Faith & Reason Honors Program

SENIOR THESIS

Name
Kathleen Glynn

Thesis Title
A Universal Undertow

Thesis Sub-Title
The Sweeping Effects of Cancer on Man’s Faith

Thesis Director
Kristin Fieseler, M.F.A. (Dance)

Year
2009
When cancer invades one’s own body, family, and home the meaning behind the all-too-familiar societal term immediately transforms into a deep and individual wound. The concept of cancer tends to greet people severely; leaving no room for personal space and separation as it spreads and even smothers every single aspect of one’s life. Its seemingly sly arrival may appear as an uninvited attack, a punishment for a wrongdoing, or an embarrassing weakness. A quick scan or the discovery of a lump can swiftly drench one in an unimaginable reality, forcing a confrontation of the disease face-to-face. Dr. Sharon Moalem, Ph.D. in human physiology, wrote, “If there’s a health-related word more closely associated with fear and mortality than cancer, I don’t know what it is. It’s so widely assumed to be a likely death sentence that, in millions of families, it’s barely spoken out loud; instead it’s only spoken, if at all, a kind of stage whisper” (Moalem 186). Approximately 10.4 million Americans are currently combating one of the 72 identifiable forms of cancer. Every year about 1,437,180 Americans experience the abrupt, exceedingly personal introduction to cancer, and 12 million people do so globally (American Cancer Society). As with any illness, a cancer diagnosis engulfs a whole new wave of panicked human questions, concerns and reflections. In a sense cancer is similar to the ocean; it is massive, ambiguous, peacefully quiet but so shrill all at the same time.

As capable human beings and children of God, we dare to dive into both the scientific and philosophical reasons behind cancer. Our spiritual selves naturally drift towards the faith-related trials and tribulations of the heavy disease, including
faith-filled victories and empathetic losses. No matter how calm or rough the waters may seem, nearly all human beings, regardless of age, gender, or religion, unconsciously challenge one question so universal, yet so complex: why? One naturally yearns to unearth cancer’s purpose, it’s meaning in life. In Lance Armstrong’s *It’s Not about the Bike: My Journey Back to Life*, he wrote, “Things take place, there is a confluence of events and circumstances, and we can’t always know their purpose, or even if there is one. But we can take responsibility for ourselves and be brave” (Armstrong 265). As the intellectual being battles for answers and more comforting circumstances, we have no choice but to incessantly fight for the sacred lives of ourselves and each other. In digging, navigating, and exploring through the malleable depths of cancer and all mortal diseases, there’s no real place to begin except as basic as possible. One must acknowledge cancer’s clear existence in the world, alongside the existence of all misfortune, pain, and tragedy. These hardships, as natural or unnatural as they may seem, are presently a functionary part of God’s creation and human life. The beautifully intricate minds and hearts of human beings can and should acknowledge the philosophical science behind cancer in the world, accept its existence, and learn to grow from this mortal hardship.

The agony and confusion of any calamity provokes most humans to question and frantically search for some sort of fulfilling reason or justification; repeating and demanding the common “why?” and “how?” Man’s natural ability and potential to think, to reason, and to solve stimulates one to tirelessly search for explanations and resolutions. The evidence of unhappiness and misfortune such as death,
disease, suffering, poverty, and destruction prove that everything is not purely good in a world molded by God, a world populated with humankind created in His own image and likeness. There is a need for closure and for control through knowledge, something often difficult or impossible to achieve in the case of misfortune. But one can certainly begin to dig with faith and patience. Genesis depicts the earth’s formation and Lord’s work, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 11:31). The Lord’s glory and magnificence as the Creator of heaven and earth has been revealed through the splendor of all He has molded and produced,

“Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel... ‘Will you question me about My children, or command Me concerning the work of My hands? I made the earth; and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out to the heavens, and I commanded all their hosts”’ (Isa. 45.11-12).

The Lord proclaimed to have crafted such a beaming universe, filled with a multitude of life forms, in His very own divine image and likeness. How, then, has so much strife and grief surfaced on God’s own precious handiwork?

In order to dissect such heart-wrenching questions and to produce semi-satisfactory answers, it is essential to primarily perceive everything as basic and as general as possible in world swamped with complications and obscurities. The Catholic faith loyally believes that God constructed a place of good, but evil is now
present within, leading to a very instinctive frustration: why do bad things happen to good people? Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, wrote, “The misfortunes of good people are not only a problem to the people who suffer and to their families. They are a problem to everyone who wants to believe in a just and fair and livable world. They inevitably raise questions about the goodness, the kindness, even the existence of God” (Kushner need pg. #)

One cannot break down this question without first clearly defining and pinpointing the existence of “good” and “bad”. Of course, good is what God intended for his children. It is pure virtue, beauty, truth and love. God did not intentionally place nor create bad and evil on His earth. However, He did indirectly grant evil’s presence with the gift of free will and liberation of choice for human beings. Free will is one of the four different entities opposing God’s intended plan. The other three include the spirit of evil, or the devil, original sin, and the forces of nature. Man’s intellectual freedom is exactly what separates humankind from every other earthly species. The very first sin seeped into the world with Adam and Eve, birthing original sin. Since then, every human being has fallen and sinned, with the pure exception of the Virgin Mary. It is true that each individual represents one universal human being. That collective human being is a sinner, and a large part of one’s humanness is to fail in order to be humbled and to grow through experience. The spirit of evil, the infamous devil and fallen angel, served as a constant temptation to Jesus Christ; and it still does so today. This further induces original
sin; these two, original sin and temptation, often work together in supporting evil’s presence (Breighner 28-29).

