

## **HOPE FROM A HOSPITAL BED**

This week for the first time in my life I was on the other side of the hospital bed. Except for the day I was born, I've never been between the rails of a hospital bed in 40 years. I've visited hospital rooms for 20 years (many of you and your loved ones) and I've prayed for you and held your hands and hugged you and tried to offer you "hope" but I always left wondering if you received any hope. I never feel quite adequate when dispensing "hope" to folks who are hurting.

This past week I found myself in a hospital bed and I needed hope. The doctors didn't have much to give me. Every test they took brought worse news. MRI, CT Scan, Bone Scan, Lung Biopsy...all pointed to the hopeless word none of us want to hear...CANCER.

2 weeks ago I was throwing Micah and Caleb around in the pool, lugging our potato sack we named Lucas Samuel all over Target, pitching mulch, re-landscaping our yard, working out at least 5 days a week and smooching my wife every chance I got. (I'm still doing that!)

2 weeks ago I was preaching 3 times a week in this pulpit, running this church every day in the office, conducting 3 funerals in 1 week, counseling 2 different couples, and everything else fun around here I can get into.

Within 2 weeks I have been diagnosed with "non-small cell adeno carcinoma" (fancy word for lung cancer) that has spread to a multitude of my ribs, up and down my spine, on my upper pelvic region, to my upper clavicle wing, and finally invading my brain in at least 3 places, the largest of which is 2 centimeters.

I have more spots than a bag of dirty laundry.

My boys play connect-the-dots with my X-rays.

Someone asked me where my cancer is and I said, "it's easier to tell you where it's not...my arms and legs!"

This Wednesday I go for my first appointment with Dr.Simon at Moffitt Cancer Center to determine my future treatment, which will probably be a combination of chemotherapy and radiation. So if I come in here glowing don't think I've been on the mountain with God, it's the treatment.

Now we've spoken to doctor after doctor and I'm going to tell you, so far there's not much hope available. We've heard the words "incurable" and "treatment to prolong, not save." But the LORD has had a different word for us...it's the word "HOPE."

The first night I stayed alone in the hospital after forcing Evona to take the boys home to our house so they could be with their mother, she called me late. She said she had gotten the boys in bed and went to be alone and fell in a heap before God crying out for a word. She found her way to her Bible and the Lord opened it to Psalms 30:2,3 "O Lord my God I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." She said, "Cliff God gave me this and it's OURS - it may have been in the Bible thousands of years but NOW it's OURS!"

Since that moment, I cannot say we have not cried after talking with doctors, or read tests results, or just looked at our precious little boys...but the HOPE God gave us keeps coming back and we choose to believe that God will heal me, either miraculously or through suffering and I will raise my family and build this church!

The verse does say God will bring me up from the grave and though I don't believe God is literally raising people from the dead (He can make exceptions anytime though) I do believe He allows us to be planted in the "grave of HUMAN HOPE." It has to be this way! If all human hope is not lost, how can God get full and complete glory that He deserves for raising me up?

It has to be THIS WAY! It has to be OF GOD and NOT MAN for Him to get full glory.

You may say, then don't go to Moffitt, don't take treatment and just wait for the healing. What are you nuts? That's like the guy who asked God to save him from drowning and passed up the canoe, the boat and the helicopter and then drowned and God told him He had sent all 3 to save him. I'm gonna let God use the means He provides, even if it makes me sick and causes me suffering.

No one, and I mean, no one will give chemo and radiation the credit when God raises me up, not with all these tumors! Do you realize I'm a "walking carcinoma?"

My cancer is lung cancer. I've never smoked!. 95 percent of lung cancer patients are life-time or long-time smokers. The other 5 percent are split...2 and a half percent of those are from 2<sup>nd</sup> hand smoke and the last 2 and a half percent are a mystery...and I shouldn't even fall in that category because I'm 25 years too young. No one suspected lung cancer...NO ONE!

Apparently I've had this a while because it's spread so extensively. LISTEN TO ME...no one will give chemo and radiation the credit when God raises me up from this grave of human hope. Now what have I learned? I've been to school this past 2 weeks. God has worked me over and I and my family are forever changed.

