

Calvary Cancer Ministry Uplifting Emails

June 2nd, 2026

"Find the Joy"

Hey friends,

I've been thinking a lot about joy this week - and this is a long one, so please scroll as you read!

Not happiness. Not excitement. Not the feeling you get when your bloodwork behaves itself. I mean joy.

Because happiness tends to depend on circumstances. Joy seems to show up in places where it has absolutely no business showing up.

I've seen it in my grandchildren climbing into my lap.

I've seen it in Pam, who still reaches for my hand after a long day.

I've seen it in my dogs, who think I'm the greatest human ever created simply because I opened a bag of treats.

I've seen it in sunsets that stop us in our tracks, birds singing before sunrise, and those moments in nature when God seems to whisper, "I'm still here."

Cancer has a way of shrinking our world if we let it. We become focused on appointments, scans, medications, side effects, waiting rooms, and numbers on a chart. Understandably so. But every once in a while, God nudges us to look up.

To notice the laughter around the dinner table. To appreciate the friend who calls just to check in. To sit outside and feel the warmth of the sun on our faces. To remember that even in difficult seasons, beauty is still everywhere.

Scripture tells us: **"The joy of the Lord is your strength." – Nehemiah 8:10**

Notice it doesn't say that joy comes from perfect health.

It doesn't say joy comes when all the uncertainty disappears.

It doesn't say joy arrives after we've figured everything out.

It says the joy of the Lord is our strength.

That means joy isn't something we manufacture. It's something we discover. It's found in God's presence. In His faithfulness. In the reminder that our story is bigger than our diagnosis.

And maybe that's why joy can coexist with pain.

Maybe joy isn't the absence of struggle.

Maybe joy is the stubborn refusal to let struggle have the final word.

So this week, I challenge you to actively look for joy. Find it in your family, find it in creation, find it in a conversation with a friend, find it in a quiet moment with God.

And if all else fails, find joy in knowing that God created both majestic mountain ranges and the giraffe. One inspires awe. The other looks like it was designed five minutes before the deadline.

That alone should give us something to smile about.

Blessings,
Mark

June 9th, 2026

“The Waiting Room”

Hey friends,

I've been thinking a lot about patience this week.

Mostly because cancer seems to involve an Olympic-level amount of waiting.

We wait for appointments. We wait for test results. We wait for treatments. We wait to hear from doctors. We wait for side effects to go away.

And sometimes we wait for people to stop telling us that "everything happens for a reason."

But wait! **(See what I did there? LOL)**

If cancer has taught me anything, it's that I was not nearly as patient as I thought I was. I used to think I was pretty good at waiting. Then I got cancer and discovered that I wanted answers immediately, healing immediately, and if possible, a direct line to God where He explains His timeline in great detail.

Apparently, that's not how this works. It turns out my mother's claims of being "connected" only went so far.

Sunday at church, Pastor Michael Field spoke about waiting during his sermon and how God works through us during those seasons of waiting

Not after the waiting. Not once the answer arrives. Not once the breakthrough happens. **During the waiting.**

That hit me.

Because most of us spend our time treating waiting like it's a pause button on life. We think the real story starts once the scan comes back, the treatment ends, or the circumstances improve.

But what if God is doing some of His most important work right now? What if the waiting isn't empty?

What if He's strengthening our faith, teaching us trust, deepening relationships, and drawing us closer to Him in ways that wouldn't happen if everything moved according to our preferred schedule? I know that was true for me - I moved closer to God during my cancer journey.

Scripture reminds us: **"But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."**
– Romans 8:25

I'll be honest - that verse sounds a lot better when you're reading it than when you're living it!

Waiting patiently is hard, especially when the thing you're waiting for matters. Especially when you're scared. Especially when you're tired.

But I've learned that patience isn't about pretending the waiting is easy, it's about trusting that God is still present when the answer hasn't arrived yet.

He's in the waiting room. He's in the sleepless nights. He's in the uncertainty. He's in the extra week you didn't expect to wait. He's in the room with you when an unexpected challenge arises.

He's still working even when we can't see it.

So if you're in a season of waiting right now - and let's be honest, most of us are - know that you're not wasting time.

God hasn't forgotten you. He hasn't stepped away. He hasn't misplaced your file somewhere in a heavenly office.

He's working.

And while you're waiting, give yourself grace.

Take the walk...call the friend...spend time with family, sit with God. And for heavens sake, **FIND MOMENTS OF JOY!**

Remember - patience is easier when you're not trying to carry tomorrow on your shoulders today.

So if anyone figures out how to make a doctor's office call back faster, please let the rest of us know. That information alone could win a Nobel Prize.

As always, thank you for being part of this community. One of the things I've learned over the years is that none of us were meant to walk these journeys alone. Whether you're in a season of

waiting, healing, celebrating, or simply putting one foot in front of the other, know that you're surrounded by people who understand and care.

Blessings,

Mark

June 16, 2026

"If God Has a Plan, Why Cancer?"

Hey friends,

I've been thinking a lot this week about God's plans for our lives. It's one of those topics that sounds simple until life gets complicated.

This verse from Jeremiah 29:11 is beautiful: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

But let's be honest here...

If you've ever sat in a doctor's office and heard the word "cancer," you've probably wondered at some point: "Okay God, if You have plans to prosper me and give me hope, can we talk about this cancer thing for a minute?" I know I did.

Because when we're young, we tend to imagine God's plan looking something like this:

Good health. Happy family. Financial security. Minimal drama (of course, this is prior to social media, now it's a jungle out there - keep your head on a swivel!), and maybe a lake house, preferably with good Wi-Fi (you know...for social media scrolling).

But life rarely unfolds according to our preferred script. People get sick. Relationships get strained. Dreams change. Doors close. And sometimes we find ourselves walking roads we never would have chosen.

The older I get, the more I realize that God's plan isn't necessarily about making our lives comfortable. It's about making our lives meaningful. It's about shaping our character, strengthening our faith, teaching us compassion, and drawing us closer to Him. Would I have chosen cancer fourteen years ago? Absolutely not. Would I have chosen the lessons, relationships, perspective, and deeper dependence on God that came from that journey? Those are gifts I wouldn't want to lose.

Cancer didn't define my story, but God certainly used it to shape it.

Romans 8:28 reminds us: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

Notice it doesn't say that all things are good. Cancer isn't good. Pain isn't good. Fear isn't good. But God is so powerful that He can take even the things we never wanted and weave them into something meaningful. That doesn't always answer the "why", but it reminds us of the "who."

The God who walks beside us.

The God who comforts us.

The God who never wastes our pain.

The God who still has a purpose for our lives.

So if you're struggling with questions this week, you're not alone. God is not intimidated by our questions. He is not offended by our doubts. He's not afraid of your anger towards him - he can handle it. Trust me, I know...I hit him with a lot of it and I still think he digs me. And God is certainly not finished writing your story.

Also, if God's plan for my life included learning patience, I feel like He could have covered that lesson in a much shorter chapter - just saying.

Blessings,

Mark

June 22, 2026

"What Do We Do When We Feel Like Giving Up?"

Hey friends,

The title of this week's email came to me during last Thursday's meeting, and I've been thinking about it ever since. What do we do when we feel like giving up? Not giving up in the big way, I mean giving up being sick.

Giving up having cancer.

Giving up appointments, scans, treatments, side effects, insurance forms, waiting rooms, and all the other things that somehow become part of our lives whether we invited them or not.

Let's face it - sometimes you're just tired. Tired of being poked. Tired of being tested. Tired of hearing the phrase, "We just want to run one more scan." Tired of every procedure that's supposedly designed to help you somehow making you feel worse before you feel better.

Seriously... what is that?

It's like finding a termite in your garage and deciding the best solution is to launch a controlled missile strike at the house. The termite problem is solved, but there may be a few follow-up repairs.