Father Joseph Breighner, acclaimed Catholic author, defined God’s will within three distinct categories, as inspired by a presentation presented by Rev. Lesley Weatherhead. His book, *When Life Doesn’t Make Sense*, organized God's intent as “intentional will”, “circumstantial will” and “ultimate will”. “Intentional will” consists of what God truly hopes and expects for the world, “circumstantial will is “how circumstances of life attempt to alter God’s plan”. “Ultimate will”, reassuringly, will be God's triumphant victory over all evil, sin, and death. Again, God constructed a world out of goodness and love; but with the gift of free will comes consequential changes in human fate and fortune. As promised and foreshadowed with the rising of Jesus Christ, God will cast out all evil and save His children from sin and mortal confliction. One cannot deny nor choose to ignore the effects of complete free will which naturally includes the inclination of sin and mistakes.

The Catholic universal prayer, “The Our Father” or “The Lord's Prayer” clearly demonstrates man’s sinful identity, “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive who trespass against us.” Human beings recite these lines out loud as a community in Mass, further emphasizing universality as sinners and as humble children of God. Also recalling biblical history, from the fall of Adam and Eve through Cain’s murder of Abel, Noah and the flood, Abraham’s covenant,
Moses and the Exodus, and onward, man has fallen into a systematic pattern of sin. Man, or men, first sin, acknowledge this, sincerely repent, receive pardon, and recover a clean soul. Just as He fulfills the role of Creator, God is the forgiving Redeemer. In addition to personal growth and learning, forgiveness is another virtuous component of sin. In *To Forgive is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past*, a collaboration of three authors wrote, “Forgiveness is a moral virtue embodied in the context of relationships. A virtue is an internal quality of character that is morally good.” (McCullough 27). Through sin and mortal limitations, man not only is offered to opportunity to morally develop and change, but to also receive and offer forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a divine and human mutuality; a power which can teach, inspire, revitalize, and restore. Offering forgiveness is another outlet to exercise moral liberation of choice and mortal free will. It is an art form which man can never fully master in a world distorted by sin and tainted with temptation; but the sacred experience of forgiveness on both giving and receiving ends is a conversion experience. Norman Cousins advocated forgiveness, “Forgiveness is a gift we need to give not only to others but to ourselves, freeing us from self-punishment and enabling us to see a wider horizon in life than is possible under circumstances of guilt or grudge” (Cousins 111).

Since virtue is embedded in forgiveness and forgiveness should be an essential component of sin, there is an evidential amount of “good” in the “bad”. If one did
not function within this cycle of failure and renewal, human beings would not be human, but divine beings. The Lord’s Prayer, biblical history’s repetitive sequence of events, and the immenseness of forgiveness in the Catholic religion present sin as a principal and unquestionable part of humanity.

However, the proven identity as sinners does not justify human mistakes. Catholics are pushed and tested to continually improve and work towards individual and communal growth. In The Catechism of the Catholic Church, The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults, “Human history is in large part a record of wars and personal failures and tragedies. Human puzzlement over pain is recognized also in the Gospels” (Wuerl 21). The etymology of “gospel” is a combination of “good” and “story”, more familiar to Catholics as “the good news”. This good news sheds light on a new kind of life; the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John conclude most parables with an offertory challenge. For example, Matthew’s story of the temptation of Jesus closes with Jesus’ challenge, “Go away, Satan! The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him!’” (Matthew 4:10). In Mark’s version of another temptation of Jesus, the Lord proclaimed, “Have the salt of friendship among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.” (Mark 9: 50). In His Blessing of the Children in Luke’s gospel, Jesus said, “Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” (Luke 18: 17). Finally, an example from John’s gospel is Jesus before Pontius Pilate, “I told you that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth
listens to Me.” (John 18: 37). The good news is a revolutionary gift. It provides a peek into how wonderful the world could be, serving as an inspiration and enlightenment for all humble readers.

The Beatitudes, most clearly stated in the gospel of Matthew, further invite the same challenge, as do the 10 Commandments. Both Catholic proclamations exist as part of the good news. The essentiality of the Commandments is evident with their multiple appearances in the Catholic Bible, first in Deuteronomy and sporadically repeated in all four gospels (Wuerl 250). These four gospels, the Beatitudes and the 10 Commandments, wholly acknowledge and confront man’s principal characteristic of free will and consequently of sin. Each traditional and literary proclamation of faith offers a redeeming challenge to convert and change, to seek better and more goodness in light of human wrongdoing and failure. More importantly, Jesus’ defining act of dying in order to rise from death needed to happen in order to save humans from sin. Scripture speaks, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The holy and glorified life of Jesus serves as perfect evidence to prove the presence of sin within human nature; and as a summon to change through the Lord’s own personal sacrifice of His life.

In this sense, the concept of sin and all bad is a component of good, it is exactly what emerges when we ignore, deny, or mistake good. Bad is good’s absence. Adam
and Eve were presented a choice with the temptation of the tree of knowledge. They turned away from true goodness in favor of the false and temporary allure of the tree of knowledge, allotting room for the bad. Because of free will, some amount of good is lost every day. When virtue and morality are sadly missing, bad encompasses that emptiness. Good and bad are not opposites infinitely combating for victory, but instead bad is the deficiency of good, the result of good’s abandonment. The potential of bad surfaces when good is not in its most complete form. However, just as God will one day swiftly defeat the unfortunate circumstances of human life, good still emerges from sin through forgiveness and a call to convert.

Lance Armstrong wrote, “So if there is a purpose to the suffering that is cancer, I think it must be this: it’s meant to improve us” (Armstrong 267). Once more, good can always find its way amidst the bad. Bad and good are both vibrantly existent in humanity because of one’s ability to choose. Plenty of sources, in addition to The Lord’s Prayer, the four gospels, and biblical references, confirm that failure and sin are embedded in human nature. A more contemporary perspective comes from Randy Pausch, Carnegie Mellon University professor who lost his life to 10 fatal tumors in his liver. Pausch stated the same idea of sin and all bad things as a beneficial and challenging gift in The Last Lecture, “Brick walls are there for a reason. They give us a chance to show how badly we want something” (Pausch 79). Are our human mistakes indeed nothing short of a blessing? It is at the bottom of one’s darkest, weakest and deepest failures that one has no choice but to muster up
the strength to rebuild and revitalize. Are these desolate human affairs the moments that one grows and blossoms the most?

