

THE POWER OF PRAYER

I felt that I should record the following account which has left a deep impression in me and, I think, with several other members of the family.

It is about my brother-in-law John who was diagnosed with prostate cancer just over two years ago. Evidently, the treatments he received did not work; it seems that he had unfortunately drawn the short straw. So it went on for over two years, John showed great courage, hope and optimism never once in my presence showing any sign of despair. His treatment went on, but the cancer eventually began to spread and finally reached his leg. In October 2018, he had a fall and fractured his thigh; he had an operation where a metal rod was inserted to give him more support. He recovered fairly quickly and he was able to move about and even drove his car to hospital on one occasion, everyone was lifted up by this, but the prognosis was not good.

A day or two before Christmas 2018, we were told that the oncologist had said there was nothing more they could do for him and that they could only offer him palliative care.

Both my wife and I had prayed for John throughout his illness. Whenever we saw him he was always cheerful and said very little about his illness except for the fact that he was '...alright...', he never once complained to us that he was in pain, except when he had his fall.

We arranged to see John as soon as possible after Christmas, and we paid him a visit few days after the holiday. To us at least, John and his wife Sheila had never publicly shown that they were overly religious apart from attending the usual 'christenings, weddings and funerals', which most of us do. Whether either of them believed in Jesus Christ or not, we didn't know.

Before we left to visit him, I was determined this time to ask him if he would let me pray *with* him and that morning I asked God to help give me the words of comfort and hope. As I was about to leave home, something special happened. For some reason, I turned back and took a small Bible out of my bedside cabinet and put it in my pocket – I now believe God prompted me to do that.

With Ellen and my daughter Tracy we set out for where they lived. When we arrived John was sitting in his usual chair and he seemed quite calm as we chatted for a couple of hours. Eventually, as we prepared to leave, I asked John if I could pray for him. He looked at me and said:

“I was wondering about that...”. I was pleasantly surprised and, quite naturally, we spoke about Jesus’ promises, the forgiveness of sin and God’s mercy for a few minutes and then the four of us gathered around him and we held hands as we prayed for him asking for God’s help in seeing John through his coming ordeal. When we finished the prayer, John continued to hold my hand and, after a pause, I asked:

“John, do you want more?”

“Yes please,” he replied.

I knew at that moment, why God had prompted me to pick up that pocket Bible. I gave it to him to hold and asked him to repeat after me the prayer I was about to give. I then gave him what I have heard called the saving prayer, where John repeated after me and stated that he believed in God the Father and Christ His only Son, and that he had sinned and repented those sins and asked for God’s forgiveness and mercy, etc. Afterwards, I suggested that John should read John’s Gospel in the New Testament if he could and we then prayed again and left. I was shaking as we continued driving home, I could hardly believe what had happened.

At my next visit I relayed some of the suggestions made by a friend including the title of a book that might prove helpful. By this time John was quite weak and was lying in a hospital-type bed downstairs when we next visited him. It was then that we heard that Sheila had been diagnosed with bowel cancer and needed an operation as soon as possible. We were dismayed at this news and talked for some time and prayed with and for them both before leaving.

The next time we saw John was on the 29th January. Shortly after we arrived, the District Nursing team arrived and made him comfortable. He seemed quite bright and we had a good chat about things in general. After a couple of hours we were preparing to leave and, while Ellen was chatting to Sheila, I got up and said to John:

“Time to have our chat with God, John...” He looked at me and gave one of those wonderful smiles of his and said quite loudly so that everyone heard:

“I bet you won’t be praying about me getting up from this bed?” he grinned. That took me back for a while and holding his hand, I replied:

“Of course not, we have better things to say to Him...” – John interrupted me and said:

“Do you know what: it’s strange, but I am not afraid at all and I have no pain; **and I have peace of mind** – you know...?” his voice tailed away.

Sheila and Ellen, having heard, stopped talking. For what seemed a minute or two we were unable to say anything in reply. Eventually, we prayed and thanked God for His mercy and for His love and care and many other things. As we left, we knew deep down that his time was fast approaching.

That weekend, we heard that Sheila had to go into Colchester hospital for her operation to remove the tumour in her bowel, apparently at John’s insistence. As a result, John was also moved into St Helena’s Hospice, Colchester. We arranged to meet his daughter Jo at the Hospice on the Tuesday morning of the 5th February – when we went into his room, we didn’t know if John recognised us or not and it wasn’t possible to have a conversation with him as he was barely conscious, but he seemed quite comfortable and peaceful. We chatted with Jo for a while and then, we three stood and prayed once more for him; we asked God to give John peace and take him Home as he was ready to go to glory. Sadly, we left and went on to see Sheila in hospital who was naturally quite distressed at not being with her husband. She was recovering quite well from the operation, but was still seriously ill. We stayed some time trying to comfort her.

Late the next morning, we heard from Jo that John had just passed away very peacefully in his sleep.

There is a sequel to this story. Before we left on Tuesday, Ellen had asked John if he would like a beer, she knew that he really enjoyed a drink and, I think, was trying to see if there would be any reaction. Strangely, that afternoon, after we had left, the Hospice nurse brought him a cup of Guinness and John apparently enjoyed a few sips, before going to sleep. Jo tells us that, the following morning he reached for the cup and had another sip of the remaining Guinness (which must have been really flat), Jo asked him if he had enjoyed it. He looked at her, smiled and licked his lips, turned over, closed his eyes and went home to glory. Alleluia!

I suppose the cynic would say: "...of course he had no pain – he was doped up to the eyeballs...", but that doesn't explain his 'Peace of mind' and lack of fear – does it?

We attended John's funeral on the 8th March and I was honoured that it was on my birthday.

I believe that this testimony shows just how much prayer and the love of God can be of such great comfort at a very difficult time. John undoubtedly felt much more at ease for knowing that he was in God's care and he passed from this life in peace.

Ken, April 2019



John 1944-2019