

Key Ideas from John Eaves

Finishing Well: Learning to Live Through Terminal Illness

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

“Death is real, but death is not final.” p. 119

“We are not sent here to protect assets but to risk them for Jesus.” p. 84

1. The background story...

Introduction by John Kramp & Sam House

p. 9 “When my friend John Eaves learned he had colon cancer, he called me. He understood the course set before him and purposed to run it well. In reality, though, he had lived those last months exactly the way he lived the previous years. Long before a doctor delivered bad health news, John had learned to live by faith. Feelings and circumstances would not govern his life. Although cancer presented a new hurdle, he regrouped and kept running.”

p. 10 “Throughout his life, John focused on Jesus and ran the race of faith. Nothing distracted him; nothing stopped him. He rebuffed any suggestion that his manner of living was anything special. To him, his life of faith was normal for a Christian. John taught others as he lived. He didn’t talk about faith; he simply believed God.”

p. 14 “The key to ‘finishing well’ is to ‘live well.’ This is John Eaves’ legacy: John finished well. This was his goal. He achieved that goal. What this little book cannot tell is the larger story of John’s life. To understand how John ‘finished well,’ you must know how he ‘lived well.’ The final lap of John’s life was not a sprinter’s burst fueled by adrenaline; it was the final leg in a marathon of faith.”

p. 16 “...the announcement that John had stage 4 colon cancer with just months to live hit them like a ton of bricks. But after the initial shock, John decided to fully live each moment he had left. He wrote in a letter to friends and family: ‘I am praying that the days God gives will be some of the most meaningful in life. I am not running to the sidelines. I am headed toward the center of the field.’”

2. Asking the right question...

Hebrews 11:32 - Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV) And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

p. 25 – 26 Quoting Sam House: “That Scripture (Heb 11:32 – Heb 12:3) fits perfectly with a sermon John read by Helmut Thielecke years ago. Thielecke, standing under the sky in the ruins of his church in Stuttgart, Germany, during World War II, and facing the aftermath of the horrific bombing of one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, spoke to the surviving half of his congregation. He knew they had questions, but if they asked the wrong question, they would get the wrong answer.

“Thielecke said ‘why?’ is the wrong question to ask God,’ John summarized. ‘It is a self-centered question. The right question is ‘To what end? What purpose do you have for my life, God?’

“John immediately thought of those words when he learned he could have only four months to live, perhaps twenty with treatment. ‘I have never asked God why I have cancer. Instead I ask, ‘to what end?’

“I’m learning to trust God for the day,’ John said. ‘We can be witnesses in a lot of ways. It can be through a miracle, suffering, and even death. I have come to realize that we walk in what we have. Whatever my time, like the roll call of faith in Hebrews, I only want to finish well...”

3. The Emails heard around the world... These are quotes from a series of letters/emails sent out by John Eaves to his family and friends during his battle with cancer...

p. 30 – 31 Email dated 4/26/03: “In his marvelous grace, God was preparing us to stand firm in faith, almost like an inoculation, and to allow Him to fight the battle as we stand in a position of preserving faith. My biggest prayer at the moment is positioning ourselves in such a way that we discern how God is working in this specific context so we can direct our intercession accordingly.

“In recent days, I have been looking at Paul’s life as he advanced toward his destiny. When you read his final letters, like 2 Timothy and Philippians, Paul never gave up on life. He concerned himself with the practical details of his ministry to the very end. In fact, if anything, he accelerated toward his destiny, fully convinced of God’s presence and deliverance.”

p. 32 – 33 Email dated 5/6/03: “The CT scan yesterday revealed that the cancer in my body is far more advanced than was first thought. It has spread into the lymph nodes and liver. The interesting thing about this news is that as Kay and I were praying on Saturday, I found myself saying, ‘Lord, you can use us as your witnesses in all kinds of circumstances. We are your witnesses when you heal. We are your witnesses in suffering. We are witnesses even in death.

