

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 20 & 21, 2018

Dear Friends and Family:

Last week my doctor prescribed physical therapy as an answer to my stiffness and achiness. On Monday my PT gave me three exercises to do at home and today (Wednesday) I go in for another session. Since I had a great week on Revlimid, and I schedule to do another week of that chemo drug starting this coming Saturday. Hopefully I won't react to the drug.

As I struggle to deal with this "long" ordeal, I am reminded of this verse "Elisha said, to the woman, 'Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few'" 2 Kings 4:3. Ever been in that place where you feel you've given God everything you have, and yet somehow it doesn't seem enough? Can you imagine living your life completely for God — then being completely abandoned, with no future or hope?

In 2 Kings 4, we meet the widow of a prophet from Elisha's company. She's at the end of herself. She tells Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." (2 Kings 4:1b, NIV) This woman's circumstances were unbearable. But to her credit, instead of turning away from God, she turns to Him by going to Elisha. She tells Elisha, she has nothing, except a small jar of olive oil. Elisha tells her to go ask her neighbors for empty jars — and not just a few. He instructs her to pour the oil into all the jars until they're filled and put them aside. The widow did as he asked. Then, Elisha told her to go sell the oil to pay her debts. After that, she could live on what was left.

This moment in Elisha's life gives us insight into his understanding of how God works. Like the woman, our needs too, are God's opportunity to reveal His generosity and goodness toward us.

Elisha tells the widow to ask for empty jars. And he insists, "Don't ask for just a few." Here, Elisha gives her a heads-up to not ask for too little. Elisha seems to know the human inclination to expect too little from God. As if he's trying to prod the woman's faith: "Trust me, you're going to want to have a lot of empty jars."

As she filled all the jars, just maybe she wished then she had collected more jars. It's not incidental that when all the jars are full and not a jar is left, then — and only then — does the oil stop flowing. God does not run out of oil; the widow runs out of empty jars.

God is trying to teach us something here. He fills every empty jar we bring to Him. He takes the small jar of oil and multiplies it into unimaginable abundance. Most importantly, when I prepare my heart to receive from God, I shouldn't ask for "just a few." I should get all the "jars" I can, because the moment they're full, the oil stops flowing.

This isn't about greed or avarice or choosing gluttony over gratitude. This is about posturing my heart and life in God's direction, knowing while He may not give everything I ask for, He's waiting to offer proof that He's with us. God can do and desires to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine.

I keep asking for "total remission," that's means God will fill all the jars I have. May you to continue to collect the jars and bring them to God to have Him fill them by His grace and Mercy.

Filled Jars to Everyone. Pastor Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 13 & 14, 2018

Dear Friends and Family:

This week I am back on the chemo drug Revlimid and so far, the side effects have been minimal. Praise the Lord! Andrea and I have joined our son and daughter-in-law in 21 days of prayer, which their church does every New Year. It is meant to start off the year with God's blessings as we spend time in God's Word and on our knees in prayer. We continue to pray that I would go into remission and that the side effects would be tolerable.

When I began sharing my diagnosis of multiple myeloma cancer with family and friends, more than one responded in all caps, "**I HATE CANCER!**" I get it. Nothing lovable about cancer cells, nothing joyful about malignant tumors, and definitely nothing fun about bone marrow transplantation, chemotherapy, radiation and all the rest.

But there's been another side to this unexpected journey. Some glorious, eye-opening, wouldn't-trade-anything-for-them moments came when I was willing to embrace this verse with my whole heart: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Am I saying I'm grateful to have cancer? Yes, that's what I'm saying. Feel free to shake your head, roll your eyes or sigh loudly at this point. What I'm about to share may sound like a person who has swallowed one too many steroid pills with my latest chemotherapy treatment and is floating on a drug-induced euphoria.

The truth is, my gratitude has nothing to do with chemicals and everything to do with Christ. After many years of knowing Him as my Lord and Savior, I now know Him as my Comforter, Healer and Friend. I have never been more aware of His presence or more in awe of His power. And I've never felt more compelled to speak His name or sing His praises!

