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part one

MY STORY

*Praise be to the God and Father of
our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of
compassion and the God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our troubles,
so that we can comfort those in any
trouble with the comfort we ourselves
have received from God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4; NIV

Jeana Floyd



ONE *I Prayed for This?*

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

PSALM 62:8; NIV

God's Unique Answer

Some people say to be careful what you pray for because you just might get it. Those same people might view my journey through breast cancer as God's mixed-up answer to my prayers for a less cluttered life. After all, no one asks for sickness. And who would imagine that He'd use something like cancer to show me new levels of His peace and hope . . . and even joy?

Surely not me.

But that's just what He did. If that sounds too good to be true, rest assured I say it with complete honesty. God makes no mistakes, and He allows no sorrow

without a purpose. I grew in unexpected ways through having cancer. While it was a journey I am glad to have behind me, it is one I do feel grateful for.

It began in the late 1980s. Raising two young boys and sharing in ministry as a pastor's wife, I enjoyed having my hands full and my schedule busy. However, as we approached the 1989 holiday season, I found myself craving simplicity. As is common in the western world, it's easy for my husband, Ronnie, and me to get caught in the trappings of our calling. We love to give of our time, and we cherish our church, but we often find ourselves long on commitments and short on rest and relaxation. Anyone in full-time ministry can tell you it makes for a somewhat complicated lifestyle.


While the dust settled after busy Christmas and New Year's celebrations, I found myself reflecting on the previous year's harried schedule that had slowly taken its toll on me. As the first days of January ushered in a new year, I craved simplicity for the coming months, so I asked God to remove the excess clutter from my life. Where was I overbooked, overwhelmed, overstressed? I had several ideas for how He could answer my request.

Not one of them included a cancerous lump in my breast.

An Uninvited Guest

I had actually found the lump a couple of years earlier when we lived in Texas. A preliminary visit to the doctor gave me small comfort when I was told it likely was





nothing of concern — just fibrocystic breast disease. My doctor recommended a mammogram and simply told me to watch it.

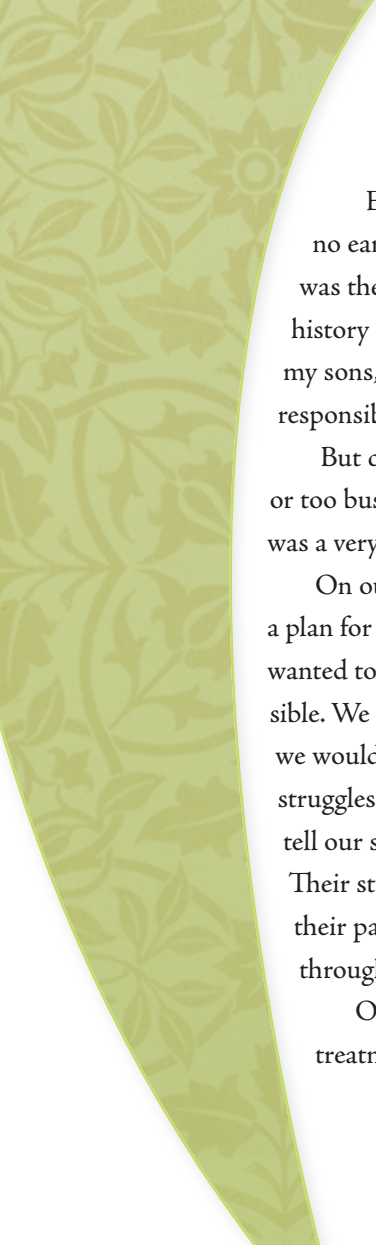
However, in the closing weeks of 1989, I knew the lump had changed, and my apprehension grew with it. You may identify with the initial twinge of fear I felt. Something wasn't quite right about that lump. When the nagging feeling persisted, I sought out a doctor friend, Dr. John Kendrick, at church, who had offered to perform a biopsy after the new year. So we crossed into 1990, and I sat in his office on January 15.

Ronnie and I heard the news that very day. In my mind that morning, this was going to be an insignificant interruption in my busy schedule, and I also didn't want to throw a kink into Ronnie's busy schedule — but thankfully, he sensed the need to be there. He sat in the waiting room during the procedure as the morning sun crept higher over the horizon. When the doctor requested to see him privately, he knew something was going on.

“Jeana has cancer.”

When people talk about hearing “those three little words,” most times they're referring to a warm, fuzzy “I love you.” Both messages are life-changing, but oh, they're worlds apart in meaning.

Although I was the patient, Ronnie took the initial blow and felt the first weight of enormous fear. He and the doctor waited while the anesthetic wore off, and then told me the news together. The lump was malignant.



Even now, it doesn't make sense to my human mind. There was no earthly reason why I should have that disease. At 35 years old, I was the picture of health. I had done everything right. I had no family history of breast cancer at that time. I took care of myself, I'd nursed my sons, and Ronnie and I walked three miles a day. Plus, I had many responsibilities and no time for a sickness hiatus.

