after death be like if I ended my pain this way?* Thankfully, the Holy Spirit prompted me to call my friend Vicki, who came over immediately and stayed with me for more than four hours. Vicki told me, "Elaine, it's not for us to decide when our time on earth is finished. It's in the Lord's time." That's when I realized a force much greater than I was in charge. The crisis passed.

For many months after my initial hospitalization, I refused to attend church. My stated excuse was the deep fatigue of MS, but in reality, I was still angry at God. Finally, I realized God has surrounded me with loving church friends to help me on my journey to a more spirit-filled life. For more than two years, Christine, a willing listener and prayer partner, grocery shopped for me. When she returned to



Honduras for missionary work, another Christine graciously became available. Rick gives me a lift to church and even devoted an entire weekend to help me move into a new apartment.

Returning to work was especially difficult. In the beginning, I could only stay an hour before deep fatigue overpowered me and I'd have to return home. Then blurred vision became a frustrating reality. But God has gathered messengers of hope and compassion all around me. Pete, my department head, calms my fears by letting me know my special needs will always be honored. Mona, a close coworker, often takes over my responsibilities when she senses I am tiring. Joe, my other supervisor, reminds me daily of what Christian witnessing is all about. While asking for help is difficult, I've come to understand my friends are God's gift to me.

Although I've successfully worked my way through denial, fear, and despair, my children struggle through these stages. Shortly after I returned home from the hospital, my teenage daughter confessed, "Mom, I'm afraid you're going to die." My son echoed her fears by tearfully confessing, "You're so different now, so fragile, always needing a cane. I feel so helpless around you." For a few special moments we tightly embraced. Yet even during this painfully emotional time, I felt the Holy Spirit permeating my soul.

"Be still, and know that I am God," has taken on a new and special meaning for me.

Later, I found living with my daughter too stressful, so she moved in with her dad. I tearfully admitted I could no longer be the mom who could fix anything for my daughter. Using all my energy to work all day, I needed quiet and almost complete bedrest when I returned home.

Change isn't easy, regardless of age. My children now are young adults. I do my best to mirror to them a Christian spirit in my own life. I pray they'll someday come to realize there's only one constant in any of our lives: the steadfast presence and love of God.

Despite my battle with MS, I've reached the point where I can joyfully celebrate the "new me." While there's no known cure for multiple sclerosis—its cause is still undetermined, although research points to the possibility of an invasive virus that causes the body's immune system to attack itself—there are various treatments available. One is the use of steroids, but their side effects are too severe for me. In 1994, a new drug became available: Betaseron. Betaseron is supposed to slow the



disease's progression and make relapses less severe. I've been taking the drug for three years, and while I still experience some of its side effects, such as flu-like symptoms, it's better than the ten Advil I used to take each day for pain. Today I need no pain relievers.

I use a cane and take frequent rests, but I'm fairly mobile. I go to work every day and am on the prayer chain at my church.

I've come to accept my need for rest as a gift that revitalizes me spiritually as well as physically. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10) has taken on a new and special meaning for me. My forced slowness has given me the patience to blossom into an artist. With abundant doses of encouragement, my friend Rex helps me nurture my special gift by bringing me canvasses, paints, and books about painting. And Elena, my art teacher, is doing her part to develop the best of the new me.

I still experience brief periods of despair and anger. But when that happens, I call on friends who have been and continue to be God's most precious gift to me. And even though my family lives quite far away, they continue to be a spiritual support to me.

Today I move much slower than before, but the new me runs the race the Lord's set before me with perseverance. Well, maybe the word *run* is an exaggeration—but I certainly do it with perseverance. And I rejoice that because of my growing faith in Jesus Christ, God considers me a good and faithful servant. He affirms me—just the way I am.

Elaine Powers is a freelance writer living in Texas. This article first appeared in the May/June 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.



Thought Provokers

- *Upon learning about the presence of an illness, whether your own or someone else's, what emotions did you experience? Anger? Denial? Sadness? Describe your emotions.*
- *How do you respond to the question, "Why doesn't God heal me?"*
- *In what ways can an illness provide the gift of spiritual rest?*
- *Which Scriptures are especially meaningful to you in times of hardship and struggle, and why?*



FEATURES



Taking On Breast Cancer

This survivor's fought the disease—twice. Here are her strategies.

by Phyllis Ten Elshof

The first time I had breast cancer, in 1993, I thought I'd die. Everyone around me thought so, too—especially people who knew people who'd died of it.

My mother tried to console me, saying, "The further you get from this, the safer you'll feel." But I didn't believe her. Two years later, my physician ordered a bone scan after I complained of nagging hip pain. Its results revealed a suspicious spot on my hip bone that indicated the possibility my breast cancer had metastasized.

In the anxious days that followed, I shared my worries with another cancer survivor who told me how she coped with worry. "I saved a couple extra chemo pills," she said. "Whenever I feel anxious about a recurrence, I pop one." We both laughed, but something eased within me. I suddenly recognized the need we cancer survivors have to battle one of the disease's most invasive side effects: the fear of its return.

Thankfully, after my physicians identified the hot spot on my scan as a stress fracture, not cancer, I vowed to slip the grip of fear by making the most of every cancer-free day I had. I'd make more time for people. If my daughter, son, or friends called, I'd drop what I was doing to talk with them. I'd say no to projects I once enjoyed but were energy drains. I'd stay on a low-fat diet for health reasons, but allow an occasional indulgence, such as a hot-fudge sundae. I'd get more sleep, read better books, spend more time in prayer. I decided to see cancer not as a death sentence, but as an invitation to live.

Then an abnormal mammogram in May 2001 indicated I had to take on my foe again. While round two of breast cancer initially knocked me for a loop, I wasn't down long. My



systems for coping were already in place. Here's what has helped me—and can help you, too, if you ever have to face breast cancer or know someone who does.

Don't Rush the Process

In my grandmother's time, a malignant breast lump meant unconditional surrender to what followed. A woman might awaken from a surgical biopsy minus the lump, breast, axillary nodes—even chest muscle. In addition to facing an ugly slash and hollow where her breast had been, she coped with minimized movement, increased risk of infection, and painful swelling in the adjacent arm.

By the time I was treated for breast cancer, things had changed. Thanks to women's advocacy groups, enlightened surgeons, and a host of studies, the radical Halstead, described above, had been replaced by a modified radical, which leaves the muscle intact. In many cases, women are offered the choice of a mastectomy or a lumpectomy plus radiation, in which small lumps are excised with cancer-free margins.

The first time around, I wasn't given a choice. The size of the lump in my left breast (3.8 cm, or golf ball-sized) eliminated the lumpectomy option. Fortunately, my mastectomy was justified by the results: In addition to the primary lump, the pathologist reported two others, plus "abundant fibrous breast tissue showing fibrocystic alteration." Five of my 16 lymph nodes were malignant, meaning I'd have to have six months of chemotherapy.

Still, I wondered if I should have gotten a second opinion. A different surgeon might have echoed the first's advice, but even that would have assured me I was doing the right thing. The point is, don't rush to judgment. Breast cancer grows slow enough for you to make an informed decision about how to treat it. When my mother-in-law was diagnosed, she recoiled at a surgeon's advice to have a mastectomy. At my urging, she sought a second opinion. She's cancer-free today after a lumpectomy and radiation.

Research the Dickens Out of It

Some people want to hear only what they have to about a medical problem; anything more terrifies them. For me, information is power; it offers a sense of direction through something that threatens to rob me of all sense of control.

My second round of breast cancer was easier to deal with, partly because of what I'd learned from the first. My work with breast-cancer support groups such as Reach to Recovery and Expressions for Women had put me in regular contact with survivors. I'd read everything I could get my hands on, crowding my bookshelves with classics



such as Dr. Susan Love's *Breast Book*, *Living Beyond Limits* by David Spiegel, M.D., *Cancer as a Turning Point* by Lawrence LeShan, and *MAMM*, a magazine for women with cancer. I'd researched dozens of Internet sites. I knew so much about breast cancer, I was bored by it.

But like a bolt of lightning, my abnormal mammogram in May 2001 recharged my interest. I surfed the Net for information on mammogram findings, core biopsies, and treatment for recurrent breast cancer. I was back on the phone with my breast-cancer buddies. And what I learned eased the tangle of stress inside me so I could think rationally about big decisions I'd soon have to make, such as: Would I need a mastectomy in my right breast? Could I get by this time with a lumpectomy and radiation? Should I have chemotherapy again?

Lean On the Professionals

Personal research is helpful, but it can only go so far. God gave us health-care professionals for a reason—to help guide us through a mass of information toward a reasonable solution.

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer the second time, my surgeon suggested a conference at which my husband and I and various physicians would discuss my case to determine the best treatment course. I leaped at the opportunity.

The conference at a nearby hospital began with slides of my cancer cells and two treatment options: mastectomy or lumpectomy with radiation. The choice narrowed after I mentioned I'd also been diagnosed the previous year with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I was in remission but deeply concerned about how breast-cancer treatment might affect my immune system's ability to cope with the lymphoma.

