

Dear Friends:

We tend to think in terms of God having two shelves He draws from for us: one is the “*Blessing Shelf*”. Like little children, we think of it as the shelf full of treats and candy and goodies— or, the things we want in life. It is the shelf we desire to receive gifts from.

The other is a shelf called “*Trials*”. We don’t like for God to give us things from that shelf because they usually seem to involve suffering, pain and the like. A well taught believer tries to prepare himself for the times God hands out something from this shelf. I’ve often prayed, “*O Lord help me to endure it, give me the strength to bear up in the trial.*”

On Thursday, August 4th, Beth and I arrived home late at night with our youngest son, Luke (now in his Senior year at BJU). We’d driven to Greenville, SC, to pick him up at the end of his summer tour on the BJU drama team. The next day Luke and I went kayaking up river and I was surprised at how easily I made it up a small rapids that has sort of served as the ultimate test of our prowess as we’ve kayaked the river the past few years. I told Luke, “*I’m 54 and believe I’m in better shape than ever. I don’t think I could have so handily conquered that rapids when I was 24!*” I was about to be reminded of how fragile and fickle mere human strength is. That night, August 5th, without any previous warning, in my sleep, I went into severe convulsions and ended up being taken by ambulance to *Methodist Hospital* in Indianapolis. They quickly discovered I had bleeding and an egg sized tumor in my brain. The doctors explained to us that tumors of this size seldom originate in brains so they were sure it was a product of a tumor elsewhere, probably on my lungs. They sent me for a CAT scan where they discovered a golf ball size tumor in my right lung. After receiving the pathology report from a biopsy of that tumor, they told me that, though I’m not a smoker, I had Stage 4 (the worst stage) aggressive lung cancer. (One of the doctors later mentioned they had given me 10 months to live at the most.) The hospital’s chief neurosurgeon told me he needed to operate immediately to cut the tumor out of my brain before it could do more damage, then submit the area to aggressive radiation. If a PET scan didn’t reveal any other tumors, they would also remove the lower right lobe of my lung. Their hope was that the surgeries, followed by radiation and possibly chemotherapy, might extend my life a little longer.

On Friday, August 11, Dr. Horner opened my skull and removed the egg sized tumor and was amazed to find it a meningioma, a type of benign brain tumor. On August 28 (I was barely recovering from the brain surgery) Dr. Wozniac (their chief pulmonary surgeon) cut out a large portion of my right lung. I’m in the process of recovering from that surgery and finding it much more painful, debilitating and slower than recovering from the brain surgery.

When the pathologist’s report came back after they had extracted the golf ball size tumor in my lung (that they had already done a biopsy of and declared it the worst kind of lung cancer,) to the bewilderment of the doctors, they concluded that it too was a meningioma. It is extremely rare for a meningioma, which originates in the brain to metastasize (travel) to the lung. They canceled all plans for chemo or radiation and concluded I didn’t have cancer after all! As our church family and so many Christian friends were praying, we believe the inexplicable change is the work of the Great Physician! In fact, a few days before I was released from the hospital, one of the main administrative nurses came to my room, introduced herself and said she’d read the doctors’ reports of my prognosis, the surgeries, and the unaccountable outcome and she wanted to talk to me personally because she was convinced that the only logical explanation was that it was a miracle of God.

Through the experiences of the last few weeks, God has taught me a thrilling lesson: the “*trial shelf*” can contain as great or greater long term benefits and treasures from the hand of our omnipotent, merciful Father, as the *blessing shelf*! That’s why God tells us, “*Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights.*” (James 1:17). Whichever “*shelf*” it comes from, *every* gift He gives is “perfect”— it is for His glory and our good and that’s why we’re commanded, earlier in James 1, to “count it all *joy*” when we “fall into diverse temptations”, various trials (James 12-3)!

It would take too much time and space to enumerate all the wonderful treasures that have already resulted from this trial, but here are a few examples: during the long days at the hospital, God gave me numerous opportunities to be a

witness to doctors, nurses, and many others. I was inundated with cards, e-mails, letters, flowers and other thoughtful gifts from our church family and Christian friends from around the world.

In God's perfect, providential timing, our church had called our oldest son, Joshua, to come on staff in May 2005. He'd previously completed a Masters in Counseling and had just finished a Master of Divinity at BJU as well. It's been a great fit, and at the urging of a number of our deacons and others, I had just promoted Joshua to be my associate.

The Lord has blessed Joshua's preaching and given him great wisdom in handling numerous, serious problems that arose during my absence. God has continued to bless, protect, and move our precious assembly forward.

Here is just one letter that gives testimony to God's good gifts from the "*trial shelf*." It is part of a letter from Bob Armstrong, one of our men who has been a deacon, serving with me for the 22 years of my pastorate at *Grace* as well as previous to my coming.

"Although the church is under the very capable direction of Brother Josh, your flock, and I personally, sorely miss you. Our prayers are for you to get the rest that you so need and heal quickly and completely."

"God has used you, as His willing tool, in so many ways, but I believe through this experience He used you in a most unusual and unexpected way."

"I have read the miracles of the feeding of the thousands, the restoring of sight, and the raising of Lazarus, to name only a few, and I am absolutely convinced that God reached down from heaven and changed a cancerous growth to a benign tumor."

"This is the second time I personally witnessed a miracle in my lifetime. The other was when God, by His grace, reached out and saved my lost soul. Praise His name!"

"I have sensed a feeling of revival among our church. I believe your illness has broken many of us, and although I would rather have had this done in some other way, I know that God always knows best, and makes no mistakes..."

I'm praying God will indelibly impress this beautiful lesson in my understanding and that I will be less immature in wanting gifts only from the "*blessing shelf*" for the "*blessings*" out of the trial that began suddenly on August 5th are continuing to be showered upon me and the congregation I so love!

In Christ,

Leigh Crockett