

My journey at 18

November 1972, from letter from my parents

The past three weeks have taught us a new dependence on the Lord. Just a little over three weeks ago Beverly began feeling sick so we took her to the doctor and he diagnosed that she had a light case of hepatitis. It was more of a nuisance than a worry because she had planned to visit Jungle Camp this week with a girlfriend and all the arrangements had been made; she also had an appointment with the orthodontist in Puebla. She took her medicines and stayed in bed and seemed to be getting better; then she suddenly began to feel worse, but that seemed to be expected since her case had been diagnosed so early that it hadn't progressed to the worst stage. Then, on Tuesday morning, November 7, she had two convulsions, which left her in a coma from which she didn't recover for a week. The convulsions were the result of a post-infectious encephalitis which was caused by an allergic reaction to the hepatitis virus. It's a very rare thing to happen.

Bev was in the hospital for eight days and is still recuperating at home, but we praise the Lord that He has answered prayer and she has no physical or mental impairment from the convulsions. They did make her temporarily lose her memory, but she is quickly regaining it. Her attitude is good and she can laugh at herself about the things she can't remember. She lost 17 pounds so her days are now filled with resting, remembering, and eating snacks.

Our fellow Wycliffe members here in Mitla were especially helpful to us during this difficult time as they brought food or had us over for a meal or fed our younger children while John and I were both at the hospital. They prayed constantly for Beverly, as did many others both here in Mexico and in the States. This experience has drawn all of us as a family and as a group into much closer fellowship with each other and with the Lord.

Naturally our other work came to a standstill as we spent our days and nights with Beverly in the hospital. Now that she has been home for several days and is making such a miraculous recovery we are beginning to get back to work on translation and linguistic projects.... We pray that the Lord will be very real to you especially at this holiday season and that He will use you for the furtherance of the Gospel throughout the coming year.

My thoughts, November 27, 1972

These last few weeks have taught me so much that I don't want to ever forget, so that's why I'm writing again. I started coming down with a light case of hepatitis, which was really a nuisance 'cuz Sanna and I were planning on visiting J.C. for a week and being there for Thanksgiving. Well, God had different plans. I suddenly had two convulsions which left me in a coma for 10 days, so I was rushed to Oaxaca, which I don't remember at all. I did all kinds of crazy things in the hospital which we can laugh at now, but at the time it really scared my family 'cuz I was so close to death. There were so many people praying for me, and God was faithful in His answers. They had a prayer meeting here and people sent me cards saying they were praying for me. In M.C. and in Ixmi they had a 24 hr. prayer-meeting and the kids in school stopped every half hr. to pray. In the States at least 4 churches and all kinds of friends were praying and some of Diane's, David N.'s and Todd's friends who don't even know me prayed and sent notes and letters. That just showed me more about the oneness of God's family!

Kay L. sent the neatest letter saying that Ray led the prayer meeting in M.C. and almost didn't make it through, and they said that if they had a daughter they would have liked to have one like me. It is just so encouraging to know that people care.

God must have had this planned for all of us ‘cuz it’s taught us so much. It’s taught me to trust and depend on the Lord more and not to worry but to have peace, and to “have His words abide in me more.” It’s brought our family closer and given me a more cheerful attitude. I’ve lost 17 pounds and only gained back 3 so far, so my bones stick out all over and my clothes keep trying to fall off. Help!

At the Thanksgiving meeting every family had to do something, so I was our family’s contribution. I was scared but I really wanted to let them know how much I appreciated their prayers for my family and me during this time and what God has been doing in my life. It has really done a lot for others in teaching them to trust God and to have more faith in prayer.

Mrs. Merrifield was telling me how Kenny (he’s 6) had prayed for me one night. It was so funny but neat. He said, “Dear Jesus, Please help Grandma to get well, and thank you for helping Beverly to get better, but do a little more for her, ok? Good night.” !!

November 30

There have been so many things to do, I just don’t know how I’ll get this all written down ‘cuz there’s so much I want to say! Most of my time has been spent writing letters. Ugh!

