

MY GOD
IS TRUE!



MY GOD IS TRUE!

*Lessons Learned along
Cancer's Dark Road*

Paul D. Wolfe



THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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TO CHRISTY,
WHO WALKED THE ROAD WITH ME,
AND WHO WALKS IT WITH ME STILL

TO HENRY, PHILIP AND CHARLOTTE,
WHO ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS,
AND GREATLY LOVED

IN MEMORY OF
LINDA DAVIS OLSON
(1943-2007),

TO WHOM GOD
WAS FAITHFUL



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Foreword

I still remember the sight. Paul Wolfe almost certainly will not. I had returned to teach for a few days at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where Paul was a student. As I walked onto the campus on an overcast, wintry day, I saw in the distance a student purposefully making his way towards Van Til Hall for a lecture. From the distance he appeared gaunt. He raised a hand in a gesticulation of greeting. I acknowledged his wave with one of my own, all the while thinking to myself, 'I should know that man.'

Only later, in conversation with some Faculty members, did it dawn on me: it was Paul Wolfe—the bright, able student who had been receiving treatment for cancer.

Fast forward to Friday evening, May 26, 2000 and once again to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This time my wife and I were guests at the Seminary Graduation banquet. Unusually one student had been asked to give a word of personal testimony. Yes, Paul Wolfe. I remember turning to my wife and saying to her, 'This is the young man who has had cancer.' The graciousness of his testimony to God's faithfulness lingered long with us. Perhaps it lingers particularly in my own mind because the title I had given for the Commencement Address the following day was *Ad Gloriam Patris: Counsel for Graduates in the School of Christ*. The passage was John 15:1ff. Paul was a living illustration of its teaching: Abide in Christ and

you will bear fruit; those who bear fruit the Father prunes that they may bear more fruit. All this is to the glory of the Father.

I am glad that now—a decade on from his treatment—Paul has been able to put his story into book form. Once you have read a few pages, and are drawn into the narrative, you will realize that these pages need no commendation from me to encourage you to read further.

With simplicity, modesty, and not a little wry humour, Paul tells the story of God's providence in his life, traces the path—where he is now able to detect it—of God's wisdom, and recounts the evidences of God's faithfulness. He does this, not in a spirit of triumphalism, but in a deep consciousness that since the Lord has employed the skill of surgeons and doctors to preserve his life, like his apostolic namesake, there must still be 'fruitful labour' for him in the purposes of his heavenly Father (*Phil.* 1:22). His ministry since then, and now this book, together constitute a down payment on that harvest.

One of the hallmarks of *My God is True!*, that makes it stand apart, is not only the engaging modesty with which the story is told, but the framework within which it has been written—a deep sense of the undergirding sovereignty and grace of God, his faithfulness, and his wisdom—a recognition that his ways are higher, deeper, and wiser than ours. While this is the story of a young man's pain, his struggles, his journey through a valley of deep darkness, it is also a story of love—Paul's love for Christ, his shared love with his wife Christy and their family circle. It is a testimony to what it means to belong to the living fellowship of Christ's people, the church.

It is almost a decade now since on Saturday morning May 27, 2000 Paul joined some eighty others who 'commenced' from Westminster Seminary. To everyone who knew his story his reception of the Master of Divinity Diploma was a particularly moving

moment. But yet more moving was to think of him joining in the traditional opening hymn for the Commencement Exercises as an expression of the divinity in which he had been schooled outside of the Seminary classroom:

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He has said—
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed!
For I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of woe shall not you overflow;
For I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
And sanctify to you your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you: I only design
Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

God has been all this and more to Paul and Christy Wolfe. This is the story of their past. It is also one of a countless multitude of stories about the faithful God who holds their future. It will comfort, encourage, challenge and inspire you as you read it. You will also come to admire and feel an affection for this couple through their story. But more, I hope that through these pages—

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as is certainly Paul's desire in writing them—you will come to love, trust, and admire their Lord and Saviour.

