

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Dedication | v |
| The Pilgrimage | 1 |
| TRANSFORMING MY DARKNESS INTO HIS LIGHT..... | 3 |
| 1. All Things Become New | 4 |
| 2. Light Up Your World | 6 |
| 3. Love My Enemies?..... | 8 |
| 4. Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star | 12 |
| 5. Hold On! | 14 |
| 6. Sparkles for Your Day | 16 |
| HE LOVES ME..... | 19 |
| 7. You're the Apple of My Eye | 20 |
| 8. He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not | 22 |
| 9. My Heart Is How Big? | 24 |
| 10. What a Sky | 28 |
| 11. I Am Wonderfully Made | 30 |
| 12. A Warm Smile from God's Love | 32 |
| 13. Sing! | 34 |
| HIS PROMISES ARE FOR ME FOREVER | 37 |
| 14. Take Me Out to the Ballgame..... | 38 |
| 15. When It Rains, It Pours and Pours and Pours..... | 40 |
| 16. Let Go, Let God..... | 43 |
| 17. Powerful! Alive! | 46 |
| I WILL FEAR NOT, BUT TRUST | 47 |
| 18. I Am | 50 |
| 19. It's Cool | 54 |
| 20. Save Me, Lord! | 56 |
| 21. Trouble Lurking About | 60 |
| 22. I'm Gonna Getcha..... | 62 |

*To all those who are seeking
hope, meaning, and encouragement
on their own pilgrimage with cancer.*

Table of Contents

PUTTING HIS GLADNESS IN MY HEART.....65

23. It's So Unfair! 66

24. If Only 68

25. Putting Gladness in My Heart 70

26. Flowers are Smiles from God..... 72

DAILY VICTORY GOD'S WAY.....75

27. Need a Little Sunshine? 76

28. Beeing a Busy Bee 78

29. This Way? Or That Way? 80

30. Thou Shalt Be a Stickler 82

31. May All Your Wishes Come True 84

32. Feeling Weary?..... 86

LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN HIS STRENGTH..... 89

33. He's Got the Whole World in His Hands 90

34. Good Night Sleep Tight 92

35. Looking Good 94

36. Come and See..... 96

37. Just Hanging Around..... 98

38. Yum! 100

TRUE FRIENDS ARE FOREVER.....103

39. Feeling Alone?..... 104

40. Heaven Is Watching Over You..... 106

41. Friends Share the Joy and Divide the Sorrow 108

42. I'm Here for You! 110

KEEP FAITH ALIVE.....113

43. The Power of Prayer in Times of Uncertainty 114

44. Treasures of the Snow 118

45. What Did I Forget to Remember? 120

46. Liberty 122

47. Keep the Faith 124

Table of Contents

HUGS & HOPE FOR THE HOLY HOLIDAYS.....127

48. May Christmas Hug Your Heart 128

49. The Power of the Resurrection 130

50. Tale of Three Trees..... 132

A TIME TO GIVE THANKS & FOCUS ON A NEW YEAR.....135

51. It's Thanksgiving 136

52. It's a New Year 140

Epilogue..... 143

Acknowledgments 145

Scripture Notes 146

My Reflections 149

Excerpts follow from
It's Cancer: A 52-Week Devotional
 Available at
ReflectingLightMinistry.com

6

SPARKLES FOR YOUR DAY

Glimmering with God's Sparkles of Abundant Blessings

*Our light and momentary troubles
are achieving for us an eternal glory
that far outweighs them all.*

~ 2 Corinthians 4:17

Can cancer be a blessing? I did not believe so when in 1998 I was diagnosed with breast cancer—my third journey with cancer, having been treated twice for lymphoma in the early seventies. Coming at a dark and challenging time when my husband had lost his job and we were making plans to move to Oxford, Ohio, we struggled with trying to make sense out of what appeared nonsensical. What we could not understand at the time is that God was using my experiences with cancer to work out a divine plan for us to be a blessing and receive sparkles of blessings in return.