But cancer does not distinguish between the too young, too healthy, or too busy. Sure enough, it had knocked on my door. And naturally, it was a very unwelcome visitor.

On our way home from the doctor's office, Ronnie and I agreed on a plan for sharing the news. Being the leaders of a large congregation, we wanted to nip rumors in the bud by telling our church as soon as possible. We wanted them to hear the whole truth from us, and we knew we would need their prayers and practical support through whatever struggles the next few months, or years, would bring. We also decided to tell our sons Josh and Nick, who were a mere nine and six at the time. Their stable world inevitably would be rocked to some extent while their parents reeled from shock and learned to live in survival mode through a season of treatment we had yet to decide upon.

Originally from Texas, Ronnie and I knew we wanted to seek treatment advice from M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. We'd

visited many patients there in previous years and knew of its world-renowned reputation. So we made the first of two trips soon after the biopsy and ended up following their advice for a rigorous treatment, which included a lumpectomy, followed by six weeks of radiation, followed by six months of chemotherapy.

There it was. *Chemotherapy* . . . a word I dreaded hearing, let alone experiencing. It was my greatest fear — the poison, the sickness, the nausea. All of it for the intentional purpose of killing off the sick parts of me to save the rest of me.

My other greatest fear was losing my hair, something I knew chemo often caused. Like many people, my hair is my subconscious “crown,” as the Bible calls it (Prov. 16:31; Song of Sol. 7:5). It is a protection and a covering. I didn’t view my fears of losing my hair as shallow or prideful. I was simply a normal, red-blooded woman who found a measure of self-worth in my appearance. God created women to reflect His beauty. Could I do that bald? Was my hair really a part of the “clutter” that needed to go?

I did not understand the whys of it all, but I had enough background with God to know that He was about to lead me on a path of deeper faith as I lived each day watching Him unfold a suddenly uncertain future.

February 15, 1990 . . . A month ago today we found out I had breast cancer. This past month has been a mirage of events — 2 trips to M.D. Anderson, surgery, and now I have begun radiation treatment. I can’t

remember everything — it has all happened so fast — many emotions to deal with. God has been gracious through it all. It's still really hard to believe this is happening to me. I look around at NARTI (Northwest Arkansas Radiation Therapy Institute) and everyone is at least 70 or 80 years old & I wonder, "What am I doing here? I don't belong here!!" Today I feel very strong & positive. Every day has not been so easy. Some days I have felt as though my heart would break in two. . . . Today, on a day when I feel happy & think I can handle anything (even losing my hair!), I want the Lord to know my heart. Other days I may not be strong. Lord, I want to experience all you have for me during this time. I want to walk with you in a new way. Change my perspective — you already have in so many ways. Keep me pure & loving, not filled with bitterness. Keep my heart tender. Thank you for reassurance in your Word & for the wonderful people you have sent to minister to me. May my life truly be a testimony of your grace. I pray I will learn the lessons you have for me — gracefully. I want to walk through this gracefully. Let beauty from inside glow. May I radiate with your love so clearly that even in illness you can shine through. . . . Give me courage to walk through days of suffering. Give me courage & self-control when my hair falls out. Do a work within me so that I may be able to accept your perfect will. Give Ronnie the same courage & grace to walk through this with me.



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Lord, I even think today I can thank you for this. What an opportunity to know you better — praise the Lord! You have chosen me for this special time.

Father, protect my children from fear — fear of many things. May all of us grow more deeply in love with one another. In some ways I feel like I'm going on a year-long retreat. Where will I be this time next year?

As our world became swallowed up in cancer talk and cancer thought, no one in our family escaped scot-free from cancer fears.

Ronnie claimed a Scripture for me and carried it on a note card in his pocket throughout my treatment. It speaks of God's presence no matter what catastrophes we face:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Isaiah 43:1–3; NASB

As for our kids, we tried to share just enough details to let them know what was happening, or going to happen, just before the actual event so they didn't have

time to get caught up in fears of the unknown. Still, we had no real control over what went through their young minds.

I recently asked them what they remember about those days.

Josh told me, “I remember being very scared at first. I know that I asked Dad if you were going to die from this. He said no, and that the medicine was going to help you.”

And Nick remembers the night we told them. He added, “I can remember Josh [later] asking, ‘Why can’t they give her all the medicine at the same time?’ to which Dad responded, ‘Because it would kill her.’ That’s the first time I think I realized it was serious.”

They remember the wig and turbans, trips to NARTI, even eating Happy Meals with the nurses.

Somehow life continued as the days crept through my treatment, despite our fears and lack of control over much of its daily pace and its outcome. That’s God’s sovereign faithfulness. *He* remained in control as He sent daily lessons about what it means to let go and rest in His wisdom and care.

In His quiet, relentless way, God led me through my fears.