

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#1 Dec. 12, 2006

Dear Ron,

Well, today was denial day. Good healthy denial is ok periodically. So, today, I decided – I don't want to have cancer. I am blaming the pain on hemorrhoids, the nausea on an upset stomach and weakness on laziness and stress.

It actually worked out very well, so this letter will be an extension of that denial.

Russ and I went to the Island to finish up some details on our house and move. It was a spectacular day. The snow-covered mountains were clearly visible on all sides. The people we had business with were so friendly and personable, especially when they found I was moving there. We ate in a little tiny place in Coupeville that had chowder to kill for and grossly sinful homemade pie.

We laughed, I popped pain pills, ran to the toilet, and we had a fine day. I obviously overdid and am gladly paying for it today. Denial, overdoing and over eating have a price attached, but dance the dance – pay the fiddler.

I am finding more hope. One week ago I was not able to function or even be out of the house. I now don't need a diaper, don't smell like an outhouse and actually went to the staff luncheon on Thursday.

It helps that I don't have any Dr's appointments before Thursday. I think the longest I have gone is two days without having some kind of consultation, test, procedure or puncture.

Hope is so important. This disease and its treatment can easily become the entire center of one's life. The more immersed I become in the fact of cancer, the more I lose perspective on life in general. Everything begins to reduce to doctors, hospitals, pain, medication (I am currently up to 16) and most dangerously, "me". There must be more to life than cancer and that is difficult to pull off. I suspect it will be more so when the treatments and radiation start.

Now, I want to tell you about our Island home. We have seen bald eagles every time we have been there. We have seen whales and boats wandering up the Saratoga Passage in front of our property.

Here is my great revelation for the future. You and Susan will be coming up, of course. Here is the revealed agenda. We don't have much room but you are welcome to all of it for as long as you want. However, if you can do a little extended R&R there are spectacular bed and breakfasts within 5 minutes of our home.

Plan A:

We join you for a sumptuous breakfast at the B&B and then hang out. Visit around the island, go to our home and ... hang out. Eat dinner and ...hang out. Walk on the beach. Play some music or games or talk in the evening, watch a ball game and ...hang out. (Are you seeing a pattern here?) You and your bride back to your beautiful suite for a peaceful night's rest. This can be repeated with innumerable variations, ad infinitum.

Plan B... or A2:

At any moment of any day or activity you and/or Susan can return to our house or the B&B to crash. Or, Barb and Susan can hit the consignment and antique stores that populate every mile of the island. You and I, of course can hang out, commiserate, whine, make enormous Kingdom plans and solve the great unsolvable theological and ecclesiastical problems facing our planet while we drink coffee and watch whales and boats from my deck.

I don't know when, but it must happen and soon! It must not become filed in the "I sure wish we had" category.

Now, don't you agree that anyone who would turn down something like that has more wrong than mere cancer and will need more than chemo and radiation to cure them?

This weekend we are moving to the island. The family is here – it is an overall madhouse from which Buddy, my faithful beagle, and I escape every few hours for a sanity check.

I sure love you, Ron. We will make it through this. You are in my constant prayers and concern. My love to Susan.

Your Friend, down the road, but not far.

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#2 Dec. 20, 2006

Dear Ron,

This does not qualify as a letter, just a note.

Chemo slammed me for 4 days. I am now beginning to recognize the planet again. It is Thursday before Christmas. My goal is to make one of the services Sunday and enjoy the family who are coming in on Monday.

Lots to tell you, but can't right now. I will write after Christmas and fill in all the blanks. (Well, some of the blanks, you don't what all of them filled in.)

Love and prayers.

Your Friend, down the road, but not far.

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#3 Dec. 28-30, 2006

Dear Ron,

Well, Christmas is about done. What a great time! The Jamies are here until Sunday. Meg and Sundar until Sat.

I was so excited to make it to the Christmas Eve service Sunday. As I mentioned, it was one of my major goals. I felt like I was in solitary confinement. I hadn't been to the church in almost 2 months. Everyone acted like they were happy to see me. I know I was sure thrilled to see them. I only had to get up and leave once, which was a medium sized miracle in itself.

I am in my second chemo session now. Sure is nice to know the drill a little better. Not so much anxiety as before. I am getting a little more used to the term "cancer". It still has an element of unreality, though.

I wish I could convey accurately the sense of deep peace and gratitude I have. It seems incongruous, but this whole transition would not have happened without the cancer diagnosis. By that I mean, timing. Had it come before our decision to sell and move to the island, we never would have done it and therefore, without my ability to travel, would have been trapped in a life-style we could not support and a house we could not handle.

The diagnosis caused us to back out of the original property we had made an offer on, it would not work now. Within 6 days of that decision we had sold the house and bought this one. This is the home and the style of living (I'm a small town hill-boy at heart and roots) we have dreamed of all our life. We didn't know it until we got here. And the route we were led to get here was a life we had always dreamed of and didn't know till we got there. Perhaps when He says, "I go to prepare a place for you", it is not only intended for heaven.

At times, in the middle of the aches and pain, the exhaustion and frustrations, I find myself almost overwhelmed with gratitude and love for God and deluged in His love for me. I can't tell you all the remarkable ways I have been able to encourage, bring some joy, have a prayer and a laugh with complete strangers since coming to the Island. It is a remarkable experience to say the least.

When we are together I will tell you more about the family, my boys, the wives, Christi, Dan and, praise God, Carmen. The holidays were beyond anything anyone of us could have imagined. Our hearts and lives were bonded deeper than we could ever have thought possible. "Family" for us is a dynamic unfolding reality mostly set in motion by "Daddy having cancer" and "the folks moving to Greenbank".

Chemo went well today. I finished early and so far am doing good. The Dr. gave me some meds to help some of the violent reaction I had last time and so far they seem to be working.

I think of you many times a day and use that as an occasion to pray and appreciate you and Susan, and just be with you for a minute.

I love you both and will call after we make it successfully into 2007. Please call me at anytime.

From down the road, but not far;

Your Brother

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#4 January 5, 2007

Dear Ron,

So glad you called. I didn't want to bother your holidays by calling myself—but really wanted to talk with you. It was very timely. I have been sick since Sunday afternoon (chemo was on Thursday). It was delayed by some dope they gave me this time, but it finally caught me. The post-surgical inflammation has been very stubborn and is set off by the chemo each time. Incredibly painful. (The hot poker routine). I am taking hydro morphine to try to control it. Sure helps. Anyway, your call was a wonderful oasis.

I was very disappointed to not get to the services this past weekend. I started feeling bad late Saturday night. I thought I might try to go anyway but I'm sure glad I didn't. With me, the bottom just suddenly drops out. No easing into it, just bad, then crash! I'm learning.

I miss being with the church. *Being* the church is wonderful, and being *with* the church is essential and life-sustaining. The "one and the many" philosophical demand and Christianity fulfills it while no other religious system does.

