

Guest editorial: Our greatest hope lies in the arms of God

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My wife, Diana, called me in the midst of a Baylor University Council of Deans meeting to come to the emergency room at the hospital. She was in extreme pain after driving back from Dallas. She had been suffering off and on for some time, but the cause seemed to be some mysterious ailment that evaded diagnosis. That is what we expected to hear as we sat waiting in a dark hallway for the results of the MRI: “We do not know what is causing it.”

Instead, the news was jolting—suspicious spots in the pancreas. The next day, it was confirmed to be Stage IV pancreatic cancer.

Diana had overcome so many other medical issues before that I hoped she would do so again. She received many cards, many phone calls and many prayers on her behalf. We had hope. We also had hope from an oncologist in Denver about a promising immunotherapy trial, but one had to go through traditional treatments first to qualify. I was writing a commentary on Acts at the time and sat by her side during eight-hour chemotherapy infusions working on final edits.

Prayers and deliverance

Acts is filled with miracles and answers to prayer. I had hope. The account in Acts 12 of the arrests of James and Peter, however, was sobering. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison—for the second time, no less. Perhaps Diana would be miraculously delivered from the prison of her cancer. But James was not delivered, and instead suffered a brutal martyr’s death. Luke tells us Peter’s deliverance was an answer to the church’s prayers. I am sure they also prayed for James, but the answer was quite

different.

I had hope that God would answer prayers and deliver Diana. Near the end, she was in such excruciating pain that I prayed she would be delivered quickly from her physical suffering. It was not quick. When my prayer finally was answered and she died in my arms, it was utterly devastating.

Writing a commentary on Acts, I knew that miracles, no matter how fervently prayed for, are not always forthcoming. God does not always rescue.

Christians place their trust in a God who says, “I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster” (Isaiah 45:6-7). What matters is not our own personal welfare as we would plan it, but committing our lives entirely to God.

Greater hope

I would hope to have faith like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who announced when King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to barbecue them alive in a furnace: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18).

Our hope is in God who raised our Lord from the dead and who promises to raise us. This hope is so much greater than our beggarly hopes for our own welfare and happiness. We have great hopes for Baylor on the Brazos, but our greater hope is to be received en los Brazos de Dios (in the arms of God) beyond this veil of tears.

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