With that revelation, the discussion shifted. The oncologist said he preferred getting rid of all breast tissue to avert possible recurrence. The surgeon argued for mastectomy, too, saying it would be better to do everything now rather than in stages. Within minutes, a consensus emerged.

I left the conference with a clear sense of direction. My questions had been addressed. I'd been a full participant in the discussion. Everyone in that room had helped me decide a mastectomy was my best choice.

Don't Settle for Less Than the Best

During my first round of breast cancer, a surgeon made a suggestion for which I've always been grateful. "You're so young, you ought to consider immediate reconstruction," he said. I was 48 at the time.



A few days later, I met with a plastic surgeon to discuss how to rebuild my breast. He explained several options, including a TRAM-flap reconstruction (Traverse Rectus Abdominus Myocuta-neous flap—also called the “sit-up muscle” of the abdomen), in which he’d build a breast entirely of my own tissue, scavenging muscle and fat from my belly. This option required more surgery and recovery time, but the results were more natural than an implant. Best of all, I’d wake up from surgery with a new breast already in place. I chose the TRAM.

For the most part, I was happy with the results. But several months later, when I attended a Reach to Recovery seminar and saw the slides of a plastic surgeon who specialized in breast reconstruction, I began to wonder if my plastic surgeon had really done so well. What would this specialist think of my reconstruction? From what I could see, my left breast couldn’t compare with what was on screen.

When I faced a second mastectomy in 2001, I tried calling that plastic surgeon. While waiting for a response, I researched the list of physicians provided by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. No one stood out as a breast-reconstruction specialist.

I even met with a local plastic surgeon. But his answers to my questions were hardly reassuring. When I asked about back-flap construction, he said, “I see no point in going through all that when you can get the same results with an expander-implant” (a deflated plastic balloon-type insert with a flange in which the physician adds saline weekly until it reaches the required size).

Question: “What about skin-sparing surgery?”

Blank stare.

Rephrase: “What kind of incision is made?”

“Ah!” The wedge he drew made me dive for the exit. Forget the inconvenience; I wanted a physician I could trust. And I wanted a breast I could live with the rest of my life—without having to dodge eyes in a locker room. Most of all, I wanted something I could show to other women as proof that breast cancer didn’t have to leave anyone maimed or disfigured.

A week later, I made a trip across two states to see the specialist whose work I’d seen. “This is *quite* a challenge,” he said after examining the first plastic surgeon’s work on me. He then outlined what he’d do. Along with repairing a hernia left from



the original TRAM, he'd repair the hollow area above my left breast. And to rebuild the right breast, he'd use muscle from my back. "We'll create a breast that looks *better* than the one you had," he said.

From the time the bandage came off, my new breast looked so natural I didn't think of mourning the one I'd lost. Best of all, I no longer had breast tissue to tempt another round of cancer.

See Cancer as a Gift

When people ask why God would give me breast cancer twice, I often say, "Why would he give me health? One is no more deserved than another."

I go on to tell them how God's used cancer for good in my life. For one thing, it's brought the reconciliation of my son and daughter. Sibling rivalry ruled through childhood, teenage years, and well after both left home. But the day we learned the spot on my hip might be metastasized breast cancer, my son and daughter reached out for each other. As I watched them embrace, tears ran down my cheeks. If this is what cancer could accomplish, I was willing.

There have been other blessings, too, such as priceless memories of my post-operative care. I think of how my daughter bathed me and washed my hair in the hospital. How my mother fixed tea and fetched me pillows, how my sisters dropped off meals, how my stepdad stocked the birdfeeder to entice the finches I love to watch. How friends kidnapped me for lunch. And, finally, how my husband helped me into the car for the long ride home. All the while, I was buoyed by people who were praying for me at work, at church, and in various support groups.

But the sweetest blessing is how cancer makes me cling to God. Life can be so busy, it may take something such as cancer to teach us that regardless of how rewarding our job, family, friendships, and church responsibilities are, nothing's more precious than time we spend with God.

Live Like a Winner

Several years ago, Betty Rollins wrote a book titled *First You Cry*. I agree—there definitely is a time for tears. You cry on the elevator ride from the doctor's office after he's put you at the top of his "hit list" for surgery. You cry when your husband wraps his arms around you, trying to ease the blow of a biopsy report. You cry on the phone when you're telling your kids. You cry when Mom tells you, "I wish I could have this instead of you."



But there's a time to stop mourning, too, and get back to life. One way to do that is to get back to whatever it is God's called you to do. Work is therapeutic, I've found. It focuses attention on what you can do rather than on what you're powerless to control. It makes you productive and useful. And if you're blessed as I am with believing coworkers, it plugs you back into a network of daily support.

Another way to get a grip on cancer is to start helping others. You can't mope around feeling sorry for yourself if you're out shopping for hats with someone about to start chemo. Or be paralyzed by worry if you're chugging off to the hospital to deliver flowers to someone who's just had surgery. The beauty of such helping, of course, is that in helping, we find ourselves being helped.

But the best way to beat back the enemy is to put every fear into the hands of the God who made us, sustains us, and controls whatever happens to us. He knew I'd have cancer. In his unfathomable wisdom, he allowed it to happen for reasons that are only beginning to become apparent to me. And in his boundless grace, he's not only using cancer to bless me but to bless those around me.

Will I have cancer again? Most likely. The lymphoma I have is the type that *will* return, and the breast cancer of nine years ago might still metastasize to other parts of my body. Even if it does, though, it won't have the power to conquer my spirit. For I know that even if cancer so ravages my body that I no longer have the strength to go on living, I'll still win the battle. As Philippians 1:18, 21 so beautifully says: "I will continue to rejoice ... for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Phyllis Ten Elshof is an editor at Christianity Today International who lives with her husband in the Chicago area. This article first appeared in the March/April 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *How is fear one of the most invasive side effects of an illness?*
- *How can doing research and getting a second opinion help someone deal with an illness?*
- *If you have an illness, how has God used it for good in your life, and how can you share this with others? If someone you know is ill, how can you encourage them to see God's hand at work?*





My Husband Has Alzheimer's

I've vowed not to become the disease's second victim.

by Ruth Crawford Lindsey

When the neurologist told me in 1984 that my husband, Jack, had Alzheimer's disease, I felt as though I was suffocating. *Oh, God, no, my heart pounded. Please, not that.*

Over the previous year, Jack had been having trouble following instructions at work. A professional printer with more than 25 years experience at layout, he no longer could handle stressful deadlines. His foreman had reassigned him twice to easier jobs. Finding his time card was a daily challenge. Sometimes Jack punched someone else's card, much to that employee's consternation. Then, after a near-fatal bout with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever in the summer, his personality changed. He didn't want me out of his sight; he kept asking the same questions over and over; he became careless with his appearance and had to be urged even to take a bath.

Jack was 55; I was seven years younger. We'd been married only five years. After serving 13 years as a single missionary-teacher in Brazil, I'd thought I'd remain unmarried the rest of my life. Then I met Jack, who fell in love with me at first sight, he said. I loved being married—but Jack's diagnosis shattered my dreams of having a companion with whom I could share my life.

Along with others, I prayed earnestly for Jack's healing. Repeatedly I quoted Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" I recited Psalm 103:2–3: "Praise the Lord, O my soul ... who heals all your diseases." But when I finally became quiet before the Lord, he spoke to my spirit: *Don't be afraid. Trust me. My grace will always be greater than your need.*



Living with Illness

My Husband Has Alzheimer's

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Like persistent termites, the disease silently devoured Jack's short-term memory, coordination, and judgment. He became my shadow, not allowing me even five minutes of privacy in the bathroom.

I began attending meetings of an Alzheimer's support group. At first, my participation in the meetings was minimal. I hesitated to publicize what was happening at our house. Soon, however, I learned talking about it was therapeutic. People in the group were at different stages in the journey. Some were caring for family members at home; others had been forced to place their loved one in a nursing home. I silently prayed I could continue taking care of Jack at home.

About five years after the diagnosis, changes in Jack's condition accelerated. He became agitated and angry for no apparent cause. I couldn't reason with him. He accused me of infidelity and threatened revenge. Although I knew in my heart this wasn't the "real Jack," his words hurt. I cried, but my crying just made matters worse.

The nights were more difficult than the days. Because Jack couldn't sleep, neither could I. He paced constantly. Sometimes he left the house scantily clothed; once he exited naked.

There were other evidences, too, of his deterioration. He forgot how to tie his shoes. He became incapable of shaving, bathing, and brushing his teeth. Eventually he became incontinent. By mid-1989, Jack required around-the-clock care. For the past four years, he has been totally dependent on others, even for spoon-feeding. When I finally had to admit him to a nursing home, my heart broke. He didn't understand why we had to be separated.

Those first visits were extremely difficult. Somehow I managed to hold myself together until I left the premises—then sobs wrenched my body.

Surprisingly, Jack adjusted quickly to the nursing-home routine. Within a few weeks, he seemed not to have remembered ever having lived anywhere else. He watched for me and clapped his hands when I arrived. We strolled on the premises and played "catch" with a purple fuzzy Koosh ball designed for preschoolers.