And then there's scanxiety. You all know it. I knew it well. And I feel it for each one of you going through it. The waiting. The wondering. The mental gymnastics. The way your mind can take a tiny concern and turn it into a full-length feature film by 2:00 in the morning. And I'm not talking Rom-Com.

It's. So. Exhausting.

And another thing nobody talks about enough: people don't speak to us the same way during cancer. Before cancer, people ask things like, "How was your vacation?" During cancer, they tilt their head slightly and ask, "How are you doing?", in that annoying "sing song" voice. You know the look. The look that says they care deeply but are also afraid you might break into tears while trying to decide between 47 different flavors of yogurt at Trader Joe's.

Cancer changes things.

I used to tell people that chemotherapy reminded me of a loose diamond sitting in the back corner of an elegant jewelry store. The owners decide to retrieve it using a Backhoe. Sure, they get the diamond, but the damage to the jewelry store is substantial.

Most cancer survivors hear that analogy and immediately nod their heads.

And if we're being completely honest, there's another thing we don't talk about enough. We love our caregivers. We love our helpers. We are grateful beyond words for the people who show up for us. But every now and then we'd like them all to go away. Not because we don't appreciate or love them. Because we want our old life back.

We want normal. We want independence. We want to stop being "the cancer person."

And that's okay, that's normal. There is no guilt required for feeling that way. But here's where my story took a turn I never expected.

Years ago, after a lot of wrestling, questioning, frustration, and conversations with God, I came to a conclusion that surprised me: Cancer was a gift.

Now before you throw your phones across the room, stay with me. I'm not saying cancer itself was good. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. But God used it, and that's different. My cancer became the wake-up call that drew me closer to Him. Not closer to healthy eating. Not closer to exercise. Not closer to annual checkups. Those things were beneficial, sure. But they were the free gift with purchase from the Lancome counter at JC Penney in the 1980s.

The real gift was my relationship with God. That's what changed everything.

Psalm 34:18 says that **“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”**

Cancer pushed me into conversations with God that I probably never would have had otherwise. Real conversations. Honest conversations. The kind where you're not trying to sound spiritual. The kind where you simply show up and tell Him exactly what's on your heart. And somewhere in those conversations, God transformed one of the most terrifying seasons of my life into one of the greatest blessings. Not because the cancer was good. Because God is good.

Today I'm part of this group because of cancer. I've met incredible people because of cancer. I've had the privilege of encouraging others because of cancer. I've witnessed courage, faith, kindness, and resilience because of cancer. How freakin' amazing is that?

What started as one of the darkest chapters of my life became one of the greatest testimonies of God's faithfulness. God did that. A God who has an entire universe to manage somehow took the time to meet me exactly where I was. How humbling is that? I tear up just thinking about it.

So what do we do when we feel like giving up?

Maybe we don't try harder.

Maybe we lean in deeper.

Maybe we stop striving for a moment and start talking with God.

Not formal prayers.

Not fancy words.

Just a conversation.

A heart-to-heart.

Tell Him you're tired.

Tell Him you're frustrated.

Tell Him you're scared.

Tell Him you're angry.

He can handle it.

In fact, He already knows.

So lean in.

Because sometimes what feels like the end of your strength is actually the beginning of His.

Blessings,

Mark

June 30, 2026

“Being Stuck”

Hey friends,

Well...this week's email almost didn't happen. Not because I didn't want to write it. Because I was stuck.

Completely, utterly, staring-at-a-blinking-cursor-like-it-owed-me-money stuck.

I tried everything, Diet Cherry Coke, Licorice, Almond Butter filled Pretzels...another Diet Cherry Coke. Playing bass. Looking in the refrigerator five different times as if paragraph three was somehow hiding behind the leftover Salmon. Nothing.

I've learned there are two kinds of being stuck. The first is when you know exactly what you want to say, but the words refuse to cooperate. The second is when you walk into a room and completely forget why you're there.

I experience the second one about seven times a day.

I blame birthdays. Or cancer. Or maybe Costco. I'm still investigating.

So there I was, frustrated because I couldn't write an email that, hopefully, might encourage someone. Finally, I stopped trying to write, and just started talking with God.

Not a formal prayer, just a conversation - and I told Him exactly how I was feeling.

"I don't know what to write." "I don't know if these emails are helping anyone." "I don't know if I'm making any difference at all." And then something happened. As I sat there talking with Him, I felt a vibration move through my body. I can't explain it. It might have been a mixture of physical and spiritual. I honestly don't know. But I do know what happened next...

The frustration disappeared. The doubts became quieter. And instead of feeling stuck, I felt...held. Not because God suddenly handed me the perfect email. But because He reminded me that it isn't my job to measure whether these words are changing lives.

That's His job.

Scripture says, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."**
Proverbs 3:5-6

It doesn't say, "Figure everything out first" or, "Wait until you're confident." And it definitely doesn't say, "Make sure your email is brilliant before you hit Send." It simply says...trust.

Maybe that's true for all of us.

Cancer has a way of making us feel stuck.

Stuck waiting.

Stuck healing.

Stuck wondering if life will ever feel normal again.

But what if we're not actually stuck?

What if God is doing His deepest work during the seasons when we feel like nothing is happening? Looking back at my own cancer journey, I know that some of the greatest growth in my faith happened when I thought everything had come to a standstill - and that was super cool. God wasn't absent. He was just working quietly. Kind of like Wi-Fi. You can't see it, and you certainly don't always understand it - but when it stops working, everybody notices, and you have to fix it.

So if you're feeling stuck this week, maybe don't spend all your energy trying to get unstuck.

Resetting the black box won't work for this one.

Instead, spend some time talking with God. Really talking.

You might discover, like I did, that He was never waiting for the perfect words, he was simply waiting for your heart.

Blessings,
Mark

July 07, 2026

"It's OK to Be Sad"

Hey friends,

I've been thinking a lot about sadness this week.

Not the kind of sadness you get when your favorite baseball team loses. Or when you buy a carton of ice cream, only to discover someone in your house has apparently mistaken it for a personal challenge and left you exactly one spoonful. Infuriating, by the way...

I'm talking about the deeper kind. The kind cancer brings. The kind that quietly sneaks into the room and sits beside you.

Cancer has a way of making us sad.

Sometimes it's because we're tired. Sometimes it's because another scan is coming.

Sometimes it's because we miss the life we had before all of this. Sometimes it's because we're grieving the things cancer has taken from us - our energy, our independence, our plans, or simply the feeling that life was predictable.

And sometimes...we're just sad. No explanation needed.

I think one of the biggest mistakes we make is believing that because we're Christians, we shouldn't feel that way. But the Bible is filled with people who loved God and still experienced deep sadness.

David wrote about it. Elijah experienced it. Even Jesus wept. Sadness doesn't mean your faith is weak. It means you're human. At least most of us...

Remember this one? **"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." — Psalm 34:18**

I love that verse because it doesn't say God waits for us to pull ourselves together. It says He comes closer when our hearts are breaking.

Think about that for a minute. When we feel like everyone else has moved on, God draws near.

When we feel forgotten, God draws near.

When we're lying awake at two in the morning wondering what tomorrow's scan will show, God draws near.

Looking back at my own cancer journey fourteen years ago, I can honestly tell you there were days when I felt overwhelmed by sadness.

Not because I had given up. Because I was simply carrying more than I thought I could. And here's what I've learned...

When sadness starts whispering that you're alone...lean into God. When sadness tells you there's no hope...lean into God.

When sadness convinces you that tomorrow won't be any better...lean into God.

Not because the sadness disappears overnight. But because His presence reminds us that we don't have to carry it by ourselves. I love to picture it this way.

When I was little, if I fell down or got hurt, I didn't need someone to explain why it happened. I just wanted my mom or dad to pick me up.

