

God

Cancer once was a foreign word I barely understood. Years before I was diagnosed with cancer, my Uncle Scott died from lung cancer, and my beloved piano teacher Mrs. Becker died from a type of cancer I can't remember. I never imagined that I would fall into the same world they were once in. chemotherapy, radiation, surgery. Never in a million years.

As the daughter of an Episcopal Priest and a Catholic Religious Educator and Director of Liturgy, I obviously grew up in a very religious household. I was taught to love God and Jesus and to love my neighbors even more. I always believed I was kind, thoughtful, and caring towards others. Sure I made mistakes, but I only wanted the best for everyone. I attended church every Sunday with either my Mom or Dad and sat in my Dad's classes while doing homework for five years. I traveled to Israel and experienced the trip of a lifetime. I volunteered, stood up for what I believed in, and helped in every way I could in my community. So why me? Why did I get cancer?

I was diagnosed with an extremely rare form of liver cancer called Fibrolamellar Hepatocellular Carcinoma in the Fall of 2017 when I was 15 years old. My story is long, complicated, and heartbreaking. My original tumor was 15 pounds, and it nearly killed me four times. It put me to sleep for over a month. After four months of chemotherapy, I was in remission for eight months. But then it came back. Not only did it come back, but the radiologist missed my tumor a few months before we learned it had returned. As a result, I've lost trust with most of my medical team, despite knowing that they are just as human as I am. I had surgery again, and this time the tumor was the size of a baseball. I underwent chemotherapy for another three months and started radiation for the first time for five weeks. I flew to New York City, and during our stay, we found more cancer in my left lung. So I decided to have surgery to remove it

in New York City. I have had over twenty surgeries just in the last two years. One scar spanning almost a foot long horizontally across my abdomen. I have suffered so much, and not once did I feel the presence of God I was promised.

After I woke up from my month-long slumber, I was in tremendous pain. I had two drainage tubes sown to my abdomen, a chest tube to prevent extra body fluids from drowning my lungs, and a tube in my nose that fed me. I was forced to relearn how to walk, sit up, eat, use the bathroom, and perform basic tasks. I lost everything. At night as I would lay in bed unable to move I would scream and cry out to God, "Why God? Why me? Why didn't you just let me die!?" Not once did I feel like God was there for me. Recovering from that surgery was the hardest thing I have ever done. God didn't save me. I did.

Over the last year, I found myself involved in the chronic illness community online. I made friends with people from all over the world with all types of chronic illnesses. Teens from South Africa, England, New Zealand, and all over the country too. But I noticed something most of them share in common that I can't relate to. A strong belief in God, despite their state of health. They often describe "experiences" or "encounters" they had with God bringing them peace and comfort in times of need. So, where is mine? You would think that with my religious upbringing, I of all people would encounter such an experience. Why did I have to fight cancer by myself? Sometimes I question if my internet friends are crazy, or if God just hates me.

Despite the harshness of my situation, I am still alive, and I don't understand why. In addition to losing Uncle Scott and Mrs. Becker to cancer, I have lost many more friends and loved ones during my battle these past two years. Nothing hurts more than watching someone else die from the same disease you survived. If God is real, why did God save me but not my friends? Does God love me more than them? Or did God let me live as a punishment? Although I

survived the worst of my cancer, my pain lives on through emotional trauma, PTSD, major depression, anxiety, and physical ailments due to post-cancer treatment. I continue to live, but I live in Hell. A Hell where God refuses to let me die but also refuses to let me live. God does not love. A God that loves would do anything for his so-called "Children of God". Unlike God, a loving mother or father would protect, love, and do anything to save their child from demise. God is incapable of love. I was never taught to believe in Satan or a place like Hell, where terrible people go to after they perish. However, I have started to wonder if God is a satan. A satan that prevents me from completing what I must achieve. A satan that stops me and so many others from living.

I have lost all faith in God, and it truly disheartens me. The loneliness, isolation, and feelings of abandonment that come with a faith crisis are sometimes unbearable. I was taught that God would always be there for me. If that was the case, then WHERE ARE YOU GOD? Over the past two years, I have come to terms that God is a vast entity of energy that sits quietly aside selfishly. Is the human condition of pain, doubt, fear, and suffering some sick game God plays when he is bored? Or does God sit idly and watch his creations scream out in agony as they wither away for his entertainment? Whether God inflicts pain on purpose, looks away, or stands idly is unacceptable. God must be held accountable. But one question remains, how does one punish God?