My stepchildren found it emotionally draining to visit Jack in the nursing home. Their visits became less frequent. Then one day, he no longer recognized them. After that, they virtually stopped going.



Living with Illness

My Husband Has Alzheimer's

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We'd always expressed our love to each other. Daily at the nursing home I continued to assure him of my love. My heart warmed when he responded, "I love you, too." But with time, that shortened to a faltering "I—love—you," then to "I—love—," and finally to "I—I—I—." Then weeks of silence followed.

"Lord," I prayed, "are my words getting through? Please give me the assurance that Jack feels loved."

Though he didn't respond, I kept talking to Jack, hoping my words penetrated his tangled brain cells. Then one day in 1993, when I again said "I love you, Jack," he replied slowly but clearly, "I—know—that."

He hasn't spoken a word since. I'm confident, however, he still understands some, at least, of what I tell him. He responds to my voice and touch. Whether he still comprehends I'm his wife, I don't know.

Jack's condition has remained relatively stable for the past year. I teach full-time at a local college, but my class schedule permits me to spend a couple hours with him at noon each day. The nursing home is understaffed, so I do whatever I can to make Jack more comfortable—shaving him, brushing his teeth, or even changing soiled underclothes. Then I feed him. Finally, I walk with him, slowing my pace to his four-inch-step shuffle, while talking to him, quoting Scripture, or softly singing choruses and hymns he himself sang in bygone years.

When I leave the nursing home, I consciously relinquish Jack to the staff's care. At home I keenly miss him and often think about how things might have been. Sometimes I dream he's by my side, only to awaken, reach for him, and touch an empty pillow.

Having observed that the caregiver sometimes becomes the second victim of Alzheimer's—not by contracting the disease, but by becoming a recluse—I've tried to avoid that fate. To stay active socially, I've actually increased my efforts to cultivate a network of friends. I attend church regularly and sometimes go to concerts and other performances. Since gardening is my favorite pastime, I spend many pleasant hours working in my backyard. Digging in the dirt and watching things grow are therapeutic for me. And the garden provides delicious fresh vegetables for home-cooked meals, to which I often invite friends.

Caring and coping have brought some changes into my own life. Through caregiving, I've learned more about God's love. God loves me regardless of how I respond to his love—or even if I don't respond at all.



Living with Illness

My Husband Has Alzheimer's

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Jack offers no glimmer of recognition or word of thanks when I do a “dirty job” to make him more comfortable. On the contrary, sometimes he lashes out at me, grabbing my wrists and twisting them. Instead of retorting “That does it! I’ll not help you anymore,” I excuse his behavior because he doesn’t understand what he’s doing. And I go back the next day, perhaps with a wrist brace on, to continue to do whatever I can for him.

I can recall times when I’ve lashed out at God, when I’ve sulked, when I’ve neglected talking with him, when I haven’t acknowledged his goodness. But that hasn’t driven God away. Just as I coax Jack, the Lord has said to me, *Come on, I’ll help you. I love you.*

I’m learning God’s grace is provided as I need it. If twelve years ago I’d been told I would do some of the things for Jack I’ve done and am doing, I’d have said, “I can’t do it.” But then I didn’t have to. When grace has been needed, grace has been provided—just as God promised.

Ruth Crawford Lindsey teaches English at Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee. This article first appeared in the September/October 1996 issue of TODAY’S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *What dreams can be shattered with the diagnosis of an illness? How have you experienced or witnessed this?*
- *In what ways can caregivers become the second victim of an illness? How can caregivers fight against this?*
- *How is God’s grace provided as we need it? If someone had told you what you would face in the future, how would you have responded at that time? How has God prepared you for your current role and circumstances?*



FEATURES



My Special Child

I never realized her physical and mental challenges could be such a blessing.

by Carla L. Bailey

When I was growing up, I always knew I wanted to marry and have lots of children. *When I have a girl*, I daydreamed, *she'll be in ballet classes and take piano lessons*. In my wildest dreams, I never thought my child would be unable to do any of these things.

My daughter, Amber Marie Scott, was born at 24 weeks. During my 12th week of pregnancy, my appendix ruptured and I had to have surgery. Soon after, I went into premature labor, so once again I was rushed to the hospital. There my physician put me on medication to halt the contractions, and placed me on bedrest in a vertical position to keep the baby in my womb. After two days, the physicians felt I'd made it past the crisis stage, and I spent the next nine and a half weeks in the hospital on bedrest in a semi-vertical position.

It was an incredibly stressful time. I kept going into labor every other day, which meant I was on large quantities of medication to stop my baby from being born. During the 24th week, the medications started to affect my heart, so on September 9, 1989, at 5:11 a.m., doctors performed an emergency C-section. I gave birth to Amber, who weighed 2 pounds, 15 ounces.

Although I was a Christian, I'd stopped attending church because my husband wasn't a Christian. Our rocky marriage became even rockier with the added stress of my complicated pregnancy. And as a result, my husband abandoned me six months after Amber was born. Although he did see Amber after her birth, once our divorce was finalized, he never visited her again.



But from the first moment I saw Amber in the neonatal intensive care unit—diaperless, under a heat lamp in an incubator, numerous wires connected to her—I fell madly, completely in love. Her nurse asked me if I wanted to hold her, and I nodded yes. It took the nurse nearly 15 minutes to free Amber from the tubes and wires so I could hold her. As I drew her close to my heart, Amber gave me a beautiful smile. At that moment, Amber was a perfect little girl—without any of the pain and frustration she'd have to deal with later in life.

Before Amber was released from the hospital, she underwent two surgeries. One 14-hour operation repaired the damage caused by necrotizing enterocolitis, a disease in which intestinal tissue dies and that 50 percent of premature babies contract. Physicians removed her appendix, half her large intestine, and one-third of her small intestine, and gave Amber a colostomy. The second surgery was for colostomy closure.

When Amber went home, no one told me anything was wrong with her—just that she might be a little slow in maturing. Then, during a check-up three and a half months later, my pediatrician told me Amber had cerebral palsy and a hearing impairment that would require hearing aids.

When I heard the news, I really didn't know how to react; at first I thought the pediatrician was talking about someone else's child, because I felt we'd already endured so much. My pain was so great, I couldn't find the words to describe it. Here I was, 30 years old, an unemployed single parent who lived with her parents. I became angry with God for how my life had turned out, and I refused even to pray.

I especially dreaded telling Amber's diagnosis to my twin sister, Carolyn, who was happily married and pregnant with her first child. Carolyn had been with me every day at the hospital, and was as close to Amber as I was. I wanted so much for this time in my twin sister's life to be happy, but once everyone in my family learned the news, my twin sister's pregnancy seemed to go unnoticed. Although Carolyn's love for Amber helped her deal with it, my guilt felt unbearable.

My innermost pain and fears came in different forms: from uncontrollable crying to relentless thoughts of suicide. Then one Sunday evening, when Amber was seven months old, I decided to take a long drive. My body was so tired, all I wanted to do was get away from everything. While my parents cared for Amber, I checked into a hotel so I could rest. As I took a shower, I started to cry. My life was such a mess; I'd been blaming God for my mistakes. I knew I needed to ask God to forgive me. I got down on my knees in the shower and asked God—for the first time in a long time—to take control. As I prayed, I sensed God telling me, *Amber isn't a curse but a blessing. Trust in me and you'll see my purpose for you and Amber. And remember, you're never alone.*



Soon I began working full-time as a precertification representative at a children's hospital. My parents, who were retired, took Amber to her physical therapy twice a week and speech therapy once a week. We struggled to get by financially; because I was employed, I wasn't eligible for any special assistance.

But it was an emotional struggle, too. Whenever I took Amber out, because of her disabilities, people would stare and point at her. And when friends had birthday parties for their children, Amber wouldn't be invited.

However, when Amber was five years old, my sister introduced me to my future husband, whom she brought to our church. On March 18, 1995, I married Major Jonathon D. Bailey, Sr., who loved us unconditionally. Our blended family of two teenage daughters, Janitra and Tanisha, has given Amber a new outlook on life. We now also have two lively additions to the "Bailey Bunch," Jasmine, five, and Jonathon, Jr., two, whom I was able to deliver naturally.

Because of my constant concern for my daughter's welfare and the lack of information available for families of physically challenged children, I made a commitment to minimize the difficulties these parents face. So in 1990, I founded Special Ties, Inc., a nonprofit organization for parents of physically challenged and special-needs children. Special Ties provides seminars, workshops, and support groups. To date we've been able to help more than 2,000 families by mentoring and counseling them through every means available. One of my goals is to educate and sensitize healthcare professionals to the emotional, social, and financial issues that impact the entire family of a special-needs child.

It's now almost 12 years later. I often look back and marvel at how I've been able to deal with the overwhelming challenges of raising Amber. I can specifically remember times I thought caring for Amber would be more than I could bear. Then I'd find comfort in God's promise that his grace is sufficient to carry me through all the dark, difficult times (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Amber, a loving girl with a strong spirit, remains a severe spastic quadriplegic who requires special attention. To date she still wears diapers and is only mobile when in a wheelchair. Developmentally, Amber's like a two year old. She requires hearing aids, can say 25 words, and communicates through pointing and using sign language—but because she can't use her right hand and has very little use of her left, it's hard to make out what she's trying to say.