### **1. I've learned the URGENCY OF THE MOMENT.**

The word “cancer” made me stop and evaluate my life and the flippancy with which I’ve lived each moment. I’m supposed to rest and I find myself not wanting to take naps because its seems a “waste of life”

Every kiss from my wife is more precious, every hug from my boys is more prized. I’m treasuring mere moments. The TV hasn’t been on much.

We’re eating dinner at the table together as a family each night...not me, Evona and baby at the table and the boys at the bar. (They’re much too young to go to bars anyway)

We’re praying together as a family every night and I’m laying in bed with them before they go to sleep talking about the day like we used to before we got “out of the habit.”

Evona and I have always had a great relationship but we have talked more the past 2 weeks than we have in a long time...and about life, and our feelings, and most of all the Lord and His Word rather than what show we want to watch or where we’d like to go eat or buy at Target.

All of us should be living each moment as if it were our last, whether it is or not. WHY do you have to hear “cancer” before you start? Shouldn’t the love of Christ in saving us and His soon return for us be enough to cause us to live each moment to God’s fullest?

God gives us every moment of life...it could be our LAST moment.

THE MOST URGENT THING YOU NEED TO DO IS BE SAVED IF YOU’RE NOT.

THE 2<sup>ND</sup> MOST URGENT THING YOU NEED TO DO IF YOU’RE ALREADY SAVED IS SURRENDER YOUR LIFE TO GOD’S WILL COMPLETELY.

I’ve learned the urgency of the moment.

## **2. I’ve learned to LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

I’ve been saved since I was a boy. I surrendered to preach as a teen. I went into the ministry as Youth Pastor here at Fellowship in 1985. I’ve been your Pastor since 1995. I’ve been preaching over 20 years and I thought I knew what it meant to walk with God...but “cancer” took me to a different level of intimacy with Christ.

I prayed before...now I cry out.

I thanked Him before...now I praise Him from the depths of my heart.

I would tell Him I loved Him many times... now I tell Him over and over again for what seems like hours.

I started writing little sayings on the “Nurse/Patient Communication Board” when I was in the

hospital so I could be a witness and an encouragement to the nurses. I wrote things like “God Is Always Good and Always Right” and “Wait On The Lord” and one day I wrote “Praise The Lord At All Times.” The nurses would come in and say “What’s our message today?”

I had a day when these pains came on me that were excruciating. I think I had been up too much and my medicine was wearing off but for a minute I thought I was going to die. I asked for pain medicine and I put a heating pad on my head but the pain just got worse. I looked up at my message on the nurses’s board “Praise God At All Times” and I thought, “I need to practice that right now!” and so I began praising and blessing God. It didn’t happen immediately but within a few minutes, the pain subsided and I just lay there blessing Him. Pain can be the pathway to living in the presence of God more deeply than comfort.

I have appreciated the time you have given our family during this ordeal to be together and to seek God’s face and process all the information we’ve been given. I will never forget how you have honored my wishes to have a time of privacy. During these weeks, I have grown close to the Lord in a different way. I have a little garden I had already designed at my home with some mountain rocks and flowers and a bench. It’s under some tall oaks and I love everything about it except the mosquitos and if they’ll take less blood than the hospital’s been taking I’ll keep them. I sit in my garden and I read my Bible and I pray and let me tell you something...I talk to the Lord like He’s seated next to me. I’m learning to hear Him better and enter His presence with more humility and holiness.

The wonderful thing is this...God is always present. He’s always nigh. He’s ever waiting for me. It’s not He that keeps us from communing...IT’S ME!

It’s me with my busy schedule

It’s me with my foolish hobbies and side interests

It’s me with my and my sinful thought-life

It’s me with my critical spirit.

I’ve discovered the greatest change needed in my relationship with the Lord is me.

I’ve asked God to keep me in this position so I won’t forget how much I need Him again. I’m not sure if that means He’ll keep me sick but if that is my thorn in the flesh than I’ll carry it so I can learn to rejoice in my infirmities and stay weak enough for Him to be strong.

I’ve learned to live in the presence of God...

### **3. I’ve learned the POWER OF LOVE.**

I knew that the Lord loved me and my family loved me my church loved me but until “cancer” I didn’t know how powerfully I am loved

God has shown Himself more loving than I ever imagined during these weeks.