I am glad your treatments have started. Let's get these things killed off! They told me the sicker I got, the better it's working. In other words, the worse you feel the better it is. So far, mine is working great... I am learning that it can be "going good" but I can be "feeling lousy". A good answer when people ask.

I'm doing my personal study in Hebrews right now. Sure hope we get a chance to talk about some of it when we're together. Do you think Milchizadek was a pre-incarnational appearance of the second person of the Trinity? It occurred to me that it is we humans that would need a mediator high priest to fulfill our end of the covenant. This would then be God establishing it in human dimension, but with eternal foundation – thus, "the lamb slain from the foundations of the world". Just a thought but a good one, I think.

Our home is really coming together and the more it does, the more we love it. We are able to arrange and furnish it exactly as we want. Pure fun. I bought a little electric generator the other day. We've had 2 power outages since arriving. One for 3 days, the other for 10 hours. Enter – generator. My pioneering days are over.

I am so excited about coming down for a weekend. If I haven't set a date with this mailing, I will right away. You, Susan, the staff and church family are so much a part of my life. You really are my second home church and you my pastor. I would never want to impose into your church or personal schedule, but am confident you will say "no" whenever you need to (or want to). If I am sure of that, I will feel free to suggest.

I am sorry about the first class flying thing but at this point I really can't do anything else. If that's a hardship I'll wait awhile.

I have made a commitment to laughter, as I mentioned. A really good decision. First, laughter feels good and is a healer. But a side benefit is when people find out, they send me humorous stories, jokes, cards, etc. I am sending you a copy of this one I got from Tony Maupin. I think it's classic!

Well... enough.

You are being prayed for, thought of and given thanks for constantly by this old man.....

Your friend and brother
From down the road, but not far

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#5 January 16, 2007

Dear Ron,

Speed bumps are quite common on this road. I've just hit another one. Had to cancel my chemo this week. I have had a lot of severe pain in my lower back, hip and lower bowels. They did another cat scan and found some troubling stuff. They are not sure if it's cancer or a severe infection. They are treating it with antibiotics in hope that it will respond. One lymph node was quite enlarged as well, but I'm praying that it is because of fighting the infection. If I'm better they will resume chemo next Monday, but I guess the radiation is in doubt at this point. They have given me more dope to handle the pain.

I am encouraged this morning, however. I think the antibiotics are starting to kick in. If that is true then it is likely not cancer, but the infection that we are battling. I had a pretty good night's sleep. At one point, 4 hrs. straight. I actually had a few minutes without pain, then, wouldn't you know it, I couldn't stay awake to enjoy it.

They also found some spots on my lungs. We think it's scarring from some problems I had a few years ago. I'll know more on Friday when I have another appointment with the surgeon.

OK, nuff of that!!

The last two weekends we had a big bash around the playoffs – Seahawks. Everyone says we lost to Chicago, actually we lost to stupid. Crazy play calling in the last two minutes. The coaches had my phone number but didn't call to get my advice – so, we lost.

The whole family will be here for the Superbowl. Meg and Sundar will be out for about six days – the Jamies have moved to Tacoma and will be here. Of course, Dan and Christi and Russ will be here as well. We do parties really well!

Sundar has taken a position in Winchester, VA. He will be setting up and directing a memory clinic (his specialty) in a private neuro-psych clinic. In two years he will have the option to buy in as a partner if he chooses to. Meg has a wonderful position as an occupational therapist in a recovery facility there as well. The Lord has really opened a wonderful door for them. We are excited. He will start in July when his fellowship at UVA is finished.

The Jamies have moved to Tacoma in preparation to go as a couple for two terms in the Peace Corps. Probably to Africa. He is finishing a final term at the UW. She has a great job as a physical therapist in a facility there until they are ready to leave. We are so excited for their good choices.

I taught my class at the School of Ministry last Thursday. It was one of my major goals to be there for the first night of our new term. It was great to see the students. I think I actually made sense part of the time. This term I am teaching the relationship>identity>vision....stuff that I did with you. I'm filling it out for the class and exploring how to create an environment that encourages this dynamic and then how, as leaders, we identify each phase and its development to the congregation. I'd like to talk to you more about some of the content.

It is sure easy to lapse into a lethargic mode. I mentioned to Barb, my good days now are days I would have called in sick before. I really need to stay productive in some way. It's easy to lay around, count the hours to the next shot of dope and start getting catastrophic about every new ache and pain.

It is wonderful the way the Lord seems to always provide a productive option for me. If I choose to take it, he gives me the strength to go there. We really do find what we look for. There is plenty to be afraid about and plenty of people to join me in the fear. When I go there, the fear items multiply right before my eyes. But the same is true of the positive and incredible benefits that are part of my life right now.

Well, this needs to stop for this time. Just an aside, you asked about hair loss...mine is starting to thin out a little. Be interesting to see where it stops – or if it does. I am gathering a collection of favorite hats. My family assured me Sunday that they would love me bald...We'll see.

You are never far from my thoughts. Praying for you is a continuous, habitual part of my days. Thank you for your friendship, prayer and support.

Please give my love to Susan. I pray for her as well -- always. Her assignment as supporter and caregiver is huge. Plus it's added to everything else she does. Our wives are quite remarkable. We done good!!

From down the road, but not far,

Your brother and friend,

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#6 January 22, 2007

Hi Ron,

I am writing from my poison cell. They call it a chemotherapy suite, but I have my own semantic. Isn't it amazing that poison can cure when rightly focused? It's death to death-dealing renegade cells and releases life to the healthy ones. Sort of the way the Holy Spirit handles sin in our system. Come to think of it, His treatments are not always pleasant but they always destroy the toxic and release life.

When Barb and I got the mixed, but mostly frightening report from the surgeon last Friday, we were stunned. None of the options seemed good. It had been a very long day and a draining one. I left her for a few minutes after the session. As I was returning to meet her at the truck a thought was powerfully impressed on me. It's almost cliché, but it became very definitive for both of us. "Get on with LIFE!" Don't mope about the future, get on with life. I told her I had made an executive decision – to just get on with life. It seemed to lift both of us. I popped a pain pill and we went to the mall to spend a gift certificate. We got home later than we intended; more tired than we believed possible and in good spirits and rather proud of ourselves.

It is amazing how the Holy Spirit can take a common cliché, give it life and send it right into your spirit.

Have we talked about heaven and God's presence in terms of "person light" (my invented phrase)? It's a subject I want to pursue further with you.

It is hard to express, I haven't developed the language yet. It comes from the statement, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all". And from John 1. The idea of light as person, rather than merely an environment or accompanying condition is incredibly challenging and productive for me in my growing understanding of both God and heaven. If this is an interesting thought or one you have explored already, please share your ideas with me.

I am getting a little scattered and can no longer read my hand writing, so will finish this later tonight.

Later – The chemo is over, I'm on the pump and doing ok.

