

CHAPTER 1

The Big C

It always happens to someone else. A dreaded knock on the door late at night while parents lie in bed wondering why a child is not yet home. A call from the hospital saying a spouse is waiting in the emergency room and heart-wrenching decisions need to be made. For me, it had always happened to someone else; the bony finger of death had lifted people out of my sphere, but so far that grim reaper had only been working at the periphery of my life.

That all changed with one phone call.

My wife Mary called me at the restaurant I had managed for seventeen years. Her strained voice said, “It’s malignant.” My mind raced—benign, malignant—which is good news, which is bad? I couldn’t remember.

“What does that mean?”

“I have cancer.” The words jerked out between sobs. I told Mary I was coming home, hung up the phone, dropped my head into my hands, and for the first time in years, wept.

As I prepared to go home to my wife, the daily calendar on my desk caught my eye. On that day, August 30, 2002, the meditation came from the lyrics of an old song by Harry Emerson Fosdick, a song I had often sung growing up in the Conservative Mennonite Church:

*God of grace and God of glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power.*