

A JOURNEY with God through  
the Valley of Cancer...

# Aboard God's Train



By: Lynona Gordon Chaffart

## ABOARD GOD'S TRAIN

### A Journey with God Through the Valley of Cancer

Copyright © Lynona Gordon Chaffart

The author Lynona Gordon Chaffart asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Publish, Sable Publishing House, and copyright holder, Lynona Gordon Chaffart.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynona Gordon Chaffart was born in 1962, in California, USA. She holds an MS degree in Speech-Language Pathology and has recently retired after 31 years as a Speech Therapist. In addition, Lyn is a dedicated wife, a mother of two young men and an articulate Christian communicator. She is the administrator of two regular online Christian circulations, The Illustrator and The Nugget.

Lyn has many varied interests. Her active lifestyle has taken her on trips through Europe, Iceland, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. She currently lives in Canada with her husband Rob.

Lyn was diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2012. Throughout the whirlwind of appointments, surgery and oncology, God was with her in a real, practical and tangible way, so much so that she can now honestly say, “Thank You Lord for allowing me to take this journey with You!” Praise God, she has been cancer-free for one year and now feels driven to share her personal and intimate trials and travels through this fearful valley of life—a journey in the company of the Lord, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

Lyn’s christian commitment has deeply impacted a global audience and is a weekly source of desirable reading in the office of Sable Publishing House.



## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Howard Steward Congdon Jr.

Though involved in his own life struggle with terminal cancer, Stewart never stopped encouraging others. He served as a real inspiration to me during the weakest moments of my cancer journey. Stewart now enjoys his ultimate rest in the arms of Jesus.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the people who helped and supported me during my trip through the valley of cancer.

First of all, I wish to thank my colleagues and coworkers for their support and love, the food baskets, cards and flowers; and a special thanks to Katie for covering both her caseload and mine while I was away from work. Also my dear friends Sandy, Pat, Ning, Karen and Patty, as well as the pastors of my church and the volunteers of the Answers2Prayer ministries for being sensitive to the nudging of God and sending encouragement at the moment I needed it most.

I also wish to thank my family for their undivided support. For doing the dishes and wiping the crumbs from the counters, for helping me live within new physical limitations and for being there for me every minute of every day. I especially wish to thank Rob, my loving husband, for being my support and soul mate through this experience.

In addition, my heartfelt gratitude is owed to those who helped and supported me throughout the writing and preparation of this, my first book. To Wynona Gordon, Elizabeth Price, Suresh Manoharan and Donovan Chaffart for the invaluable feedback on the scripts, and to all my family and friends for your support and encouragement.

Finally and most importantly, I thank my loving Heavenly Father, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and my sweet, sweet inspiration, God's Living Spirit, the true inspiration for this story.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	7
PROLOGUE .....	8
Chapter 1: WHEN TROUBLES COME .....	14
Chapter 2: CRUMBS ON THE COUNTER .....	19
Chapter 3: MY FIFTIETH YEAR.....	26
Chapter 4: WHIRLWIND OF APPOINTMENTS .....	35
Chapter 5: JUST <i>WHO</i> IS GOING TO BE CARING FOR ME?.....	40
Chapter 6: ULTIMATE REST .....	45
Chapter 7: TELLING THE FAMILY .....	50
Chapter 8: THE DECISION.....	58
Chapter 9: THE MEASURE OF WOMANLINESS .....	65
Chapter 10: THE TOTALLING OF MY CAR .....	72
Chapter 11: GOD’S REASSURANCES.....	77
Chapter 12: THE DAY BEFORE .....	84
Chapter 13: THE HORRORS OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE .....	88
Chapter 14: THE WAITING GAME .....	95
Chapter 15: ANESTHESIA-PHOBIA!.....	101
Chapter 16: THE STANDSTILL .....	109
Chapter 17: THE END OF THE TRACK.....	113
Chapter 18: DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT .....	118
Chapter 19: THE REPORT .....	122
Chapter 20: WEARING JESUS .....	127
Chapter 21: ONE DAY AT A TIME .....	133
Chapter 22: THE STOWAWAY.....	139
Chapter 23: IN HIS TIME.....	146
Chapter 24: THE STIGMA OF CANCER .....	152
Chapter 25: STEADY MY HEART.....	159
Chapter 26: THE BEST LAID PLANS.....	166
Chapter 27: THE STILL SMALL VOICE .....	171
EPILOGUE .....	177
AFTERWORD .....	182



## FOREWORD

I have heard so many sermons preached on the subject of letting God handle our problems, and this is the subject of much of my own writing. But how does one, in the midst of something as ominous as breast cancer, truly give all the details to God and leave them there? There are the appointments, worrying about telling the family, preparing for a leave-of-absence from life, getting ready for surgery, going through recovery, and of course, waiting for Oncology. I truly desired to let God handle the details, but I didn't know how to not slip up. I didn't know how to let God carry me all the way, and if I didn't succeed, I didn't know how I would get through the next few months and weeks. The next few days. The next few hours....

Just how does one truly give God all the details of a problem and leave them in His hands?



## PROLOGUE

*"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*

(1 Peter 5:6,7)

Europe. At last!

It had been 15 hours since we had left our home on Ontario, Canada. First there had been our airport bus ride to Toronto; then the overnight flight to Reykjavik with its corresponding two-hour layover; and finally, the transatlantic flight. As we stepped off the plane in Amsterdam, however, we knew our dream was a reality.

It was with excitement that we boarded the train. My mother-in-law, who suffered from advanced Alzheimer's, lived in a nursing home in Ostend, Belgium, and the first half of our trip would be spent with her. With her fading mind and failing health, it is more and more difficult to live so far away, and we couldn't wait to see her again.

Our train trip was comfortable. Our luggage fit nicely in the overhead bins, and the three of us had a little cubby all to ourselves. The two rows of seats faced each other with a small table between them and a large window to the side, allowing us to enjoy the Dutch countryside as we flew down the rails. We didn't have a worry or a care, and I, for one, slept most of the trip.

Once in Ostend, we exited the train station and boarded the Belgian coastal tram. Our luggage was around our feet this time, but it was only a matter of minutes until the tram came to its next stop, just in front of our hotel.





Darien, my 17 year-old son, climbed off the tram with the luggage, and as he and I headed for the hotel to check in, Rob, my husband, continued down the tram line four more stops to the nursing home.

And so the first seven days of our trip flew by. Whenever we needed to go anywhere, we climbed aboard a tram, a city bus or a train, and the vehicle of our choice whisked us to our final destination. No worries, no cares. We could simply sit back with our feet up and enjoy the ride.

It was with mixed emotions that we left Ostend for the final week of our vacation. We were sad to leave my mother-in-law, but we were also looking forward to our trip through the northern provinces of France. The total distance we would cover would be about 800 kms, as the crow flies, but our goal was not to get from Ostend to Brest, France, in the quickest way possible. Rather, we were here to experience history and culture: From the pre-historic dolmens and megaliths, to the medieval castles, churches and forests, to the modern-day beaches in Normandy that hosted the famous invasion of the allied forces during World War II. Being Canadian, we also planned a special stop at Vimy Ridge, a memorial to Canadians who fought bravely in World War I. The trip would involve, in all, some 4000 kilometers of road, and we determined it would be to our best interest to rent a car.

Due to Rob's limited vision and Darien's age, I was the designated driver. It didn't take me long, however, to realize that though I am a good driver at home, I was lacking some of the necessary skills needed to adequately and safely navigate French roads!

The most blatant missing skill set became apparent the first time I tried to park. There tends to often be limited street parking in the cities, and due to the narrow, winding roads, it is absolutely imperative to be good at parallel parking. Unfortunately I have never quite mastered that particular skill....



Where adequate street parking is unavailable, there are often parking buildings. Although parallel parking isn't required, these tend to be underground and only accessible through the use of narrow, steep ramps littered with sharp turns and concrete posts. Quite the challenge for someone who isn't used to driving with a standard transmission!

I must say that there is one thing I discovered that I am good at accomplishing from behind the wheel in Europe. I am very good at raising the ire of the European drivers. Especially when I block traffic in my feeble attempts to manoeuvre the whole parking nightmare! Take, for example, the day I dropped Rob and Darien at our hotel door in St. Malo, France. Their goal was to check in and then find directions to the parking garage. Meanwhile, I had put the nose of our rental into a spot that was too small for my parallel parking abilities. The road was a narrow, one-lane affair, and needless to say, my attempt at parking ended with the rear-end of my car completely blocking all traffic. I watched with trepidation as five cars quickly lined up behind me; but there was nothing I could do. The first car was literally on my bumper. There was no way for me to back out of my spot so that the traffic could again flow.

Eventually the car behind me realized my dilemma and tried to back up. A chain reaction resulted, and soon all five cars were moving in the reverse direction, allowing me to literally “uncork” the road. I did the only sensible thing then. I drove around the block and ended up in front of the same hotel on the same narrow street. The only difference was, I didn't try to put my nose in that too-small spot. Instead, I just completely blocked the road! Fortunately, there were different cars behind me this time....

Seeing my dilemma, the hotel owner came out to the curb and pointed towards the parking garage. My heart sank. The opening was, from my perspective, narrower than my car, and I couldn't see the pavement, a sure sign that the ramp went straight down....



She must have seen the look of pure horror on my face, for when I rolled down the window, I heard the sweetest sound in the world: “Je peux garer votre voiture, si vous voulez!” Loosely translated, that human angel was offering to park my car! I believe I set a world’s record in handing her the keys.

Another of my frustrations with driving through France had to do with the apparent lack of signs indicating street names. Street signs are usually posted high up on the side of buildings, but they are never consistently in the same place, and are thus, easily missed. The French roads are also full of round-a-bouts. The various roads that take off from these circular intersections are usually well marked with the small towns or attractions you can find along them, but they are seldom marked with the name of the road. Naturally, all our directions involved road names, and thus, we were left with absolutely no clue which road to take. Fortunately we could go around these round-a-bouts as many times as we wished. I believe our record was seven, and even at that, we still managed to take the wrong road! Is anyone surprised that we were frequently lost? We did, actually, have one good day. We only got lost three times. Our average was nine. But then, who, besides the teenager in the back seat, was counting?

Yet another frustration had to do with the speed limits. In France, you will receive a ticket for going as little as one kilometer over the speed limit, and I carefully used the cruise control at all times. I even set it 2-3 kilometers UNDER the limit!

The speed limits, 130 km per hour on the highway, was usually well marked; but from my perspective, they could drop with little or no warning. Speed isn’t controlled by police cars in France. Instead they have radar stations along the roads. If you aren’t driving at or under the limit when you pass these stations, you will see a quick, bright flash, and you will know that very soon you will receive a speeding ticket in the mail. Imagine my delight when we returned the car



without having seen any of those quick, bright lights; but imagine my horror to arrive home to not one speeding ticket, but two! Somehow I must have missed the signs indicating change in speed....

Needless to say, the entire time we had the car was incredibly stressful for me. What a difference from the seven days of stress-free public transit, where there were no narrow roads, traffic jams, speeding tickets or parking nightmares, and where we never had to worry about getting lost!

The entire Europe trip was but a tiny break in an era of tumultuous waters at my house, for it was just three days before we left that I learned I had breast cancer. Once back home, God began speaking to me about the train. He reminded me that just like there are two ways to get around Europe -- Either I drive myself to ultimate stress, or I relax on the train -- life's problems also present us with two choices.

The first is to try to navigate them on our own. The only problem is, when we try to “drive” ourselves, we are continually running into narrow roads, twists and turns, angry drivers, narrow, steep parking garages and speed traps. And if we're lucky, we'll only get lost three times in a day! The bottom line is this: The stress will be incredibly high.

But there is another way. In the same way that public transit bypasses any need to park, navigate traffic and read invisible street signs, we can choose to let God carry us through our valleys of life. We can choose to sit back and relax in His arms in the face of those unmarked roads. We can close our eyes to the honking of irate drivers. We can let Him worry about where we are going to park, and we will never have to worry about getting a speeding ticket!



This was my first introduction to taking God's Train through the trials of life, and I made the decision that day to get on board and let Him navigate me through the troubled waters of breast cancer. The decision instantly flooded me with peace of mind and heart. After all, why should I worry? I knew my Train would arrive at the right station safely and on time. Wasn't God the Train Driver?

But perhaps it would be good to back up a bit, to the beginning of the story....



## Chapter 1: WHEN TROUBLES COME

*“I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'”*

(Psalms. 91:2)

The flashing lights, the clanging bell, the lowering of the guard arm.... It can only mean one thing: A train is on its way. Due to the massive size of the vehicle, its potential speeds and the amount of time it takes for an engine to slow down, a train always has the right of way. The message of the approaching whistle is clear: Get off the tracks!

What might happen if we didn't heed that warning?

There would be a lot more casualties involving trains!

What about the Train ride through life's problems? Are we given adequate warning for these as well?

My warning came early in the morning of May 7, 2012, roughly two months before our trip to Europe. I was sitting in my living room, having some quiet time with God before I began my day.

This was my little “oasis”, my little break in what I perceived as a turbulent moment in the Chaffart household. Donovan, my older son, was home from university. He had been unable to land a co-op position for the summer term, and though I didn't fully understand what this meant to his future, I couldn't help worrying. Then there was Darien. He was seeking an internship in Northern Canada, working with the native population. He had, to date, been unable to find one.



Being of the personality that I am, I like to know what to expect. I don't like surprises. I need to know how to plan! And with summer plans so completely up in the air, I was in turmoil.

Because it so often stands in the way of me being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, I consider this particular trait of my character to be a "flaw". But God, in His grace, knows me well. In fact, He is the One who created me with this particular character trait. And He used it to His glory that morning....

As I opened my Bible, I found myself reading Genesis 44, the story of how Joseph framed his baby brother, Benjamin, for theft, and then proceeded to have him arrested.

Now my mind was completely taken up with the issue of summer plans, and when I initially read this chapter, all I could see was that it was a story of how lives can be changed. The only possible connection I saw with my current family dilemma was that maybe God was telling me that my "need to know" attitude needed to change!

"Change me, Lord!" I prayed. "I want to be changed 100% into Your likeness!"

*Read it again!*

I looked up sharply. Where had the audible voice come from? Or was it just that I perceived it to be audible?

But there was no one around.

"Was that you, Lord?" I whispered.

*Read it again!*

In obedience, my eyes raised back to the beginning of the 44<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis.

"Lord," I prayed, "I didn't understand what You were trying to tell me here, did I? Open my



Spiritual eyes and ears! Help me to hear Your voice and to see what You are trying to teach me through this scripture!”

As I reread the story, it all came into sharp focus. This was a story of a test. A nasty test from the perspective of Benjamin, an innocent boy who is being falsely accused. As a result, he will not be able to return to his father and his father will die of sorrow. The test is really not about Benjamin at all, however; it is about the 10 older brothers, the same brothers who had, years earlier, sold Joseph into slavery! Were they still the conniving boys who had staged Joseph’s death, lied to their father and broken his heart?

A knot rose in the pit of my stomach. “Lord?” I whispered. “You’re not talking about the situation with the boys’ summer plans, are you?” My throat tightened: “You are forewarning me that I am to be tested! Something terrible is about to come!”

*Yes!*

I drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to calm the panic. “Lord?” I whispered. “I don’t think I can handle a trial of this calibre!”

God obviously thought I could, and knowing my need to plan, He was forewarning me. In his love and wisdom, He was giving me the foresight that I would need to get through this upcoming valley experience.

Before my anxiety could climb too high, however, God reminded me of the end of the story. The brothers all passed their test, and as a result, they were deemed worthy of a much greater blessing. Joseph is revealed to Benjamin as his long-lost brother, the boy is allowed to return home to their father, and the door is opened for the entire family to return in glory to





Egypt, to live in a land where, despite ongoing famine, there are still provisions. It was, in all, a promise of restoration!

Again I understood. Whatever it was I was to go through, it was to be considered a test, a “Divine preparation”, to receive His greater blessing.

In all honesty, I had no idea what God was talking about. Not until that evening, that is. As I sat on the same couch at the end of the day, wrapping up my day and praying to God, I was suddenly impressed to do something that all women are encouraged to do monthly, but something that I never, ever do: Self-examination for breast cancer.

That’s when I found the lump, in the “12:00” position on the right-hand side.

It wasn’t very big, but as my fingers explored it, God’s message from that morning came back to me. This was what God was forewarning me about! From that very moment, I knew that I had breast cancer.

It took the medical field a few weeks to come into agreement with what I already knew. First there was the two week wait to see my doctor, then the two week wait for the mammogram and ultrasound. Then there was the ten day wait for my doctor to receive the results: A suspicious-looking growth in my right breast. A needle biopsy was then scheduled, and eight days afterwards, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, my family doctor confirmed what I already knew.

The interesting thing was, throughout all this time, I wasn’t worried about the fact that I had cancer!

Why not?

Because knowing my need to know, my Lord and Savior had not only forewarned me, but He had also given me a promise! I would be tested for a time, but in the end, victory! As a



result, instead of fear, all I felt was deep, all-encompassing love. I felt like I was being cared for, even pampered, by the God of the universe Himself. I truly was experiencing what the psalmist meant when he said, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, *"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday."* (Ps. 91:1-6)

How could I ever wish such an experience to go away???

But would a forewarning and a promise be enough to carry me through the realities of actually living with breast cancer? I could only hope and pray it would....



## Chapter 2: CRUMBS ON THE COUNTER

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven....”*

(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

My mother and I had just boarded the underground train at Toronto Union Station. Our destination was the fourth stop up the line, at Queen’s Park. We first had to pass St. Andrews, then Osgood and St. Patrick, and then we would finally arrive at our destination.

As the train slowed for its first stop, however, the sign marking the station didn’t read “St. Andrews” at all. Instead, it read “King”!

What?

Panicking, I jumped out of my seat. As I stared up at the system map on the wall over the doorway, my heart dropped to the bottom of my chest. King was the first stop going the other way on the underground! We were going the wrong direction! We would have to get off the train at the next stop and turn around.

It is truly a strange thing to realize you are traveling the wrong way, and as I sat in the doctor’s office on the evening of July 17, listening to the words, “you have breast cancer” coming from my doctor’s mouth, I knew that somehow I had gotten on a train that was *very much* traveling in the *wrong* direction. Only this time, there would be no way to turn around!

A knot the size of a watermelon rose in my throat, and the only words I could squeak out were the ones I had rehearsed for this moment: “I am prepared to hear that!”

But was I? Really?



True enough, I had known in my heart from the moment I found the lump that I had breast cancer, but if I was really so “well prepared”, then why did I feel like I was going the wrong way? Why was I squeezing my eyes shut to keep them from leaking all over the doctor’s arm chair? What was wrong with me?

Somehow, hearing those words spoken in second person from the lips of my own doctor made it seem, oh, so much more ominous. Yes, I *had been* prepared to hear those words. But perhaps I wasn’t so prepared to hear them *now*, and maybe I was only prepared to *hear* them, not *live* them!

I could see that my doctor’s lips were continuing to move, and I have this vague memory of hearing her voice. I even remember trying valiantly to concentrate on her words that I was sure were important; but a thousand other thoughts were whirling through my mind.

Mostly it was insignificant stuff. I definitely fit the definition of a Type “A” personality: ambitious, rigidly organized, impatient, taking on more than I can handle, proactive, and especially, obsessed with time management. I am most comfortable when my life fits neatly in a little box. I have my schedules and routines, and every moment is full of vital things: taxiing kids, cleaning house, preparing meals, watering plants, volunteering, horseback riding, singing in choir, keeping up with an exercise routine, mothering my teens, walking the dog, disciplining the cat, writing devotionals, working on a book, answering emails and...oh! We can’t forget that I also work full-time! There would be no room whatsoever for anything as time-consuming as breast cancer!

I don’t remember what sort of nonsense tumbled from my lips at that point, but it must have had something to do with time concerns because my doctor said, “Lyn, you WILL have to give up some things for the fall! You can’t go through this with a schedule as full as yours!”



I knew she was right, but at that moment in time, with the wet streaks I could now feel on my cheeks indicating that I had lost the battle for tear-control, I couldn't think of a single thing on my plate that I could relinquish.

My doctor was looking at me. She obviously expected a response. How could I possibly say *anything* with my throat in this impossible knot?

I did a little "allergy-season" sniff to clear the fluid that was threatening to spill out of my sinuses, then I swallowed and prayed my voice would work: "Like what?" I squeaked.

"Like your ministry, for one thing," she said.

I couldn't respond to that. I just *couldn't* give up the ministry!

"And you are going to have to learn to accept that the house work may not get done to your standards."

Hum. Safer ground! Maybe if I made it into a joke I would regain some emotional control.... "You mean like crumbs on my counter?"

My doctor laughed then. "I mean like crumbs on your counter!" Then a twinkle rose in her eye: "Lyn," she said, "if you don't have crumbs on your counter, I will personally come and sprinkle some there! I don't want to be the ONLY one in the world with crumbs on the counter!"

I had a good laugh at that. It was one of those laughs that would feel more natural if it were a good cry, and I realized something very sad as I struggled to not cross that emotional line: My doctor had just told me I had breast cancer, and my biggest concern was how I would fit it into my life! I would have to do some serious soul searching. I would need to define my priorities and take some steps towards change, and that became the focus of my prayer over the next few days.



I truly thought that giving up responsibilities would be a hardship for me, but in the end, it wasn't. First of all, my doctor's wisdom and light manner went a long ways towards helping me understand the importance of lightening my personal load. God had truly given me the best person to help me see that I needed to consider some changes. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, I discovered that when I asked God to help me define my true priorities, He did!

In the end, I cancelled the trip to Atlanta that I was planning with some friends for the fall. My friends completely understood, and we currently look forward to planning another trip in the future. Next, I took a temporary leave of absence from choir. Again, this wasn't as hard as I had anticipated. God helped me realize that they would be just fine without me, and that although I am valuable to the choir and would be missed, I wasn't as "essential" as I thought I was. My next decision was to stop volunteering for the fall. Wouldn't you know, that fall proved to be the quietest fall yet for the therapeutic riding program I am involved with. They would have no difficulties getting by without me.

The bottom line was, though I was sure I couldn't live without doing all these things, I found myself suddenly relieved that I didn't have to worry about them anymore!

Why?

Because God took care of that piece, too! He simply took away my need to be involved in everything!

I then began something that is totally and completely foreign to me: I began accepting the help of family and friends, even when things weren't being done to my standards. I learned to shut my eyes to the fact that the clothes were being hung on the line up-side-down and wrong-side-out. They still got dry, didn't they? And whoever took them off the line had to worry about



turning them right-side-out! Then there were the meals. Maybe they weren't quite as "home-cooked" as I would have made them, but we were being filled with healthy food all the same. I even shut my eyes to the animal hair that seems to "grow" on my floors, and as a result, I learned that my husband does, indeed, know how to use the vacuum!

Throughout all this, I discovered something that I had never really known before: The reason my family doesn't help more around the house is that I have set standards that are too high for the men of my house to meet. It isn't that they don't want to help. It's that I am too much of a perfectionist. If you can't do something right, then why try at all?

As for ministry?

I determined the moment I left the doctor's office that my ministry work was NOT going to be put aside. It was the one thing in my busy schedule that I actually don't do for me: I do it for God. Besides, if God wanted me to continue in ministry, He would provide the time and energy.

Is anyone surprised to learn that I was able, with no extra effort or stress, to keep my website updated, to send out the newsletters, and to respond to emails? And God certainly did His part. The email load was extremely light throughout my recovery, and God gave me paid time off work to rehabilitate, as well as a loving husband and supportive sons and co-workers to help with the house work and cooking.

As I look back, I realize that my priorities have always been on the "wrong track", and God has been trying for years to teach me some important lessons in this area. My problem was that I never stopped long enough to listen. Isn't it too bad that it took breast cancer for Him to get my attention, for Him to get my priorities back on the right track?



God's lessons were as follows:

1. I need to let God help me set my priorities. Not just when I'm ill, but all the time!
2. It's okay to say "no" once in a while. I am really NOT indispensable. There ARE others who can fill my shoes!
3. I don't need to be in control of everything. God is, and He's a lot better at it than I am.  
When I try to maintain control, I am taking over His job!
4. God will provide everything I need. He will provide the courage to let things drop off my list of responsibilities, He will provide the time and motivation to do what He tells me to NOT drop, and He will keep these responsibilities to a size that is manageable for me in whatever condition I find myself in. Oh, and He will provide me with the grace to overlook crumbs on my counters!

And what about those crumbs?

The other day I went into the kitchen that had been cleaned by one of the men who live in my house, and I proceeded to wipe crumbs from the counter and table.

"Hey!" Rob cried. "Remember what the doctor said? If your counters are too clean, she'll come and sprinkle them with crumbs!"

I laughed. "I'm just proving that someone with breast cancer doesn't HAVE to live with crumbs on her counters!" And then I added, "And I'm thanking God for helping me to get my priorities back on the right track!"

Is it truly a surprise to anyone that the world's wisest man penned the following words?

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*





*a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV)*

Perhaps, if I could add a line, it would go something like this: “A time to hold on and a time to let go!” This experience with breast cancer was definitely one of those times to let go, to let God be in control.

But then, perhaps my life would be less stressful if I let Him be in control ALL the time!

And maybe, just maybe, I would never again find myself speeding away from my desired destination on a train that is traveling in the wrong direction....



### Chapter 3: MY FIFTIETH YEAR

*"Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen...but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.'" (Zechariah 1:20-21)*

If you've ever taken the time to walk a railroad, you will notice that the track does not always pass over level terrain. Instead, it must somehow traverse rolling hills, dip down into steep ravines, and climb up the side of rocky peaks to pass through narrow mountain passes. Efforts are made to keep the track as level as possible. Bridges are built to span the valleys and cross the rivers, and tunnels are dug through hills and mountains; but sometimes the trains are simply required to climb and descend steep slopes. How much simpler it would be if the terrain were always the same!

And perhaps part of the challenge of going through my breast cancer Train ride was centered in the fact that it wasn't the only thing I was dealing with. Rather, I was passing through many different types of "terrain" at the same time....

My father used to tell the story of how he contracted every known childhood disease, all within the same school year. He would jokingly tell us this was why he had been so incredibly healthy all his life: Because he had suffered everything in Grade 1!