Now, please, turn from these words of introduction and read for yourself Paul Wolfe's story, *My God Is True!*

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON
First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, SC
USA

Preface

The decision to write this book grew out of a desire to record, and thus to share with others, lessons learned during a nearly year-long battle with cancer that spanned from April of 1999 to March of 2000. Years have passed since we endured that experience, but during those years the truths that were so vividly impressed upon us in the midst of the storm have, I believe, only continued to season our souls and to shape my service as a pastor. Thus, though time has passed since those powerful first impressions, I remain eager to share what the Lord was pleased to teach.

This book is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject of suffering. The reader will be sorely disappointed if he seeks that here! Rather, it is part memoir, part teaching, with a focus on the truths that stood out in our experience.

There are few, it seems, whose lives have not been touched in some way by cancer. And of course, there is no one whose life is untouched by suffering altogether. There are all sorts of dark roads that people must travel, all shapes and sizes of sorrows to be borne. Each and every one of us must come to grips with the reality of suffering in this life, and about this the gospel of Jesus Christ has much to say. For that reason I believe there are lessons here that everyone may embrace and apply. I pray that this book will be a help in that way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people who, in different ways, contributed to making this book possible.

Drs Arthur Kobrine, Allen Mondzac and Peter Moskowitz are the skilled physicians who preserved my life. I owe them a debt that cannot be paid.

The saints of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Fairfax, Virginia, love the Word of God. For that reason (and so many others) I have loved preaching that Word to them for over twelve years. This story is, in part, their story, too. See Chapter 6.

Dave Coffin, New Hope's senior pastor, by his faithful ministry, thoughtful scholarship and welcoming friendship, has left indelible marks all over my life for which I am profoundly grateful. In short, he has shared with me his life, and thus has impacted mine. Plus, he studied in Pittsburgh, so you know he must be wise.

Sinclair Ferguson was the Barnabas behind this little book. Without his encouragement it surely would have remained *The Book I Always Wished I Had Written*. In his lectures at Westminster Seminary he taught me about God and the gospel, and by the example of his own writing and preaching he has taught me that those truths are meant to be taken from the seminary classroom and passed on to bless others. May it be so.

Most importantly, I should acknowledge my wife, Christy. The story and the lessons of this book are just as much hers as they are mine. In our wedding ceremony she looked me in the eyes and said 'in sickness and in health', and she has proven true to her word. He who finds a wife like mine finds a very good thing.

WHY THIS TITLE

Finally, let me say a word about the title of this book, *My God Is True! Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road*.

The title is taken from the words of a hymn that has come to

mean a great deal to me, ‘Whate’er My God Ordains Is Right.’ One of the responsibilities I assumed when I began my service as a pastoral intern at New Hope Presbyterian Church in the summer of 1997 was to lead the congregation in learning some of the less familiar hymns in our hymnal. ‘Whate’er My God Ordains Is Right’ was one of the very first we learned together that summer. The history behind the hymn text is noteworthy: the story is told that Samuel Rodigast wrote the words in 1675 for his friend, the composer Severus Gastorius, who was suffering at the time from a serious illness.

Of course, I had no idea when I first read and taught those words just how pointedly—and wonderfully—they would address me in my own illness only a few years later. Learning that I had cancer, followed by the process of being treated for it, was in many ways a ‘dark road’ (see verse 1 below), but I discovered all along the way that ‘my God is true’ (see verse 3). I have become only more persuaded of his truthfulness and faithfulness ever since.

Whate’er my God ordains is right:
His holy will abideth;
I will be still whate’er He doth;
And follow where He guideth.
He is my God; though dark my road,
He holds me that I shall not fall:
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.

Whate’er my God ordains is right:
He never will deceive me;
He leads me by the proper path;
I know He will not leave me.
I take, content, what He hath sent;
His hand can turn my griefs away,
And patiently I wait His day.

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Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Though now this cup, in drinking,
May bitter seem to my faint heart,
I take it, all unshrinking.
My God is true; each morn anew
Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,
And pain and sorrow shall depart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Here shall my stand be taken;
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
Yet am I not forsaken.
My Father's care is round me there;
He holds me that I shall not fall:
And so to Him I leave it all.

