

shared the story of the emotional devastation his 17-year-old son experienced after surgery for cancer. “The day following the operation, the surgeon came into the recovery room and, in the presence of the patient, told the father that he should expect the death of his son in a matter of days, perhaps a week at most.

“The father was shocked not just by the catastrophic news but by the fact that the surgeon had no hesitation in delivering the verdict in the presence of the patient.

“I followed the surgeon out of the room, . . . and, as a fellow physician, berated him for his reprehensible conduct. He seemed surprised by my anger and defended himself by saying that doctors had to be honest and that patients should not be deceived. He missed the point. He should have consulted with me first and we could have decided on what ought to be done or said under the circumstances.

“I came back to the room and told my son that I had just chewed out the surgeon and that I had known too many patients who made surprising comebacks to justify the kind of verdict the surgeon delivered. I told my son to disregard what the surgeon said and that we would work together in proving him wrong. My son believed me. He sailed through the first week after the surgery and has been in remission ever since. That was four years ago and my son is living a normal life in every way.”<sup>6</sup>

When the human spirit is rallied, not by fairy tale unreality, but by a determination to pursue life, the human body is energized to fight for health. Norman Cousins’ challenge is: Don’t deny the diagnosis, just defy the verdict. In other words, face your mortality and your state of health honestly, but don’t stop there in despair. Uncertainty and anxiety magnify pain and slow the healing process. Our thoughts actually impact the effectiveness of our built-in chemotherapy.

Defy the verdict with an attitude of hope. Know that you possess mechanisms for warding off disease and combating it. The most complex and powerful apothecary is built right into the human system.

## DREAM BIG

Too often we trust a medical system and if it cannot help us we become despondent. We say our case is “hopeless.” But our case is never hopeless!

Repair, regeneration and recovery are some of the greatest healing forces on earth. But to truly hope in them requires an understanding that they have a Source. When you see, for example, regeneration or recovery at work you can know that God’s power is being revealed. Too often God is blamed for death, disease or destruction. But Scripture gives another perspective. “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundant.”<sup>7</sup> The enemy of our soul will seek to discourage and divert us away from God by bringing disaster. But there is hope in the Life-giver. When hope is placed in Him amazing things happen.

This kind of trust, this kind of hope is the most powerful weapon we have. A

strong will to live, a determination to get the best out of whatever is possible, and trust in God are some of the best ways of activating our own immune system.

While the act of hoping is powerful and positive thinking physiologically impacts our health status, there must be something or someone to hope in. Placing our hope in a particular medicine, doctor, experience or protocol doesn’t always work. We have been disappointed so many times. And it is disappointment that has destroyed our confidence in hope.

Depression, so rampant in our society, is associated with diminished immune cell activity, accelerated tumor spread and with significantly poorer DNA repair in immune cells exposed to radiation.<sup>8</sup> Depression is the physiologic symptom of our hopelessness. Anxiety is bred here as well. While anxiety has varying levels and degrees, it is defined as nervousness or agitation often about something that is going to happen, a subject or concern that causes worry, a state of intense apprehension or fear of real or imagined danger. Add to that definition doubt and unbelief.

Most, if not all, of our actions are motivated by either hope or hopelessness. Every hour of our life we live somewhere between the two. If we discard hope as an untrustworthy emotion, or limit our hope to things that are immediately tangible, we will never get out of life all there is. To wish for something with expectation of its fulfillment, to look forward to something with confidence or expectation, to desire and dream, is not foolish when we have such a mighty God. To hope in God and the promises He has made casts all other hopes in a brighter light.

The Bible says, “Hope removed makes the heart sick, but when the desire is restored, it is a tree of life.”<sup>9</sup> Living without hope will only result in sickness and disease, of mind and body. But when desire is restored, it is life-giving. The restoration of hope can be found in prayer. There we connect with the Author and Source of hope.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cousins, Norman. *Head First*, p. 46. New York: Penguin Group, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Felitti, M.D., Vincent J. *The Relation Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Health: Turning Gold into Lead*, The Permanente Journal/Winter 2002/Volume 6 No. 1., p. 45. Initial article appeared in: May 1998, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, v 14: 245-258.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Colbert, Don. *Deadly Emotions*, p. 150. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Cousins, Norman. *Head First*, p. 49-50. New York: Penguin Group, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>8</sup> Cousins, Norman. *Head First*, p. 85. New York: Penguin Group, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 13:12 (personal paraphrase).

<sup>10</sup> Romans 15:13, NIV.



# HOPE

## A Tree of Life



# HOPE A Tree of Life

It is part of the cure  
to wish to be cured.—Seneca

The diagnosis was devastating: lung cancer. Shortly after being diagnosed, Martha developed severe pains. While medications partially relieved the symptoms, they also caused her to suffer from various side effects. Then, after other oncologists carefully reexamined the original x-rays, it was discovered that the diagnosis had been mistaken. She did not have cancer of the lung after all! Martha's pains began receding immediately, and finally disappeared, as she was gradually taken off the medications. "The woman rejoiced over her liberation from the disease but was profoundly angered by having had to sustain four months of anguish and apprehension over the original diagnosis, to say nothing of the pain, which was none the less severe for being largely caused by her anxieties."<sup>1</sup>

## ADVERSE EMOTIONS

Are we familiar with pains that are "none-the-less severe" for being caused by our anxieties? Anxiety stems from the trunk of our thoughts and feelings and science is proving that these thoughts and feelings transform and alter our biology in a very real way. A close sympathy exists between the mind and body. How you feel emotionally can determine how you feel physically.