We can be sad. There's no shame in that. But we don't pitch a tent there. We stand our ground and let our faith grow stronger. Remember, when you got hurt as a kid, your mom gave you a

hug, made sure nothing was broken...and then lovingly told you to brush yourself off and get back in the game. I have a feeling God smiles and does something very similar with us. He doesn't answer every question. He simply wraps us in His love until we're ready to take the next step.

So if today is one of those sad days, don't feel guilty. Don't feel like you've failed. Just let yourself rest in God's caring hands.

He's not disappointed in you. He's not asking you to be stronger. He's simply asking you to let Him be close.

And one last thing...If someone tells you, "Just think happy thoughts," you have my permission to smile politely while envisioning them being hit in the face with a pie.

Hope is knowing that even when everything isn't okay, God still is.

Blessings,

Mark

July 12, 2026

"Let's Choose Joy"

Hey friends,

My email is coming a day early because I have a challenge for each of you: let's actively choose **Joy** this week!

Let's not sit around and wait for it to magically show up. We're going to choose to search it out and live in it! Because let's be honest... when you're dealing with cancer, joy doesn't exactly come looking for you.

Some mornings, just putting both feet on the floor feels like a victory. The medications can make us feel lousy. The waiting wears us down, our bodies don't always cooperate, and sometimes we wake up feeling like we ate some tuna that was in the fridge that maybe should have been tossed the day before.

So... joy? It can feel a million miles away.

But here's something I've learned: joy isn't always a feeling. Sometimes it's a decision.

Scripture says, **"Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."**
— **Psalm 37:4**

I used to think that meant if I loved God enough, He'd hand me everything on my wish list: a faster metabolism, hair that stayed where I wanted it (and didn't leave the crown of my head), and a remote control with a button that silences political commercials. Apparently, I was wrong. So very, very wrong... but I digress.

The more we delight in God, the more He changes what our hearts long for. We begin to notice blessings we once overlooked and become grateful for the little things: a good conversation, a walk outside, a grandchild's laugh, a sunrise, a text from a friend, or simply feeling a little better than yesterday.

Joy starts showing up because we're looking for it.

That doesn't mean we ignore the hard stuff, because if we're being honest with ourselves, we can't. Cancer is hard. Recovery is hard. Waiting is hard. But joy and hardship can exist in the very same heart. I've seen it over and over again in this group. I've watched people smile while carrying burdens most people couldn't imagine, and I've watched people encourage others while quietly fighting battles of their own.

That's joy. And it's a choice. And honestly, it's beautiful, and we need more of it.

So here's my challenge this week: **Don't wait for joy to find you. Go looking for it!**

Call someone who makes you laugh - and yes, I know you all immediately thought of me. Spend ten minutes outside. Listen to your favorite song. Play with your grandchildren. Pet the dog. Listen to the Table Read Podcast (selfless promotion in effect). Do the thing - or things - that bring you joy. You don't need permission because God wants that for you!!

Before your feet hit the floor each morning, thank God for one thing. Then thank Him for one more before you go to bed.

Joy grows where gratitude is planted. I have a feeling God smiles every time we choose joy over despair - not because life suddenly became easy, but because we trusted Him enough to believe there was still something beautiful to notice.

So this week, make a conscious decision - not to ignore your circumstances or pretend you're never tired - but to choose joy anyway.

Because while cancer may influence how we feel, it doesn't get to decide where we place our hope.

Blessings,
Mark

July 20, 2026

"Disappointment"

Hey friends,

This week's email is about disappointment.

Some disappointments are life-changing. Others involve cereal.

Last week, Pam and I were walking through Sprouts when we wandered into the cereal aisle. As I walked down that aisle, reliving my childhood years, I noticed a box of Sprouts-brand Cocoa Krispies on the shelf. My eyes lit up and a joyful feeling overcame me. I knew I needed to buy them, and because I'm 62 years old, I did. No judgement.

Fast forward to about 9:00 that night. I got out of bed, walked to the kitchen and poured myself a generous bowl, added some ice-cold milk, sat down in my favorite chair, and prepared for what I was certain would be a nostalgic trip back to being nine years old. They even smelled right. That first spoonful hit my mouth, and for a brief moment I thought, "This is going to be amazing." Then I started chewing.

Friends...

It was one of the greatest betrayals in breakfast cereal history. Way worse than Shredded Wheat. And that's when I remembered the words proudly displayed on the box that I had completely ignored while standing in the aisle:

Gluten Free.

Vegan.

Suddenly everything made sense.

The disappointment was immediate.

And profound.

I'm not saying I cried... but I know me...I was not going to throw the box away. I am not wasteful. I knew I had to eat them all.

The funny thing is, we all deal with disappointment every single day.

Sometimes it's as silly as disappointing cereal. Sometimes it's a phone call you didn't want to receive. A scan that didn't go the way you hoped. A treatment that didn't produce the results you prayed for. Plans that suddenly change, or people who let us down.

Life has a way of handing us disappointments in all shapes and sizes. The little ones make us laugh. The big ones can leave us questioning everything.

And here's the hard part; just because we know God is with us doesn't mean disappointment hurts any less.

Faith doesn't erase disappointment. It gives us somewhere to take it.

Scripture reminds us: **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." - Proverbs 3:5-6**

I've realized that disappointment often begins with my own expectations. I expected life to go one way.

God had another path in mind. That doesn't mean His path is always easier.

But looking back over my own cancer journey, I can honestly say His path was better.

Not because cancer was good.

It wasn't.

But because God used one of the greatest challenges of my life to deepen my faith, reshape my priorities, and bring people into my life that I never would have met otherwise - including all of you!

Without my Cancer journey, I never would have chosen that road. Today, I'm incredibly grateful for where it led.

So if you're carrying disappointment this week, remember this:

God is never disappointed in you.

He isn't surprised by your tears.

He isn't asking you to pretend everything is okay.

He's simply asking you to trust Him with the parts of the story you can't yet understand.

Oh... and before anyone starts worrying about my emotional well-being...

Pam rescued me.

The other day she came home with a proper box of **real** Cocoa Krispies.

Gluten-full and proudly non-vegan.

She's the best, and balance has been restored to the universe.

And somehow, I think God smiled.

Blessings,
Mark

July 28, 2026

"Help"

Hey friends,

Let's talk about asking for help. If you're anything like me, that's not always easy.

I've spent most of my life believing I could figure things out on my own. If something was broken, I'd fix it. If there was a problem, I'd solve it. If life got hard... I'd just work harder.

I call it "selective independence." It's why I'll make four trips from the car carrying every grocery bag instead of admitting I should've asked Pam to grab two.

I'll gladly help anyone else, but if I need help? Well... suddenly I'm "fine."

Cancer has a funny way of exposing that kind of thinking. It reminds us that there are some battles we simply weren't designed to fight alone.

Scripture says: **"Two are better than one... If either of them falls, one can help the other up." – Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**

I don't believe that's just talking about having someone nearby. I think it's talking about community.

People who pray for us. People who sit with us during treatment. People who drive us to appointments. People who send the text message at just the right time. People who make us laugh when we'd rather cry. People like you find in this Cancer Care Ministry.

Sometimes the greatest act of faith isn't helping someone else. Sometimes it's allowing someone else to help us.

That can be uncomfortable, because we don't want to feel like a burden. We don't want people to see us struggling. We tell everyone, "I'm okay", even when we're clearly not. But here's something worth remembering:

When we refuse help, we may also be refusing one of the ways God is trying to care for us. He often answers prayers through people.

A phone call.

A meal.

A hug.

A ride to treatment.

A friend who simply sits beside us without trying to fix anything.

Those moments aren't interruptions, they're gifts.

One of the greatest blessings of our Cancer Care Ministry is that no one has to pretend they have it all together. We've all been there. We've all had days when we needed someone else to carry a little of the weight. And one day, we'll get to return the favor.

So here's my challenge this week.

If someone asks how you're doing... be honest. They may not want to hear it, but tell them anyway...hit 'em with both barrels! Hey, they asked...