I’ve been having doubts about CSU, so I prayed and found a SPC catalog in my closet and I suggested it to my parents ‘cuz it looked pretty good and they said “No way.” I was just so confused I started crying at the table and later felt so ashamed ‘cuz I realized how much I wasn’t trusting God. He comforted me and left me at peace knowing He would work things out in His time and will. Then yesterday Daddy talked to me and showed me the good and bad between Wheaton and CSU, and said that no matter what the cost I should go where I want to! So he said

just wait and pray and see what God decides. Today I was feeling kind of depressed about it, but was comforted again.

I want to tell you about my family before I run on about myself. Well, I got interrupted by supper, but it was hilarious! (Chuck's at David Lymons and has been there all day and is spending the night and I miss him—the little kook.) We're having Rosie over though and that's almost as bad—no it's worse—she's a nut! We were reminiscing about a lot of crazy things—Daddy told us about how Grandma used to give his friend who came over to play with him a bath before they could play!! After they left for prayer meeting we sat around and talked about old crushes, etc.! It was too funny. It reminded me of Donny—the valentine and airplane, and sitting by him. Steve Longacre—the heart he gave me that said "I love you." Danny A.—the note he wrapped around the pencil and gave to me. Oh and when Brad and Kyle—They aren't quite as crazy—Thank goodness!! The other night Sharon and Kelly were in bed and asked for a drink of water, so I got each of them a glass of water and when they finished they hollered to Mom, "Come get our glasses please, Mom." And she hollered back, "Why did you wear your glasses to bed?!"

They just decided to play Rook, but were too scared to go into Chuck's room so all of us did and came running back as fast as we could!

(I'm planning on freezing Rosie's bra tonight—hope it works!)

I got a neat poster and letter from Lois Weathers with verses from Isaiah that fit beautifully to this time. I want to study some of the O.T. and maybe that would *be* a good place to start. I had two really good talks with Teri and the last one was about prayer. I had gotten a letter from David about how he'd been learning about prayer and I found a book, *Prayer, Conversing with God* in my drawer, and then in the mail I got one from Diane about prayer.

They were contradicting about using “You or Thee and Thou” but God told me—just believe what My book says. Then when I talked with Teri it was made clear that people have been made different and of course act different and God would be happy no matter how we talk to Him, just so we do and are sincere. So many times we just try to impress people and are not really talking to Him. Another thing is we need to know Him, before we can really talk to Him—no, I guess that’s not true, but it helps. Mommy and I had a good talk on prayer this afternoon and we hardly ever talk like that. I need to learn more about prayer! There was something neat I was taught in Col. 1:2 “May God our Father shower you with blessing and fill you with His great peace.” To be filled and showered we need to be completely emptied of everything wrong inside and outside before we can. Another verse in Col. 2:1 “I wish you could know how much I have struggled in prayer for you...and for my many other friends who have never known me personally.”

Daddy’s work is coming along pretty good—right now he’s working on getting his dissertation ready for publication for SIL and Mommy’s typing stuff out. Today he told her how much more efficient she helps him to be—she really appreciated that!

Praise Him who has done so much for me and my family and all of us. We need to know Him even better and come closer together.

Elaine’s coming down a week early –Hurray!! They might call tomorrow night!

I hope none of this sounds fake ‘cuz it’s not.

I found all kinds of stuff in a box we never unpacked from the tribe ‘cuz I got sick right after that—it had my music books I’d been looking for—music theory books—my diary from this year that I’d forgotten I had. And in my underwear box I found my extra pair of contacts, clippers, makeup, and earrings. Better quit, it’s almost 10:00 and my eyes are killing me.

Thank you letter draft

I want to tell you how much I appreciate your praying for my family and me during this time. . So many people have been praying for me and I'm sure that's why God has been healing me so soon. He has taught me to trust and depend on Him more through this, and He has brought our family closer together. We went to see Dr. Barona yesterday and he said I was 95% better—and he said, “Just trust the Lord and be patient!” There are a few verses I'd like to share with you that have been very helpful while I've been sick, Romans 5:1-5 and Phil. 4:6,7.