I take total care of all Amber's needs, from brushing her teeth, to feeding, bathing, and dressing her. But every time I give Amber a bath or change her clothes, I look



at the scars from the corrective surgeries she's had. I then thank God for bringing her through them all.

Recently, Amber was baptized at church. Although I know Amber can't confess faith in Christ with her mouth, I had an overwhelming feeling it was the right thing to do. What an emotional experience it was for me—especially when I helped hold her in the water with our pastor. As the warm water surrounded us in the baptismal pool, I felt I was being baptized with her, that all my pains and sins were being washed away.

I thank God daily for Amber. She brings me such joy. I didn't realize I could love someone so much. I tell other parents with special-needs children to trust God and open their hearts to what he's telling them. Always know you're not alone. Surround yourself with positive people and other parents of special children. Go to as many support groups as possible, and never be ashamed to ask them for help when you need it. Don't shut yourself away from your loved ones, especially your spouse. Share all your concerns and fears with him, or a professional, and always hold on to God's unchanging hand!

I know Amber and I still have a long road to travel together. We'll have more ups and downs, more challenges. But I'm certain we won't be alone. God's with us. I firmly believe I've received God's greatest gift in the form of my daughter. I'm a living witness of how God can turn someone's life around. By giving me Amber, God's helped me realize the true meaning of his unselfish love.

*Carla L. Bailey is the founder and executive director of Special Ties, P.O. Box 307685, Gahanna, OH 43230; fax: 614-761-2417; e-mail: luetwin@aol.com. This article first appeared in the **March/April 2001** issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*



Thought Provokers

- *What hardships do parents face in having a child with an illness, disease, or a birth defect? How have you, or someone you know, dealt with this situation?*
- *What types of resources or support groups are available for the situation you face? How are these helpful?*
- *If there is a lack of resources or support for an illness you are aware of, how could you become involved in making those available?*



FEATURES



Living with Epilepsy

How four sisters cope with its challenges.

by Jane Johnson Struck

The statistics may surprise you: More than two million people in the U.S. suffer from epilepsy, a term for various seizure disorders that range from convulsions and involuntary shaking (grand mal) to momentary loss of awareness and muscle control (petit mal). While epilepsy can be caused by head trauma, a brain tumor, or infections such as meningitis, 70 percent of cases have no known cause. Although anyone can develop epilepsy at any time, according to the Epilepsy Foundation, 50 percent of those dealing with a seizure disorder develop it before age 25.

Unfortunately, statistics remain statistics until there's a face put to them. That's why TCW met with The Darins, a sister singing group comprised of Heather, 22, Rachelle, 23, Stacy, 26, and Krista, 27. As a family, The Darins have tackled this disorder firsthand; two siblings—Rachelle and Heather—have epilepsy. They've had to grapple with some of the more sobering facts about epilepsy's effect on women: Because of fluctuating hormone levels, they're more apt to have seizures before the onset of their period; they're also at higher risk for infertility and menstrual irregularities. And due to antiepileptic drugs, the odds of giving birth to a baby with certain kinds of birth defects increase.

How these Christian recording artists, whose self-titled first release, **The Darins** (Pamplin), hit stores last year, have faced this challenge will inform and inspire you.

When did your family discover you two had epilepsy?

Rachelle: I was in second grade. My teacher suspected I was having seizures because her daughter had had them, and she recognized the signs. I'd be talking to her when all of a sudden, I'd stop and wouldn't remember what I'd been saying. Also, my grades started to fall rapidly. So she alerted my parents. At first, they didn't think it was possible.



Stacy: But when I told them I thought Rachelle was doing something funny every once in a while—like zoning out—that’s when Mom and Dad said, “Okay, we need to check this out.”

Rachelle: It’s tough when you’re seven or eight and you have to go through MRIs and EEGs. For one test, I had to go without sleep for a long time so I would sleep throughout the procedure. That’s because you’re more apt to have seizures when you’re tired.

How did your classmates react to the news?

Rachelle: Although no one ever made fun of me, I didn’t feel the same as everyone else. And as I grew older and went to sleepovers and had to take medicine at certain times, I started to think, *I’m not normal. Why is God allowing this to happen to me?*

Krista: I remember Mom and Dad really worried about Rachelle, and the doctors didn’t know if this was something she’d outgrow.

Stacy: That was before Rachelle had her first grand mal seizure in 1994—and Heather hers in 1993.

What happened?

Heather: I was a junior in high school and had just gotten my driver’s license when I had my first seizure. That was so tough—everybody else was driving and wanting to go out. I had to stay a passenger; all of a sudden I couldn’t drive.

The way it came on was especially rough. We were attending an out-of-state soccer tournament. Out of the blue, at the hotel where our family was staying, I had a grand mal seizure.

Your family must have been terrified.

Krista: It was a frightening time for my parents. Heather was hospitalized for a few days because the doctors weren’t sure what had caused her seizure. They put her on medication immediately. I cried uncontrollably because I didn’t understand why this was happening. Why would Heather have this, too?

Stacy: I knew what seizures were, but I’d never seen a grand mal seizure before. I actually thought Heather was dying—she turned blue and wasn’t breathing.

Rachelle: Although I’d had petit mal seizures since second grade, I’d gone five years without one. Then, I had my first grand mal seizure a year after Heather. I went



three years without a seizure and was starting to feel “normal” again when I had grand mal seizures in January, March, and May of 1997. Right now it’s been almost three years without another seizure.

Heather: My last one was in May of 1999.

Do the doctors know the cause of your seizures?

Rachelle: They’re not sure. But flashing lights can be a trigger—like watching TV in a dark room. Or stress. Lack of sleep. Hormonal changes.

Heather: They think my latest one was because of low blood sugar. But usually I get them when I’m sick.

Rachelle: I have to watch what I eat. I don’t eat chocolate. I stay away from caffeine, and I don’t drink any sodas.

Heather: I don’t really cut out anything from my diet.

Krista: After Heather wakes up, she usually lies in bed for 20 minutes before she gets up, because if she gets up from bed too quickly, bam, she could have a seizure.

What about medication?

Heather: It’s been trial and error to find out what works. I’ve probably been on them all. One made me itch, another brought my white cell count dangerously low and was damaging my liver. Eventually I’ll have to change to another medication, because my system will become immune to the one I’m on.

Stacy: That’s a long-term result that’s scary, because even if Rachelle and Heather stay seizure-free, you don’t know what the medication will do to their livers. You have to see the doctor regularly to get that checked.

Has this disorder affected your dating relationships?

Rachelle: Our neurologist’s told me that because of the medication I’m on, if I got married and wanted to get pregnant sometime soon, it would affect the baby. I’d have to stop taking it for months, almost years before getting pregnant.

I’ve thought about how this is something my future husband will have to deal with. But he’ll know going into the marriage that I have this disorder, so it’ll be something we’ll have to work out together.



Heather: I wonder if it would be a turn-off for someone I may date. Obviously if it is, he's not the right one. But the fact that I have epilepsy is always in the back of my mind.

Krista: I suppose there have been times I've felt guilty that it wasn't me who had epilepsy—that maybe I could handle it better, being the oldest. But there's also that fear: Will *I* develop it?

So how do you deal with fear?

Krista: On the days I'm anxious about how epilepsy affects our family, I just pray.

Rachelle: Sometimes I worry that I'm going to have a seizure when I'm alone. I have to tell myself, *Okay, Rachelle, you're not alone. God's with you, wherever you are.*

Krista: God's protected us. There's never been a time when Rachelle or Heather had a seizure and were home by themselves—except for the one Heather had in the car.

Were you driving?

Heather: Yes. I was on my way to work. I blacked out and coasted into a telephone pole on the opposite side of an intersection. Thankfully, I wasn't hurt—and neither was anybody else.

You must have felt God was looking out for you.

Heather: That accident showed me he's in control of my life and in control of this disorder. So I know that he'll see me through it.

How has this disorder impacted your family?

Krista: We'd never have gotten through this if it weren't for our relationship with God—and for prayer. Every time Heather or Rachelle have had a seizure, the first thing my mom and dad would do after calling 911 is pray and ask relatives and church friends to pray.

Rachelle: I think it's drawn our family closer. We respect each other, and we've learned tremendous respect for our parents through this. When you're a teenager, you think it's not cool to have your mom tell you to take your medicine and all that stuff. But when it's for a life-and-death reason, you accept that authority, and grow to appreciate it.



Krista: There have been bad days when we'd all cry and wonder, *What's going on? Why is this happening to our family?* But we've also seen what God's capable of doing—even during the difficult times when Heather or Rachelle have had seizures.

Have you been open about epilepsy when you sing before an audience?

Krista: Yes. We don't make a big deal out of it, but we do mention it's something our family's struggled with. What's amazing are the people who come up afterwards to talk to us about their own experience with epilepsy. And because of the disorder, lots of people pray for our health and safety while we're on the road.

What would you say to someone with seizure disorder?