However, even if good can be discovered in the instance of sin, how does this explain natural disasters and pure accidental catastrophes that involve no conscious choice? Incidents including cancer, most diseases, earthquakes, floods, fire, car accidents, and many more leave no philosophical substance to trace back to without meddling into scientific and medical intricacies. There is no true free will involved, sin is something one willfully performs, but other tragic calamities and pain seem to simply appear, leaving one with a puzzling passive participation. Reverend Richard Phillips, chair of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, wrote,

“One place to begin is that these disasters prove that something is terribly wrong with our world. The world was obviously made by someone good – the sun shines, plants grow, and gorgeous beaches line the ocean like emeralds. But there is a terrible flaw – a crack, if you will – that manifests itself in both daily frustrations and epochal disasters. The Bible explains this by pointing to the terrible intrusion of sin in this world. Man’s sin has defaced the world.”

It is possible that the massive ripple effect of sin and immorality have completely polluted the intertwining of the world, in a way we can only partially understand. However, Voltaire’s French enlightenment theory was substantiated in an attempt
to rationalize the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755. He compared God to a watch-maker, “He makes the clock, winds it up, and then forgets about it” (Solimeo). Voltaire and several other philosophers and intellectuals have assumed and still do perceive these things as a divine punishment. However, Luiz Sérgio Solimeo clarified God’s true existence and active involvement,

“The fact that God normally governs the universe through secondary causes does not mean they are not under His power. Being the primary Author of all that exists, He is also author of the substances that make up the secondary causes and the laws of nature. Thus, He can produce effects directly, unaided by these secondary causes.” (Solimeo).

In His glory God does and will bring all good and true things to some sort of end. Fr. Joseph Breighner supports this argument in presenting God’s “ultimate will”. Although Catholic disciples do not believe that the Lord is constantly directing fate and poking His fingers into the cycle of earth, He does allow nature to run its own course, even if this may induce a certain amount of corruption. Pope Benedict XIII sermonized about natural disasters at the Vatican in November 2008,

“...history must take its course, which also involves human tragedies and natural calamities. As time develops, the design of salvation that Christ has already taken effect in his incarnation, death and resurrection [becomes clearer]. This mystery is continually announced by the Church and actualized in her preaching,
with the celebration of the sacraments and the testimony of charity” (Catholic News).

The Holy Father urged his congregation to continue living with a faithful love towards God and His plan. Like Pope Benedict XIII, Randy Pausch met a personal conclusion with his critical diagnosis, “That is what it is. We can’t change it. We just have to decide how we will respond. We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand” (Pausch 17). Tragedy and pain exist on earth; human beings have the ability to reason, rationalize and recover physically and emotionally from such unforeseen disasters. Human beings have no choice but to accept such burdens, except with an emotional refusal. Lamenting and reacting irrationally to such misfortunes blinds one from any good or hidden blessing that could transpire. Lance Armstrong reflected upon his own arduous struggle with cancer, “When I was sick, I saw more beauty and triumph and truth in a single day than I ever did in a bike race- but they were human moments, not miraculous ones” (Armstrong 5).

In “God Images Following Hurricane Katrina In South Mississippi: An Exploratory Study” published in Journal of Psychology and Theology states, “Individuals who feel that God will take care of them in times of trauma, as well as individuals who believe God will answer their prayers, may experience reduced anxiety in the face of a traumatic event” (Aten 250). Through an interviewing process at the University of Southern Mississippi two months after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, researchers found that the majority of people, regardless of
religion, primarily associated God with the word “omnipresent”. One participant observed, “God is everywhere. You can see Him in nature, in the people driving the vans full of first-aid material down here, and in the people serving soup in the shelters” (Aten 251). Just because evil persists on earth does not mean God is absent and ignorant in picking His children back up and rebuilding what once was. Not only will God restore his people and their faith, but He will provide hope and reassurance. Awful experiences like Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath often change one with a renewed and strengthened sense of faith. Other participants in this study did also describe God as “omnipotent” and “personal” but some did quite understandably find Him both “distant” and “judgmental” especially within the context of the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina.

Human nature is not capable of fully grasping the profundity of God’s divine plan and how He works within, around, and through man. One must understand that one cannot understand. Norman Cousins wrote in his book, *Head First: The Biology of Hope,*

“Common to the sciences and the humanities is the human urge to understand the universe and man’s connection to it. The failures that have pockmarked history have come at times of philosophical poverty. Humans may enlarge their objective techniques and even their knowledge, but they cannot change the basic fact that their position in
contemplating the great questions is inherently subjective” (Cousins 195).

Again, Armstrong wrote about his startling, severe sickness in a comparable sense to Cousins, “I still don’t completely understand it. All I can do is tell you what happened” (Armstrong 5). Humans can use the many extraordinary gifts of intellect, emotion, reasoning, instinct and sense to piece together some of the puzzle and wholly form ideas and theories. But as children of God, men are too small to catch every one of the infinite fine distinctions and obscurities swarming around that combine to tie together an absolutely stunning and miraculous plan. Therefore, despite doubts or misgivings that may make God seem distant and judgmental, what is essential is how courageously man can react and hold onto his faith at these times. The rest is partially beyond mortal capacity. Michael J. Fox, warrior of Parkinson’s disease and former celebrated actor, wrote that since his disease is completely out of his own control, he looks towards and accepts the existence of a power higher than himself in his book Always Looking Up. He also wrote, “For everything this disease has taken away, something with greater value has been given” (Fox 92). Armstrong continued, “To believe, when all along we humans know that nothing can cure the briefness of this life, that there is no remedy for our basic mortality, that is a form of bravery” (Armstrong 113). Yes, one should keep searching for answers, but one should also seek personal remedies as Fox and Armstrong did: optimism and bravery.
Just like cancer and its uninvited, personal invasion, all burdensome tribulations tend to enter people’s lives as an unwanted astonishment. Arthur Godfrey, past American TV star and survivor of lung cancer once wrote, “Most people have the idea that bad things happen to other people, not to themselves. When it hits close to home, it rocks them” (Ross 5). Most likely, the personal shock effect of bad news significantly enhances a victimized feeling. When death and suffering invade on an intimate level, it seems natural to seek not just the “why”, but “why me?”