“Many of you know that the last part of Hebrews 11 is one of my favorite passages. This role call of faith reminds us that God’s leading in our lives may make us look to the world like an utter failure. But to Him, they are a beautiful testimony to faith that looks beyond circumstance. Right now, because of your prayers, I am fearless in the hands of the Lord. It is a gift, and I want to walk in it for all the days the Lord gives to me.”

p. 35 – 37 Email dated 5/13/03: “The spiritual side is much more exciting and engaging at the moment. Isn’t it just like God to take what looks like a disaster and turn it into a blessing? That is exactly what is happening. Hearts are moved, lives touched, and God is on the move. I am praying that the days God gives will be some of the most meaningful in my life. I am not running to the sidelines. I am headed toward the center of the field.”

p. 41 – 43 Email dated 6/4/03: “Over the years, I used to quote a statement from Oswald Chambers that a life crisis does not build anything new into our life at that moment of testing but simply reveals what is already there. My experience in recent weeks would perhaps modify that thought a bit. I would add that in our hour of testing, the follower of Jesus is given an ace up his or her sleeve—the Holy Spirit. In our moments of greatest weakness and vulnerability, the Lord comes to empower, comfort, and instill hope...

“...Throughout biblical history, the wilderness plays a huge role in God’s interaction with His people. From Moses to Jesus, God calls His people into the wilderness. For us, it is a place of vulnerability, danger, and uncertainty. We are placed in an unfamiliar and hostile environment, where we see most clearly our inadequacy. But God never calls us into the wilderness without His provision. He meets with us in that desperate hour, reminding us of His precious promises and meeting our need. The wilderness becomes that place where danger and provision intersect with such incredible result. I think this captures my circumstance perfectly. In fact, we all encounter the wilderness experience several times during our lives. It is comforting to know that as followers of Jesus, we never go there alone.”

p. 44 – 45 “Last week, I was really pushing for an answer from the Lord as to which path I was to walk. On one of those mornings, I got my answer, ‘I’m not going to tell you. The discernment you are seeking I cannot give, because I want you to trust me each day... each moment.’ Isn’t that just like the Lord? No insider information... just the eternal truth that each of us is called to trust Him every day for our lives and wellbeing. God’s peace be with you.”

p. 45 – 47 Email dated 6/26/03: “You would think that a life measured in months would take on a certain frantic urgency. But when you place your life in God’s hands, you become more comfortable with His pace in these matters. Here, life deepens with an appreciation for small things that we often overlook: pausing to thank, to encourage others, and being empowered to walk into hard places with a confidence you know is of a heavenly origin. Any way I look at it, I am a blessed man...

“It seems that, for the most part, Christians in America struggle with how a man or woman in the Lord is to ‘die well.’ We don’t get a lot of coaching on this topic, and that is unfortunate because knowing how to die as a believer helps us to live life to a fuller capacity. One of the first thing I did after moving back to NYC was to help Kay and the family by taking care of the business of death. You may think this is a rather morbid and indicates a lack of faith on my part for God to heal me. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that when we prepare for death, we are then truly free to live. By me taking the initiative to revise wills, change car titles, and take care of funeral arrangements, I am expressing a tangible love for my family in doing what they should not have to do. Now that this aspect is cared for, I am free to explore all of the ministry opportunities God is bringing my way on a daily basis, to testify to the incredible dimensions of God’s grace in the face of terminal illness.”

p. 47 “The reality of my condition is that for a follower of Jesus Christ, cancer never wins. It is never a question as to whether we will walk away from it or not, because we always will overcome it. The only remaining issue will be in what body—our earthly one or heavenly one. Either way, we win in Jesus, because He slam-dunked death.”

p. 49 – 51 Email dated 7/24/03: “Your prayers are making an incredible difference—not only for me, but also for all of the ministry opportunities that come my way each day as a result of my illness.