If someone offers to help... say yes.

If you're feeling overwhelmed... reach out.

Because courage isn't always standing on your own, sometimes courage is allowing someone to stand beside you.

Walking through cancer can feel like walking through fire. The heat is real. The fear is real. And if we convince ourselves we have to face it alone, that fire can seem impossible to survive. God promises His presence in the fire, and He often delivers that promise through the people He places around us. Every hand that reaches out, every meal that's delivered, every prayer that's prayed, every hug that's given - they're all reminders that God is walking with us. Sometimes He simply wears the face of a friend.

Remember, he never intended for us to fight cancer by ourselves. He gave us each other.

And I'm incredibly grateful He did. And I am incredibly grateful for **each and every one of you!**

Blessings,
Mark

August 03, 2026

"Cancer is Inconvenient"

Hey friends,

Let's talk about inconvenience.

More specifically... Cancer is inconvenient.

I know - that's probably the understatement of the century. It's right up there with saying the Grand Canyon is "a pretty decent-sized hole" or that the Titanic "had a rough evening."

Cancer is inconvenient.

It interrupts careers. Vacations. Family dinners. Sleep. Plans. Retirement.

And for some reason, it seems to have a personal vendetta against weekends.

Cancer doesn't check your calendar before showing up. It doesn't care that you already had plans. It doesn't ask if this is a good time. It just barges into your life like that one neighbor who never knocks and somehow always arrives right before dinner.

One day you're making plans for next summer. The next day you're learning words like "port," "PET scan," and "oncologist." Not exactly the vocabulary expansion any of us were hoping for.

And the inconvenience isn't just the appointments. It's the waiting. It's rearranging life around treatment schedules. It's realizing that a simple trip to the grocery store now requires the same level of planning as a family trip to Disneyland. It's exhausting.

And here's the thing... It's okay to admit that.

Sometimes, as Christians, we feel like we have to skip over the frustration and jump straight to, "God is good." And He is. Always.

But I don't think God is offended when we also admit that cancer is incredibly inconvenient.

The Psalms are full of people telling God exactly how hard life was.

God never asked us to pretend. He asked us to trust Him.

Scripture says: **"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." — 1 Peter 5:7**

Notice it doesn't say... "Only bring Me the big things."

It simply says... Bring it all.

The fear.

The frustration.

The disappointment.

The inconvenience.

The Anger.

Because if it matters to us... It matters to Him.

Looking back at my own cancer journey fourteen years ago, I can honestly say that cancer interrupted almost every part of my life.

But here's what surprises me now...

Looking back, I don't remember most of the inconveniences. I remember the people. The conversations. The kindness. The moments God showed up in ways I never expected.

Cancer was incredibly inconvenient.

God's faithfulness was incredibly unforgettable.

So if cancer has inconvenienced your plans this week...

Take a breath.

Tell God exactly how you're feeling.

Laugh whenever you get the chance.

Accept help when it's offered.

And remember...

Cancer may interrupt our schedules...

But it never interrupts God's plans.

Blessings,

Mark

August 11, 2026

"I Am Not Cancer"

Hey friends,

This week let's talk about identity.

Who are you? Seems like a pretty simple question, until cancer enters the picture.

Because something strange happens when you're diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly, you're not just Mark, Pam, Bob, Susan, Dad, Mom, Grandpa, friend, coworker, neighbor...

You become "the one with cancer." People look at you differently. Conversations change. Every phone call starts with, "How are you feeling?"

And don't get me wrong - I appreciated every person who cared enough to ask. But when I had cancer fourteen years ago, I decided pretty early on that cancer was NOT going to become my identity. In fact, I created a rule.

Monday through Friday, you could call me and ask about cancer. Ask about treatment. Ask how I was feeling. Ask about doctors, appointments, tests... whatever you wanted. But if you called me on the weekend, you'd better be inviting us somewhere fun. I didn't have cancer on weekends.

Now, before anyone contacts the medical community to tell them about this revolutionary treatment... Yes, of course I still had cancer.

But cancer had already taken enough from me. I wasn't giving it Saturday and Sunday too. That was my way of taking back a little control and reminding myself that underneath the diagnosis, I was still me.

I did something similar with work. Shortly after my diagnosis, I started working for a new employer. I didn't tell them I had cancer. Not because I was ashamed of it. I simply didn't want to walk through the door and immediately become "the guy with cancer." I wanted them to know me for my work. My experience. My personality. My contributions. And of course, my incredibly charming disposition.

Cancer could wait its turn.

Until I needed time off for surgery, I didn't miss a single day of work, and my productivity didn't change. For me, it couldn't. I needed that part of my life to remain normal. Eventually, of course, I had to tell them. It's difficult to explain major surgery with, "I have a thing Tuesday." But by then, they already knew me. Not my diagnosis. And I think there's something important in that. Cancer may become part of our story. But it doesn't get to become our name.

Scripture says: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." - Isaiah 43:1

I love those words: "I have summoned you by name."

God doesn't call us by our diagnosis. He doesn't look down and see "the cancer patient." He sees you. The person He created. The person He loves. The person you were before the diagnosis and the person you are becoming through everything you've experienced.

You're still a husband or wife. A mom or dad. A grandparent. A friend. A coworker. A musician. An athlete. An artist. A pain in somebody's butt.

Whatever made you you before cancer is still there. Maybe some of it has changed. Maybe cancer has even added some things. More compassion. More patience. More gratitude. A deeper relationship with God. But you are still you. Cancer doesn't get naming rights.

So maybe this week, do something that has absolutely nothing to do with cancer.

Go somewhere. See some friends. Play some music. Have dinner with your family. Laugh until something hurts - and preferably something that wasn't already hurting. Remember the things you loved before cancer entered the room.

And if you're currently walking through treatment, maybe give yourself a cancer-free Saturday. Not medically, obviously. My licensing agreement requires me to make that clear.

Just emotionally.

Give yourself permission to be you for the day, because cancer is something you're going through.

It isn't who you are.

God already settled that question.

He called you by name.

Blessings,

Mark

August 18, 2026

"Yes, Thank You"

Hey friends,

Let's talk gratitude.

And before you think I'm going to tell everyone dealing with cancer to simply "be grateful," please keep reading. I haven't completely lost my mind.

Yet.

A good friend of mine, Michael Hunter, shared something with me a while back that I've tried to incorporate into my everyday life. It's incredibly simple:

"Yes, thank you."

Whatever life puts in front of you... **Yes, thank you.**

Now, admittedly, some things are easier to "yes, thank you" than others.

Beautiful sunset? Yes, thank you. Dinner with people you love? Yes, thank you. Grandchildren climbing into your lap? Yes, thank you. Finding twenty dollars in a jacket you haven't worn in six months?

YES. THANK YOU!

Cancer?

Okay...this may require a little more discussion.

Because I'm certainly not suggesting that anyone should be thankful for cancer. Cancer is frightening. Treatment is difficult. The waiting is exhausting. There are appointments, medications, procedures, side effects and moments when gratitude probably isn't even in the top 50 things you're feeling. And that's okay.

But maybe "yes, thank you" isn't about being grateful for everything that happens to us. Maybe it's about being willing to ask God:

"What can You show me through this?"

Scripture says: **"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18**

Notice the wording. It doesn't say give thanks **FOR** all circumstances. It says give thanks **IN** all circumstances. That's a pretty important distinction.

Looking back at my own cancer journey, there were certainly things I never would have chosen. But today I can also see things that came from that experience that I am profoundly grateful for.

A deeper relationship with God.
A different perspective on life.
More compassion for people who are hurting.
Relationships I never would have had otherwise.
This ministry.
All of you.

