

## DON'T WASTE YOUR CANCER

I heard of a seminary student who asked his professor how many points a sermon should have. The professor said, ..."At least one." Well, the Lord has lead me to "10 points"!

At my last visit to the Proton treatment center, I found a booklet titled, "Don't Waste Your Cancer". Not only the title caught my attention, but the author did as well: John Piper! It was written 2-15-06. For those of you who may not know Piper, he is a well-respected Bible teacher & scholar. The text that follows is based on Piper's booklet & is used by permission. (By the way, there was just one copy.... Left for me!!)

Piper says, "I write this on the eve of prostate surgery. I believe in God's power to heal-by miracle and by medicine. I believe it is right and good to pray for both kinds of healing. Cancer is not wasted when it is healed by God. He gets the glory and that is why cancer exists. So not to pray for healing may waste your cancer.... I am praying for myself and for you that we will not waste this pain."

### 1. You will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God.

It will not do to say that God only uses our cancer but does not design it. What God permits, he permits for a reason. And that reason is his design. If God foresees molecular developments becoming cancer, he can stop it or not. If he does not, he has a purpose....

- a. The reality of God's design brings out and channels our honest outcry to the One Who cares. God's design invites honest speech, rather than silencing us into resignation.
- b. When there is a need, cry out to the One Who cares; **Ps.28:1,2, "To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help... v.6, Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield..."**
- c. When **Habakkuk** was faced with the reality of God's judgment on Israel, and the fact that he too would suffer in that judgment, he declared **3:17-18, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will be joyful in God my Savior."**
- d. The particulars of your situation may not include cancer... **PLEASE, replace** the word "**cancer**" with whatever crisis you may be facing. The principle is the same: **call upon the One Who cares...** **know** that your circumstance is not accidental... **ask** for insight into your situation, and **realize** that God is working out His plan for you & in you.

### 2. You will waste your cancer if you believe it is a curse and not a gift.

- a. In His beloved children our Father works a most kind good through our most grievous losses: sometimes healing and restoring... always sustaining and teaching us that we might know and love him more simply.

- b. Jas.1:2-5, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”
  - c. 1Pet.1:6, “In all this (our blessings of new birth in Christ) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.
- 3. You will waste your cancer if you seek comfort from your odds rather than from God.**
- a. The design of God in your cancer is not to train you in the rationalistic, human calculation of odds.
  - b. Re-phrasing Ps 20:7, Piper says “Some count their chariots (percentages of survival) and some count their horses (side effects of treatment) but we trust in the name of the Lord our God”. !
  - c. The hymn, “Be Still My Soul” reckons the odds right: we are 100% certain to suffer, and Christ is 100% certain to meet us, to come for us, comfort us, & restore Love’s purest joys.
- 4. You will waste your cancer if you refuse to think about death.**
- a. We will die, if Jesus postpones His return. Not to think about what it will be like to leave this life and meet God is folly.
  - b. Eccl. 7:2, “It is better to go to a house of mourning (a funeral) than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.”
  - c. Ps. 90:12, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Numbering our days means thinking about how few there are...
  - d. Someone has said, “Cancer is one “downpayment” on inevitable death, giving one bad taste of the reality of our mortality. It is the last enemy we must face, but Christ has defeated this last enemy! It has no final power if you are a child of God, so you can look it in the eye!
- 5. You will waste your cancer if you think that “beating” cancer means staying alive rather than cherishing Christ.**
- a. Satan’s and God’s designs in your cancer are not the same. Satan designs to destroy your love for Christ. God designs to deepen your love for Christ.
  - b. Cancer does not win if you die. It wins if you fail to cherish Christ. It (cancer) is meant to help you say and feel, Phil.3:8, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ... 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (underline & italics, mine!)
  - c. Cherishing Christ expresses the two core activities of faith: dire need... & utter joy.
- 6. You will waste your cancer if you spend too much time reading about cancer and not enough time reading about God.**
- a. It is not wrong to study about or to know about cancer. Ignorance is not a virtue. But to strive for more knowledge of cancer, while at the same time having a lack of zeal to know God more and more is symptomatic of a lack of unbelief! It is meant to awaken us

to the truth of **Dan. 11:32**, “The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.”

- b. Other people will often express their care and concern by inquiring about your health. That’s good but the conversation easily gets stuck there. So tell them openly about your sickness, seeking their prayers and counsel, but then change the direction of conversation by telling them what your God is doing to faithfully sustain you. Robert Murray McCheyne said wisely said “For every look at your sins (cancer) take ten looks at Christ.”
- c. For every hour you spend researching or discussing your cancer... spend 10 hours researching, and discussing and serving your Lord.

**7. You will waste your cancer if you let it drive you into solitude instead of deepen your relationships with manifest affection.**

- a. When Epaphroditus brought the gifts to Paul (sent by the Philippian church) he became ill and almost died. Paul tells the Philippians, “He has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill”, 2:26,27. What an amazing response! It does not say *they* were distressed that he was ill, but that *he* was distressed because they *heard* he was ill. That is the kind of heart God is aiming to create with cancer; a deeply affectionate, caring heart for people. Don’t waste your cancer by retreating into yourself!

**8. You will waste your cancer if you grieve as those who have no hope.**

- a. Related to loved ones dying, Paul wrote, **1 Thess. 4:13**, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”
- b. There is always grief at death, but it should be different for believers. Our grief should be “permeated with hope.”
- c. Grief that has no hope often chooses denial or escape or busyness because it can’t face reality without becoming distraught.
- d. We follow in the image of the One who was “a man of sorrows acquainted with grief”. The One Who “for the joy set before him” willingly chose the cross.
- e. From **John 15-17**, “My joy will be in you and your joy will be made full... Your grief will be turned to joy... No one will take your joy away from you... These things I speak in the world, so that they may have my joy made full in themselves.”

**9. You will waste your cancer if you treat sin as casually as before.**

- a. Are your besetting sins as attractive as they were before you had cancer? Cancer is designed to destroy the appetite for sin... pride; greed; lust; unforgiveness; impatience; (certainly the list could go on & on!).
- b. All these things are worse enemies than cancer!
- c. Let the presence of eternity make the sins of time look as futile as they really are.
- d. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself.”, Lk.9:25.
- e. Will you become more bitter, despairing, addictive, fearful, frenzied...? Will you pretend it’s business as usual?

- f. If you are God's, suffering in Christ's hands will change you... you come to terms with life and death on His terms.
  - g. Your *inner enemy*- a *mora cancer* 10,000 times more deadly than your physical cancer- will be dying as you continue seeking and finding your Savior.
  - h. Ps.25, "For your name's sake O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is very great. Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose."
- 10. You will waste your cancer if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of God.**
- a. Christians are never anywhere by divine accident. There are reasons for why we wind up where we do.
  - b. Consider what Jesus said about painful, unplanned circumstances: Lk.21:12,13, "They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. v.13, And so you will bear testimony to me. (v. 13, ESV, "This will be your opportunity to bear witness".)
  - c. And so it is with cancer... your opportunity to bear witness... to show that Christ is infinitely worthy... & worth more than life itself!
  - d. **DON'T WASTE IT!**
  - e. And as Piper ends his booklet, "In your cancer (or trying circumstance-*parenthesis mine*), you will need your brothers and sisters to witness to the truth and glory of Christ, to walk with you, to live out their faith beside you, to love you. And you can do same with them and with all others, becoming the heart that loves with the love of Christ, the mouth filled with hope to both friends and strangers."