

# DYING IS NOT FUN

Leukemia.

Klarissa will never forget the day her doctor spoke that word. She hadn't been feeling well—tired, joints painful, ankles swollen—but everyone had the flu that year. Except Klarissa.

There they were, her mother and stepdad, sitting in the silent aftermath of the word, the horrible word. Everyone cried that day in the doctor's office—everyone but Klarissa. She couldn't cry. She couldn't be sad. But she was angry. Angry with God, angry with the doctor, angry with everything. Leukemia wasn't fair, it wasn't good, it wasn't right. All these years Klarissa sat in youth group, went to camp, talked about Jesus and how much she loved him and he loved her. Now it all seemed like empty, cruel gibberish. If there is a God, she decided, he doesn't demonstrate his love for someone by giving them leukemia.

But the anger was nothing compared to the loneliness Klarissa experienced. When she used to feel lonely before, it wasn't anything like this. When her youth director led discussions about loneliness, the group didn't know what they were talking about. They weren't talking about loneliness, Klarissa thought—they were talking about the silly adolescent experience of feeling like people didn't like you.

But loneliness—real, anguishing loneliness—was what Klarissa experienced now. She could feel her friends treating her differently—the patronizing, gosh-we-feel-sorry-for-you-it-must-be-awful-I'm-glad-it-isn't-me attitude all her friends now had. Even her parents, her brother, her uncles and aunts—even in their words Klarissa could hear their relief it wasn't them. Sure, everyone's words were loving, kind, compassionate—but it was a thin veneer over their own fear of death.

Klarissa was a marked girl. She knew it, her friends knew it, the doctors knew it. It was the absolute terror of being alone, not the leukemia, that was killing Klarissa.

From the day Klarissa heard the word leukemia in the doctor's office, she stopped going to church. She never mentioned the name of Jesus except in bitterness. She remained friends with kids from the youth group and she appreciated their prayers for her, but Klarissa figured that from then on, she was on her own. Jesus and God are great when you're in good health or when you're old, she concluded, but not when your whole life is being robbed from you by the very one who supposedly gives you life. Klarissa made up her mind that if she was to beat death, it'd be because of her determination, not because of some sort of supposed "love" of Jesus—unless, of course, this Jesus she used to believe in showed up pretty soon. And that didn't seem very likely.



## "My little sister

was diagnosed with cancer. After the surgery, we had to take her to Children's Hospital every Thursday for her meds, for chemotherapy. Every day I prayed for her healing. Then one day I had to stand with my sister in line with 10 other little boys and girls who had cancer as well. It was then I realized I couldn't pray for Zoe's healing again. How could I ask God to heal Zoe and not heal all the other children? Surely, God doesn't heal only the children of those who pray, does he? He doesn't answer only Christians' prayers, right? After that I never prayed again for her healing."

Wil, 22, college senior

## By the Book...

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Romans 7:24

Could you not keep watch for one hour?

Mark 14:37

1. Can you blame Klarissa for feeling the way she did about Jesus?

2. What would you say to or do for Klarissa in an attempt to change her mind?

3. How could the youth group communicate to Klarissa the reality and presence of Jesus?

4. What do you think about Klarissa's terror of being alone? Have you ever experienced this kind of loneliness?