To continue the thought of "personal light": The whole idea of God not being embodied as we are, which is consistent throughout scripture, brings up the whole question of how he is experienced or seen. If we give person qualities to the presence of light and expand that into heaven being a residence in His presence, it answers to many of the Biblical descriptions of both.

After I had done some thinking and writing on this idea – probably first begun at the end of last summer – my daughter-in-law, Meg, gave me a book at Christmas to read while they were here. I think the title is “90 Minutes in Heaven”. I will get the author and title for you. It was uncanny how closely parallel his experience of heaven was to my ideations.

It is now Wednesday. It is a beautiful day starting with a spectacular sunrise. We will be leaving soon to get the chemo pump unplugged and do a few errands in the city.

I pray you are recovering from the last round of poison. Quite a journey. I am so sorry you have to take it, but at least we can walk some of it together.

You are never far from me and constantly in my thoughts and prayers.

From down the road, but not far.

Your brother and friend

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#7 February 8, 2007

Dear Ron,

From the poison cell. Meg and Sundar came with me. What a delight they are.

I am processing some stuff. I found out that there is nothing they can do about the fractures. There are 2. A small one on the left side of my pelvis and a larger one on the right. They will not heal while the chemo is going on because it messes with the bone marrow. So, that is a pain management (dope) issue and I can deal with that. (They've assured me I will not become a "junkie.") It will heal after I am finished in June.

The infection seems to be decreasing and we are walking a tight rope between leaving time for it to heal and getting the radiation started as soon as possible. That decision will be made next week.....Enough!

I am realizing an interesting thing about my emotions. I guess I am at the anger stage. Not rage – and not focused. I am not “an angry man”, nor am I angry with anyone or anything specific. It's a little hard to describe and a bit tricky. Rather than analyze it I am trying to use its energy. I don't have much energy of my own, but our emotions produce energy and if I can convert that into positive action, I can get a lot more accomplished. That's true of joy, frustration, anxiety – etc. With anger it is more dangerous. It can come uncorked and lash out inappropriately and very suddenly. I think I'm doing better now that I understand the process a little more.

Some of the anger stems from the love/hate relationship I have with the cancer. I hate it. It has rudely interrupted my life at the most inopportune time. It has brought months of excruciating pain and now promises to keep it coming. It has wrecked my already wretched body; thinned my hair and made me look old, even to me. It interrupts my sleep, blurs my days and demands huge block of my time--that makes me angry!

On the other hand, because of this diagnosis I have entered an entirely new stage of my life. My network of friends has broadened dramatically and deepened profoundly. Our family has bonded in entirely new dimensions. We live in the home and enjoy the life we have dreamed of. Because of being free from the tentacles of the religious organization, I am doing more true pastoral work now than I have for 10 years. My spiritual life is deepening, our marriage is richer; the gratitude levels of my life are off the chart.

My emotions seem to reside somewhere in the space between these two extremes. I am endeavoring to direct their energy to serve the love side and not the hate side. That is the challenge.

An example of the hate occurred last night. Sundar and Meg are here and we decided to go with Dan and Christi to the little theater in Langley to see Pursuit of Happiness (great movie)

Wonderful night but when the movie was over I got up to leave and the pain in my hips hit me in paralyzing intensity and then my calves both tied up in cramps and I couldn't move. By the time I got out of the theater I had attracted far too much sympathetic attention and I felt like a feeble, sick old man. The love side was that my family was not embarrassed, but loving and helpful. Having a feeble old man for a father didn't seem to bother them at all – and if not them – maybe it shouldn't bother me quite so much.

As I go along, the side effects of the chemo are increasing as they predicted. My fingers don't work well and are numb a lot. (Thank God for spell check) My feet burn and cramp and my toes are numb. When the cold air hits my face my lips stiffen and I can't talk right. Interestingly, none of this bothers me much. It's the price of winning the battle and certainly manageable.

It's the fatigue of constant pain and accommodation that weakens me, but I am learning to just go with it --not whine—do what I can and be thankful; don't labor over what I can't do and not allow resentment to seep in.

Good lessons --- tough school.

Sure love you.

I am so excited about seeing you soon.

Just some thoughts from down the road, but not far.

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#8 February 28, 2007

Hi, Ron;

Still enjoying the Andy and Barney show. What a delight to see you and Susan. Thank you for the time you spent. I hope you have recovered!

I'm in the poison cell. I skipped a week because my platelets were low. They have recovered well and I am back to the routine. They will start radiation in one month, so, 1st of April. That's good news, but ominous. I don't know what to expect. Everyday for 30 days...but I think I can stand most anything for a month. I guess I will stand it for a month, won't I.

My favorite cousin and her husband visited for a week. My children's director at Easthill for 15 years and his wife were here over the weekend, and I was able to go with them and the Jamies to services on Sunday. The last three days have been quiet and Tony Maupin is coming today for a few days....it's great.

I am doing ok. I have to catch sleep in little bites during the nights and days because of the pain in my hip. Overall – I feel stronger. My doctor for the first time this week talked to me about post-chemo treatment and used the word “years” instead of “months” or “the next treatment”. That was very hopeful and encouraging for me. I think I can do today and that is good enough for now.

How do you handle the overwhelming sense of love and support we are receiving? The incredible warmth and reception I received there: The people here so excited to see me and expressing their love beyond anything I could imagine and certainly never expect: Letters and cards from all over the world: Commitments of prayer and statements of concern and love from people I don't even know, on and on...

I really don't have a handle on how people perceive me. In fact, I almost don't care or spend time trying to affect that perception. I certainly don't expect to be disliked or rejected, though, of course that happens to all of us at times. I have almost always felt well received and, frankly, surprised at the opportunities and acceptance I've had. But now, I seem to be treated as someone special and I find I don't know what to do with that. Not externally or behaviorally. We are both experienced enough to be genuine and authentic in our responses. It is more my own view of me. I feel like I am getting dividend checks from an account I never knew existed and certainly never opened.

The view of life as an investment or ministry in terms of investing in people I believe is very wrong. You always expect a return on any investment no matter how small. To live life with some expectation of reciprocation for what you are doing not only ends in disappointment and

ultimately bitterness (the return never seems to be enough), but becomes self-serving and blocks true ministry. You end up with life and people owing you something. This discussion is not some effort at humility. I don't know much about humility and what I think I do know is probably goofy. But there is a broader and deeper influence level that I want to not misunderstand and certainly not miss.

I know you are experiencing a similar thing and to a much greater degree. How do you approach this? Can you help me understand this better? These letters are not intended for you to respond to – but in this case, if we were walking along – I would stop talking for once and listen eagerly to your observations.

There are so many facets to our lives right now. Some are familiar, some are vague, many are utterly new. I find I am endeavoring to integrate in some sensible way my former life and my present one. As we mentioned when I was there, there is quite a chasm between the two. It really does seem like another life. I have no idea what “well” or “normal” must feel like. I simply can't remember the sensation. I remember doing some pretty demanding things and wonder how I did that and certainly can't imagine doing it now.