None of that makes cancer good. It simply reminds me that God can create good in places where I never thought to look for it. That's where "yes, thank you" becomes powerful. Maybe the scan didn't bring the news you wanted. **Yes, thank you, God. Help me see what comes next.** Maybe treatment is taking longer than expected. **Yes, thank you. Be with me while I walk through it.** Maybe someone shows up with dinner when you'd rather be the person making dinner for everyone else. **Yes, thank you.**

And then eat the lasagna.

Receiving is part of gratitude too. "Yes, thank you" doesn't mean we like everything that's happening. It doesn't mean we stop being scared, frustrated, angry, or tired. It means we're making a conscious choice to leave enough room in those feelings for God to show us something else. Something we might have missed.

A person.
A moment.
A blessing.
A lesson.
Maybe even a reason to laugh.

So here's my challenge for this week: Try **"Yes, Thank You."**

When something wonderful happens, say it. When something inconvenient happens, try it. And when something difficult happens, maybe take a moment before saying anything at all... and ask God to help you find the "thank you." Because gratitude doesn't necessarily change what's in front of us. Sometimes it changes the way we see what's in front of us.

And when we allow God into that space, He has an amazing way of showing us that even on the hardest days, there is still something worth being thankful for.

Yes, Lord. Thank You.

Blessings,

Mark

August 24, 2026

"I'm Over It"

Hey friends,

This week's email topic comes courtesy of two of our Cancer Care Ministry friends, **Tulima Tuanaki and Lauren Saez**.

During a recent conversation, they both expressed essentially the same sentiment about cancer: **"I'm over it!"** And I thought... There's the topic for this week.

Because if you've been dealing with cancer for any length of time, there's a pretty good chance you've had your own "I'm over it" moment. Or week. Or month.

You're over the appointments, the tests, the waiting, the medications. You're over people asking, "How are you feeling?" and trying to decide whether they want the real answer or the polite answer. You're over rearranging your life around something you never invited into it in the first place. You're over being told how strong you are.

Because sometimes you don't want to be strong. Sometimes you'd like to be incredibly weak, slightly irresponsible, eat something you're not supposed to eat, and have somebody else handle everything until Tuesday.

You're just over it.

And you know what? I think that's okay. Being over it doesn't mean you're giving up. There's a difference. Sometimes being "over it" simply means you're tired of carrying something that's really, really heavy.

Scripture says: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." - Matthew 11:28**

I love that Jesus doesn't say, "Come to me once you've gotten your attitude together." That would eliminate a lot of us right away... LOL. He doesn't say, "Come to me when you're feeling positive again." And He certainly doesn't say, "Come back when you've stopped complaining." If He did, I have a feeling attendance would be pretty light.

He says come when you're weary. Come when you're carrying too much. Come when you're over it. There's something incredibly comforting about that. **God doesn't require us to be inspirational every day**. Read that last sentence again - there is a lot in those words.

Some days our faith looks like we're standing tall and saying, "God, I trust You!" Other days it looks more like collapsing into a chair and saying, "God... You're going to have to take this one because I've got nothing."

Both count.

Looking back at my own cancer journey, there were certainly days when I'd had enough. Enough cancer talk. Enough treatment. Enough thinking about what was happening inside my body. Enough having cancer occupy space in my head without paying rent.

I wanted normal. I wanted boring. I wanted a day when cancer wasn't the first subject of conversation. And I don't think there was anything wrong with wanting that.

Cancer may demand our attention, but it doesn't deserve all of it.

There are still people to love. Places to go. Things to laugh about. Sunsets to watch. Music to listen to. Meals to share. God to talk with. And a life that is still happening right now.

So maybe when you reach that "I'm over it" point, don't fight the feeling. Acknowledge it.

Tell God about it. Tell someone you trust. Take a day off emotionally if you can. Do something that has absolutely nothing to do with cancer.

And remember that being tired of the fight doesn't mean you've stopped fighting. Sometimes it simply means you need to put the gloves down for a minute and let God hold them.

So, **Tulima and Lauren**...Thank you. Thank you for saying out loud what I'm guessing quite a few people needed permission to say - **I'm over it**. And if that's where you are this week, you're in very good company.

Be over it. Rest. Laugh. Lean into the people around you. Lean even harder into God.

And tomorrow...we'll see how we feel.

Blessings,

Mark

September 01, 2026

"Thank You Jesus!"

Hey friends,

I've had three words running through my head this week: **Thank You, Jesus!**

And I don't mean the casual "thank you, Jesus" we occasionally mutter when the light turns green, we find our missing phone, or the person with 47 items decides not to get into the express checkout line.

I'm talking about a **THANK YOU, JESUS!**

The kind you might hear shouted from the back row of a Baptist revival. The kind that comes from somewhere deep inside you. The kind where you don't particularly care who's listening because you know what God has brought you through.

Thank You, Jesus!

I've been thinking about how often we pray when we need something. Jesus, help me. Jesus, heal me. Jesus, get me through this. Jesus, please let these results be good. Jesus, give me strength.

And there is absolutely nothing wrong with any of those prayers. God wants us to bring those things to Him. But how often do we come back afterward simply to say...**Thank You?**

Scripture says: **"Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name." - Psalm 100:4**

There's an enthusiasm in that verse that I love. Don't sneak through the gate. Don't quietly slip into the back row. Come in with **thanksgiving**. Come in with **praise**.

There were plenty of times during my cancer journey when my prayers were about what I needed. I needed healing. I needed strength. I needed courage. I needed God to protect my family. And I'm sure there were probably a few prayers that sounded something like, "Jesus, I have absolutely no idea what You're doing here, but I'm going to need some clarification."

But today, looking back fourteen years later, there are so many things for which I can simply say:

Thank You, Jesus.

Thank You for getting me through it.

Thank You for the doctors who cared for me.

Thank You for the people who stood beside me.

Thank You for the lessons I learned.

Thank You for changing the way I see my life.

Thank You for bringing me closer to You.

Thank You for taking something I never wanted and turning it into something that gave me purpose, deepened my faith, and eventually brought me into this room with all of you.

None of that means I'm thankful cancer happened. I'm not. It means I'm thankful that cancer didn't get the final word. Jesus did. And maybe that's something all of us can think about this week.

What is your **"Thank You, Jesus"**?

Maybe you got good scan results. **Thank You, Jesus!**

Maybe you made it through another treatment. **Thank You, Jesus!**

Maybe you finally had an appetite today. **Thank You, Jesus - pizza is delicious!**

Maybe somebody called at exactly the moment you needed to hear their voice. **Thank You, Jesus!**

Maybe you woke up this morning tired, frustrated, hurting and completely over it...but you woke up. **Thank You, Jesus!**

He wants us to be thankful. There's a great story about this in Luke 17:11–19. Jesus heals ten men with leprosy, but only one of them comes back to thank Him. Jesus actually asks, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"

I don't know about you guys, but I do NOT want Jesus wondering where I went. So I'm going to say my thank-yous - loudly, often, and with my whole heart.

Thank You, Jesus!

It doesn't always have to be something enormous. Sometimes gratitude is simply stopping long enough to recognize that God has been present in a thousand little moments when we were too busy worrying about the next thing to notice.

So here's my challenge this week. Find yours. Find one thing every day that makes you stop and say it. And don't just think it. **Say it out loud!!**

In the car. In the shower. On your walk. Sitting in a treatment chair. Standing in the kitchen. And if the Spirit moves you to throw one hand in the air and scare the dog... So be it.

THANK YOU, JESUS!

Not because everything is perfect. Not because every prayer has been answered the way we wanted. Not because the road has been easy. But because through every appointment, every treatment, every disappointment, every victory, every tear and every laugh...

He has been there. And sometimes three words are enough.

Blessings,

Mark

September 8, 2026

“Can We Be Mad at God?”

Hey friends,

I've got a question for you this week.

Can we be mad at God?

Can we be disappointed with His timing? Can we question His plans? Can we look toward heaven every once in a while and say, "Seriously? *THIS* is what we're doing?"

Because I have.