SAMUEL RODIGAST (1675),
tr. CATHERINE WINKWORTH (1863,
alt. 1961)

Chronology

1998

| | |
|-----------|---|
| May 23 | Wedding Day |
| September | Back to seminary for third year of study |
| Fall | First symptoms |

1999

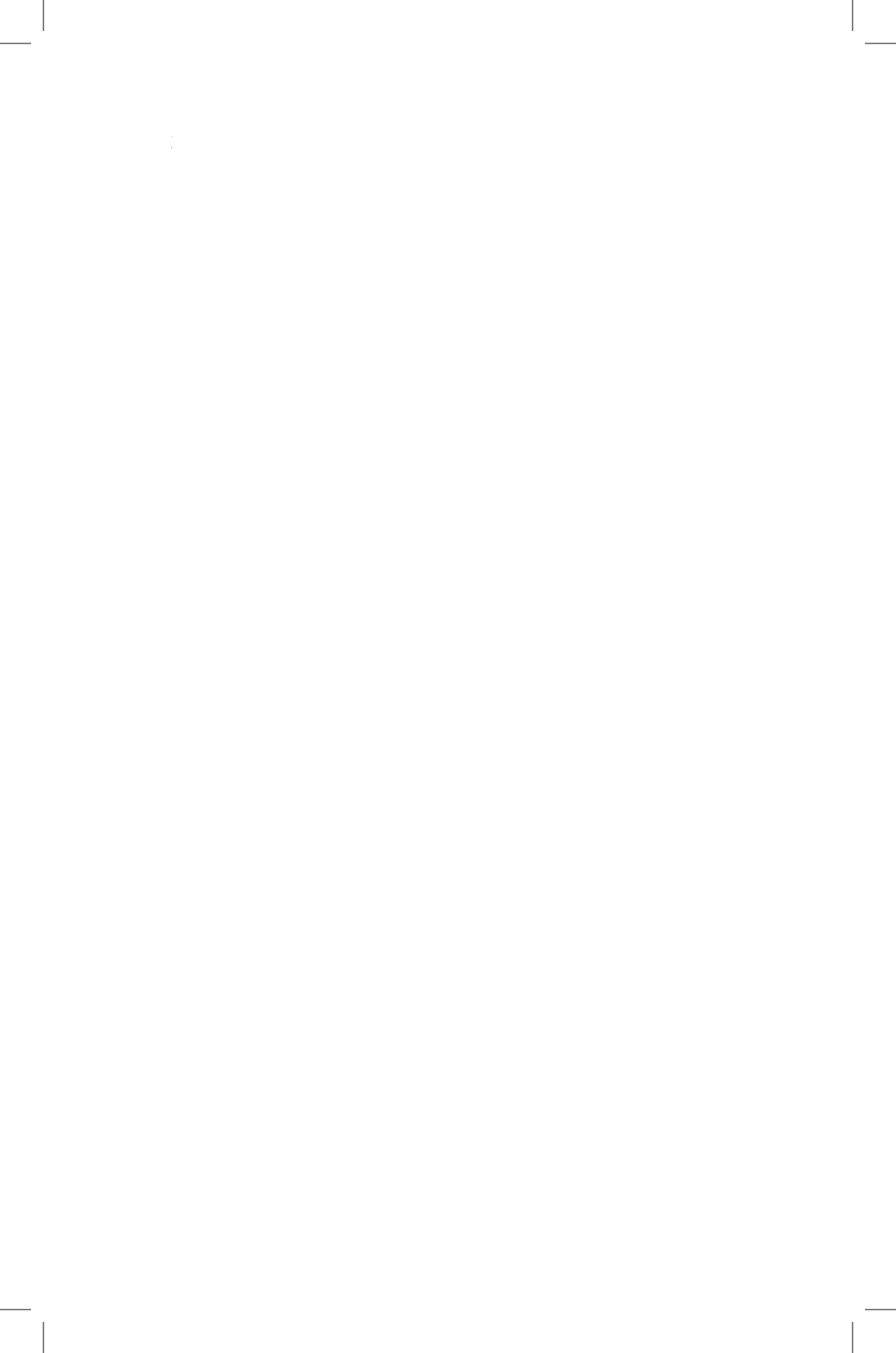
| | |
|-------------------|--|
| January | Appointment with general practitioner |
| April 16 | Appointment with orthopedic surgeon |
| April 23 | Diagnosis: cancer |
| April 24 | Surgery |
| April–August | Chemotherapy, Part 1 |
| July | Pneumonia |
| October | Radiation |
| November–December | Chemotherapy, Part 2 |