My Journey with Cancer

For some time I have wanted to pull together some of my reflections on my experience with breast cancer. I have hesitated for many reasons, but since I have not found much written by Christian women on this subject, I want to share my experience with others as an encouragement from someone who has been traveling this road with God. I found it helpful to read books and articles about other women's experiences and see how their character had been strengthened, they'd found a "new voice", a new sense of purpose, a greater zest for life, how they directed their anger to becoming involved in the fight against cancer—but I longed for something more—for something that would remind me that a compassionate, loving Father was by my side, that he understood the pain I was afraid to embrace, and that He could be trusted no matter what—He would never leave or forsake me.

That is why I've decided to write down some of my reflections in hopes that they may encourage a sister pilgrim through this rugged valley. Each woman's experiences will be unique—I simply want to share how God has been with me every step just as He will be for you.

In mid April 1991 I began noticing some discomfort from a lump in my left armpit. Since I was nursing my 6 mos. Old son at the time, I presumed it was probably a clogged milk duct, and waited almost a month before going to see my general physician. He was not overly concerned, but referred me to a surgeon. When I saw him a year later, he told me that his wife had died of breast cancer six years before. Another doctor may not have felt the same need to leave no doubt about the cause of the lump. The surgeon requested a sonogram since a mammogram would be ineffective while nursing. The results showed a fluid filled cyst. He suggest, however, I consider discontinuing nursing and have a mammogram. I had nursed my older son until he was one year and wanted to do the same for Robert. I didn't sense from the

doctor an urgency to quit, so I continued nursing another six weeks. I began having trouble with my milk letting down and both of us were getting frustrated. I also began to be concerned for the first time when the surgeon's office had called after about a month to see if I was ready for a mammogram, but again, they left the timing up to me and didn't convey any sense of urgency. Several weeks after I quit nursing, my left breast was not returning to normal, and had a hardness my right breast didn't have. At this point I knew the likelihood of my having cancer was very real, and I began to feel an urgency to know. When I called to request a mammogram, they said it would be weeks before I could get in! Here I was finally sensing urgency and the system was holding things up. After talking with the surgeon's office, they said an "emergency" mammogram would have to be approved by the committee, which met once a week.

Discovering I had breast cancer in September 1991 came at a time when my life was already in chaos. My husband was unemployed and going through a time of depression, our marriage was in turmoil and our future felt very uncertain. I felt emotionally drained and weary from months fighting battles, which often felt hopeless. In some sense, these struggles prepared me for the difficulties to come. I felt like I had "hit bottom"—life was beyond my control. What could I do but trust God? In those dark days I begged for God to "fix" things and He didn't.

I'd begun dealing with those agonizing questions we can't avoid when life hurts. Is God really there? If He is God, He has to be good, so why isn't he being good to me? I believe He is able to intervene, so why doesn't He? I clung to truths I'd been taught all my life, set my conflicting emotions aside, and stoically did my best to be obedient and faithful. All I could come up with is that He uses trials in our life for good, so He must have a purpose in my circumstances. I had to accept by faith that He was there and in control of my circumstances, and now and then His presence was real.

God also began surrounding me with a few people I could confide in besides my family who all lived out of town. They listened to me any time day or night, saw my failures and loved and accepted me anyway, and gave me comfort and strength from their wisdom.

By the time Robert was a year old, I'd had surgery and started chemotherapy. I lost all my hair and discovered I'm not a beautiful bald—the back of my head is flat. Cancer was just one of the major challenges we were facing at that point in our lives, so it was a difficult time.

Shortly after I finished my chemo treatments I discovered a lump near my collar-bone and I was convinced the cancer had returned. On hearing the results of the testing which showed it wasn't cancer, I felt like my life had been given back to me! But mixed with the incredible sense of relief and gratitude was a disturbing feeling that the experience had shaken my confidence and trust in God. How could I trust a God who still might allow me to die young, leaving my husband alone and my children with the emotional scars of losing their mother while they were so young?

