

PRAYING FOR GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:16

Christmas was nice but uneventful. We spent a few days in east Texas with Sharon's family. I do not recall the presents or the holiday festivities. The only memorable experience about the trip was the fact that Sharon had a nagging cold the whole time.

Upon returning home, the cold disappeared but a gland in her neck continued to remain swollen. It did not cause alarm because she frequently has swollen glands in response to an infection. It was not until she visited the doctor for her regular check up that we thought it might be a problem.

He thought the gland need to be investigated further so he made an appointment that afternoon for us to visit a surgeon. After his examination, out-patient surgery was scheduled and our fears began to mount. We were reassured that it was a precautionary procedure and there was no need to be alarmed.

Nevertheless, we were anxious, especially on the day of surgery. The operation went smoothly. The doctor came out and reported that everything appeared fine and that all he found was an abscess. A sample would be sent to the lab but we had no reason to worry. We went home comforted, anticipating a short recovery time.

Two days after the surgery, Sharon received a call from the doctor's office requesting that we come in that afternoon. When she called me at the office, we both knew it had to be bad news. After a quick lunch, we planned to make the long drive to the city to see the doctor.

While trying to eat a sandwich, the phone rang once again. This time it was a woman in our church. She had just received word that her brother was diagnosed with cancer. She wanted me to go with her to tell their parents. We hurriedly made plans and I rushed over to the older couples house to help break the tragic news. The whole time I was trying to console this family, I knew similar news was awaiting my own family.

Finally, I was able to leave, anxious to get on the road to the doctor's office. It was a seventy-five mile trip and the entire time was spent speculating various scenarios and wrestling with fears. We finally arrived and Sharon and I walked into the waiting room.

We were hurriedly escorted into an examining room and the doctor wasted no time in removing the bandages to study the wound. He told us that they had received the test results and it showed cancer cells. Although the news was expected it still hit us like a punch in the stomach.

The doctor, who was not very adept at communication or personal relations skills, began to talk about some rare form of cancer. He did not make any sense. Sharon was sitting on the examining table, almost in shock. I grew weary of his attempts at communication and finally demanded that he speak more clearly.

With every thoughtless word from the doctor our level of fear increased. He finally realized the problem he was creating and suggested we go see a specialist. I was ready to see anybody who could help us make sense of Sharon's condition.

The second doctor was an answer to prayer. After a thorough examination and reading the surgeon's notes, he was able to provide some answers. He indicated that it was likely the cancer was totally removed by the initial surgery. However, follow-up treatment is often recommended. When I asked what he would do if it were his wife, he opted for radiation treatment.

The next step required a trip to the cancer center and a meeting with Dr. Epley. By this time, Sharon was exhausted and dazed. She insisted that no other doctor would be

allowed to examine her. She was finished and I suspect that she was preparing in her mind for death.

I was able to convince her to at least talk with the doctor by promising that I would not let him touch her. We would simply talk. In our opinion, Dr. Epley was an angel from God. His words were reassuring and his manner exuded concern. Almost without her knowledge, he gently examined Sharon's neck and throat. He recommended six weeks of radiation treatment.

Our journey into the most difficult days of our lives had begun. The next few weeks were filled with preparations and prayers. Sharon required some dental work prior to the radiation. It was an extremely difficult and painful process. We needed to make arrangements for the boys who were still quite young.

The church I pastored was remarkably helpful. They took care of most of the logistics and continually provided extra money to help cover expenses. The roles had been reversed and they were our minister.

The effects of radiation are not felt immediately. We were told that the first two weeks would not be difficult but before the treatments were finished we could expect some difficulties. Since we had some time before Sharon began to feel ill, we planned a family outing.

It was not much but we checked into the Holiday Inn for the weekend. It provided swimming and other entertainment for the boys and a change of pace for all of us. We were all very anxious about our situation but looking forward to the break.

Late in the afternoon I was walking around the atrium in the hotel. I offered a prayer that I later asked God not to answer. In my practical manner, I calculated that if Sharon could live for ten more years then we could make it. By that time, Andrew would be twelve and Jeremy would be old enough to help. It made good sense to me.

Thus, I prayed that God would allow Sharon to live for ten more years. At the moment it seemed like a rather selfish prayer. Now, more than a dozen years later, it seems more like a prayer that failed to account for God's grace. Less than a year later I began to ask God not to answer my desperate prayer.

The treatments were difficult. Sharon became very ill with a dry mouth and sore throat. She was unable to eat. The ladies in our church transported her to Amarillo every day for six weeks. It was a beautiful expression of compassion. In spite of her discomfort, Sharon always made a great appearance. She did not even miss any church services until the final few weeks.

During the six month ordeal, we prayed thousands of prayers. Some were cries of anguish; others were pleas for help. The one great lesson about prayer that I learned was the necessity of praying for God's perspective. I finally found solace when I simply said, "Lord, show us what you are doing."

We would not like to repeat the experience but, in all honesty, we are stronger in our faith because of that great trial. Often, the greatest prayer we can offer is "*O Lord, open my eyes so I may see.*"