Rachelle: You have to turn everything—your health, your life—completely over to God. And when you do that, he'll turn your negative situation into a positive one.

Krista: Talk to others about it if you can. Let others pray for you.

Heather: So many people struggling with epilepsy feel lonely and depressed. I want them to know I still struggle, too, but God graciously helps me—and he can help them, too.

Rachelle: I remember a time when I was in high school. I was with my dad and I asked, "Dad, why me? What have I done wrong?" My dad assured me that my disorder wasn't because I had done something wrong, and that he knew that with God, I could handle it. The best advice I can give is to hang in there. The road may be rough, but keep your eyes focused on God. That's what I want to keep doing every day.

For more information about seizure disorders, contact the Epilepsy Foundation toll-free at 1-800-EFA-1000, or at www.epilepsyfoundation.org. If you'd like to reach The Darins, e-mail them at: sisters@TheDarins.com. *This article first appeared in the March/April 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*



Thought Provokers

- *How do you deal with the fear of being ill and being alone? What Scriptures encourage you to trust God to protect you and provide for you, or for those you care about who are ill?*
- *How can an illness draw people and families closer together? How have you seen this happen in your life?*
- *How does depression play a role in your life, or the life of someone you care about who is ill? How do you handle depression, or help someone else to deal with it?*





Radical Gratitude

**What a dying friend taught me
about being thankful “in all things.”**

by Mayo Mathers

“You need to visit Marcia,” said the woman I’d just met after learning we shared a mutual friend. “She’s not doing well.”

Marcia had moved to a neighboring town a few years earlier, so I no longer saw her as often as I once did. When I finally went to her home, Marcia’s skeletal appearance shocked me. A once-gregarious bundle of energy, Marcia came to the door in a slow, excruciating shuffle.

“I’ve been diagnosed with systemic Scleroderma,” she said, blinking back tears. “It’s a fatal disease where your skin and internal organs harden.”

On that first visit we mostly cried. On following visits we talked more, stopping frequently to pray. Marcia wanted to respond to her disease in a way that honored God, but forming effective prayers seemed impossible.

“Do I ask God to help me accept my diagnosis, or do I ask for healing?” Marcia wondered aloud one afternoon. I wondered the same thing. One prayer seemed to indicate a lack of faith, the other a lack of trust.

As I read the Bible to Marcia, familiar verses, when held against her bleak future, often brought more questions than comfort. One in particular raised harsh questions: “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NASB). Could it truly be God’s will for us to give thanks even for Marcia’s terminal disease?



Regardless of how illogical the command seemed, Marcia decided to do it, although she added one condition: “God, I’ve never lied to you before and I’m not going to start now. There’s *no* way I can thank you for this life-robbing, painful disease or for the fact I’m not going to see my grandchildren grow up. But I will thank you for the things for which I’m truly grateful.”

With that brutally honest prayer, Marcia began experiencing an intimacy with God she’d never known before. And as I spent time meditating on that verse, I realized Marcia’s conditional obedience to God’s command wasn’t presumptuous at all. The verse says *in* everything give thanks, not *for* everything. There’s a big difference in those two little words. God would never expect our gratitude toward things he finds repugnant or evil. However, as our Creator, he knows an overall attitude of thankfulness frees us from the grip of fear, worry, or hopelessness.

From Doubt and Fear

Hebrews 13:15 says, “Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God” (NASB). Setting aside our deepest emotions and speaking words of praise and trust—especially when we have doubts about what God allows in our life—are sacrificial.

My son has chosen to walk counter to God’s call on his life. Despite this excruciating heartbreak, I anticipate the day when he recommits himself fully to God. However, I occasionally succumb to dark times of disillusionment and doubt. The only way I can dispel them is by sacrificing my urge to mourn what isn’t and embrace what is: My son is not serving God; God is trustworthy in all things. Speaking words of trust takes an act of sheer will. But the reason God wants me to praise him is because he knows the pattern this forms in me. If I’m praising, I’m not doubting ... if I’m not doubting, I’m trusting ... when I’m trusting, I’m praising ... when I’m praising, I’m not doubting—and so on. A continual attitude of praise protects me against debilitating doubt.

Attitude Readjustments

Recently my husband, Steve, made a huge career decision that affects us both without discussing it with me beforehand. My immediate desire was to lash out at him, but I managed, barely, to hold my tongue. Yet inwardly I burned with resentment and anger.

“Lord,” I pleaded one morning, “take these feelings away. I don’t want to wound Steve with my words, but I need relief from these emotions.” In the midst of my prayer, God reminded me to “give thanks in everything.”



The very thought of being thankful at that moment was galling. It was the *last* thing I wanted to do. But as I begrudgingly thanked my way around the circumstances of Steve's decision, my resentment slowly receded, and I became overwhelmed by a renewed confidence in God. The devastating comments I longed to hurl at Steve dissipated to the point where I actually could view his decision objectively!

Until this incident, I'd thought any time I held my tongue I deserved big pats on the back from God. Now I realized holding my tongue wasn't enough. Destructive emotions still swirled inside me, affecting my attitude. Only by forcing myself to speak words of thankfulness did I find relief from the deep wound Steve's decision had inflicted. Thankfulness changed my perspective so I could discuss our situation rationally and constructively.

Enjoying the Results

The last part of Hebrews 13:15 talks about "the fruit of lips that give thanks to [God's] name." God knows precisely the extent of the sacrifice involved in setting aside our natural inclinations, and he's quick to make it worth our while.

Marcia is incredible evidence of this. She began pursuing an attitude of thankfulness while I was out of town for several weeks. When I visited her on my return, I couldn't believe the difference. Physically Marcia hadn't changed—still emaciated, the hardened skin on her hands stretched so tightly it pulled her fingers in toward her palms. She was on heavy doses of pain medication and rarely got out of bed. Emotionally, however, she was a woman transformed.

"What's happened?" I asked, scarcely believing the sparkle in her eyes.

Marcia smiled. "I've been thanking God!" she explained. First, she said, she'd begun with little things: the blue sky outside her window, the roof over her head, her wonderful husband. Every day she persevered in this task regardless of how much pain she was in.

"It's the most astonishing thing," she said. "The more I praise God, the more aware of his presence I become. In fact," she continued, "one morning as I was thinking of things I was thankful for, without even realizing it I heard myself say, 'God, thank you for this disease that's brought me so much closer to you!'"



I could only stare in astonishment. In her determination to be thankful, regardless of how illogical it seemed, Marcia had loosened the chokehold of terror in which the disease had held her. Marcia had switched her focus from her helplessness to God's holiness. No wonder God tells us to cultivate thankfulness in our lives! It's an attitude that empowers rather than debilitates.

I saw it in the sparkle of Marcia's eyes. I felt it when my son called recently and made plans to meet us at church. Such tasty fruit has made me an avid believer in this illogical command that wields such power. And I will continue, *in everything*, to give thanks.

Mayo Mathers, a TCW Regular Contributor, lives in Oregon. This article first appeared in the November/December 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *How have you prayed for yourself or someone else: have you asked God to help accept the diagnosis, or have you asked for healing? Are these in conflict with each other? If so, how?*
- *Reread 1 Thessalonians 5:18. How can you apply this to your situation?*
- *How can obeying God's Word introduce a new intimacy with God during a difficult time? How can you encourage others through your obedience and closeness to God?*



FEATURES



Love Story

Here's how God's using one woman's loss to bring health and hope to others.

by Jane Johnson Struck

Low-fat cookbook author Dawn Hall, 39, knows a thing or two about grief. Dawn married her high-school sweetheart, Tracy, in 1984, and together they built a ranch house just outside Toledo, Ohio, where they lived contentedly with their two daughters, Whitney, now 14, and Ashley, 13. Then life as she knew it suffered a seismic shift: Tracy was diagnosed with aggressive brain cancer in November 1994, just one day after his 32nd birthday.

“Surgeons removed one pound of malignant tumor but weren't able to get it all,” Dawn explains. “Tracy was completely paralyzed on his left side. Radiation didn't shrink his remaining tumor; it only left him bald, weak, and tired. Our oncologist told Tracy, ‘There's nothing more we can do.’”

But the Halls weren't prepared to call it quits. They had their faith in Christ—and their desire to explore every medical option available. Unfortunately, their medical insurance wouldn't cover the experimental treatments they decided to pursue to save Tracy's life. That's when God, Dawn insists, prompted her to turn her passion—creating the quick-and-easy, low-fat recipes her family and friends had enjoyed for years—into a solution: She'd self-publish a cookbook to cover their mounting medical costs.

Dawn's first cookbook, *Down Home Cookin' Without the Down Home Fat*, sold like wildfire with the help of church friends, family, and local bookstores, allowing Dawn to pay the thousands of dollars needed for Tracy's experimental treatments. Soon his tumor shrank, and he was back on his feet, able to return to work part-time as a tool and die maker. As



the popularity of her first cookbook grew, Dawn published two more—*Busy People's Low-Fat Cookbook* and *2nd Serving of Busy People's Low-Fat Cookbook*—through her new company, Cozy Homestead Publishing; a fourth, *Busy People's Diabetic Cookbook*, is soon to be released.