2000

| | |
|----------|--|
| March 13 | Closure: appointment in New York City |
|----------|--|



Part I: Discovery



CHAPTER ONE

Act 1: Infamy

Just one day after the attack at Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt predicted that December 7, 1941 would be ‘a date which will live in infamy’. Today, of course, the same can be said of September 11, 2001. The mere mention of those dates brings to mind the loss of so many lives, as well as the anger, helplessness and fear that filled so many hearts. There is a kind of deathly chill that we feel whenever we stop and remember. Those are moments in history we are unable to forget. It is as if the dates will not let us.

For many of us there are infamous dates like that associated with events in our individual lives. Mine is April 23, 1999. On that day I was told that I had cancer. I was twenty-eight years old.

Anger. Helplessness. Fear. A deathly chill. We felt them all.

A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan that morning, followed by a needle biopsy that afternoon, revealed a cancerous mass in my upper back that was pressing up against my spinal cord. That was the explanation for all of those worsening symptoms I had been experiencing, but it was certainly not the explanation we had anticipated. *A cancerous mass pressing up against my spinal cord.* That was why I had been suffering so much back pain for months. That was why I had gradually lost the use of my legs over the preceding weeks. And that was why I needed to be admitted to the George Washington University Hospital across the street from the MRI centre to begin treatment as soon as possible.

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Thus began what would turn out to be the nearly year-long odyssey that was our battle against non-Hodgkin's lymphoma: surgery, followed by chemotherapy, followed by radiation, followed by more chemotherapy—combined with all of the emotional highs and lows that anyone with any experience of cancer, either as a patient or as a loving observer, knows all too well.

It was, naturally, a trying time for my wife Christy and me. But it was a learning time as well. Even along cancer's dark road, there was light. The brilliant light of God's Word guided us in our cancer pilgrimage: challenging our expectations, renewing our faith, and, above all, strengthening our hope.

Throughout this book I want to share the lessons we learned. In order to do so I will need to tell parts of our story as I go. So, I will recount our experience as a play in three acts, with lessons learned interspersed along the way.

Before the curtain rises on Act 1, let me say that I would be the first to acknowledge that our experience with cancer was not as arduous and painful as that of many others. Between the day of my diagnosis and the day when the door was finally, happily closed on the treatment process, less than one year had elapsed. But for many, the road is much longer. Also—at the risk of stating the obvious—my treatments worked. I was healed. But for many, healing never comes, the road ends in death, and loved ones are left in sorrow. I do not claim that we suffered the most. Many have travelled darker paths.

Still, I think it is true to say that a little cancer goes a long way. Though we did not suffer the most, we certainly suffered enough—enough to be given a unique opportunity (what peculiar 'opportunities' the Father gives to his children!) to consider the reality of suffering in the light of the gospel.

I should also say that though I was healed, at other times in my life some close to me were not. In God's providence our family has

not been left untouched by the worst that cancer can do. In my own life the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away. I write as one who has seen both life and death. More about that later.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Though April 23, 1999 was my ‘diagnosis day’, we need to back up a bit to start the story. We need to back up several months to the previous fall.

In the fall of 1998 I was a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania, north of Philadelphia. I had just begun the third year of my studies, aiming to complete my degree program in four years. My goal was to become a minister. I was a member of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Fairfax, Virginia in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and I had begun serving that congregation as a pastoral intern the year before.

Most importantly, I was newly married. Christine Olson and I had become Mr and Mrs Paul Wolfe on Memorial Day weekend of 1998. We had decided to make our home in the Northern Virginia area with the thought that I would keep up a commuting arrangement between home and school, travelling back-and-forth between Virginia and Pennsylvania by car or train and spending just a few nights away from home each week. I should also say—that I enjoyed tennis, basketball, and hiking with my wife. In other words, I was, as far as I knew, a healthy twenty-eight year-old, and an active one. My forehand was my bane, but apart from that I was, on the whole, a happy man. I had every right to be. I had been given an abundance of blessings.