“What does all of this mean? It seems to me that the Lord is lengthening my days and giving me a renewed strength so I can accomplish all He intends for my life...

“Why is it that when fear strikes, faith goes out the window? Rebecca Pippert, in her recent book entitled *A Heart for God*, states: ‘The silver lining in the dark cloud of fear is that fear pushes us to decide on our view of reality. What do I truly believe about the universe? Am I alone in this battle, or is there a God who overrules human affairs? Does my deliverance depend upon human prowess and things I can see, or does the final outcome depend on a massive resource beyond my own—the powerful, faithful, living God?’

“What I have discovered is that I do not need more self-confidence but God-confidence... My confidence is not my own. It stems from trusting that God is who He says He is, and that when He says He will be a present help in all our troubles, He means it and acts accordingly. It’s just like the comment a friend shared with me last weekend when he said that the 23rd Psalm is not a hope of David, nor even a prayer. Rather, it is a statement of fact about God’s character and nature. The Lord is our shepherd.”

p. 54 – 55 Email dated 8/11/03: “Friday afternoon I had an incredible experience. I was taking a short nap in preparation for the wedding that evening, and as I was laying in bed, two words came to mind— ‘resting faith.’ In the Scriptures, we really do see two kinds of faith. The first is what I would call ‘active faith.’ It is the kind of faith that is exhibited by fasting, perseverance, and tenacity for seeking God with all of your heart, mind, strength, and soul. It is a faith that blasts right past circumstance and grabs hold of the horns of the altar, as it were. But the Lord reminded me of a second kind of faith—a resting faith. It is the kind of faith we see exhibited by Paul in prison in Philippians 4:11-13 about learning to be content in all circumstances.”

p. 56 – 57 Email dated 8/9/03: “It is incredible how the Lord has used this illness to allow me to come alongside others who are walking the same path. It was something I did not anticipate, but I am making the most out of the opportunities for bringing testimony to the fact that God’s grace is sufficient for any and every life trail. I have come to see that God can deliver us in two ways—He delivers us from our trails and He delivers us through our trails. It is an important distinction, because I think we tend to opt for the first option, so when the second one comes our way we are somehow caught off guard and start questioning where God is in our hour of need.”

p. 60 – 61 Email dated 9/25/03: “We know we can trust the Lord for our future because of His faithfulness in the past. I think that is why I so appreciate Paul’s attitude in his life trail while imprisoned in Rome...”

Phil 1:19 – 26 (Message) because I know how it’s going to turn out. Through your faithful prayers and the generous response of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, everything he wants to do in and through me will be done. **20** I can hardly wait to continue on my course. I don’t expect to be embarrassed in the least. On the contrary, everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known, regardless of whether I live or die. They didn’t shut me up; they gave me a pulpit! **21** Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his bounty. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose. **22** As long as I’m alive in this body, there is good work for me to do. If I had to choose right now, I hardly know which I’d choose. **23** Hard choice! The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better. **24** But most days, because of what you are going through, I am sure that it’s better for me to stick it out here. **25** So I plan to be around awhile, companion to you as your growth and joy in this life of trusting God continues. **26** You can start looking forward to a great reunion when I come visit you again. We’ll be praising Christ, enjoying each other

Speaking of Philippians 1: 19 – 26: “That’s the way I feel today. I can’t lose when I am with Jesus. Cancer in my body is only serving to make Jesus known to those who are searching for an authentic experience with God. I never in a thousand years would have imagined such incredible opportunities to come alongside others who are walking this same path, but the truth is that empowerment in ministry comes through personally identifying with those we are seeking to love.”

p. 63 – 65 Email dated 10/9/03: “You know, I don’t think a lot about cancer. In a very untypical manner, I have had little interest in doing a lot of research, or seeking after a variety of therapy options. Frankly, I have other things I would rather be doing in terms of carrying on a ministry. Why? Because God can heal me without my help. This illness is not about me. It is about Him.”