Though I wouldn't wish cancer on anyone, I long for my brothers and sisters in Christ to experience firsthand what happens when we accept the reality of our circumstances and not only trust God, but also thank God for the path He has laid out for us. You and I have six reasons to be thankful through a hard season in your life?

A greater sense of His faithfulness. When I cried out to Him from my hospital bed in the middle of the night, He was already there, calming my broken heart, assuring me of His love, just as His Word tells us, "Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies" (Psalm 36:5).

A richer understanding of His peace. After the oncologist explained my diagnosis, the Lord dried my tears and reminded me of His sovereignty in all things. Since God's in charge, and we are not, we can let go of our anxious thoughts and rest in Him. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

A constant assurance of His goodness. Because His plans for us are always good and always purposeful, I can lift my head and say, "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

A deeper dependence on His presence. Desperately aware of my need for Jesus, I am praying more often and more earnestly than ever before. When I'm on my knees, He meets me without fail. "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2).

A fresh experience of His freedom. Of all the emotions that have washed over me, fear held sway for some time in my life. After much weeping and gnashing of teeth, by God's grace I chose to stand on His truth and be set free. "So, do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God" (Isaiah 41:10a).

A clearer vision of His hope. Whatever the outcome — healing or heaven — God holds out a bright beacon of hope for my future and yours, and provides the greatest reason for gratitude. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom (namely "Heaven) that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful ..." (Hebrews 12:28a).

Whatever you might be going through right now, beloved, I am grateful for the honor of encouraging you, this New Year and always. Lord, give us the strength to be thankful in all circumstances. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Loving you always, Pastor Jim

Additional Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 6 & 7, 2018

Dear Friends and Family:

After all the lab work and Doctor's appointment on Friday, I felt another update was needed. My number are up, which is not good, from 251 to 301. It is still below 400, where bone damage will occur, so that's good. But the doctor wants me to continue on the chemo drug that I have so terrible side effects with. I had gone into the appoint thinking that I would not go back to Revlimid, but the doctor talked me into trying it for another month. Then if the numbers are up still again, a different approach will be necessary. So, I decided to start with the chemo drug today, rather than wait. I also have steroids on hand, incase I get really itchy, which I know will happen, regardless how positive my thoughts. All this leads me to ask:

What are we supposed to do when our circumstances look different than the hopeful promises God has given us? Imagine. ... You're living the good life. Sure, it's messy at times, but you can still see God and feel His blessings in your career, marriage, tight-knit family or some health concern. Then, one day, life throws you a major curveball. A loss. A broken heart. A financial whirlwind. A weight that's heavier than you feel capable to bear.

For me, when hard times come, my weaknesses bubble to the surface. At times I wrestle with believing God for the miracle. I struggle to see His goodness in the bad. I am vulnerable. I try to remain hopeful, but I fail so often. It's in these moments when I'm reminded of how weak I truly am.

The truth is this: We all have weaknesses, and God knows each one of them. It's no surprise to Him when our futures appear uncertain, our relationships are shaken, or the fulfillment of His promises have yet to come to pass in our lives.

Could God miraculously answer our prayers overnight if He wanted to? Yes, of course! But there's a greater lesson God is teaching us in times of uncertainty: ***Our weaknesses display His strength.***

That's why I like 2 Corinthians 12:9a. It tells us our weakness is the place where we discover Christ's strength. ***"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"*** Our doubts, insecurities and deficiencies are where Christ's power is perfected in our lives.

When the void in our hearts leaves us desperate for answers, in our vulnerability we run to the Lord. And He takes us — broken and discouraged — by the hand, then leads us to a deeper level of trust in Him. A trust that chooses to see His strength instead of our weakness.

Even when the report says all hope is lost, ***He is faithful.*** Even when we feel betrayed by those we love the most, ***He is consistent.*** Even when we are exhausted and feel like a failure, ***He will never fail us.*** Even when years have passed, and victory has yet to be declared, ***His promises are true.***

Have the storms in your own life left you doubting the goodness of God today? With today's verse, you can take comfort knowing God is at work in your life. He has not forgotten you but is perfecting your faith in Him. And day by day, storm by storm, our heavenly Father is proving His grace is sufficient, and His power is made perfect in all our weaknesses.