The Book of Job, whether partly fictional or a true historical story, serves as a great inspirational resource and stepping stone in the journey to unravel why good people are suffering. Job was an ideal follower of God, morally upright, fearful of God and against all evil; he was blessed with a large family and a fruitful livestock. Initiated by Satan’s challenge, God tested Job by first destroying his animals and seven children. However, what Job did not factually know was that God was protecting him from the wrath of Satan and simultaneously testing the endurance of his faith. The prophet spoke, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1: 20). Despite all his terrible losses which hit Job so unexpectedly, he remained zealously faithful, loyal and trusting in God. The same happened again when Satan challenged the Lord to disturb Job’s health; bestowing upon him innumerable sores from head to toe. Despite Job’s wife, who was hopelessly drifting in faith, he proclaimed, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of
God, and not receive the bad?” (Job 2:9). Job triumphed as a true disciple of the Lord again. In the face of what today may seem like a tremendous bucket of bad luck, a curse, or some sort of punishment, Job accepted his fate and continued to live in a manner most pleasing to the Lord. No matter how difficult his life circumstances had become, he persevered.

Job’s integrity shattered and his beliefs were angrily tossed away. He cursed his life, defied God, felt humiliation and despondence, and voiced frustrations with the world and its Redeemer. However, at the end of his extensive, despairing toil for answers, comfort, and relief, Job was re-enlightened and returned home to God and his faith:

“I know that you can do all things,
And that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” (Job 42: 2-3).

After Job’s suffering and steep journey back to faith, the Lord restored him with twice as much as before. Parallel to this, Job’s love for God and faith in his divinity seems to have returned twice as strong as before. All throughout Job’s tumultuous trials and distraught journey, the Lord remained beside Job, listening and responding. His story is a valuable lesson and inspiration in several ways.
Job’s story is a prime example that one’s individual achievements or mistakes, virtue or immorality, financial status or social class do not significantly alter the rest of one’s lifetime destiny. Of course, select choices in one’s lifestyle have the potential to create medical or moral consequences, but in the grand scheme of things there seems to be no logic behind the progression of events in one’s life. Fred Hutchinson, former baseball pitcher who defeated a large cancerous tumor exceptionally rapidly, reflected, “After all, cancer is a disease, but it’s not a social disease. It’s something that happens. It doesn’t make any difference who you are; there are no barriers along those lines.” (Ross 55). Every man will suffer, experience a loss, and feel pain. It is an essential part of human life.

The inclination towards victimization is normal. In the midst of his battle with chemotherapy, Lance Armstrong reflected, “I was startled to read that eight million Americans were living with some form of cancer; how could I possibly feel like mine was an isolated problem?” (Armstrong 150). Regardless of religious affiliation, Armstrong became aware of the universality of human beings. He accepted that all are confronted with pain and anguish in some form or another; humans are not meant to handle our burdens alone, but rather to lift each other up in light of them. Jesus Christ was a victim of hatred and fear in a completely human sense. However, even when brutally crucified and alone on the cross, Jesus turned toward His father, not away from Him or against Him.
If cancer or any painful event were triggered intentionally, how would one begin to explain the suffering and death of the most undeserving, youthful, innocent, children have experienced? Dr. Harold W. K. Drageon, one of the most eminent pediatricians in American medicine, once said, “They [the parents of sick children] have to learn that cancer is a reality, even in the child’s world. They must understand that this disease, cancer, is nobody’s fault. It can’t be attributed to an infection or neglect…” (Ross 153). The fresh abundance of virtuousness and purity within the youth baffles and disqualifies most attempts to crack the logic or sensible pattern behind any misfortune. In fact, most parents are prone to load blame onto themselves in order to achieve some sort of reasonable equation. The American Cancer Society precautions, “Parents have the major task of protecting their child from danger. They may question what behavior or action of theirs may have contributed to their child having this life-threatening disease” (ACS). Everything and anything from the nuances of pregnancy to child-raising may be frenziedly examined in the hopes of beginning to fill such a resentful and bewildering situation. Reasons, solutions, and excuses all intermingle as one in the same; cancer is merely inexplicable in a philosophical sense, whether burdened with this disease at age 1 or 101. It only seems more wrong when placed upon a human being so unexposed to the world, helpless, blameless and unaware.

Children’s cancer remains as a baffling mystery in coping with both the natural course of evil and its impenetrable method of striking certain individuals. If a cancer diagnosis isn’t terrible enough, how is it that a being so fragile, innocent,
and pure can carry such a heavy and powerful illness? How is this particular tragedy, which seems more like an outrageous crime, even feasible in a world that is supposed to be spun out of goodness? Pediatrician Harold W. K. Dargeon talked about the difficulty of grasping children's cancer, “They [parents] have to learn that cancer is a reality, even in the child’s world. They must understand that this disease, cancer, is nobody’s fault” (Ross 153). Just like sin, all human beings will experience pain and suffering within the course of mortal life. Some may be challenged with more hurt than others, and others more frequently throughout life, and others rather rarely. Some individuals encounter pain as early as birth, others meet death more suddenly than a flash of lightening. Regardless, upset and agony are an essential and complete component of human nature for the same reasons and purposes of sin and mortal failure: to experience God’s forgiving, healing love and to grow from its warmth. The method behind these tragedies and who they will encounter is a mystery embedded in God’s plan.