“These cookbooks are a gift from God,” says Dawn, who’s increasingly in demand as an inspirational speaker. The host of a new 30-minute cooking show, *Cooking for Busy People*, airing this month on Cornerstone TeleVision Network, Dawn tithes the profits of her cookbook sales to support a Toledo-based inner-city ministry, and makes her books available at cost as fundraising tools for other families facing financial hardship due to medical crises.

Sadly, Tracy Hall lost his valiant battle for life, leaving Dawn to raise their teenage daughters alone. In this interview, Dawn talks about how her devotion to Jesus Christ strengthened her throughout her husband’s illness and death, and helps her triumph over tragedy.

How are you holding up emotionally after losing Tracy?

It’s been tough. Sometimes I’ve felt overwhelmed by grief. When that happens, I try to maintain my composure until I can go somewhere by myself and bawl for as long as it takes. I’ll cry, then I’ll be okay. Then I’ll weep again, then be okay.

As Christians, it’s important to get those feelings out, because God already knows how we feel. We’re just admitting to those emotions. If we deny ourselves the opportunity to express our grief, we hinder the healing process.

Tracy and I would have been married 17 years on June 29, 2001, but he died on May 4 from an accidental fall. When he died, he was considered a hospice *reject*. Have you ever heard of that?

No.

Tracy was battling cancer but had improved as a result of the experimental therapy—even bicycling 30 miles in a day! But suddenly his medical condition took a turn in 1999. I was shaving him, showering him, rolling him over in bed. In 2000, he ended up in hospice care. When Tracy began another type of experimental treatment using blood-thinning medication, he rallied enough that they kicked him out of hospice! Before he died, he was doing much better—driving, walking around with a cane. I’d tease him, “Babe, you’re going to be chasing me around the house soon!”

What happened, then?

On May 4, he’d gone next door to deliver a gift to our neighbor. It was a warm day, and Tracy unexpectedly passed out in the sun, hit his head on the cement, broke his



skull, and had a brain hemorrhage. Although he was considered brain-dead, the hospital kept Tracy on life support so his skin, eyes, and bones could be donated to others. My husband died a hero.

How did you two meet?

We started dating before our junior year in high school. Tracy was captain of the basketball team; I was a cheerleader. I was a Christian, and I knew I'd never get serious about someone unless we shared a faith in Christ. Tracy started coming to church with me, and by the time we were seniors, he'd accepted Jesus as his Savior.

We loved each other, but since we wanted to be absolutely sure about our relationship, we decided to separate for a while. It was hard living so close and not seeing each other, so I moved from Ohio to Kentucky, got a waitressing job, and lived in a cockroach-infested apartment with no telephone. It was during this time I realized that though I was a Christian, God wasn't number one in my life.

So who was?

Tracy! That realization hit me like a ton of bricks. About two or three months into our separation, as I sat on the floor of my no-bedroom apartment reading my Bible, I decided then and there to give everything to God. It was a very emotional time. Not long after, Tracy asked me to marry him. I moved home, and we married two years later.

I'm glad I decided to make God first in my life; if Tracy had been number one, his illness and death would have been much more difficult. Many times in the last seven years, marriage was more about commitment than passion. I'm grateful for the love affair Tracy and I shared with Christ.

Is that what keeps you going?

Yes. As long as I focus on God, I'm fine, but whenever I'm foolish enough to look at a situation with human eyes, I become overwhelmed, depressed. One of my favorite Bible verses is **Joshua 1:5**: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

When did you first realize something was wrong?

Tracy had a seizure and trouble with his balance. It took three weeks of my nagging before he went to see a doctor. I knew it was serious when the physician called us Friday night to tell us he wanted to see us in the hospital the next day. Doctors don't usually call from a cell phone at night with good news.



How did Tracy react to the diagnosis of brain cancer?

With shock, disbelief, tears. I'd only seen him cry once before. He really began focusing on his faith. Many people say cancer either pulls you away from God or draws you closer. It definitely drew Tracy closer.

And your reaction?

I bawled for hours when I heard Tracy had a cancerous tumor the size of a baseball. Thank goodness we live near a wooded area, because I went ballistic back in the woods. I knew I needed to get all my emotions out so I could then be strong for Tracy, Whitney, and Ashley.

What did you tell the girls?

We told them the truth. We've always been honest with Whitney and Ashley. At the time, they were seven and six, so we explained it to them in as much detail as we could.

Did you ever pray, "We're so young, God. Why are you allowing this to happen"?

I got that out during my ranting. After that, I can say honestly I never asked God why again. He's not accountable to me; I'm accountable to *him*.

I also sensed that somehow, God would use this for his glory—I just didn't know how. That's exactly what's happened. I'd never in a million years choose to go through what we went through, but I'm grateful for the good that's come from it.

Such as?

I was able to share the gospel message with the 2,000 people who attended Tracy's funeral. So many people have come to Christ, and are appreciating life more, because of his death.

I share God's Word through my cookbooks as well. People who wouldn't listen to a pastor aren't threatened by a "cookbook lady." Women who don't feel comfortable giving someone a Bible can give her my cookbook. I also offer "a book for a buck," *The Message of Hope* from NavPress to anyone who requests it from one of my cookbooks. It outlines how God can fill the void and give you love, joy, and peace.

What prompted your interest in nutrition?

Food addictions run in my family. I was *born* watching my weight. My love for food is something with which I've always struggled. So I figured if I had to work out to keep my weight under control, I might as well make money doing it! When



we moved into this area, I taught aerobics at a local health club and started a group called WOW—"Watching Our Weight." The WOW group followed a 12-step model similar to Overeaters Anonymous. We had accountability; I encouraged people to exercise and to document what they ate daily.

Do you still teach these classes?

No, I stopped when Tracy was diagnosed. But my WOW students encouraged me to compile my low-fat recipes into a cookbook. I didn't know how to type; I didn't even know how to use a computer! I saved all those handwritten recipes on top of our refrigerator.

I believe God prompted me to write the book for a fundraiser. We had to come up with \$100,000 for the treatments my husband's medical insurance wouldn't cover. We had \$3,000 in savings, and we spent that on our first 1,000 cookbooks—spiral-bound, photocopied recipes someone had typed up for us. I'll never forget seeing my van loaded with cookbooks and thinking, *I'm nuts! How am I going to sell 1,000 books?* But we sold those 1,000 cookbooks the first week.

How did you distribute them?

Through friends and family. We gave away boxes of books on the honor system. But there were some discouraging moments. My mom told me, "Honey, that's great. But you need to get a real job, because the only reason people buy these is to help you out."

So after Tracy and I discussed our options and prayed about them, we decided to borrow money against our home to self-publish that first cookbook, *Down Home Cookin' Without the Down Home Fat*, in 1996. It was a huge step of faith, but we believed God was leading us. We've sold more than 250,000 copies of that book now, and we've published three others. Now I'm working on my fifth; it's on crockpot cooking.

What do you hope readers glean from your books?

That our body's a gift from God. But too often we treat it like an in-and-out mart, a 7-Eleven. Cancer, heart disease, and diabetes thrive on a high-fat diet. One grandmother and two of my grandfathers died either of cancer or heart disease. My parents both are battling cancer right now. The good side of my genetic heritage [*smiling*] is I don't have to save for retirement!

Joking aside, my family history's why I maintain a low-fat lifestyle and exercise. The key is to do something you enjoy. I dance aerobically in the morning, then lift



weights three days a week. I eat carbohydrates the size of my fist and protein the size of my palm six times a day, and as many green vegetables as I want. I watch sugars and fat. And I have a free day once a week when I eat whatever I want.

What advice would you give someone dealing with chronic illness?

When Tracy first saw himself bald, paralyzed on his left side, and in a wheelchair, he said, “I look pathetic.” I replied, “Tracy, we have your right side. We have each other. We have a lot to be thankful for.”

I chose to be thankful. And that’s why each night my daughters and I say three things for which we’re thankful. Sometimes life’s so hard, my three things are I’m grateful the day’s over, I can take a hot bath, and I can go to bed! First Thessalonians 5:18 says we’re to “give thanks in all circumstances.” It’s all about choice.

During the last seven years, Tracy and I weren’t able to have the most romantic marriage, but I chose to be thankful for what we *could* do. Just because we were in a challenging situation didn’t mean there weren’t moments of joy. You make the best of it along the way.

In what practical ways did you do that?

A year before Tracy died, we heard a radio preacher ask, “If you had one year to live, what would you do so you’d have no regrets?” I immediately thought, *Have more fun*. So I bought a red convertible with 86,000 miles on it, and in the evenings, Tracy and I would drive to get some ice cream, turn our Christian music up *loud*, and ride home under the stars.

I learned you shouldn’t think about what you *can’t* do; think about what you *can*. So if you’re not able to have long kisses anymore, then enjoy holding each other’s hand. Have little nicknames for each other; squeeze each other’s hand three times in public to communicate “I love you.”

Those are the kinds of things you did with Tracy?

For all the years we loved each other! We teased each other, joked around. Tried to find the humor in things.

You went through “for better or worse,” didn’t you?

We took our marriage vows to the max!



