

## Outsource Your Worries to God

By Josette Keelor

My friend Eliza was 21 when she was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. It was summer when she first noticed something was wrong, but she was busy with school and work. She figured it was nothing serious and she had time to wait on making a doctor's appointment. By that fall, the cancer had worsened.

In January, she had a double mastectomy. She went through radiation. She shaved her head in preparation for chemotherapy, and she endured months of weakness, sickness, and fatigue.

Eliza and I had met when she was 17 and we worked at a Daily Grind coffee shop in Winchester. And only four years later, still a year away from college graduation, she was fighting a type of cancer most people wouldn't start fearing until midlife or late in life—or ever.

Cancer didn't run in her family, but now Eliza's mother has to be tested, because her daughter's experience heightened her own risk of developing breast cancer.

Eliza survived.

In spite of the risk factors, and the unlikelihood of breast cancer developing in someone so young, she made it through her treatments. She had reconstructive surgery, and her doctors declared her cancer in remission.

She graduated college and fast-tracked her way through grad school. She married her fiancé, Thomas.

They knew she would likely never have children of her own, so when her cousin's infant daughter needed a new home, Eliza stepped up. For four months, she and Thomas cared for the baby, enduring long nights of screaming as they weaned the baby off drugs that had been in her system since birth. But just as the baby started gaining weight and showing signs of thriving, the grandmother, who still had legal custody, stepped in and took her away.

Eliza told me the experience soured her on adoption, and I don't blame her. We all hear stories of private adoptions falling through. I would expect family adoptions to be easier than stranger adoptions, but Eliza's experience shows that nothing in life is certain.

Three years later, she and Thomas haven't tried adoption again. But yesterday she told me that against all odds, against her doctors' predictions, Eliza is nine weeks pregnant.

Before marrying Thomas six years ago, Eliza dragged him to a fertility specialist, who told them that pregnancy would be impossible.

But nothing is impossible with God.

Today's readings all ask us to trust in God, even when things look bleak, even when we can't see a way out of our circumstances, and even if we can't believe in ourselves. But that often feels easier said than done, doesn't it? It's tough to believe in God's plan when we don't know what's coming next—or when the plan we thought was laid out for us falls apart. And the examples in today's readings are all too familiar to challenges we face in our lives.

Abram and his wife are dealing with infertility, unsure if they'll have an heir. Like Eliza and Thomas, Abram wonders how he might pass on his inheritance to the next generation.

Paul writes to the Philippians, advising them to trust in God rather than turning to earthly solutions for their problems. And Jesus, in the third reading, addresses the Pharisees, who warn him against sticking around Jerusalem because the Romans want to kill him.

These are all fears and warnings we might face today—wondering how to build a family when biology is against us; wondering how we can possibly feed our souls when our bellies are empty and there's no money for food; and wondering how to remain in a situation where our physical or mental wellness is threatened.

These are fears that I've seen expressed in the lives of people I know. In fact, this has been a tough week for people in my life.

One young woman I know has been experiencing persistent recurring homelessness, and this week found herself unable to afford housing until her next social security check comes on April 3.

A second friend has been chronically unemployed, and her partner has threatened to kick her out if she doesn't find a job by April 15.

Another person in my life made a mistake last year that just came to light this week, and he fears it will cost him his career.

All three of these people are believers. Two have faith in God, and the third trusts in Allah. But all three are understandably afraid.

It's hard to have faith when it seems the world is against you—when you have no place to live, no way of making money, no way of fixing a mistake that can cost you everything.

But that's exactly what today's readings are asking us to do. We're asked to trust that He can right all wrongs, make the impossible possible, and find solutions even when we can't.

In our reading from Genesis, God tells Abram to believe, but Abram isn't so quick to trust in God. He wants assurance that God's promises will come to pass. And instead of granting immediate solutions, God offers him a prophetic experience as a promise.

A commentary I found online explains that “[i]f there's any plot movement in our Old Testament lesson, it's a movement from Abram's *need for understanding* to God's *provision of understanding*.”

The more fundamental issue underlying the lesson is “*the problem of making sense out of divine revelation when it doesn't make sense in the actual life of the recipient*. Possessing no actual heir, Abram is given not a substitute or even a son, but rather a prophetic experience of promise that there will be one. Owning no actual estate to pass on, Abram is given no possession but a covenant commitment that the vast land will ultimately go to his descendants.”

In our second reading, Paul warns us not to live like nonbelievers who trust in earthly possessions to solve all their problems, or to feed their spiritual needs with earthly solutions.

“Their end is destruction,” he writes. “Their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.”

In trying to find a meaning for this passage online, I just became more and more frustrated. All the commentaries I read focused on other parts of the reading—specifically the themes of perfection and how Paul’s plea for the Philippians to imitate him can come off as arrogant.

No one was talking about what it means for a nonbeliever’s end to be their destruction. So, I had to draw my own conclusion, appropriately finding an answer outside the very earthy solution of the Internet.

When Paul writes “their end is destruction,” I figured he might be referencing the idea that nonbelievers would see nothing in the way of an afterlife and would therefore assume that when they die, the world as they know it is destroyed. If life is all that matters to them, then the absence of life would mean destruction. And, in truth, he could be saying something like that. If all they care about is themselves, then when they die, they will be destroyed, because they’ll leave nothing of themselves behind on earth as an inheritance for the next generation.

But I think Paul’s message is revealed by the examples he uses of how these nonbelievers spend their lives:

“Their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.”

When we look to earthly solutions to solve our problems, then any setback is likely to devastate us. If we lose a job, we lose our home, we’re diagnosed with a medical condition that doctors can’t fix, it would be easy to feel hopeless in those situations. We start to resent our family and friends who either don’t know how to help or aren’t able to help. We resent our society or government for not providing solutions. And worst of all, if we don’t have God as a solution, then we look to ourselves to solve our problems. That can often end in blaming ourselves for our struggles and our inability to come up with solutions. It’s a huge burden to place on ourselves.

The nonbeliever’s end game is to accumulate earthly wealth; but that kind of existence can only end in destruction.

Trusting in God to remove that burden takes the responsibility off ourselves. Admitting that we’re powerless in this situation frees us from having to come up with solutions. Instead, we do what we can—we change our way of thinking, we becoming better people, better employees, better Christians. We let God do the heavy lifting.

It reminds me of a line I read in a book about how small business owners might outsource work to people who can do it better and more efficiently, saving business owners time and stress.

The author, feeling desperately overwhelmed one day, jokingly asked his assistant to spend time each day doing the worrying for him.

“Do not worry,” she replied, in all earnestness. “I will do the worrying for you.”

Just think what your life might be like if you let God do the worrying for you each day, so you wouldn't have to.