However, the multitude of complexities within these difficult questions and the shades of grey constantly lingering in the world produce an abundance of negative emotions and frustrations. One of the first and most popular emotions one may harbor is anger. One may feel anger towards God, himself, or the world in general. Elissa Thorner, a young and fit athlete, was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 23. She said in an interview "I went through unbelievable anger, feeling my body had failed me. I remember being out at a bar with a girlfriend—she was having a cosmo and a cigarette—and feeling how unfair it was. She sleeps with
random men and lives a single bachelor life, and I've never done anything like that." (Thorner). Thorner begged “why me?” and searched to find the logic between her exceptionally healthy lifestyle and her life-threatening diagnosis. Deacon George Kelly, Director of Institutional Research at DeSales University, conquered colon cancer almost 10 years ago. When asked in an interview if he experienced any anger, he responded, “I personally did not experience any real anger or blaming. But it is okay to feel that way. God understands. Do not have a guilt trip on yourself for being mad at Him. You will then gradually realize that God allowed it, but he didn’t cause it. And He will be there for the healing part.” Human emotions are an essential and beautiful part of living; one should not repress or deny any feeling.

Resentment is justified and occasional form of anger. Feeling this way corroborates respect of self and a need to protect oneself; it also confirms that one has the free will and choice to reason and react emotionally. In his literary piece, *Grief: God’s Way of Healing*, James White wrote, “... we all must admit that at times we are angry with God. Yes, even believers can feel anger toward God for their loss, and anyone who says otherwise just isn't being honest. Thankfully, God is big enough to handle our anger and our tough questions” (White). Genuine sentiments and passions make humans full of vigor and life; they are one of the most real, unguarded and innate glances to one’s soul. Emotions are not chosen and handpicked based upon convenience and tolerability, positive and negative feelings simply exist and mutate through action, intention, and perspective. These negative
feelings, anger and resentment, need to be recognized and deeply explored in order for them to evolve and remain healthy.

Human instincts in addition to a lack of wholly fulfilling answers understandably incite one to leash out anger and frustration to the One we trust as our creator, to the One we want to wholeheartedly believe and trust. The prophet Jeremiah, the “reluctant prophet” notoriously voiced a strong accusation and denial of God after a brutal beating for prophesying, crying out, “For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, ‘Violence and plunder! Because the word of the Lord was made to me, A reproach and a derision daily.’ Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.’” (Jer 20: 7). After hesitantly honoring the commandment of the Lord, Jeremiah preached to his enemies, who surprisingly repented and converted. Billy Graham wrote in “The Christian Post”, “Jeremiah was angry at God- but God didn’t reject him. Instead, Jeremiah needed to learn to trust God, even if he didn’t like what was going on” (Graham). These feelings are real and common, even to those exceptionally close and intimate with the Lord. Human emotions are one of the most honest components of man, one of the most direct products of man’s inner self. “It isn't that God needs us to be honest – he sees through the performance anyway. It's that we need us to be honest, so that we can move forward spiritually. The more we lie to ourselves, to God, and to other people, the more impossible it is for us to move on” (Arthur). Fully experiencing and sensing resentment is healthy, if once anger is acknowledged it is managed in a spiritually beneficial manner.
With time and rational reason, that anger toward God should diminish to a general anger and then subdue to a more subtle form of resentment. Lance Armstrong reflected on his long battle, “After the cancer I needed a different emotional fuel, too, something different than anger. Cancer forced me to develop a plan for living, and that, in turn, taught me how to develop a plan for smaller goals like each stage of the Tour” (Armstrong 284). Armstrong did just that—he acknowledged his anger and responded to it in a manner both healthy and beneficial to him. The Book of Romans states, “Never take revenge my friends, but instead, let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, ‘I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.’... Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.” (Romans 12: 19, 21). After a demoralizing remission of breast cancer on her 25th birthday, Elissa Thorner also realized that she needed to choose a new approach besides anger and channel her energies differently.

“But this time, she [Elissa] knew there wasn't going to be a good explanation for her cancer, so she took a new approach: reshuffling her own priorities and helping other young women with breast cancer through her work with Susan G. Komen for the Cure, among other organizations” (“A Clean-Living Young Athlete With Breast Cancer Asks, ‘Why Me?’”)

In the fuming cloud of rage two spiritual principles should calm the heart. First, God is the one who gave Himself in order to save His children from their own sins
and failures. If He suffered and died to provide the ultimate forgiveness, how can one remain angry with Him? Second, from this passage alone one forgets so easily that the Lord is always on the same side. He is not the opposing team or even a spectator watching beings suffer. He walks beside those bearing pain throughout the whole journey, protecting and loving each individual. One day He will embrace man and make everything just and right for His children. “Footprints in the Sand” poem, written by Mary Stevenson in 1936, portrays a young man who feels abandoned by God at the time he needed Him the most. Stevenson lost her mother at age 6, suffered through the Great Depression, and fled from an abusive marriage. She wrote these comforting words originally for her friends in need; picturing how the Lord would reply to their cries for help, “My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of suffering, when you could see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.” Father Joseph Breighner spoke the same message,

“Yes, I do believe that great good can come about as a result of terrible tragedies. Yes, people with disabilities and sicknesses and limitations of various kinds are often able to triumph over such realities and become inspirations for millions. But these are examples of God’s presence comforting and strengthening people in times of trial, not God causing the trial! To name the tragedy as the will of God is to make God appear indifferent at best, and sadistic, at worst” (Breighner 19-20).
Again, one cannot know and fully absorb the many tragedies on earth. Human beings are welcomed to fully absorb God’s love and to trust in Him as He remains beside during both the good and bad periods of life. At the Last Supper before his own mortal death, Jesus washed the feet of His steadfast disciples. Feet are such a well-used, often concealed and rather ugly part of one’s body. They support and carry the body; they trek through dirt, dust, rain, snow, sand and more. The illustration of Jesus carefully washing such a worn in, crucial, and concealed part of the human body within His own hands shows His unconditional love. The sacred act portrays Jesus’ clear view of every scratch, every sin, and every weakness scorched upon each individual’s soul and His will to wholeheartedly embrace every faithful disciple regardless of how soiled one may appear physically, emotionally, and morally. The Lord welcomes and supports each human being unconditionally through sickness, despite how despondent, disheartened and alone one may feel.

