

Heather's Testimony

Most people can divide their lives into a series of "Before and Afters" indicating a radical change in the circumstances of their life. For example, life before kids and life after kids. Life before a family member has died and life after their death. Life before marriage and life after marriage. Many Christians divide their life like this, life before making a decision to follow Christ and life after becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. This is the story of my life, Before and After.

In 1998 I was 24 years old. I had already graduated with my BA and was completing a diploma course in college. I was actively involved in my Church. I was living at home with my family and I had big dreams for the future. That was before.

In June 1998 I was diagnosed with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia. What does a young woman with hopes and dreams know about cancer? I had never even thought about it. It was never a part of my life plan and certainly not a part of dreams.

In my first journal entry after I was diagnosed I wrote about my dreams for the future. "How do I live one day at a time and still dream for the future? True, no one knows what tomorrow brings but grieving the loss of what might have been is all a part of the process. I'm grieving the loss of a normal life. My life is different now than it was before I was diagnosed. I am the same person, but my thoughts and hopes and fears are different now."

When I was first diagnosed I spent a lot of time questioning the greater purpose of my life with cancer. As I sat waiting at the hospital for my treatments I couldn't help but look around and wonder about the lives of the others waiting for their treatments. I was often the youngest in the room and I would look around and mumble to God "It's not fair! These men and women have had more opportunity to live out their dreams, they've had more time. Why me? It's not fair!"

Then I made the most important decision regarding my life and my understanding of fairness. In my journal I wrote, "*Life isn't about fairness. And so I can choose anger or joy... tears or laughter...*" Later I wrote "*I trust in God's plan for my life. I don't always understand it but it is my responsibility to continually live in obedience to Christ. We don't always choose our circumstances but we do have a choice when it comes to our attitude. I'm choosing joy.*"

When I look at my life I know that my "After" is inseparably connected with my "Before". Before I had cancer I knew with certainty three things about God; the first thing I knew was that God absolutely loved me. **"How great is the love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"**
1John 3:1

The second was that I knew is that God had a plan for my life. **"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." Jeremiah 29:11

And thirdly, I knew that God is faithful to keep his promises. **"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Phillipians 1:6**

When I was diagnosed with cancer, it was only the circumstances of my life that changed. The foundation of my life had been built on God's truth and these truths will by far out last the days of my life.

Every story of "Before and After" hinges on the present, on Today. For me this includes the living of my dreams. God has orchestrated a life for me far better than I could ever have imagined. My body still has leukemia but my heart belongs to God. I still dream. And I still make plans, but I know that it is God who holds my life in his hands. He is the Author of my life story, my "Before and Afters".