“...God never intends for us to walk this road of life alone. Faith does not have to deny the facts. I am sick. I have a terminal disease. God does not want me to deny it or pretend like it does not exist. Rather, He wants me to trust Him and leave the matter in His hands...”

“...It begins with ‘the Lord is my shepherd.’ Park on that phrase for a while, and you begin to understand that illness is God’s battle, not ours. Deliverance can take us from the trial, but it can also lead us through it. David does not say ‘if I walk

through the shadow of death, I will fear not evil.' He says 'when I walk...' As our shepherd, God releases us from fear because He is the one watching the front and back doors of our lives."

p. 67 - 69 Email dated 10/24/03: The oncologist confirms liver tumors have doubled in four weeks. "What does news like this do to those of you who are praying so fervently for God's healing of my body? What does it do to me? I can answer for both of us. It should do nothing. Our life circumstance is but one component to being a follower of Jesus. God has other life components that take higher priority. Listen to how the apostle Paul describes this truth:

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV) Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 5:5-10 (NIV) Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

"Paul understands what it means to live life through the eyes of eternity, rather than thinking all there is to our existence is what happens in this body of ours. Faith gives us the capacity to view human reality from God's point of view rather than our own. It is what gives us the ability to rightly measure life circumstance as only a small piece of a much greater picture. This is what gives us the hope to walk through our trials rather than cave into them in bitterness and disappointment."

p. 69 – 70 "Mind you, I am still ready for God to heal my body. I have no doubt in His capacity to do so. Yet as a follower of Jesus, I see my life in a fuller light. The paradox of walking with Jesus is that faith grows better in trial than in ease. I don't look for troubles in life, but when they come, I stand in a God-given confidence and peace that is perhaps just as great a witness to a watching world as to be delivered from it all. Faith builds upon faith, and I am a blessed man today to stare bad news in the face and not be discouraged. It is a gift indeed."

p. 71 – 72 Email dated 11/13/03: "Over the thirty years I have followed Jesus, He has always shown Himself to be a faithful Savior. I do not use the word 'always' lightly. I mean what I say. God has always been there for me and for my family, and He has come through with what He knew I needed. The result is that I simply have too much history with the Lord to doubt Him. You might not feel that way. Maybe you have not followed Him for a long period of time, or maybe things did not go the way you wanted, so you questioned His love and His presence in your life. But if you do what pastor and writer Eugene Peterson suggests in his book entitled *A Long Obedience in The Same Direction*, then you begin to discover the remarkable mercy and love and faithfulness of Jesus' presence. What is this obedience? It is simple trust in a Savior who has lavished on us an indescribable love and grace that transforms us from the inside out."

p. 72 – 75 Email dated 12/2/03: "Who gets to speak the final word about matters of life and of death? The one who gives us life in the first place—Jesus. If you believe, as I do, that life is not about us but about Jesus and our faithful witness for Him, then you come to understand why Heb 11:32 – 12:3 gives us the most accurate and realistic view of the Christian walk in all of the Bible. It has been the track that God has given me to run on these past seven months, and has yet to fail me in matters of encouragement and discerning God's hand at work through difficult circumstances that potentially fog our view."

p. 75 – 76 "Looking back to last April, I have greatly benefited from the wonderful role many of you have faithfully performed as my 'stretcher-bearers- (Mk 2:1-12) in bringing your requests for my healing before the throne of God. You did not passively sit on the sidelines, but fully engaged in the business of bearing up a dying man so he could focus on other ministry opportunities. Yet I am a bit concerned for you today. I wonder how you will bear up when you learn that God did not answer your prayers for my healing in the way you thought He would. I don't want you to become discouraged. Prayer always has, and will be a powerful and effective weapon in the hands of Jesus' followers. You and I will never fully know all that God accomplished by taking your healing prayers and translating them into a spiritual force that has sustained me physically, emotionally, and spiritually these last several months."

p. 77 - 78 "My point was that God can have us pray for a particular thing, but can answer it in a manner entirely different from the request. It only took Paul three times to figure that out. God reminded him from his own ministry that the power of God is best displayed in wounded warriors, not healthy ones. It is the wounded ones who know best their need of God. The healthy ones all too frequently strike out on their own and ask God to bless their efforts on His behalf. Ironic, but true: the paradox of weakness."

p. 82 – 84 An email dated 1/22/04: "Yesterday could have been a day of crushing. It arrived, right on schedule. But I don't think it had the intended effect. After a series of extended tests, the oncologist said all medical interventions to date had failed..."

