

Faith tested twice, Baylor grad overcomes cancer

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WACO—When [Baylor University](#) senior Stephen Hinson of Spring walked across the Ferrell Center stage recently to receive his diploma, no one should have been surprised if they witnessed him pause and relish the moment.

“It was like, ‘God, thank you for allowing me to return to Baylor and finish,’” he said.

In 2003 and just out of high school, Hinson was diagnosed with cancer, although doctors couldn’t find a mass or anything abnormal in his bloodstream.

Even though he was brought up in a strong Christian home—a Baptist preacher’s kid—Hinson acknowledged his whole world caved in when he heard the word “cancer.”

Stephen Hinson, pictured with his parents, Bill and Kathy Hinson of Houston, found his faith tested by two bouts of cancer. (Baylor Photo)

“I didn’t know where to turn. I couldn’t find any comfort in anyone else. They can’t do anything, and so that’s when I turned to God. And that’s when I really turned my life around,” Hinson said.

Instead of choosing extreme medical treatments that would target “everything” in his body, he “went the alternative route” and radically changed his diet, with positive results. A year later, he decided to go to college and enrolled at Baylor. He had a great freshman year, he said.

However, during Hinson's sophomore year, excruciating pain began. Cancer had manifested itself again.

"In September (2005), I woke up with a really bad headache that wouldn't go away. I tried to wait it out, but day after day, it was the same thing," Hinson said. "I was realizing what it probably was, but I kept it to myself. Finally, it was too much, and I had a friend take me to the ER in Houston."

He called his parents, who had moved from Houston to North Carolina. They met their son at M.D. Anderson the following morning, where an MRI showed masses on his brain —lymphoma in the central nervous system.

They consulted with a brain surgeon, and by that night, Hinson underwent brain surgery. Miraculously, he suffered no complications. In fact, walked out of the hospital after only a few days of recovery.

"Any normal person couldn't tell something was going on," Hinson said.

But during this second go-round with cancer, Hinson didn't reach out to God. Instead, he became angry. The cancer, surgery and subsequent treatments forced him to withdraw from Baylor, leaving behind his studies, his friends and his faith.

"When I was diagnosed the second time, you would think that I would have got on my knees and prayed, 'God, heal me of this,'" he said.

"I was real confused, and it was kind of a dark time. In fact, it got so dark where I just had to say: 'All right, Stephen—stop. What are you going to do? Are you going to keep continuing down this dark path, or are you going to turn to God again and watch him work in your life?'"

He made it through chemotherapy with a few side effects. The cancer, at that point, wasn't gone, and although radiation was the next course of treatment, doctors said it would only prevent the cancer from spreading.

"That wasn't very uplifting, but they told me that if I did not do it, I would start having neurological damage, like to motor functions, so I did radiation for a few weeks and another small round of chemotherapy, and that would be the completion of the treatment," he said.

As he began radiation in February 2006, Hinson dropped everything and started praying again.

"I remember the first time, I was like: 'God, bring me back to Baylor. Bring me back to Baylor.' And soon that darkness started being lifted away. I started spending time, hours a day in the word of God, and little by little that darkness left, and I started praying for healing," he said.

Hinson's father, Bill, a former missionary and pastor of Fairmont Central Baptist Church in Pasadena, gave his son a booklet—*Healed of Cancer*—filled with healing Scriptures.

"I just started believing them, rereading them and memorizing them," he said.

With his faith restored, Hinson completed his last treatment and faced his final hurdle—a test to see if the cancer was gone.

"I remember being upstairs by myself. I was just praying, 'God, let the cancer be gone.' And I remember him speaking to me and to my heart. 'Stop praying for the cancer to be gone and start rejoicing, because it is.' So right then, I just started crying," he recalled.

As he and his parents drove to the hospital, Hinson said he sat in the back seat of the car at peace, looking up at a clear blue sky. Once at the doctor's office, he heard the good news he was already expecting. The tests showed everything was clear. No cancer remained.

"It was a great time with my parents. They had been through so much. We

just gathered around and cried and prayed to thank God. He cured me and allowed me to come back to Baylor. He's been faithful since I've come back. All the tests and checkups have been clear."

Graduating with a sociology degree and a solid background in science, Hinson has been accepted to Cornell's master of health administration program. He said his own hospital experiences greatly affected his decision to go into healthcare management.

"I know the patient side of it and the business side dealing with insurance. So, it was something I was familiar with, comfortable with and had a heart for," he said.

First, however, Hinson will defer for a year to take part in a 12-month discipleship program with [Teen Mania Ministries](#) in Tyler, focusing on growing in biblical knowledge, leadership and character.

"It's a time of abandonment, of one year devoted to God, so I can go strong afterwards," he said. He will begin his studies at Cornell in fall 2010.

During the time leading up to his Baylor graduation, Hinson was reflective about the difficult road he's traveled for the past six years. When he returned to Baylor the second time in 2006, he was "a new person physically, mentally and spiritually." And more thankful, he said, of his blessings than the first time he started at Baylor.

"I didn't take anything for granted. I was determined to make the following years some of the best of my life," he said.

As a two-time cancer survivor, Hinson felt called to share his experience with his fellow graduating seniors that they, too, can overcome anything through their faith in Christ.

"We're going to go through trials. We're going to hit rock bottom. But I

would say the most important thing you can do is have that relationship with Christ. Lean on him. He is the one who's going to pull you through. Don't look at circumstances that are before you. Just look ahead and know there's light at the end of the tunnel."