Researchers have directly and scientifically linked our emotional psyche to hypertension, cardiovascular disease and diseases related to the immune system. Studies have also highly correlated emotions with infections, allergies and autoimmune diseases.

Take for example, The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. It began when researchers discovered the complexity of emotional factors with obese patients experiencing lack of success in their weight loss program. Interestingly, while the patients expressed a desire to lose weight and had surges of success, they also had one foot on the brakes. It was found that the negative emotional factors stemmed from childhood trauma. The researchers resolved to further study how negative childhood experiences could determine current health status decades later.

Current adult health status of participants of the ACE study was compared with eight categories of frequent adverse childhood experiences that had been identified in the weight program. Three categories pertained to personal abuse:

1. physical
2. emotional
3. sexual

Five categories dealt with growing up in a dysfunctional household:

4. the presence in the home of an alcohol or drug addict
5. a family member in prison
6. the presence in the home of a mentally ill, chronically depressed, or suicidal member
7. violence in the home
8. separation, divorce or loss of parents

Being exposed to none of the categories measured a 0 on the ACE score.

An individual exposed to any 4, had an ACE score of 4. The average age of study participant was 57 years old. Adverse childhood experiences were found to be more common than had been previously recognized or acknowledged. Vincent J. Felitti, M.D. wrote, "Of equal importance was our observation that they had a powerful correlation to adult health a half-century later."<sup>2</sup>

Smoking was found to have a high degree of association with what had happened decades earlier in childhood. The higher the ACE score, the greater the likelihood of current smoking. Smoking in turn increases disease risk such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which was 390% more likely to occur when an ACE score of 4 was present than a score of 0. An individual with an ACE score greater than 4 was 460% more likely to be depressed than a person with ACE score of 0. A male child with an ACE score of 6 was found to have a 4600% increase in the likelihood of later using intravenous drugs. Relationships were found between ACE scores and heart disease, diabetes, obesity, alcoholism and even job performance.

While there are thousands of people who long to be free of their addictions, or hope to prevent the major causes of death, there is often more to the picture than physical causes such as virus, bacteria, cholesterol or nicotine. With the remnants of emotional stress hidden in the shadows of our mind, we need more than medicine or lifestyle change. As the study author asked, "Are certain common, chronic, adult diseases the result of attempts at self-treatment of concealed problems that occurred in childhood?"<sup>3</sup>

Where the mind goes, the health of the body will sooner or later follow. As author Don Colbert, M.D. put it: "If your mind is full of anxiety, fear, anger, depression, and guilt it chronically stimulates the stress response which opens the door for disease to enter the body. I believe that many diseases, such as autoimmune disease and cancer, are directly related to deadly emotions. It's like deadly emotions are flipping a self-destruct switch in your body."<sup>4</sup>

## LIFE ENHANCERS

Typically we are aware that negative emotions and stress impact our health in damaging ways. But what if we flip the coin? Just how powerful are the thought processes of joy, anticipation, humor, forgiveness or healing of past 'wounded-ness'?

Norman Cousins, after retiring as editor of the Saturday Review, worked with the UCLA medical school to develop a program focused on investigating the way emotions register in the body. Part of his quest was to

see how purpose, determination, love, hope, faith, will to live and festivity could affect biology; what is the role of attitudes in combating serious illness; and can the human brain bring about changes for the better in the way human beings confront illness?

One facet of Cousins' work at UCLA was to personally encourage and work with patients who were diagnosed with serious life-threatening disease. One morning he received a phone call.

"I need your help. . . . My sister intends to get married. They're about to send out the wedding invitations. It's weird. What are they going to do? Send out invitations to the same list a few months later for funeral services? My sister has cancer. There's not much hope. She's not being realistic. Maybe if you speak to her it might make a difference. I know she's . . . read some of your books. You can really help us.

'Does your sister know she has advanced cancer?'

'Yes.'

'Does her fiancé know she has advanced cancer?'

'Yes.'

'And they still want to get married?'

'Yes.'

"I said I would be glad to telephone her sister, which I did. But I didn't deliver the requested message. Instead, I congratulated the sister and told her how inspired I was by her decision to get on with her life and to reach out for the best. I said I had the utmost admiration for her and her fiancé and wished them both well. The couple proceeded with their wedding plans.

"The wedding took place as scheduled. The woman went into remission. Once or twice a year I would telephone the woman to inquire about her health. After ten years she is still in complete remission. Her physician says it is difficult to convince him that her decision to move ahead resolutely didn't have something to do with the retreat of the cancer."<sup>5</sup>

How could this happen? It is because living with hope affects our physiology. Hope, purpose and determination are not merely mental states. They have electrochemical connections that play a large part in the workings of the immune system. Life enhancing emotions are powerful biochemical prescriptions.

## REASSURANCE

Illness can be a terrifying experience. Something is happening that people either don't know how to deal with or feel incapable of controlling. They are reaching out for hope.

Insurance companies will tell physicians not to offer hope unless there is clear evidence to back it up. Presenting the best-case scenario is seen as a liability. They believe that in this kind of situation, being legally correct overrides the expression of compassion. Blunt frankness, making sure the patient is aware of the worst case, is considered the best approach. But sometimes telling patients the worst can bring on the worst.

Words can be emotionally devastating, or they can be life-saving. A father