

This article was originally published on www.RadiantMagazine.com as “Worshipping With Breast Cancer.” The web site is no longer accessible.

“This is gonna hurt.” She moved my gown to inject the radioactive dye deep into my right breast. “Oh, you’re small. This is really gonna hurt.”

Way to go, God, I snipped as I practiced clinching my teeth.

“Breathe in. Do you have any siblings?”

Oh, no. Not that question. Not right now. “Um, yes.”

“Are you the oldest? Youngest? Breathe out.”

OOOUUCCCHHH! “In the middle,” I murmured out of habit and returned to my clinching.

“In the middle?” she repeated with the excitement of a fellow middle child.

I nodded slightly as she removed the first needle. When I could open my eyes again, I clarified, “Well, um, except that my little sister died in a car accident last month.”

Stillness.

“And now you have breast cancer. Your parents have been through a lot recently. Breathe in.”

“Yeah.” Silence. Clinching.

“Breathe out. Was she a passenger?”

I nearly swallowed my entire face to keep from yelling.

“I’m sorry. Do you want me to stop talking about it?”

“PAAAIINNNN!”

Release.

She removed the second needle.

Relief.

“She was driving, and fortunately she didn’t have any passengers,” I finally answered.

“Breathe in.”

I survived two more injections, a lumpectomy, and a lymph node biopsy that day.

That was eleven days ago.

Yesterday Melissa from the radiology center called to tell me my insurance hadn’t approved the MRI I was scheduled to have at 10:15. It was 8:45. I explained the urgency of having the MRI before I went back into surgery next week. She made some more calls.

I continued to get dressed for the appointment. I opened my little drawer of hair stuff—brush, spray, goop—and realized I wouldn’t need that little drawer much longer. I put a dab of goop in my hair. As I grabbed the blow dryer with my left hand, I thought of the hair I used to have. When I was a college freshman, I had so much hair it took me half an hour to dry it. I memorized the first two chapters of 1 John one semester while I was drying my hair. Now my hair is so short I can dry it in two minutes—with one hand. During these two minutes of waving the hot air around my head, I worried about the insurance approval and the domino crises their refusal could cause. Then I remembered that God was on His throne, and He would take care of me with or without insurance. I rested the dryer on the counter and recited to the mirror, “Jesus wept, John 11:35.”

Melissa called back. The insurance had agreed to pay for an MRI of my right breast, but not the left. The point of the MRI was to make sure I didn’t have any

undetected tumors in either breast, not just the right. Melissa assured me that their machine could only scan both sides, not one or the other. They would charge the insurance for the right scan, but the report would include both. Problem solved.

Two hours later I was lying in the MRI machine, wondering how much longer I could lie perfectly still and keep my sore right arm over my head. The whole procedure lasted half an hour—the same amount of time I used to hold my hair dryer over my head. I couldn't remember any of John while I lay there. I tried to pray for my family and friends, but I mostly amused myself with random thoughts. I thought about the three items I saw sitting on my dresser when I grabbed my keys: the program from my sister's funeral, a bottle of Ibuprofen, and Chris Tomlin's *See the Morning* CD. My life right there on my dresser: loss, pain, hope.

"Eleven more minutes," the tech notified me. Ah, the light at the end of the MRI tunnel. More prayers for family and friends. More random thoughts.

"The end must be close. I'll just take this ten seconds at a time. One, two. . . ."

Today I met with my surgeon. He gave me a post-op exam, showed me the stretches he wanted me to do every hour and scared me into doing them.

"If you don't do this, you'll never get your arm straight over your head again."

But then he really scared me. He read the results of the MRI.

"Did you say left breast?"

"Yes."

He explained that next week's surgery to remove what was left of the cancer on the right side had to be postponed. We had to wait until we received the biopsy results for

this suspicious spot on the left, the spot the insurance company had refused to pay to look for. I could tell he was miffed. The implications of finding cancer on the other side slowly made their way to my brain. Sometimes one plus one doesn't equal two.

He went on to his next patient as the nurse scheduled the biopsy. I sat in the exam room unable to remember 1 John. I asked God what He thought about all this. He reminded me of what He told me the day I found out I had cancer: Cancer is not God.

So I raised my left hand over my head and sang—outloud, right there in the exam room:

And right now
 In the good times and bad
 You are on Your throne
 You are God alone
 You're unchangeable
 You're unshakable
 You're unstoppable
 That's what You are¹

The biopsy will be on Wednesday. I'll put my arms over my head and slide through the MRI machine again so they can find the suspicious spot. I've been doing my stretches, though, so I shouldn't be sore by Wednesday. Maybe I'll review 1 John, too.

The biopsy results will determine how much more surgery I'll need, and whether I'll get those awful injections on the left side. Either way, I know Who's on the Throne. And right now, I can almost raise my hands to worship Him.

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Ps 141:2 NIV).

¹ "You Are God Alone [not a god]" by Billy James Foote/Cindy Foote ©2004 Billy Foote Songs/ASCAP (adm by Integrity's Hosanna! Music) & Integrity's Hosanna! Music/ASCAP c/o Integrity Media, Inc., 1000 Cody Road, Mobile, AL 36695. All rights reserved. Used by permission.