Even though human identity limits philosophical and intellectual capacity and understanding of God’s ultimate plan and design, man has advanced significantly in medical and scientific knowledge. In Dr. Sharon Moalem’s *Survival of the Sickest: A Medical Maverick Discovers Why We Need Disease*, he explained how several current medical maladies can be explained and reasoned because they were a bodily defense or natural antibody at one point in time. Dr. Moalem has helped ease some of the “how” frustrations on a humanly technical level, separate of God’s divine plan and the marvelously complex workings of the universe. He wrote,
“So to be crystal clear: everything out there is influencing the evolution of everything else. The bacteria and viruses and parasites that cause disease in us have affected our evolution as we have adapted in ways to cope with their effects. In response they have evolved in turn, and keep on doing so. All kinds of environmental factors have affected our evolution, from shifting weather patterns to changing food supplies— even dietary preferences that are largely cultural” (Moalem xv).

In some cases, an illness one may be burdened with today could simply have been the body’s natural defense to another disease centuries before. Without jumping too deeply into precise and scientific details, Dr. Moalem has produced a large amount of soothing evidence when questioning the profound how’s and why’s of people’s physical suffering. He has provided possible logical, evolutionary answers and explanations of diseases including hemochromatosis, diabetes, high cholesterol, and cowpox. Dr. Moalem proved that several physical diseases were natural bodily defenses at one point in history. Without too many knotty rationales and methods underneath this principle, Dr. Moalem’s work supports that there is indeed a solid purpose and basis for illness and affliction. In hemochromatosis one’s blood continues to absorb iron unabated, which can eventually be fatal without treatment. This build-up of iron may be related to the bubonic plague from 1347-1350, an outbreak so serious it became called the Black Death. Studies have revealed that Europeans with a stronger percentage of iron in their blood held a much better natural defense to the disease. Dr. Moalem wrote,
“If hemochromatosis helped the first generation of carriers to survive the plague, multiplying its frequency across the population as a result, it’s likely that these successive outbreaks compounded that effect, further breeding the mutation into the Northern and Western European populations every time the disease resurfaced over the ensuing three hundred years” (Moalem 15).

The lack of another outbreak as severe as the Black Death since 1347 also substantiates Dr. Moalem’s theory about hemochromatosis as mutation.

Diabetes, technically *diabetes mellitus*, is most likely a protective reaction to quick, drastic shifts in climate. In its most basic sense, diabetes is the insulin’s inability to produce, causing alarmingly high levels of blood sugar. Sugar is a natural antifreeze; and the more one’s body holds of it, the warmer he or she can remain. Along with a combination of reasons including inheritance, environmental factors, and diet; changes in temperature and climate may trigger diabetes in a protective sense of the body. In a study of over 285,000 diabetic Americans, all blood sugar levels rose in cold seasons and fell with an increase in heat. Again, Dr. Moalem has helped to demonstrate that the body may not be betraying us as severely and cruelly as we naturally assume.

Although high cholesterol can lead to serious heart disease and damage, stroke, or angina, it is our body’s supplier of vitamin D. Vitamin D ensures an ample amount of calcium and phosphorous in the bones, preventing osteoporosis and other
bone deformities; and when exposed to the right type of sunlight, we convert cholesterol to vitamin D. Just like most of Dr. Moalem’s cases, this idea still ignites several questions, doubts and details, but the author proclaims, “One thing is clear—there is mounting evidence that where our ancestors came from, how they adapted to their environment, and where we live today are all combine to have a significant impact on our health” (Moalem 69). Cowpox is another example. Cowpox is the first disease that doctors, Edwards Jenner specifically, used to discover the power of vaccination. The word vaccination actually derives from the Latin root vacca which means cowpox (Moalem 125). Despite that cowpox is a definite infection, obvious advancement and good has sprouted from it.

The innumerable functions and the wavering positives and negatives of these health conditions produce substantial reconsideration and questioning of the instinctive human assumption of misfortune and the body’s betrayal. Dr. Sharon Moalem has thoroughly explored and shared the possibility of disease working as a former natural bodily protection. The problem with some health troubles may not be as much a malfunction of the body, but an environment that has changed too rapidly and too drastically for one’s systems, immunities, and organs to mold and adapt. In concluding his argument, Moalem declares,

“Our relationship with disease is much more complex than we may have previously realized...Given all the forces pulling for disorder, it’s a wonder that we live at all- and as long and as well as most of us do.
Which is why, instead of taking our health for granted, we should appreciate it with the reverence it deserves” (Moalem 207).

According to Dr. Moalem, one’s body has a few natural defenses and devices against the rapid growth and reproduction of cells starting in a particular organ, also known as cancer. Clearly both medicine and the malleable human body should keep progressing against this disease, its prevention and its final cure.

The truth is, however, that cancer is here. Maybe it is a mutation or a former natural defense of the body like hemochromatosis and diabetes. Nevertheless, it is present across the earth and still a leading cause of death in the year 2009. One has plenty of justifiable reasons to feel anger and lash out blame, but one has plenty more reasons to patiently accept acceptance, cherish a sturdy faith, and trust in the tenderness of God’s love. Despite frequent corporal weaknesses and impairments, the human body is a magnificent miracle and a direct, individualized gift from God. The book of Corinthians proclaims, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body," (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The well-known imagery of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit implies that one encompasses all beliefs of Catholic faith inside himself. A temple is carefully constructed and intricately designed; it is a place of honor, respect, worship, prayer, offering, and redemption. In a study executed by the Catholic Apologetics and
Research Ministry, Matthew J. Slick cited the story of Solomon to demonstrate how much personal and financial wealth was invested in a temple,

“With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God -- gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble -- all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?” (1 Chr. 29:2-5)

For the human body to be compared to such an edifice of greatness means each child of God has been blessed with an instrument of pure magnitude, a completely sacred gift unlike any other.