I have to chuckle as I think of that story; but I'm afraid my chuckle is a bit strangled. You see, it would appear I followed in my father's footsteps, only instead of all my problems happening in Grade 1, they all happened in my 50<sup>th</sup> year!



I turned 49 on September 24, 2011, and on that day, I officially entered that foreboding year. It wasn't too long after my birthday that I fell off a horse. Donovan and I were galloping down the road on a pair of crazy ponies. I already knew that his pony would buck if he thought someone was too close to his heels, and so I did my best to keep my pony clear. We were actually a good horse-length behind when it happened. The problem was, the pony under my son didn't realize -- or didn't care -- that we were actually a horse-length behind, and he kicked out. My pony saw it coming, and though the heels were too far ahead to make contact, he decided to play it safe. He swerved to the right.

Unfortunately, I continued going straight. Needless to say, the next thing I knew, I was on the ground with the pony's bridle still tightly clutched in my hand.

Imagine my surprise to look over at Donovan and see him also on the ground. "You didn't have to dismount to help me," I said. "I'm okay!"

"What?" he said. "You fell too???"

Apparently we like to do things in stereo.

Neither of us was hurt that we could tell, and after re-bridling my wayward pony, we continued on our way...at a bit more subdued pace!

I immediately forgot about the fall, but my body didn't. Gradually over time, I began noticing some pain in my left bicep when I awoke each morning.

"I'm just too weak," I thought, and I had Darien start me on an upper body exercise routine. This only made things worse, however, and it wasn't too many more weeks before certain movements of my left arm sent excruciating waves of pain from my shoulder to my fingertips. As time went on, these "certain movements" became much more frequent, and soon



they encompassed some part of every activity, from getting dressed to putting away groceries, to pointing out something on the white board at work!

It was time to do some investigation, and in May of my 50<sup>th</sup> year, the MRI finally confirmed what I really didn't want to hear: During my fall from the crazy pony, I had developed a rotator cuff tear to my left shoulder.

Just a month before receiving this news, I was practicing for an Easter play at church when I tripped and fell, landing hard against a church pew. A massive black eye was ensuing, one that eventually discoloured my entire face and took over 5 weeks to completely heal. Although this injury got the most attention, it was the other one that caused me the most grief: I also injured my left side, making it difficult to take a deep breath and stand up straight, let alone exercise, run, or ride a horse!

Had I cracked some ribs?

The original x-rays didn't show anything. I was told at the time that even if the ribs were cracked, the injury likely wouldn't show up on x-ray; but not to worry, because cracked ribs wouldn't be treated anyway.

That was all fine and good, but it would have been nice to know why, after three months, I still had pain in my side!

Early spring of that same year was difficult for me in yet a third sense. I woke up with a Charlie-horse in my right calf one morning, and for the next three months, my leg gave me grief every time I tried to do anything.

You can only imagine what the combination of these three injuries did to my workout routine. I am, by nature, an active person, and my favorite activities include walking, running,



hiking, biking, and of course, horseback riding. Between my torn rotator cuff, my seized-up calf, and my sore ribs, I did good to limp around the block!

And right in the middle of all this, I found the lump on my breast.

“Oh, God,” I cried. “Why is all this happening to me?”

When there was no immediate answer, I began searching for reasons. Maybe it was my lifestyle.

Apart from the eating disorder I struggled with as a teen, however, I have always tried to live a healthy lifestyle, and everyone around me knew it. As a matter of fact, the day after I announced to my team at work that I had breast cancer, I received the following note from them in the format of a medical prescription:

“For: Lyn Chaffart

“We’ve decided that since you have such good habits and bad things still happen to you, that we would recommend some bad habits to start, so good things will happen!”

They then proceeded to list all the things I am known to NOT do, along with a recommendation to start doing them; and, just to illustrate things nicely, they gave me a “gift” basket.... Cigarettes, a lighter, alcohol.... You name it!

Wait a minute! Is there some truth to what they said? Do I need to start some bad habits so that good things will happen? It defies logic!

So maybe it wasn’t lifestyle after all. Maybe it was my body rebelling against this half-a-century landmark; but if I was truly falling apart in my 50<sup>th</sup> year, how on earth would I be able to make it to 60? Was I destined to hobble and limp my way through the rest of my years? And with the possibility of cancer, would there be any “rest of my years” to stumble through?



No matter what, I just couldn't come to terms with why everything bad was happening to me all at once. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "I know You promised You would never give me more than You and I can handle together, and I'm trying so hard to let You help me handle it all! But how much more can one person take?"

That was my prayer that morning, on June 12, a month before I would officially learn that the lump was cancer.

God's response? He gave me Zechariah 1:18: "*Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were four horns.*" (NKJV)

"Huh? Not quite sure what You're getting at here, Lord! What do four horns have to do with my life falling apart at 50?"

Interestingly, Zechariah, the prophet who received this vision, didn't understand either: "*And I said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these?'*" (Zech.1:19a)

My attention honed in on the next half of the verse, the angel's response: "*He answered me, 'these are the **horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.**'*" (Zech.1:19b)

Wait! Horns that scattered Israel.... Four.... Hey! Wasn't that the number of physical problems that I was contending with?

I proceeded to count them off on my fingers:

- Torn rotator cuff -- 1!
- Seized calf -- 2!
- Sore ribs -- 3!
- Lump in my breast -- 4!



Four horns.... Four ailments....

“Lord?” I whispered. “Are you really speaking to me of my four problems? The things that have ‘scattered’ my health?”

I knew in my heart that He was, and I realized what He was trying to tell me. I had already experienced my “four horns”. This was all that I would have to contend with in my 50<sup>th</sup> year!

Somehow knowing this made it all seem oh, so much more manageable!

But the best was still to come. I read on: *“Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. And I said, ‘what are these coming to do?’ So he said, ‘these are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but **the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that have lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.**”*

God was speaking Truth into my heart. He was speaking promise into my situation. Yes, there had been four assaults to my health, but God was also sending in *four craftsmen* to “fix” them!

It has been my experience that sometimes God heals in miraculous ways. The lumps disappear, for example, or the shoulder miraculously regains its range of motion. I realized as I read this verse, however, that God hadn’t planned a miraculous healing for me this time. Otherwise there would be no need for “craftsmen”. Instead, He was sending in professional people to help me.

That same day, during a routine visit, my chiropractor said, “For some reason, your pelvis is tilted.” He began investigating why, and he soon discovered the extremely tight muscles in my right calf. This was causing muscle tightness to run up my hamstrings, and was throwing my



pelvis off-balance. Further investigation revealed that the muscle knot in my calf was so large that it had formed an adhesion to the bone of my lower leg. Using Active Release Therapy, he quickly worked the knot out.

Craftsman #1: My Chiropractor!

That very same week, I began physiotherapy for my shoulder, and slowly but surely, I began to regain the functioning in my left arm.

Craftsman #2: My physiotherapist!

As for the pain in my left side? During a later bone scan to rule out metastatic disease, increased cellular activity was noted over two of my ribs, indicating that they were currently healing! I had, indeed, cracked them! At least now I knew the reason behind the twinges in my side, and God was in the process of taking care of this problem too!

Craftsman #3: Mother Nature's healing process!

A few weeks later, when my family doctor confirmed that I did, indeed, have breast cancer, she gave me the name of a wonderful surgeon.

Craftsman #4: My surgeon!

It is a known fact that problems come in bunches. We cannot change this. We can only change our response to them. It is our choice to either let our current bunch of problems overwhelm us, or to give them all to God. The point is, God will TRULY never give us more than we can bear, as long as we rely on Him for our strength. It's true that the Train may sometimes disappear into a tunnel or cross a long, high bridge, but the moment we begin to feel overwhelmed is the moment we have taken our eyes off Jesus. It's the moment we have decided





to take over control, and it's the moment we've stopped trusting in the One who can truly resolve our problems!

Whatever the track looks like ahead, let's resolve to rest in Jesus!





## Chapter 4: WHIRLWIND OF APPOINTMENTS

*"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, ' Says the LORD of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6)*

When I was young, I loved roller coasters. The higher and steeper, the better. I especially liked how they would jolt you from side to side in unexpected turns and dips, and how the floor would seem to drop out from under you as you topped a hill and then raced back down at break-neck speed. The ones that were completely in the dark were the best of all. Then you couldn't see to anticipate those dips and rises and turns!

Something happened to me, however. Somewhere along the line, I lost that love of roller coasters. They make me sick to my stomach, they give me a headache and they make my head spin. Especially when the coaster train isn't confined to an amusement park, but rather, when it has become a graphic representation of my life!

That's how I felt during the early days after discovering the lump in my breast. My emotions jumped from lows to highs so quickly and unexpectedly that my head was left spinning. Even that might have felt manageable, however, had it not been for the unforeseen, sharp turns and drops, the ones that literally left my stomach tied up in knots!

One of these "sharp turns" revolved around the sudden whirlwind of appointments that I now found myself caught up in. Just how was I supposed to work them all in? I mean, I was already having multiple appointments in connection with my other health concerns. Time was, after all, not unlimited!



Needless to say, the upcoming nebula of medical appointments had me on edge. I decided however, that if God was big enough to tell me in advance that I would go through some troubled times, and if He was loving enough to tell me the positive outcome in advance, then maybe He was powerful enough to handle my whirlwind of appointments.

As anticipated, I couldn't get in to see my doctor, at any time of day, for the next three weeks. I could see the nurse practitioner, however. She was available on a Monday morning. Monday is the one day I don't have to be to work until 11:00. Wow, Lord! How smooth was that?

The visit ended up as I expected. Ultrasound was the follow-up of choice, but as I was in my 50<sup>th</sup> year, and 50 is the magic number in my area for beginning routine mammography, a mammogram was also suggested. I agreed to the procedures, and I was told I would be contacted with appointment dates.

Whew! The first appointment was done, and it hadn't interfered with anything else in my life!

But now I had two more to face. Would I have to dip into my coveted vacation time to accommodate them?

Again, I decided to let God worry about the appointments. The call came in a few days later. My two appointments had actually been combined into one. They would do both tests at the same time, and I had been given the first appointment of the day on a Thursday morning.

I heaved another sigh of relief. Nothing major goes on at work on a Thursday morning. I would be back to work in plenty of time to do the important stuff, and since my schedule allows for a tiny bit of flexibility on Thursdays, I would be able to make up the lost time by staying late.



And maybe, just maybe, these would be the last tests necessary!

When the results showed the presence of a small, “suspicious-looking” growth, I knew that I had not yet gotten through the whirlwind of appointments. I was again tempted to be worried about the time, but instead, I remembered. I remembered how God had already worked in my other appointments. I remembered how the MRI of my shoulder had been scheduled for 6:15 am, and how I had been finished in plenty of time to get to work. I remembered that I had a physiotherapist who had appointments afterhours. I remembered that my appointment with the orthopedic surgeon who would examine my arm was on a Monday morning. No, there was no need to worry.

The doctor’s office called me on Monday, July 2, to let me know that the next step would be a needle biopsy of the tumor. She finished the call by saying I would be contacted directly with my appointment time. After setting the phone back in its cradle, I couldn’t help but say, “Okay, Lord! Let’s see what You are going to do now!”

Two days later, on July 4, my colleague approached me. She and I run a new assessment clinic together on Monday afternoons, and we pre-approve the clinic dates months in advance. We all know we are not to take off time on Monday afternoons for any non-pre-arranged reason, but something had come up. My colleague had to take off Monday, July 9.

I admit, I was bit annoyed. That meant cancelling appointments and rescheduling them, and with our waiting times for initial assessments already being 4-6 months, any unnecessary wait for these patients was unacceptable. She had no choice, however, and since I can’t run the new assessment clinic without her, neither did I. I proceeded to cancel the entire clinic.



The very next morning, July 5, I got the call from the Radiation scheduling department. My needle biopsy had been scheduled...for 1:00 on Monday, July 9! Wow. The timing couldn't have been better! Because I had already cancelled the assessment clinic, I could go to work early, take off at lunch time for my appointment at 1:00, and return to work in time to still see individual patients from 4-7! God did it again!

I was told by the ultrasound technician who assisted the radiologist with the needle biopsy to make a follow-up appointment with my family doctor a week later. I could only sigh. It was so difficult to see her around work hours. Again, I gave it to God, and when I called, she had an end-of-the-day appointment the following Tuesday, July 17. This would allow me to finish my work day and still have time to drive to her office.

I learned that day that the tumour was, indeed, cancer, and that the next step would be to see the surgeon. Imagine my horror when the appointment had already been set up for me...during the time we would be in Europe! Would I be able to receive another timely appointment upon our return? Would we have to cancel the trip?

God had already worked out all these details. When I called the surgeon's office the next day, there was no problem changing my appointment to just two days after our return, and it was a noon appointment at an office not far from where I work. I could see the surgeon on my lunch hour!

I didn't receive the surgery date that day. The surgeon was currently scheduling surgeries four weeks in advance, but because she wanted to get me in sooner than that, she said she would see what she could arrange. By the following Monday morning, I had my date in hand. It was for Thursday, August 16. Though it was just three days away those three days would give me



exactly the time I needed to wrap up everything at work and prepare for an extended leave of absence.

Just why is it that I needed to worry about that whirlwind of appointments, anyway? God had it all under control from the beginning. All I had to do was relax in His arms!

Just imagine how much less stressful my life would be if I would let Him handle the little details all the time, if I were to always let Him take care of my worries and concerns, if I would remember that it's "*Not by might nor by power...*" but by the Spirit of the Living God!  
(Zechariah 4:6)



## Chapter 5: JUST WHO IS GOING TO BE CARING FOR ME?

*“The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father’s household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give this land’—he will send his angel before you....” (Genesis 24:7)*

We have all experienced the fact that those who serve us can either make or break a venture. Take, for example, the conductor who comes through the coaches of trains in Europe to check tickets. The conductors who smile and are pleasant go a long ways towards making the trip more pleasant, whereas the ones who simply demand your tickets tend to leave a bad taste in the mouth.

In the same way, medical professionals can either make or break a medical experience. If you were to ask me what my ideal would be for the healthcare personnel who would care for me, I would have summed it up in three words: Competent, caring and professional.

The problem was, from the moment I found the lump in my breast, I knew I wouldn’t be able to “hand-pick” my medical professionals. I would literally be at the mercy of many, perhaps even hundreds of them. Would any of them fit my ideal?

Some of you will likely scratch your heads in wonder that I would let such a tiny concern bother me. I *did* have good reason for my apprehension, however. Simply stated, I work in health care. As a Speech-Language pathologist, I know many, wonderful, caring healthcare professionals; but I also know one or two who wouldn’t fall in that category. I can personally testify that the bedside manner of the healthcare professionals can either make or break a medical





experience, and I am acutely aware that though patients come to see medical professionals for their expertise, the patient is still the expert of his or her own body. It is the moment we forget this that we are no longer giving our patients top-notch care. Yet so many downplay the patient's own report....

And there was one other little reason for my concern.... It's just that...well, let's put it bluntly: This wasn't exactly a part of my physique that I wished to have bared to the world. Especially not to uncaring professionals, and preferably not to men!

The first stop was my family doctor, and I wasn't particularly worried about this visit. In my opinion, she is the most wonderful doctor in the region, and the fact that she is a "she" helped to ease my discomfort.

When I couldn't get an immediate appointment with her, I accepted one with the nurse practitioner. This didn't particularly bother me either. I had met this nurse practitioner before, and I also knew her to be a caring professional.

My next stop would be Radiology, where I would have a mammogram. From reports I had heard, this wouldn't be the most pleasant experience in the world, and I couldn't stop thoughts of "What if the technician isn't caring?" and "What if she wasn't gentle?" from crossing my mind. And of course the biggest concern was, "What if she isn't a 'she' at all, but a 'he'?"

I gave it to God.

The x-ray technician who did my mammogram had the knack for putting people immediately at ease. She told me in advance everything that I could expect, she took my sore left shoulder into account and modified her procedures to maintain my comfort, and she even



empathized with me when the test proved to be true to its description: Not the most pleasant in the world!

The X-ray technician who did my ultrasound was also a woman. She was quiet, but very nice. And quiet was okay for this particular test. After all, an ultrasound isn't invasive, and it doesn't hurt!

When I left the hospital that morning, I felt that I had been adequately cared for. I knew that God had placed me in the hands of competent, caring health professionals, and for that, I was grateful.

Next came the needle biopsy under ultrasound. Who would do this test?

After talking to a friend who had recently gone through a needle biopsy of her thyroid, I knew that this would also not be a pleasant medical procedure, and I again realized that the medical personnel would have the power to either make this procedure either bearable or even more unpleasant.

The ultrasound technician this time was of a bubbly personality, likeable from the first introduction. She put me immediately at ease, and then she told me exactly what to expect, even giving me tips for dealing with the disconcerting “retort” of the biopsy gun.

I had a momentary jolt of concern to learn that it would actually be the radiologist doing the biopsy instead of her. Especially when the x-ray technician referred to this doctor as a “he”. But God had it all under control. The radiologist was also very professional and personable, leaving me with no doubt that I was in good, competent, professional hands, even though the procedure hurt a lot more than everyone said it would!



My next stop was back to see my family doctor. I am afraid that had I not gone through this cancer experience, I might never have known how deeply she cares for her patients. She cleared her evening schedule when she saw I was to come in. She invited me into her personal office instead of the regular examining room, and she couldn't have broken the news in any fashion that would have made me feel more comfortable. Imagine my surprise, when at the end of her spiel, she asked if there was anything she could do for me.

"I don't know," I said, still in shock from the news. "What kind of thing can you do for me?"

"I could tell Rob if you want me to!"

I nodded. Yes, that would be helpful. My husband needed to find this out from someone with a medical background who could field his many questions. It would help him to better accept the situation.

My doctor then proceeded to call him personally. She invited him to come to her office where she spent about two hours with us, answering our questions and giving us God-sent advice.

Is anyone surprised that the surgeon I was referred to was also professional, personable and caring? That she made me feel immediately at ease? I am sure that she was literally hand-picked by God Himself to meet my needs.

In thinking back over these experiences, I am reminded of Genesis 24:7: *"The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'—he will send his angel before you...."* (Gen 24:7) Being surrounded by competent medical professionals is



such an important thing when you are facing something as ominous as cancer. It is unfortunate that we need to worry about such things, but the good news is this: Our unchanging God is *still* in the business of *sending His angels before us and clearing the paths!* He knows who we need to see, and when and why, and we can trust Him explicitly! All we have to do is relax on the Train, ever knowing that our “conductors” have been hand-picked by the Train Driver Himself!



## Chapter 6: ULTIMATE REST

*"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philipeans 4:19)*

One thing I have noticed in recent years is that traveling by train in Europe costs more than it used to. As a student 30 years ago, I remember using the train because it was the only thing I could afford. If train tickets had been as expensive then as they are now, the price would have put train travel completely out of my very limited budget. Especially the time the money my parents sent went to Argentina instead of Austria!

We would learn, however, that there are still ways to travel by train in Belgium without spending a fortune. There are 10-ride passes, for example, and student discounts that my boys were eligible for; and this past summer, there was a summer special: You could travel anywhere in Belgium for just 7 euros per person.

In the same way I was disappointed to learn that train travel in Europe is more expensive than it was 30 years ago, there are many things in life that do not turn out the way we expect them too. It is often said that the only constant is change, and God's Train Ride through breast cancer was no different. Would God's Train have 10-ride passes, student discounts, and summer specials? I sure hoped so, for the day of my needle biopsy was here, and I wasn't looking forward to it.

Every day since finding the lump, I had been clinging to God's promise that this was nothing but a "test". Though I knew in my heart at the time that I had breast cancer, I interpreted



God's promise to mean that the lump would just mysteriously vanish. When it didn't, and I was scheduled for the needle biopsy, I continued to pray, claiming my interpretation of God's original promise. I was sure it would be gone the morning of the procedure, and when I went in, they would find nothing to biopsy!

Unfortunately, this wasn't what God meant when He promised me a good final outcome, and when I awoke on July 7, the day of my scheduled biopsy, the lump was still there.

I have to admit that I was a bit annoyed at God. He had promised a good outcome from this trial. Why wasn't He coming through for me?

When I opened my Bible that morning, I read a very interesting story.

The setting was the Wilderness of Sin, the timing, just a few days after the incredible exodus from Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. We find the children of Israel grumbling and complaining: *"Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."* (Ex 16:1-3)

We could be quite harsh on the Children of Israel at this point. We could say, "Have you already forgotten how God so miraculously brought you out of Egypt? Don't you realize that the God who could do all THAT is big enough to provide food for you in the wilderness?"

I realized then that I was no different. I know God's provision is real, yet so often I turn around and complain that a certain prayer hasn't been answered the way I want it to be. In fact, isn't that what I had doing right then?

God was patient with Israel. He told them, *"Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them,*



*whether they will walk in My law or not."* (Ex 16:4-5 NKJV) There were a few stipulations, however. First, the people were only supposed to gather enough for one day, and any leftovers would be full of maggots by the next. Secondly, there would be one day of the week, the "preparation day", when the people were supposed to gather twice as much bread because the bread wouldn't fall the following day, on the Sabbath: *"And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."* (Exodus 16:5 NKJV) Sure enough, on the seventh day, there was no bread, and the leftover bread from the "preparation day" was still fresh.

Unfortunately, not everyone believed that their left-over bread would still be good, and they went out to gather bread on the seventh day. They would go hungry, but not because God hadn't provided: *"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none."* (E 16:27)

So what was the purpose of no bread falling on the Sabbath day?

God had many important lessons to teach Israel, but the one God brought to my mind that morning was this: He wanted Israel to learn that He was their provision, whether the manna fell or not! He wanted them to learn that even when His provision didn't seem to be present, they could still depend on Him. His provision would simply look different than they had anticipated!

That was also the message God wanted me to hear that morning before my needle biopsy. He wanted me to know that just because I didn't "see" His provision the way I had expected to see it, just because the tumor hadn't just "vanished", this didn't mean God's provision wasn't there. I needed to continue to cling to His promise and let Him be my provision every step of the way. After all, He never promised me the tumor would vanish. He only promised that the final outcome would be good!



Later that morning, as I dressed for work, I was overwhelmed with the feeling that I should wear a scarf. I almost didn't do it. It was too hot for a scarf. In the end, however, because it went well with my outfit, I put one on; and then I proceeded to carry God's message for me in my heart as I went through that biopsy.

God came through. He surrounded me with caring medical professionals, He gave me courage, and He also gave me the strength I hadn't anticipated needing. You see, I had been warned that I would hear a sharp sound, like the retort of a staple gun, but I would feel no pain. Their report was 100% right when it came to the sound. And 100% wrong about the pain! The actual biopsy felt for all the world like a staple had been shot into my chest!

I had been told there would be three different samples taken, and though the first one was painful, I heaved a sigh of relief when the pain waned in just a couple of minutes. I could do this two more times!

The pain from the second cut was far sharper, however, and five minutes afterwards, I still felt like I had been "stapled". "God," I prayed, "I don't think I can do this again! Help me!"

The pain again began to subside.

Then came the third cut. This one hurt much worse than the other two, and two hours later, I was still in pain. It was also the last procedure. It didn't matter that the pain didn't subside right away! I thanked God for that, and also for giving me the strength to get through the process.

Having not anticipated the pain, I certainly hadn't anticipated the amount of bruising and bandaging that ran up my chest after this little procedure. I looked like I had been beaten up. How could I return to work to see those last few patients looking like this?





That's when I remembered the scarf, the one God told me to wear. Sure enough, it completely hid the battle scars. God truly had taken care of even the smallest details. Though His miraculous provision hadn't appeared quite the same as what I had expected, it was there nonetheless!

Whatever it is we are facing, let's remember the manna in the wilderness. God will provide. Period. There will be times when it looks like His provision has run out; but in these times it will just be that His provision has changed forms. We can rest in the assurance that there is going to be enough for tomorrow, even when the expected manna doesn't fall, and sometimes His "unexpected" ways are even more beautiful than the ones we anticipated!

Oh, and when the Train ride looks like it's going to "cost" more than we anticipated, let's remember to watch for God's specials!



## Chapter 7: TELLING THE FAMILY

*“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

(Philippians 4:19 NIV)

It is very difficult for a train to move through an area without making its presence known. You can hear it from blocks away, you can smell it coming, and if you pay careful attention, you can even feel its rumble – to say nothing of it blocking traffic!

In much the same way, I knew that the fact that I had cancer would be impossible to hide from my family. I wouldn't be able to keep them in the dark on this one. Besides, I knew they needed to know; but oh, I didn't want to tell them!

You see, I like to suffer in silence. I hate it when people hover over me, asking me what is wrong, trying to help. When I have a major problem, I like to put all my attention into resolving it. There is just no thought left over for dealing with other people's reactions. I had no idea how my family would react to the news. Would they support me in the ways I needed to be supported? Or would I end up having to support them as well as myself?

I was particularly concerned about telling Rob. Besides being a worrier by nature, he tends to be a bit of a “mother hen”. I anticipated that he would try to baby me, and I didn't want any part of it.

I wasn't quite as concerned about telling Donovan. He was blessed with an eternally optimistic outlook on life. Would this be one of those times when he couldn't tap into that optimism? He had a major exam on August the 7<sup>th</sup>, and in September he would begin his second



year in a difficult engineering program. Would this interfere with his ability to apply himself to his studies?

Telling Darien was another story altogether. He tends to hold things inside, making it necessary to guess what he is thinking. He is also a fixer. We don't call him "MacGyver" for nothing! If there is a problem he can't fix, he has difficulties accepting this, and everything else he puts his mind to will suffer. He would be leaving soon for Northern Ontario, and upon his return, he would be beginning his final year of high school. He didn't need anything distracting him from his best!

Finally, there was my mother. After losing both parents to cancer, she had become a widow at age 62 and had lost my younger brother 6 years later. How would she deal with the fact that I had cancer? I just couldn't see any positive outcomes.

In the end, my doctor told my husband herself, and he took it calmly. He had anticipated something like this when the doctor called him to her office, and he had used the 20 minute drive to come to terms with the possibility of a bad diagnosis. When we returned home from the doctor's office, he didn't try to baby me. Instead he came downstairs with a word of encouragement in his hand.

