

The Good in the Hard

Six Things God Taught Me While Recovering from Surgery this Year.

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After twenty years of working amidst challenging orphan stories, I felt pretty fluent in hard. I had learned a long time ago to answer my theological questions with some version of “God is sovereign.” You’d think I was prepared for the tough season that came to our home this year;

but it’s clear from the list below, I still had a lot of learning to do.

On Christmas Eve, 2015, I received the news I was BRCA2 positive. BRCA2 is the breast cancer gene that increased my risk of breast cancer to 87%, ovarian cancer to 25-50%, and carries an increased risk of pancreatic cancer, melanoma and multiple myeloma. As a result of this diagnosis, I followed the medical community’s recommendation and underwent a complete hysterectomy and bilateral mastectomy. I can absolutely testify I have no regrets. In fact, if the post-surgery me could whisper to the scared, pre-surgery me earlier this year, I would say, “Hold on. It’s all about to get really good.” Scars, health bills, and missed opportunities are not good, but growth, connection, gratefulness and maturity made it all worth it. Here’s a look at some of the lessons I am still processing...

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1 People matter.

People Matter. I am so grateful for the people who took time out of their lives to come sit with me. I will never say again, “I was thinking about you” to a friend going through their own story of hard. I will put action to my words and pick up the phone, make the meal, or drive to their house. Jesus wasn’t kidding when He said Christians are known by their love. When someone loves you well, you are effected. This season I was convicted about all the previous times I had put a task or an accomplishment above a relationship. If I am too busy for people, what exactly am I doing?

2 Vulnerability is maturity.

Vulnerability is Maturity. It is habit to answer people who ask how you are with a response that makes them feel good. It takes more than I want to offer up to someone, “This hurts.” Or “I am struggling.” But the days I was real, I found most of the time, it opened the door to a real exchange or gave someone the chance to offer me his or her strength and gifts. This is how community was meant to be experienced. Pretending I didn’t need anyone in a time when I so obviously did would have been woefully immature.

3 God doesn't waste a thing.

God doesn’t waste a thing. Even hard is good if it makes us more like Him. Todd and I kept saying when this journey started, “If we do this well, we will be more like Christ on the other side.” And I can joyfully attest He has been busy remaking and recreating me. I experienced plenty of conviction in this season and had no excuse but to work through it with him. Flat on my back, I was an eager student in His classroom and for that alone, I would go through it all again.

4 Gratefulness changes everything.

Gratefulness changes everything. I am not “less than” today. In fact, I am now “more than.” More generous, dependent, empathetic, and connected—and that’s just for starters. The overwhelming emotion I experienced in this season was grateful. I felt grateful in the hospital for a private room and a wonderful surgeon. I felt grateful for heating pads, soft pajamas, and good friends. Gratefulness overflowed for the Holy Spirit, fresh flowers, genetic counselors, pain medication, for peppermint tea. I felt grateful for sparkling water, the Internet, and the list goes on. I honestly felt like my metaphorical basket was so ridiculously full that there wasn’t time to miss or mourn what was taken from me.

5 Rest is a choice.

Rest is a choice. I sat still in the months following the surgery more than I ever have. I talked to the Lord about subjects I preferred not to, and everything felt deeper. My love for Todd grew, my appreciation for our kids was profound, my thinking was complex, and my rest substantial. I laughed harder, cried more often, listened better, and I grew an appetite for gravitas. I decided I could skim the top of life, frantic in a lifestyle more busy than productive, or I could plunge into the core of it and have richer relationships, and intentional exchanges.

6 Pain makes us mean.

Pain makes us mean. I am not someone who gets mean very often. I have plenty of other faults, but verbal cruelty is not one of them. Imagine my family’s surprise when I was less than kind on days the pain was more than I could manage. I spent a lot of time apologizing and even more time analyzing what was right under the surface of my heart. Last week, months after I’ve kicked my painkillers, I was sitting at my son’s football game and I heard a woman be unkind to her child. Instead of my usual first reaction of judgment, *how could anyone talk to a child that way?* I thought instead, *I wonder where she’s hurting?* If all of this was just so I could learn that, the journey might already be worth it.

Today I feel better than ever. Thank you for your prayers, for being on this journey alongside of me. I hope these lessons translate into thoughtful leadership and intentional discipleship. I am asking the Lord to continue to use this experience to grow me into a woman who is humble, brave and grateful.