

# My Savior Gazing Back at Me

By Dr. Steve Benson

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; you are mine.” Isaiah 43:1

**O**ur two children played upstairs while I sat on the couch exhausted. The seven-month emotional rollercoaster of facing cancer had taken its toll.

“I can’t go on. It’s too much,” I told my wife with my hands over my face. “I don’t know. I don’t know. . .” My chemo brain wouldn’t let me get the words out. “I’m. . . I’m . . .”

Through the tears, I looked up.

Krista, my wife, gazed into my eyes, “Honey, you are feeling powerless.” She said the word I didn’t want to utter—powerlessness.



## Cancer Treatment

The doctors discovered a four-inch cancerous mass that had metastasized into many lymph nodes in the left rectum wall. I had a 50/50 chance of it staying local or spreading to other organs. If the cancer spread, I would be terminal.

I received twenty-five radiation treatments in five weeks. I also had eight rounds of intravenous chemotherapy. This entailed six hours of treatment along with a chemotherapy bag that dripped medicine into my veins for forty-six hours. I experienced extreme constipation and pain followed by chills, muscle spasms, weight loss (44 pounds), and fatigue. The pain was great, the exhaustion was greater. I was depleted emotionally, spiritually, physically, and psychologically. Powerless!

**In either direction, powerlessness conquers our faith. It sabotages grace. Fear makes us cower in unbelief rather than shelter in an all-powerful God. Fear made my faith go sideways!**

## Fear Makes My Faith Go Sideways.

Powerlessness is defined (though more complex) as a state of being trapped, threatened, or weakened by something greater than oneself. The circumstance, person, or inner turmoil endangers the soul’s safety towards hopelessness.

Over the years, I struggled through experiences of powerlessness in my life. As I matured, I finally thought my struggle was defeated. Then cancer became a reality. I found myself wrestling with it on a deeper level.

When we feel powerless, our self-protection displays itself in two mentalities: the victim guy or the tough guy (or girl).

As the victim guy, I believe that everyone is against me. I say, “Woe is me. Nobody wants me.” I blame everyone else for my issues. I stop taking responsibility for myself. I become critical and cynical of others (and myself) which leads to depression. As a result, my life has no meaning except survival. My victim mentality devours faith and sabotages hope.

As the tough guy, I am fixated on overcoming the issues alone. I say, “I don’t need you. I’m on my own.” I become stubborn and contemptuous if anyone stands in my way. And if I make it through, my character develops into independent arrogance. I find knowledge in only myself. My self-absorption devours love and sabotages hope.

In either direction, powerlessness conquers our faith. It sabotages grace. Fear makes us cower in unbelief rather than shelter in an all-powerful God. Fear made my faith go sideways!

## Facing My Greatest Fear

Each treatment ravished my body. When I got to the last one, my body was physically done. My oncologist encouraged me to finish the process of chemotherapy. But it was my choice.

As I waited for my blood work results, I wrestled with God about my decision. “Do I truly believe that **You** are in control? Do I completely believe that **You** placed these people in my story to provide me with this care? Am I willing to suffer again and become more powerless?”

My blood work came back well to proceed with my last chemotherapy dosage. The nurse asked, “Do you want your last treatment?”

My thoughts raced to my children, my wife, and the gaze she had given me just a few days earlier. “Now is the time to trust,” my heart whispered. Then I said, “Let’s do it.” I chose more suffering and powerlessness.



## Suffering Leads to Maturity.

Suffering is not only the way to redemption but also the way to a life of maturity. Jesus says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) To deny oneself, one must learn humility, obedience, and surrender.

**Humility** means I have an awareness greater than myself. I don’t lean on my understanding, competency, or desires. I love, think, and care with the realization that others are more important than me. I continue to love even if my care involves personal suffering,

**Obedience** means listening to an authority greater than myself. I am disciplined and follow feedback even when I disagree. I trust other’s wisdom even if their instructions hurt me in the moment.

**Surrender** means releasing my desired outcome for something greater than myself. I am willing to give up my wants, wills, and wishes for a greater purpose. I have a perspective that does not focus on the temporary but the eternal. I find the reward of blessings even if they do not come in the now.

**Suffering is not only the way to redemption but also the way to a life of maturity.**

**Jesus stared down our greatest fear— death— through suffering. It was the only way to win the war. The gospel proclaims victory. The gospel calls me by name— beloved! The gospel redeems fear into faith.**

## The Gaze of the Savior

As of December 2023, I am in remission and cancer-free. Suffering leads to redemption. Jesus stared down our greatest fear – death - through suffering. It was the only way to win the war. The gospel proclaims victory. The gospel calls me by name - beloved! The gospel redeems my fear into faith. Because of grace, my Savior joyfully gazes at me.

When I live in humility, obedience, and surrender, I enter a greater narrative of God’s design. God is sovereign—He is powerful and in control of my life’s situation. Life is not about me. It is about loving everyone beyond me— an eternal perspective. Suffering redeemed me from fear. Pain is God’s instrument of grace to grow me into who I need to become.

Powerlessness is not my enemy (though I still struggle) but a friend that leads me to intimacy. Although still crooked at times, my faith is no longer sideways. Grace keeps it straight.

Krista looked into my eyes. She saw my soul and then I saw me. She helped me deal with my biggest enemy. My wife is a conduit of grace. Now, when I look into her eyes, I see my Savior gazing back at me.†

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