Through a friend whose 9 year-old daughter had recently died of leukemia, God spoke to me. My friend pointed out that it seemed I wanted to trust God to make everything ok, but was I willing to trust Him no matter what? Could I trust God in the midst of trouble? I was willing to trust God only if He would guarantee that He wouldn't allow anything awful to happen. Of course I knew there were no such guarantees and that was the source of my turmoil. He went on to explain that he and his wife found they COULD trust God no matter what, that even in the most difficult times and in the on-going sadness over their loss, they had found God to be completely trustworthy. He told me a good friend of his summed it up by the phrase, "Life is tough, but God is good." I went away from that conversation with a sense of hope. The seed of

truth about God's utter trustworthiness began to grow in me from that point. What I'd known in my head took root in my heart.

God answered many prayers during that time in our lives and He graciously gave me 4 1/2 years of good health. Then 3 1/2 years ago the cancer returned. Since I'd already had standard treatment and radiation as an added precaution, my doctor advised getting a stem cell transplant, which is similar to a bone marrow transplant. It allows very high doses of chemotherapy to be used, but it increases the risks from infection when the immune system is weakened. My doctor recommended I get into a protocol at the NCI since it was questionable whether my insurance company would pay for the procedure and she did not think highly of the doctor doing the procedure in our area.

It was a very difficult decision for several reasons. Though none of the drugs were experimental (just the sequence and combination), I knew that some people have died from complications in transplant procedures. I would have to make numerous trips to the Washington, DC area over a 10 month period, some for several weeks at a time. All but the first airline ticket would be paid for along with the medical costs (thanks to your tax dollars), but we couldn't afford the expense of staying at a hotel much of the time. And my biggest concern was who would care for my family, especially my kids? So we prayed and asked God for His guidance on what to do. In His sovereignty God put me in touch with two friends who lived near DC, and I could get to their homes by the Metro and commuter train. Many friends volunteered to take care of my kids and some of our family said they'd be able to come and stay during my longer trips so I knew my family would be cared for. During the times I was gone many people also brought food and some even came to clean the house. God's love was very real to us through all the people who became His hands and His feet in our lives.

It just “so happened” (really, it was God’s sovereign timing) that my job ended the week before I made my first trip to see if I would be accepted into the research program. The people at my office collected \$250 as a going away gift and my airline ticket ended up costing \$264! My job being done gave me a chance to work full time and I ended up getting just enough hours by the deadline. It was a hard decision, but since God was taking care of all the details, I sense it was His answer and He gave me peace that confirmed it was the right choice.

On my first trip to get chemo I was put in the same room with a Christian woman named Susie who has two boys my kids’ age and we went through hours and hours of treatment together, went wig shopping together, and stayed in the hospital several times together. It was so encouraging to have a Christian friend in a place where I didn’t know anyone.

God gave me many other blessings. Some people we didn’t even know loaned us one of their cars for 3 weeks during a period I couldn’t ride the Metro because the high dose chemo made my immune system unable to fight germs. Others gave money—for example, a missionary I knew as a kid in Mexico whose husband had recently died of cancer sent money which I used to get a suitcase with rollers which was a lifesaver getting around on the Metro. Another time our car broke down and a few days earlier someone had sent just enough money to get it fixed. I ended up needing emergency surgery at one point and some friends gave over \$500 so Tim could fly up and be with me for several days.

Another big blessing was one trip the kids and Tim came with me and they got to meet the families I stayed with, saw the hospital, plus got to see sights in the Capitol and meet cousins from PA they’d never met before. In all these things, I could see God’s sovereign hand and loving care, knowing what we’d need and not only providing for our needs but pouring out blessings on top.