My doctor suggested that I not tell my children or my mother about the cancer until I had seen the surgeon. Her reasoning made sense: I wouldn't have any answers for them anyway, so why not wait until I had some? I followed her advice, and we left for Europe with only my husband being aware of the situation. Before leaving however, I had begun to receive emails about how sugar feeds cancer and how lemons have anti-carcinogenic properties. I promptly went off all sugar and began eating lemons every day. This did not escape the notice of my perceptive 17-year-old. "Mom, you're in Europe -- Home of the best pastries, the best chocolate



and the best ice cream in the world! Why aren't you eating sugar?" And another time, "Mom, you hate lemons! Why are you eating lemons every day?"

Somehow he didn't buy my feeble attempts at an explanation....

We would later learn that Darien proceeded to send his brother a Facebook message from Europe, asking him to do research on mom's "peculiar" symptoms. The product of that research? Apparently, according, to the internet sites that Donovan visited, not eating sugar and eating lemons can mean that you are pregnant. My poor teens had to go through the next two weeks worried that they would have to live with what they interpreted to be the ultimate shame of having a baby in the house!

My appointment with the surgeon was on the first Wednesday after we had returned from Europe on Monday. I wanted to tell both my boys that same day, but Darien was gone on a camping trip until Thursday. I did the next best thing: I invited Donovan to take a walk with me.

Friends, please know that I had been praying about the reactions of my family since before I even heard the dreaded words from my doctor's mouth. Should I have been surprised that Donovan took the news well? That he promised to leave the outcome in God's hands? That he proceeded to go through his evening and week and into his test as if he hadn't a worry in the world?

I told my mom Thursday evening. You can believe me when I say that the drive to her house was thoroughly coated in prayer. Besides the bomb I was about to drop on her, she had received some bad financial news that day. I just knew she would be an emotional wreck before I even opened my mouth.



As I prayed about how to break the news to her, God showed me, step by step, exactly what to say and when. I followed His outline explicitly. First of all, I told my mother about taking the train in Europe and how much stress we experienced when renting the car. I then suggested to her that just like we have the choice of taking the car or the train to travel through Europe, we have the choice to either try to drive ourselves through our problems or to give them to God and let Him do the driving.

She understood the imagery, and when I asked her to take the Train through her financial difficulties, she not only agreed, but stated that she had already given it all to God.

I thanked God for this, but my bomb hadn't yet been dropped.... "Mom," I said, "I now have a favor to ask of you."

She looked at me sharply.

"I need you to promise to stay on the Train with me about something else as well."

She promised, but I could read the worry in her eyes.

I proceeded to tell her everything that had transpired since the day God told me I would go through troubled times, and when I finally made my announcement, she simply nodded her head. "I already knew in my heart you had cancer," she stated. "I just didn't know what kind!"

My chin dropped to my chest. "But...how would you have known?"

Apparently my boys had shared their suspicions about their mother's "funny" behavior, as well as their diagnosis of pregnancy. Having a little more medical and world knowledge than they did, she figured out the truth and had already accepted it!



As I took this all in, I realized that God had been at work behind the scenes the entire time. While I had been so worried about how “I” was going to help her through this situation, He had already taken care of the problem!

We prayed together then, and I left to pick Darien up from his camping trip. Just one more hurdle to cross!

I prayed about this one, too. I prayed as he got into the car, I prayed as we exchanged pleasantries about his trip, and I prayed as I broached the looming topic. Once again, God told me exactly what to say. It went something like this: “I hear you are suspicious about my behavior lately.”

“Yup!”

A one-word response! How typical of this particular teen.

“Well I wanted you to know that I saw another specialist yesterday.”

“About your shoulder?” The question was hopeful.

“No.”

“Oh.”

I could hear the disappointment in his voice. “But now that I’ve seen this one, I am free to tell you the whole story.”

Though it was dark in the car, I could feel his anxiety raising.

“First of all, I want to reassure you that I’m not pregnant!”

“Whew!” he said, and then we both had a good laugh about his “diagnosis”. When I finally made my announcement, the tension had already been broken. In fact, if I’m not



mistaken, he may have been a little bit relieved, because when I asked him whether he would have preferred pregnancy or breast cancer, his response was a bit slow in coming: “Well, let’s just say I’m glad you’re not pregnant!”

Darien then went on to ask a few very good, well-thought-out questions, ones that you wouldn’t have expected from someone so young; but then what I had been dreading happened: He got really quiet.

I didn’t know what to do. How can you help someone who just closes down? Again God told me what to do, and the words flowed: “I need you to promise me four things.”

“What?”

We had arrived back home at this point, and I could see from the light of the garage door opener that there was pain in his stance, that he hurt inside. “First, you have to promise!”

He slowly nodded his head.

“I need you to promise me that this will NOT disrupt your plans to go up north next week, and that you will not let it interfere with your experience with the native kids.”

He hesitated, and then as if relieved by the thought, he nodded. “Okay.”

“I also need you to promise me that you will let God worry about this.” I then proceeded to tell him of the promise God had already given me, ending up the short story with another request: “You promise?”

Again, he slowly nodded his head. “I promise.”

“Next I need you to promise that you won’t go out and do a bunch of research.”

I could feel his resistance with this. Researching is his way of dealing with trouble.



“There is tons of research on breast cancer,” I continued, parroting what my doctor had told me. “99% of it will be irrelevant to my case. We have to find out what the tumor is and how far it has spread before any relevant research can be done.”

It seemed to make sense to him, because his head nod came a bit quicker that time. “And what else?”

“I need for you to promise me that you will talk about how you are feeling.”

That was the kicker, and I waited with baited breath. When there was no immediate response, I pressed, “I need you to not hold your feelings inside. I need you to talk about them.”

His next question came as a total surprise: “Is it okay if I tell Pastor Rick?”

It had never crossed my mind that he would want to tell his youth pastor, but I had no objections.

“Is it okay if I meet Pastor Rick for lunch tomorrow?”

Suddenly I understood. My son’s way of talking over his feelings was to make a lunch date with his youth pastor. What better person to turn to! Tears came to my eyes and my throat tightened up. “Of course,” I breathed.

Things were a little lighter at this point, but I could still sense a heavy sadness over my son. “So,” I pushed, “what are you thinking?”

“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. “I think I just need time to process it.”

Yes, that would be Darien. And I already knew that with only a little encouragement, he would take some private time with God to do just that. “Will you promise me to take a walk with God tomorrow so you can talk it over with Him?”





“That’s five promises!”

“So, I can’t count.”

He smiled. “I promise!”

When I returned from work the next day, my 17-year-old was back to his normal, happy self. “What happened?” I asked.

“I had a good talk with God,” he acknowledged, “and I talked with Pastor Rick.”

“You feel better now?”

“Yup!” And then he gave me that slow, shy smile that is also so characteristic of him.

In the end, I don’t know if waiting to tell my family was the right thing to do or not. If I had told them from the beginning, I would have saved my boys the worry of having to deal with the thought of having a baby in the house. I firmly believe, however, that the little pregnancy “scare” was just God’s sense of humor coming through as He proved yet again that He knew how to make good come out of bad situations.

It is interesting that upon hearing the news, each of my family members asked my permission to tell someone. Donovan wanted to tell his girlfriend. My mother wanted to tell her best friend. My husband wanted to send out an email to our prayer chain, and Darien wished to tell his youth pastor. Each one of us deals with things in a very different way. We all have differing needs. I only praise God that He put the right person in the lives of each of my family members so that each one would have someone to share with. It’s just another example of my Train Driver taking care of everything.

But then, who’s surprised?



## Chapter 8: THE DECISION

*“...hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” (Jude 23)*

Decisions, decisions, decisions.... We could take the noon train, but it had a stopover and wouldn't arrive until 6:00 pm. Alternatively, we could take the non-stop train that left at 4:00 and arrived at 7:30. Our decision would most definitely influence how we spent our day.

In the same way, life is filled with decisions, and each one we make will affect our future. For better...or for worse!

There appears to be two types of people in the world when it comes to decision making. First there are those who come to a decision quickly, sometimes without exploring all the pros and cons, and once the decision is made, they tend to not give it a second thought. The second class of decision-makers are those who thoroughly look at all the pros and cons before coming to a decision. They are prone to agonizing about the process and then questioning it once the decision has been made. They are also known to change their minds often.

I am definitely of the first group, and I tend to become rather impatient with those in the second. Nonetheless, when it came to my medical care for the cancer, I was happy enough to not be given many decisions to make. When you are facing this kind of a diagnosis, the last thing you want to do is to have to make decisions every step of the way!

There was, however, one little decision that was left completely up to me: to have a lumpectomy followed by 20 sessions of radiation therapy, or to have a total mastectomy with no radiation.



I was blown away by the fact that this was my choice to make. I mean, weren't the doctors the experts on what will result in most optimal treatment outcomes? Why should this be MY decision? How was I to know what was right for me?

I have to admit that up until that point, I hadn't even considered the concept of a total mastectomy, and just hearing the words from the surgeon's mouth sent shivers up my spine. Was my cancer really so severe that they would have to take the entire breast? For that tiny lump?

I tried to get my surgeon to tell me what I should do, but all she would say was that it was my decision to make. And since she was so insistent that I could choose, I made my decision then and there: I would preserve my breast at all costs. I would go for the lumpectomy. Oh, I would talk it over with Rob, of course, and I would pray about it; but I already knew God's response as well as that of my husband: They would agree with me, because it was, after all, MY decision to make!

And somehow, the decision to have a lumpectomy made me feel a little more feminine.

I went home that evening and sat down with Rob. "Here is the choice I have to make." I then explained the two options, and I fully expected that he, like me, would want the breast to be saved.

Initially, it appeared that he agreed: "Hands down," he said, "that's a no-brainer."

I nodded. This was just the confirmation I needed.

But he wasn't finished: "You should have the total mastectomy so that you don't have to go through radiation therapy."

It felt like a rock had dropped about 90 feet to land in the pit of my stomach.



“Listen,” he said, sensing my change in mood. “It is your decision, and I’ll support you no matter what you do; but so many cancer patients I’ve been in contact with tell me about the bad experiences they have had with radiation therapy. You already know that chemotherapy will likely be a necessary step. I just think that if you can in any way minimize the amount of post-operative cancer treatment, then you should do it.”

It did kind of make sense. All along, I, too, had been dreading the follow-up cancer treatments even more than the actual surgery.... But I didn’t want a mastectomy!

“Besides, if they take the whole thing,” he continued, “then there is less likelihood of them missing small cancer cells that aren’t big enough to be detected with mammograms and ultrasound.”

Well, that kind of made sense, too. Nonetheless, that rock wouldn’t budge from my stomach. “Wouldn’t you miss it?”

He shook his head. “I would miss YOU much more if this were to end up taking your life. It’s YOU I love, not any particular part of your body.”

For some reason, I couldn’t see the picture as clearly as he could.

“Tell me what you are thinking,” he invited.

“It’s kind of like losing a leg, isn’t it?”

He shrugged. “But if that leg is diseased, and if it could end up spreading that disease throughout your body, wouldn’t you want it gone?”

It was at that moment in time that I realized I would much rather lose a leg than a breast. I nodded, however, and promised to pray about it.



And I did. At 1:00 in the morning when I awoke from a nightmare about a one-breasted monster wearing my face! Sensing there would be no more sleep until the issue was resolved, I stumbled to the living room and turned on the light. “God?” I said, “You don’t think I need a total mastectomy, do you?”

It wasn’t really a question. It was more of a statement, and it left me haunted by the idea that I wasn’t really asking for advice.

Needless to say, there was no answer.

“God?” I whispered again, “You really DON’T think I need the mastectomy...do You?”

A strange question immediately flashed into my mind: *Why don’t you want a total mastectomy?*

Well, that was a no-brainer! Because I didn’t want to lose that part of my body!

*Why not?*

“God?” I whispered, “Don’t You know?”

The thoughts flowed freely then: *You don’t want one because you are afraid of looking funny. You’re afraid of being less of a woman. You’re afraid of what people will think.*

Yup. God knows me pretty well! “Is it so wrong?” I whimpered.

*What is your motivation?*

That’s when I realized that all my hesitations were propelled by one single motivating force: *Vanity!*

“But God,” I whined, “is it so wrong to want to keep my breast?”

There was no answer. Again. Just stone silence.



Once again, I wasn't really asking God for His advice. I was simply asking Him to approve my plan....

"I'm sorry," I repented. And I truly was. The tears flowed freely then. "God, I do want to know what is best, what Your will is. Please, show me!"

I was impressed to pick up my Bible then.

"Where do you want me to read?" I whispered.

*Jude!*

Jude! That little book? I was astounded by the response. What possible message did God have for me in the book of Jude?

I dutifully turned to the back of my Bible. "The book isn't very long, Lord," I whispered. "Where do you want me to start reading?"

Again, I was overcome with the urge to start reading right there, where my eyes fell, right at a section entitled, "A Call to Preserve".

A-ha! Just what I wanted to hear! "See, Lord?" I cried. "You were just giving me a lesson in vanity! You really DO want me to have the lumpectomy, don't You?"

*Read further!*

I didn't like the implications of that, but I dutifully let my eyes fall to vs. 17-22 of Jude:

*"But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.*



*Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."*

I swallowed. The entire passage was about preserving the purity of the church, doing whatever it took to get rid of corruption. Did this mean....

No. Surely not!

Or did it? Did it mean that I needed to do whatever I could to ensure that the "corruption", the cancer, was all gone? Did it mean I needed to take some "drastic" measures? Did it mean that dreaded "m" word?

My eyes again fell to the last line: *"Hating even the **clothing** stained by **corrupted flesh**"!*

Nothing corrupts flesh like cancer, and I understood then. God was telling me to get rid of all of it. To get rid of anything that had even touched it. He was telling me to have the total mastectomy.

Naturally, I asked God for confirmation. At least four more times. And He gave it. Freely and lovingly.

Interestingly, all my friends and most of my close family firmly supported my decision. After hearing my reasoning, they all confirmed, "I think I would likely do the same in your shoes!" My mother's comment was perhaps the most priceless: "You don't have to worry about what you'll look like! You can just stick a sock in your bra!"

I had only a brief moment of indecision. My surgeon called Rob and I in for a special appointment and reviewed the two procedures with us before I made my final decision. I sensed



that she felt the mastectomy was overkill, and that made me begin to doubt. After all, was I going against my medical doctor's opinion?

That very same morning God had given me a very special message, one which I didn't fully understand until that moment in time: Stand firm in your convictions, no matter what, for this is truly what is best for you.

I did stand firm; and just because He knew I needed it, God surrounded me with medical professionals on the day of my surgery who also vocalized that they thought I was making the right decision. Even the home care nurse who cared for me after surgery voiced the same opinion.

What would have happened if I had decided to go for the lumpectomy?

Twenty radiation sessions, for one thing. And beyond that? I have no idea; but I can be assured that God always knows what is best. Period! Whatever I missed out on by having the total mastectomy was well worth missing out on.

God knows our fears and our weaknesses, and He will send us whatever confirmation and comfort we need to hold firm to His will. Our job is to be open to His leading, His comfort and His support. Our job is to *ask* God's advice, and not just *tell* Him what we want!





## Chapter 9: THE MEASURE OF WOMANLINESS

*"...for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1*

*Samuel 16:7)*

I could perhaps be accused of being a bit nostalgic, but I miss the caboose. There was something whimsical about the little car that used to be found at the end of every train.

I'm not sure just when the caboose stopped being a habitual part of a train, and I certainly have no idea why it happened. After all, didn't the caboose serve an important role? How can trains continue to operate without them? I just don't get it. Things shouldn't have to get by with missing parts!

Despite the fact that God had told me to have a total mastectomy, I still didn't get that, either. Why should I have to go through life with a missing part?

You see, my concerns about having a total mastectomy didn't just disappear the instant God's will was revealed. In fact, they mushroomed in my imagination until it was all I could think about.

Perhaps I had never fully realized before how much that particular body part meant to me. I had taken a lot of teasing throughout my life for my lack of size on top, and I just couldn't seem to imagine going through life with even less. The thought was more than I could bear at 1:00 in the morning—or at any other time, for that matter! I must admit that I spent the next few hours grieving.



Counsellors tell us that there is a specific cycle that we go through when we are faced with loss. This includes denial, anger, depression, and then finally, acceptance. We are told that everyone goes through each of these stages, some to a greater degree than others, and this is not only perfectly normal but also a necessary part of coming to healthy acceptance of a less-than-ideal situation.

Counsellors also tell us that a potential problem with coming to acceptance lies in the fact that we can get stuck in one of these stages. Was this my problem? Was I “stuck” in a stage? If so, which one?

As I sat on that couch, my Bible still opened to the book of Jude and my mind still open to God’s Spirit, I realized that I was, indeed, stuck. I had already gone through denial. That’s what I had been doing up until I finally heard God’s voice and accepted His will. Now I was angry. I was angry at...God! Angry at a God who would allow me to have breast cancer in the first place. Angry at a God who refused to agree with me that a lumpectomy would be the best treatment. Angry at a God who would allow me to go through the rest of my life missing an important body part!

With my feelings now defined, I felt free to cry out: “Why, God? You told me when this started that in the end, I was going to be okay. But now I have to lose my breast! This isn’t what I signed on for!”

God let me rave for a few moments. He knew I needed it. Besides, over my ranting I wouldn’t have heard His voice anyway. Only after having shed an embarrassing number of tears and angry words did I finally ran out of steam.

“God?” I whispered. “I guess that ‘being okay’ didn’t mean being 100% whole, did it?”



I could almost sense God smiling now.

“I’m sorry!” I said. “I did ask You what to do. It isn’t exactly fair of me to get mad at You for telling me, is it?”

With that, the last remnants of anger dissipated completely, only to be replaced by the depression. As I slumped back onto the couch, exhausted by my outbursts, the image of the one-breasted monster once again marched through my vivid imagination. “I know, God,” I said. “You ALWAYS help me through, but how am I going to be able to face the world looking even funnier than ever? How am I going to be able to wear my clothes? How am I going to be able to face my patients? My family? Go to church? Go shopping? How am I going to...?”

*Child?*

“Yes, Lord?”

And the words of a familiar Psalm began to flow into my mind: ***“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*** (Psalm 139:13-16 NIV)

Yes, I recognized the words. I had even memorized them in the past. “Lord?” I whispered. “Are you saying that this IS the person You created me to be? Before I was conceived, You knew I would have to have a mastectomy? You allowed this path for me, because You knew it was the best one for me?”

*Child? Do you trust Me enough to bring you through this?*



“Of course, Lord,” I blubbered. “But I just don’t see how I’m going to have anything to wear. How am I going to be able to face my patients? My family? Go to church? Go shopping? How am I going to....”

*Child?*

Why did that loving--but rather annoying--voice keep interrupting me?

“Yes, Lord?”

*Do you trust Me enough to bring you through this?*

I hesitated this time. I wanted to repeat myself a third time, but I knew God would only interrupt me again. The words of another familiar verse then flowed through my mind:

*“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; **he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**” (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV)*

Yes. Those were words I use when I help other people through their trials. Why was God throwing them back into my face? “That’s different, Lord!” I reasoned. “That’s speaking of temptation. This isn’t a temptation. It’s something I seem to be *required* to go through!”

I knew, however, as the words exited my mouth, that they were wrong. You see, it’s true the mastectomy isn’t a “temptation”, but the choice to not come to acceptance, the choice to reject God’s comfort and to revel instead in depression IS a temptation! I now had a choice to make. Either I accepted God’s help to bring me out of my depression, or I rejected it. But if I rejected it, then there would be nothing to help me out of my current depressive state!

Then, for the third time, I could hear God’s voice asking me the same question:



*Child, do you trust Me enough to bring you through this?*

“Yeeesss,” I mumbled. Then louder, and with more conviction: “Yes, Lord, I do!” I still wasn’t quite ready to move on to acceptance, however.

*Have you gotten off the Train?*

I sighed as the realization washed over me. I had already committed the entire breast cancer experience into His hands. The aftermath of surgery was part of the trip, too, wasn’t it? “I guess I have, Lord!” I whispered. “In fact, at this moment in time, I don’t even know where the train station is!”

Slowly but surely, over the course of the next few hours, God helped me get back on my Train. He led me to total acceptance.

I would like to say that that was the end of that. And it was. At least for a while.

It wasn’t until after surgery that the grieving returned. I didn’t look at myself in the mirror that the first day. In fact, it wasn’t until the home care nurse came and removed the bandages that I dared look. I wish I could say that I was prepared for what I saw, but I wasn’t. Not at all!

You see, during the night I had spent grieving for my breast, I had actually only been grieving a concept, and I had come to terms with that concept. Now the concept was reality, and that reality was staring me in the face: I WAS that one-breasted monster that I had been haunted by. Yup, I was wearing my OWN face!

I suppose it could be said that the “denial” stage was in place while the bandages were completely hiding the surgical result; but as soon as they came off, I again hit the “anger” stage, followed by the depression. Only this time, the depression lasted several days.



How did I get out of it?

Over time, God helped me to see that for my entire life, I had allowed my value as a woman to be defined by the size of my bust.

This wasn't a completely new idea to me, but in the past, every time God had sent me reassurance that my value had nothing to do with the size of my underwear, I had rejected it. I don't know how many times my husband had told me, "You are beautiful just the way you are! I wouldn't want you ANY other way!" But I just wouldn't believe it. Now, for the first time in my life, I came to realize that my value as a person, and especially my femininity, was completely separate from my bust-size. How much pain I could have saved myself all these years, had I only realized this earlier.

Knowing how much I needed some human reinforcement at that point in my life, God sent in my dear husband. I cannot tell you how relieved I was when he wasn't afraid to look at me, when he said things like, "I'm glad it's gone. No more cancer! No radiation required!" It all helped, and slowly but surely, I came into acceptance. Just like a train runs just fine without the whimsical caboose, I, too, would be just fine without this part of my body.

That feeling of peace with myself, perhaps the first self-acceptance I've ever experienced, has stayed with me. Even through the day when I had a reaction to something in the surgical bra I had been fitted with, and I could no longer wear my prosthesis. I didn't panic. I simply took off the prosthesis and the offending bra and gave the entire problem to God.

I don't yet know what will happen in the end. I am, apparently, a candidate for reconstruction surgery, but whether or not I go that route will depend upon what God tells me. I know that no matter what happens, my God will bring me through victorious.



Oh, and for the first time in my life, I'm not nearly as concerned about what people think about how I look. Hey! Maybe this was part of God's plan from the beginning! If any of you women out there have fallen into the same deadly trap that I did, if you have come to define who you are, your value, your femininity or your womanliness, by your physical appearance, then please take this lesson to heart: Your value is defined by God—not by the size of your bra! The woman with a GG cup is no more feminine than the woman who is AAA. And the AAAs don't have nearly as many upper back problems! Remember, just like you don't have to have a caboose to be a good train, you don't have to have a big bust line, or even two breasts, to be a good woman!



## Chapter 10: THE TALLING OF MY CAR

*"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20)*

We were warned many times during our train ride from Amsterdam to Ostend to not leave luggage unattended, and wherever we were, we made sure to keep a close eye on our belongings. Not everyone was as vigilant, however. We came to a stop in Liege, Belgium, and a large family with about 20 pieces of luggage got off the train. Two minutes later, a lady came running through the coach: "Those people took my suitcase! They have my suitcase!"

I felt sorry for her, but a small part of me couldn't help but think that she should have been more careful with her luggage!

As I think about this, I can't help but wish that this world would be such that we can feel free leaving our luggage unattended. But it isn't. Even on my Train ride through breast cancer, I needed to keep vigilant watch....

Yes, it's true that I had determined to take the Train through the entire breast cancer experience, and for the most part, I was succeeding. But something was definitely wrong. I couldn't put my finger on it, but the closer we came to my surgery date, the more little things began to bother me. It was as if the cancer had used up all my reserves for patience and stress, and there was nothing left over for life's other problems!





Take, for example, the fact that the breakfast dishes would still be in the sink when I got home from work. They shouldn't be there! Both Rob and Darien were out of school for the summer! Why should I have to do the dishes when I was the only one working all day?

Then there was the laundry. Nobody seemed to see it on the line, especially when the rain started! How many days did my laundry get washed twice, once in the washer, and once by the rain?

I knew I was overreacting, but I couldn't seem to stop myself. I tried to be less crabby, and to some degree I succeeded; but little things just wouldn't stop pushing me over the edge! Lord, help me!

Unfortunately, that coveted help didn't seem to arrive. In fact, things only got worse. Like, for example, the day Donovan returned home driving a wreck that had at one time been my beautiful car!

The unusual dry spell and heat we had been experiencing had caused the dry roads to be covered with a thin layer of oil, and when the rains finally came that Saturday afternoon, they became dangerous for hydroplaning. Donovan had driven a friend to a local conservation area for some hiking, and as the car crested a hill, it slipped on the wet oil, careened across the road, and if it hadn't been for the guardrail, it would have continued its rapid descent into the ravine below.

Thanks be to God, Donovan and his friend were unhurt. The car, however, was not so fortunate. Taking the brunt of the blow, the driver's side was completely wrecked. The front end was smashed beyond recognition, the frame was bent, and the driver's door refused to open more than five centimeters. Even the back fender was dented. How the car was still drivable, I'll never



know; but somehow all the lights still worked, and if you could make the fender stop dragging on the front wheel, you could drive slowly for short distances.

I took one look at that mess and I knew in my heart that the cost of professionally repairing the damage was more than the 10 year-old vehicle with 225,000 kms was worth. My faithful little car was totalled!

I should have just been happy the kids were safe, but all I could think about were the glaring problems: How would we all get to work and back with just the use of the only other vehicle? How could we afford to fix or replace this one? How could we afford the steep increase in insurance that would surely ensure? How could....

Needless to say, I spent the rest of the evening completely stressed out by all the “how could” questions, and it wasn’t until the next morning that God was able to finally get my attention enough to focus on His voice:

*You’ve allowed your luggage to slip off the Train!*

“Why no, Lord!” I argued. “I’m not worrying about the cancer. I’m worried about the car! Two totally separate things!”

*You’ve allowed your luggage to slip off the Train!*

That’s when I realized that the Train Ride wasn’t just about cancer. It was about everything in life. My car, for example, was a giant suitcase, and by only paying attention to the cancer, my “suitcase” had been stolen! It was off the train!

