**Longing for “Normal”**

One of the great ***blessings***of having Stage 4 T-Cell Lymphoma was the spiritual lessons it taught me, such as: learning to really trust God for everything, having the opportunity to understand what is really important in life; experiencing true gratitude for even the smallest of blessings; being forced to face your own mortality every morning as you look in the mirror; and related to it, feeling the true freedom from the fear of dying. One of the great ***challenges*** of having survived Stage 4 T-Cell Lymphoma (for the last sixteen years now) is continuing to remember and live by those lessons I learned while sick and recovering.

I recall remarking several times during those months of illness and chemotherapy, how nice it would be to just get back to my “normal” previous aches, pains, and challenges. I think we can all somewhat relate now… indeed, how nice it would be, and how we long for, our “normal” (and previous) lives and problems. But to return to my previous situation and its illustrative considerations, surviving Stage 4 T-Cell Lymphoma resets “normal” in both positive and negative ways:

* Positively, it provides an opportunity to continue life with a new, readjusted perspective of what “normal” should be… if we remember the lessons learned; and,
* Negatively, such a new “normal” comes with its own set of aches, pains, and challenges- some of which never really go away.

So, the old adage “Be careful what you wish for,” though grammatically flawed, is certainly apropos. Do we really want to return to the “normal” of:

1. Taking even our most basic *physical* needs (food, toilet paper; remember those empty shelves at the store?) for granted? We’ve become more *thankful* for everything (1Thess.5:18), more aware of the preciousness of *family, friends, health,* and *time* (Eph.5:15-16), more *content* with less (1Tim.6:8), and more aware of our *dependence* on God for life and its sustenance (Acts 14:15-17). Don’t give that up for a return to “normal.”
2. Taking our fundamental *spiritual* privileges of collective and in-person worship, bible study, and fellowship for granted, Heb.13:12-19? Since the quarantine, we’ve been more aware of our *spiritual needs*, so we’ve spent more personal time in prayer, have been more willing to seek out opportunities to love, listen, serve, worship, pray, and study (just this last week I’ve had two of you tell me about studies and ideas for reaching the lost you’ve discovered online). Have we not *drawn nearer* to God and one another, done a better job of *holding fast,* and done more *considering* of how to *stimulate others to love and good deeds,* Heb.10:22-24? Let’s make these things the *new* “normal”!
3. Being too proud, too self-reliant, and too invincible? Forgive me for returning to personal matters one more time, but I began working outside the home/farm at twelve or thirteen years old. In high school, I bought my own clothes, transportation, and recreation. By college time, I provided my own tuition and textbooks (which were much more reasonable at the time!). By 21, I had married the love of my life and had bought my first home. To say I was very independent and proud is a gross understatement. But at 39, I was lying on a couch in our nearly 3,000 sq. ft. home, helplessly watching my 80-year-old father mow our two-acre lawn… knowing my arms didn’t weigh 200 lbs. each, but feeling like they did. Then, none of that *other* stuff mattered quite so much. Then, I was much more worried about who would provide and “fix” things for D, and who would teach those two young boys all the things I’d been too busy to teach them. Then, more than ever before, I was concerned with *eternity* over the *present* (2Pet.3:13-15a)… and that was a good thing.

“Yes,” I too long for a return to “normal.” But perhaps a *new, adjusted,* and *better* “normal” which brings with it greater appreciation and thankfulness for the **physical blessings** God so bountifully supplies; a fuller gratitude of and deeper commitment to the **spiritual blessings** which are imminently more important; and lingering **humility** in awareness of our own **vulnerability**- and therefore our **dependence** on our Father who is in heaven. “Normal”? Perhaps not so much.