“From a human viewpoint, it looked like a major defeat. One big slam-dunk for Satan. Something akin to Jesus hanging on the cross. Things came to a complete stop on the hill. Satan gloated over how easy it was to take out the Son of God. He lost focus, not aware of things happening in other locations around the city and in heaven. Because about the same time I was getting my news, a high school senior was weighing out his life after reading John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart*. His conclusion was to wholly commit his life to Jesus and to serve him like his parents had done. That person was my son Matthew.

“What did my disease bring? The raising up of a new generation wholly committed to Jesus as their Lord. It was the gift a father can wait a lifetime to see, and when it comes there is no greater blessing.”

p. 84 “Thank God for the countless victories He has won through my cancer and God calling me to walk through it as His witness. God has been silent for the last several weeks, while the pain increased and my ability to walk steadfastly in the Lord was more and more difficult. I am not afraid of the silence of God. The flip side of silence is frequently an expression of trust in us. It sounds weird, but what is there about the Christian life that is ‘normal’ by the world’s standards? Trust expressed by one person frequently elicits trust from the second person involved. That is why I open myself to risking for the Lord in following His guidance and directives in my life. This is what my generation needs more of. ***We are not sent here to protect assets but to risk them for Jesus.*** I am not at all set back. Rather I need you to live out this truth: It’s not over until it is over.”

p. 86 – 87 The final email, undated: “A few days ago a friend asked me if I had been thinking more about heaven, and if so, what was I thinking? I realized that the Lord had changed the way I now answer such a question. The Bible only gives us brief snapshots of heaven and the transition from one location to the next. Bible commentators have done a pretty good job in detailing certain aspects regarding appearance and some kind of timetable. I now take a different approach to the question, because the answer must reflect our belief in seeing life today through the eyes of eternity. Do you want to really know what the transition from this earthly reality into a heavenly reality is all about? It is simply another day.

“Don’t be shocked. It’s true. If we, as believers, are living our lives through the eyes of eternity, then our death and transition to be with the Lord in heaven is another day in this road we are walking through eternity. Oh sure, things look different—very different, in fact. Yet in that difference resides a sameness as well. I am still me in spirit. Jesus is still Jesus. Relations are, at least in heaven’s timetable, temporarily changed with the saints continuing to do God’s work on earth. Old relationships are now reunited. Never mind the timetable to all of this. With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day (Ps 90:4). The beauty of the resurrection life is that, as always, we remain firmly in God’s loving hands. Another day of witnessing and living out His Divine faithfulness. There is not fear, for in the eyes of eternity, today is just another day.”

4. Comments from a sermon John Eaves gave at West End Community Church in Nashville, TN on November 23rd, 2003.

p. 89 – 117 John’s sermon: “Finishing Well, A Sermon on Learning to Live Through Terminal Illness”

p. 90 – 92 “There was never any mention of ‘cure’ either. Rather, I was assigned to a category called ‘palliative care patient’ which is a nice way of saying that we can try to keep you comfortable and extend you days through chemo treatments. But we will never be able to heal you...”

p. 91 - 92 “In some ways, it continues to amaze me how many people think this way. It sounds so plausible, but in reality, it is a lie. Why? Because this belief is based on our belief that we have the capacity to control our destiny, and the truth is we have no such control.

