

QUESTION: My friends sometimes accuse me of writing articles about them. I accuse them in return of having a guilty conscience. Instead of answering someone else's question this time, I'm going to write about one of my own concerns. I think it will be helpful for me, and I hope it will be helpful for others with the same concern.

ANSWER: As I write this article, I am two days away from surgery for prostate cancer. By the time you read it, I am confident I will be well on my way to a complete recovery, but the road from diagnosis to surgery has been an emotionally difficult road to travel. Since many men and their families are now, or in the future will be, dealing with the same dilemma, I offer my reflections in the spirit of reality and hope.

First, a dose of reality. Most men will sooner or later develop prostate cancer. It is caused by, among other things, testosterone (some women will consider this poetic justice!). The mean age at which it is now detected is age 62. At 59, I'm just a little ahead of the curve. Like most cancers, early detection and treatment are the keys to survival. Prostate cancer remains slow growing until it moves outside the prostate gland. Once outside the gland, it becomes a much more serious problem. That's why it is so important to have regular check-ups beginning at age 50 (or age 40 if there is a family history of prostate cancer). As one who has annual check-ups, my cancer was detected quite early, and I am now looking at a very favorable prognosis.

What I am learning, however, is that despite a favorable prognosis, cancer is still a frightening prospect, and I have been wrestling with varying degrees of anxiety and depression since September 2, when abnormalities were found during my annual

physical. That was followed by a trip to the urologist three weeks later. I used to joke that you could always tell you were in an urologist's waiting room because it is filled with middle-age men trying not to look nervous. It's not quite so funny any more because now "I are one." I have now peed in more cups and had my privates examined so often that my theme song has become "All My Privates Have Gone Public!" As a way of coping with my anxiety, I have actually written a song with that title, but I'll spare you that today.

The next landmark was the biopsy on October 7 when the message was, "It could be several things besides cancer," to results from the biopsy the following week that revealed cancer in three of the 16 samples taken. At that point, the anxiety went to industrial strength for both my wife and me, despite the relatively small amount of cancer. Cancer is a scary word at any size!

The rest of October and early November were spent reading and researching the various choices among radiation, hormonal and surgical choices available. It became a confusing, frustrating time. To add to the dilemma, after effects of the treatments include at least two things men don't want to even think about: incontinence and impotence. I suspect any remaining men readers just put the paper down, but since counselors have learned to talk about *anything*, I'll plunge ahead. Early on, I focused more on incontinence and impotence than I did the cancer. My wife and family, of course, focused on getting rid of the cancer. They seem to want me around whatever the after effects might be. After a few weeks of frustrating my wife in pursuit of other treatments I finally came to my senses and realized that getting rid of the cancer was the primary objective here. While other men and their families might make other

choices, we became convinced that surgery was the best way to remove the cancer and to determine if it had spread outside the prostate. While incontinence and impotence may prove to be temporary, there are several ways of dealing with them if they remain permanent.

So it's off to see the surgeon for me. Perhaps I'll have more to say about all this later. In the meantime, I wish all of you who are dealing with prostate cancer as much peace as you can muster during your own ordeal. I have discovered the Man to Man Support group, which meets at the Trinity Lutheran Ministry Center in St. Joseph (3rd Tuesday of the month at 7 pm) a helpful resource. I have also found the presence and support of friends, a session or two with a therapist, and the spiritual comfort of my faith priceless as I deal with the inevitable emotions that ebb and flow throughout this process. May all of you find the comfort and support you need as well.

Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 1850 Colfax Ave., Benton Harbor, MI 49022, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to pbambrick@samcounseling.org. Glenn Chapman, Executive Director of the Center, answered today's question.

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