

**“Prayer has more healing power than medicine”**  
**Faith and Value Section**  
**The Tennessean**  
**1/6/07**

Cancer specialists can answer the “How?” questions most of the time. But the “Why?” questions continue to disturb our sleep. The magnificence, scope, and intricacy of creation confirm there is a higher power. But creation by itself tells us nothing of God’s character. So people who suffer ask valid questions such as, “Why?,” and “Doesn’t God care?” And if some things are fated because they are part of God’s “mysterious” plan, you and I ask how can intelligent people pray for a different outcome.

Albert Einstein says science can never answer our “Why?” questions. For the answer to these questions, he says we must turn to God. When we look at Matthew 25, we discover God calls us to both see Christ in and to be Christ to those who are sick. We learn we are God’s eyes, hands, and feet. So people of faith are less concerned with God’s response, and are more concerned with their own response to the suffering of others. That is, we stop asking why God seems not to care, and start asking why humanity seems not to care.

Among cancer patients, I have found suffering includes not just physical pain, but also anxiety, despair, and loneliness. One can be physically whole but spiritually broken, and physically broken but spiritually whole. And James 5 tells us prayer can make us whole. So I pray with and help my patients find God’s healing presence in their suffering.

A few months ago, I saw a person with stage IV lung cancer. I told him what the textbooks say, that he cannot be cured, and that his prognosis is only 8-12 months. But he has even more serious issues in his life. His relationships with his wife, children, and God are broken. So we hold hands and pray both for a cure and a healing. For a healing of his broken relationships. Our prayer pushes down a taproot into the healing waters of God’s hope, peace, and joy. He later tells me that in an unexpected way, his incurable illness has been a blessing. In prayer, we don’t always get what we ask for, but I am convinced we always get what we hope for.

A few years ago, I diagnosed a man in my office with myeloma, a painful cancer. He told me he knew why he had cancer. He had been bad, and God was punishing him. First we prayed for God’s hope, and then for God’s healing peace and joy. Then I told him I did not know the mind of God, but even so, I was absolutely certain God neither inflicts nor allows suffering as instruction or punishment. Several years later, when his cancer was in remission, he told me the most important thing I ever did for him was not the obvious, putting his cancer into remission with chemotherapy, but was persuasively telling him that God loves him. No one had ever told him that before.

Every day I am reminded that the words, presence, and touch of prayer have more healing power than medical science. Patients from rural Tennessee use the words “help” and “hope” interchangeably. They ask me to “hope” them. This is what pastors and physicians have in common. Both are in the business of “hope.”

*The Reverend Michael J. Magee, MD, is a cancer specialist at Baptist Hospital in Nashville, and a minister of the Word and Sacrament at Brentwood First Presbyterian Church (USA). His e-mail address is [mageemichaelj@aol.com](mailto:mageemichaelj@aol.com).*

*the website of his church is [www.brentwoodfirstpresbyterian.org](http://www.brentwoodfirstpresbyterian.org), and his phone number is 615-329-7870.*