“All of us have come face to face with death or suffering at one time or another. If you are like most people, you get stumped on an incredibly simple question—Why? Such an innocent word, only three letters, yet filled with unresolved anger, bitterness, and confusion. We all want to ask it, and none of us gets the answer we are looking for. I am thankful that I never asked that question, because of a simple sermon I read more than twenty-five years ago by a German pastor named Helmut Thielecke.”

p. 92 – 93 Quoting Thielecke’s sermon in 1944 to a German congregation in Stuttgart, Germany after their church and town was destroyed by Allied bombing...

“I know the question many of you want to ask this morning. But I want to remind you that if you ask the wrong question, you will inevitably receive the wrong answer. Today ‘why’ is the wrong question to ask. The reason is that at the core of this simple three letter word is an attitude of self-centeredness. The focus is on ourselves, not on God. Life did not go as we anticipated, and we insist on knowing why it did not. The better question to ask in such a situation is ‘to what end?’ that is a question God can answer and can work with, because we are focusing on God rather than ourselves. This is a question He longs to answer for us this morning.”

p. 93 “Some of you this morning are still stuck on the ‘why’ question. You have become embittered, angry, and refuse God’s repeated attempts to lead you through the valley of trial to a place of rest and provision. You have created your own hell of self-pity, and you insist on keeping yourself in this self-imposed state of mind. Come out! Come out, now! Simply ask the right question and see what God will do by shifting your focus from yourself to Him.”

p. 94 “God is so amazing in preparing us for trials and hardships in life. In my case, weeks before I knew anything about cancer, my quiet times were filled with words of admonition and encouragement to stand firm, to allow the Lord to fight our battles, and to trust Him in all things.”

p. 94 – 95 “I returned to a favorite passage of mine—Hebrews 11:32 – 12:3. As you know, biblical scholars know this chapter as the roll call of faith...

“The first few sentences in the paragraph are predictable. Miracles are performed—the dead raised to life, people delivered from certain death. It is an incredibly powerful encounter with God when he breaks into human circumstance. Suddenly, the tone changes beginning in the second part of Hebrews 11:35. God’s people are being openly violated, persecuted, tortured, beaten, and killed for their faith. They are deprived of earthly comforts, disoriented, and destitute. Many die, for no other reason than identifying themselves as servants of God and following His directives. Could it be that we in America have been sold short when it comes to understanding the Christian life in the fullness it represents? Yes, we have.”

p. 96 Our witness through three paths...

- Our witness through God’s miracles
- Our witness through trials and hardships
- Our witness in the way we die

p. 97 “I do not think Jesus will have a conversation with me in heaven saying, ‘John, I would have healed you, but your faith quotient was only 48% and you need a 50% minimum to pass... As I read the Scriptures, I notice something striking about Jesus and healing. Roughly half the time Jesus makes some comment regarding the faith of the person he has healed. But the other times, he just healed people with no pre-conditions whatsoever. Today, there is a lot of bad teaching floating around on healing.”

p. 100 – 101 “Faith has two distinct expressions for the follower of Jesus. the first we can call an ‘active faith.’ This is the one we are most accustomed to, and to which most teaching on healing tends to camp out. It is a tenacious faith, holding on and holding out until God responds...

“However, the second biblical expression of faith is equally viable and necessary. It is a ‘resting faith’; faith that knows...that it knows...that it knows. It is the faith we see expressed in Daniel 3: 17-18 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said to the king of Babylon, ‘The God we serve is able to rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, ...we will not serve your gods.’ It is the faith credited as righteousness to Abraham when he believed God for a son in his old age (Gen 15:6). This is the faith God has imparted into my life. I am resting in His daily provision, never insisting on things going my way, but His. It is a yielded life, a surrendered life, which intimately becomes a transformed life (Rom 8:28-30).”

p. 103 “The second witness we have in this world is through trials and hardship. God delivers His people in two ways: He delivers us from our trials, and He delivers us through our trials. The interesting thing is we do not have a choice as to which path we travel...”

p. 103 – 105 “One of the great lessons I learned through my illness is that God will frequently call us to come alongside others who are facing the same circumstance we are. I call it ‘incarnational illness.’ God deliberately intersects our lives with the hurting at the very moment when we hurt. Why does He do this? Because He knows that weakness is the perfect soil for growing dependence in Him...

