

THE PARALLEL TRACKS OF GOOD AND BAD

The late Ron Dunn, a preacher whom I highly esteem, coined a truism I frequently lean upon: Good and bad run along parallel tracks and often arrive about the same time.

Though some had warned us, nothing could have prepared us for our first visit to the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. From children to the aged, the outward devastation of pernicious disease on frail human bodies overloaded our senses.

They are courageous souls in hand-to-hand combat with a vicious enemy of seemingly inexhaustible tenacity. But they press on. To cover the almost-inevitable baldness that cancer treatment wreaks, many select colorful head scarves or stylish wigs as banners for their individual battles.

Calling cancer a bad thing is a gross and trivial understatement. But even amid their roiling seas of trouble, good persists in bobbing to the surface as cancer patients openly discuss both defeats and victories.

Without a hint of bitterness, Mr. Boudreaux relates the loss of a leg and other traumatic setbacks with this emphasis: "I wear a cross on my hard hat at work to remind others that faith in God is more important than what's happening to my body."

Linda, who is nearing the end of her chemotherapy, questions Mary. The Linda asks, "So why aren't you crying?" Mary responds, "I've read the end of The Book and know it will eventually work out well."

Another shares that because her cancer has returned, she must endure a second onslaught of debilitating chemotherapy. "They tell me that I only have a 20 percent chance of survival, but I intend to be one in that 20."

When a third person confides that she is now a seven-year survivor, I ask how she's done it. "Because of my positive attitude--and faith in God."

Liezle, our Filipino nurse, cheerfully describes her baby daughter, Ester. Is she familiar with the great heritage of her namesake, Queen Ester of the Bible? She isn't, so I recount how Ester was providentially elevated to royalty at just the precise moment to rescue the nation of Israel from annihilation. Face aglow, Liezle promises to rush home that evening and read the thrilling account for herself.

Maggie Johnson, a dear young friend, mailed Mary a pair of stuffed animals: a wooly sheep with her baby lamb tucked safely between her strong front legs. "They will remind you that you are God's little lamb, and that He's holding you close to Himself."

Though Mary's sister, Betty, visits her for a week each fall, that's never enough time to fulfill all their plans. Now they're getting to be together for a solid five weeks.

More than ever before, Mary embraces each day as a gift from God to be enjoyed and purposes to make the most of it. And just as we learned that we would be traveling to Houston, our son and his girlfriend announced their engagement--good and bad arriving at the same time.

Given a choice, we would not to be on this particular track, the one that lingers far too long in the land of pain and suffering. But occasionally we catch a glimpse of that parallel track, the one we'd all choose if afforded the chance, and anticipate that adequate measures of its cargo of good will arrive when we need it the most.