I know my desires and drives have changed. I view people in my life very differently and I think, much more accurately and deeply. My emotions are much more intense and understandably more surface. I seem to identify them and share them more consistently and freely. Perhaps that goes back to my continuing effort to exploit their energy.

Are you finding there are fewer strangers in your life? I'm tending to see people more as friends I haven't met yet. This hasn't been a conscious thing I've sought to develop – it just seems to be developing and quite surprisingly so.

I wonder sometimes if this is all just the dope and my chemo head! Maybe I'm semi-high all the time and have lost my social boundaries. Now, there's a happy thought! Another loose cannon set free in Jesus name.....

Well, friend – we do seem to be managing to stay on the road. I am sure glad I have you to share it with.

Ramblings from down the road, but not far.

You are loved,

jc

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#9 March 21, 2007

Hi, Ron;

It's been a little longer between letters this time. Sorry.

I had a pretty rough time after chemo last time then got feeling much better near the end of the cycle. I had to delay one round for a week because of a low platelet count again. But it was back up today, so we are going. I am really hoping to stay on schedule so I can get the radiation done and get this phase of the treatment over with.

It seems to be so contradictory. Some days I feel stronger than I have for a long time, then I suddenly start a very steep and unanticipated hill. Right now, it's pretty uphill. The challenge is to go uphill physically but stay level emotionally. I am learning more about separating my physical situation from my emotions. It must not, nor can it be, separated completely. We cannot live a fractured life. But we must not let the physical determine or control the emotional and spiritual.

Another interesting development is my attitude towards pain. Pain connected directly with the cancer and therefore lethal in its implications is much less tolerable, though it may be less intense. Pain that is not lethal; cramps, the pelvic fractures, chemo associated aches, etc. may be much greater in intensity but much more easily tolerated and managed. In fact, I am tending to disregard what I consider non-lethal pain. For example the fractures. My back and hip hurt constantly and so intensely that I seldom get more than 3 hours relief from the pain pills, day or night. But because it will not kill me, I don't take it very seriously. I must force myself to remember that pain is a system alert and should not be ignored or disrespected – lethal or not.

I'm not sure what all this means. I do know that I can easily overlook Barb's feelings. My pain is of great concern to her. She feels it deeply and wants to do something about it, when there really is nothing more to do. She also tries to keep me from doing anything that hurts, when to me pain is the given. I find myself, disappointingly, becoming impatient with her concerns.

I know how much I want to fix any pain she may have and how I try to tell her how to regulate her life so she won't hurt anymore. When I do it, it's loving care, when she does it, it's nagging. I sure need to grow here. Any suggestions?

One thing this cancer thing does is point out some areas of strength but any areas of weakness blow out like a flawed tire under pressure on a hot day. It seems that God helps us at the blowout points so we don't get thrown into the ditch and destroyed. And cancer, more than any illness I have experienced brings so much pressure that the tiniest flaw or weakness, emotionally, spiritually and relationally are exposed and challenged. His help in dealing with

this process must be part of what is meant by, “in everything he works for the good”. I sure am giving him plenty to work with.

Have you noticed the incredible insult that this cancer thing brings? It has the audacity to pay no attention whatever to your plans, either for the day or the future. You just get things laid out, accommodating to the last interruption and here it comes again –“Sorry, your platelets are low today, we’ll have to delay your treatment until Monday”. That sounds innocent, but it dominoes hopelessly forward; throws radiation treatment into the air and threatens the very week you think you planned with plenty of margin in place. That probably accounts for a lot of the on-going anger which – or course, God uses for our good. It’s disgusting!!

Well, I need to get this in the mail to you. It’s been too long since the last one. Forgive me.

You are always with me.

Some rambling thoughts from down the road, but not too far.

Your faithful and loving friend

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#10 March 25, 2007

Good morning Ron. I am in-between treatments right now so recovery is starting to kick in. Should have a few good days before the next series on Monday.

Barb and I watched the documentary DVD, “Bonhoeffer” last night. He was a very potent voice for pacifism, then found himself conflicted in his values and became part of ten men that tried three times to assassinate Hitler. He ultimately was hanged in a German concentration camp at the very end of the war. A remarkable and accurate film.

Its impact on me was quite deep and clarifying. It isn’t often that we are able to seriously define the major streams of influence that are responsible for one’s personal faith and theological development. I suspect that in this helter-skelter world it is not even deemed important.

But there are two unmistakable influences: those of experience and academic history.

The first, we seldom have much choice in particularly at the front end. Our parents, a friend, a crisis, usually is the catalyst that becomes basic to our religious experience.

But, we have a great deal to say as to the second—academic history. We can very independently choose our influencers and thus, the way our history is interpreted and conveyed into life.

The interesting, and I think, tragic thing, is that our religious experience or tradition often determines or at least sets the boundaries on who and what is legitimate academic material to study.

For example, many evangelical Christians were convinced that to study any theology or tradition other than their own was not only dangerous, it was wrong.

Liberal theologians – or wanna be’s, castigate the conservatives and admit they do not and will not read the inferior academic drivel they produce.

Evangelical traditions reject out of hand, not liberal theology; most don’t even know what its basic foundations are. They reject people who are *viewed* as liberal and close their minds to those who can’t find a place within their microcosm, denying the possibility that anything of Christ could come from them. Without knowing it – we close the loop on both our learning and our experience and exclude any who don’t pass our test.

We do, at times, tolerate differences but usually for the purpose of appearance or the opportunity to convert and therefore keep our loop closed. (token hippie, token rich man, token black, Hispanic, Asian, lawyer, doctor,...etc.)

Sorry the cynical bent to all of this, but.....

To come back to Bonhoeffer...it seems to me it is very important to be able to define the streams of thought that have dramatically and primarily influenced the development of our personal faith and practical theology.

As I watched the movie, I was taken back again to my grad studies at seminary. At that time (1960's) Barth, Bultmann and Bonhoeffer were very important voices in the Christian world. Of the three, Barth and Bonhoeffer became primary in the on-going development of my thought.

Barth's great contribution was in his development of scripture. He believed it to be the Word of God, not just historically but contemporaneously. God had not only spoken, God, through His word was still speaking. Furthermore, the contemporary focus of God's Word was not organizations or the classical church hierarchies, but individual readers. Each man could, in reading the Bible, hear the word of God for and to himself. This was revolutionary on the Continent, and thought very liberal in America.

The corner was laid firmly through my studies not only of his theology, but the setting of WWI and Nazism, which were the backdrop for his thought and writing. What an incredible time to be able to hear God's Word for yourself!