Could it be that this was why I had been feeling so irritable? Because on my Train ride, I was only paying attention to the cancer?



I repented then and there. I gave the entire car scenario, along with the rain-washed laundry, the dirty dishes, and everything else I had been stressing about, to Jesus. I got all my luggage back on the Train.

Later that day, I learned that the father and brother of the friend Donovan had been with when the car was wrecked made a hobby of doing body work. They thought they might be able to fix my car. If not completely, they would at least be able to improve its looks and drivability.

I had no idea how they would manage this, I had no idea how the car would get to them, I had no idea how long we would be without a car or how we would survive while it was away being fixed; but I kept that suitcase on the Train.

Somehow we limped through that first Monday. Donovan drove the wreck to work, and I took the other car. That's the day I would learn that my surgery would be on Thursday of that same week.

Wait! That meant we only had to limp through a couple more days, and then I would be off work and we wouldn't even need the second car.

Our friends were able to find a car of the same make, model and year in a nearby junk yard. Its back end was damaged beyond repair, but the front end was intact. We left our car at their home on Saturday after my surgery, and less than a week later, we got the message: The car is ready!

Right on time, too. Though my surgery had taken away any need for a car during the week it had been gone, numerous medical appointments for the family were scheduled for the following week. The second car would again be needed.



Then there was the cost. Unbelievable! We only paid \$370, and as this was less than our insurance deductible, we didn't have to report anything to insurance. My son's driving record was preserved, and there would be no increase in rates.

All my original worries, resolved.

God wasn't finished. I was prepared for the fact that the car wouldn't be all one color anymore. After all, what were the chances that the junked car was silver? And since I knew they didn't have the proper equipment to straighten the frame, I was prepared for the fact that the frame would still be a bit bent.

God doesn't do things halfway, however. The junk yard car was silver, just like mine. My car was still all one color; and the frame had apparently been bent at a spot where the metal was the thinnest, and the men were able to straighten it with the use of a rubber mallet.

To me these things were like frosting on a cake. Unnecessary, but oh, so nice!

God STILL wasn't finished. This particular model of car looks great with a hood protector, but as they are expensive and primarily cosmetic, I had never purchased one. Imagine my delight when I saw that my repaired car now had a hood protector!

As I sat back and reflected on this, it occurred to me that God was trying to teach me an important lesson. When I keep *all* my luggage on the Train, leaving *all* my problems in His hands, He doesn't only fix them, He throws in a few bonuses as well!

But then, isn't this what the Bible means when it says: "*And we know that **all things work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*" (Rom 8:28) and "*Now to Him who is able to do **exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works in us*" (Ephesians 3:20)?



## Chapter 11: GOD’S REASSURANCES

*“The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26 NKJV)*

Many of the major train stations in Europe now have automated ticket machines in addition to their manned ticket windows. I don’t know about you, but I prefer to buy my ticket from a human being. Being new to the region, I don’t always know exactly which train I need to take. I rely on the expertise of the train personnel to direct me; and sometimes, even when I’ve been given a clear travel plan, I still like to ask, just to have the reassurance that I’m where I need to be!

It is the same as we go through life. I am very, very happy that we have a “manned” ticket booth—that God is not a distant entity, but rather, He desires to communicate with us, to provide us with assurance that we’re on the right track!

Just how much assurance do we really need? I mean, Jesus gave up His post in Heaven to come down and make a way for Salvation. Shouldn’t that be assurance enough of God’s unfailing love? And what about all the stories in the Bible? Shouldn’t those be enough? Why is it, then, that we so often find ourselves entangled in the thralls of doubt?

I think of the story of the disciples, caught up in a terrible storm at sea, and I have to wonder: Why were they so afraid? They, of all people, had personally witnessed hundreds of miracles. They should have known they would be okay! Surely God’s patience has its limits!



Then there's me. I certainly had no reason to doubt. I had personally experienced the unthinkable: The God of the universe had given me forewarning of what would come, and He had lovingly told me, before I even knew there was trouble on the way, that it would be only a test. That should be all the assurance I needed, right?

Let's just say that I hoped so. You see, I know my tendency to doubt, and I figured that after receiving such a powerful promise, God would expect me to just take a stand in faith.

Fortunately for the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, God is far more loving than that. After dealing with humanity for thousands of years, He well knows our tendency to second guess. When the disciples woke Jesus up, He patiently calmed the sea, and it is only after the fact that they were given the gentle rebuke: *"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"* (Mark 4:40 NKJV)

God's patience didn't run out with the calming of the storm at sea, either. He still had plenty left over for me! Without me even having to ask, He began to regularly feed me reassurances of His initial promise.

It all began with the sermons. Every Sunday, beginning with the Sunday just before I found the lump, our pastor's sermons were on hope and encouragement. Take June 3, for example. His main point was that when we give the overwhelming problems to God, we change from being overwhelmed by our problems to being overwhelmed by the miracles. Then there was July 8. The pastor's main point was this: Even though we suffer, we **WILL** overcome! July 14's sermon was entitled "Freedom from Discouragement", and the list goes on to include many others I didn't take notes on!



It wasn't just the sermons either. Through the online prayer ministry coordinated out of our home, we often receive devotional submissions to be published through our newsletters. For several weeks, between May and July, every devotional that came through my email box seemed to be on the same subject: Hope in times of trouble. In the same way, every time I picked up my Bible, the story was one that focused on victory.

Was God trying to get my attention or what?

I truly didn't know what it all meant, however.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, would have understood my feelings. After hearing the prophecies proclaimed by the shepherds, by Anna and Simon in the temple, and after hearing what Jesus Himself said after He was found in the temple teaching the priests, she didn't completely understand it all either; but we are told that she, *"treasured all these things in her heart."* (Luke 2:19, 51), knowing that one day it would all become clear. That's exactly what I did. I didn't have all the dots connected yet, but I treasured the words in my heart, knowing that one day I would understand.

Then came the day when I officially learned that I had breast cancer. I understood, and I was thankful to God for sending me all the reassurance.

He still wasn't finished reassuring me, however. Rob was given a message for me the day we learned the official diagnosis. It was a text from 1 Peter 5:10: *"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself **restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**"*

Now how much more encouraging could a message be?



Then there were the encouragements we received from prayer warriors. I began receiving hundreds of encouraging emails from all over the world. I treasured each one. I printed them up and kept them for moments when I was feeling discouraged.

August 12, the Sunday before my surgery, our pastor's sermon focused yet again on combating discouragement. He emphasized the point that when the devil discourages us, God will always encourage us in one of four different ways:

1. Through the partnership of friends
2. Through the promise of presence
3. Through the promise of protection
4. Through the promise of power.

I contemplated this as the pastor made his closing remarks. I couldn't help but realize that God had, indeed, done each one of these things for me. He had surrounded me with a partnership of wonderful friends and family; throughout the weeks since May 7 His presence had been so real to me that it was almost tangible; He had not ceased to give me promise after promise of a wonderful outcome; and with Him taking care of all the little details, such as timing my appointments around work hours and setting me up with the best possible medical professionals, I sensed His protection all the way.

The pastor then turned and scanned the audience until his eyes met mine. "No matter what it is you are suffering," he said, "Be it cancer...or sore shoulders...or whatever it is, you have hope! There is NO REASON to NOT keep on going!"

I couldn't stop the tears from flowing down my cheeks. You see, my pastor didn't know what I was going through.





*Wait, you say. Darien told his youth pastor. Wouldn't he have told his senior pastor?*

Perhaps, but I would later learn that Darien's youth pastor had kept the information confidential. Besides, even he didn't know about my torn rotator cuff. No, this was most definitely God, speaking directly to me through my pastor.

That very same day, my mother gave me a little present. It was a plush toy, a sheep holding a tiny lamb. I recognized it. It was, in fact, something I had given to her before one of her many surgeries, and its purpose was to remind her that our Good Shepherd holds us in the palms of His hands no matter what. Now she was giving it back to me to remind me of the same thing!

After all that, I truly had no reason to be discouraged. Nonetheless, when I received the call the very next day about my surgical date, I lost it. You see, up until that point, the upcoming surgery had just been a concept. Yes, I wanted to get it over and done with as quickly as possible, but it was all just a vague idea. There was nothing concrete about it. With that call, it all came into focus: This was really happening! I had a surgical date, and it was just three days away!

I was standing in the office of an orthopaedic surgeon when that call about my surgical date came through on my cell phone. This was the specialist I had waited months to see, the one who could potentially help me with my sore shoulder, and I certainly wasn't prepared to think about my breast cancer at that particular moment in time. I must have looked as upset as I felt, for I could see the orthopaedic surgeon's receptionist watching me with concern. I could only think of one thing: *God, help me get through this appointment! I don't want to lose control in front of these people!*



God's hand of comfort came over me right then and there. My emotions dried up and I regained control. When the orthopaedic surgeon asked me about other complicating medical history, I was even able to tell him about my upcoming surgery without bursting into tears, and that sense of comfort stayed with me until I was back in the safe confines of my car.

Then I lost it. Again! Despite all the assurances God had sent me, I still couldn't help it. I broke down and cried.

God was still there, however, patiently handing out help. I could hear Him whispering in my ear: *Call Rob!*

Great idea! I pressed the voice activation button on my cell phone and mumbled those exact words: "Call Rob".

I was soon rewarded by the comforting voice of my husband. He listened to me blubber for a few minutes, and I don't even remember what he said. In the end, however, I once again felt peace and comfort overcome me, and I was again able to stop the flow of tears. God used my husband to reassure me, yet again, that He hadn't, and wouldn't, let me down!

Things even went okay at work. Throughout all the time since my doctor confirmed I had cancer, I had maintained an attitude of telling people on a "need to know" basis, and to date, only a couple of people fell into the "need to know" category. Now, however, with me going off work in three days for an undetermined number of weeks, I realized that several more had just come on that list. I would need strength and assurance to get through the telling!

One of the ones who needed to know was my manager. Unfortunately, she was away for two weeks, and the manager in charge was someone I didn't know well and certainly didn't feel comfortable telling I had breast cancer. I prayed that God would give me strength as I went in to



see him. To my relief, he didn't ask any questions; but he did tell me something I really needed to hear: "It's been my experience," he said, "that people often come back from medical leaves of absence too quickly. This doesn't profit you or the people you are serving. Sometimes it is better to take more time off, just to make sure you are strong enough to return!"

Yes, I *was* feeling guilty about leaving my colleagues to shoulder my load, and God used this manager's words to give me the reassurance I needed.

I told my team next. Imagine my surprise when they presented me with a gift the next day. It was a gag gift, a gift box full of pink, representing all the things I tell patients not to do. I laughed, and as I looked at those ladies I worked with, God's Spirit brought back to my mind the part of my pastor's sermon two days earlier that spoke of God giving us encouragement through the partnership of friendship. I admit, I got teary-eyed again. This time though, it was because I realized how big God's love really is. Yes, He had given me plenty of reason to be strong. He had pre-warned me, He had given me the promise of a positive outcome, He had fed me assurance after assurance, and when I still fell into the clutches of despair, He was there to provide me with the comfort and assurance I so badly needed. I must really be a special person to merit such personal attention from the God of the universe!

But then, He IS a God of love. He is a God who wants to be there for each of us in this personal of a way, all the time. There are no automated ticket booths in Heaven. Jesus came to this Earth to die on the cross in order for us to once again be able to commune with Him on a personal level! What a wonderful, personable God we serve!



## Chapter 12: THE DAY BEFORE

*"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...." (James 1:2)*

The preparation for any trip is tedious, and for even the most well-planned journey, the day before can be stressful. You review the mental checklists over and over.... The neighbors are picking up the mail: Check. Extra cat food bought: Check. Passports are in the travel bag: Check. And the lists go on and on.

It was no different with my “trip” to surgery. Wednesday, the day before surgery, arrived. This would be my last day at work for several weeks, and I had a lot of things to tidy up. There were reports to finish, charting to complete and email and phone messages regarding my leave-of-absence to put together. I had to transfer the care of my patients to my colleagues, I had to clean up my office and record my statistics, and of course, I had to tell people.

I wasn’t consciously dreading the day from the onset, but the longer I was at work, the worse the day became. By 10:00 in the morning, I was sure that this must be the longest day in history. I couldn’t stop myself from watching the clock, and every time I did, I would think: “Only \_\_\_ more hours, and then I lose my breast!”

Wait. I had already fought the battle over the loss of a body part, and I had won! Just what was my problem?

Try as I might, however, I couldn’t change my mind set. Only God could adjust my attitude when it comes to this kind of thing, and He did. As I was reaching down to the printer for yet another report I had generated, I suddenly noticed the front of my blouse, and a new



thought crossed my mind: It wasn't about losing a breast; it was about losing diseased tissue! That image stuck with me for the rest of the day. From then on, every time I looked at the clock, I would think, "by this time tomorrow, I'll be getting rid of this diseased flesh!" Or "by this time tomorrow, I'll be in recovery, and this will be all gone!" Or "by this time tomorrow, I'll be going back home to my family -- disease free!"

This was also a day of telling people.

Don't get me wrong. The people I told were all very, very supportive and positive. Take, for example, my patients. One of my stroke survivors was someone who had been in ministry for years. As I tried to explain to him and his lovely daughter-in-law that I would be transferring his care to my colleague due to medical concerns, he interrupted me mid-sentence and began to pray for God's comfort, strength and healing hand to be upon me and to carry me through.

The patients I dreaded telling the most were in my voice remediation group. These were a small group of wonderful ladies, and I knew that though they wouldn't ask questions, they would want to know. Unfortunately, I just couldn't tell them. They were forced to leave the session knowing they would have a break of undetermined length, without even being given a reason more specific than "medical leave of absence".

I wanted to apologize to them. I wanted them to understand that this break from their treatment was completely out of my hands, but all I could say was, "I'm sorry, but there is absolutely nothing I can do about it."

There were several other co-workers I needed to tell as well. Like those who coordinated my schedule, for example. All these wonderful people were friends as well as co-workers, but after dismissing my voice group, I couldn't tell one more person face to face. It would take too



long, for one thing, because each person I had told so far took up at least a half an hour. With the clock ticking and my pile of work not melting away fast enough, there just wasn't any time. That wasn't the only reason, however. I didn't have the emotional strength to keep on telling people.

I decided to resort to email. I holed up in my office and began composing notes that I would send out after everyone had gone home for the day. Then, about 6:30 in the evening, I finally finished the last thing on my "must do" list. Every report was written, signed and tucked away in an envelope on the desk of one of my colleagues. My patients were all transferred to the care of another Speech Pathologist. Every email was sent. My stats were recorded, my materials were put away, my desk was clean and my voice mail and email messages were changed.

Suddenly I didn't want to leave.

"God," I whispered, "what's up?"

Then I knew. This was kind of like closing yet another door. Once I left work, there would be nothing to occupy my mind before surgery. Was I strong enough to stay on the Train without this distraction?

"I'm going to need help, Lord!" I prayed, and then I proceeded to again put everything in His hands. My fears, my concerns, everything.

God came through. He filled me with peace. Joy. Love. I had a very normal evening. My left arm was hurting when it was time to go to bed, and God planted the idea of sports cream and a body pillow in my mind. I went to bed slathered in the goo with my arm propped up on a body pillow, and I actually slept well. In fact, the next morning, I was able to record in my journal: "Thank you Lord! Only You are worthy! Lord, You are so beautiful! I just want to fall on my knees and worship You!"



Only God can take a very stressful “last day” and turn it into a day of praise, and that, only if we let Him be in charge of our last minute tasks!



## Chapter 13: THE HORRORS OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE

*“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” (Psalms 23:1)*

From the moment God gave me the Train analogy, I had tried to let Him be my Train Driver. He had allowed me to walk through this valley, yes, but He had been in control every step of the way. He promised from the beginning that it was only a test, and He had carried me through. God gave me supportive, loving, caring medical people, who were mostly all women; He gave me the time to work the medical appointments into my schedule; He took me through the tough phase of telling the family and everyone at work; and He even carried me through my last day at work. I had absolutely nothing to worry about on surgery day.

Why was it, then, that the little feeling of unease in my stomach wouldn't go away, no matter what I did?

As I thought about it, I realized what part of my problem was that I was nervous about my first stop on surgery day: Nuclear Medicine!

Oh, I knew this was an important step. It was in Nuclear Medicine that they would identify the sentinel lymph nodes, those all-important lymph nodes that would be able to show whether or not the cancer had spread to the lymphatic system.

One of the biggest fears when breast cancer is diagnosed is whether or not the cancer has spread through the lymph ducts that pass over the breast tissue and into their corresponding lymph nodes under the arm. When cancer cells are found in the lymph nodes, they are known to





be more likely to spread to other parts of the body, and thus, may later result in metastatic disease.

In the past, mastectomies were generally “radical”, meaning that they routinely included a lymphectomy -- the removal of all the lymph nodes under the arm on the affected side -- in order to ensure that the cancer cells are all gone. Research has shown, however, that the lymph ducts of the breast usually drain to one or two nodes first before draining through the rest of the nodes underneath the arm. These first nodes are known as the “sentinel lymph nodes”, and the condition of the sentinel nodes will help determine whether or not the cancer has spread to the lymphatic system. Thus, if the sentinel nodes do not test positive for cancer, then it is highly unlikely the cancer has spread, and it is unnecessary to do a lymphectomy at the time of the mastectomy.

Before the sentinel lymph nodes can be removed and tested, however, it is first necessary to find them. This was the point of Nuclear Medicine. A weak radioactive dye would be placed via four injections into the nipple, followed by a ten minute massage of the breast tissue. A scan would then determine which nodes the dye flowed to first.

Yes, it was a necessary step. I got that piece, but it didn’t sound at all pleasant. Generally I’m not queasy about the thought of needles, but I couldn’t help but remember the horror of the needle biopsy. Besides, just the thought of having needles injected into that part of my body was enough to make me shiver. Of course, there was still the issue of not really wanting to bare that part of my anatomy to just anyone, especially if a ten minute massage by the technician was required!



Thus my nerves were on edge when I was asked to put on a set of hospital gowns. Unfortunately, the gowns were thin. They were modest, but they left me freezing cold. In fact, I felt like Nuclear Medicine was constructed on an iceberg.

I'm sure it was nerves, because I've been to that particular department since and I didn't find it cold; but whatever the reason, I was shivering uncontrollably. Someone in the department brought me a blanket, and then another, and after that, everyone seemed to think that my body temperature was their personal responsibility. I was grateful to them, but as I waited for my technician, my stomach remained in a knot. "Lord," I whispered, "help me!"

In the days leading up to this one, I had received numerous emails from prayer warriors around the world. I had printed these off and I brought them with me to the hospital, and it occurred to me that it would be comforting to read some of them. Unfortunately I had left them with my husband, who hadn't been allowed to come to Nuclear Medicine with me. Two in particular, however, stood out clearly in my memory: "Before the operation just abandon yourself to Jesus, and tell Him that you want to be His child, sleeping securely in His arms, and you will be filled with His love and peace."

"Lord," I whispered, "I want to abandon myself to You, but...I can't seem to do that today!"

The words of the second email then came to mind, "Focus on Jesus and let Him heal you, for He lives within your heart. See in the following Psalm how God is always by your side and will comfort you."

The reference was Psalms 23.

Wait a minute! I knew that Psalm!



The words began to roll through my mind: *“The Lord in my Shepherd. I shall NOT want!”* (Psalms 23:1)

Did I believe those words?

I decided then and there that I did believe them, and that simple decision was all it took for me to feel God’s comfort and strength overtaking me. I knew that He was, indeed, carrying me through the day, and that included this trip to Nuclear Medicine. Imagine my joy when I began to feel warm—on the inside!

*“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.”* (vs 2,3a)

“God,” I whispered, “The pastures don’t seem all that green right now, or the waters so still.” My eyes immediately dropped to my gowns. They were green, and the fabric had been used and washed so many times that they were soft and comfortable. He was literally making me lie down in “green pastures”!

As I meditated upon this, I began to notice a sound. It was like the calming gurgle of a gentle brook. At first I thought I was imagining it, but then I realized that I did, indeed, hear a soft gurgle. I will never know what produced that sound. It was probably the noise of a piece of medical equipment somewhere; but the sound had its desired effect. It restored my soul, and God used that sound to show me He was right there, at my side.

*“Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will FEAR NO EVIL, for You are with me!”* (vs. 4)



Yes, I was quite literally walking through the valley of the shadow of death. My valley's specific name was cancer. The verse said, however, that I would fear no evil.... Why then, was I afraid?

That's when I realized that this, too, was a promise, one that I needed to choose to believe. I needed to CHOOSE to fear no evil, and suddenly, it wasn't a difficult choice to make!

*"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me!"* (vs. 4c)

I could see it then: The shepherd's rod. God was using it to ward off evil....

*"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies!"* (vs. 5a)

Yes, my enemies did surround me. I was, after all, in the hospital, facing major surgery, with cancer freely circulating through my body. Yet God was promising to prepare a *table* for me—a place of *fellowship*, a place of *nourishment*! Since I was fasting, this took on a whole new significance. My nourishment was not physical, it was spiritual, and the fellowship at my table, in the presence of my enemy, cancer, was the Lord, Himself. God was filling me up! In fact, He was stuffing me full!

*"You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over."* (vs. 5b)

There, in the presence of my arch-enemy, cancer, God was pouring out His Spirit upon me, not just in tiny quantities, but so that I felt like I was overflowing with His presence!

*"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me **all the days of my life** and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* (vs. 6)

Once again God was reminding me that I would not succumb to this disease. I would come through victorious! The enemy, cancer, would NOT prevail over me, and I would go on to lead a long, productive life. What a promise. What a God. What a gentle, caring shepherd!



“Would you be Lyn?”

The familiar voice jarred me from my reverie, and as I turned towards the technician, I couldn't help but think that I knew her from somewhere. Try as I might, however, I couldn't place her.

She settled me on the table, but before starting the procedure, she said, in true keeping with patient confidentiality, “We may have a conflict of interest here. I am one of your former patients.”

A-ha! That's where I knew the voice from...and the memory of one of my favorite voice clients of all times came back to me. This lady had bought into the concept of voice care, she had done her homework, and she had ended up with a positive outcome. Though I like to think I have a good rapport with all my patients, there was no question in my mind about this particular lady.

“If you aren't comfortable with me taking care of you,” she continued, “we can switch you to the schedule of the other technician.”

I didn't bat an eye. “No, don't do that. I'm perfectly comfortable with you taking care of me. In fact, I take comfort in the idea!”

In the end, my former patient took extra good care of me. She made sure I was warm and that my sore left shoulder was comfortable. The needles didn't hurt, she was professional about the massage, and the entire experience was over before I could even remember that I had been worried about it.

As I was being taken back up to the pre-operative waiting area where I had left my husband, the words of Psalms 23 again came to my mind. God truly HAD been the best shepherd in the world for me. He had provided me with a caring technician, with physical and spiritual



warmth, and He had kept me from worry and harm. The best part was, He wasn't about to STOP being my shepherd. This divine care and out-of-this-world love wasn't just available for me when I was going through Nuclear Medicine.... It is available to me all the time!

Whatever it is that we face, all we have to do is make that vital decision to give it to God, to *let* Him be our Shepherd, to *let* Him lead us by the still waters, to *let* Him make us lie down in green pastures, to *let* Him anoint us with His precious Spirit so that our cups can overflow. When we make that vital decision to let Him drive the Train, then we can know that His goodness and mercy WILL follow us ALL the days of our lives—even through the horror of Nuclear Medicine!

Rob came over to me as I re-entered the pre-operative waiting area, and my nurse's eyes widened. "I didn't realize you had someone with you," she apologized. "He could have gone to Nuclear Medicine with you."

Well, it was a bit late, but as I thought about it, I realized that if Rob had been with me, I would have clung to him for comfort and he would have been there for me. The moments with God down in Nuclear Medicine, however, were so precious to me that I wouldn't have traded them for anything.

I'm sure that some of you who are reading this book work in the medical profession as I do. If so, please remember: What goes around comes around. It's worth it to make our patients feel comfortable. It makes their otherwise scary procedures much easier to get through, and in the end, you never know when one of those same patients may end up taking care of—you!



## Chapter 14: THE WAITING GAME

*"But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)*

There is a railroad crossing near our home. The track in that area runs to a small train yard where the trains have the option of switching to a different track. The trains that cross at our crossing are often quite long, and as they approach the train yard, they usually slow down, sometimes even coming to a complete stop. Quite naturally, this typically occurs when the last car of the train is still blocking the road. If the train is switching tracks, it will generally begin to move again after a few minutes, but in the reverse direction, and those of us who are “fortunate” enough to be sitting at the train crossing don’t have to wait for the train just once, but twice!

It truly requires the patience of Job to sit at that crossing sometimes.

Sometimes patience with waiting is also required in our Train ride through the dark valleys of our lives.... Like the one through Surgery Day....

“So what happens now?” Rob asked as he joined me in the pre-operative waiting room.

I had just returned from Nuclear Medicine, and as I took my seat, I turned to him and smiled. I admit, my smile was a bit strained, for my response was said through teeth that were a bit more clenched than required: “Now? Now we hurry up and wait!”

He started to laugh, and somehow the laughter helped to break the tension.



Though my surgery was scheduled for noon, we had been told to report to the hospital for 8:00 AM. As we had made the drive to the hospital that morning, I couldn't help wondering what I was going to do with those four hours of time. I had preregistered two days earlier. and all my pre-operative requirements were already finished. I would have nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs as my nerves mounted in anticipation of surgery. True to my suspicions, "hurry up and wait" had been the theme of the day. Upon our arrival at the hospital that morning, we had rushed upstairs to the pre-designated waiting area and sat down. It was exactly 8:00.

"Is this all you have to do?" Rob asked.

"Yes," I had assured him. "They said to just sit down here and someone will call me."

So we sat...and waited....

Something wasn't adding up in my mind, however. There was this black phone on the desk for one thing, and it was labeled "patient phone". What was a "patient phone" doing in a waiting room? And what was that note with a hospital extension doing over the top of the phone?

I got up to look at the note: "Surgical patients call extension 55555". That's when I remembered I was supposed to call and let them know I was here....

I picked up the phone and gave my name to the lady who answered.

"Chaffart...Chaffart.... Hum. I don't see you...."

I started to panic. "My surgery is scheduled for noon!"

