

Praying to Heal Cancer

by Francis MacNutt

taken from the July/August 2002 issue

As we all know, cancer is one of our deadliest diseases, and if you have prayed for cancer patients, you have discovered that it is also one of our most difficult and mysterious ailments to pray for. At times, we have seen amazing results when we have prayed and occasionally we have actually seen tumors shrink before our very eyes. But we also need to be honest and say that it doesn't always go that well. At other times, the cancer remains but, nevertheless, the pain diminishes or disappears. Sometimes with prayer the harmful side effects of the chemo or radiation treatment are reduced or even eliminated: the patient's appetite remains normal, the hair does not fall out, and his/her strength and vigor remains. Still another wonderful effect of prayer: a person who is given three months to live, lives on another two years beyond what the doctors predicted. Most wonderful of all: at the moment of death, the patient is in great peace; some seem to experience a vision of angels, or better yet, of Jesus. And so, even when there isn't a total physical healing, a notable partial healing takes place. It is no small thing if the pain goes away, while the patient remains at peace. From what we have learned about cancer, there are several things I would like to share.

1. Inner healing. Apparently, all of us have cancer cells in our body but usually our immune systems deal with them, especially when we are younger. But, if we suffer a severe loss or emotional trauma, the immune system can become depressed and our bodies fail to contain or destroy the unhealthy cells. For instance, some studies indicate that the most dangerous period comes for a married man if his wife dies before he does: his desire to live is weakened by his mourning and loneliness. His body picks up on this sadness and stops fighting against the force of diseases, such as cancer. The practical application of this is simply: if you are praying to heal cancer, you may suspect that an inner healing – a healing of the memories – may also be very helpful. It will take time from the moment the emotional blow first strikes until the cancer grows large enough for us to notice it, perhaps a year. So if you are praying to heal cancer, check and see if the patient suffered an emotional trauma about a year before the onset of the cancer. Was a wife deserted by her husband – or vice versa? Did a beloved family member die – such as a child, a mother or a father? Praying to heal the pain of that loss or rejection may be crucial to the physical healing of the cancer.

2. Soaking prayer. Everything we have learned about spending time in prayer specially pertains to praying for cancer. Occasionally, someone is healed immediately (as was Judith, my wife, 1979), but ordinarily the healing takes time – what we call “soaking prayer.” As I see it, soaking prayer applied to cancer is like God's radiation treatment; the longer our hands are held near the cancer site, the more the cancer cells wither away, while God strengthens the healthy cells and the immune system to fight back. (Occasionally, too, there is a “spirit of infirmity” or of “cancer” that needs to be confronted and cast out.) Praying for cancer can be a long-time process. Just as we do not expect a cancer patient to be cured by one chemo treatment, neither do we ordinarily expect that one single, brief prayer

will be sufficient. Usually, when we have seen cancer healed through prayer, the patient's family and church have really persevered in continuous prayer. (The wonderful thing about prayer is that it has no harmful side effects, as do continued chemo and radiation treatments.) 3. When cancer seems to return. I don't like to talk about people "losing" their healing, as if the sick person is to blame. I have known one person, at least, who seemed to be dramatically and instantly healed of stomach cancer. And then, a year later, the cancer returned – this time in the lungs. I think the best way to explain the mysterious relapse is that almost all the cancer cells were eradicated. But a few unhealthy cells were left, taking a year for them to multiply. What was missing was follow-up prayer. We rejoiced in her total healing but it wasn't as total as we thought. And so we neglected to keep on praying as a precaution; in those days it almost seemed that we were lacking in faith if we prayed again, after her apparently miraculous healing. But just as in the natural order, we return to the physician for a check-up after an operation, we likewise need to be spiritually prudent and continue to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." 4. How to Pray. The way to pray for cancer ordinarily has two elements in it. One is the prayer part where we ask God to heal the cancer or we command the cancer cells to stop multiplying. This takes just a short time. Then comes the laying on of hands, which is like God's own radiation treatment. This part can take plenty of time. The longer the cancer is held in God's force-field, the more healing takes place. Sick cells die, while healthy cells take on added life. If you pray in tongues, this would be a good time to do it. The laying-on of hands can take anywhere from a minute to an hour or more. It can be repeated every day (in a family especially, where husbands and wives pray together) or every week or so, if they visit a prayer minister. In churches or prayer groups, it is usually not feasible to spend a lot of time praying for one individual, so this is one reason we at CHM stress that every church and prayer group needs a small, dedicated group of prayer ministers who can spend time in praying with the sick. Above all, as Jesus encourages us, "Pray continually and never lose heart!" (Luke 18:1).