This view has enormous dangers, some of which Barth fell into. But a fear of the dangers pushed the ever-defensive evangelical thinker away and the label of "Liberal" minimized his influence in that puddle. My Biblical theology does not follow Barth exclusively but he is the most influential stream flowing into the development of my understanding of the Scripture.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer. I read much of his work and made friends with scholars who were his accomplished students. He faced the impossible dilemma that, though a thoughtful and Biblically based pacifist (in the sense of a call to peace world wide –similar to Gandhi), he finally felt faith and conscience bound to found an illegal seminary in which his understanding of pacifism could be taught and exported. Not in the vapid political sense it is often seen today, but in the authentic effort to live like Jesus taught. He actually believed the Sermon on the Mount was intended to be lived out in real life. A revolutionary idea for that day, and rather startling, even today.

His seminary was closed by the Nazis and a small group formed under Bonhoeffer's leadership that sought eventually to assassinate Hitler. Their plans nearly succeeded three different times. He was hanged in a Nazi concentration camp and his books burned near the end of the war.

His thought bent the direction of my faith like no other in the areas of the Church as community, the church as the Body of Christ, and the church as champion for all the oppressed – social justice.

A third stone was placed in my theological foundation in C.S. Lewis. He focused true Christian belief for me. In his writing I discovered a Christian view of the fall, of death, of regeneration

and redemptive transformation. I developed a true curiosity for heaven as not just a glitzy new earth. His influence is woven deeply into my faith development.

Those are the Big Three.

Quickly, there are two more that I must acknowledge in order to understand my own thought better.

Paul Tournier, a Swiss psychiatrist, laid the foundation for the development of my value of the individual and the absolute necessity of a healthy relationally based life and faith. He also defined the nature of Grace for me.

Jacque Ellul, a French professor, politician and lay-theologian, influenced me with regards to the nature of the church and institutions. He led me to suspect and never fall in love with institutional forms of any kind for any reason. They can be valuable vehicles, however, dangerous ones, but they must never be courted and certainly never married. He helped me understand more clearly the necessity of the church standing outside and away from established form if it is going to be able to speak prophetically to its world.

Ron, I am not altogether sure why this little review was so helpful for me. I think at times I need to know not just what I think, but how I got here. Spontaneity, creativity, revelation, inspiration...they are all essential. But, they become very dangerous when they have no recognized basis. Without some historical reference we can neither evaluate our present thought or action, nor can we be consistent.

Well, this has nothing directly to do with cancer – or maybe it does. I know my faith is more important and central to my life than ever before.

This would be an interesting conversation for me to pursue with you some time.

Meanwhile today, I go to the eye doctor; get my labs done, then go fishing at Lone Lake.

So thankful your infection is clearing up. Don't do that any more!

Your friend from down the road, but not far

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#11 April 9, 2007

Hi, Ron.

Two more months of treatment. Hard to believe! It has almost become a way of life. I am so anxious for its completion, but had not counted on the sense of loss I will feel, because I am moving to the radiation clinic. Certainly, no loss for the treatments, labs, tests, scans, etc., but for the many people at the center. I have come to know them on a first name basis, and they lovingly, prayerfully and sensitively cared for me. Sort of like foxhole bonding.

The effects the pain and long-term suffering have had are interesting. I was particularly troubled when I talked with our bookkeeper at church. She had passed out at work and been taken by ambulance to the hospital. She stayed overnight and was diagnosed with a thyroid deficiency. She was terribly frightened by the incident, so uncomfortable and anxious at the hospital. She had some sores on her lips because of the problem. As I listened, I caught myself comparing her overnighter with my 14 days and following 5 months. It is so easy to do: Minimize another's pain and trauma because in comparison they don't make whatever list I think I and my suffering are on.

It was very disappointing but very important. My continuing prayer is for the Holy Spirit to identify any toxic attitudes before they have a chance to affect my behavior and catch me quick when I'm being toxic. I was kind, and sympathetic and loving but under it all was this little growth of pride. I am learning that all comparatives are dangerous because they inflate reality. We come out either grossly inferior or foolishly superior. Comparatives block authentic relational response and must be resisted at all costs.

I have realized also, a real respect for anyone who seems to be winning in their battle with cancer. I'm not sure all it involves, but I think the main thing is that we represent hope. There is an international fear of cancer and deep sense that its diagnosis is a death sentence. Those of us who seem to be winning challenge that fear. "Maybe there is hope for me; my father; my husband or child". I want to steward that respect well and never mistake it for anything I deserve or have done personally. We know, don't we, that we have functioned well beyond our own resources the entire time. I am still alive because of the love and prayers of my family and friends and God's gracious response to them.

I have one more mountain to climb, then five years in the foothills and hopefully, then back to "all-terrain" living.

I am reminded of being in Bern, Switzerland. The Green Mountains are the beautiful foothills to the Alps. They are lush and green. They are where the cattle of the Swiss dairymen graze. They are wonderful. Filled with steep trails and valleys; filled with every color of wild flower. All the

cattle wear huge bells so they can be located in the steep ravines where they graze. As I walked along the trails, the air was filled with the sound of those bells. It is the backdrop for the musicale, "The Sound of Music". "The Hills Are Alive With The Sound of Music" is a song taken from this setting.

I feel like I have been in the Alps. I can see the Green Mountains and hear faintly the bells. There is one more steep mountain and then five years in the Green Mountains. I think I can climb it. The faint whisper of music helps.

The Alps are dangerous, with death always imminent. The Green Mountains are steep and rugged, but blooming with life, lush grasses and breathtaking forms of ferns and flowers. I am finally reaching for life rather than running from death. It feels wonderful!

There is a high Alps ridge near Bern that I will try to remember to tell you about next time. It really is a graphic picture of where we have been living these past months.

I have learned all my right hand rolls for the banjo – can't do them very well with my fingers numb and out of control – but my brain does them perfectly, just waitin' for the fingers to come home again.

What a wonderful gift you gave me!!

From down the road, but not far;

Your friend,

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#12 April 20, 2007

Hi, Ron,

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood. Sunny, warm, so nice I'm going fishing!

It is a little tricky getting out of the Alps. I think it's altitude sickness. But the Green Mountains are coming.

Last time I mentioned an experience I had in Switzerland. Barb and I were in Bern in late spring speaking for a leadership conference. Our hosts took us to a spectacular sight deep into the alpine crags and rock canyons. We were on a trail on top of a ridge about 25 or 30 ft. wide. No rails or guards as you would expect. Just this high ridge surrounded by enormous peaks and glaciers and a drop on each side of hundreds, if not thousands, of feet. We came out onto the point of the ridge and it was a site for paragliding. There were probably 30 or 40 people on the ground getting in their harnesses, and another 10 or 20 already in the air. I was transfixed by the whole thing. The gliders would just go to the edge of the bottomless canyon rim and step off into the cold, thin air. It was terrifying; exhilarating...the beauty was so intense I felt invaded by it.