"Noon? Then you are early. Oh yes. I see your name...."

"They told me to come early because I have to go to Nuclear Medicine."





“Oh! Yes.” She politely asked me to have a seat, saying someone would be out to get me “shortly”.

To me, “shortly” means a minute or two. Obviously the hospital had a different definition of the word, for after 20 minutes, I was still waiting. Didn’t I have an appointment to keep in Nuclear Medicine? What if...?

God didn’t let me continue with the what ifs: *Get back on the Train!*

That’s when I realized that the whole hospital experience was actually part of the Train ride as well. All I needed to do was sit back and let the wheels roll! I patiently pulled out a Sudoku puzzle.

They did call me soon after that, and we were whisked down to the day surgery waiting area where a nurse asked me a list of questions, and it wasn’t long before I was taken to Nuclear Medicine. To my chagrin, I was back to the pre-surgical waiting area by 10:00. Only half the time used up! What on Earth was I going to do with the next two hours?

Fortunately my husband was now allowed to join me, and he brought my Sudoku magazine, my print-outs of the prayers of world-wide prayer warriors and his reading material. At least maybe I could distract myself....

As we took our seats, I notice a small, ancient TV in the waiting area. The news was playing. I assumed it was there to help shorten the wait, but I couldn’t concentrate on it.

The nurses came around several times after that with armloads of hot blankets. It was a welcome gift, especially since we were all freezing cold; but it only used up less than five minutes of time....



One by one the nurse began calling each of the patients awaiting surgery into a special room to start their IVs. It was a welcome diversion. One that took an entire 10 minutes. At least that was 10 minutes when we didn't have to twiddle our thumbs and worry about our surgeries....

Then I continued to wait—and wait—and the clock crept its way to 11:00.

Rob tried his best to keep me amused. He read me funny pieces of information from articles he had brought with him, and he tried to distract me with thoughts of our recent vacation. It was all good, and I loved him all the more for it; but I was sure someone must have taken the battery out of that clock!

I tried to focus on my Sudoku then, but somehow, the medium puzzles, the same ones that were usually too easy for me, were really hard. Was there something wrong with my magazine? No, it was the same one I always worked. It had to be me. This waiting would be the death of me!

Could it be that God knows how impatient I am? Could this be why He had fast-tracked everything up until this particular point in time? I couldn't help but thank Him, but I also realized that perhaps patience was one of the things I needed to learn through this current waiting game. After all, aren't we told to: *"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces **patience**. But let **patience** have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing...."* (James 1:2-4 NKJV)?

I began to chat with a lady who had been in the waiting area when I first arrived. I would learn that her surgery had been scheduled for 10:00. Apparently her surgeon and the corresponding operating room had been taken over for an emergency C-Section, and her surgery



was delayed. How was she managing to still have a smile on her face when her operating time had long since passed? Then the thought occurred to me that my surgery could be delayed as well. I dismissed the thought. Surely it wouldn't happen....

Then it was noon. Finally! But no one was there to call my name! Hey! What about my surgery? Had they all forgotten?

After what seemed like three hours, someone did finally call my name. I was so overjoyed I almost tripped over my IV pole. As I started to hand my things to Rob however, I heard the words I really didn't want to hear: "We're not quite ready for you yet. I just wanted to talk to you."

My heart dropped, but as I made my way across the room, I noticed the clock: 12:15. My "three hours" had only been 15 minutes!

This lady was a medical resident who would be presiding, with the help of an anaesthesiologist, over my anaesthesia; and true to her word, she had a few questions for me. She then sent me back to the waiting room. To wait. With all those other people who were also still waiting.

Wait a minute. Doesn't the Bible say something about waiting? Something like "Wait upon the Lord"?

Yes! Many, many times!

Weren't those verses put in the Bible for times such as these?

With that thought, I remembered all the prayers and words of encouragement I had received prior to Surgery Day and had carefully printed out to bring with me. I pulled them out



then, and as I started to read I was instantly transported out of that waiting room and into a much lovelier place: The presence of God.

Why hadn't I done this sooner?

Microseconds later, I was called to the operating room where my surgeon, the anaesthesiologist and his resident, the nurses and everyone else were already there, waiting for me. The clock read 12:45. How had those 30 minutes gone by so quickly?

Yes, God does know what we need. He knows when we need patience, and He gives us times in our lives when we can grow in this area. The good news is, no matter how long our wait, God is there, eagerly waiting to give us that patience, to transport us directly into His presence where the wait will pass in the twinkling of an eye. All we have to do is seek Him.

Perhaps I will have to try this the next time I'm waiting at the train crossing near our home....



## Chapter 15: ANTESTHESIA-PHOBIA!

*"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."*

(2 Timothy 1:7)

Before boarding a train in Europe, you must first make sure you are climbing into the right coach. The coaches are marked with either a “1” or a “2”, and only passengers who have paid extra for first class tickets are supposed to board through the doors marked “1”.

Fortunately for those of us who can only afford second class tickets, most of the coaches are marked with a “2”; but believe me, the ride is far more comfortable in first class coaches!

The longer I stayed on my Train through the valley of breast cancer, the more acutely aware I became that God’s Train also has first and second class coaches. The first class coaches are labeled “faith”, and the second class ones are labeled “fear”. Our tickets are always for first class, yet sometimes we still tend to come on board in the second class coach. Wouldn’t our Train ride be more comfortable if we would only ride in the first class of faith?

In all reality, I have very few phobias. None that I can think of, actually, except for this one: I have anaesthesia-phobia: The fear of anaesthesia!

I once had to have Kryotherapy done for my sinuses. My otolaryngologist (ENT) was a personal friend, and after begging and pleading, she agreed to do the procedure under local anaesthesia. Sometime later, when I had to have a cyst removed from my cervix, another day-surgical procedure, I once again begged and pleaded for local anaesthesia.



I know, I know. This is crazy; but when I've had gastroscopies, I have refused the Valium that I was offered. I would rather experience that thumb-width tube going down my throat, moving around in my stomach, filling my belly with air, etc., than take the medication. I even refused the medication they offered me when they did biopsies of my stomach. In fact, I kept my eyes on the screen, and....

Okay, now I'm getting a bit too graphic. The point is, my phobia of anaesthesia has kept me from accepting the help that was available to me.

Another way of stating Anaesthesia-Phobia is "fear of being unconscious", and likely for some, this includes the fear of being out of control of what is going on around them. However, although I am someone who always likes to be in control, the primary root of my fear of anaesthesia is grounded in something totally different: I'm irrationally afraid of what anaesthesia will do to my stomach and mind as it wears off!

Why?

Because twenty-three years ago I had to have a large ganglion cyst removed from my foot. I was given general anaesthesia, and I will never forget the discomfort, the stomach upset, and the disorientation that I experienced. Once bitten, I am many times shy!

With this in mind, one of the things that I naturally dreaded the most about my mastectomy was the idea of having to go under general anaesthesia. I even asked the surgeon if she would mind doing the procedure under local. She just stared at me with big eyes, and finally stammered out, "I -- don't -- think -- so!"

It's true that she had just described a two hour procedure. Even I really didn't want to be awake for that!



“Besides,” she said, after hearing my reason for asking, “anaesthesia isn’t the same as it was twenty-three years ago. They’ve come a long ways towards making the experience less disorienting, and they can give you medication that will help your stomach.”

My mother was also reassuring: “I never have trouble with anaesthesia. I wake up all at once and I’m not disoriented at all!” Since she had undergone 12 major surgeries in the past 7 years, I guess her assessment of modern general anaesthesia should have been credible. I already knew she didn’t have stomach problems with her surgeries, but my sensitive stomach was from my dad’s side of the family, so perhaps her report wasn’t as convincing as it could be....

And so it went. Everyone tried to help me understand that my anaesthesia-phobia was senseless, but I dismissed everyone’s reasons as “not credible”, and I continued to worry.

If you had asked me at that time if I had gotten off the Train, I would have said, “Not at all!” It was true. I hadn’t gotten off the Train about the subject of anaesthesia; but I was sitting back in second class, the one labeled, “Fear”. It wasn’t until the day before my surgery, when I couldn’t get past the “creepy-crawly” feeling down in the pit of my stomach, that I realized my train ticket was not for second class at all, but for first class!

“Okay, God!” I said. “I give You the anaesthesia, too! I give You the disorientation and the stomach upset. I know that means You might take both away, but I also know that it means You might not. Either way, You will get me through them, for You have never, ever let me down!” With that, I moved to the first class coach.

Is anyone surprised that the creepy-crawlies went away?



The next morning I was again tempted to worry about the anaesthesia, and many other times between 8:00 and 12:45, when they finally took me into the operating room. Each time, however, I pushed it aside with a whispered, “God will get me through it!”

It wasn’t until my initial visit with the resident who would be assisting the anaesthesiologist that I learned about the intubation. Now there was something I had never even thought to worry about. Perhaps God hid that particular fact from me? You see, my expertise in the field of Speech-Language Pathology lies the area of voice care. One of my responsibilities is to work alongside an ENT imaging vocal fold movement and health. I am well aware of the potential damage to the vocal folds that intubation can cause, and we had personally seen a few disarticulated arytenoids cartilages resulting from improperly-done intubations. The result is vocal fold paralyses and significant voice problems. Would I be at risk for -- that?

“I’m sorry,” I said to the resident. “I work with voice patients and...”

She didn’t let me get any farther. “I am actually an ENT resident,” she said. “I totally understand your concern.”

I couldn’t believe it. Of all people to be putting a tube down my throat, I had an ENT resident -- someone who knew vocal folds, respected them, and was keenly aware of the damage that could result from intubation....

In general, the anaesthesiologist and the ENT resident who was assisting him were both very caring. They were careful of my sore left arm as I arranged myself on the operating table, they took into account my concerns, and as the mask came over my face and I started to cough, they were quick to reassure me it was just oxygen.





That's the last thing I remember before waking up in recovery, and I woke up knowing exactly where I was and what had happened to me. In fact, as I awoke, I only had two problems: pain, which I had expected and didn't fear, and stomach upset!

"How are you?" called out a friendly voice.

"It hurts," I croaked. Suddenly I was alarmed. My voice was barely more than a whisper!

"Why can't I talk?"

"That's normal," she said with a kind smile. "It's a result of the anaesthesia."

*Or the tube!*

Post-surgical disarticulated arytenoids cartilages, however, are rare, certainly far from the norm, and the nurse had just said it was "normal". Besides God was taking care of me. Hadn't He placed me in the hands of an ENT resident for the intubation? I was instantly flooded with peace of mind.

"On a scale of 1-10," continued the nurse, "with 1 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you've ever experienced, how would you rate your pain?"

Hum. Well the worst pain I had ever experienced was child birth, and this was nowhere near that bad. "Maybe a '5'," I croaked, and then I quickly added: "My stomach is a '5', too!"

"We'll give you some Morpheme for the pain," she said with a smile, "and some Gravol for the upset stomach." Then she was gone.

"No! No Gravol!" I tried to cry out. "I don't tolerate Gravol! It makes me...." But my voice was faint...too faint to be heard over the sounds of the blood-pressure cuffs and the monitors in the room. Before I knew it, she had put both Morpheme and Gravol through my IV line.



The only thing that changed was I became less aware of my surroundings. My stomach was still upset and I still hurt. I immediately blamed the Gravol for my drowsiness, and when the nurse returned a few minutes later to ask about my pain, I was quick to tell her, “No more Gravol.” Instead, I asked for some Ginger Ale.

The nurse shook her head. “It isn’t allowed in recovery. It will just make you vomit.”

“Not me,” I argued. “This stomach ache is caused by my stomach being too empty. Gravol won’t help. Ginger Ale will.”

She shook her head again, and I could read genuine concern in her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she repeated. “It isn’t allowed in recovery. Let me give you some more Morpheme at least.”

Imagine my surprise when she returned a few minutes later with a cup of Ginger Ale! “Shhhh,” she said. “We just won’t tell anyone!”

I sipped the drink slowly, savoring the bubbles that I could already feel calming the disquiet in my gut. The only problem was, it was sugar free Ginger Ale. I hate sugar free pop!

The nurse soon returned. “They are going to take you down to out-patient recovery soon. How’s your pain now?”

Sure enough, the Morpheme had done its job. “Fine,” I croaked. “Maybe a two? Oh, and my stomach is a two as well!”

The nurse smiled. “Do you want more Ginger Ale before you go down?”

“Yes,” I answered. “I would love some more.” I decided I would push it a little then. “Do you have any that isn’t diet?”



She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye that said: *A-ha! I give you an inch, and you take a mile!* The only thing she said aloud, however, was, “Not here. I’ll make sure you get some regular Ginger Ale when you get down to the out-patient recovery room.”

She disappeared again, only to return a moment later with a cup of *regular* Ginger Ale! I could have hugged her.

As I later thought back over the whole experience with general anaesthesia, I realized that God, had, indeed, taken care of all my concerns, even the ones I didn’t know about in advance. He had hidden the intubation from me so I wouldn’t worry, and knowing I needed peace of mind when I did learn about the procedure, He had prepared an ENT resident in advance. He then completely removed the disorientation, and He gave me a caring recovery room nurse who was not only willing to bend the rules for my stomach, but was also willing to go the extra mile. In the end, even my stomach came through the process victorious.

It’s true that there was one moment that the feared “stomach upset” got the best of me. The transport wheelchair they used to take me to the car had four rotating wheels, and its wiggling and wobbling in the hot elevator felt just like a boat on rough seas. My stomach emptied itself quickly and gently, and that was the end of the stomach upset.

More than likely most of you reading this do not have an anaesthesia-phobia; but we all have our own fears and concerns, most of which are likely founded on much more valid reasons than my fear of anaesthesia. The source of the fear and the reason behind it isn’t what matters, however. What matters is that we give it all to God. When we do, He will take care of each and every worry, even the ones we don’t know about in advance. He’ll put ENT residents to do our intubations, He’ll give us nurses who are willing to bend the rules, and He’ll make sure we don’t wake up disoriented. He is there for us, and He will come through. Our only job is to realize that



we have first class tickets. There is absolutely no need to ride the Train in the second class of fear!



## Chapter 16: THE STANDSTILL

*.rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer...." (Romans 12:12)*

The year was 1981, and it was my first trip to Europe. I had taken the ferry from England to Belgium, and I was on my way via train to Munich, Germany. I spoke only one language at the time, English, and in those days, English wasn't as widely spoken in Europe as it is today. Needless to say, when my train jerked to a halt in the middle of the night, my coach was unhooked, and the rest of the train took off, leaving me and my coach behind, I was more than a little perplexed.

I tried to asked my fellow passengers, but to no avail. They didn't speak English. I must say that I passed through some pretty stressful moments before another train came along, hooked itself to my coach, and we continued down the rails.

The interesting thing was, my fellow passengers didn't seem nearly as stressed out by the little delay as I was. Was it possible they knew something I didn't?

Isn't it true that as long as whatever path we are taking in life follows an expected course, we don't tend to stress about it; but the moment things appear to come to a standstill, we panic?

And when my spiritual Train came to a standstill, three days after surgery, guess what I did....

I awoke that morning feeling frustrated and confused. Why was I so tired? Where had all my innate energy gone? Shouldn't I be bouncing back a bit quicker than this?



Rob told me it was normal. After all, I had just undergone major surgery. No one had warned me, however, that I would feel so drained, so completely unable to do anything.

I've always been a person who could push myself to the maximum, and I have always found that even when I'm completely at the end of my reserves, there is always enough to accomplish the task at hand. Now, for the first time in my life, there simply were no hidden reserves.

As the morning went on, I became more and more melancholic. I ate breakfast and then took a nap. Rob helped me get dressed and brush my hair and teeth, and then I took a nap. I drank some water, and then I took a nap. Unfortunately, those naps didn't serve to rebuild any energy.

It was Sunday, and I truly would have liked to have been at church rather than napping in my recliner. Rob knew this, and striving to lift my spirit, he pulled together a little church service. He called up a song on You-tube, a song I knew well, and asked me to sing it with him. I couldn't. My throat was still too sore from the intubation, but I agreed to listen, and as I listened, God began speaking to me through the words: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling over death by death, come awake, come awake, come and rise up from the grave!"

Hey! It might be true that I didn't have any energy, but I wasn't in the grave! I couldn't be! Christ had trampled over death! I would rise up from my stupor. I would be energetic again!

Next he read me an inspirational story. The setting was Normandy, France, and the year, 1944. It was the day the allied troops did the impossible by breaking through the Atlantic Wall and taking five different beaches in Normandy, France. Up until that point, the war had looked



hopelessly lost. After this one day of victory, however, the tide turned in the favor of the Allied forces.

The story then shifted to the crossing of the Red Sea. How trapped the Israelites must have felt, with an army on one side and a vast sea of water on the other; but God gave them victory. He opened the Red Sea for Israel, just as He opened the Normandy Beaches for the Allied troops. God's message to me was clear: He would also open the door for me to get my energy back!

Later that same day, as I was preparing to send out the daily newsletter from our ministry, I happened to notice the title of the featured devotional. It was one that I had written several years earlier, and it was entitled, "Towards the Light". The story was inspired by a run down a dark country road. During that run, every time I looked out over the darkness of the fields bordering the road, I would become disoriented and my steps would veer towards the ditch that separated me from those fields. If I forced myself to keep my eyes on the streetlight at the end of this long country block, I would stay on the road and my steps would go straight towards the end.

As I re-read this story, it spoke to me strongly: In my frustration over my lack of energy, I had taken my eyes off of my light, Jesus Christ. I had allowed myself to look out over the dark fields of the unknown.

Slowly I began to understand. God wasn't abandoning me to my fatigue. He hadn't unhooked His Engine from my coach. He hadn't left me in the middle of nowhere in a foreign country without knowing the language. It was simply a little "bump" in the track. I hadn't anticipated it, true enough, but just like the other passengers on that coach were not at all upset by the fact that we had been left behind, I also didn't need to worry. God wasn't there to just take



care of my surgery. He was also there to help me through these very moments of no energy. He would hold me up. He would hold me together. All I had to do was stay on the Train.

Then an unusual thought occurred to me: Why would I have been given so much time off work if I could just get up, three days after surgery, and resume my normal life?

“Lord,” I whispered. “Thank You that You have already taken care of the details of my rehabilitation. And mostly, thank You that despite the fact I doubted you, You were ever there, loving me, coaxing me back, patiently feeding me the things I needed to hear, so that I would repent of my doubt and return to You!”

I am happy to say that this was the last day I spent complaining about my lack of energy. I learned to patiently take each day as a new challenge. Each morning I would think about what I had managed to do the day before, and I would add just one more tiny task to my list. Over time, my energy began to rebuild.

I hope I have learned something through all this. I hope I have learned that I should never push myself to the limits of my energy reserves, for maybe, just maybe, that’s why I suffer from so many stress symptoms! Do you think?





## Chapter 17: THE END OF THE TRACK

*"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)*

After a brief stop to take on and drop off passengers, trains most often pass through train stations and continue on down the track. Not so in Ostend, Belgium. This train station is truly the end of the line, for only the waters of the North Sea lie beyond. In more melancholic moments, I find this sad. There is something nostalgic about the thought of train tracks going on forever. I wasn't feeling melancholic or nostalgic that evening, however, as we got off the train from Amsterdam. Ostend *was* our final destination. Our ultimate reward was here, right in Ostend. Right at the end of the track.

Our trip through life can also be seen as a track that we all must follow. When we are young, it seems to us that this track will go on forever. Just as trains must make brief stops in most train stations, however, we discover as we get older that there are little pauses in our track as well. Sometimes, as in the case of medical difficulties, we even have to take little "detours". We have to walk the "road to recovery" to get us back on our track through life.

For those suffering from cancer, the road to recovery includes recovery from surgery, recovery from radiation and recovery from chemotherapy. But what if the cancer is one that does not have a good prognosis? What if the cancer has metastasized to other parts of the body? Does the road to recovery still lead back to life's track? Or, like the train track in Ostend, does it come to an abrupt end?



These were the kinds of questions I had to face as I passed through this breast cancer experience. Although initial reports were all good, no one can know exactly where their cancer, or any other bad medical diagnosis, will eventually lead. As with everything, I would have to learn to take things one step at a time; and since my first post-op concern was to walk the road to recovery from surgery, this is where I initially focussed my time and energy.

Being someone who is used to taking charge, to always be “doing” something, I knew ahead of time that this surgical-recovery road would not be a stroll in the park. Rob knew this too, and he spent time in advance trying to prepare me for the restrictions that I would be given. Take the post-op restrictions, for example. I wasn’t to lift anything over 10 pounds and I wasn’t to bend or reach. To help me prepare, Rob went out before surgery and bought two weeks’ worth of easy-to-fix meals, and then he made a list of the things I normally do in the house that would not be within the post-operative restrictions. To my chagrin, the list was pretty long. In fact, there didn’t seem to be anything left that I *could* do!

During those first few days after surgery, however, he didn’t need to have worried. My body dictated loudly what I should and shouldn’t be doing, and my list of “shoulds” was far shorter than his! I became a model patient those first few days. I relaxed in my recliner, working my sudoku puzzles in between my naps, and working on a cross stitch picture when I felt up to it. I even let Rob help me dress, because between the surgical stiffness of my right arm and my torn rotator cuff on the left side, I couldn’t lift my arms enough to get my shirt on or off. He even learned how to feed my hair through the hole in the back of a baseball cap!

My activities were also initially limited by the fact that I had a drain in place that had to be cared for. I called it “my baby”, for it went wherever I went, and whatever I tried to do, it got in the way. Because the clasp that was supposed to fasten itself to my clothing was weak, I had



to make sure I wore something that had large pockets. Over all that, the only shirt I felt comfortable in was an XL Tee. Quite a change for someone who normally wears mediums! To make matters even worse, I wasn't allowed to take a shower with the drain in place. That meant I couldn't even wash my hair. How I chomped at the bit to be done with that drain!

Unfortunately, the drain would have to stay in place until the liquid that drained off measured no more than 30 ml in a 24 hour period. You have never seen anyone as fastidious about emptying the drain and recording the drainage. I wanted that thing gone!

A nurse from Home Care came to the house the day after my surgery to remove the original bandages and to review the drain care. She then called me every day to find out how I was doing and whether or not she needed to see me. Finally that glorious day came, six days after surgery, when my overall 24 hour drainage was exactly 30 ml. She removed the drain that day. I could have hugged her.

Unfortunately, the tube, once removed, left behind a ¼ inch hole in my side. I wouldn't be able to take a shower until that had closed over; but at least now the healing process could begin. Thirty-six hours later I took the best shower of my life.

Thankfully, my post-op hospital instructions said that I should make myself walk, and I used this to my utmost advantage. Every day Rob and I would walk a little bit farther, until by week three, I was back up to walking my normal 4 km route. As soon I felt like doing so, I began adding other activities to my routine as well, things like folding laundry, rinsing dishes and making light meals.

The third week of my surgical recovery marked the day Rob had to return to school. It was the first Tuesday in September, that magical date when all schools in our region resume



session, but the timing was perfect, for my previous restrictions had just been lifted, and I was beginning to feel more energetic. That was the week I took back the cooking responsibilities completely. Initially I made the same kinds of simple, pre-made meals that Rob had been making, but gradually I again began to make things from scratch. That first cake to come out of the oven was absolutely delicious!

Overall, throughout those initial weeks on the road to surgical recovery, I came to realize that letting others do things for me wasn't as hard as I had originally anticipated. My family was so supportive that with their help, I didn't have to worry about the things my body didn't feel like doing, and by listening to my body, I was able to slowly but surely resume a more normal life, and so it was that my road to surgical recovery was smooth. Without too much lost time, I returned to my regular track through life.

What about the detour I would have to follow on the road to overall recovery? Would it return to my regular track as well?

It was with relief that I would hear that I was free of metastatic disease. My bone and liver scans came back normal, my lungs were clear and my lymph nodes tested negative for cancer. Of course there is always the possibility that metastatic disease will appear over the next five years, and that is a possibility that I must live with. If that is the case, will there even be a road to overall recovery? Or is my road, like the train tracks in Ostend, destined to come to an abrupt halt?

As I think about this, I realize that no matter how endless they may seem, every train track eventually does come to an end. For those of us who have to walk the road to recovery from cancer, we may have a complete recovery and go on to lead a long, productive life. We may also find that our track comes to a halt through the gradual succumbing to disease. At some



point, however, we all reach the end of the road. In just the same way, even those who are fortunate enough to not have to walk the road to cancer recovery are not immune to this. Every one of life's journeys could end at any time. The point is, no matter what road we must walk in life, our journey must eventually come to the end of the track.

A depressing thought?

Not for followers of Jesus Christ. For those who have accepted Jesus' gift of grace, who have been redeemed from sin, the road through life is *always* a road to recovery: Ultimate recovery! After all, what could possibly be better than spending eternity free of pain with our Lord and Savior?

No matter what it is we are facing right now, as followers of Christ Jesus, there *is* a road to recovery. Our job is to let God worry about the details of that road, for we can be sure that the end of the track is victory in Jesus. I don't know about you, but it looks like a win/win situation to me!



## Chapter 18: DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT

*"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus...." (Romans 15:5)*

Despite the fact that we ran all the way across the train station, we had to stand and stare as our train pulled away just as we arrived. We had only missed it by seconds, but there wouldn't be another one to our destination for over an hour. Now what?

Just how does one, in such situations, keep discouragement and frustration completely at bay? And what if those disappointments and frustrations aren't physical in nature, but spiritual? Then what?

As I read back over my daily journal on my breast cancer experience, I have to ask myself that very question. Why was it that despite the numerous promises from God, despite the thousands of times God provided me with reassurance, why were there so many entries after surgery that said, "I fought discouragement today"?

I don't know the answer to this question; but God is faithful and loving. He reaches out to us, no matter where we are, no matter what trap of the enemy we've fallen into, and pulls us out.

I was at day five of my recovery from surgery. Despite the fact that my drain was still in place, my incision had swelled up during the night. I could feel the fluid building up under the skin, and besides being worried that the drain was blocked, it was also very uncomfortable. Especially when I tried to sleep. To make matters worse, my left arm began to ache and my restless leg syndrome began to make itself known.



I had already taken two long walks to settle my restless legs, but even after that I couldn't sleep because my left shoulder was aching too much. In all, I was feeling pretty discouraged and very tempted to complain.