“For me, the treatment center became my new congregation. Rather than hide behind curtains, we circled our chairs and began to talk.”

p. 107 – 108 “Whenever God called His people into the wilderness, He always met them with His full provision. Think back to Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, the prophets, and Jesus. They all had wilderness experiences. What is the wilderness? It is a literal place of danger and vulnerability. Where in the wilderness will we find food and water? Where will we find shelter? What about the wild animals, the bandits, and the specter of being lost? The wilderness is a real place and genuinely life-threatening. Yet over and over again, God provides for His people in their wilderness experience, *without exception*. What strength and confidence this gives us! We never enter the wilderness without His full provision of grace. This is precisely why Paul was able to say: ‘I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances...’ (Phil 4:11-13).”

p. 108 “Godly contentment is birthed out of unreserved trust. God’s track record in the wilderness not only should encourage us, but also empower us to walk through the trials we face, because we are assured that God is indeed bigger than those trials.”

p. 109 “The truth is that we are people who have learned that finishing well in life is just as important to God as how we live our lives each day. We proved that death can, and should, have a humorous side as well. We can laugh, because we have read the final pages of the book, and we know who wins.”

p. 111 – 112 “For the follower of Jesus, fear of death should be a non-issue. That bears repeating—our fear of death should be a non-issue. This may sound totally unrealistic for you as you struggle with the idea of dying, but when you boil it down, we are simply aligning what we claim to believe as a Christian with how we behave in daily life. How are we supposed to believe and behave regarding the issue of dying? The writer of Hebrews says it best (Heb 2:14-15).”

Hebrews 2:14-15 (NIV) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

“Why should we not fear death? Because Jesus has freed us from that fear! Having been held in slavery to this fear all of our lives, we forget that through Jesus’ death, we are, among other things, freed from the fear of dying. We see Jesus affirm this truth when He looked straight into Martha’s eyes, and said in John 11:25, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.’

“Will you allow Jesus to look you in the eyes through your imagination and receive this promised freedom? I want nothing more than for Him to free you from this curse. Once you are freed, believe me, you will know it!”

p. 115 “The real issue for Americans and death is control. We are so presumptuous about our mortality; we actually believe it is within our capacity to remain in control to the very end. As with life, we want death on our terms. Almost unbelievable to comprehend, but nonetheless true.

“The purpose of my inquiry into these issues is not to convince you of my point of view. I am perfectly at peace with your own conscience leading you in such matters. What is important is that you not fear the process—any part of it. The only way you know you are free from the fear of death is if you can stare it in the face and not flinch. Jesus calls us, His followers, to live our lives through the eyes of eternity rather than through our mortality.”

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

p. 116 – 117 “This brings us to the final verses of our text in Hebrews 12: 1-2. God is calling us today to remember the race we are running. It is a race that stretches into eternity, and it is only run successfully when we fix our eyes in the right direction—on Jesus. God does not intend for us to face life alone. Whether we experience His miracles of deliverance, endure hardship and trials, or even face death, we remain, now and forevermore, His witnesses. This is the essence of our life in Him.”

5. Transition...

p. 118 “Early in the morning on February 22, 2004, John finished the race and entered eternity...”

p. 119 “Death is real, but it is not final. We imagine John walking toward Jesus’ throne, joined by a crowd of faithful followers who comprised the group of ‘first-timers’ that Sunday morning. We picture John’s huge smile as he walks to Jesus and waits for his face-to-face encounter. And we celebrate with John the affirmation Jesus gives our friend, ‘Well done, faithful servant. You finished well.’”