

# Faith helped Rangers coach battle cancer

April 7, 2017

ARLINGTON (RNS)—Tony Beasley never lost faith, even when he was diagnosed with cancer.

“It’s been an opportunity for me to be who I said I am,” said Beasley, third base coach for the Texas Rangers. “My favorite verse is 2 Corinthians 5:7: ‘For we walk by faith, not by sight.’ To have an opportunity to actually live that out was a blessing.”

With a giant U.S. flag unfurled in the outfield grass and a sellout crowd of 48,350 standing to honor America, all attention centered on Beasley on Opening Day, April 3, when he returned full time to the game he loves after a year spent battling rectal cancer.

## **‘An inspiration to us all’**

“An inspiration to us all” is how longtime Rangers public address announcer Chuck Morgan introduced the 50-year-old coach, who was invited to sing the national anthem on opening day.

“You can ask anybody in here just how big an impact Beasley has on everybody as far as his faith and his attitude. It’s just contagious,” outfielder Delino DeShields told a reporter in the Rangers’ clubhouse at Globe Life Park. “Even last year, he came in with a smile on his face and always had positive words.”

## **Emotional journey**

Under blue skies on a 76-degree night, Beasley offered a soulful rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner”—and couldn’t help but reflect on his

emotional journey of the past year.



Rougned Odor (left) talks with coach Tony Beasley as players Nomar Mazara and Jurickson Profar watch a game last August. (Photo/Creative Commons/Keith Allison) “I actually closed my eyes when I sang, just to keep in rhythm with the beat and to block out the delay,” the coach said. “But it was an honor. It was a blessing.”

“This time last year, I was undergoing chemotherapy,” added Beasley, who received his cancer diagnosis in January 2016. “And to be able to be back at full capacity, I just thank God for that.”

As he gently swayed his head from side to side as he sang, Beasley said, he concentrated on his gratefulness that God had healed him—with an aggressive 11 months of treatment that included radiation and surgery. He received a clean bill of health in December.

“I’m always thinking in spiritual terms because everything I have and everything I do is because of God’s goodness and his grace,” said the coach, who is married to Stacy and has a son, Tony Jr., 22, an outfielder for Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene. “I don’t have to be here, but because of his mercy, I’m here. So I’m thankful.”

### **Deeply rooted Christian faith**

The roots of Beasley's faith stretch back to his childhood: He grew up one of eight brothers and sisters born to the late James and Arlene Beasley. His working-class father earned a living as a logger. His mother stayed busy caring for the children.

The family had little in terms of material blessings, but it had everything it really needed, as Beasley recalls.

The Beasleys fed their souls each Sunday at the Jerusalem Baptist Church in rural Sparta, Va. Tony Beasley still worships at that same church in the offseason, and his brother Jared is the pastor.

Jerusalem Baptist is where a young Tony Beasley first developed his vocal talents. He sang in the church youth choir starting at age 11 or 12—he can't remember which—and became a church deacon at 19.

But Beasley said he didn't really embrace his Christian faith until he joined the baseball team in 1988 at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. Then-Liberty coach Bobby Richardson, who played second base for the New York Yankees from 1955 to 1966, served as a mentor to Beasley.

"At Liberty was when I really understood what it meant to have a personal relationship with Christ and to really surrender," Beasley said. "And so that's when I really fully gave my all to him. (Since then), I've been trying to walk worthy of God's glory."

### **Close friendship with Rangers' manager**

Beasley was drafted by the Baltimore Orioles in 1989 and traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1991. He played nine seasons in the minor leagues before becoming a coach in the Pirates and Washington Nationals organizations. He came to Texas in 2015 when his longtime friend Jeff Banister was hired as the Rangers' manager.

Banister faced his own health battle when he was diagnosed with cancer in his left leg as a high school sophomore and underwent seven surgeries. He praised his longtime friend—with whom he rooms during spring training—for confronting the disease with a fighting, confident spirit.

Beasley's faith definitely made a difference in his approach to cancer, the manager said.

"For Tony, it's a strong role because it's a strong faith," Banister said. "That's where he draws his overall strength."

Jared Sandler, a Rangers radio broadcaster, has a torn ACL and is walking on crutches, but he made his way to the dirt area behind home plate to hear Beasley perform the national anthem.

"I was down there just as a subtle sign of respect and appreciation," Sandler said, suggesting that Beasley's faith can be seen—in a simple way—in his personal interactions. "He really treats people in a way that I think the people up above would be proud of."

### **Enlarged territory**

In 1 Chronicles, an obscure Bible character named Jabez asks God to bless him and enlarge his territory—a request that inspired a best-selling book by Bruce Wilkinson in 2000.

Before his cancer diagnosis, Beasley said he—like Jabez—asked God to enlarge his territory.

"Sometimes, you get what you ask for," the coach said. "My platform has been increased, and my territory has been enlarged by the way of going through cancer. God is receiving the glory ... and I'm thankful for every door he opens and every door he closes."

Never for a moment, Beasley said, did he doubt God would save him from

the cancer.

“I believed from Day One that I would be healed,” he said. “I claimed healing in the name of Jesus.”

And now he’s back in the third base coach’s box, focused on the Rangers’ pursuit of a third straight American League West division championship.