One particular day in the fall of 1998 stands out in my memory as the first day of this personal tale, though there did not seem to be anything momentous about that day at the time. During the fall semester I was taking only one class up at Westminster, and

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that freed me up to help out around the church office in various ways. So, one day that fall, New Hope's pastor, Dave Coffin, and I undertook the project of assembling bookshelves for our church office. As we put together bookshelf after bookshelf to hold the many volumes that made up our church library, the radio was on in the background broadcasting coverage of the mission of the Space Shuttle *Discovery* with astronaut John Glenn aboard. How strange, the details we remember about days so long ago. God-speed, John Glenn.

Our story begins that day because that was the first day I felt the pain in my back that would become a near-constant companion during the months to come. Naturally, I assumed when I first noticed it that the pain was the result of the work that Dave and I had been doing all day, which included some lifting of those shelves. Nothing too heavy, to be sure, but heavy enough to make me think that I had simply strained a muscle and that taking a little ibuprofen would be the end of it.

That proved to be a vain expectation.

Taking a little ibuprofen was not the end of my pain. Neither was taking a lot of ibuprofen! The pain lingered through November, and then into December. It joined us for Thanksgiving, and stayed on for Christmas. It was on hand when we rang in the New Year, 1999. It had become the uninvited guest that would not leave! Pain-relievers did not work. Sleeping with a heating pad did not work. Sleeping some nights in the recliner in our living room did not make much of a difference, either. Inexplicably, the pain just . . . lingered.

THE SPRING SEMESTER

Finally, sometime in January, I got around to seeing a doctor. I described to her the pain I had been experiencing and told her the story of our putting together those shelves, since that seemed to be the most natural explanation. She agreed. Based upon the story I

related to her, she concluded that I had likely strained a muscle in my back—nothing too serious—and that it would probably take several more weeks for the pain to dissipate. Though I did not leave her office suddenly pain-free, at least I felt that I could turn my attention to other things. There was nothing to worry about.

And as the spring semester began at Westminster, I had glorious things to occupy my attention. I had four classes on my schedule that semester, and it was, surely, one of the richest line-ups in the whole four-year curriculum. On Mondays and Wednesdays, I would be studying the book of Acts and the letters of Paul with Richard Gaffin. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would be learning about the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit in a course taught by Sinclair Ferguson. On Wednesday nights, I would be attending Dr Gaffin's class on the work of Christ for our salvation. And on Thursday mornings, I would round out my week with a course on the books of the Old Testament Prophets taught by Al Groves. These men were able and faithful professors who regularly provided a rich feast of instruction for their students. It was nice to know that, after the first few weeks of the semester, I would be able to sit comfortably again and take in those hours-long lectures without difficulty. It would not be too long now, surely, before this strained muscle was a thing of the past.

But, one more time, that proved to be a vain expectation. Still the pain lingered. Several weeks went by. January gave way to February. February gave way to March. It got to the point that an abundant supply of pain-relievers became an important item on my checklist of things to pack for school. And not only did the pain stick around, but now it had begun to move around. One day it was predominately on my right side; the next day, on my left. On a Tuesday it might be sharpest in my upper back; by Wednesday, around the

¹ Whac-a-Mole, an arcade game in which plastic moles appear randomly from a series of holes.

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front near my rib cage. It began to feel as if a game of Whac-a-Mole was being played out within my body: the pain goes away here today, only to pop up on the other side tomorrow!

Well then, why didn't you go back to see your doctor right away?

I did not go back to see my doctor during those months for the same reasons that many do not go to see a doctor in similar circumstances. The pain was not excruciating. There were times when it was barely noticeable. And I had reason to suspect that the cause of it was not all that serious. And, frankly, I had plenty of other things to keep me busy: textbooks to read, tests to study for, papers to write. Let's face it, going to the doctor just seems so inconvenient sometimes. So, you tell yourself, 'I'll get back to see my doctor when I've got more free time. Perhaps when spring break arrives. Or maybe when the semester is over. No hurry. No bright red warning flags here. My medical appointment can wait. After all, it's just a strained muscle. Right?'