God knows how much a person can take, and He knew I was nearing my breaking point. Suddenly my left arm stopped aching. Wow! One problem gone!

That very same afternoon, a colleague from work stopped by unexpectedly. She came bearing gifts. Three huge bags of them! There were frozen lasagnes and pasta sauce and fruit and fresh veggies already cut up and ready to cook or eat. There were crackers and soup and homemade cookies and banana bread and muffins. There were nuts and yogurt and granola... All the things that make up the staples of my diet. Even chocolate!

I was absolutely floored by the generosity of my colleagues at work, but what shocked me even more was the timing. God knew I was discouraged, and He "planned" something into my day that would pick me up.

A few days later, I tried wearing regular clothes for the first time. They all looked funny on me, however, and I was discouraged. Later that same day, I received a gift in the mail. A tiny golden butterfly sent from a dear friend in New Jersey. It was the symbol of a new life. God was telling me that the new life would be different, but golden all the same; and that just like the butterfly is much more beautiful and much more mobile than a caterpillar, my new life would also be much better if only I would let Him be in charge. I was really touched by the gift, and again, I was shocked by the timing. It came on just the day I needed it!

A few days later, I again became discouraged. I went to see my physiotherapist to continue the therapy for my torn left shoulder. It was my first appointment since my surgery, and



I came home completely exhausted. God's response? "Write a book about your experiences!" Just why that particular command made me feel better, I will never know. Maybe the idea that my experiences might be useful to others was enough to make me stop focusing on myself. Whatever it was, however, it picked me up out of my discouragement. Once again, God knew!

I became discouraged again the very next day, however.

What did God do?

He sent a friend to visit me, a friend who I hadn't seen in a very long time. We had a lovely visit, one that served to distract me from my discouragement.

A few days later, I went to church for the first time since my surgery. I was blessed, but I became quite discouraged that it wore me out, emotionally and physically, to the point that I couldn't wait to get out of the building, away from all those people. God sent a Christian friend to visit with me that afternoon. We were able to talk about my reaction and analyze it, and God showed me why I had felt the way I had at church. With the explanation firmly in place, the discouragement fled.

There were so many other times when God used a word of encouragement, a prayer, a story or a poem to pick me up. One prayer warrior even wrote a few poems just for me, and they always arrived exactly at times when the message portrayed in those poems was JUST what I needed to hear.

With all the many promises God has given me about my cancer and recovery, it would be easy enough to say, "You have no reason to be discouraged. God has already pronounced the final outcome as 'very good'!" The truth of the matter, however, is that we all get discouraged.





Every time circumstances claim our attention, we take our eyes off Jesus and the discouragement slips in.

Should we allow this to happen? Not at all! It is a sign of lack of faith. Nonetheless, it happen, even to those who are close to God. I can only thank God that no matter what, He is there. He knows how to help us through those discouraging moments, and He knows how to pick us up and set us back on our feet so that our eyes are once again focused on Him.

So what is our responsibility when dealing with discouragement?

First and foremost, we must try to keep our eyes on Jesus. We need to give every bad circumstance immediately to Him, for this keeps the discouragement at bay.

If we don't succeed in this, however, then we need to admit to ourselves that we are discouraged. Only then can we open our hearts to God. Once we've done this we can just sit back and watch for the encouragement He will send our way; and when it does arrive, our job is to accept it and to let God heal us of the discouragement that wants to overcome us.

And be sure to answer the doorbell when it rings. You never know when God decides to lift your discouragement by sending friends bearing gifts!

Oh, and as it turned out, another train to our destination arrived just 10 minutes later....



## Chapter 19: THE REPORT

*"PRAISE the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." (Psalms 106:1)*

As we boarded what I would consider to be one of the oldest trains in Belgium, I couldn't help but be envious of those who were taking a much more modern-looking, comfortable train at the next platform. And when our little train huffed and puffed into each station along the way, stopping every five minutes, I couldn't stop those little envious thoughts: If we had been on a better train, we would be there already....

Nonetheless, we still arrived at our destination, and maybe my trip would have been more pleasant if I had stopped complaining long enough to appreciate the fact that we did, indeed, arrive at our desired destination! Perhaps my spiritual Train ride would also be more pleasant if I would stop complaining about everything along the way as well....

All along, everyone called my tumor a "Stage 1", and that should have brought me comfort. It would have, too, if they hadn't all ended that statement with, "but if the sentinel lymph nodes come back positive for cancer, it will be a Stage 2."

There were just so many "what ifs", and it didn't take me long to realize that nobody would have any fixed answers until the entire tumor was out of my body and had been thoroughly analyzed by a pathologist.

Oh, there were many good reasons to think of it as a "stage 1". We had early detection on our side for one thing, as well as the small size of the tumor. There had also been no other



findings of cancer in either breast. I was relatively young and healthy, and apart from the three other health concerns that defined this fiftieth year of my life, I was in good shape. We already knew that it was an infiltrating duct carcinoma. Although no cancer is “good”, this was the most common type of breast cancer, one that had been extensively studied and has extensive treatment protocols based on each possible outcome.

It was actually the potential lymphatic involvement that was responsible for casting all the doubt. During my surgery, the surgeon had removed the sentinel lymph nodes and had performed what was called a frozen section to determine the presence or absence of cancer cells. Had she found any, she would have then done a lymphectomy.

In my case, the frozen section of the sentinel nodes did not show any cancer, making the lymphectomy unnecessary. This was a good thing; however, the frozen section is, apparently, not the most precise pathological test for cancer. The final word would come with the full pathology report. If the nodes then tested positive for cancer using more exact examination, more surgery would be required to remove the lymph nodes under the arm and I would be required to undergo radiation therapy. Only if the nodes tested negative for cancer in pathology would I be assured that no further surgery and no radiation therapy would be required.

It wasn't until two weeks after surgery, when I saw my surgeon for a post-surgical follow-up, that I would learn the full pathology report. Now two weeks is a lot of time to worry, but I had already learned my “worry” lesson. I simply stayed on the Train. Whatever God had planned for me in regards to follow-up, it was all in His hands; and even if it wasn't the outcome I might have hand-picked for myself, He would carry me through!

As a result, that two weeks was taken up with sleeping, resting, eating, slowly building up my endurance, and, in general, just getting better.



The post-surgical visit was full of good news. The sentinel lymph nodes were cancer free, therefore it was truly a “stage 1” cancer. There would be no need for further surgery, and no need for radiation therapy.

Excellent! Thank you, Lord!

In addition, the surgeon was pleased with the way the incision was healing up. She gave me the green light to begin physiotherapy on my right arm so that I could begin to regain the range of motion lost by surgery, and she even planted the seeds about reconstructive surgery in my mind, once all the cancer therapies had been completed.

Unfortunately, there were some test results that were not yet in. According to my surgeon, we wouldn’t know what other post-surgical cancer treatments would be necessary until all the reports returned. In other words, we would have no idea whether or not chemotherapy would be required.

“So you’ll let me know?” I asked hopefully.

“No,” she said. “From here on out, you will be followed by an Oncologist, and they will decide.”

Oncology.... Such an ominous word.... Such a scary word! “So, when will I see this Oncologist?”

“They will contact you.”

It wasn’t the answer I wanted to hear. “They will contact you” could mean days, or weeks, or even months, and by my calculations, I was due to return to work in just two weeks. I needed to know about follow-up before returning. I needed to have all of this move more quickly than “they will contact you”!



“Uh,” I stammered, “any idea how long it generally takes to hear from Oncology?”

“Two to four weeks,” was the answer.

Sure, you can say, I should have been happy it was two to four weeks and not two to four months. Unfortunately, all I could see was the fact that I would have to return to work without having a clue what else would be involved with my cancer recovery or how much more time off work I would need; and I also wouldn’t know when I could consider reconstruction!

Needless to say, I left the office with a bitter taste in my mouth. “That was a useless visit!” I grumbled to my poor husband as he drove us home. “I still don’t know what I really want to know! I have to wait who-knows-how-long to see Oncology, and I have to wait who-knows-how-much-longer to see about reconstructive surgery!”

In his wisdom, Rob let me ramble on. He even held his tongue when my grumbling finally slowed to a trickle. He never admitted it, but I’m sure he was praying for me, because that’s when I finally began to hear God’s voice:

*Aren’t you happy about the pathology reports?*

Yes, of course I am! But....

*But what?*

But I want to know about oncology! I want to know about reconstructive surgery!

*It could have been so much worse, you know! You could now be facing lymphectomy and radiation therapy!*

All too true, and I repented immediately. Turning to Rob, I said, “Here I am grumbling about one little thing that I don’t know yet, and about another little thing that will take a tiny bit



longer than I had hoped, and what I really should be doing is thanking God for the positive pathology reports. No more surgery, no radiation!”

He just smiled.

I often think about the Children of Israel in the wilderness and how they completely forgot the miraculous deliverance from Egypt and refused to enter the Promised Land because of the report of walled cities and giants. Before I come down hard on them, however, I have to remember that I am no better. I so often tend to focus on the one tiny thing that is still an unknown or is still not yet taken care of, and in the process, I completely overlook the huge miracle that God has provided for me.

God taught me an important lesson that day. He taught me to stop complaining that my Train might not move as quickly as others, or that it might not look as sleek and new. He taught me instead to give Him thanks for EVERY SINGLE blessing that comes my way. Instead of dwelling on the pieces I would still like to change, I’m learning to focus on the miracles, ever believing that the God who brought me back a good pathology report is big enough to know how and when and where any necessary follow-ups will take place. Isn’t the God who has so perfectly timed this entire ordeal still in charge of the time-line? I simply don’t need to worry what my Train looks like or how often it stops. My Train Driver is the God of the universe!

I did finally hear from Oncology. Four weeks later. But that’s another story!



## Chapter 20: WEARING JESUS

*"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."*

*(Isaiah 61:10)*

I am told that before a train can leave a station, a certain list of safety checks must be done. Only when everything on the list passes inspection can the train driver feel safe to leave.

What about our trek through life? Are there safety checks we need to make before we leave our prayer closets each morning? What if we overlook them, just for once?

In the days leading up to my surgery, I had struggled with pride and vanity as I was forced to make the decision to have a full mastectomy. But the grace of God, I overcame! Two of my archenemies, gone for good!

Or so I thought.

You see, once I figured that pride and vanity were overcome, I stopped worrying about them. I stopped doing the safety checks. That's when they snuck back in, in full battle array!

After my surgery, it took me a while to adjust to the way I looked in the mirror, but I did eventually adjust, and things were good.

Until the day I had to go out for the first time....



My skin was still too tender to wear regular undergarments, so I chose a baggy tank top and pulled an even-more baggy shirt over the top. I carefully inspected myself in the mirror: Nope! No one could see that I had just undergone a mastectomy. Good! And this is how I dressed when I went out those first few days.

As the days went on and I continued to heal, my son invited a friend over for supper. Unfortunately, it was too warm in the house to wear two shirts. What would I do?

I began experimenting with my old bra and a pair of socks. In the end, I found a combination that seemed to work, and again I carefully inspected myself in the mirror: No one could tell! Double good!

This is how I then proceeded to dress every time I was around people.

A few days after this, during my post-operative visit with my surgeon, she began to talk to me about reconstructive surgery, and the seed planted itself in my mind. She indicated that at the same time I had the surgical side reconstructed, I might want to consider having surgery to the other side as well to maybe “bulk it up”!

I already knew this was to be a thing of the future, as I would need to go through Oncology before even considering reconstruction. Nonetheless, I couldn’t get the idea out of my head. Hey! Maybe in the end I would look better than I ever had in my life! It wasn’t long before I again began to fixate on that day in the future when I might, perhaps for the first time ever, look “normal”.

It was a beautiful air castle. The only problem was that I couldn’t get one nagging idea out of my head: Maybe I needed to ask God if reconstruction was a good idea!





Yes. I would do that. But it wasn't a decision I had to make right away. I hadn't even been given my first Oncology appointment! And I continued to fixate on my air castles.

God most often speaks to me in the quiet of the morning hours, and this was His chosen time that second day of September, when He was finally able to help me understand that I needed to ask Him about reconstruction before continuing to fixate on the idea. "Lord," I prayed, "I need to know Your will regarding reconstructive surgery!"

He didn't seem to answer me. Instead I was overwhelmed with the realization that I had let my physical appearance once again dominate my life. Wait a minute! What did that have to do with reconstruction?

That's when I realized that reconstruction wasn't the point here. Breaking free from vanity was. "Lord," I whispered, "I think that you are telling me to not go through with reconstruction in order that I may break free of vanity for good!"

Unfortunately, I couldn't let it go. My next prayer? "Could You please confirm that?"

Yup. I was holding on to hope. Maybe I had heard God wrong. Maybe He was just telling me that I needed to break from vanity *before* considering reconstruction. Maybe....

I opened my Bible to Exodus 28:31-43, the passage where I had left off reading the day before. It was a passage all about how Aaron the high priest was to be dressed. He was to wear an ephod of blue. He was to put on a breastplate that bore each of the names of the tribes of Israel. He was to wear linen undergarments. He was to have the words, "Holiness to the Lord" attached to the turban on his head.... The instructions continued, but the idea was all the same: The clothing that Aaron was to wear was highly symbolic. Every piece pointed to Jesus. Everything was a visible symbol of God, of the love of Christ!



Wait. Why would God be speaking to me of clothing, when I was asking about reconstruction? It made no sense!

Or did it?

When people looked at Aaron, they couldn't help but be reminded of God. What about me? When people looked at me, did they also see God? Did they see reminders of Jesus' love? As a follower of Jesus Christ, I have been given Jesus' robe of righteousness (See Isaiah 6:10) Do I wear it? Or, like the wedding guest in Jesus' parable (Matthew 22:8-14), do I refuse to put it on?

"Lord," I prayed, "You are telling me that I need to be less worried about how I look and more worried that I am spiritually dressed in the way that will bring honor to Your name!"

God wasn't quite through convincing me, however. I turned to Acts 14:21-28. The passage is the story of Paul and Barnabas' return to Antioch after their first missionary journey. It speaks of how they went from city to city, *"strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith...."*

The message to me was clear: I was fixated on reconstruction, when my full emphasis needed to be on my real reason-to-be: To strengthen my brothers and sisters on Earth and to exhort them to continue in the faith!

I was sure that God was done with my "lesson" at that point, but when I turned to the book of Hosea, I saw that He wasn't. The passage spoke of idols and how they were the downfall Israel, and I understood: God was warning me that I was making an idol out of my appearance. I needed to repent, I needed to be more worried about whether or not I was "wearing" Christ, whether or not the world can see Christ through me!



I repented, and I put aside the idea of reconstruction. I still don't know if I've received the final answer or not. All I know is that at that moment in time, while I waited to go through oncology, this was not to be my concern. Instead, I was to focus on wearing Jesus.

I couldn't help one last question: "Is a prosthesis okay, Lord?"

I could almost feel Him smiling at me, and I knew the answer: It wasn't wrong, as long as I wore it *under* Jesus' robe of righteousness, as long as the words "*holiness to the Lord*" were so stamped upon my life that the world would know they were there.

My new prayer?

*Lord, help me to wear You today! Help me to truly demonstrate a clear picture of You to the unsaved world around me. Help me to live my life in a way that the world will see Your holiness through me, that the world will want what I have in You, that I will be a little "mirror" of Christ!*

We all have idols in our lives. They may be innocent things, but if they stand in the way of our witness for Christ, they need to be done away with. Let's remember Jesus' advice: "*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*" (Matthew 5:30 NKJV); and.... "*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*" (Matthew 18:6 NKJV)

Let's especially remember the safety checks. It doesn't matter how victorious we are over some pet sin in one circumstance, we must continue to be on our guard. Just like the train driver must be diligent in checking his list of safety concerns before leaving every station, we must also



be diligent in seeking God's help in recognizing and fighting the enemy, for he is like a roaring lion, stalking us at all times, seeking for moments of weakness where he can again pull us into his evil traps.

But that is yet another story....



## Chapter 21: ONE DAY AT A TIME

*“Therefore do **not worry about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.*

*Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34)*

If you spend much time in any train station, it becomes obvious that there are two kinds of train travelers. There are those who stand at attention, luggage in hand, toes on the yellow line, straining to see down the track as they wait. When the train does arrive, they have their hand on the door before the door locks are released, and they don't wait for the passengers who are getting off to exit before trying to push onto the train.

Then there are the other riders. These tend to sit back and wait until the train has stopped, until the exiting passengers have all climbed off, and until those who are in the first category have boarded. Only then do they move towards the train doors.

Which passengers are less stressed? Which ones truly believe that the train driver will not leave them behind?

I have often heard the expression, *Take life one day at a time*. I know this is the way we are supposed to live, the “formula” so to speak, for a stress-free life. It is even included in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount: *“Therefore **do not worry about tomorrow**, for **tomorrow will worry about its own things**. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34)*

Just what does this mean, however, to someone like me? I wanted to see change. I wanted to be able to plan, to know when my return to work date would be, to know when I would see



Oncology and what kinds of therapies would be required from then on out. How could I survive without knowing? How could I truly take life *one day at a time*?

I was sure all my questions would be answered at my post-operative visit to the surgeon, but they weren't. This had serious implications for my return-to-work date. My surgeon needed to fill in some paperwork that would help Occupational Health guide me through the return-to-work process, but when, three weeks post-surgery, the paperwork still wasn't in, the temptation to panic was ever-present. Especially since the original guidelines I had been given said 28 days, which meant exactly one more week.

Just how was I supposed to live one day at a time, with all these unknowns?

God's response? Lovingly as always, He reminded me of how He had taken care of all my pre-surgery concerns. He then asked me, very gently, if I thought that perhaps He no longer drove the Train...if I believed that His miracles of time were only for before surgery....

Of course not! And I repented of my doubt.

God then reminded me of some all-important Truths on how to live one day at a time. It is interesting that these Truths all *precede* the verse where Jesus advises us to live one day at a time. Could it be that in His wisdom, when He gave those sage words, He knew people like me would need to know how to do what He advised? Did He realize that living one day at a time was too foreign for us to be able to achieve without instruction?

Jesus said: "*Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?***" (Vs. 25)



Or, in my case, is my life not more than timelines? Isn't the quality of my life dictated by things far more important than "planning" everything to the maximum? Hum. God did have a point. In all reality, the quality of my life is dictated by how much time I spend with Him!

*"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Vs. 26)*

One of the things I've been able to do during my rehabilitation is sit out on the deck and watch the birds. I have a female ruby-throated hummingbird who visits my deck regularly. She is quite territorial and will drive away any other hummer. She isn't at all shy of humans and will often dive-bomb me if there isn't fresh food in the feeder. Would I have ever known this if I hadn't been sitting out on the deck? If I were so all consumed with worrying about return to work, would I have ever even seen this tiny but welcome part of the nature in my backyard?

*"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (Vs. 27)*

That tiny hummingbird, the smallest of all birds, didn't need any added stature. She had everything she needed right there. She had a constant food supply, she had her speed and agility, and she had her tenacity. She didn't worry about a thing, and even if she had done so, she wouldn't have grown even a millimetre in height.

*"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Vs. 28-30)*

As happens every summer, the lack of rain had almost killed my lawn. There was only a little green grass evident over the septic bed and around the garden, while the rest of our 1.5



acres had all gone to weeds. This year, for the first time ever, I took the time to admire those “weeds”, and I discovered dainty purple, yellow and white flowers, lacy-green ferns, Barnyard Grass, Bluegrass, Goose Grass and many other types of grasses that I had no idea even existed. I couldn’t help but marvel at the intricacy of Queen Ann’s lace and purple asters, and I even had to admit that the dandelion was a masterful work of ingenuity. Intricate works of art, each and every one. Do they worry? Not for a moment. Not even when they see the lawn tractor leaving the garage. Not even when they realize that in moments they will be nothing more than mulch!

The verse spoke directly to my heart: If God so clothed the weeds of my backyard, which were here today, but would be mulched by the lawn tractor tomorrow, wouldn’t He also take care of my time constraints? Wouldn’t He fix all my appointments so that the return to work went smoothly? Wasn’t He big enough and loving enough to take care of all these “all important” details?

*“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Vs. 31)*

I read, “When shall I return to work? When shall I see oncology? How will I work in medical appointments around work?”

*“For after all these things the Gentiles seek.” (Vs. 32a)*

Yes, naturally! The things I worry about are things that everyone worries about; but not everyone knows my Lord and Savior! Oh, Lord! Have I fallen so low?

*“For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” (Vs. 32b)*

Did I really believe that? Truly? Down in my heart?

Of course I did!





Then why was I worrying?

It took a few moments for me to realize that though I thought I believed, deep inside was a layer of unbelief, one that I had never truly known was there. “Lord,” I prayed, “help my unbelief! Help me to be like the train passengers who relax as they wait, ever knowing their Train will never leave them behind!”

I was still puzzled, however. It is, after all, normal to think about things. My colleagues *were* asking me about return to work. My return to work date *would* affect how the entire department would run over the next few weeks and how the patients would be cared for. How could I *not* think about these things?

Jesus didn’t leave us in the dark on this one either. His answer lies in the next few words: *“But seek first **the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**”* (Vs. 33)

Wow. Wasn’t this what I had done pre-operatively? I had sought Him with all my heart, and He had answered me, not only in the emotional support, but also in the kinds of things I was worried about now. My Train Driver hadn’t stepped down from His post. He would never leave without me. I didn’t need to push and shove!

The secret to truly living one day at a time lies in seeking Jesus. It is the times when I focus only on Him that I am successful. The moment I get distracted, the moment I take my eyes off of Him, I fall back into all the old patterns.

For anyone who is like me, living one day at a time is a process. I haven’t completely mastered it, but praise be to God, I have begun the process. The days I remember to relax on the Train and let God drive me through the mazes and dead-ends and parking garages have truly



been beautiful, stress-free days. On the days where I fall back into my old patterns, however, God is still there. He's still gracious and longsuffering. He simply calls me from the engine of the Train: "Relax, My child! I won't leave the station without you!"



## Chapter 22: THE STOWAWAY

*“...your adversary the devil walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8b)*

In the olden days it was common to hear stories of people stowing away aboard trains. Courageous and desperate men would leap onto the tops of coal cars as then passed under bridges, sneak into box cars at train yards, or get aboard in a variety of other ways; and then they would ride the train until they either arrived at their final destinations or got kicked off, whichever came first!

Sometimes these stowaways were simply down on their luck and desperate to get to their destinations. Others were in it for the thrill. They stowed away simply because they could. Still others had more evil intent: They were there to hold up the train and rob and kill its passengers....

Do people still stow away aboard trains?

It likely wouldn't be that difficult in Europe, since tickets are not checked as you enter the train. If caught, however, the stowaway must buy a ticket on the spot or be thrown off at the next station with a hefty fine.

I have to wonder how the train driver and conductor view the stowaway. It must be kind of strange to have a train full of legitimate, ticket-holding passengers, with just one person who isn't supposed to be there. Do they wonder if the vagabond will act as a negative influence on the other passengers? Do they worry that he or she will convince others of the thrill of riding the train without paying? What if the stowaway is a dangerous felon, intent on harm?



What if it is an angry, uncaged dog?

I don't really know what would go through a train driver's head, but I do know what went through my head when I learned I had a "stowaway", a lump of unknown origin in my body. My active imagination immediately turned the thing into an angry, felonious dog, one that had a voracious appetite and was dead set on taking my life.

Where did this come from?

I'm not sure. I love dogs and am certainly not afraid of them. Every time I thought of that lump, however, all I could see in my mind's eye was blood dripping from the bared fangs of a vicious, snarling canine, and all I wanted to do was get rid of it!

The day of my needle biopsy, that dog fought back. It certainly didn't appreciate the needle, and it made its immediate fury known in the pain. It took days for that to completely settle, and the biopsy also resulted in the angry dog changing shape. Initially, it was like a round object; but after the biopsy, it became rough and jagged. I would later be told this was normal, for three pieces of the tumor were, indeed, cut away. In my mind, however, it was just my ferocious stowaway showing its cruel teeth. You see, as crazy as this seems, I knew that this "dog" was very, very angry. It wanted to be left alone. It wanted to overtake my body, to overtake my life, and it wanted to do so in peace!

Was I putting strange, human actions on an inanimate object? I thought so, and I closely guarded this little visual image in my mind. It wouldn't do for people to laugh at me!

The day my doctor told me I had breast cancer, somehow in the course of our conversation, my visual image slipped out.



She wasn't at all surprised. "It's common for women to view their tumors as something ferocious," she explained. "In fact, it's a positive part of the healing process."

That made me feel better. At least I wasn't crazy to have given such a living identity to the tumor. All I knew was that if the "dog" had become so "angry" after a simple biopsy, it would stop at nothing short of taking my life. I wanted that stowaway caged. Destroyed. Completely removed from any holds it had taken over my body, before it overtook my other breast, my lymphatic system, my life! This is what fuelled my emphatic reply to my surgeon when she asked me if I was okay with a surgical date anytime within the next four weeks: "Yes!" I nearly shouted. "I just want to get through this as quickly as possible!"

It was, perhaps, this image that helped me in the days leading up to my surgery. Yes, I dreaded the anaesthesia. Yes, I dreaded Nuclear Medicine. Yes, I dreaded the thought of losing my breast. Yes, I dreaded the thought of chemotherapy; but whatever was necessary to get rid of that stowaway was acceptable.

Though the "angry dog" during the breast cancer experience was my tumor, I realize that we all have "angry dogs" around us all the time. We are, in fact, surrounded by them. Consider this text: "...*your adversary the devil walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" (1 Peter 5:8b)

Wait. That verse is talking about a roaring lion. Hardly the same as a dog!

True enough, but just like that tumor in my breast sought to devour me, to riddle me with cancer, to eventually take my life, the devil stalks us, and his goal is to riddle us with strongholds, with internal strife, and ultimately to take our lives. He wants nothing more than for all God's children to end up burning in hell.



What should our response be?

The same as my response to the tumour! Our number one priority should be to get rid of the devil! Immediately!

My “stowaway” was removed via well-established medical protocols. What about the “roaring lion”? Can he be so easily removed?