Maybe you were absolutely certain that a new job was yours. It wasn't. Maybe you deserved the promotion. Someone else got it. *Thanks a lot, Terry...*

Maybe you prayed for a relationship to be restored. It wasn't. Maybe you walked into a doctor's office believing with everything inside you that the scan was going to be clear. It wasn't.

Or maybe you've prayed for something much bigger.

Healing.

More time.

A miracle.

And the answer you wanted never came. What do we do with that? Are we allowed to be disappointed in God? Are we allowed to be angry? I believe we are.

When my wife passed away, I was viscerally angry with God for about eight months. Not mildly irritated. Not "I'm struggling with this." I was angry. I didn't understand why she was gone. I didn't understand God's timing. I didn't understand why the prayers weren't answered the way I desperately wanted them to be.

I had questions, and God wasn't providing answers on my preferred timetable - which, by the way, I generally find to be a recurring issue between God and me. Apparently, He remains unwilling to consult my calendar.

But here's what's interesting: **I was angry WITH God.** I wasn't walking away from Him. I was talking to Him.

Sometimes those conversations weren't particularly pretty. Sometimes they weren't especially reverent. Sometimes I'm sure they sounded more like an argument than a prayer. But I kept talking. And He kept listening.

There's a lot of this in Scripture:

David asks: **"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" - Psalm 13:1**

That's not a man pretending everything is fine. That's frustration. That's pain. That's someone who loves God enough to tell Him the truth. And I think that's important.

God already knows we're angry. He already knows we're disappointed. He knows the question we're afraid to ask. So who exactly are we fooling when we pretend we're fine? Certainly not Him.

Faith doesn't require us to understand everything God does. And I don't believe faith requires us to **like** everything God allows. Sometimes faith is simply staying in the conversation.

"God, I'm angry." Stay in the conversation.

"God, I don't understand this." Stay in the conversation.

"God, this isn't what I prayed for." Stay in the conversation.

"God, I thought You were going to do something different."

Stay in the conversation.

Because anger isn't the opposite of faith. Indifference might be. Anger says this matters to me. Disappointment says I hoped for something different. Grief says I loved something deeply. And faith says, **"God, I don't understand You right now, but I'm still here."** It took me a long time to get through that anger. And there wasn't one magical morning when I woke up, heard angels singing, and announced, "Okay, God, we're good!" It happened slowly. The anger softened. The questions became quieter.

Eventually I began to understand something: I didn't need an answer to every **why** in order to continue trusting **Who**. I still don't understand everything, and it's likely that I never will. None of us will on this side of heaven. Loss happens to us all in many forms, some losses are soul crushing. But I've learned that God is big enough for my anger. He's big enough for my disappointment. He's big enough for my questions. And thankfully, He's patient enough to wait while I work through them.

So if you're angry with God today... Tell Him.

If you're disappointed... Tell Him.

If you think His timing absolutely sucks... Maybe choose your own vocabulary, but **tell Him**.

Don't run from Him because you're angry. Run **TO** Him with it. **HE ALREADY KNOWS!!!**

I believe He would much rather hear our angry, confused, completely honest prayer than hear nothing from us at all.

Sometimes the most honest prayer we can offer is simply: **"God, I don't understand. I'm angry. But I'm still here."**

After all, that's faith.

Blessings,
Mark

September 14th, 2026

What if I don't feel strong?

Hey friends,

Let me holler at you about strength this week.

If you've dealt with cancer for more than about fifteen minutes, chances are someone has told you:

"You're so strong." And it's usually said with love. But have you ever smiled, thanked them, and thought... *"You have absolutely no idea."*

Because some days we don't feel strong. Some days we're tired. Some days we're scared. Some days we're angry. Some days getting out of bed, taking a shower, getting dressed, and making it to an appointment feels like we've already completed a full day's work - and it's 9:15 in the morning.

Strong?

During my cancer journey there were days I would have settled for upright and reasonably coherent. But I made a conscious decision that I was going to keep moving. I worked through treatment. I tried to keep life as normal as possible. I didn't want cancer defining who I was. People saw strength in that. At times my choices felt almost defiant, like I was refusing to play the role cancer had suddenly assigned me.

Good. I wanted that defiance. Was it stubborn? Probably. But it made me feel like I was still in charge of something more than what I was gonna eat for lunch.

But what they didn't always see were the days I cried. The fear. The exhaustion. The moments when I wondered how much more I had in me.

And I've come to understand something: **Strength doesn't mean never feeling weak.** In fact, Scripture tells us something almost completely opposite. Paul writes about asking God to remove something that was causing him tremendous difficulty.

God's response was: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** - 2 Corinthians 12:9

Read that again.

"My power is made perfect in weakness."

God doesn't say, "Come back when you're stronger." He doesn't say, "Pull yourself together." He doesn't say, "Could you at least try to look a little more inspirational? People are watching."

He meets us in our weakness.

I think sometimes we put enormous pressure on ourselves to be strong for everyone else.

For our spouse.

For our kids.

For our friends.

For the people at work.

We don't want them worrying about us, so we put on the brave face and tell everyone we're doing great.

Sometimes we are. Sometimes we're absolutely full of it.

And God knows the difference.

Maybe real strength isn't pretending we're okay. Maybe strength is being able to say: **"I'm not okay today."** Maybe it's asking someone for help. Maybe it's crying. Maybe it's admitting you're scared. Maybe it's sitting quietly with God and saying, "I don't have much today. You're going to have to carry me."

And maybe that's exactly where He wants to meet us.

There's a reason God never asks us to prove how tough we are before He steps in. His strength isn't the reward we get for successfully using up all of ours.

It's available when ours is gone.

So if you don't feel particularly strong this week, that's okay.

You don't have to be the warrior today.

You don't have to inspire anybody.

You don't have to put on the brave face.

You just have to show up.

Let the people who love you help.

Let yourself rest.

And most importantly, let God be strong when you can't be. Because maybe the strongest prayer we can offer some days isn't: **"God, I've got this."**

Maybe it's: **"God, I don't. But I know You've got me."**

And that, my friends, is more than enough.

This week's song choice is **"Strong Enough" by Matthew West**. If you are definitely not feeling it this week, lean into these lyrics: *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength"*.

September 21st, 2026

Celebrate

Friends,

Let's face it - we simply don't celebrate enough.

And I'm not talking about birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, promotions, or finally finding something in the refrigerator that hasn't expired.

I'm talking about us.

We spend so much time focusing on what's wrong, what hurts, what we're waiting for, what the next scan might show, what treatment is doing to us, or what life has thrown in our direction that sometimes we forget to stop and recognize something pretty important:

We're still here.

And that is worth celebrating.

If you're going through treatment, celebrate your strength. Not because you feel strong every day - we talked about that last week - but because you keep showing up.

Celebrate the appointment you got through. Celebrate the treatment you finished. Celebrate the day you actually felt pretty good. Celebrate the person who sat beside you. Celebrate the prayer that got you through a night when your mind wouldn't shut off.

And celebrate your faith.

Philippians 4:4 says: **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"**

Paul doesn't say, "Rejoice because everything is going perfectly." Thank God, because that would eliminate most of us immediately. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord." There's a difference.

We can celebrate God's goodness even when life doesn't feel particularly good. We can celebrate His presence while we're still waiting for an answer. We can celebrate the strength He gives us while admitting that some days we don't feel very strong at all.

And maybe we need to get better at celebrating the small victories, too.

Cancer has a way of moving the goalposts. We start waiting for the big celebration - the end of treatment, the clear scan, remission, the moment somebody finally tells us, "Everything looks good."

Those moments absolutely deserve a celebration.

But so does Tuesday.

Because sometimes just getting through Tuesday is a pretty impressive accomplishment.

So this week, find something to celebrate.

Your faith. Your strength. Your family. Your friends. Your doctors and nurses. The person who keeps showing up. The prayer that was answered - and maybe even the strength God is giving you while you're still waiting for the one that hasn't been.

