

Life's Insecurities and My Journey in Knowing God

Edwin Chong

Some of my biggest insecurities while growing up stem from the uncertainties that lay ahead in life. Life seemed so unpredictable; I never knew if I'd graduate from high school, let alone college, if my friends would continue to like me, if I'd find a wife, or even if I'd live past thirty. Being raised in a Catholic family, going to mass every Sunday, even faithfully saying my prayers every night before bedtime, I was well aware that the uncertainties of life were part and parcel of God's handiwork. I just didn't know if I could trust that He had my best in mind.

I attended Catholic elementary and high schools in Malaysia, where I grew up. I moved to Adelaide, Australia, in 1982 to attend my final two years of high school, also in a Catholic school. The uncertainty of a new environment took its toll on my spirits. Through friendships with Christian international students, I started reading the Bible on my own and attending weekly fellowship meetings. Though I had prayed often to God ever since I was a child, I did not have an intimate relationship with Him, nor did I know much of what was written in the Bible. Over time, I began to realize that it is possible to have a personal and intimate relationship with God through Christ. I yearned for this relationship, committing my life and future to Him with the knowledge of His faithfulness that I came to know through the Bible.

All through my years of college and graduate school, I continued to grow in my spiritual walk with Christ, deepening my personal relationship with Him, and trusting Him for everything. I served actively in several Christian leadership and ministry roles. I married Yat-Yee in 1988. I received my Ph.D. from Princeton in 1991, and that year joined Purdue University as a professor. The uncertainties of life no longer seemed like such a big deal. I knew that God always has my best in mind.

In early 1994, I woke up one morning to find a lump in my right leg. Owing to various circumstances, it was not until May 1994 that I was diagnosed with a sarcoma, a relatively rare form of cancer. The published prognosis for my particular

type and stage of tumor was not bright: less than a 25% five-year survivorship. I was twenty-eight.

My cancer treatment that followed lasted more than seven intensive months, with several surgical procedures, including an operation to remove one of my right quadriceps, physical therapy to help me use my leg again, followed by radiation therapy, and finally chemotherapy. This ordeal was arguable more difficult to endure for my wife, Yat-Yee, and my family than it was for me. During my treatments, a complication with a catheter that was used to deliver chemotherapy drugs into my heart developed into a condition known as septic shock. I spent several days in the intensive care unit, where doctors monitored my internal organs for possible permanent damage. While I have no direct memory of the incident (except my stay at the intensive care unit), I was later told that my chances of survival through that event was only 50%, with a risk, even if I survived, of permanent damage to the heart, lung, or brain. As far as I can tell, no significant damage persists.

It has been ten years since I was diagnosed with cancer. Typically, five years is considered a significant milestone for cancer survivors. As I look back, I find it strange that I never thought to ask "why." Indeed, "why not" seemed a more appropriate response. Life is unpredictable, and I can live with that. Because of the person of Jesus Christ, I know that God has my best in mind. Although I am still learning what that truly means, I trust Him with my life, a life that is eternal, a gift from Him.

"All things work together for the good of those who love God." [Romans 8:28]

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