To be clear, I do not fault that doctor I visited in January. She couched what she said to me in appropriately tentative terms. She did not make any definitive pronouncements, no guaranteed diagnoses. She offered a theory that made good sense of the symptoms I presented. For all I know a strained muscle was a part of the problem. This is not some 'let's bash the doctors' tale, charging that she and her colleagues failed me by not raising the cancer flag on day one. Far from it. In fact, if anything, I came through this whole process profoundly impressed with what doctors and nurses and researchers know, and with what they can do, and with the equipment they have at their disposal to do it. I do not fault her. Nor, I suppose, do I fault myself for coming away from that January appointment feeling somewhat reassured. There was good reason to believe that this was a relatively minor nuisance, and throughout January and February and early March I was simply too busy with all of the commuting and studying and test-taking and paper-

writing to think seriously about setting up yet another medical appointment. There would time enough for that—later.

NO TIME TO WAIT

But by late March/early April my tune was beginning to change. By then the pain had become intense enough, and disruptive enough, that Christy and I realized there would be no waiting until the end of the semester. It was time to take action. I made an appointment to see an orthopedic surgeon on April 16.

That turned out to be a very good thing, because by then yet another symptom had emerged, and this one got my attention far more than the back pain ever had. I woke up one morning to find that there was a strange tingling feeling in my toes. They felt numb, something like the way your feet feel when they have ‘fallen asleep’. Over the next few days, the numbness began to climb up my legs, and then the same thing began in my arms as well. I became unsteady in my walking. I had difficulty putting on a pair of socks. Simple tasks that were previously so unnoticeable had become, well, *noticeable*, in a way that was increasingly unsettling. You should not have to focus so intently on putting on socks.

My appointment with the orthopedic surgeon on Friday, April 16, turned out to be inconclusive. I told him my months-long tale of pain and numbness. He raised the possibility that I was suffering from a herniated disk in my back that was placing pressure on my spinal cord. After all, that would have accounted for everything: the months of back pain and now this strange, new numbness in my arms and legs. An X-ray taken in his office that day did not show any signs of a herniated disk, but that still seemed to him to be a likely explanation. So, the next step would be an MRI scan. That way we could get a better picture of what was going on inside me. I was more than happy to schedule it because I was eager for resolution. After some discussion about

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available time slots, we settled on the morning of the following Friday, April 23.

To be honest, coming out of that appointment on April 16, I was relieved. No, not relieved of my pain and unsteadiness. None of that had disappeared. But relieved of the uncertainty. I still was not well, but at least it looked like we finally knew *why*, and there was some comfort in that. After all, the diagnosis of a herniated disk seemed to make so much sense, and at last we were taking steps in the right direction of getting this whole mess resolved. Naturally I did not relish the prospect of surgery to repair a bad back (I understood that surgery might be required), but I reasoned, 'If that's what it's going to take to get me back on the tennis court, well then, point me to the operating room. I'll gladly stumble there myself.'

I suppose the best news coming out of that day, April 16, was the simple fact that I had survived it: because of my difficulty walking, I had a rather close call with a bus as I crossed the street in Washington, D.C. on my way to the doctor's office. You see, mine is a story of preservation in more ways than one!

A FRIGHTFUL WEEK

The next seven days leading up to my MRI scan were days of rapid decline in my condition. I marvel when I remember the details of those days, all the more so because I had no idea what was actually going on within my body.

I remember spending the weekend of April 17–18 in Pittsburgh for a friend's wedding, making my way around the reception hall by shuffling along the wall, leaning on Christy, leaning on chairs. I remember returning to Westminster on Monday, April 19, for my week of classes, and realizing later that if I had felt on Monday the way I felt by Wednesday, I never would have gone. I recall awkward moments as I passed students and professors on campus: they

expressed concern as they saw me shuffling about, uncomfortably, but I could barely look up from the ground to meet their gaze and reply. I remember having to stand upright for Dr Gaffin's lecture on the Doctrine of Christ that Wednesday night—standing up and taking notes at the piano in the classroom—because I could no longer bear to be seated for any length of time. I remember how two of my fellow students helped me to my car when the lecture was over.

