My Spouse Has A TERMINAL ILLNESS

—by Audrey Sutherland

When your spouse is told that they have a terminal illness, life changes. They enter an emotional roller coaster ride and a good support system is imperative in getting you both through this journey. The most important members of her support system are God and you, her husband. Your job is a challenging one that requires patience, love and empathy in abundance. This task may be daunting and may impact their self-esteem. While people may say “Who cares what you look like, you’re alive” it can be difficult to adjust to being stared at or not feeling as feminine or masculine as they once did. Being sensitive to this and making them feel adored and loved can help.

Stand by their side

Although your spouse will technically be fighting the illness alone, keep telling them that you are a team and that you are in this together with God. In Isaiah 41:13 it says: “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” Pray with them and put the fight in God’s hands and ask Him to guide you both.

Be solution-focused

Focusing on what can be done to solve the problem instead of just focusing on the problem will get you both into gear to prepare you for what lies ahead. The treatments and tests can be scary and can leave your spouse feeling more ill than they felt to begin with. Being there to assist with household chores or just keeping them company will help tremendously. If you can’t take time off work, arrange to have a friend visit or hire a domestic worker to help keep the home in order and to ensure your loved one is given meals if they are too weak to make them.

Physical support

Some surgeries leave scarring or may disfigure your spouse and this may impact their self-esteem. While people may say “Who cares what you look like, you’re alive” it can be difficult to adjust to being stared at or not feeling as feminine or masculine as they once did. Being sensitive to this and making them feel adored and loved can help.

Encouragement is important

Being optimistic is important, if they feel that you believe that they are going to beat this, it makes them more likely to believe it too. At times they may feel horrible from the treatment and want to give up. Acknowledge their feelings and then remind them of the benefits of the treatment and that God is with them and will help them through anything. Read to your husband or wife from Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

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Lift them up in prayer

Keeping God involved is important because the situation is bigger than the two of you or the doctors. Having cancer can leave your spouse feeling like a puppet, having very little control over their body. If the doctors give a poor prognosis or are unsure how the treatment will go and you both feel concerned, read Matthew 19:26 “But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”

Thoughts of dying

If your husband or wife talks about death occasionally and reconciles with the fact that they may not win the physical battle, accept it. Do not tell her to stop thinking of dying as it is also important to think about the life that awaits us in Heaven, be it now or when they are elderly. The analogy of dying being compared to taking off a coat and leaving it on the floor while you walk on, is something many people find comforting. When you both feel scared, read John 14:27 where God says: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Find your strength in the presence of the Lord

While you will be your spouse’s rock, the journey ahead is going to be draining. You need to ensure that you have your own support system to enable you to cope. Turn to family and friends or see a therapist to talk out your feelings and then remind them of the benefits of the treatment and that God is with them and will help them through anything. Read to your husband or wife from Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Focus on your relationship with God and tell Him all of your fears. Rely on Him for guidance and peace, every step of the way.

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Isaiah 41:13