I guess the point here is that is how my experience with cancer seems to have been. There has been a small path surrounded by enormous, rugged and treacherous canyons. As in the Alps, I could hear the sound of rockslides and the other mountain sounds sometimes close, sometimes far distant, but always ominous. There have been no guardrails to secure me. The slightest misstep or unexpected hidden rock could send me over the edge into whatever unknown was there.

Yet, there has been something wonderful, majestic happening as well. No handrail, but a sensation of being embraced by family and friends, and their momentum carries me. Above all these, the unmistakable, over-arching presence of God. He embraces us and we are all carried by the momentum and energy of His immediacy.

Now, finally, there is a pass through the peaks and I can hear the bells. The air is changing from the damp cold thinness. Sunny wildflower scented currents are beginning to brush my face – and with them, hope.

I am going to my fourth radiation treatment today. I call it the “George Foreman Grill”. It is the 4th of 30 daily sessions. (I get Sat. and Sun. off). I guess I am at the mouth of the pass but as with all mountain passes, distance hides their true topography, they are always rougher than they appeared. But...it is the pass. I can feel the surrounding embrace of family and friends tighten and hold me a little closer. God's presence is still over-arching, and he has the same expression

Dad used to have when we were together in the mountains. He had been there before and knew exactly what to expect. He would just step a little closer to me, give that “its ok” look and on we’d go. And sure enough, it was ok.

I find so many similes from my past that fit this phase of my experience and somehow help. Perhaps in God’s presence, life prepares us for life. We haven’t been “here” before but we have been places that are a little bit like “here” and it adds confidence.

Do you feel like it will end? I don’t yet, but on the other hand, I know it's coming to an end – at least the severe treatment is. It is the POW thing: I’ll believe it when I’m on American soil.

I heard of a lady last night that had gone through 65 sessions of chemo! It was a news item about her in general and the newscaster just reeled it off, unintentionally oblivious to what he was saying and what she had endured. Her story helps me cope. I hope our story will help someone cope.

Well, I have to go visit George Foreman now.

I love you and am constantly aware of you and praying for you. I guess we should just relax and feel the embrace of our friends and family and see the confident look on Father’s face.

From down the road, but not far.

jc

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#13 April 27, 2007

Hi, Ron;

Well, I'm back on the grill. My pump was disconnected for the weekend to allow me to go to Canada and the ceremonies without it. Now, back to work and reality. It was a wonderful interlude.

I had an interesting conversation with myself as I was driving back (about 2 1/2 hrs.) Barbara became very ill and had to be in bed at home for the entire weekend, so I was driving alone.

As you can imagine, the evening was very Jerry Cook oriented. Tim Peterson, who ministered 15 of the 20 years at East Hill with me, was retiring as President of Foursquare Canada and was the graduation speaker. So, of course, there were many stories. They put together a two-page biography and put a copy in the program, then read it at the presentation. To say the least, it was a very remarkable evening.

I was debating in my head how I should view it. There is a false humility rampant in Christian circles that says to actually enjoy this kind of thing is somehow "stealing God's glory". I was schooled in this way of thinking. But, the facts they recorded about my life actually did happen as they describe. Their opinions about me in relation to those facts are very gracious and probably too generous. I can't evaluate that. The conflict I felt was that I really did enjoy and deeply appreciate the night. I kept thinking how unlikely it is that those opportunities would ever come to me: That I would live at a time (late 60's-80's) that was so exceptional and blooming with doors for ministry to suffering people of all ages, but especially the young.

I found myself responding with great gratitude and awe at the life Christ has brought and is bringing to me. Help me, Ron, if I'm off base here, but I deeply enjoyed the whole affair and found myself experiencing none of the evangelical-demanded guilt. Nor do I feel a need to apologize to God for stealing any of his glory. (As if my small doing could impinge even slightly His glory!!)

Where did that stuff come from? It betrays such a shallow view of grace. It is also based on a temperamental God who must be the star of every game and get all the credit in all the post-game interviews. It's like someone complimenting a member of the San Antonio Spurs (a team I like for some reason I don't understand) whose three-point shot just won the game. Can you imagine him saying to the interviewer, "Oh, it really wasn't me, it was Tim Duncan"? Ridiculous in basketball yet not only tolerated, but preached as Christian truth in many segments of the church. I don't want to play on that kind of team, nor, thank God, is there such a team to play on.

On Sunday I think I could see Jesus standing and clapping with the rest of my friends. I'm his boy – and I'm being honored. I actually had someone comment to me afterwards, "I sure would like to have known your father". If my earthly father, how much more my heavenly Father?

If I can't see Jesus standing with the crowd, it may be an award I have manipulated and selfishly influenced to my benefit rather than one authentically given. In that case, I doubt He would attend at all. It seems to me I must always see Him in the crowd cheering. If He is not there, more than likely, I should not be either.

Well, I have to go now. It took me a couple of days to finish this. I have been very sick since returning from Canada. Everything below the waist is on fire; everything above the waist is nauseous, and everything above my shoulders throbs...other than that, I'm doing ok. Both radiation and chemo are proving to be pretty rough. The doctors are suspending the chemo for five days in an effort to get me well enough to finish all 20 of the days of radiation.

I sure love you and am praying constantly for your full recovery. "Please, Jesus, make Ron's treatment effective and take away the tumor. We have only you to trust and we trust only you".

From down the road, but not far.

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#14 May 5 & 17, 2007

Hi, Ron,

Last week, three weeks to the end of treatment seemed a short time. But now two more weeks seems like an eternity. Strange how time re-arranges itself.

Much of the pain has returned. The old infection is back and the fractures have enlarged and spread, whine, whine, whine.

On Friday I got up at 3:30 AM to catch a 6 AM ferry for a 7 AM radiation treatment before leaving for a retreat in California. I was in so much pain, I had to cancel and went to an 11:00 doctor appointment instead. The doctors were trying to help me get on a plane to go to Sacramento. After 3 hours of hydration and pain/nausea infusion, I made it to Old Oak Ranch at 11:30 PM. It was an absolutely horrible day.

We were driving up the last hill before the camp and as we came around one of the sharp curves we were suddenly and unexpectedly confronted by a full moon of huge circumference and absolutely indescribable orange in color. It was startling -- it was GLORIOUS. It lay full orbed on the horizon directly ahead.

It was somehow God's benediction to the painful, impossible day. Through that momentary encounter with Him, I was able to make the top of the mountain and had a wonderful night's rest in a peaceful, private house reserved for me. This morning's session was really quite remarkable and there is little doubt that this is His assignment accomplished totally on His strength and presence.

I guess I am telling you this to say – we really can do this, Ron. He really is faithful. He really does weld together horrible and precious. (See my added note)

I mentioned that the moon was “glorious”. I am working with the subject of Glory; God's glory; the glory of God; living to the praise of his glory, etc. The theme of glory is very central to scripture. I haven't researched it completely, but I believe it occurs as a significant concept in every book of the Bible. However, the idea of glory is usually very vague. It is more emotional than actual. Is God so self-centered and egotistical that he must always have the center stage? (I touched this in my last letter). Is He so insecure that he must look good at all times? This is the impression that much of our teaching on the subject leaves.