The physical body is an everyday miracle in its creation and continuous development of bones, muscles, ligaments, cells, veins, arteries, capillaries, tissue, organs, and organ systems all elaborately working together for life. It is a glorious form of human individuality and identity; each body is different from the next
internally and externally. This gift not only allows one to purely exist but to think, communicate, feel and express emotions, create, and much more. One’s body does have the potential to endure pain, but pain is often an essential signifier and warning of something deeper that may have gone wrong. It’s the physicality of man’s body alerting his intellectuality. Yes, illness originates literally within the body, but so do a multitude of beautiful actions, from giving birth to the ability to laugh and cry. In his book, *Head First: The Biology of Hope*, Norman Cousins wrote, “...we tend to develop a one-sided human view of the human body, regarding it as a ready receiver for all sorts of illnesses. The most important health lesson of all to be learned is that the human body is a beautifully robust mechanism, capable of attending to most of its needs” (Cousins 95). As benefactors of such an amazing gift one should fully appreciate and nurture the precious human body, remembering that it is made in total goodness and love.

The mind and body working as one united team provides a limitless amount of possibilities including athletics, performing arts, reflex reactions, personal mannerisms, spiritual ritual traditions, and corporal transformations of the body, especially healing. Various trials and studies have proved that when the mind faithfully believes that the body will recover from cancer and thinks in a primarily positive way, the results will be positive. Norman Cousins concluded some adverse effects,
“Serious illness almost universally produces depression; the affected individual feels loss of control and seems helpless to stop onrushing events. Those emotions work their way from the brain into hormonal and immune functions, intensifying the underlying problem with consequent deepening of helplessness and depression” (Cousins 187).

Human emotion and the chemical, mechanical, and nervous systems of the body are intertwined and central influences to each other. Just as God sculpted a universe tied together through an infinite amount of intricacies and nuances, one's body is a compound arrangement of coinciding functions and reflexes. Cousins further supported this argument by summarizing 10 major conclusions among Aesculapians,

“A strong will to live, along with the other positive emotions - faith, love, purpose, determination, humor - are biochemical realities that can affect the environment of medical care. The positive emotions are no less a physiological factor on the upside than are the negative emotions on the downside” (Cousins 279).

Cousins explained in reason #5 that depression can exacerbate side effects of illness and usually hampers the body from producing its maximum amount of disease-fighting immune cells. The author of *Head First: The Biology of Hope*, shared a study achieved by Dr. Lydia Temoshock with telling evidence. A structured interview process which specifically noted emotional, behavioral, physical, and
mental reactions disclosed that patients with an active approach as opposed to a passive approach benefited from better immune function and slower tumor growth.

Another study executed by Dr. Sandra M. Levy and Dr. Ronald B. Herberman discovered similar results, according to Cousins. The doctors found that depressed patients with cancer who maintain that a positive attitude and an uplifted heart can cure, evidence is directing that a heavy heart and misery have the ability to suppress the body’s potential (Cousins 279). Walter Sanford Ross concluded his entire novel dedicated to hope, *The Climate is Hope: How They Triumphed Over Cancer*, with the same uplifting morale in a philosophical translation, “Altogether, this means that more than half the lives lost to cancer could be saved today with optimum diagnosis and treatments... There is, in short, reason to hope” (Ross 184).

In light of how indescribably valuable the human body is and how attached one’s heart and soul are to the functions, appearance, and purposes of the temple of the Holy Spirit, any sort of malady or impairment will stimulate sensations of the grief process. Most health-related impediments force an individual to change or to adapt physically and emotionally. The surgical removal of something dangerous, new handicaps, side effects of radiation and chemotherapy, along with a plethora of other possibilities, are all adjustments and losses of what previously existed. These procedures and changes, ironically essential for the perseverance of life, are really diminutive deaths. Reverend Millicent Wess explained from his experience as counselor and healer, “Cancer is one of the most feared diseases in the world. The
fear of this disease contributes to the grief experienced after the diagnosis. The patient, family members, caregivers, and physicians experience this grief, which has many dimensions and can be extremely complicated” (Wess 41). Technically, grief incorporates a sequence of denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Anne Gibson Lanpher, a zealous French teacher whose entire career was jeopardized with cancer of the throat, wrote, “After any major operation that costs you a part of your body, for most people there is a ‘period of mourning’. And who’s to say they’re not entitled to it?” (Ross 39).

The many ups and downs, remissions and failed remedies, and uncertainties involved with illness may stimulate a more fragmented and broken grieving process. The grief is carried by caregivers and healers as well, not just those enduring the physical pain. Lenora Siebert wrote about experiencing “the truth of living with the sense of loss” (Siebert) through her husband’s multiple sclerosis, referring to her struggle as a long-term grieving process. Siebert discerned,

“Grief is an emotional reaction to a loss of something or someone that's important to us. When someone passes away, it's final. Loss through death is horrific, and we're never prepared mentally. At first, the grief is overwhelming, but it subsides as time goes by. With a long-term and irreversible condition, caregiver grief lingers on and on” (Siebert).

Although cancer is not completely irreversible as with multiple sclerosis, the lack of knowledge and chances of remission and failure generate a grieving process distinct
from death. Cancer may cause the patient to mourn a loss and/or adjustment of ability, appearance, or lifestyle. Cancer for a caregiver may cause a loss and/or change in relationship, expectations, and more. Both may undergo a perspective transformation of life itself.