Like a diamond hidden in rock, undergoing centuries of pressure to form its sparkling beauty, I felt I was being squeezed and molded during that dark time. My husband and I wrestled with accepting the diagnosis and making decisions about treatments. During the uncertain time of tests and surgeries and the long arduous period of chemotherapy, God began the painful process of cutting and chipping the rough diamond that He saw in me to reveal hidden sparkles that would shine out blessings to others.

While searching for answers, I started journaling. The journaling led to writing devotional thoughts that led to developing

inspirational cards. I shared these cards with other patients at the oncology clinic where I received my treatments, and sparkles of blessings began to brighten my journey.

On one occasion, I met with a lady who had just been diagnosed with an advanced stage of cancer. She was alone waiting in the exam room. At first she was reserved and assured me she was doing alright. I shared with her a bit then handed her a packet of cards. She laid them down on the exam table, then turned around and grabbed me in a bear hug, sobbing. We hugged and cried together. A big sparkle was added to my diamond.

A few weeks later, the nurse at the clinic told me this patient had passed away. "Her family was so touched by your kindness, they wanted you to have this," handing me an envelope with a donation and thank you. Another sparkle added.

Is cancer a blessing? If I had my choice, I would rather receive blessings through less painful and difficult ways. But that was not God's supreme plan. He saw a diamond that needed to be refined and used cancer as His tool.

Sparkles are emerging from this rough diamond, but the chipping process continues. Without going through three journeys with cancer and now living with chronic illnesses as a result of chemotherapy, I would not be able to relate encouragement to others with illness. So I keep shining out blessings where I can and look for sparkles of blessings to return to me.

As you read this, you are giving my ministry another sparkle! God bless you.

Do you feel like you are being squeezed, chipped, and chiseled during your illness? It may be hard, but it's okay. Let God, the Master jeweler, refine and polish you into His special sparkling creation. And in the process, look for glimmering sparkles of blessings to brighten your journey!

We can "*be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer,*"¹ because "*our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*"²

I AM WONDERFULLY MADE

Confident in God's Faithful Care

The next time you admire all the wonderful things God has made . . . remember you are the best of them!

Did you know . . .

- Human bone is as strong as granite in supporting weight. A block of bone the size of a matchbox can support nine tons.
- The focusing muscles of the eyes move around 100,000 times a day. To give your leg muscles the same workout, you would need to walk 50 miles every day.
- You use 200 muscles to take one step.
- Nerve impulses to and from the brain travel as fast as 170 mph. Operating on the same amount of power as a 10-watt light bulb, the human brain can hold 5 times as much information as the Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Every day the average person loses 60–100 strands of hair. (Unless, you are taking chemotherapy!)
- The human heart creates enough pressure to squirt blood 30 feet. The body is estimated to have 60,000 miles of blood vessels.
- The lungs contain over 300,000 million capillaries. If they were laid end to end, they would stretch 1,500 miles.
- Scientists have counted over 500 different liver functions.
- Your nose can remember 50,000 different scents.

- Coughs clock in at about 60 mph. Sneezes regularly exceed 100 mph. God bless you!
- Of the estimated 10–50 trillion cells in the body, 300 million cells die in the human body every minute. Every day an adult body produces 300 billion new cells.
- About 32 million bacteria call every inch of your skin home. (Eww!) A majority of these are entirely harmless and some are even helpful in maintaining a healthy body.

Did you know when you awake with the discomforts of cancer, God knows them all and is ready to help you? Or when you awake feeling better and have a good day, God is smiling with you?¹ He is thinking about you all day. He knows every hair on your head,² every muscle you use, every dying cell and every new cell, every heart beat,³ and every breath.⁴

Did you know when parts of His wonderfully complex creation do not function as He designed, God is working on your behalf to bring about good for a purpose?⁵ When we question why, God says to trust Him.⁶ *“My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.”*⁷

You are God's special creation. He cares very deeply about you and what you are facing with cancer. *“If God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you?”*⁸

So the next time you sneeze, let it be an encouraging reminder that God is watching over you. God bless you!



Dear God,

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake in the morning, you are still with me! In Jesus' name I pray, amen.