What I read about God in scripture was confirmed in my experiences. God's word was so alive and spoke just what I needed to hear so many times. It gave me inner strength, perspective and hope. I don't have time to share the passages that became so meaningful but one that stands out is Lam. 3:21-23. "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

One of the things I prayed for a lot was courage and strength to get through the treatment. God answered my prayers and gave me peace and protection from fear through scriptures that promised He'd be WITH me. I experienced the truth of God's omnipresence in a very personal way. A good friend gave me a beautiful pillowcase to take on my trips on which she'd written Isaiah 41:10 which says, "Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yea I will help you, yea I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." It was so encouraging to lay my head on that promise each night and it led to some good conversations with people in the hospital who asked about it.

I also prayed a lot for protection from complications like severe infection. But there came a point when it seemed God wasn't answering my prayers for protection. I got very, very sick after my last high dose chemo. My stomach was in constant, terrible pain and they couldn't figure out what was wrong. It turned out I had developed severe infection in my colon related to diverticulosis I wasn't aware I had. I also had a rare e-coli bacteria that wouldn't respond to the antibiotics. The infection got into my blood stream and spread throughout my body. I had to go into the Intensive Care Unit and while I was there they pumped me full of fluid and I gained 30 lbs. in several days. I was on morphine and had terrible nightmares. During this time I wasn't allowed to eat or swallow anything for over 3 weeks. Finally they did surgery on my colon and

removed about 18" and gave me a temporary colostomy, but I still had infection after the surgery and I had developed pneumonia. So the respiratory therapists (we called them respiratory terrorists) would come in several times a day and pound on me like I was a drum or use a machine that was like a flat headed jackhammer. So you get the picture—it was a miserable and scary time. Finally, after 6 long weeks, I got to go home. Before I returned home, they did another CT scan and bone scan and there was no evidence of cancer anymore! My platelet count didn't recover enough to complete the remaining months of the protocol so I was released and was given radiation as an added precaution. But my prayer for healing had been answered and I was spared several months of treatment and trips. And every day I'm grateful and thank God for my continued good health.

During that 6 weeks in the hospital, I was so weak and drugged with pain medication it was hard to even pray most of the time and I couldn't sense God was there with me like I usually can. It was a period of real darkness for me. All I could do at that point was depend on the prayers of other people, not my own. I was concerned that my faith didn't seem like it had been strong enough for the testing I'd been through.

So did God forget about me or desert me because He didn't answer my prayer for protection from complications? No—He didn't forget me or desert me, and though He didn't keep me from having complications, He DID protect me in the midst of trouble like He promises so many places in scripture. One of these is Isaiah 43:1-3 which says "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." He didn't answer my prayer that I

wouldn't have complications, but I believe it's because He had something even BETTER in mind. Until I get to heaven I won't see the whole picture of how He was working all things together for good, but one benefit I can see now is that my faith was tested and became stronger. God wanted me to get to the place where I could completely trust Him no matter what, like my friend had explained during my first experience with cancer. Life had been tough, but God was good in all of it. And I can honestly say that I know I can trust Him in anything, even in death. I know I'll be going home and I believe God will take care of my family. Jerry Bridges' book *Trusting God* has a beautiful quote, which sums things up this way: "God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about." Should I face cancer or other adversity again I know I will struggle for a time, but I'm confident that the truths I've learned about God's love, His sovereignty, His presence with me, and His utter trustworthiness and faithfulness will again sustain me and give me peace.

A song by Scott Kryppaine that I heard for the first time the day after I found out the cancer was back says, "Sometimes He calms the storm with a whisper "Peace be still". He can settle any sea, but it doesn't mean He will. Sometimes He calms the storm, other times He calms His child." This song is a beautiful reminder that He is able to take away any problem, but when He doesn't and He allows us to go through the trials, He is able to give us unshakeable peace when we put our faith in Him.

Reflections when cancer returned

I was asked to share a part of my testimony today that illustrates how important being part of God's family has been in my life, especially during the challenges with my health.

Our family came to Aberdeen Alliance in the Spring of 1999 and later that year I had a dry cough that persisted, so the allergist I went to see finally decided a CT scan would be appropriate based on my health history. Some of you have heard this story, but for those who haven't, I'd had surgery for breast cancer in October 1991 and started my chemotherapy the day after Robert's 1st birthday. I had a recurrence of the cancer in 1996 and had a stem cell transplant to treat it. I had severe complications with infection after the high dose chemo which resulted in 6 weeks in the hospital with major challenges and several times we wondered whether I would make it home. But God answered our prayers and I had four more years cancer free.