Those ideas must, of course, be rejected. I wrote this morning something on this in my journal:

“It seems his glory has more to do with the fact that he is truly glorious. He is a glorious *person*!! We talk about glorious sunrises and sunsets. It seems to me when all our glorious

experiences and items are mixed together into one expression of glory, then mathematically extended to the n^{th} power, we begin to approach what is meant by a glorious God. Giving God glory or living to glorify him has nothing to do with his need or even desire. It has only to do with his person.

We have been created to be the vehicles through which all worlds (there are more than just our own tiny earth) would find out that at the eternal center of everything is not some chance event, some law of physics, some monster or cosmic freak, some unexplainable, "big bang". There is at the eternal center of all things a glorious God who is in love with us and everything he has created. This assignment is our single reason for existence. It is to be extended through every conceivable event of our life.

It is satan's announced intention in his rebellion to keep this fact about God hidden or at least distorted. Sin is simply joining satan in this intention rather than fulfilling our created intention. I understand that it is in the intentional choice to follow His purpose that, 'We live to the praise of His glory'."

I would love to talk with you more about this. Do you think I am on the right track?

I love you – I pray for you, I am available to you in any and every sense possible. I am sorry that I am so limited right now in my ability to be with you. I know you have a strong network of friends and prayer. That gives me no small amount of comfort.

Anxious to see you.

Your friend,

NOTE:

In reviewing this letter after our phone conversation (5/17) I find I need to take my own advice and believe we can make it. Since I wrote, the doctors have urged me to cancel all travel, interrupted the radiation/chemo regimen and I seem to be having a physical and emotional meltdown.

My daughter Christi is with me, just holding my hand. Barb is tired from her unselfish giving and care and will spend a few days with her parents in Oregon. Jamie spent the night with me. Sundar spent an hour with me on the phone. My wonderful friend, Ron called and talked at length to me and Russ is coming to hang around this weekend. My point is that I think I understand that Jesus is reaching me in His love through all of these.

I cannot analyze where I am, nor where Barb is; I am just reaching for His hand and help for the next moment. So far, that is all I have been able to do, and, thank God, all He wants me to do.

The doctors have given me some helpful pain management advice, will not continue the chemo and are pressing me to gather all my resources and make it through the next two weeks starting on Monday. Without the radiation, there is a high likelihood that the cancer will return and metastasize. At this moment, I think by Monday I can do that.

Your call meant more than you can know.

It will be so good to see you again.

From back up the road, but not too far. (With your test results coming when they are scheduled to, and my radiation ending when it is supposed to, we could finish within days of each other. Incredible!)

Your brother and friend

**Letters from down the road
To my friend, Ron**

#15 June 29, 2007

Hi, Ron,

Well, I am 15 days out from having completed the radiation. I have bid farewell to the George Forman Grill...forever! Everyone gathered and congratulated me. The head nurse presented me with my discharge papers. We even took a couple of pictures. Everyone was very happy, even emotional, except me. I really felt like a dead man moving around watching everything. I was so tired. My body felt like it weighted 1000 lbs. Yet it was the thinnest it had been since I was in Jr. High School.

I caught myself getting mentally geared up to come back the next day for another treatment, then I realized I didn't have to, but my mind wouldn't stop. It just kept planning. I came to the conclusion that I could not make it back for even one more and tried to embrace that this really was over.

“The first week you'll plateau, and then start to slowly feel better.”

Dr. Eric Taylor; Radiologist

I've learned several things:

1. It is always worse then they say
2. It always hurts more than they tell you
3. It always lasts longer than you expect
4. You are always thankful they didn't tell you the truth
5. It does get better

It was during the plateau that you came. Your visit was an absolute gift from heaven. I had mixed feelings about your coming. Not that I didn't want to see you, I was excited about that possibility. But, I knew you would be starting your radiation series soon and didn't want you to see how sick I was following mine. But, thankfully, you did come and what a wonderful couple of days. I'm afraid I wore you out with my theories and theologies. It had been so long since I could talk about those things with anyone. We enjoyed the eagle and a myriad of birds and rabbits. The mountains even overcame their bashfulness and peeked out from behind the clouds. To quote a famous author, “you brought a burst of California sunshine to a cold Seattle drizzle”. (That may not be an exact quote.)

I don't want to tell you about the week following Dr. Taylor's plateau. I don't want you to anticipate the same thing. But I was very weak and unhealthy going into the grill, you are strong and perhaps it will be much better for you. I pray earnestly that it will be.

When you left, the plateau gave way to hell. It was like every side effect and result of both the chemo and the radiation came back for a curtain call. The burning was like the worst possible sunburn, except it was on the inside and couldn't be relieved. The bathroom became a torture chamber that reduced me at times to tears and always to a cold sweat that left me weak and barely able to get back to the bed.

My bones caught fire and my hip and the fractures had to get in on the act as well. All the nerve stuff returned with a vengeance; my mouth and hands and feet all were numb. My eyes blurry and hearing so distorted I couldn't make out what people were saying. Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, muscle cramps...the whole truckload. I could only think that I didn't have to go back for more treatments and pray this wasn't the cancer coming back.

And then here came all those crazy catastrophic thought patterns that come in when you're too weak to defend against them. I was in bed most of the day now, berating myself for not getting up and being encouraged by everyone to rest.

Then, I don't know which day, the burning was a tiny bit less intense; the vomiting a little less violent. And, I remember lying on the bed and suddenly, calling to Barb, "Have we beaten this cancer?" She assured me that we had and for the first time I connected the completion of the treatments with the end of the cancer. It dawned on me what the doctors were saying when they said it was "very positive"; "the treatments were successful"; "An 80% chance for no re-occurrence." It slowly was sinking in; it really was over. I actually have one of those crazy, gaudy t-shirts I saw the first day I arrived at the cancer center that celebrate, "I KICKED CHEMO".

There is a whole world in these last nine months...some I'll process, some I'll just leave to settle and seep into my reality from wherever these kinds of things pool. Over time they flavor our lives in innumerable ways.

Please, God, spare my friend from the nameless canyon after the plateau. May his health and strength and your grace carry him on to, "Cancer Free."

There are cat scans and tests and all the things that are involved, but it's now recovery, not survival. That is a whole new world into which I have never traveled. And, perhaps a whole new set of letters. Certainly many long conversations between friends who are walking the road together. Your friendship, love and prayers have been so tremendously significant in my getting to this point.

Please remember on the days ahead when it seems impossible to do one more treatment, there is an end, there is a stronger day down the road.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

I will be praying and through the Spirit be present with you during the weeping and definitely present, hopefully in person to wish you a beautiful, "Good morning."

