

One of the greatest inventions, in my opinion, is Caller ID. I love that I can look at my phone when it rings and know who is calling. Recently, my phone rang, and the Caller ID said, “Breast Cancer.” That’s all that would fit in the window. Nope. I’ve received that call before, and it was not fun. I told Andy, “Breast Cancer is calling.” He said, “Don’t answer it!” That is one call none of us want to get, but “deadly cancers [are] diagnosed...every 30 seconds in the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of us have received that call. Raise your hand if you have had cancer. Raise your hand if you know someone who has had cancer. It’s an epidemic, which makes sense that many of you want to ask God, “Why is there cancer and other debilitating diseases?”

From a biological perspective, “cancer cells are created when the genes responsible for regulating cell division are damaged.”<sup>2</sup> Cells become damaged by genetic changes from aging, inherited genetic mutations, environmental exposure, and lifestyle choices. So, we have cancer due to genetic changes.

A cancer diagnosis sends us spiraling and we want to make sense of it, so we ask Why? Why me, Lord? We begin to look for answers by breaking down the potential causes and assigning blame, when it’s actually just from cell changes. It’s not personal. All of our cells change. God created us, so that our cells can change to renew and regenerate, but sometimes they just go haywire. But, still, we need to make sense of it, so we ask why.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/3537-humans-sick.html>

Somewhere along the way, we were taught to believe that people get what they deserve. We are judgmental creatures and feel that people deserve bad things, if they are “bad.” If someone gets lung cancer after smoking for 30 years, that makes sense that they got lung cancer. If someone’s diet contains mostly sugar and no exercise, it makes sense that person developed diabetes. If someone inherits damaged DNA, such as the BRAC1 gene or their body just doesn’t produce enough insulin, even if it is out of their control and not their fault, it still makes sense that they developed cancer or diabetes.

It doesn’t make sense to us, when “bad things happen to good people.” We are baffled when the person does everything “right” and still gets a debilitating disease. We don’t think “good people” deserve bad things, but in reality, their body’s cells are changing just like a “bad person’s”. We are all the same. Are there really any “good people”? By good, I mean, good like God is good.

Paul says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). None of us are “good people” because we “miss the mark” every day. None of us get what we deserve. None of us deserve to be healed because we sin against God, but Jesus brings healing anyway.

We see this in today’s scripture when Jesus begins his ministry of healing. After calling the first disciples to join him, the first thing Jesus does is teach the good news about his kingdom that brings healing. Verses 23-24: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes\\_of\\_cancer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_cancer)

and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains...and he cured them.” Their lifestyle choices were certainly different from ours today, and the environment has changed tremendously since then, yet they still had diseases. Their cells changed just like ours. Jesus doesn’t condemn nor blame them. He cures them. Making people whole and well was Jesus’ ministry. He was their light and salvation.

That still beckons us to ask – why do we have cancer and debilitating disease in the first place? One biblical perspective supports the belief that God created a perfect world, but Adam and Eve messed it up when they sinned against God. When sin entered the world, so did pain, suffering, disease, and death. Jesus came to reconcile the broken world and walk with us through the brokenness. So, we brought sin and disease into God’s perfect world. However, there is scientific evidence “of cancer in the fossil record of dinosaurs.”<sup>3</sup> That suggests that cancer is not a consequence of sin since the dinosaurs came before humans.

Another biblical perspective suggests that it’s just part of God’s creation since we have the ability to change and regenerate. The creation story tells us that God created both light and darkness. When “God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void, and darkness covered the deep waters” (Gen 1:1). God created the heavens and the earth; God created the darkness. “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). God hovered over the darkness. “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and

there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness” to create order (Gen. 1:3).

We have interpreted that since God separated light and darkness, and that the light was good, then the darkness must be bad. But, if God created the darkness, and God is good, how can darkness be bad? God doesn’t say the darkness is bad. God says the light, the day, is good, but he never says that the night is bad. It’s just a part of the order of the day that God created.

Why would God have darkness and disease part of creation? Remember, cancer forms when cells are damaged from genetic changes. Our cells are constantly changing. The world is constantly changing. God created the universe and us to be able to change. We don’t live in a static world. We wouldn’t survive if we didn’t change or adapt. In order for us to be able to change and adapt, there had to be light and dark.

Hear the good news: God didn’t leave us alone in the darkness. God hovered over the darkness, and Jesus came to be our light when we dwell in darkness. He is our light and our salvation. Just as we saw in the scripture, Jesus brings healing from all diseases. It may not be the healing that we want. It may be a spiritual healing instead of a physical healing. Healing may eventually come through death, when we are face-to-face in God’s presence. Darkness and disease are just part of this world, yet Jesus walks with us through the darkness. He is the light to show us the way.

We will all face some kind of cancer or debilitating disease because our cells are constantly changing. Sometimes they get out of control and become damaged. Sometimes it’s just the hand we’re dealt with our family’s DNA. It’s not because we get what we deserve. It’s not a divine

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<sup>3</sup> <https://biologos.org/articles/is-cancer-part-of-gods-good-world/>

*You Asked For It: Cancer. Why?*

Matthew 4:12-17; 23-25

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punishment from our sin or all of  
humanity's. It's just the way God created a  
constantly changing world. God is good  
because he gives us the ability to change.  
Sometimes these changes are painful, but  
Jesus joins us in our changes and challenges  
and brings healing. Jesus is our light and  
our salvation. Amen.