

## **“I HAVE CANCER”**

*When a cancer patient faces uncertainty*



### **Your body has let you down**

It is so strange – it feels like your body has let you down. You feel uneasy and discomfort, tired and weak. You Google your symptoms – which only makes you more paranoid. You ultimately go to the doctor who says, “Let’s do tests, just to be safe.”

It is very exposing to go for tests and constantly talking about your bodily discomfort. You do not want to believe that it is cancer – cancer has always been associated with death and you are not ready to die.

But then the diagnosis comes: you have a disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body. In short: you have cancer.

## The Club

Welcome to the Cancer Club, or perhaps we should rather speak of the 'Uncertainty Club'. The waiting period from a biopsy to a diagnosis is an absolute roller coaster. You would be surprised how many people receive biopsies and wait for a possible diagnosis.

In this waiting period: breathe. Pray and ask the Lord to strengthen you internally; to provide the right doctors and treatment. Ask the Lord to give you and your loved ones peace for the journey ahead.

Some people choose not to share with loved ones that they had a biopsy done. That is their prerogative. It is your privilege to choose how you want to approach this journey, who you want to share this journey with, what you want to share, and when you are comfortable doing so.

In this 'Uncertainty Club', there are only a few rules, and everyone's rules apply only to him or herself. You and your loved ones can write, develop, and adapt your rules as you journey together.

### A new speed: Uncertainty

The one with the diagnosis usually determines the speed and rhythm of the journey. Your loved ones may look at you differently; not necessarily out of pity, but out of uncertainty. When it comes to loved ones, ask and communicate clearly:

- Tell them to slow things down to the pace you feel comfortable with, especially when it comes to big decisions.
- Ask for spaces and conversations you need for you to be at peace.
- Learn how to communicate with and listen to your loved ones – they are afraid and uncertain too.

- Consider talking to a therapist – sometimes it's good to be able to have a safe, neutral space where you can share your experience boldly and unfiltered.
- Uncertainty is your new best friend. She is going to be with you for a long time. Learn new rhythms and practices that can help you to stay calm amid uncertainty.
- Until your doctor offers a diagnosis, suggests a treatment, or receives new results, learn habits to protect your own heart and mind. You are not 'there' until the doctor says you are. Words like 'currently', 'at this moment' and 'for now' can help you and your loved ones to hold this space.

### The people say...

On this journey, you might meet people who speak from their own experiences with great certainty. They offer well-intentioned advice, which can cause more confusion or leave you feeling worse. Some cancer patients would, as a courtesy, say 'yes' and 'thank you' to everything, but ignore the advice. Others are so eager to find something to hold onto, that they would blindly follow any given advice. These are the extremes in the search for certainty.

*It is important to remember that each person's journey is unique.*

Cancer comes with doubt and insecurity. You have been diagnosed *now* and you are *currently* undergoing treatment; it could be better or worse. People's bodies react differently to treatment and survival rates vary, despite seeing the same doctors, receiving the same treatment, and serving the same Lord.

### God?

Cancer confronts our understanding of the gospel which often emphasises certainty. In times of diagnosis, difficult treatment, or possible death, it makes sense to search for things to hold onto

and ground you; we want to understand God and we want to understand the suffering.

Being diagnosed with cancer is traumatic – you are confronted with uncertainty about tomorrow, next week, next year... You are unsure of what your future might look like and how to move towards it. You might question your purpose and even ask questions like: "Why me?", "Why did I get sick?" or even "Why did God make me sick?"

Some people find comfort in the idea that God might have caused it. If God brought the cancer upon them, it must be to bring something great out of it – some sort of testimony through your life and healing. An alternative view is that cancer is just part of life. That diseases – like cancer – are part of the broken world we are part of. It is what it is and there aren't necessarily concealed reasons for it. This is much harder to hold space for.

*Does this mean that God has no part in this cancer journey?*

No, God is with us. In the ups and downs of life. At the birth of a child and the death of a loved one; in diagnoses, and during chemo and radiation treatments; while recovering at home, struggling to be positive, and even when you feel weak, fragile, and when you want to give up. In your darkest hours and brightest days, God is with you.

God does not give people cancer to make something beautiful out of it. The triune God is not a God who deliberately makes us suffer to look good – that is just cruel. God can certainly use us through the way we live as disciples in our treatment; in the way we testify to our awareness of God's presence. *This* is the testimony in cancer.

## Discipleship and cancer

Follow the doctor's orders: Let your body rest. Take your sick leave or negotiate with your employer about alternative possibilities. Remember that you will have good days and some bad days when undergoing treatment. This would influence your ability to work. If possible, keep on working. It is good to have something to get up for in the morning. If you can't work (either because of your health or working conditions), consider other spaces to still be able to get out of the house.

With that said, it is important to remember that we do not stop being disciples when we are diagnosed – discipleship does not go on sick leave! You will think and talk differently about faith, and this too becomes a testament to your relationship with God. The vulnerability in your faith, questions about God, and struggles about purpose testify to your relationship with God. It testifies to your humanity and authenticity in your faith journey.

Don't try to imitate someone else's cancer or faith journey. Be yourself. Discover more about yourself in this phase of your faith journey during cancer.

## Cancer is not your identity

You are now a cancer patient. Yes, people won't necessarily recognise your sick body anymore. Yes, you will feel like a stranger in your body and notice the change in your appearance, strength, and abilities. But you are still you – someone with a personality, gifts, a story, loved ones, friends. But above all: You belong to God. Jesus died so that you and you may have life and life in its fullness, abundantly. This is also true during our cancer diagnosis, treatment and even death.

Live to the glory of the Lord and die to the glory of the Lord, regardless of whether it is because of cancer or not. A diagnosis

is not necessarily a death sentence. It is not your identity, and you are more than your cancer.

May you discover more about yourself and God's love for you on the cancer journey.

God is with you.

If you or a loved one has cancer, contact Cansa, Hospice, or established organisations.

Cansa: <https://cansa.org.za> or 0800 22 66 22

Cancer Alliance: <https://canceralliance.co.za>

Hospice: <https://hpca.co.za>



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