Your friend from down the road but not far,

Letters from Down the Road To My Friend, Ron

#16 July 7, 2007

Dear Ron,

I am writing what will likely be my last in this series. It has been a surprising and highly revealing experience...these little letters to you. For me, they catalogue the journey down a very treacherous, painful, utterly unknown road. Now, I am three weeks beyond my final radiation treatment; crawling out of the pit after the radiation is over that they forgot to tell me about. I am able to sit just long enough to get this written (I hope).

I really don't feel obligated to have learned great lessons and to have made profound discoveries, although, I must admit, I have. Most of my time has been spent trying to stay alive, learning to control pain and not utterly destroy the poor people caring for me with my jagged emotions demands, whining and self-pity.

It is incredible to think that all of this could have been avoided by just having a colonoscopy five years ago. I have become a radical enthusiast for men and women getting this test.

“It's too expensive and insurance won't cover it.”

“I really haven't had time, but I'm going to.”

“It's too embarrassing”

“I've never had any problems like that.”

All that whining came to a sudden end for me when the doctor looked over the side of my bed and sent my whole world into a chaotic tail-spin; “The test was very disappointing Jerry. We found a tumor in your colon and are sure it is malignant. We will have to operate immediately”.

There are several observations I'd like to make – I guess more like reflections against this side of the mountains I have traveled through.

1. The whole family has cancer, not just me. Oh, not the actual disease but the entire family system and each member is involved dramatically and directly. Patterns of behavior are challenged, schedules hopelessly impacted, plans abruptly changed, ever reversed. Finances have to be re-structured, or in our case, re-discovered which is a huge pressure in and of itself. Other people's needs are put aside in preference for me. Dreams are dashed and our reasonably laid out life becomes like some other person's, living on a completely foreign planet. And with all this going on, I know of no other time when the family members so deeply need each other.

I don't have any magic formulas or advice. All I know is that my family has been dramatically impacted. Each one has been given demands and experienced pressures and fears that no one ever should have to experience. As you know, both my boys had only been married a few short months before my diagnosis. So, cancer was added without warning to the first year of their marriage challenges.

My daughter, Christi, took the assignment to see that everyone else was kept up to date on my constantly changing conditions. She regularly prepared brief newsletters that were sent to each family member, extended family and certain other close friends.

They all found their assignments naturally and with no hesitation set off on this crazy journey. Each found their own way to wrestle this monster to the ground and transcend the lurking destruction that was salivating close by.

We don't all live close, but we were together as much as possible, bending our worlds to the unwelcome circumstances. We all freely shared. We shared without judgment our feelings, fears, frustration, questions – hundreds of questions – our hope and prayers. Most of all we shared our love for one another. Their strength, courage and commitment are the reasons I am alive and this side of the mountains.

Their gentle support and guidance for Barb, my companion and so much more in all this, helped her make many of the myriads of decisions that had to be made without me. Not the least of which was to sell our family home and pick a new one, then oversee the move and the details of the transaction. A huge choice when everything is going smoothly, I can imagine what it must have been in the chaos we were in.

Cancer tests the family in every conceivable way. I guess we just have to stay in love with God and stay in love with one another and trust Him to teach us how to do both.

2. Another observation is that one of the greatest gifts I can give those loving me and seeking to help is to actually welcome and receive their help. Self-sufficiency can feel like strength but is usually just a form of egotism. This is not the time to prove my strength or be some kind of hero. All those who love me want me to live and will do anything at anytime to see that I do. The fact is, I can't do it alone. We run out of our resources very early in this process. God has placed strategic people in our lives to bring those much needed emotional, physical and spiritual resources at just the right time. I find that sometimes I'm almost too proud to be weak. I'm used to being the strong one. I can easily disregard the love and gifting of others based on some inflated idea of how I am supposed to be or even who I am expected to be. God, help me maintain a confident transparency that has the courage to cry, "help", and the grace to say, "thank you".
3. I had to keep God off the hook. We have talked about this before. God must never be seen to be the cause nor the perpetuator of this cancer. I remember times so excruciatingly painful and interminably long...had I believed God had anything at all to do with my being in that horror, I would have rejected the very idea of His existence. No God with any love or feeling

could bring that kind of suffering on one of His children. When I was in the hospital, I had to know that when I heard the footsteps of my doctor coming down the hall, he was coming as my healer, never as my torturer. I must know the same thing about my God.

4. Cancer would have liked to consume me emotionally and spiritually as well as physically. It is so pervasive. It encroached into every tiny crack of my being. For me, to do meaningful work, however little it might have been, was essential. Anything to keep life from imploding into that cancerous pit. Then, the time came when I was too weak to do anything meaningful; a time when all my reserves physically, spiritually and emotionally were totally depleted. The unending pain, not just from the surgery, but the blood clot and pneumonia and infection and now, somehow I had developed two fractures in my pelvis which could not begin to heal until all the chemo and radiation were complete. I was unable to keep food in long enough to gain strength. All this and more finally overwhelmed the systems of my body and I collapsed in exhaustion. For the first time I honestly felt the cancer had won and I could not continue with treatment or life.

Now it was others that would not let the cancer overwhelm me. My daughter came immediately and sat holding my hand all afternoon. She and the other children made it possible for Barb to get an absolutely essential break from all of this ... and me. The team of doctors at the center talked with me about pain control and helped me imagine coming in again for continuing radiation. Some dear friends gave us an apartment close to the clinic so we could come to daily treatments and not have to drive back to the island.

I guess my point in all this is: I did make it through the months of chemo and radiation and have started the rehab process. The resources to do so were there all the time. For a while I was able to bring something to the table. When I couldn't, Jesus had who and what I needed and more already in place. I actually went to bed last night thinking, "I might be stronger tomorrow", and sure enough, it's still early but this is the best I have felt so far. I'm not well (whatever that feels like) but I am better. That is hope. At every step His presence insures that we will have first, a better day, then the healthy day.

I am thinking and praying for you as you come down the home stretch. You have done so well. When you were here I was so encouraged and strengthened by your hopeful attitude. You were working to construct a more healthy and authentic life as you return to your work. There was no bitterness or anger or even regret. You are a great man, my friend. I am so sorry you had to travel this road. I would have done anything to prevent it. But, I tell you, seeing you in my rearview mirror, knowing you were praying for me as you followed into the next curve, was my life saver. Even when our routes took their own separate turns, I knew you were there, believing in me; praying for me. How do men without deep friendship make it through this darkness? My observation is that often they don't. Some part of their world and sometimes the whole thing blows apart, hopelessly scattering the precious like so much shrapnel

Thank you for your companionship.

David the Psalmist, writing after one of his terrors said it beautifully:

"Weeping may endure for the night, but, joy comes in the morning." (Ps. 30:5)

We have wept together through the night, now finally, we can see a bit of the light in the East. I am going to sign this final letter --- yell --“GOOD MORNING, RON”, -- and go out on my deck and have a long, joyful cup of coffee with my wife.

Your friend, near the off-ramp, down the road but not far