

Faith, Family, and the Power of Cancer: Teresa's Story of Hope and Healing

After a breast cancer diagnosis turned her life upside down, Teresa found strength in her faith, her family—and a story she felt called to share with the world.



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“When we face challenging times, we have an opportunity to strengthen our faith and allow God to use our circumstances to help others and grow us. We need to leverage our pain for the greater good. I am sharing what I have gone through to provide hope and encouragement to those experiencing difficulties. There is purpose in your pain.”

— Teresa Howard in *The Power of Cancer*

A Diagnosis in the Midst of Chaos

When Teresa was diagnosed with breast cancer, her world was already full. She was serving as the director of a Christian preschool ministry at her church and overseeing daily operations and the children's education. All of this was during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time that forced schools—including hers—to pivot to remote learning. Balancing this with her own care became a challenge of strength and endurance.

She had always been proactive about her health, undergoing mammograms every six months due to a previous identified risk. But one appointment revealed something unexpected—a tumor in an area that hadn't raised concern before. Further testing uncovered a second, even larger tumor. Her diagnosis: triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive form that doesn't respond to hormone therapy and is typically treated with chemotherapy and radiation.

What followed was a whirlwind. Biopsies. Diagnostic mammograms. Steroid and antibiotic treatments. A lung complication led to two bronchoscopies and ultimately surgery. “It was a lot. I lost count after 111 tests and procedures,” Teresa says, “but I never doubted my own survival – I knew God would bring me through it.”

From the beginning, her response wasn't fear—it was faith. “So, this is how You've chosen to use me,” she remembers thinking after hearing the diagnosis. “Okay, show me the way.”

Surrounded by Love and Sustained by Faith

Through it all, Teresa was never alone. Her immediate family, friends, church community, and school rallied to support her in ways that were both practical and profoundly emotional. A meal train ran for nearly a month. Her daughter coordinated uplifting texts from loved ones the night before her surgery. Her son played worship songs on the guitar to lift her spirits. Her sister brought her favorite Godiva chocolate, and her church friend Laurie—herself a breast cancer survivor—offered wisdom and understanding.



Throughout her journey, Teresa's family and friends found meaningful ways to show their love and support—like when her husband added pink lights to their traditional Christmas decorations.

Her support system extended into her medical care. Though she began her treatment journey elsewhere, Teresa now receives care at Hematology Oncology of



Teresa (center in pink) with M. Sarfraz Nawaz, MD, to her left, wearing the pink ribbon, and from left, her son Timothy and his wife, Mary, her husband, Pete, and their daughter, Sarah, at a signing and presentation of her book, *The Power of Cancer*.

Indiana under the guidance of M. Sarfraz Nawaz, MD. She describes her experience there as nothing short of a blessing.

“The minute I walked through the doors, I felt seen,” she says. “The women at the front desk were kind and empathetic. I wasn’t just a number — I was a person. Dr. Nawaz took time with me every visit. I never felt rushed. One day, he even paused our conversation and said, ‘Why do I feel like I’m being interviewed?’ When he found out I was writing a book, he was thrilled. He wanted to support me.”

In addition to her cancer diagnosis, Teresa was also diagnosed with pulmonary sarcoidosis, a rare inflammatory disease that led to lung surgery and intense post-op pain. The chemo brought its own challenges, including a severe allergic reaction that required a social worker to sit with her during treatment. Through each trial, she leaned heavily on her spiritual foundation—quoting scripture, praying with her family, and trusting in a plan bigger than her own.

Her husband, a longtime children’s ministry leader, was her rock. But even he carried unseen burdens. “He hadn’t read my book at first,” Teresa shares. “He told me it was

because he didn’t want to take control of my story—and because he wasn’t ready to relive that year.” Later, her son said, “I didn’t realize how much you went through until I read it.”

A Calling to Help Others

Teresa’s story didn’t end with recovery—it grew into a mission. She felt compelled to share what she had endured and learned, not just for herself but for others navigating similar paths. That calling became her memoir, *The Power of Cancer: A Journey of Hope and Faith*.

Her book doesn’t dwell on cancer’s capacity to destroy, but rather on its unexpected power to transform. Through all her medical appointments, biopsies, surgeries, treatments, and the grief of losing a beloved family member—her stepfather—Teresa saw the hand of God guiding her. “God was showing up and showing off,” she writes. “I loved it when He did that.”

Teresa now uses her story to speak to others facing cancer, especially those who feel overwhelmed or alone. Her message is simple and profound: You don’t have to do this on your own. We gain our strength from God and from those around us. She offers these final words to anyone facing their own diagnosis, “I just want to hold their hand and tell them it’s going to be OK—and I know that can mean different things. I knew, deep in my soul, that I’d be fine. That I’d be a survivor. I also knew it wouldn’t be a cakewalk. But even if I wasn’t OK, I knew I’d be in the arms of my Savior.”

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MEDICAL ONCOLOGIST
M. Sarfraz Nawaz, MD

Note: Cancer patient outcomes and experiences may vary, even for those with the same type of cancer. An individual patient’s story should not be used as a prediction of how another patient will respond to treatment.

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