

WHAT HOPE CAN DO

BY

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How does a young man in the prime of life deal with an incurable disease, loss of strength, the news that he cannot be a father, and the likelihood of a shortened life-span?

At the age of 29, our son, Steve, began a journey we never expected. After completing his Master of Physical Therapy degree, he began working at a hospital and soon became ill with pneumonia. His doctor said, "Steve, I believe you have cystic fibrosis," Two positive sweat tests confirmed the diagnosis, and he began respiratory therapy that he would need the rest of his life.

My husband, Jim, and I, were shocked as no one else in our family had the Genetic disease. About 10% of CF patients are diagnosed in adulthood because one of the parents carries a mutation of the CF gene; and tests verified that truth for us. Cystic fibrosis destroys the lungs by clogging them with thick secretions and causes other organs to malfunction because of the mal-distribution of cellular salt and water. Digestion is also affected, so Steve also began taking digestive enzymes. No cure is available for cystic fibrosis. As part of his physical therapy training, Steve had learned how to treat patients with CF, but he had no idea that he would eventually become his own caregiver.

The jolt of this news had barely become reality when Steve almost died with renal failure due to IGA nephropathy, a separate autoimmune disease. Added to his respiratory treatments, he then needed three trips a week to the hemodialysis clinic. Still, he continued working part time in home health PT. After three years, he switched to peritoneal dialysis that allowed him to use a computerized machine at home where he dialyzed at night. Finally he did not have the strength to continue his profession but he used his time to begin a home-based business.

Steve lived every day with HOPE. As a child he had received Jesus as his Savior, and he continued growing in faith throughout his years. He prayed daily for healing, and believed that God could completely heal him, if it was His will. But one day Steve said, “Mom, I know God can heal me, but if He doesn’t heal me on earth, I know I will be healed in heaven.”

His healing came following much suffering at his last hospitalization when irreversible complications of CF accelerated; and at the age of 43, Steve moved peacefully to heaven on Sept. 22, 2012.

My son taught me many lessons about courage, faith, perseverance, and hope. Between numerous hospitalizations in 2005 and 2008 he wrote two books. One day he said with a wry grin, “Mom, God has given me a project and I’ll let you know when I’m finished.” I had no idea he was writing a book until one day he showed me the manuscript for *Jesus Really Said It*. He searched the four gospels and categorized the words of Jesus to address forgiveness, healing, faith, deliverance, relationships, conflict resolution, and more. He wanted to reach people who might not pick up a Bible but who would read a book addressing topics of interest to them. He later wrote another book using Proverbs and addressed subjects of guidance and instruction, wisdom, warnings, finance, words, children, anger, pride, joy, mercy, and others. *Make the Right Choice : A Personal Decision Guide*, is a great resource for young people and for anyone needing wise counsel. His books, published by Xulon, are still available there and at Amazon.com.

Steve didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for him and he did not discuss his physical limitations. However, he attended church and Bible studies when possible, and often asked for prayer. Many, many people prayed with Steve and for Steve’s healing. About two months before he passed away, Steve wrote a tract with the title, *So What Happens Next?* in which he addressed the subject of eternity. To date approximately 10,000 tracts have been distributed.

Although Steve lived in a townhouse about an hour away from our home, I helped him regularly and stayed with him during his hospitalizations and recuperations. Just a few days prior to his last hospitalization, Steve said, “Mom, you know I’ve been sick for a really long time.”

“Steve,” I said, “God will not take you home until your work on earth is done.” His ultimate healing came within a few weeks of our conversation.

Now breathing the breath of heaven, Steve has left behind a legacy of hope and inspiration for anyone who is facing life’s disappointments and physical limitations.

Biblical hope is not “maybe”—it is assurance, confident expectation. Our hope comes from God (Psalm 62: 5). His truth-- that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord-- is very comforting. As parents we want our children, regardless of their age, to be safe, happy, and holy. What better place to be than resting in the arms of Jesus, the author of perfect love?

The pain of grief cannot be denied. It is a personal journey. The separation is excruciating and photographs are not enough, memories are not enough. We long to see that smile, to hug, to talk and laugh together, and to say, “I love you.” The emptiness remains. God understands. We don’t have to pretend.

We can be thankful for the blessing of stewardship for our children for the time given. They always belonged to God. We live in a fallen world, and horrible diseases and accidents remind us of it daily, BUT GOD, has made a way through His son, Jesus, for us to be close to our loved ones who precede us to glory. I am encouraged by these words from the former Senate Chaplain, Peter Marshall: “Those we love are with the Lord, and the Lord has promised to be with us. If they are with Him, and He is with us, they cannot be far away.”

The Bible reminds us that God is near. “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147: 3). Joseph Bayley, father of three who died, once said, “Never forget in the dark what you learned in the light.”

A Chinese pictograph for the word, “Crisis”, has two images: one for danger, and the other for opportunity. Let’s pray that through our grief, our tears, our emptiness and longing, that it becomes an opportunity to grow closer to the One who loved us enough to die in our place, and who lives that we might have Eternal Life. The prayer of our hearts becomes---Lord be glorified. Let others see the joy and peace You give us—and be drawn to Your supernatural love and the power of hope.