Living itself is an art form and expression. Just as Job’s faith was rekindled after a long period of strife, so should one’s faith and respect for the body at times of physical weakness. Cousins declared, “Life is the ultimate prize and it takes on ultimate value when suddenly we discover how tentative and fragile it can be. The essential art of living is to recognize and savor its preciousness when it is free of imminent threat or jeopardy” (Cousins 107). Armstrong felt similarly to Cousins, “The truth is that cancer was the best thing that ever happened to me. I don’t know why I got the illness, but it did wonders for me, and I wouldn’t want to walk away from it. Why would I want to change, even for a day, the most important and shaping event in my life?” (Armstrong 4). What appeared as a terrible physical burden in Armstrong’s body changed his heart, soul and mind in a revolutionary way. Michael J. Fox, who calls himself an “incurable optimism”, even battled a public discrepancy for calling his Parkinson’s disease a “gift”. He said, “OK, if it’s a gift, it’s a gift that keeps on taking. I’ll give you that”, but he could not deny the irreplaceable and life-altering experiences his diagnosis has bestowed upon him (Aro, Margaret).
The power and beauty of the healing process is a true renewal voyage. Healing and physical recovery of the body provide an invigorated sense of self identity, human life, and the natural surrounding world. In light of how connected and united the body and mind are, physical recovery is also an emotional, intellectual, and faithful remedial journey. The grieving process is parallel to the bodily progression of sickness in the same way that an emotional recovery is parallel to corporal healing. It is a personal expedition which can only be genuinely completed through the essentiality of time, patience and faith.

God will lift up His people from human suffering, pain and sickness as He will conquer all sin and evil; now not only as Creator, but as Comforter. The Lord’s resurrection and His 2nd coming into the world will be the ultimate rescue, the greatest act of forgiveness, and the final challenge to convert. The recovery, healing and redemption humans beings absorb in faith from both sin and sickness symbolize and minimally frame God’s colossal plan. After all the pain and suffering, humans will no longer feel inclined to beg “why?” and “why me?” within an unfortunate context. Instead man will ask “Why have you saved me, Lord?” and “How could you love me, Lord?” on the beautiful, universal day of healing. The sacraments of healing, Holy Penance and The Anointing of the Sick, further emphasize the principal components of rebuilding and reconciling within the Catholic faith. The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults, says, “They see it [biblical people] not merely as a physical reality, but as situated in actual condition of sin. Further, they do not distinguish clearly between body and soul, but
see the individual as unity; healing is intended for the whole soul” (Wuerl 444). Just as one’s bodily systems work together in a connective manner, one’s entire being cannot be disjointed. Good and bad things, such as healing and illness, happen to the whole person, not solely the body, heart, mind, or soul.

Sickness is one with sin in consideration of the human and divine blessings and benefits which can manifest from both situations, along with the universality of pain and suffering. The nature of intent and blame are clearly separate, but God has and will again redeem His children from the two situations which seem to be filled with bad instead of good. Anointing of the Sick is meant to renew and refresh in the same manner that Job’s faith was revived, “So we do not lose heart. Our outer nature is wasting away; our inner nature is being renewed every day” (Wuerl 445).

Lance Armstrong wrote about the healers which he was so grateful to come across,

“I began to think that they [healers] knew more about life and death than most people; they had a view of humanity that others didn’t, because they surveyed so much emotional landscape. They not only saw people live and die, they witnessed how we handled those two circumstances, unmasked, with all of our irrational optimism and fear and incredible strength, on a daily basis” (Armstrong 122).
Mrs. Joanne Kelly also learned how to be of service by the example of her healers. In a personal interview in which she recalled her 18-month tribulation with breast cancer, a hip replacement and 2 knee replacements, Mrs. Kelly said, “What my time with cancer and experience with how other people approached me and the situation, I realized how important it is to listen. If people need you to talk advise them they will ask you, but nothing meant more to me when I was sick than the people who really just sat and let me bear my soul” (Kelly). The vocation and the receiving of healing is such a beautiful thing full of lessons, challenges, and fulfillment. It’s something the body and soul can partake in amidst the suffering. Just as cancer may well be about loss and change, so is the healing and mending of one’s being,

“Healing is accompanied with a sense of belonging, a sense of control over one's life. The sense of belonging is important and implies that the person is loved or has a rightful place among the living. But to have self-esteem in that experience a person needs to feel some sense of power over his environment. But watch out, the sense of self-efficacy or control over one's life is tricky. There is another side to it, a counterbalancing need for a measure of acceptance, a kind of "letting go and letting God." Healing is always about change”(Quevedo).

The one true healer and Savior of all human shortcomings, Jesus Christ, proclaimed compassion and mercy the key components of the Catholic faith through His own moving example. After the washing of His disciples’ feet Jesus decreed,
“You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you” (John 13: 13-16).

The Son of God proclaimed, “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11.5). Again, this healing and recovering is not primarily related to the body, but also to the heart and soul. One may not be blind to the appearance of visual entities but to truth, justice, and God’s love. Jesus’ miraculous and faithfully zealous life, indescribable suffering and sacrifice, and His glorious resurrection from the dead are the complete curing of all human beings. “The fact that Christ was raised on the third day constitutes the final sign of messianic mission, a sign that perfects the entire revelation of merciful love in a world that is subject to evil” (Wuerl 133).

Although man has been blessed with the instruments to think, discover, and reason, there are still thousands of unknowns inside cancer, scattered across medical, scientific, philosophical, religious and intellectual fields. One cannot fully explain its presence, nor develop a pattern as to who will stumble upon a fatal diagnosis. Humans can embrace this and other hardships in a way beneficial to the individual and the evolving world. As Lance Armstrong wrote, “As I continued
upward, I saw my life as a whole. I saw the pattern and the privilege of it, and the purpose of it too. It was simply this: I was meant for a long, hard climb” (Armstrong 197). Every word, every action, and every experience in one’s life has the power to become a change and rebirth in one’s life. Cancer is no exception to that.


Works Cited


<http://www.health.com/health/condition-article/0,,20189359_2,00.html>.