It sounds as though you had years to . . .

You want me to say it for you? . . .to make peace with the fact Tracy was going to die.

Yes.

About two years before his death, Tracy wasn't interested in kissing me passionately anymore. A peck on the cheek is fine, but . . . ! I felt really hurt. But as I look back on Tracy's actions, I realize now it was his way of letting go.

Throughout our marriage, I never wanted to dishonor my husband. If I even so much as saw an attractive man, I'd turn my head and flee. At times it was hard, because I'm a passionate person. But I wanted to be totally devoted to Tracy. I'm glad I was, because now I feel free to move on. I was the best wife I could be.

What would you tell somebody grieving the loss of a loved one?

Keep your focus on God. It's only when we take our eyes off Jesus that we become tearful, afraid, worried. Satan would love to rob us of what joy we can experience in the midst of our trials.

Cling to Scripture. I've written certain Bible verses down. When I feel things are impossible, God says, "All things are possible" (Luke 18:27). When I'm too tired, God reminds me he'll "give [me] rest" (Matthew 11:28), that his "grace is sufficient" (2 Corinthians 12:9). When I can't figure things out, God says he'll "make [my] paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). If I feel I can't do something, God tells me I can do "everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). When I complain, "Lord, I just can't manage," God says he "will meet all [my] needs" (Philippians 4:19). I hold onto these Scriptures.

How can other people help?

Some Christians told us, "You're not being healed because you don't have enough faith." Or, "The reason God gave you cancer is because you're such a good Christian. He knew you could handle it."

Ouch! That doesn't make Christianity very appealing.

Exactly! But you know what *really* hurt? When people said, "Yeah, we love you. We're praying for you," then never so much as sent a card. I'd much rather have somebody *show* her love than *say* it. Actions *do* speak louder than words.

The reality is, cancer happens to the good, the bad, and everyone in between. People try to figure God out, but God isn't accountable to us. We should spend less time trying to figure God out and more time on our knees staying focused on him and



showing others his love. That's what I hope to do through my cookbooks, my speaking, even my cooking show.

What's your ultimate message?

To encourage women to make God number one—not their spouse or their children. When they do, everything else falls into place. Most things we think are important in life really aren't. What's important is having a close relationship with God, being a living example of his love.

Three days after Tracy's funeral, I was scheduled to speak in Maine, and I decided not to cancel. The ladies there didn't know Tracy had passed away. A woman came to me afterwards for prayer, and told me, "My husband's a wonderful man, and I know he loves me. But I'm not attracted to him."

It was a blessing for me to be able to tell her to remain faithful to her husband, to get some counseling, and to stay focused on God. I could tell her God would use it for good. I honestly believe I wouldn't have these opportunities if I hadn't done that myself. It's a huge gift God gave me, and I gave myself: the gift of no regrets.

To contact Dawn, e-mail her at dawnhallcookbook@aol.com. For more information on her cookbooks, call 1-888-436-9646. *This article first appeared in the January/February 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*

Thought Provokers

- *How can an illness help you to either draw closer to or further from God? In which of these ways have you or someone you know reacted?*
- *How have you asked God to be "accountable" to you for an illness? What attitude should we have when it comes to our lives and God?*
- *How can you make the best of a challenging or difficult situation?*
- *Do you cling to Scripture during difficult times? Which verses would you write down to encourage yourself or someone else?*



FEATURES



A Special Kind of Bond

How the gift of a kidney brought these two friends together.

by *Camerin Courtney*

Toni Whatley could never have guessed a casual acquaintance in her church would be the answer to her prayers for healing from kidney disease. Or that those prayers would also yield one of the best friends she's ever had. But isn't that just like God, who delights in exceeding our expectations (Ephesians 3:20)?

Twenty-eight years ago, when Toni was a 20-year-old newlywed, she was diagnosed with kidney disease. For many years she was able to manage the illness with a modified diet. But with time and two pregnancies, her kidneys became weaker and finally failed seven years ago.

Dialysis three times a week in a Cleveland dialysis center provided a temporary fix—but at three and a half hours and a night of debilitating exhaustion per session, it consumed Toni's time and severely restricted her activities.

But without dialysis, a process that cleans toxins from the blood—a vital function healthy kidneys provide—Toni would have died. So while she waited to receive a new kidney through organ donation, she endured five years of dialysis. Though the statistics on organ donation weren't terribly promising—each year an average of 36,000 people are placed on the waiting list for a new kidney, with only about 8,600 transplants performed—Toni kept waiting, hoping, and praying for a miracle.

Diana Harrill, 48, a self-described “cautious person,” was surprised the first time she heard God ask if she'd be willing to be part of his solution for Toni.

Diana had been praying for Toni as part of their church's 40-day fast and focus on prayer.



She felt a kinship to this fellow mom of teens who had the added burden of medical problems. And while she didn't know what part of the solution God wanted her to be, Diana obediently said yes and continued her prayers for Toni.

After Diana heard God speak to her several more times, the question changed. "On the way to work one morning I felt God ask me, *Would you be willing to donate a kidney to Toni?*" says Diana, a sense of incredulity still in her voice.

"I put the thought out of my mind. But I felt God ask me this three more times," says Diana. "Finally I asked, 'God, is that really you?'"

Diana didn't tell anyone about these startling conversations with God. "I wanted to figure out on my own if this was God or just some crazy idea."

True to her cautious, logical nature, Diana researched kidney transplants. She discovered that almost all people are born with two kidneys and that healthy people only need one. She also learned that with compatible blood types, kidney transplants have a high success rate.

Armed with this information and continued prompting from God, Diana approached her husband, Ivan. When she explained the unconventional idea, he questioned whether or not she was serious. Her response—"Honey, I couldn't be more serious"—caused great concern.

"It hasn't been an easy process for him—or for our children either," says Diana. "But Ivan's never said 'no' or that I was crazy."

Together Diana and Ivan prayed for God's leading. And Toni continued dialysis—oblivious to the incredible conversations and prayers taking place on her behalf.

Diana finally approached Toni one morning in Sunday school: "I've been thinking about donating a kidney to you. Is there someone, perhaps your doctor, I can call to get information about this?"

Toni was floored. "You could've knocked me over with a feather," she says with a smile.

Not wanting to pressure Toni or put her on the spot, Diana told her she could think about it and call her with the information. Diana figured that after the initial shock wore off, she'd hear from Toni that evening. But two weeks later, Diana still hadn't heard from Toni.



So she went back to her fellow church choir member and restated her interest. A week later, Toni handed Diana a piece of paper in Sunday school with her doctor's phone number on it. While Toni's hesitancy was confusing at first, it was definitely understandable. Her mother and sister had been ruled out as potential kidney donors because of medical conditions. And four times she'd been contacted about cadaver kidneys, all of which for one reason or another had been given to someone else on the waiting list. Toni was still hopeful, but a bit guarded.

Diana's call to Toni's doctor started months of tests. First was the crucial test to see if their blood types matched. The results were positive.

The doctor then sat Diana and Ivan down and explained the transplant procedure. It was major surgery, he warned, involving significant pain and weeks of recovery. If Diana did go through with the transplant, she would have only one kidney left. If her one remaining kidney was ever injured, she could be placed on dialysis herself. And even if the surgeries were successful, Toni's body could still reject the new kidney within days, weeks, or years. The doctor went so far as to mention the possibility of death for both women—a risk involved with most major surgeries.

Diana was undaunted. "Under normal circumstances, this would have scared me. But instead I just thought, *Yeah, this is doable*," she says. "That was definitely God's peace." Ivan was beginning to warm to the idea, but their children—especially their son, Matthew—were still wary.

Next came psychological testing. Diana was the most concerned about this exam, fearing the psychologist would think her crazy for hearing God's voice and taking on such a risk for a casual acquaintance. But at the end of the interview, he deemed her an excellent candidate. "I quietly said thanks, but inside I was going, 'Yes!'" says Diana with a sparkle in her eye.

Tests on Toni's immune system and Diana's kidneys came back positive. All systems were go until Diana's blood pressure spiked. This put Diana's healthy kidneys in danger and made the prospect of major surgery too risky. The process was stalled—so Diana prayed.

"I realized I'd taken responsibility on myself for Toni—whether or not she'd be disappointed, whether or not she'd receive my kidney," Diana explains. "I should have left it in God's hands. When I gave the responsibility back to God, my blood pressure came down almost immediately."



By now Diana's husband, Ivan, was completely behind her. Their teenage daughter, Sharon, was proud of what her mom was doing for Toni. Matthew, however, still didn't want his mom to take such a risk. When Diana sat him down and compared what she was doing to the risks he takes as a fire fighter and to the fear she feels each time he goes to work, he began to soften. "He understood for the first time why I was doing this and why I wanted his support," says Diana. "He didn't like it, but he understood."

The church they attended was excited about what God was doing in the lives of two of its members. And nearly a year after the church fast when God first spoke to Diana about giving her kidney to Toni, the surgeries were scheduled.

When Toni and Diana arrived at the hospital at 6 A.M. the day of the surgery—May 5, 1998—they were surprised by the dozens of family and friends who'd gathered to wish them well and pray.

