



***Strength for the Cancer Journey* provides daily reminders that God is an ever-present ally for anyone facing cancer. Cancer is a journey no one wants to take, but no one has to walk that road alone. This devotional helps patients engage deeply with God, gaining strength for their cancer journey.**

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Contents

DAY 1	Strength for the Journey	9
DAY 2	Why, Lord?	15
DAY 3	Waiting	21
DAY 4	Boundaries	27
DAY 5	Jehovah-Raah	33
DAY 6	Roots	39
DAY 7	Roller Coaster	45
DAY 8	Not on Bread Alone	51
DAY 9	Lonely	57
DAY 10	Support	63
DAY 11	Promoters and Protectors	69
DAY 12	Anger	75
DAY 13	The Cancer Chapter	81
DAY 14	Sar-Shalom	85
DAY 15	Grateful	91
DAY 16	Sing!	97
DAY 17	Brain Fog	103
DAY 18	Jehovah-Rapha	109
DAY 19	New Clothes	115
DAY 20	Prayer	121
DAY 21	Look Up	127

DAY 22	Overwhelmed	131
DAY 23	Gorgeous	137
DAY 24	Jonathan and Jehoshaphat	143
DAY 25	The Hardest Part	149
DAY 26	Rebel Cells	155
DAY 27	What If?	161
DAY 28	Fear Not	167
DAY 29	Hope	173
DAY 30	What's Next?	179
	Appendix	185
	Acknowledgments	195
	Notes	197
	About the Author	202

Day 1

Strength for the Journey

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

ISAIAH 41:10

There's nothing easy about having cancer. For most people, cancer is a hard, reluctant journey through rugged, unfamiliar terrain. If you have cancer now, or have had it in the past, you will understand the comments of some whose stories appear in this book:

Keela

When they called me from the breast clinic to come in for my results, I was thinking, "You know what? If it was good news, they would tell me over the phone." As soon as we went back into the office, immediately they gave me the news and passed out the Kleenex. It was hard.

Dwight

There's not a day that I get eight hours of sleep in a row. For example, last night I didn't sleep very well. I woke up after a few hours of sleep, and I went back and slept again. And when I woke up, I didn't have much strength. And that has happened multiple times this week.

Sheryl

When you get tired, when you're on chemo, you get *tired*. And you can't buck up and just keep going. No, you can't. You've got to stop.

Jeff

When you work a plan out with your healthcare team and things don't turn out the way you anticipated, and they don't turn out the way that your team anticipated, it's really hard to deal with.

Laura

They said this is an easy cancer to cure, even though I feel like it's been a long, hard road.

The apostle Paul journeyed “a long, hard road” of a different sort. He wasn't thinking about cancer treatments when he, led by the Holy Spirit, penned these

words about his personal affliction, which he described as “a thorn in my flesh”:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong

(2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10 NIV).

The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what Paul’s “thorn” was. However, the Greek word that he chose as a metaphor for his problem gives us a hint. The word he chose was not used to describe something merely bothersome, such as a cactus thorn. It was a word used to describe something much bigger, more like a tent stake.¹ Thus, Paul would have compassionately understood, as God surely does, any tent stake–sized “thorns” you encounter on your cancer journey.

Where can you find strength on the “thorny” days when you are physically exhausted, emotionally weary, or spiritually wavering? You will find your strength where Paul found his: in the One whose grace is sufficient for you and whose power is made perfect in weak-

ness. God has the power to make you strong because He is *El Shaddai*, which means “Giver of Strength” in Hebrew. When everything in our lives is going well, we feel strong and self-sufficient. When we have the world by the tail (or so we think), we tend to trust ourselves rather than God. Often, only when a tent stake-sized thorn reveals the truth of our weakness, do we allow *El Shaddai* to infuse us with His strength, bringing glory to Him, not to us. This is a great paradox of the Christian life: we are strongest when we are weak.

There are really only two ways to face cancer: in your own strength, or with the help and strength that God supplies. Let this devotional book remind you, day by day, that *El Shaddai* is your ever-present ally on the cancer journey. As you draw upon His limitless supply of strength, may the words of the prophet Habakkuk describe more and more His powerful presence in your life:

The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]!

(HABAKKUK 3:19 AMP)

*He gives power to the weak and strength
to the powerless.—ISAIAH 40:29*

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

How does the paradox that *we are strongest when we are weak* apply to your cancer journey?

My journal...

Day 2

Why, Lord?

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD.
“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.”*

ISAIAH 55:8

Y*ou have cancer.*

Whether you have been walking closely with the Lord or running hard on a path far away from Him, those words stop you in your tracks and then bring you to your knees. *Cancer*—could there be a more unwelcome, more truly loathsome intruder? You have, no doubt, recoiled at the thought of cancer and perhaps struggled numbly to comprehend what sort of storm may lie ahead. And maybe your heart has voiced a silent, sincere question to God: *why, Lord?*

When Laura was diagnosed with stage 2 Hodgkin’s lymphoma, she not only wondered *why*, but also *why now*? Just 29 years old, Laura and her husband were still settling into their first home and celebrating the birth of their newborn son when Laura’s diagnosis came. The diagnosis explained a lot of the discomfort that had begun

late in her pregnancy—the constant, painful crick in her neck, the dry cough that would not go away, and the small, odd lump in her neck. But *cancer? Now?* Thrilled to be a first-time mom, Laura just wanted to enjoy her new baby. But the cancer growing in her neck and chest was demanding her attention, forcing her down an unknown road and spoiling so much of her joy.