The answer is an emphatic “Yes”! Just like there was a medical “track” that I followed for treating breast cancer, God has given us a spiritual “track” -- A guideline -- for staying out of the devil’s traps. The steps are as follows:

1. Humility: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time....”* (1 Peter 5:6)

When I first learned I had breast cancer, I realized I was at the mercy of the medical profession, and I was happy to be there. Why? Because they knew how to deal with my cancer, and I did not. They had the expertise, the equipment and the time.

What would have happened if I had said, “No, I won’t let them help me”?

The “stowaway” would still be a part of me.

It’s the same with our fight against the devil. The first step is to humbly submit ourselves to God. We need to admit that we can’t fight the battle on our own, that we need expert help.

And Who is more of an expert with the devil than God Himself?

2. Surrender: *“...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* (1 Peter 5:7)



What if I had told the doctor she could care for me, but then I had refused to keep my medical appointments? What if I had refused the blood work or the pre-op chest x-ray? What if I hadn't shown up for surgery? What if I had come to surgery, but I hadn't been fasting?

In order for me to be completely free of my "stowaway", I had to follow the guidelines of my doctor exactly. I had to take my "but I know better" and my "I don't know if it will work", etc., and I had to surrender them into her hands. I needed to trust her completely.

It is the same with our battle with the "roaring lion", the devil. We need to surrender ourselves completely into God's hands. We need to not doubt that He knows what He's doing. We need to truly "cast all of our cares upon Him"!

3. Vigilance: "*Be sober, be vigilant....*" (1 Peter 5:8a)

Have you noticed something? Have you noticed that all the steps for doing away with the "roaring lion" are all from the same Biblical passage where we are warned about him (1 Peter 5:8b)? Isn't it interesting that just before God tells us the devil is like a roaring lion, He tells us to be sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8a)?

In my battle with my "stowaway", I needed to be sober and vigilant. I needed to be vigilant in regular breast screenings, and the day I found the tumor, I needed to be vigilant in taking action.

In our battle with the devil, we also need to be watching. We need to be aware of his schemes, and once we sense that he is prowling around us, we need to take immediate action, for that is the moment we need to seek the master physician, God Himself!

4. Resistance: "*Resist him....*" (1 Peter 5:9a)



The day I found that lump in my breast, I knew I was involved in a battle, and I had a choice to make. I could ignore the tumor, or I could resist it. I chose to resist. I submitted myself in faith to my medical professionals knowing that I wasn't the first to suffer breast cancer and that the expertise gathered over years of studying this disease would in the end, free me from my "stowaway".

The moment we sense the devil "*prowling around*", "*seeking who he can devour*" is the moment to begin resisting as well!

5.     Stand Firm: Finally we are told: "*Resist Him, **steadfast in the faith**, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*" (1 Peter 5:9)

Just what does it mean to be "*steadfast in the faith*"?

To answer this question, let's consider a lion's habitat. Quite generally we do not find them roaming the streets of our neighbourhoods. It's true that we sometimes keep lions in zoos and wild animal parks, but generally speaking, in order to meet up with the lions that will prove to be dangerous to us, we must go into their territory. We must leave the confines of our homes and our towns, and we must go out into the African Savannah.

When God originally forewarned me of troubled times ahead, I had a choice to make. I could either stay "*steadfast in the faith*", clinging to His promise, or I could stray into the "African Savannah" of doubt. As long as I clung to His promise, I was kept safe, well out of the clutches of the devil. The moment I strayed from that promise, however, and allowed myself to doubt, I found myself overcome with discouragement, and that discouragement would stay with me until I again chose to stand in faith.





It is the same with all of the devil's tactics. If we are "*steadfast in the faith*", if we keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord, we stay out of the devil's territory. It's the moment we take our eyes off of Jesus that we stray into enemy territory, and once there, the "roaring lion" has free reign.

I find it very interesting that immediately after this passage in 1 Peter 5, we find the promise God gave me through my husband the day we learned that the tumor was, indeed, cancer: "*But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.***" (1 Peter 5:10)

You see, I suffered at the teeth of my stowaway, my "angry dog", but God promised deliverance. In the same way, we will suffer at the paws of the "roaring lion"; but if we humble ourselves before God, if we submit all our cares to Him, if we are vigilant, if we resist, and if we are "*steadfast in the faith*", we will **also** come through perfect, established, strengthened, and settled. Though the devil has been practicing his tactics for thousands of years, God has also had thousands of years of experience resisting him. Even more importantly, however, He has also prescribed the overall cure, the one thing that can turn away that roaring lion once and for all: The blood of Jesus!

Let's be sure there are no "stowaways" on board our trek through life. Let's be ever on the alert for the "roaring lion", the devil. He may attack us in many different forms, but each one is doomed to fail, because God is the Master at "lion taming"!



## Chapter 23: IN HIS TIME

*"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11)*

Trains in Belgium are notorious for being on time. It's true that your train may arrive one to two minutes late, and rarely, even more, but it generally catches up by the next scheduled stop. It's just one of the things I like about taking the train: I can always count on when we will arrive.

Could I count on my breast cancer Train to be on time as well? Because, Lord, it looks to me like it is way off schedule!

That is how I felt the day I found the lump on my breast and for several weeks afterwards. I became so immersed in the "Why, Lord? Why now?" phase of my spiritual walk that it was difficult to stay focused. Oh, I wasn't off the Train. I had simply resigned myself to the fact that its timetable was more than a little bit off. After all, summer was coming--My favorite season of the year. This trip through breast cancer would most certainly ruin my summer. We also really needed to see my mother-in-law. Having breast cancer was bound to interfere with our planned trip to Europe. Besides, I would be out of commission for who knew how long. That meant one less body to shoulder the load at work. Lord, this Train *can't* be on time. What *were* You thinking?

It took me a few weeks, but I finally came to realize that part of staying on the Train was to put the timing of things into His hands. After all, if God could work all my medical



appointments around my work schedule, then even though I can't see the "big picture", the timing of everything would somehow work out. Perhaps it wouldn't be to my liking, but it would be the best timing for me.

And I firmly believed that.

Especially the part that it wouldn't be the timing of my liking....

Sure enough, the day I had my follow-up appointment with my family doctor to receive the results of the needle biopsy was perhaps the worst timing ever. We were scheduled to leave for Europe in just three days, and as my husband's birthday would come up while we were away, the boys and I, along with my mother, had decided to give him a little "surprise" birthday party that same evening. When my doctor broke the news, I couldn't help but think, "*There goes Rob's birthday dinner!*" Especially when she proceeded to call him in to personally tell him the news!

And what about our vacation? Besides the pleasure of being able to visit my mother-in-law, we were already imagining ourselves exploring Belgium and le Mont St. Michel, picking our way through the sand of the D-Day beaches and discovering Vimy Ridge, a tiny piece of Canadian soil in France. We were looking forward to our once-in-a-lifetime chance to visit the Channel Islands and learning about all the medieval and pre-historic history in the region, and we could already taste the crepes and gallettes, the wonderful French cheeses, the pastries, the chocolate, and let's not forget the fresh French bread! But now my doctor was telling me that the appointment with the surgeon was the following week, when we were supposed to be in Europe. The entire trip would have to be cancelled due to the very poor timing of my breast cancer. God, just what *were* You thinking!



We didn't end up cancelling Rob's birthday dinner after all. The festivities of the evening, albeit a bit dampened, served to keep our minds off the bad news. It kept me from breaking into tears every two minutes, and it kept the boys and my mother from asking too many questions. I was also able to reschedule the appointment with the surgeon for two days after our return from Europe, and that in itself, as I would later learn, turned out to be a miracle of God's timing.

In general, our trip to Europe served as a wonderful distraction. In fact, the trip couldn't have been timed better. While we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves, not only were we able to put the worries of breast cancer behind us, but all the built-up stresses of the year as well. When we returned, we were far better able to cope with the cancer than we would have been had we not gone, and what better way to fill the waiting time then by touring Europe!

During my first appointment with the surgeon, she informed me that I would normally have to wait about four weeks for a surgical date. However, due to a couple of other pressing cases that had come across her desk that same week, she was in the process of requesting addition operating room time. If she were to get it, I would be the first on the list for surgery on that day. In the end, she was able to schedule my surgery for just eight days later, almost exactly four weeks after learning I had breast cancer. I had my surgery even before I would have had it had I cancelled my trip to Europe to keep the original appointment. It wasn't bad timing at all. It was a gift of God for us to learn about the cancer just prior to leaving.

After telling Darien that I had breast cancer, one of his primary concerns was that I might have my surgery while he was at the native centre in Northern Ontario. Imagine my surprise and pleasure when surgery was scheduled for the day before he would leave. It was also scheduled



on a day when Donovan was off work, and the date, August 16, was exactly two and a half weeks before Rob had to return to school!

That's when I began to recognize God's ingenuity in keeping the Train on schedule. He planned it all so that my husband would be off during the early days after my surgery, during the time when I would need him the most!

Rob also considered this a direct gift of God. His exact words to his colleagues were, "These past two weeks have been like a little paradise. I've been able to spend special time with my wife. I couldn't ask for any more perfect gift!"

Of course, surgery also meant several weeks off work for me, right in the best part of summer and early fall. As I contemplated this, I realized that although summer is my favorite season, I generally end up feeling a bit cheated because I have to spend those beautiful, hot, sunny days enclosed in an over-air-conditioned building, in an office without windows, shivering beside a foot heater. Now, during my absolute favorite season, I was being gifted several weeks where I could sit out on the deck and enjoy the sunshine, where I could take strolls in the cool summer evenings, where I could truly enjoy my summer!

There was just one more little concern.... I had just returned from a two week vacation, and my colleague, who had to cover for me while I was away, was faced with several more weeks of the stress of covering both her caseload and mine.

Is anyone surprised to hear that for the first few weeks they went into the slowest time that I've ever known since being on this particular team? By taking all her own cases, plus mine as well, my colleague still reported feeling "un-busy", with a caseload of less than she would normally have carried. Even the assistants, who often get the brunt of the work when someone is



off, reported time and time again that they weren't particularly busy. It is true that things got busy again before I returned. Quite busy, in fact, causing them more than a little stress, but I couldn't help being thankful that this was not the case for my entire leave of absence.

And God still wasn't finished.

My surgeon was to fill in some forms for the medical leave of absence. The only problem was, I had forgotten to sign the back of the form, giving legal authority for them to communicate with my workplace. The surgeon's office is in a neighboring town, too far to just "drop in". I would have to plan a special trip, and with the price of gas, to say nothing of my limited post-surgery energy, that's not exactly what I wanted to do.

God had it all worked out. Again. After my first post-op visit with my surgeon, I was scheduled for some routine tests designed to rule-out the possibility of metastatic involvement. One, a bone scan, was scheduled for Friday of that week. I would have to go in the morning for an injection, and then return three hours later for the scan. The tests were to be done in the neighboring town. It would be too far to drive back home to wait, but it wouldn't be too far to drop by the surgeon's office and sign those forms. And that's exactly what I did, with a whispered, "Thank You, Lord!" as I exited her office.

Unfortunately, my return-to-work date continued to loom as a major unknown in my life. I was relieved to learn that my leave of absence would be extended, as per my surgeon's orders, until I had seen Oncology. However, when Oncology still hadn't contacted me by week five after surgery, it was tempting to become just a little bit frustrated. After everything had moved so quickly, why would things drop to such a standstill? Didn't God know I just wanted to get all this over with as quickly as possible?



Perhaps.... But He also knew something else. He knew that I was not yet feeling up to my normal energy level. He knew I needed further time to heal before I returned to work. He knew that I had also been assaulted by my first cold of the fall. If Chemo was to be something I had to contend with, it would be far better to face those treatments *without* any type of virus!

No, I didn't need to worry. God was taking care of all the details. With all the above evidence of God's excellent ability in dealing with timing issues, I knew that the Oncology appointment would be exactly when it needed to be, with exactly the person I needed to see, and the timing would all work out perfectly. Besides, hasn't He proven Himself, even historically, to be able to keep a Train on schedule? *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...."* (Gal 4:4)



## Chapter 24: THE STIGMA OF CANCER

*"But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. **You have put all things in subjection under his feet.**'" (Hebrews 2:6-8a)*

We had just gotten off the train in Ostend from an afternoon trip to visit Namur, home of Belgium's largest castle. We were tired, but we were also hungry; and instead of returning to our hotel, we walked down to a local sandwich shop for some supper. Since supper is never complete without desert, and since Belgian deserts are some of the best in the world, our steps next led us to a local ice cream shop, where Darien and Rob each bought a cone. We then made our way onto the dike to watch the sunset.

I didn't get an ice cream. Ice cream contains sugar, and I didn't want to "feed" my angry dog "stowaway"....

I had been strong through similar temptations all week, but for some reason it caught up to me that night on the dike: They got to have ice cream, but I couldn't because I had -- cancer!

My throat was tightening up as tears threatened to spill down my cheeks, and the only thoughts that were going through my mind were, *"It's not fair! They can enjoy their ice cream because they don't have -- **CANCER!**"*

One look from a family member that night might have been all it took to get me back in line, but they were too busy enjoying their cones and taking pictures of the sunset over the ocean





to notice my struggle, and self-pity quickly took free reign of my spirit: *You know, this is probably your last trip to Europe. After all, you have -- **cancer!***

It only took a few moments for me to feel the need to completely hide my face from my picture-snapping men. It wouldn't do for my already-curious teen to see me crying, and oh, how I wanted to cry. It was my right. After all, I had -- **CANCER!**

I'm sorry to admit that this wasn't the first time the thought of that "C" word reduced me to tears. It started, in fact, the day my doctor announced I had breast cancer. I remember nodding resolutely and forcing myself to say, "I am prepared for that!" The words, however, were squeezed out of a throat so parched and taut that it was a wonder my vocal folds would vibrate at all! *Why?* I had known in my heart I had breast cancer ever since that evening, back on May 7, when I found the lump. I *was* prepared for it. God had already told me I would come through victorious. What was going on?

I had gone through the rest of that evening in a bit of a daze. Every once in a while I would get distracted and my throat would relax, but as soon as I would think of that dreaded word, it would tighten back up again, and I would have to squeeze my eyes shut to stop the tears.

Was it a fear of death that made me react this way?

I didn't think so. God had already promised me victory, and in case I had forgotten, the same evening my doctor told us the official news, God gave me, through my husband, 1 Peter 5:10: *"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will **himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**"*

It couldn't be a fear of death. Maybe I would feel better in the morning!



In the morning I was a bit better. God gave me the story of Peter and John healing the lame man in the temple (see Acts 3:1-10), and with that story, He reassured me that I had hope in Him. I left my prayer closet with that hope, and I found that I could go about my daily work that day without thinking about the cancer. As a result, the tears stayed in check. In my journal at the end of the day, I wrote, “God gave me victory over my doubt. I feel so close to Him. I thank Him for this cancer!”

The next day then rolled around, and I had to tell one of my colleagues I had cancer. She was the one who would be covering my caseload when I was on vacation, and she needed to know that she would also be assuming it for a much longer period of time.

Initially I was very strong...until the word “cancer” needed to roll off my tongue, that is, and then I was reduced to a blubbing baby.

Just what was it about this word?

That’s when I began to define my true thoughts about cancer, and I realized that deep inside, I saw cancer as a stigma.

Webster defines stigma as: “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.” Yes, I had to admit, whenever I thought of the word, I thought of it as a mark of disgrace. True enough, God had promised I would come through victorious; but that didn’t change the fact that I was “impure”, “infected”. To admit to someone that I had cancer was like admitting that I had committed a horrible crime!

It wasn’t until evening that I finally stopped long enough to try to hear God’s opinion on the subject. When I did, I couldn’t have been more surprised: *So you have cancer. So what? You also have a torn rotator cuff!*



I wanted to hug God then and there, because for the first time, I understood. Cancer is nothing but a word. A diagnosis. Something with only earthly significance. Absolutely no different from the diagnosis of torn rotator cuff!

That image helped me immensely through the next few days. In fact, when I told people I had breast cancer, I began to finish my sentence with a smile by saying, “and I also have a torn rotator cuff.” In other words, the two are the same: Mere diagnoses of no lasting significance. Our God, the master healer, is in charge of both!

Apparently most women diagnosed with breast cancer suffer something similar as they adjust to their diagnoses, and I was especially comforted to learn that at some point, all of us get to the place where we can say the words, “breast cancer”, without getting all teary-eyed. I was happy I had already arrived at that point in time. My monster was vanquished. For good!

Until that evening about a week later, however, as my family enjoyed their ice cream along the dike....

I trailed behind as we walked back to the hotel. I could hear their pleasant chatter about their favorite flavors of ice cream and how they had gotten special shots of the sun over the North Sea. Fortunately, I could also hear another voice: God’s! I could hear Him reminding me of His many promises that I would, indeed, pull through this. I could hear Him reminding me that I was simply allowing myself to wallow in self-pity. I could hear Him reminding me then that cancer is NOT a stigma. It is nothing but a mere diagnosis, a word that had no eternal meaning.

In the name of Jesus, I claimed victory over the stigma of cancer. I renounced my arch-enemy, self-pity, then and there, sending it back to the gates of hell where it belonged.



Unfortunately, the war still wasn't over....

It was the third Sunday after my surgery. I had been feeling quite well, and I decided I was ready to try going to church. I dressed myself carefully. By choosing an old bra and a sock to fill the right side, no one could tell I had undergone a mastectomy.

We arrived on time, we took our habitual seats, and we began joining in the praise and worship service. It was a powerful service, and it didn't take me long to come completely under the Spirit of God.

After the first song, however, one of the pastors did the unthinkable: He asked us to greet each other! As I looked around at the familiar faces in the pews surrounding me, I couldn't help but wonder how many of them even knew that I had breast cancer. Suddenly, I didn't want them to know. I didn't want them to feel sorry for me for having this stigma; but at the same time, how was I supposed to reply to their friendly greetings of, "How are you", when all I could squeeze out was a strained, "Fine, thanks!"

It was difficult to re-enter worship after that. I tried, and if I closed my eyes, I could somewhat succeed. Every time I opened them, however, all I could think about was what all those people must be thinking about the fact that I had -- CANCER!!!

The sermon was powerful, and I found that as long as I focused on taking notes on my Blackberry, I was transported again into the spiritual realm. Unfortunately, I could also feel the sock in my bra slipping out of place.... What if someone noticed? Then they would know that I had been branded with that horrible "C" word! Between the sermon and communion I excused myself using the reason that I needed to use the washroom. Although it wasn't a total lie, my real purpose was to readjust my sock....



Communion was special. At least it was as long as I kept my eyes closed and concentrated on the bread and the juice. Then the service was over, and horror of horrors, we were seated near the front. We would have to pass all those people to get out the door!

I turned and slipped my way through the crowd, completely unseen, and headed for the safety of my car. From there, I used my blackberry to text my boys that it was time for them to say good-bye to their friends. I needed to leave!

What was wrong?

The problem was that I still wasn't over the stigma of cancer. I still saw myself as "stained"!

It took a couple of hours for God to help me understand that I had let my fear of what people would think rob me of my spiritual experience. I had become so focussed on "me" that I hadn't been able to receive the fullness of my blessing at church, and I certainly had let it rob me of any possible chance to be a blessing to someone else.

I repented then and there. I don't know yet if the war with the stigma of cancer is completely over, but I praise God that yet another battle is won. There is truly victory in Jesus!

If any of you ever find yourself in a situation where you are hesitant to admit something about yourself, just remember: As long as it is covered by the blood of Jesus, it doesn't matter what it is. It has no eternal significance. Aren't we told: "*You have put all things in subjection under his feet*" (Hebrews 2:8a)? Whatever it is we suffer is no worse in the eyes of God than a scrape on our knee. After all, God is the master healer!



Perhaps we would also do well to remember God's Words to Paul in his weakness: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" (2Cor 12:9) It is in our weakness that God is able to carry us in His strength. Instead of saying, "Poor me, I have cancer", perhaps it would be more correct to say, "God's strength is going to be given lots of opportunity to be manifested in my life!"



## Chapter 25: STEADY MY HEART

*“...yet now He has reconciled to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you **continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel** which you heard....” (Colossians 1:22-23)*

Have you ever noticed the straps that dangle from the ceilings of buses, trams, subways and trains? If you’ve ever been on one of these vehicles when there is standing room only, you will likely have learned what those straps are for: They are designed to steady you so that the sudden jerks and turns of the vehicle will not throw you off your feet.

What about my Train? Did it have hand straps too? Or was I at risk of being thrown off my feet every time it went a different direction than I was anticipating?

From the second week after surgery on, I had one primary concern: Oncology. When would I hear from them? Would I need chemotherapy? Would chemo interfere with work? Would I be given the time off if I needed it?

So many questions, so few answers!

You see, the surgeon had told me at my post-op follow-up visit that I would receive a “welcome packet” from Oncology in the mail. She had also said I would be contacted anywhere from 2-4 weeks for my initial oncology assessment. Needless to say, I met the mail carrier every day, watching for that welcome packet; but three weeks later, bringing us to five weeks post-surgery, I still hadn’t heard anything.



The real “me” would have been quite uptight about this, but I really wasn’t. I gave it to God, and besides, I realized that every day I didn’t hear from oncology was one day more that I could recover my energy at home instead of having to worry about returning to work. In all honesty, I was kind of enjoying my little experience as a “stay-at-home mom”!

Monday morning of week five, however, found me at the dentist’s office. I was asked to update my medical record, and in talking to the dentist about my recent diagnosis of breast cancer, she expressed concern that I still hadn’t begun follow-up treatment. “You should have heard by now,” she said. “I’ve heard of them losing referrals before. I’d follow up if I were you!”

I decided to follow her advice. The next day I called the receptionist at the surgeon’s office. She, too, expressed surprise that I had heard nothing, but after contacting oncology, she assured me that my referral was being processed. I hadn’t heard anything because they simply didn’t yet have an appointment for me.

Interestingly, two days later I finally received the welcome packet in the mail...postmarked the day the surgeon’s receptionist contacted them about my referral....

The welcome packet recommended that all new patients bring someone with them to their initial appointment. This was because so much information would be presented that it would be good to have a second set of ears. I was pretty sure the second set of ears would be nice, but Donovan had already returned to University, the appointment was scheduled during Darien’s only class of the day, and Rob was back in the classroom. There would be no one to attend the appointment with me. I shrugged it off. I was sure God would take up the slack!

Now I won’t say that the thought of the Oncology visit didn’t bother me at all, because it did. The very next Sunday, however, we had a powerful praise and worship service at church,





and during that time, I gave the oncology visit, and all its potential outcomes, to God. I told God that no matter what happened, I knew He was in charge. I even told Him that I trusted Him to carry me through chemotherapy, should it be required, and I left church with peace in my heart.

Two days later, and just three days before the scheduled appointment, Rob's principal appeared at his classroom door with the sole purpose of finding out how I was doing. When Rob happened to mention that I would finally have my Oncology initial assessment that week, her response was, "You're going to go with her, aren't you?"

Rob was astonished. "Well," he said, "I would like to, but it's in the middle of a school day."

"No problem," responded his principal. "I will make all the arrangements. Plan to take half a day off school, and if the appointment goes past noon, plan to take the entire day."

That same day, I received a package in the mail from a good friend from my university days. The contents? A hand-made, patch-work quilt, with the words of the beatitudes worked into the design.

What was God up to? After all, I had gotten on the Train about Oncology and all its outcomes on Sunday, and I hadn't gotten off. Why, then, would He send me assurance that I wouldn't have to face Oncology alone? Why would He send me, through the Beatitudes, the assurance that His promises are true? Did He know something I didn't?

The next morning, I received an email from a prayer warrior. In essence, the email stated that in order for a lump of clay to become a beautiful china dish, it must first pass through the potter's wheel and the refiner's fire. Hum. I could certainly relate, and I was already thanking



God for the refinement He had already done in me through the breast cancer experience. Why would God send me this message today?

The mail arrived in the early afternoon. As I thumbed through the stacks of letters, I noticed a particular blue envelope addressed to me in unfamiliar handwriting. I noted the name on the return address as I pulled it out. It was from the parents of another dear friend, also from my university days.

I had met my friend's parents a few times, and I liked and respected them. I would never have expected to receive a card from them, however. Especially since I knew that my friend's father was suffering from Stage 4 esophageal cancer that had metastasized to the brain. He had already undergone neurosurgery and was in the process of undergoing aggressive chemotherapy. These were people I had been praying for daily. Why would they be writing to me?

The card was beautiful, and the message, which contained two separate hand-written notes, one from my friend's mom, and the other from my friend's dad, was touching and full of encouragement. Perhaps the most encouraging piece for me was this: Despite a desperate life or death struggle with cancer that my friend's dad was going through, he thought about me, and he went to the trouble to send me a word of encouragement.

Wait. Hadn't I received two messages from God in the same day? And hadn't I received two encouragements just the day before? What *was* God up to?

That night, in a weak moment, I got out my laptop and googled chemotherapy and breast cancer. I knew my husband was watching me, so I glanced up at him: "I just want to know what I might be up against if I have to go through chemo!"



“You shouldn’t do that,” he stated. “You don’t even know the composition of the tumor yet.”

“True,” I replied. “But I figure it’s worthwhile to be informed, no matter what!”

He shrugged and left me to my research.

I went on to read the website for the better part of an hour, and each passing moment found me faced with greater fear, deeper dread and more overwhelming dismay. Oh, I thought about my Train. I recognized enough to know I wasn’t exactly “relaxing” in my seat; however, I couldn’t shake the poignant feeling of horror and trepidation that I would have to go through chemotherapy. I would lose my hair. I would have serious gastrointestinal difficulties. My immune system would be ruined. And I would likely have to go through this for the next 3-6 months!

*Oh, God! I didn’t sign on for this! You just CAN’T make me go through...THAT!!!*

Suddenly my cell phone chirped. It was a text message from a friend. We had been texting each other off and on throughout the evening, and I had mentioned that I was researching chemo. Our “conversation” had ended an hour earlier, however, with her promising to pray for me. I didn’t expect to hear from her again that evening, and I certainly didn’t expect the contents of her message: “My favorite worship song right now is ‘Steady My Heart’ by Kari Jobe.” And then she proceeded to text me the lyrics.

I knew right then and there, even before I had read the lyrics or processed the title to the song, that God was reaching down to me, through my despair, desperately trying to get my attention. I opened my heart to Him as I began reading the lyrics, and I hadn’t gotten very far when God began speaking to me.