When the allergist in Aberdeen called and said the CT scan showed what appeared to be nodules in my left lung, it was very discouraging, but not surprising. Tim was in Russia at the time it was decided I should have a bronchoscopy. I remember Beth and Kerry calling up one evening and taking me and the kids out to DQ which was a great distraction from the anxious waiting time, and an encouraging support. Beth was the one who brought me home from the hospital and she asked if she could call the prayer chain. During the days of waiting for biopsy results I had tremendous peace, which I noted in my journal I "had no other explanation than people's prayers." The first results indicated no cancer but unbeknownst to me, the second radiologist insisted on a second opinion from Mayo, and 10 days later I learned the cancer was back after all.

The church surrounded us with support and love—encouraging cards and phone calls, more ice cream outings, an evening at Schaeffers with several other families for dessert and prayer. And when I started treatment, different women came to sit with me every week. Sandra Peterson always wanted to know what day my treatment was and finally she shared with me she would fast at lunch on my chemo day and pray for me. People brought food and flowers. With

my family so far away since my parents are missionaries in Mexico, it was comforting to be loved in so many ways by our church family.

I took weekly chemo treatments for a year, then continued weekly with a drug which only attacks the cancer cells, so my hair grew back, but after 6 months, so had the tumor and the pain. We are part of a small group and I'd been meeting weekly with a group of women for prayer. They listened to me in my discouragement about the tumor growing back and loved me through it. I could be completely vulnerable knowing I would be accepted, understood, and encouraged to hold on to God's perspective on my life.

Radiation and a change in hormone therapy got the cancer under control again, but I continue to take a maintenance treatment every three weeks and will for the rest of my life. Whatever the future holds, I know God will be with me, and my family. My kids are growing strong in their relationship with God and I'm thankful for Devin who has had a huge influence on them, and for the others who have taught them in Sunday School and Awana. Tim has his own encouraging relationships with men in our church that have helped him deal with these challenges as well as his own. It helps to give me peace about their futures.

How has all of this changed me? There is probably no part of my life that has not been affected by living with a terminal disease. My dependence on God and his Word has deepened, and I live most days aware of what a gift every day I have with my family is. I would hope that the compassion and love I have received I pass on to others in my work as a counselor and in other relationships. No doubt part of my drive to participate in Sunday School and Small Groups, getting Supper Six started and working with Denise to get a women's Bible Study going come from my own need to be closely connected with our church family. But I also have a deep desire to see others connected in fellowship and growing together in discipleship. Without

relationships that go beyond superficial greeting, how will the body of Christ be able to support you in the challenges you face?

God tells us to love one another, pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, and be devoted to one another. You all have done that for me and my family, and I thank you for being our church family.

Correspondence by email

From Bev, November 2, 2001

Tim left for New Orleans for a conference this morning and took the computer, so I wanted to give a short update on my appointment with the doctor yesterday. My tumor marker was up some more but only by 20 or so which apparently is not significant. He said he'll check them again in a month and if it's continuing to go up, he will probably change the hormone therapy from Tamoxafin to something else. If they continue to go up, he'll put me back on chemo, but for now since it's not that significant, he would like to give my bone marrow more rest. He told me about treatment options still out there for me which was encouraging, but I think I was bummed out by the fact that it doesn't seem like the Herceptin is enough to keep the disease stable.

From Dad, November 4, 2001

I am sorry that you are having to bear yet another burden due to the tumor marker being higher. You know that we will be praying especially about this new concern. The Scripture which comes to mind is I Corinthians 10:13. It classified your trial as having been experienced by others, but certainly most of us don't have the same drawn-out uncertainty you have experienced. *The Message* (The New Testament in Contemporary English), says it this way:

“No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He’ll never let you be pushed past your limit: He’ll always be there to help you come through it.” The next verse is thought-provoking in the way it has been translated. “So, my dear friends, when you see people reducing God to something they can use or control, get out of their company as fast as you can.”