Keep the faith! Pastor Jim

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 6 & 7, 2018

Dear Friends and Family:

Well today (January 3rd) I had labs and will follow that up with a Doctor's appointment on Friday. I am expecting my numbers to go up, because I have not been on any chemo since back before Christmas. I called the doctor and asked if I could postpone my chemo until after Christmas so that I could enjoy our visit to Virginia. And enjoy my grandkids, we sure did. They are now Breana 10, Cameron 8 and Colton 5. What a joyous Christmas and New Years we had with our family. So sad to have to come back home, and the reality of what's happening with my cancer.

I have been facing temptation to give up when things get hard. It may be a New Year, but it is the same old cancer and its treatment. I will say to the doctor on Friday, that the definition of insanity is to do the same thing and expect different results. Taking the chemo, I have been on has only made me sick, stiff and achy along with the terrible itch, and my numbers have been going up. Why keep doing what isn't working?

We're not alone in this battle. Jesus faced temptation. In Luke 4, Jesus is in a face-to-face battle in a barren wilderness with Satan. He is tempted on every level, just as we are.

The enemy starts with a simple temptation. ***"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread'"*** (Luke 4:3). Imagine being in a wilderness with no food. Jesus' stomach caves in with hunger. With one word, the stones at Jesus' feet could be turned

to bread, but He stands firm. He's on to the enemy's plans. His Heavenly Father sent Jesus on a mission to draw a broken world to Himself.

This isn't about bread at all. The enemy wasn't trying just to destroy Jesus, but God's plans for Him. My temptation is not about this cancer I have, but rather God's good and gracious plans for my life.

Jesus doesn't argue with him. He doesn't entertain the temptation, but instead He counters with the Word of God. Through His example, He reveals that obedience to our Heavenly Father is greater than satisfying a right-now hunger. Jesus refuses to be deceived by one who cares less about Him and more about the destruction of His soul. Every one of us has heard that voice of enticement ... more than once.

Temptation calls us to compromise or fulfill an instant longing that takes us away from the will of God. It demands that we take things into our own hands and strip them from God's. It tries to separate us from God — and His perfect plans for us — as much possible.

If you're tempted, your Savior is aware of your needs, far beyond the right-now. He understands how it feels to be tempted. He promises to help overcome temptation until you're on the other side of the enemy's plans. Whatever the temptation, temporary desires will never be greater than the lasting transformation that comes from choosing truth. Your Friend in Christ, Pastor Jim.

Weekly Health Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of December 30 & 31, 2017

Dear Friends and Family:

As the old year draws to a close and the New Year and its many unknowns begin, God promises us peace that surpasses all understanding in Philippians 4:7: *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* But before we get that promise, we have some instruction. Philippians 4:4 is the key that unlocks this peace: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”*

Worship didn't erase my grief in the moment of hearing I had cancer, but transformed it into overriding peace. This was a peace I could not have found any other way. I let the goodness of who God is soothe me. I felt His power strengthen me. I sensed His presence as He comforted me. And though I knew I would grieve my cancer again and again, I took comfort in the reality I could survive this news. During this season, while I battled for a tolerable life, God gave me a verse to focus on: *“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom”* (2 Timothy 4:18a, NIV).

As I reflected on this verse, I thought, *Well, which is it? Will God rescue me from this evil attack? Or will I have to continue with these chemo treatments and all the terrible side-effects?* Eventually, I realized the answer was “yes” and “yes” but according to God's timr table. The pivotal moment in the whole journey was that day — I refused to bow to fear, pain and despair.

If I'd chosen not to worship at that time, the world would have understood. After all, death and sickness are known to take people out for a little while.

But then, *doesn't stepping out in faith usually run counter to this world?* Hearing my diagnosis felt like my Daniel-in-the-lions'-den moment. My mind told me God had abandoned me. But rather than cave to the despair of looming circumstances, by God's grace I chose to worship Him no matter what and never bow to the pressures of life. And you can, too.

Blessings,
Pastor Jim