"Words can't express how much their support meant to us. It was my first realization of how much I need other people," says Diana. "It's easier for me to give than to receive. Now I see what a blessing being on the receiving end can be!"

At 7:30 A.M., after a group prayer, doctors moved the women into side-by-side operating rooms. Diana's kidney was removed while Toni's body was prepared to receive the new, healthy organ. At 9:15 A.M. the kidney was carried next door and placed in Toni's abdomen, then connected to her blood supply and bladder. A little over three hours into the surgery, the kidney was fully functioning in Toni's body.

When doctors announced the surgeries were a success and that both women were doing fine, cheers and praises burst forth in the waiting room.

Diana recovered quickly and was sent home within a couple days. Doctors watched Toni closely for signs of her body rejecting Diana's kidney. When all initial signs were good, they sent her home three days after the surgery with an arsenal of 46 anti-rejection pills to take daily. She'll take daily medication and have regular check-ups the rest of her life, but this is hardly an inconvenience for a woman now free of dialysis.

Two years later, Diana and Toni are healthy, happy—and the dearest of friends. "My life is pretty much as close to normal as possible," says Toni. "Diana and I, along with our husbands, are planning a weekend getaway to celebrate the second anniversary of the surgeries, and we don't have to take into consideration where I'll receive dialysis treatments. What a blessing!"



Probably one of the biggest, and most surprising, blessings of this whole process was that Toni's husband, Tom, committed his life to Jesus. "To me, that's been the best gift of all," says Toni.

There have been other surprise blessings: a Dateline show featuring their story, in which both women were permitted to share their belief in God; the chance to share their faith with the Jewish woman who's the hospital media liaison; and the valuable life lessons Diana and Toni have learned along the way.

"I've learned how important a community of Christians really is," says Diana. "I had a tendency before to be a loner in my spiritual life. I never really considered bringing my needs to the church and allowing them to be there for me. But through Toni's example, I now see that when we're open and vulnerable, we can be there for each other. That's the way God wants the church to be."

Diana's also learned to value her own role in a community of Christians. "I used to think I was the type of person God could never use," she says. "But God's shown me he wants to use all of us; we're the ones who prevent him."

Toni—who calls Diana "My Gift"—is so grateful Diana allowed God to use her, and that a beautiful friendship has blossomed in the process. "We've been able to talk about very personal things because of all we've been through together," says Toni. "Many times God's given Diana the words of wisdom I've needed to hear to keep me going. When I'm talking with her, I can just blurt out what's going on. I don't have to dress it up or worry what she'll think of me. She's the kind of friend who can sort through all the garbage and love me just the same."

"This isn't how I would have guessed God would answer my prayers for healing," says Toni. "But he knows exactly what he's doing. And he's a maximizing God. He went the route that would get the maximum results—my new kidney, my friendship with Diana, others who've been encouraged and exposed to God's truth and love. God is just amazing. We've experienced that firsthand."

Kidney Donation Resources

For additional information about kidney transplants, check out these organizations and their Web sites:

American Association of Kidney Patients: A national, nonprofit, membership-based, voluntary health organization that provides education, support, and advocacy services to kidney patients and their families.



American Organ Transplant Association: A nonprofit organization that helps make organ transplant surgery and aftercare available to anyone who needs it.

National Kidney Foundation: A foundation that works to prevent kidney and urinary tract diseases, improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by the disease, and increase the availability of all organs for transplantation.

Transplant Recipients International Organization: An organization committed to improving the quality of life of transplant candidates and their families, recipients and their families.

TransWeb: A nonprofit resource dedicated to promoting donation and providing transplant education for patients, families, students, and professionals in the field.

*This article first appeared in the **May/June 2000** issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*

Thought Provokers

- *How have you been surprised at how God worked through an illness to bring someone into his kingdom, whether in your life or the life of someone you know?*
- *How has God led you to serve someone who is ill? What impact did that make on you and those involved?*
- *How has God used someone in your life to minister to you during a time of illness? What impact did that make on you and those around you?*



RESOURCES



Additional Resources

Books to help you further

🌀 **Cancer: A Medical and Spiritual Guide for Patients and Their Families**, by William Fintel and Gerald McDermott (Baker, 2004; \$7.99) Modern medicine has made amazing advances in the treatment of cancer, but most people still react with shock and fear when they receive the diagnosis. This comprehensive guide to cancer from a Christian perspective combines the hands-on experience of a medical doctor with the wisdom and compassion of a theologian. *Cancer: A Medical and Spiritual Guide for Patients and Their Families* is an essential guide for pastors, counselors, Stephen ministers, and hospice groups.

🌀 **The Dance Goes On**, by Roberta Bandy (Gospel Light Publishers, 2003; \$7.99) In this touching memoir, Roberta Bandy chronicles thirty years of her family's loving care for her son Robert, who was born with severe physical and mental handicaps. Robert's gentleness brought joy, laughter, and respect for life to all who encountered him. Roberta and her husband Phil never flagged in serving their beloved son even in his worst moments, relying on the aid of God's generous grace.

🌀 **Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness**, by Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Baker, 2006; \$11.99) *Darkness Is My Only Companion* takes a compassionate look at mental illness, offering theological understanding and personal insights from the author's personal experiences. It provides poignant glimpses into the mind of a mentally ill person and practical advice for friends, family, and clergy.

🌀 **The Final Mile: A Wife's Response to Her Husband's Terminal Illness**, by Faye Landrum (WinePress Publishing, 2003; \$11.99) "Your husband has cancer." With those jolting words, two lives are changed forever. As Faye Landrum's husband faces his final mile battling bone cancer, she faces her own battle, dealing with the worry and fatigue of a caregiver—problems that often seem insurmountable. This is the moving



story of a wife's journey as she cares for her husband, terminally ill with cancer. Through this difficult situation, God provides his promised strength and guidance. Her story will help others—especially those in similar caregiver situations—seek and find God's provision.

🌀 **Finding the Light in Cancer's Shadow: Hope, Humor, and Healing When the Treatment is Over**, by Lynn Eib (Tyndale House, 2006; \$11.99) Coping with cancer is sometimes more difficult after treatment than during it. You are left with so many questions, and there are so few who really understand survivors unique needs. With her trademark humor and straight talk, Lynn Eib takes on the tough questions: What if my cancer comes back? Is everyone as paranoid as I am? Will life ever be normal again? How do I stay positive? In these inspiring accounts, you will discover how God can help you move out from the shadow of uncertainty that often lingers over cancer survivors and their families and find renewed purpose and joy.

🌀 **Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation**, by Marva J. Dawn (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002; \$11.99) Neither a commentary on the book of Revelation nor a devotional work - though it offers aspects of both - *Joy In Our Weakness* is instead a theological and practical guide that ushers readers into the very presence of Christ and His Lordship over the powers of evil. Marva Dawn writes compassionately for those who suffer, for this book was born out of her own struggles with physical limitations and chronic illness, and it is intended to help the whole Church learn how to find joy in every circumstance of life, especially in trials and sufferings.

🌀 **May I Walk You Home? Sharing Christ's Love with the Dying**, by Melody Rossi (Bethany, 2007; \$9.99) Filled with hope, joy, and practical wisdom, *May I Walk You Home?* prepares you to talk about Jesus to family and friends with a terminal illness. Author Melody Rossi shares her personal story of losing three close family members within a span of twenty-eight months. When she had nearly given up hope that they might believe, their hearts were softened to the gospel message. In *May I Walk You Home?* you'll find wonderful insights and suggestions for the spiritual, emotional, and practical problems that surround the dying of a loved one.

🌀 **Prayers and Promises When Facing a Life-Threatening Illness: 30 Short Morning and Evening Reflections**, by Edward Dobson (Zondervan, 2007; \$9.99) Having a life-threatening illness is a constant reminder that today is precious. This book offers encouragement and hope to those who suffer and those who love and care for them. Written by a fellow pilgrim on his own journey with Lou Gehrig's disease, this powerful and inspiring devotional guide offers thirty short reflections to nurture your faith and boost your strength.



 **Seeing In the Dark: Getting the Facts on Depression & Finding Hope**

Again, by Gary Kinnaman and Richard Jacobs (Bethany, 2006; \$10.99) Written by a medical doctor and a pastor who have been personally impacted by depression, this book confronts the myths that have developed around the disease and offers strategies for every area of life—physical, psychological, and spiritual. Do you feel alone or helpless? Overcome by darkness? Let the experiences of fellow-sufferers and the expert advice presented here fill you with renewed hope for healing. A great resource for those who give counsel and support to others - pastors, counselors, small group leaders, teachers, concerned friends and family members.

 **When You Are Diagnosed with a Life-Threatening Illness**, by Jan Jovaag Ansorge (Augsburg Fortress 2002; \$14.99) The purpose of this book is to deal as honestly as possible with the most fearful issues that arise when confronting a life-threatening illness. Jan Jovaag Ansorge, a cancer survivor, shares her private, insightful reflections, even her prayers. Her practical but comforting writing style encourages us all to live courageously. To know that someone else is bravely traveling the same path as you or a loved one is extremely comforting.

