

## **Blake** (*Healing*) *Crisis!*

At eighteen, I had a lot on my mind, but cancer never even entered my thoughts. I spent all my time focused on making money, having fun, and preparing for college. One week, my head hurt terribly and I constantly felt dizzy. My father, a doctor, arranged an appointment at the hospital, where doctors scanned my head, discovering a brain tumor. To say the least, our family was stunned. Following hurried consultations, the doctors admitted me emergently to the hospital in preparation for surgery to remove this benign, golf ball-sized tumor. Though successful, the surgery to remove the tumor ravaged my coordination and sense of balance, among other effects. Most significantly, the surgeon pronounced this tumor malignant. My life changed dramatically. Unable to walk on my own or even feed myself, I had no idea what would become of my life. Would I get to college? Would I ever race my bike again? God used this surgery, and the subsequent radiation and rehabilitation, to strengthen my perseverance, increase my trust in Him, and forge a deeper dependence on Him.

Although young, I learned the importance of perseverance, especially through my sport of choice, bicycle racing. Early on, I realized that a thirty-minute workout could not sufficiently prepare me for grueling races of up to one hundred miles. When I began racing, I could have opted for the easier path and raced as a junior. But I had greater ambitions. I wanted to race as an adult; therefore, I committed to training as much as my body would allow. Specifically, I remember one rigorous seven-hour marathon in the mountains of northern Georgia. At the time, I had dedicated myself to building up endurance on par with other racers, who had ridden for years. Definitely not easy, that ride exhausted me so much that I became delirious - confirmed by the testimony of my training partner. My training and perseverance paid off in my successful racing the following season.

The perseverance that I gained through bicycling carried me through brain surgery and was refined through my rehabilitation and recovery. Lying in that hospital bed in severe pain following surgery, I easily could have just thrown in the towel. But I had not endured all those painful miles for nothing. They taught me perseverance. My resolve eventually did hit its limit, however. Following the surgery, I endured six weeks of radiation, in addition to six months of speech, occupational, and physical therapy. The months of recovery stretched into years, and to this day, my recovery is incomplete. Amazingly complex, the brain takes a lot of time to recover. Eventually, I grew tired of the fight, when even everyday tasks continually bogged me down. I began to grow discouraged, and I was tempted to give up on many occasions. However, God taught me that perseverance is necessary, especially in the hard times, when human strength fails. He promises that, "...My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) I learned that human perseverance has its limits, but when we can no longer handle a situation on our own, God willingly and gently carries us. Perseverance was not the only lesson God had for me.

Through the months of recovery and rehabilitation, God continued to cultivate my faith. Although I knew Romans 8:28 (NIV), which reads, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose," I had a tendency to doubt God. He had come through for me on so many occasions that, logically, I had no reason to mistrust Him; nevertheless, I persisted in unbelief whenever I faced new, daunting situations. An example of God's miraculous intervention occurred in kindergarten: at the end of recess one day, a large splinter imbedded itself under my fingernail. On the way to the hand surgeon's to have the splinter removed, I was crying uncontrollably from the pain. My mom suggested that we pray, believing that God could relieve my suffering. Suddenly, my pain disappeared! This is only one of many examples of God's supernatural intervention in my life and in the lives of my family. God had proven Himself trustworthy time after time.

Humans, on the other hand, tend to doubt anything that we can't see. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV), however, defines faith as, "...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." When brain surgery and radiation robbed me of almost everything I had previously

hoped in, only God remained. Proverbs 3:5 (NIV) says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." I could easily have doubted Him, since this whole situation was beyond my comprehension and I couldn't see how God could possibly redeem it. I was at a critical point in my life: would I trust God's perfect plan for me, or would I give up all hope? Thankfully, I chose to trust. Trust in God is a step-by-step process; we don't see the whole path in front of us, but we have to acknowledge that God is the best guide. Awareness of a greater goal in life imparts a will to live; if I did not trust in God's purpose for my life, I would have lost all desire to persevere. I knew, both from Scripture and personal prophecy, that God had (and has) great plans for my life. In Him, I found the strength to battle cancer and emerge victorious. I once heard someone say, "Faith is not really faith until it's all you're hanging on to." Whereas I hung on to a lot of things before my cancer, God never failed me when I could cling to Him only.

Learning to cling to God was how I deepened my dependence on Him instead of myself. Before cancer, I thought that I could rely on myself almost exclusively. In fact, my bicycling team captain, Todd Creek, characterized me at that time as one of the most mature and independent young men he had ever met. I had good reason: successful at nearly everything I attempted, I had little need to rely on anyone for anything. Indeed, I felt invincible. I could ride my bike for hours, mow a lawn or two, and still have the energy to hang out with friends; my strength seemed limitless. As I approached the top of amateur bicycling and seriously considered racing professionally, many called me the next Lance Armstrong. A teacher in high school characterized me as one of the brightest pupils she had ever taught, which confirmed by my National Merit status and a 4.0 GPA. Bright, talented, and popular, I felt little need for others, including God.

With brain surgery, all that changed. I needed help to walk, feed myself, and even roll over. Unable to call the nurse when I got sick, I lay in my own vomit for extended periods of time. Since I could no longer do anything for myself, I had to rely on Jesus for my very existence. Seeing firsthand the frailty of life, I recognized my vulnerability and mortality. Forced to depend on others, I began to see how much I needed to hold on to God. No one could guarantee me anything in terms of survival or recovery, but God held me in His hands, and guaranteed me eternal life. When radiation and rehabilitation proved so tedious and tiring, I needed to depend on God daily for everything, including strength to face the day. When I couldn't see much progress in my recovery, Jesus gave me the grace to carry on. He was there for me through this "valley of the shadow of death," and granted me the courage to gain the victory in this battle.

Years ago, a woman prophesied that I would be "a mighty man of God." With all my teenage, pre-cancer self-absorption, I was not pursuing God's calling for my life. Honestly, I believed I was on the right track in life because of all the success I experienced. A malignant brain tumor showed me the futility of living for myself and shook me out of my independence and self-reliance and forced me to rely totally on God.

In conclusion, God used brain surgery, the most traumatic experience of my life, to teach me critically important lessons: perseverance, faith in God, and dependence on Him. When my life, as I knew it, ceased to exist, I needed faith that He possessed the best plan for me. After I lost everything I had previously counted on, I came to rely more firmly on God. As Philippians 4:11 says, I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances, even in discomfort and pain, and to attempt to discover what God is showing me in that situation. Although I have no guarantee that cancer won't return, the perseverance, faith, and dependence that God taught me assure me that He will never let me down.