

Facing the Unexpected

A Personal Journey of Replacing Fear with Faith

By Dave Butts



The phone call from my doctor was a surprise to my wife Kim and me. We knew something was amiss with my health, but we had no idea the seriousness of it. It's amazing how one phone call with unexpected news can realign our best-laid plans.

The Lord has amazing timing! For several months prior, I had been pulling together resources and studying Scripture to write a devotional book on prayer, peace, and the presence of Christ. By the time I sat down to write, that peace was far more than just a topic to study. It was now an integral part of my life.

I had no idea how important the truth of Philippians 4:7 would become to me: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God Knows

I often withdraw to other places to write, and I did so for this devotional book. The Holy Spirit was clearly at work as I wrote. It seemed like the devotionals flowed from my heart and mind as I wrote for several days.

Then came the call I had been waiting for regarding medical tests a week earlier. The results showed that I have a rare form of cancer called B-cell mantle lymphoma. I confess that the writing stopped for some days while Kim and I scoured the Internet to discover all we could about this disease.

As we learned about the rarity of this cancer—and often discovered things we didn't want to know—God's peace never left us.

Now I'm back to writing again, this time about God's peace in an imperfect world. Through His Word, God prepared me with His peace for the news I received. Far more than just an academic topic, His peace is a reality. It is a precious gift we have received, and we thank Him for it.

On Guard

This peace from God is beyond understanding. A cancer diagnosis typically brings much fear and anxiety—and I confess I have had anxious thoughts. But in a way I cannot understand or begin to explain, God's amazing peace guarded our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

I think the key word is *guard*. Anxious thoughts and fears do arise. But God, through Christ, has supernaturally set a guard upon our hearts. This guard—awake and alert—prevents the natural thoughts and fears from gaining a foothold. Our minds and emotions do not have to be subservient to the circumstances around us. The peace of God is a strong guard

that protects us and allows us to overcome a situation through the thoughts that come from Him.

The key to all this is desiring God's peace and asking for it. We can read Philippians 4:7 and feel good about the potential for peace. But if we do not receive it into our lives through prayer and faith, we are allowing this truth to be nothing more than a nice thought. God's peace is available for all followers of Christ if we will ask and receive. Then we can *cultivate* His peace through a life of intimacy in prayer and studying the Word.

Really, Truly

As I began my cancer treatments, a good friend wrote to assure me of his prayers. He asked how I was doing, then he followed up his question with "Really, how are you doing?"

This was my response:

Alan,

How am I doing? That's harder to answer than you might think. Everything radically changed in my life with the diagnosis of a stage IV rare form of lymphoma. The things I thought critical are not so critical. All my speaking engagements are either cancelled or put on hold. For a guy who has spent his career living by the calendar, the calendar is irrelevant, except for doctor visits.

But how am I doing? Hate to say it this way, but I'm in an amazing place! God is so good to me. I'm experiencing His peace day by day and He has removed any and all anxiety from me. The only tears I have shed have come not from cancer, but from the amazing care and love shown by the Body of Christ. God's people have provided finances, care, and above all, an avalanche of prayer that covers me continually. I am

in an amazing place!

Even ministry-wise, I am able to write and connect with prayer leaders around the nation and even the world. I'm convinced that this temporary illness will sharpen me for far greater effectiveness in ministry and compassion than ever before. I do believe it is "an illness not unto death," but even if I'm wrong, I can't lose on this one.

I don't pretend to enjoy what I'm going through. The chemo last week was really intense because I have a very aggressive cancer. I'm paying the price for it this week. And in two more weeks I get to do the whole thing over again, for 6–8 cycles. Then we see whether the chemo killed the cancer or it killed me. I'm believing the cancer is going down!

How am I doing? I certainly cannot complain. I am on a journey with the Lord that is exciting and daunting at the same time. I am already watching Him do some amazing things and am committed to keeping my eyes open and to learning more of His ways as we go together.

Thanks for asking. Didn't mean to get carried away. I appreciate your prayers and friendship.

Blessings!

Dave

The only way I can explain the ability to deal with cancer is the supernatural peace that Christ gives to His followers. Jesus said to us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). This kind of peace is not a temperament type, nor is it the result of carefully cultivating a peaceful lifestyle. It is a gift from God to be received. And it is an important aspect of God's will for each of us.

The peace that Jesus speaks of is closely associated with His presence. The 23rd Psalm is a favorite for many people. It has become life-giving for me. You see, I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Though I firmly believe I will experience physical healing, the truth is that I currently am in stage IV lymphoma—and death shadows me.

But like King David, I can say that I am not afraid. The reason? Because Jesus is walking with me through this valley. The rod and the staff that comfort me (Ps. 23:4) are symbols of a king and a shepherd. My King and Shepherd is walking with me—and that provides perfect peace regardless of outward circumstances.

Benefits of Walking in Peace

Kim and I have discovered the amazing benefits of peace as it impacts others. Many people who are struggling with illness or other difficulties have shared ways our peace in our circumstance has encouraged them in whatever they are facing. Several of the medical staff at the hospital told us that they look forward to our every-three-week stay because we don't come in complaining. They notice the way we are filled with joy—and that has opened the doors for us to pray with nurses and share about Jesus. With God's peace, despite serious illness, you can focus on others and on ministry to the Lord.

There are other by-products of this peace:

- Peace gives rise to worship. I often find myself up in the early hours of the morning, walking and worshiping the Lord.
- My infirmities have allowed me to be more compassionate toward others who are struggling with illness.
- My appreciation for the prayers of others on my behalf has led me to greater prayer for others.

God has been so gracious to me in this time of illness. The prayers of thousands and the release of the power of God, along with the best of medical science, have brought me rapidly to remission. Though the medical community says that mantle cell lymphoma is “incurable,” I worship a God who doesn’t recognize that word. My trust and hope is in Him for complete healing. But the Lord also provides peace and strength to deal with what amounts to a chronic disease. Ministry continues unabated and with even greater effectiveness because of the peace God has given to Kim and me.

The presence of Jesus brings peace to whatever circumstances any of us are walking through. As we daily draw near to the Lord and commit ourselves to deeper intimacy with Him, His peace becomes a guard that banishes fear and gives joy. When the Prince of Peace reigns in believers, a supernatural peace marks their lives—and that speaks volumes to the world!



—Dave Butts is the president of Harvest Prayer Ministries and the author of 11 books on prayer and revival. This article is based on his book, *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God*.