Celebrate how far you've come. Celebrate that you're still standing.

And maybe, every once in a while, stop looking so far down the road that you miss the victories God has already placed right in front of you.

And hey - let's ALL celebrate that the fall semester of the Calvary Cancer Ministry starts again this Thursday night at 6:30 in room 2104!

Please, please, please join us. If you haven't taken that step and joined us in the room yet, now is the time. If you're wondering whether this ministry is really for you - it is. If you're wondering whether you'll be welcomed, supported, wrapped in love, and covered in prayer - you will be.

This room is for **YOU**. Come exactly as you are. We're here, we're ready, and we're looking forward to seeing **YOU** on Thursday night.

This week's musical selection is a rocker...I heard this song last week and it let me know EXACTLY what this week's email topic was going to be. The band is Rare Earth. The song is "I Just Want to Celebrate".

Now, when the chorus comes on, I want you all to sing out loud, "I just want to celebrate another day of livin', I just want to celebrate another day of life"...because God blesses us **every single day**. And that alone is worth celebrating.

September 28th, 2026

It Was Always Part of the Journey - Calvary Cancer Ministry

When we were kids, I doubt any of us imagined cancer would become part of our story.

We imagined growing up, falling in love, getting married, having children, building careers, traveling, and enjoying life. Maybe becoming rich and famous. Personally, I'm still waiting on a couple of those.

But cancer? I don't remember putting that on my list.

Yet there I was.

I've come to believe that my cancer journey began long before I was diagnosed. In fact, I believe it began before I ever took shape in my mother's womb.

God knew me then. He knew every step I would take, every person I would meet, every joy I would experience, and every heartbreak I would endure. He knew that cancer would eventually become part of my story.

I certainly didn't.

For the first 48 years of my life, cancer wasn't something I worried about. I was busy living, working, raising a family, and doing all the things we do when we assume tomorrow will look reasonably similar to today.

And then cancer arrived.

No warning. No gentle introduction. No polite little note from God saying, "Hey, Mark, you might want to sit down. We've got a few things coming up."

Nothing.

One day, life was moving along as expected. The next, I was having conversations about treatments, surgery, survival, and things I had never imagined I'd have to consider.

And sometimes, even all these years later, I wonder why.

Do you?

Have you ever sat there and thought, "God, You knew this was coming. You knew what I was going to go through. Couldn't You have given me a little heads-up? Maybe softened the landing just a bit?"

Or perhaps you've asked the bigger question.

What exactly is God's plan?!?!

Now, I realize that's a pretty ambitious question. It's not like God is going to open His playbook, hand me a copy, and say, "Okay, Mark, here's how the next 20 years are going to unfold. Pay particular attention to chapter seven. That one's going to get exciting!"

Although, I'll admit, I'd love to sneak a peek.

But that's not how faith works.

Jeremiah 1:5 says: **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."**

Read that first part again... "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."

God knew us before we knew anything. Before our first breath, our first heartbreak, our first great joy, and certainly before our first encounter with cancer.

Now read the second part again... "...before you were born I set you apart."

In this verse, God was speaking specifically to Jeremiah about the purpose He had for his life. "Set apart" didn't mean Jeremiah was promised an easy road - in fact, his road would be anything but easy - telling people things they didn't want to hear was probably not too popular. It meant that before Jeremiah ever understood who he was or where his life would take him, God already knew him and knew how He would use his life.

And while I believe He knew what was ahead of me, I don't pretend to understand why He allowed all of it to happen.

There are still questions I can't answer. There are experiences I wouldn't wish on anyone. There are moments I would never choose to live through again.

But here's what I can tell you.

Everything I went through brought me here.

Every worry. Every tear. Every painful experience. Every moment I questioned whether I had enough strength to keep going.

All of it became part of the road that eventually led me to this ministry and to all of you.

And I wouldn't trade the relationships I've found here for anything.

Now, would I have preferred to get here by winning the lottery and opening a beachfront retreat where we could all hang out? Absolutely. I'm not an idiot.

But that wasn't my road.

And when I look back at my life, I can see blessings I never would have recognized while I was in the middle of the struggle. I see how my experiences have helped me understand someone else's fear. How my own pain has made it easier to sit beside someone who's hurting. How the things I once wished had never happened have given me opportunities to offer comfort, encouragement, and love.

I don't believe cancer was the blessing. I believe what God has done with my experiences **is**.

And that's an important distinction.

Romans 8:28 reminds us: **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."**

It doesn't say all things are good. It says God works in all things for good.

I don't need to call every painful experience a gift to recognize the gifts God has brought out of it.

Maybe that's what I'd like us to think about this week.

We may never know why cancer became part of our journey. We may never understand why some roads are so much harder than others. And we certainly don't have to pretend we're grateful for every painful moment.

But perhaps we can look at where those roads have brought us.

The people we've met. The relationships we've built. The compassion we've developed. The faith we've discovered or rediscovered.

And maybe, just maybe, we can recognize that God was walking beside us long before we even knew we needed Him.

I can't tell you what the rest of my journey will look like. And I'm pretty sure God isn't going to email me the itinerary. I do keep asking for clues...

But I do know that the road behind me has brought me to some extraordinary people.

You are among my greatest blessings.

And for that, I thank God.

Here's your weekly reminder that this coming **Thursday night, October 1st**, is our second Fall Cancer Ministry meeting!

Oncologist Dr. Anand will be joining us for a conversation about **"The Body and Cancer."** It should be an informative and meaningful evening, with plenty of opportunity to learn and ask questions.

Please join us at 6:30 p.m. We'd love to have you in the room with us!

Blessings,

Mark

October 5th, 2026

Doctor's Orders: More Joy - Calvary Cancer Ministry

Well, apparently I was right.

I just wanted to get that out there because it doesn't happen nearly as often as I would like.

Those of you who joined us Thursday night heard Dr. Sid Anand talk about many important topics. One that really stood out to me was the importance of reducing cortisol - the hormone our bodies produce in response to stress. And let's face it, if there were ever an environment perfectly designed to produce stress, cancer would be somewhere near the top of the list.

Diagnosis. Treatment. Scans. Waiting for results. Insurance companies.

Actually, forget cancer. Just dealing with the insurance company should produce enough cortisol to power a small city.

But then Dr. Anand talked about something that really caught my attention:

Joy.

Finding joy can help counter some of the stress we're carrying.

Wait a minute...haven't we talked about this before?

Apparently, all this time I haven't just been sending you emails. **I've been practicing medicine!**

You're welcome.

And here's what I love about it. Thousands of years before anyone knew what cortisol was, Proverbs 17:22 told us: **"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."**

Good medicine.

Think about those words.

God created these incredible bodies of ours, so maybe it shouldn't surprise us that something good for our spirit can also be good for our body. But I want to be very clear about something.

Joy is not pretending.

It's not putting on a smile when you're scared. It's not denying that treatment can be miserable. It's not telling someone who's hurting to "cheer up." And it certainly isn't another thing cancer patients should feel guilty about because they're somehow not being joyful enough.

Sometimes you're going to have a lousy day.

Have the lousy day. **But maybe don't give it the next one, too.**

That's where I think joy becomes something we can actually practice. Find the thing that makes you laugh. Spend time with the person who makes everything feel a little lighter.

Go outside.

Play with your dog.

Listen to music.

Watch something completely ridiculous.

And then there was my personal favorite piece of medical advice from Dr. Anand:

Eat chocolate.

Okay, technically he recommended chocolate with at least **70% cacao**, but I'm choosing not to get bogged down in the details. A doctor told me to eat chocolate, and that's the part I'm taking with me. Seventy percent cacao. Got it. I don't know what we're supposed to do with the other 30%, but I'm assuming that's where the joy comes in. And think about the combination here: find more joy, reduce some of the stress we're carrying, AND eat dark chocolate?

