

How Faith Got Me Through

Faith is a passionate intuition.

~William Wordsworth

We all make choices in life. At times, those choices are in accordance with God's will for our lives; at times, they are not. My most important choices, I came to find out, were to walk on stepping stones that God had placed on a path He'd chosen for me -- a path that would lead me to victory over breast cancer.

When I was in my twenties, like many young adult Catholics, I set aside my religion, neglecting my spirituality and ignoring my faith. Things slowly changed when I had children. My husband and I baptized our kids, started attending Mass again, and even sent our kids to a Christian preschool.

I turned thirty-five years old the September my oldest son turned three and started at that preschool. Early in the school year, another mother named Lorraine approached me about a play date for our boys. I didn't jump at the idea, but each day I saw her, I'd think about her offer. I couldn't get the idea out of my head that we should get together. (That was God talking to me; I'd soon discover that meeting Lorraine was part of the plan.) Halfway through the school year, I finally invited Lorraine and her son to our house after school. They accepted. God must have smiled that day because I took the first step down His path.

As the boys played, I discovered that Lorraine and I had much in common. We both had September birthdays and loved to go camping. I felt a connection with her, like she was an old friend rather than a new acquaintance. Two weeks later, she had us over to her house. Unbeknownst to me, my spiritual journey was continuing.

That day at Lorraine's house, she told me that her mother and her mother-in-law had died within six months of each other the previous year after battling breast cancer. It was unimaginable to me how she had endured that heartbreak. But Lorraine made a statement that would change my life. She looked me square in the eye and said with certainty, "My faith got me through."

Lorraine went on to talk about the community and fellowship she found at her church, and while I heard her words, I kept repeating in my head: "My faith got me through." I knew I did not have that kind of faith. I wanted to have it, but I did not know at the time that I'd need it.

I noticed a *Life Application Study Bible* on the countertop and told Lorraine I'd always wanted to study the Bible. She told me about a women's Bible study at her church called "Joy in the Morning." They were reading a book by Donna Partow called *Becoming a Vessel God Can Use*. Spiritual self-help -- exactly what I needed. The church provided babysitters to care for little ones, and the women prepared coffee and brought in baked goods. It sounded wonderful. But I had a naïve concern: Could I, as a Catholic, attend a Bible study at a Protestant church?

Lorraine's opinion was quite simply evangelical: The God she knew wouldn't care what kind of building I was in as long as I was in His word. Logical, I thought, but I was skeptical. I went home and talked with my husband. Since the opportunity to study the Bible had never before presented itself so clearly, he believed that perhaps it was God's will. Possible, but I was still uncertain. I decided to search the Internet (of all

places!) for some insight. I found a website called OnceCatholic.org, and on a webpage called the Reading Room I read an analogy that went something like this: “If you lived in Italy, you could dine in Greece on Saturday night yet return home to enjoy breakfast in Rome on Sunday morning.” I had my answer! I could study the Bible at Lorraine’s church and still remain faithful to my religion.

I joined the study in January of 2003 after purchasing a *Catholic Women’s Devotional Bible*; I thought I’d learn more about my religion while learning about God and the Bible. There was so much more to God than I knew. I pored over my Bible and remembered things I’d learned as a child about Catholicism and its traditions. Within weeks, I was praying daily, getting more out of Mass each week, and gaining conviction in my personal beliefs. I began to acquire the kind of faith Lorraine had told me about -- and not a minute too soon. (God’s timing always proves to be perfect.)

The study wrapped up at the end of the school year before breaking for summer vacation. About that time, I felt something in my left breast -- not a palpable lump, but a sensation, a tenderness, like an internal bruise. It wasn’t sore to the touch, but it just wasn’t right. One night, I asked my husband, “Do you think I have breast cancer?” He thought I was crazy. Breast cancer didn’t run in my family, and I was only thirty-five. But he said that if I felt something was wrong, I should call my OB/GYN. I kept thinking about Lorraine’s mother and mother-in-law. In fact, I couldn’t shake them from my mind. The next morning, I called my OB/GYN and talked to a nurse practitioner.

She suspected I’d pulled a muscle lifting one of the kids. She also told me that my insurance company covered baseline mammograms beginning at age thirty-five, so I could schedule one if it would ease my mind. I thought of the brochure I had picked up at the gym the week prior for a radiology and mammography center. I was five years away from the recommended age for a mammogram, but I grabbed the brochure just the same and tucked it away. I wondered if God had placed that brochure within my reach for a reason, and I scheduled the baseline.

Although the discomfort had subsided, I kept my appointment. My initial mammogram required a follow-up. The follow-up showed an abnormality in my right breast -- not my left where I’d had the feeling that brought me there! I scheduled a core needle biopsy, and within a few days of the procedure, I was diagnosed with breast cancer: ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). Stage 0, treatable with surgery, radiation and hormone therapy. One hundred percent curable. I didn’t need a full mastectomy, only a partial. I would not need chemotherapy. I was so blessed! If I had waited until I was forty to get my first mammogram or until there was a more pronounced lump... Well, early detection was going to save my life, and save me from a prolonged and ugly battle.

My doctors wanted to know what had led me to schedule the mammogram. They recognized I had no reason to suspect breast cancer. They called it intuition -- listening to my body -- but I knew it was God. He sent me a message, but not until He had taught me how to hear His voice. He made sure that when He spoke to me, I would hear Him loud and clear.

That realization stayed with me throughout my treatment. I continued to feel blessed. My children were young and had no preconceived notions about cancer; they had no fear, no idea that people with cancer could die. My family, friends, and neighbors supported my husband, the children, and me with countless acts of kindness. I knew I

would survive because God wanted me to live. I realized that my faith was strong and would get me through.

I often reflect on the way God worked in my life prior to my diagnosis. He brought me to a location where I'd meet Lorraine, who showed me the importance of faith during times of trial related to breast cancer. He gave me a longing to grow my faith, but He also gave me a way to do so. He brought me to a Bible study that helped me acquire the kind of faith I saw modeled in Lorraine. He laid information about mammography before me. And then He spoke to me. He gave me a physical sensation in my healthy breast to get my attention. Then He told me that I needed a mammogram to get an official diagnosis. I felt so close to Him, so blessed that He'd go to such lengths for me. I was special to God... and that was all the strength I needed.

~Karen M. Lynch