She poured out her grief to God: “Why do I have to go through this now, when this should be one of the greatest times of my life, having a son and enjoying him and being a mom?”

For the next year, Laura would reluctantly divide her time between her son and the demands of cancer treatment. It began with four rounds of chemotherapy, followed by a PET scan, then eight more rounds of chemo. Over the next several months there were blood transfusions, more scans, countless needle sticks, more chemo, the wiping out of her immune system, and finally a stem cell transplant. It was a long, grueling road. She lost her hair and her energy. “I had days where I wanted to give up because I was just tired of everything,” Laura said. At her lowest point she remembers thinking, “There’s no hope. I’m not going to be able to see my son grow up.” But then: “One day I thought, ‘You know what? I’ve got this—God’s got me! I’m going to be okay.’ And so I powered through. I’m so glad that He showed me to never

give up and that I have so much to live for.”

Still the *why* question remains: *Why* did Laura go through all this?

On this side of heaven, we may never fully understand the wisdom behind the *why*. But there may be a clue in something Laura said. Looking back on her cancer journey, she observed, “I had faith before the cancer, but it is a whole lot stronger now.” Her experience is a reminder about how faith works. Just as muscles only grow stronger if they are continually challenged to bear more weight, so it is with faith. We grow much more in our hard times than when everything is going our way. So often, we do not yearn for God until we are broken by a painful problem or a hard circumstance we cannot change. Knowing this about us, and because of His immense love for us, God may allow adversity into our lives so that we will either return to Him or go deeper with Him. Sometimes the adversity God uses is cancer, even though God hates disease as much as we do.¹

It is a mysterious and hard-to-wrap-your-head-around truth that *sometimes God permits what He hates in order to accomplish what He loves.*² And it pains Him to do so. The Bible assures us, “He does not willingly and from His heart afflict or grieve the children of men.”³ In *The Message*, this same verse, Lamentations 3:33, reads, “He takes no pleasure in making life hard,

in throwing roadblocks in the way.”

Never forget that you are God’s beloved child. All of His plans for you are good.⁴ Our impassioned “*why Lord?*” is simply a reflection of the fact that His thoughts and ways are not like ours. Sometimes He draws us to Himself in ways we would never choose. So turn toward Him, talk to Him about your cancer, and allow Him to accomplish all He desires to do in you, for you, and through you because of it.

*I had faith before the cancer, but it is a
whole lot stronger now.*

—LAURA

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

How do you feel about the idea that *sometimes God permits what He hates in order to accomplish what He loves?*

Day 3

Waiting

I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.

PSALM 40:1

Waiting . . . it's just part of the cancer journey. Waiting to see the doctor. Waiting for test results. Waiting for surgery. Waiting while a prescription is filled. Waiting for chemo or radiation to start, then waiting for it to end. Even after it does end, the waiting continues: waiting to see if the treatments worked, and then as the years go by, waiting in an always-in-the-back-of-your-mind sort of way for the slightest indication of the one thing no one ever wants: the return of cancer.

Waiting is not easy.

The need to wait for so many things can add to the emotional distress of cancer. At times, waiting itself becomes yet another form of suffering. Even secular wisdom, however, recognizes the invaluable fruit that ripens as we endure waiting: patience. Businessman Arnold H. Glasow famously observed, “The key to everything is

patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg, not by smashing it.”¹

Keela admitted she struggles with this. “Patience is not one of my strong suits,” she said. Dwight knows exactly what she means. He said, “One of the things that I’ve always had trouble with is patience. And going through these cancer trials and tribulations has required much more patience than I’ve ever needed before.”

Nearly a century ago, a sage Christian wrote, “Patience can be acquired only just through such trials as now seem unbearable.”²

In our generation, this is still true: whenever we must endure “such trials as now seem unbearable,” invisible spiritual growth is taking place. Contemporary blogger Cortni Marrazzo described this truth well when she wrote:

When a seed is planted in the ground, there is quite a bit of time between the planting of the seed and when something actually pops through the ground. From the surface, it looks like nothing is happening for so long, but that’s because the growth is happening underneath the surface.

When you’re waiting, you’re growing, even if you can’t yet see the evidence of it. In waiting seasons, you will grow in faith and dependence on God, especially when you can’t make things go any faster . . . It’s in

these times that you'll realize how much your life depends on God.

This is when your trust in Him and in His plan for your life is tested; and subsequently grown the most.³

Waiting is one of God's favorite tools for making us more like Jesus. Waiting is never a waste of time if you lean into God while you wait. Whenever you encounter circumstances that you cannot change or when you can't make something happen on your timetable, you can be sure of this: God is at work in your life. James 1:3–4 tells us, "For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing."

Cancer treatments sometimes last for months or even years, and it's easy to grow impatient while waiting. Having received treatments for more than a year now, Dwight said, "God has impressed upon me that 'This is My time that we're on. It's not your time.' I'm learning that if you will be patient long enough, and focus on the right things, that God solves your problems. It's all about just being patient."

*For since the world began no ear has heard
and no eye has seen a God like you, who works
for those who wait for him!*

—ISAIAH 64:4

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Is God using waiting to produce patience in your life?

My journal...

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