My response? The same thing I always do when God speaks to me: I started to cry!

Why? Because through the song, God was reminding me that I had allowed my heart to become unsteady. I hadn't gotten off the Train, but it was as if I was out of my seat, standing by the glass panels in the door, straining to see out, stressing over the upcoming track. Meanwhile, the Train had just "jolted", making a sharp turn towards the valley of chemotherapy, and I, totally unsupported and unprepared, was thrown off my feet.

Yet all the while, God had been providing me with "hand straps" to hang on to, to steady my heart. He had sent me four, to be exact:

1. Hand Strap #1: Rob could attend my Oncology appointment with me. This "hand strap" reminded me that God would not abandon me to my fear. He had already prepared moral support for my visit!
2. Hand Strap #2: The Beatitudes throw quilt that my dear friend had made and sent to me. This "hand strap" reminded me of God's promises and helped me to remember that no matter what, His promises would be fulfilled!
3. Hand Strap #3: The devotional about the potter and the clay. This "hand strap" reminded me that a little bit of testing builds perseverance and character, two things I pray daily to receive. It is NOT to be wished away, it is to be EMBRACED!
4. Hand Strap #4: The encouraging card from a fellow cancer sufferer. This fourth "hand strap" reminded me that there were thousands of others in the world going through chemotherapy, and God had not abandoned any of them. In fact, He was using one of them right now to reach out to me! He then reminded me that perhaps I needed to be a little less focussed on my "fear" of chemotherapy, and a little more focussed on the needs of others around me!



After all that, God had still sent me a song, through my friend, a song that He knew would open my spiritual eyes and allow me to see the hand straps He had sent.

I must say that I still couldn't "relish" the thought of chemotherapy, but I no longer feared it. God had steadied my heart. He had given me the "hand straps" I needed to keep me on my feet. How, then, could I doubt that God would be there for me if my Train ride happened to pass through the tunnel of chemotherapy? How could I not believe that He would calm my stomach if it needed calming, just like He did after anaesthesia? That He would protect my immune system? And that maybe, just maybe, He would use the potential loss of my hair to teach me yet another important lesson in vanity!

When I think about it, I must admit that God sends me "hand straps" all the time. He is constantly in the "heart steadying" business. I just don't always see them. You see, God doesn't just send us things randomly. When He sends us things, there is always a reason. Our job is to watch for those "hand straps" that He sends our way, and then to hang on to them; for in so doing, we are allowing God to steady our hearts!



## Chapter 26: THE BEST LAID PLANS

*"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)*

There is just one thing I don't like about train travel: You can't see where you're going. Oh, you can see the scenery go by, but you can't see the track ahead!

If you had asked me back in February of that year what my biggest stresses of the upcoming summer would be, I would have said: "Donovan doesn't yet have a co-op, and Darien doesn't have an internship,"

As a result, I proceeded to put an inordinate amount of worry into those two concerns. As a matter of fact, as I read through my prayer journal for the winter, these two themes pre-dominated everything from February until the end of June!

It's silly, isn't it, the things we worry about? Why is it that I stress so much just because I can't "see"? Can't I leave such details to the One who can?

This is one of the most important lessons this walk through breast cancer has afforded me, and I hope and pray that I will never forget what God has taught me so that at no other time in my life will I again stress over the unknown.

Let's back up a bit. Donovan was a first-year engineering student. His program allowed for and required six co-op terms, the first of which would be that summer. That meant he had to



find a co-op placement for the summer, or he risked having to put in extra semesters at the end of his five year program before he could graduate. Unfortunately, this co-op was simply not falling into place for him. Oh, it wasn't for a lack of trying on his part. He put in hundreds of resumes and a corresponding number of cover letters, but most of them were met with a rejection letter: Sorry, we're not interested at this time.

Then one day, he finally managed to land an interview. I was sure he would get the position. After all, they were only interviewing six students. Why not hire my son?

Unfortunately, he didn't get a job offer.

That's when the job posting came up in Timmins. Rob and I had lived in Timmins before Donovan was born, and I was absolutely certain that God had "saved" my son from this other job so that he could work in this lovely town.

He applied, but he never heard anything from the company. Again, my hopes were dashed.

He was about to begin applying to professors when he was given another interview. This job would have been perfect for him. They needed someone who spoke French and who was willing to travel throughout Canada. My son speaks French fluently, and he loves to travel. I was sure this was it!

When the company still hadn't offered the position to anyone four weeks later, I realized that yet again, my hopes were dashed, and by this time, all the professors had their positions filled. There would be no work for my son on campus.

Why wasn't God answering my prayers? Wasn't I praying fervently enough? So I began praying harder.



The semester ended then, and he came home to continue his co-op search from home.

Once again he flooded the market with applications. He looked up all the local engineering companies in our region and sent out cover letters and resumes. He even offered to volunteer his time. No one even responded to him.

Why, Lord? You know he needs this co-op! Why aren't You opening the doors?

Someone at church gave him a lead next, and I was sure this was God's door finally opening. Imagine my frustration and anger when this lead, too, went nowhere. And then it was June. Too late to do a 12 week co-op. I had to come to terms with facts: Donovan would not be getting a co-op for the summer.

I was pretty unhappy, to say the least. I could see no reason in the world why my son's prayers, and mine, too, hadn't been answered. He did manage to land a couple summer jobs. He helped a local farmer bring in hay for the last few weeks of June, and then he got a job at a local trail riding business, leading trail rides on horseback. In the end, he had an enjoyable, relaxing summer. But Lord, it didn't help his schooling! He didn't get a co-op!

I would later learn that he actually is only required to have five co-ops throughout his schooling, so the lack of a co-op that summer didn't necessarily mean he would have to put in an extra semester. It only meant that there would be no more grace periods. He would have to find co-ops for all remaining terms.

Darien's story was a bit different, but equally as frustrating. He had spent time the previous three summers in Northern Ontario, at a fly-in native reserve, ministering to native children. He loved it, and this served to confirm for him the call that God had placed on his life to work in native ministries. Unfortunately, our church was not sponsoring a trip to Northern





Ontario this year. If he wanted to continue his summer ministry, he would have to find an internship on his own.

This was also heavy on my mind. We didn't know if he would find a position, and we certainly didn't know when, or any of the other details that I wished to know. How could we plan our summer with all these unknowns?

Our local church put out some emails to the head of native ministries for our church, and eventually Darien was able to connect with some people in Northern Ontario who run a native centre. They were very interested in having Darien come up for an internship, but the details were slow in coming. By the end of the school year, we still didn't have any firm dates, or even a firm offer. Lord, thanks for the possibility, but -- we need to know some details!

Darien had originally offered to go up north as soon as we returned from Europe. This would give them four weeks of his summer. How disappointed we all were when they only extended an invitation for the last two weeks; but at least we had dates, and just before I officially learned I had cancer, we proceeded to look at flights and make his travel arrangements.

Why, Lord? Darien wanted to give You every minute of his summer. Why are You only taking two weeks?

Of course, all this happened "before". Before our world fell apart. Before we knew that I had cancer, and certainly *well* before we had a surgical date.

It didn't occur to me until about four weeks after my surgery just why my boys' summers hadn't turned out the way I had planned; but when it did, I couldn't help but fall on my knees in praise to my Loving Heavenly Father Who knows all things. Naturally, there was a bit of



repentance thrown in there as well: Repentance for my doubting Him, repentance for my anger at Him for not answering “my” prayers and repentance for my need to “see the track ahead”.

You see, if Darien had gone up north when he offered to go, he wouldn’t have been home for my surgery. Instead, he would have had to wonder and worry beside his cell phone, with very poor cell phone reception, if I was okay. As it all turned out, he was scheduled to leave the *day after* my surgery. He could leave in peace. Wow, God! You knew all along!

As for Donovan, if he had gotten any of those co-ops that he applied or interviewed for, he wouldn’t even have been home for the summer. He would have been miles away, and he wouldn’t have been able to take the day off work to be with me for my surgery. As it was, he was right there all summer long. His summer job gave him plenty of flexibility, and he was also home during my rehabilitation. Somehow, having him home through my breast cancer experience seemed so much more comforting than if he had been away.

God had it all under control all along. His control, not mine. His plans, not mine. And His were so much better than mine would have been!

The best-laid plans of mice and men?

You can have them. I prefer the plans of my Lord and Savior -- even if I can’t see the track ahead!



## Chapter 27: THE STILL SMALL VOICE

*"Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." (1 Kings 19:11-12)*

Many of the trains that run from Ostend to Brussels in Belgium have pre-recorded voices that announce upcoming stations. It can be difficult to hear the voices, however, over the noise in the coaches, and every time we felt the train begin to slow down, we would strain to listen for the name of the upcoming station.

God speaks to us in much the same way as that voice on the Belgian trains. His voice is there, always guiding us and giving us just exactly what we need, but it isn't loud. It can easily be drowned out by whatever worry is going on around us, and sometimes we have to really strain to hear it....

The day of my coveted oncology visit had finally arrived. After a brief physical examination and a much more intense examination of my medical reports, the Oncologist nodded his head and looked up.

I braced myself. The dreaded words were most certainly on the way: *You'll need chemotherapy!*



But that's not what he said. First he reaffirmed the things I already knew: The tumor was a stage 1, the lymph nodes were clear of cancer, and all my scans were clear. Then he began with the information that I didn't yet know. He indicated that from the reports, the tumor was not considered to be overly aggressive, and it was both estrogen and progesterone receptor positive.

Other than the fact that it meant the tumor had fed and grown on the hormones in my body, this last bit of information meant nothing to me. To the Oncologist, however, it was a vital key. It meant that removing the hormones from my body would help to prevent any potential undetected cancer cells from growing. Since all the other indicators were favorable, the only necessary follow-up, in his opinion, would be to take Tamoxifen -- a hormone blocker!

It took a while for all this to filter through my mind, but when it did, my jaw fell open: "You mean I won't have to have chemotherapy?"

That's exactly what he meant. I would be required to take Tamoxifen for the next 5 years, and that, along with 6-month check-ups, would be the extent of my cancer treatment!

I should have been happy. And initially I was. Ecstatic even.... Especially when the nurse came by with my prescription. "You're one of the lucky ones," she said with a smile.

I grinned. "I am certainly very, very blessed!"

But we still weren't free to go home. We had to wait until the receptionist brought my 6-month appointment, and to fill the time, I began reading the sheets of paper the nurse had given me with the prescription. It was a list of side-effects of the Tamoxifen, and I figured that if I had to take this medication, I should know what negative effects to expect.

Imagine my horror to see "nausea", "weight gain", and "Increased night sweats", along with a list of other potential side effects that was so long, it filled two sheets of paper....



Now let me assure everyone that if you put the side-effects of Tamoxifen side by side with those of chemotherapy, Tamoxifen's list is very short indeed. Unfortunately I couldn't see this. All I could see was that the things I had been struggling with for the past several years, ever since my body started down the road of perimenopause, would only get worse; and somehow, the thought of those symptoms worsening completely clouded my reasoning to the point that I could no longer see the miracle of no chemotherapy. All I could see was that I would be vomiting and not sleeping for the next five years, and in my mind, I just figured God had picked me up out of the frying pan, only to throw me into the fire!

The next day dawned bright and clear. It began with a beautiful hour with God, and I left my "prayer closet" feeling so loved, so blessed, so ready to face the day. Unfortunately, this didn't mean I was ready to face Tamoxifen....

Suddenly, "things" started to happen. The men in my family were still in bed for one thing. Didn't they know they were sleeping away the best part of the day? And perhaps, didn't God know I would have liked to have slept that late, too?

And the miracle of oncology began to erase itself from my mind.

I felt impressed to write a couple of devotionals, but instead I picked up my Sudoku magazine. Why should they get to relax, when I had to "work"? An hour later, I put the magazine down, completely frustrated with myself for my waste of time, but especially, completely frustrated at the men for not being downstairs yet.

Nagging at the back of my mind was that trip to the pharmacy to fill the prescription. I didn't want to go. I just didn't want those night sweats! I didn't want my stomach to be worse than ever!



*Aren't you happy about no chemotherapy?*

Of course, Lord, thanks! I really didn't want chemo. But I don't want Tamoxifen either!

I decided to work on updating my website. I'd been having some problems with my site, and my "tech guy", also known as my wonderful husband, had suggested the use of a new program. I hated it before I even touched it. It was "new" and, thus, "suspect", and it didn't help when, for no apparent reason, the program began erasing my files.

My husband, who was finally up, saw I was frustrated and came over to help. Ahhh! Finally a human I could throw my frustration at! I didn't mince any words about what I thought about the program and what it had done to my files. I'm sure there must have been a few barbs thrown at the one who had given me the program as well, for he pulled away looking much like a hurt puppy.

By this time, all I wanted to do was cry. I decided to do what I always do when I'm feeling down. I pulled out my MP3 player to listen to praise music. It froze after the first song and nothing I could do would make it play again. Was someone out to discourage me, or what?

And I saw the prescription on the counter. Again!

I ignored it. Again! I started to make brunch instead. Every cupboard I opened spilled back its contents at me. Nothing was where it was supposed to be, and I couldn't find my recipes.

The washer stopped then, and I took a break to hang the laundry; but every piece of laundry was wrong side out. Or so it seemed. Then the bag of clothespins spilled all over the deck. I started to cry in frustration. *Why is this all happening to me?*



Things went from bad to worse from there on out. Whatever it was I needed seemed to fall off the desk or roll out of my reach; my keys slid themselves to the darkest, deepest crevices of my purse; I became aware of even more erased files from my website.... But perhaps the kicker happened when I went to fill my prescription. Darien had picked up a screw in the tire of my car the night before, resulting in a flat. I drove into town on the spare, with the flat tire in the trunk. I figured I could get the tire fixed and remounted on the car while my prescription was being filled. It all actually worked out. The tire was fixed at almost the same time the Tamoxifen was ready.

Unfortunately, the tire shop couldn't seem to remember that I had asked them to put the tire back on my car....

I really didn't feel like waiting. Besides, Darien could use the experience of changing a tire. Only when I got home would we learn that the repaired tire wasn't even *in* the car. It was still back at the repair shop....

I could go on and on, but suffice it to say, it was a very frustrating day!

It wasn't until the evening that I finally realized what was wrong with my day. You see, I hadn't been listening for the still small voice of God. Instead I had chosen to listen to the much more booming one, the voice of discouragement. The only problem was that this voice didn't speak Truth, and I had let the nagging worries over the side effects of Tamoxifen completely drown out the voice of my Lord and Savior, the One who had already brought me through surgery and recovery victorious, and the One who had taken away the need for chemotherapy and radiation therapy. By listening to the loud voice of discouragement, I had opened the door for the enemy forces to overtake me.



And they had. They hadn't waited for a second invitation!

Only after recognizing that I had been listening to lies all day was I finally able to hear Truth: The God who protected my stomach during anaesthesia was big enough to protect my stomach against Tamoxifen. God did not save me from one misery only to throw me into another. He would provide the solution for sleep. He would provide the patience to get through the hot flashes. He would give me victory over the vanity of weight gain. The God who had just so wonderfully carried me through the valley of breast cancer hadn't stopped driving the Train, and the tiny valley in front of me still, the one named Tamoxifen, could be a piece of cake compared to the breast cancer valley, if only I continued to listen for His still, small voice! Only if I left all the worries to Him!

I did just that.

The next morning, I took my first pill. True to its word, my stomach began to get a little upset. *Lord, I prayed, I give You the stomach ache. I thank You in advance that You will either take it away, or You will give me the strength to get through victorious!* I don't know when my stomach stopped hurting, but by lunch time I felt better than I had for a long time.

Every day after was an exact replica of day one. My Train Driver truly was getting me through. I just had to listen carefully so as to hear His voice over the other noises around me!





## EPILOGUE

*"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;" "and perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4)*

It had been a rushed morning. We had gotten up early to finish our packing, we had run to the nursing home to say good-bye to Rob's mom, we had rushed back for our luggage and run for the train station. Our train was scheduled to leave at 10:30, and we still had to buy our tickets!

Unfortunately, lines at the ticket counters were long and slow. We stood on one foot and then another as we glanced from our watches to the clock on the station wall. Would we make it in time?

It was finally our turn. It would be close, but if the ticket master hurried, we would still be able to make our train. We were already poised for the mad dash, each of us with our assigned luggage in hand....

There was a problem, however. It seemed that tickets for our train were already sold out!

Had the people in front of us just purchased "our" tickets? Were they now sitting in "our" seats? Oh, why hadn't we gotten up a little earlier? Why had we lingered with our good-byes? Why....

But those people had looked so relieved as they left the ticket booth.... Maybe they had better reason than we did to make "our" train.... There would be, after all, another train for us in just an hour.



We sat down to wait, and for the first time all morning, we caught our breath. Though this wouldn't have been our first choice, when our train finally arrived, we were able to board at our leisure. We had a lovely trip, made less stressful by the fact that we didn't have to rush all the time, and when we arrived at our destination, our rental car was still waiting for us. In the end, the only negative consequence of missing "our" train was that we had to navigate our way to the hotel in the dark. Meanwhile, someone who needed an earlier train more than we did had arrived at their destination on time. Suddenly I found myself thankful that someone else got our seats.

That's exactly how I felt as well, that Monday afternoon as I left Radiology after having undergone the needle biopsy. I would have never chosen breast cancer, yet I had just experienced God in such a powerful way that despite the fact that I was in pain and was covered in "battle scars", I couldn't stop the words from flowing from my lips: "Thank you, Lord, for choosing me to have a lump in my breast, instead of some poor woman who doesn't know You!"

I admit, I was kind of surprised to hear those words coming from my own mouth, but as I made my way to my car, I realized that I truly meant them. It wouldn't be the last time I said them, either. You see, from the moment I decided to put my trust 100% in my Train Driver, He came through for me. Not only did He take care of all the details, but He also gave me the strength to face the unknowns, He gave me the courage to keep on trying, even when I had no energy, motivation or drive, and He gave me the comfort and help I needed to get through Nuclear Medicine, general anaesthesia, surgery and oncology. He never stopped filling me with hope and reassurance, and all along the way, He had many vital lessons to teach me as He worked the wonders of His refiner's fire in my life.



No, although I never would have *chosen* to go through the valley of breast cancer, I don't regret it in the least. For the first time in my life I understand what the Bible means when it tells us to rejoice in our suffering. It means that though we may be going through terrible times, God is carrying us through, and His presence is so near, so real, so tangible, that in the end, rather than feeling cursed and beaten, we feel blessed and victorious. We can actually be thankful for having been chosen by God to walk this road.

You see, it isn't the miraculous deliverances of God that draw us closest to Him; rather, it is the walk through the valleys. Through this cancer experience, my relationship with God and my faith in Him have grown like at no other time in my life. Perhaps the most precious have been the times when I really didn't see any way out, but God picked me up in His arms and carried me through. We cannot fully appreciate God's power and love in our lives when things are going good. It is only when things get rough that we begin to truly experience God, and the more I realized these important Truths, the more I truly felt bad for all the many women who must go through breast cancer each year without knowing Him.

Just a bunch of fancy words? Perhaps. But only to those who have never experienced God in this manner. May we learn to never again wish away the valleys and deep gorges of our lives. Instead, may we learn to get on the Train and let God do the navigating. When we do, we can truly sit back and anticipate with joy the time we will spend with Him, as together we traverse the problems we will encounter.

There is one question I do have to ask myself: Would the Train ride with God through the valley of breast cancer have been nearly as meaningful if God hadn't given me the premonition that I would suffer a terrible trial? If He had not promised me from day one that it would be nothing but a test, and in the end, there would be a positive outcome?



I have to admit, I do not know the answer to this question. It is true that our faith should be such that we can stand firm in Him without premonitions and promises. My hope is that the next time I am faced with an unannounced trial of any calibre, I will remember the valuable lessons I have learned on this Train ride through breast cancer, and I will stand firm in His unfailing love and hope.

Isn't that why we are allowed to walk through the valleys of life?

Paul tells us in the book of Romans that we are to rejoice in our trials, because the, *"testing of our faith brings about perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope."* (Rom 5:3) I suppose that we would all like to jump directly to the "hope" portion, without going through the trial, but it doesn't work that way.

Too bad, you say?

Perhaps. Yet I have come to look at it in this way: Deep, unshakable hope isn't something we can simply be given. It is something that must be developed, and it is through our trials that we can develop this hope.

According to Romans 5:3, the first step to developing hope is perseverance, also defined as persistence, determination and resolution. This is such an important tool in our walk with God. God wants us to be determined in our faith, resolved in our actions, persistent in our battle between good and evil. The trials we go through help us to develop this perseverance.

Then there is character -- our moral fiber. We all need this so desperately, but a vital part of having character is *learning* to be persistent in our battle between good and evil. It's *learning* to be determined in our faith and resolute in our actions. We simply cannot develop that moral fiber, that character, without perseverance!



And what about hope? Hope is rooted in our persistent determination to believe in the One who gives us hope. It is rooted in our moral fiber. We cannot have that deep, unshakeable hope without first developing perseverance and character.

I do not know what the next trial will be, and I do not know if God will tell me about it in advance; but I do know that I thank God for helping me to develop a bit of moral fibre, a bit of persistent determination to believe in the One who gives hope. I know that as a result of this Train ride with breast cancer, my hope is much better grounded. Thank You, God!



## AFTERWORD

*"And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

It was just days after my surgery that Donovan's young adult Bible study group prayed that my trip through the valley of cancer would leave me better than ever before. I didn't know what to make of the prayer. After all, I was permanently missing what I considered to be an important body part, and at the time I still had potential cancer treatment ahead of me. How could God make me "better than ever?"

An entire year has passed since the experiences described throughout this book. I am happy to say that not only have I completely regained my strength, I have also received glowing reports from my recent one-year oncology check-up.

Has God answered my son's prayer? Can it be said that I am better off than I was before?

To answer this question, let's examine the evidence:

For the past 10 years, I have been in a premenopausal state, and each new menopausal symptom was accompanied by more frequent and longer-lasting episodes of stomach and intestinal turmoil. In fact, I only had a handful of days each month where I actually felt good. When tamoxifen pushed my body into menopause, the problem completely disappeared.

The onset of menopause also significantly increased the number of hot flashes and night sweats, which seriously interfered with my sleep. In order to promote better sleep, I began taking



a combination of Magnesium, Vitamin B6 and Vitamin D3. Imagine my pleasant surprise when this combination of remedies settled my restless leg syndrome!

Then there is my hair. I've always longed for curly hair, and Tamoxifen has given my hair some natural curl.

Am I better off now that I no longer have stomach problems, restless leg syndrome and straight hair? Absolutely! Thank You, God!

These "improvements" are all physical, however. Have there been any emotional "improvements?"

I am happy to report that the priorities of this "Type A" personality have remained in order. People come first. Period. No more do tasks dictate my day. I have learned to not overfill my schedule, I've learned the power of the word "no," and for all this I have the important lessons learned from crumbs on my countertop to thank!

Then there is the Bulimia.

Yes, I can actually say that word now. I never truly wanted to admit, even to myself, that I had an eating disorder; nevertheless, all my life I have struggled with an unhealthy view of weight. Cool people were always thin. Thin was beautiful. Thin was what I wanted to be, and because I was blessed with a fast metabolism, I could pretty much eat whatever I wanted with few consequences. By the time I reached my mid-teens, I was a stress-binger, and it wasn't long before I was binging all the time. It didn't matter, however. If I ate too much, I could simply exercise it away, and as a result, I also became an avid exerciser. I have only recently learned that this is a less-common but acknowledged form of Bulimia.



Taking tamoxifen has changed my metabolism. Despite seriously watching what I eat and continuing to exercise regularly, I have gained 10 pounds (5 kilos) since last year. Initially I saw this as a very bad thing, but God used this cancer-caused and medication-induced weight gain to help me develop a healthy view of myself, of eating and of body weight in general. Gone is the stress-eating. Gone is the binging. Gone is the over-exercising. Gone is my tendency to judge my value by my weight. Thank you, Tamoxifen; thank you, cancer; thank You, God!

Despite the huge significance of these things, I still have to say that the most important changes in my life have been in the spiritual realm.

Once I was back to the regular and routine busyness of life, it was easy to forget the closeness that I had experienced with God aboard His train. It was easy to forget to trust in Him. With the appearance of each of life's new problems, however, God reminds me of the stress-free living I experienced when I put all my worries on His train.

Perhaps the real test of this came last summer. I agreed to take a university graduate for an 8-week internship. Although supervising students is a rewarding experience, it is also a significant time commitment, something that is definitely easier to handle when work schedules aren't overly filled with patient care. Imagine my horror as I watched my caseload rise to record-high numbers the week before my student was to start....

Initially I attacked the problem as I always do. I began planning in my mind how I would come in early every day, stay late and work through lunch. When God reminded me that all I needed to do was put my excessively large caseload on His train, I remembered my valley journey, and I gave it all to Him.





My student turned out to be top-notch. She was an excellent, independent clinician who required relatively little guidance. Perhaps even more importantly, she was a serious Christian. With each new patient referral, she would remind me that God had sent her at precisely this busy time to help me. In the end, I didn't have to put in crazy hours, and imagine how pleasantly surprised I was when my caseload returned to normal once my student had finished her placement!

I am happy to report that I have now begun to put ALL my problems on God's train. A co-op for Donovan? God's problem, not mine. Living arrangements for Darien? Here you go God, all Yours! Problems with co-workers? On the train! When I think back over my life, I realize that I could have lived those 51 years completely stress-free; yet despite numerous lessons God sent my way, I never learned. I can only thank Him that by His grace, He allowed me to go through cancer. As a result, the second half of my life will be less stressful than the first.

Back to my original question: am I, one year later, better off than I was before having cancer?

The answer is an enthusiastic, "Yes!" God used this valley time in my life to bring me freedom from digestive problems, restless leg syndrome, worry, stress, even bulimia, and He has taught me how to put my trust in Him for everything. I can honestly say I am a much happier person than I ever was before, for now I have discovered the secret to a better life: staying aboard God's Train!

My prayer is that as a result of reading this book, you also will be better equipped to allow God to handle your next valley experience, and that you too will also come aboard God's train in every aspect of life.



May God bless each of you abundantly!

THE END