Finally, a treatment plan we can all get behind!

Now, before anyone shows up this Thursday with a Costco-sized bag of Hershey's Kisses and says, "Mark told me this was medically necessary," please remember the **70% cacao** part. Apparently, details matter in medicine.

But underneath the humor is something I really loved about Dr. Anand's message...

Taking care of ourselves isn't only about the big things. Sometimes it's the small choices we make every day - the people we surround ourselves with, the things that make us smile, the moments when we allow ourselves to step away from the worry and simply enjoy being alive.

Cancer asks a lot from us. It doesn't get to have all of us.

And maybe that's the part I want us to remember this week. Joy doesn't have to be some huge, life-changing event. We don't need a vacation, a celebration, or even particularly good news.

Joy can be a conversation with someone you love.

A beautiful morning.

A stupid joke.

A favorite song.

A prayer.

Five minutes when cancer isn't the first thing on your mind.

Or apparently, a square of really dark chocolate.

So this week, I'm giving all of us an assignment:

Find something that brings you joy.

Don't just wait for it to happen. Look for it. Make room for it. And when you find it, allow yourself to enjoy it without guilt. Cancer will still be there when you're done. The appointment will still be on the calendar. The scan will still happen. The questions will still need answers.

But for that moment, **choose joy.**

Because now we have Scripture telling us that a cheerful heart is good medicine, and we have the good doctor reminding us that reducing stress matters to our bodies.

So I'm calling it - **Joy is officially part of the treatment plan! Oh, and he said exercise is too, so get to it. After all, you're gonna need to work off the chocolate!!**

Find some joy this week. And find some chocolate.

Doctor's orders.

And here's your weekly reminder that we will meet this Thursday evening at 6:30 p.m. at Calvary. This week's topic will be **"Strategies for Mental Health During & After Cancer"** with Clinical Psychologist Rick Blackmon. One of the things Rick likes to say is, *"Own but don't Enthrone"*. Another important meeting you won't want to miss.

Last week we talked about Jeremiah the prophet. This week we're talking about joy. So really, there was only one possible song choice.

"Joy To The World", by Three Dog Night. Yeah, I know the prophet Jeremiah was not a bullfrog, but come on - sometimes God just tees these things up for me!

October 19th, 2026

Sure We Pray, But... - Calvary Cancer Ministry

When was the last time you spent time with God and didn't ask Him for anything?

No requests. No favors. No asking Him to fix something, change something, heal something, or make something happen. Just you and God.

Quietly.

Think about that for a minute.

We pray for so many things, and we should. God invites us to bring our worries, fears, hopes, and needs to Him. And goodness knows, those of us whose lives have been touched by cancer have had plenty to bring to Him.

But I wonder sometimes if our conversations with God aren't a little one-sided. "Good morning, Lord. I've got a few things I need You to take care of today. Nothing major. Just seventeen urgent requests, three miracles, and if You could do something about traffic on the 101, that would be terrific."

Amen - and off we go.

But what if, every once in a while, we didn't bring a list?

What if we just showed up?

I think about the people I love most. Sometimes we talk for hours. Sometimes we sit together without saying much of anything. And neither one feels like wasted time. Because being together is enough. What if we approached our relationship with God that way, too?

Psalm 46:10 tells us: **"Be still, and know that I am God."**

I love those words. Not "Be still and give Me your list." Not "Be still and explain everything you need fixed." Just be still.

We don't always have to fill the silence. We can simply recognize that He is God, and we are in His presence.

And that brings me to something I practice regularly.

Meditation.

Yep. I meditate. *And I pray.*

And before anyone starts wondering whether I've traded my Bible for a yoga mat and a subscription to incense-of-the-month, hear me out.

Meditation isn't foreign to Scripture. Psalm 1:2 speaks of the person who delights in God's law and meditates on it day and night. Joshua 1:8 encourages meditation on God's Word. Biblical meditation often involves reflecting on Scripture, God's character, and His works.

What I practice is a little different in form, but for me, it's another way to quiet the noise and intentionally spend time with God.

One of my favorite practices is something called **heart-mind meditation**.

It's wonderfully simple.

I sit quietly, close my eyes, and begin to focus on my breathing. But instead of imagining each breath filling my lungs, I imagine it filling my heart. With every slow breath, I picture my heart expanding a little more. Making room for peace. For gratitude. For love. For God's presence. And as I breathe out, I imagine releasing some of the worry, tension, and noise I've been carrying.

Now, don't worry. My lungs are still doing their job. I'm not suggesting anyone attempt to breathe through their heart. I'm pretty sure Dr. Anand would have a few things to say about that.

It's simply a way of directing my attention away from everything demanding it and toward something that matters far more.

And here's one more little twist...**do it with a smile on your face**. No matter how you're feeling or how much stress you're carrying, try smiling as you meditate. Even if you don't particularly feel like smiling,

give it a shot. You might be surprised how something so simple can lift your spirits and help you feel a little lighter. Sometimes a smile isn't just a reflection of joy - it's a way of inviting a little joy in.

And here's the part I love most about my meditations: **I'm not asking God for anything.**

I'm not looking for an answer. I'm not presenting a problem. I'm not negotiating an outcome.

I'm just sitting with Him, and sometimes that's enough. My time in meditation brings me peace and joy. I encourage you to give it a try. You might just discover a little of both for yourself.

We spend so much of our lives doing. Fixing. Planning. Solving. Worrying. Even our prayers can become another thing we're trying to accomplish, and get right. **But what if our relationship with God doesn't always need an agenda?**

What if sometimes He simply delights in our company, the way a loving father delights in spending time with his children? Not everything meaningful arrives with a big announcement. Sometimes the most important moments are the quiet ones. We do this with our spouses and our kids, and grandchildren...why can't we do it with God?

For those of us who have experienced cancer, whether as patients, survivors, or caregivers, I think this matters.

There are times when we don't have the words. Times when we're exhausted, overwhelmed, or simply tired of explaining how we feel. And I don't believe God requires us to find the perfect words before we can spend time with Him.

Sometimes we can simply be still.

So here's my invitation this week. Find five minutes, ten if you can spare them. Put the phone down. Turn off the television. Find somewhere comfortable and quiet. I prefer doing this in the morning, in the backyard, listening to the birds and feeling the cool morning air. Close your eyes if you'd like, and breathe gently.

Imagine each breath filling your heart with God's love and peace. As you exhale, allow yourself to release a little of whatever you've been carrying. If your mind wanders, that's okay. Mine does, too. Sometimes I start out spending time with God and somehow end up mentally going over the development of a new podcast series we are working on.

Just bring your attention back.

You don't have to hear a voice. You don't have to experience anything extraordinary. And you certainly don't have to get it perfect.

You don't even have to ask for anything. Just spend a few moments acknowledging that God is there.

Because prayer is a beautiful gift, and we should never stop praying. But maybe we can also learn to appreciate the moments when we don't need to say a word.

Maybe the most meaningful time we spend with God isn't always when we have something to say.

Sometimes it's when we have nothing to say at all. And sometimes, simply showing up is the prayer.

This Thursday evening, we'll be welcoming **Emma Veilleux, an Oncology Nutritionist**, to our Cancer Ministry meeting! She'll be sharing valuable insights into the important role nutrition plays in cancer care and overall well-being. It promises to be an informative evening, and we'd love to have you join us - 6:30 p.m. in room 2104 at the church.

One of my favorite parts of writing these emails each week is finding a song that speaks to me, connects with our topic, and hopefully gives all of us a little escape from whatever we're carrying - even if it's only for a few minutes. Music has a wonderful way of reaching places that words sometimes can't...

The song I've chosen for this week is **"Be Still" by The Fray**. Originally written for the lead singers little brother, I think it's a beautiful song that also helps echo the message of Psalm 46:10, reminding us to quiet our hearts, set aside the noise, and simply be still in God's presence.