I had a class on my schedule for the next day, Thursday, but after Dr Gaffin's lecture I decided that it was time to drive back to Virginia right away. There was no use in my staying at school another day. I was confident that my legs were still strong enough for me to drive safely, so it seemed best to leave that night.

I remember the long drive home, the all-too-familiar three hours along not-so-scenic Interstate 95. I remember how, after I got back to Virginia, the walk I had to make from my car to our apartment door felt like it lasted another three hours: with every slow, painful step up that hill, alone in the quiet darkness after midnight, I kept muttering to myself, 'One step at a time, one step at a time', until I reached our building, climbed the steps, and practically collapsed through our front door and into the bed. (No, it was not exactly a 'Hello, honey, I'm home' moment.)

I remember spending most of Thursday in bed, since that was about all I could manage. And then I remember the next day, Friday, April 23, 1999, which is where this chapter began. My parents were visiting for the weekend, and so the four of us—Mom, Dad, Christy and I—climbed into the car and headed off to the MRI centre on K Street in Washington. Actually, I did not so much climb into the car that morning as Dad picked me up and carried me to it. By that point my legs were of little use.

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THE TEST RESULTS

The radiologist did not use the word ‘cancer’—not at first—when he put the MRI pictures up on the board, with the light shining through from behind, and pointed out the mass next to my spinal cord that was not supposed to be there. But he began using words that ended in ‘-oma,’ and we knew enough to understand that those are words no one wants to hear. As he continued his language became more forthright, so that there was no more need to read between the lines. I was already seated in my wheelchair when he began his report, but Christy was standing—until that moment when it dawned on her just what he was saying. Then she said she needed to sit down, too. It was not a herniated disk after all. In an instant, our world had turned upside down.

CHAPTER TWO

Who's in Charge Here?

When you find out that you have cancer, a torrent of thoughts, fears and questions runs through your mind. And objections, too. For better or for worse, there are some of those. Perhaps even *plenty* of those. You say to yourself, 'Wait a minute, I'm only twenty-eight. I'm still a month away from my first wedding anniversary. I'm still a year away from graduating from seminary. I'm supposed to become a minister. I'm supposed to enjoy tennis, basketball and hiking with my wife. Cancer isn't part of the plan. Cancer isn't what *I* would have appointed for my life had I been the one in charge!'

And then, as soon as those words cross your mind—or even pass your lips—you are confronted with the question: Well then, who *is* in charge? Who *did* appoint this for my life? And then the Bible answers.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

The Lord reigns! Several of the Psalms resound with that refrain:

The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt (*Psa.* 93:1).

The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! (*Psa.* 97:1).

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The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! (*Psa.* 99:1).

According to those passages, the Lord reigns with majesty and strength from heaven, and his reign is rightly the cause of reverence and joy here on earth. The Lord is king over creation. As we read in Psalm 103:19, 'The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.'

Today we know even more about the Lord than what was known about him when those Psalms were written. Today, in the light of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we know that the Lord who reigns is one God in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God of the Bible is king over creation.

And this king is no mere figurehead. The Lord is a king with *control*. The traditional term for this divine control is 'providence'. With holiness, wisdom and power, God preserves and governs all his creatures and all that they do. Nothing that takes place is beyond the scope of his good and purposeful rule.

Consider the following passages of Scripture. Theologian Bruce Ware has helpfully referred to these as 'spectrum texts',¹ because they teach us that the providence of God comprehends the vast spectrum of things that take place in the created order: events major and minor, joyful and sorrowful, public and private, no exceptions:

Then the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?' (*Exod.* 4:11).

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I

¹ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2000), pp. 203-7.

kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand (*Deut.* 32:39).

The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts (*1 Sam.* 2:6–7).

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him (*Eccles.* 7:13–14).

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things (*Isa.* 45:5–7).

Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? (*Lam.* 3:37–38).

Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (*Amos* 3:6).

Notice the spectrum: good, bad, light, darkness, life, death, power, weakness, wounding, healing, prosperity, adversity, lowliness, exaltation, well-being, calamity, disaster. Notice the divine claim: 'I am the LORD, who does all these things' (*Isa.* 45:7). The *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563 captures this truth well:

Question 27: What do you understand by the providence of God?