He has shown me my life...a life lived in the loving hands of Christ

He loved me so much He died for my sins and rose from the dead

He loved me so much He saved me as a boy when I received Him as my Savior  
He loved me so much He pursued me when I ran from Him and played a fool in the world and all I wanted was money and fame as a teenager  
He loved me so much He spared my life in the accident in 1987 and called me to preach,  
He loved me so much He put me into this ministry as a young man and brought me up here at Fellowship in every phase of the Lord's work, from youth to music to teaching to preaching  
He loved me so much he sent a young pretty girl to my youth group who would become my wife and now the mother of my children  
He loved me so much He made me your Pastor in 1995, the Pastor of the greatest church in the world  
And now that I have cancer...HE LOVES ME MORE THAN EVER!

His love is rich, full, deep, and powerful...it cannot be severed and it cannot be defeated

God has shown me His love through the eyes of my wife, who is facing this challenge with me with the determination and faith of 100 prophets. Evona's love is so powerful to me. If you could have seen her fighting for me to get that referral when our original doctor turned us down. She said, "This WILL happen!"

My boys have shown the love of God to me. They are little men of faith! Micah said, "I know God will bring us through...He's brought you through so much in your life...He'll bring us through this!" Caleb prayed for me one night, "Lord heal my Daddy, please heal my Daddy." I was feeding little Lucas bananas one morning and he started feeding me (he's really a good cook when it comes to bananas) I just felt like the Lord was saying, "He needs his Daddy, be strong and fight for him."

My Mom and Dad have shown me God's love from the beginning of this nightmare as they have since God gave me to them 40 years ago. They've been by my side, hearing all the bad news and turning it over to the good God. I cannot describe the love they've shown me.

My sister and nieces, grandmothers, aunts and uncles, cousins, brothers and sister in law...all have shown me the power of God's love in little ways that have helped our family.

My Mom and Dad in law have worked tirelessly to get me into Moffitt and watch over our kids during all this. God used my Father in law in miraculous ways to get us through the doors at Moffitt...he and Mom Boyette have loved me like their own son and I'm in debt to them.

And you, Fellowship Baptist Church family have shown me the power of God's love. I will forever be grateful for the time you've given me these weeks to myself and my family but you people know how to love someone from a distance as good as up close. I've read every word of every card, every email, been told every phone message, received notes from our kids' classes, enjoyed food and sweets, special things for our boys, help at our house all adding up to the most powerful display of love we have ever experienced as a family. We have never felt so cherished as a Pastor, Pastor's wife and Pastor's children. You have done above and beyond the call of love.

Your love has empowered me! I want to fight this cancer with all I have and try to love you back

just an ounce of how you've loved me.

I want to fight this cancer with faith in God and love my family more than I've ever loved them.  
I want to fight this cancer with hope as the anchor of my soul and love the Lord with all my heart,  
all my soul, all my mind, and all my strength!

I've learned the power of love...

#### **4. I've learned the MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S WILL.**

There's a plan for our life...God's will. I'm convinced it doesn't include much beyond our family and our church. I know you have a to work and our kids have school and all the extra things in life and these things make life fuller and funner.

BUT NOTHING...and I mean NOTHING is bigger than the WILL OF GOD for our life.

God's will is the specific plan He has designed for YOU to take in this life. The thing is...He let's us choose whether we'll follow it or not. We will ultimately wind up doing what He wants one day but there are so many steps He has for along the way.

Every moment is a step either in the will of God or out.

2 weeks ago I began a step down a path called "cancer" and this was not by choice. It is not like other steps I've taken in the will of God, it is shrouded with mystery and darkness. It's like walking blind right now.

I know that Satan has attacked me with this disease but I truly believe that nothing happens without God's permission and so I confess that cancer is the will of God for me right now.

I've often prayed over these weeks, Lord why didn't you make it a skin cancer and we could slice it right off...or 1 of those ones they say, "Drink more coffee and it'll dissolve." Why did it have to be this one and why did it have to be all over me and why did it have to be there so long before we found it?

But I'm learning not to ask "why" anymore" and start asking "what" - Lord, what do you want me to do? What do you want me to change in me? What can I do to bring You more glory?

Who am I to choose not to follow God's will? He is perfect. He sees everything. He is ever good. His will is best place I can be...the sweetest place...the safest place...the ONLY PLACE!

I want people to be saved because of this. I want people to be revived in their spiritual lives. I want people to finally surrender to what they've known for so long God wants them to do.

**I WANT GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE!**