He promises me _____

LET GO, LET GOD

Believing in God's Uplifting Promises

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

~ Proverbs 3:5

Tucked snugly into a soft, secure nest, weak vulnerable baby birds begin their lives totally trusting in the care of their parents. As the young birds grow and their wings gain strength, some bird parents will begin taking out the soft cushion lining of the nest to force the young birds closer to the edge. Encouraged to begin actively exercising their wings, the young birds are soon nudged over the side of the nest by their parent. They are forced to let go of their source of comfort and security, dramatically challenging their level of trust. Finding themselves suddenly falling, the young birds quickly rise to a new level of confidence as they learn to use their resources—the strength of their wings and an air current lifting them up.

Just as the young birds trusted in the comfort and security of their nest and in the daily care of their parents, we go through our lives trusting (often without thought) in the things that give us comfort and security: faith, family, homes, jobs, health. We find our level of confidence, like the young birds, dramatically challenged when the diagnosis of cancer forces us to let go of these

things. We must learn to rise to a new level of dependent trust, believing in the strength of the Lord and His uplifting promises—a solid source of comfort and security.

Have faith in the Lord as you go through the journey with cancer. He promises,

Be strong and courageous, . . . for it is the Lord your God who goes with you.¹

Lean on the Lord as you make decisions about treatments. He promises,

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.²

Rely on the Lord through the challenges of eating properly while you are ill. Jesus promises,

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" . . . For . . . your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³

Depend on the Lord when you are concerned about the welfare of your family. He promises,

I will set my eyes on them for good.⁴

Rest in the Lord when your sleep is disturbed.

He promises,

If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.⁵

Confidently trust in the Lord for the future of your journey.

He promises,

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.⁶



Dear God,

Cancer has taken the soft cushion out of my nest and forced me to let go of some of the things that gave me comfort and security every day. It has been hard. Help me to rise to a new level of trust, to be able to let go and let You, God, take me through this journey day by day. I trust in Your promises.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

My favorite promise from God is _____

20

SAVE ME, LORD!

The Power of Faith in Times of Trouble

Don't be afraid. . . . Take courage, I am here.

~ Matthew 14:27

“*H*elp! Save me!” Edward yelled to Joe, frantically splashing his arms around attempting to keep his head above water. My husband, Joe, instantly grabbed his fishing net which had a long rope attached and flung it toward Edward. Just as he was about to go under the water, Edward caught hold of the rope; coughing and shivering, he was pulled to safety.

Edward was one of our boys in a group home where we worked and lived as teaching parents. Joe had taken the boys fishing at the local river and given them strict instructions to stay away from the steep bank. Edward, however, did not stay focused on Joe's safety instructions and wandered to the river bank. When he found himself in trouble, Edward cried out to his *life saver*, Joe.

When the disciple Peter found himself in trouble, he cried out to his *Life Saver*, Jesus. Peter and the other disciples were in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee late one night when strong winds whipped up large waves crashing around their boat.

Jesus saw that they were in trouble and came to them, “*walking on the [stormy] water.*”¹ When he recognized that it was Jesus, “*Peter called to him, ‘Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you*

I Will Fear Not, but Trust

by walking on water.’ ‘All right, come,’ Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. ‘Save me, Lord!’ he shouted. Instantly, Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed him.”²

With trusting faith, Peter focused on Jesus' instruction to “come”; then he got out of the boat and walked toward Jesus. But when he took his eyes off Jesus and saw the stormy conditions around him, Peter's faith faltered, and he began to sink. As soon as he refocused his faith on Jesus, his *Life Saver*, and cried out, Peter was lifted up to safety and returned to the boat.

The Bible does not tell us how they got back into the boat, only that they did. I like to think that Jesus held on to Peter's hand, and they walked back together on the water to the boat.

Do you feel overwhelmed by the diagnosis of cancer, like you are sinking in the midst of waves crashing around you? Jesus' instruction to you is, “Come.” Have faith in your Life Saver, Jesus. He will lift you up above the stormy waves so you can walk on water. When the waves start to overwhelm you and you feel your faith faltering as you begin to sink, refocus on Jesus. Shout as Peter did, “Save me, Lord!” Tell him what you are afraid of on the next pages. Jesus will reach out and grab you; He will hold on to you as you walk together over the stormy waves to the completion of your journey with cancer.