From Bev, November 5, 2001

I always appreciate your encouragement—seems to be just what I need to hear at the time. I think I started regaining my perspective on Saturday but am still fighting some discouragement. My hope is in two things. One, that God is able to do whatever He chooses concerning my health. Medical reports may indicate one thing and that’s all my doctor considers, but He’s not including God in the picture. The other thing I put my hope in is all of God’s promises—of heaven, that He will work everything together for good in the lives of my family, that He’ll be with me whatever I go through, and now this reminder that He won’t allow me to be pushed past my limit.

The tumor markers don’t indicate a drastic change at this point—just that I’m moving the wrong direction. They don’t usually make any treatment changes just based on the tumor markers because they’re not always accurate, so unless scans down the road indicate a need, he won’t do more than change the hormone therapy. I’ve never asked him what he thinks my prognosis is because I don’t think that’s helpful at this point, but our conversation alluded to it and I think that’s what discouraged me. Thanks for all your prayers.

From Bev, June 5, 2003

I got great news on the MRI report today—the spot that was there is completely gone!! If he didn't give me the report to bring home, I think I'd still have a hard time believing it! The pertinent part of the report says, "Enhancing right cerebellar nodule noted previously is no longer seen. No current evidence of metastatic disease." I am so thankful. My pastor's wife had arranged to come with me (because another friend didn't want me to get the news alone with Tim gone which was thoughtful, but I would have been fine), so she was thrilled because that was one of the things the elder's wives prayed for while the elders had their meeting Tuesday night, that the spot would be completely gone. I hadn't been so bold (or strong in faith I guess) to pray for that. So it causes me to think that very possibly the supplements I'm taking that you gave me, Mom and Dad, are having an effect. It was obviously something there since it showed up two years ago, and had changed slightly since then. Whether it was cancer or not, I guess I won't know for sure, but that's what the radiologists thought. So, God has been so good to me once again. Thanks for passing on the notes from people saying they've been praying. God does answer prayers.

Bev's response

Psalm 105:1-2 says "Oh give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name: Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him: Talk of all His wondrous works!" and I want to publicly give thanks and praise to God for the miracle He performed in my life this week in response to the prayers of many people. Two months ago an MRI showed some growth in a spot in my brain that had been there two years ago. The follow-up MRI on Thursday showed the spot has completely disappeared! My prayers had simply been "thy will be done", and to be honest, I didn't have the faith to ask for the spot to be gone. But others did, and even

this week some women in our church gathered for prayer and asked specifically for that. My oldest sister told me that the night before my test while she was praying, she sensed God telling her the spot would miraculously be gone. If Beth wasn't at my appointment to witness this or the doctor didn't send the report home with me, I would wonder if I was making this up, it's so amazing! I am awed that God answered so miraculously on my behalf. "I praise him for His continued mercy in my life." Many of you have prayed and I hope this encourages you the way it has me, to pray in a new way with more faith. I still need the chemo for my lungs at this point and am having some problems causing delays, so I appreciate your continued prayer—but not having cancer in my brain changes my outlook dramatically. God is real and He hears and answers our prayers.

Mediations

Thanksgiving Meditation

My letter is "v" so I thought I'd talk about having the kind of vision in our valleys that can give us victory. All of us will walk through valleys at some time in our lives and I know some of you are walking through difficult valleys right now.

If our vision is focused only on our circumstances we will be discouraged and defeated. But we can have victory vision when we see with eyes of faith. As Hebrews 11:1 says, we "can be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Paul put it this way in II Corinthians 4:16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are decaying, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is

seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” An eternal perspective is essential to having victory in our valleys.

With eyes of faith we can see God at work in our circumstances. We can be confident that God has a good purpose in allowing us to walk through the valley. Romans 8:28 reminds us of this truth. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God who are called according to his purpose.”