Dear Jesus,

There have been many sinking days since cancer came into my life. Tests, surgery, needles, pain, and sickness come in waves crashing around me while waves of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and anger threaten to drown me. I need You to grab hold of me and lift me up. I want to walk on these stormy waters with You, so I'm shouting, **SAVE ME, LORD!**

In Your name I pray, amen.

45

WHAT DID I FORGET to REMEMBER?

Reassuring Relief in the Palms of God's Hands

I will not forget you!

~ Isaiah 49:15

It's chemo brain again, I sighed to myself. I smiled a friendly greeting and tried to remember who the lady was that had called my name in the aisle at WalMart.

"It's so good to see you. How are you doing?" she asked.

Who is she? Where do I know her from? What is her name?

"I want to thank you again for all the cards you gave me while I was in chemo. They really helped me get through the rough times," she said as she continued to recall some of her experiences during chemotherapy. *Aha! I know her from the oncology clinic. But what is her name?*

"You probably don't remember me. My name is Gwen."

"Oh yes, of course I remember," I replied with relief as glimmers of remembrance tickled my brain. "I didn't recognize you at first. You have hair now!" We both laughed and exchanged well wishes for continued good health before going our separate ways.

Although my last chemotherapy treatment was in April of 1999, chemo brain has become a convenient excuse when I cannot remember something. I find I am using it more frequently these days. *What did I come downstairs for? What was on my shopping list*

Keep Faith Alive

that I forgot to pick up when I left home? What was the name of that special treat we like at Christmas?

Determined to help out my chemo brain, I tried carrying a note pad around the house and in my purse. The note pad ended up being forgotten at the last place I laid it down.

I guess I should resort to using my father's method of remembering—the palms of his hands. He never carried a note pad but always had a good pen ready to whip out of his pocket and jot down on his open palm someone's name, a phone number, or measurements. His information remained safe and secure in his hand until he got to his desk to write it down on paper.

We can joke about our forgetfulness, but it is no joke when we wonder if God has forgotten us. That was how I felt during some of the rough times of my chemotherapy treatments. *Has God forgotten me? Do you feel that way, too, sometimes during your illness? God has a reassuring message for us:*

I will not forget you!

See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

~ Isaiah 49:15–16¹

Be encouraged. God does not have chemo brain, nor does He need note pads. He has never forgotten you and never will. He will faithfully keep you safe and secure in the palms of His hands when you trust in His Son Jesus Christ.



Dear God,

Thank You that You have preserved in Your Word this Scripture just for me just for today. When I look at my hands, help me to remember that You care for me so much You engraved me in the palms of Your hands. What an encouragement!

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

*"You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my
god turns my darkness into light."*

~ Psalm 18:28 NIV

Linda Kovarik understands living with cancer. In 1998, she embarked on her third journey with the illness. During this time, she and her husband, Joe, prayed for God to give them His love and strength and to help them find meaning in all that appeared to be nonsensical. Linda began keeping a journal about her personal experiences with God while reflecting on His word daily.

Through these encounters, God planted a seed in Linda's heart to share His love, hope, and comfort with other pilgrims of cancer. First written and produced as cards of hope and encouragement, 52 of her most insightful and personal messages are compiled into this 52-week devotional.

The message in these devotionals is that on your personal pilgrimage with cancer, there may be discouragement, but there is also hope; weariness, but also strength; fear, but also peace; anger, but also love; sadness, but also joy; loneliness, but also friendship; darkness, but also abundant light available to you.

"Only God knows how many lives have been touched by Linda's cards! They go with me everywhere I go. Without fail, God puts people in my path who need encouragement, or know someone who does because of cancer or some other serious illness. I don't know who is more blessed, the people receiving the cards, or me!" ~ Julie Perry

"Linda's devotionals have brightened many a day. I will be passing your name on to others that need encouragement and knowledge that God is with us as we battle cancer. I Praise God for you and your efforts!" ~ Jan Watsell, Cancer Pilgrim



Joe & Linda Kovarik were actively involved in church ministry together for over 20 years. For over four years they worked in group homes for severely disturbed youth and for three years in the administration of foster care.


*Reflecting
Light*
Encouragement Ministry