Peter teaches us that one of the good things God accomplishes in our valleys is the strengthening of our faith. In I Peter Chapter 1 we read, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” And the strengthening of our faith is no small thing. As Ruth Myers says, “Faith brings victory that changes our circumstances—or victory in the midst of circumstances that don’t change.”

We can be set free from our fears when we see with eyes of faith that God is with us in our valleys. God speaks to us through Isaiah and says, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” We are completely secure in God’s presence and nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from His love.

And finally, eyes of faith make us confident that no matter what our circumstances may be, we will have victory. That victory may come here on earth or it may come in that ultimate victory when our death becomes our birth into eternal life. As I Corinthians 15 says, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Where O death

is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I hope these scriptures encourage you as they have me, to have the kind of vision in your valleys that will give you victory.

Security

Psalm 91 speaks to the security of the believer who puts his or her trust in the Most High God. Dwelling in His shelter means living there—daily choosing to be in God’s presence through prayer and His word. In order to rest in the Shadow of the Almighty He must be near enough to us so as to cast a shadow, to provide us a cool shade from the fiery heat of afflictions so that we can rest. God is described as our refuge and fortress—a place of safety in times of war with our enemies whatever they may be. Evil cannot touch us while we are in His protection. He will cover us with His feathers and protect us under His wings as an eagle protects its young. God’s faithfulness never to change, to abide by all of His promises, to never leave us or forsake us is a shield from the attacks of the enemy.

We can face real threats without fear knowing God is able to protect us from anything and nothing can cause us harm unless He allows it. He has commanded His angels to guard us and how many times have they protected us when we weren’t even aware of the danger?

During my first experience with cancer my dad shared with me that while he was earnestly praying for my health, God gave him the promises of Psalm 91:14-16 for me. “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my

salvation.” God promises to rescue and protect those who love Him and acknowledge that He is God. He promises to listen and answer our prayers when we call on Him. The greatest comfort to me has been His promise to be with me in my troubles. Truly God has delivered me and shown me His salvation and honored me with many years of life beyond what medical science would have predicted.

This Psalm has been my comfort and security in a new way since the days after September 11, 2002 when our world changed so dramatically. The threat of the terrorists to cause further destruction through attacks and biological warfare is real. And yet God tells us not to fear the “terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.” God promises His protection and we need not fear. Should He remove His hand of protection as He did on 9/11, it is to accomplish purposes that reach beyond our safety in this life. When our confidence is in Him, we can rest secure in the fact that we are in His protection here on earth and through our passage into that realm of perfect refuge in heaven.

On being refined

Once I was set free to trust God no matter what, realizing I would be okay through God’s help, even when my circumstances were difficult, I could begin to appreciate what He was accomplishing in my character through my suffering. I began to see my suffering as a strange sort of friend, as an ally. My trials were testing my faith, purifying it, as Peter explained, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when

Jesus Christ is revealed.” (I Peter 1:6,7) I longed to be able to say with Job, “But He knows the way I take; when He has tested me I will come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10) Eventually I came to a point of being able to say with Hezekiah, “I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. ... You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.” (Isaiah 30:15b, 17a)

Rejoicing in Hope

“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!” Philippians 4:4

When our circumstances are difficult we can easily question how we are supposed to be rejoicing in the Lord. But even in those times when we feel overwhelmed by the challenges of our circumstances, in the Lord there is much to rejoice about. We can rejoice because of who God is, because He chose me, because He loves me, because He is preparing a place for me, because strength and comfort come from the Spirit of God in me. Finally, even concerning my circumstances, I can have an attitude of “rejoicing in hope” as Paul describes in Romans 12:12. Because of my hope in heaven and eternal life in the presence of God, I can have hope that someday my circumstances will be better, maybe here on this earth, but without a shadow of a doubt someday life will be as perfect as God intended. In a time of waiting for Tim’s job to work out, I wrote in my journal, “I can rejoice now because of my hope—my confidence that God will bring victory and will be true to His promise of giving blessing to those who truly seek Him and trust Him. It’s been a very encouraging perspective and has given me the strength to go on.”