

Dear Lord,

It me, Bart, and I don't mean to complain -- but I've come here to complain. I just can't believe its one more thing. Last year, I battled cancer, and fought valiantly. And you were there for me -- through the chemo and radiation -- through losing my hair and sores in my mouth. I was confident that your hand was at work in my healing and recovery. I felt strong in my faith and, despite the fact that I was so ill, I held on and trusted that you would be with me. And you were.

The doctors filled me with an even greater confidence. They felt they had removed all of it and that I would be headed for a cancer-free life. And soon I was back on my feet playing tennis and racquetball and just about 100%. No more nausea. No more trips to the hospital. No more fatigue. Having fun with my kids. Loving my wife more than ever. Back at my job making up for all the time I had lost.

You can't deny, Lord, that I was as close to you as I have ever been. You were faithful to me, and I was determined that I would be faithful to you.

But now Doctor Lenz says that he found another tumor -- he fears that things have spread again -- and I feel like someone just hit me in the solar plexus and took all the wind out of my sails. Why Lord? Why? What did I do? Where have I gone wrong? Why are you punishing me? Why have you left me?

There must be something that I can do to get you back on my side again -- some bargain I can make -- some vow or pledge. What is it? Is that what you're looking for. Like Jacob, should I be bringing you some offering, resolving some major change in the way I live? Is this the result of some sin or personal weakness that you are trying to drive out of me? Just tell me. I will listen, and I will respond. Really!

Or is it not that at all? And do you just enjoy tormenting me? Am I a specimen that you watch on your dissecting tray as you pluck off one wing and then, just when I am getting used to it, pluck off another? Will it be my legs next? Or will you take out my eyes or ears or my voice?

Last Sunday, Pastor Johnson preached about that blind man whom Jesus healed, and he said that Jesus used that man's struggle so that his glory might be revealed. When I heard it I said, "yea, that makes sense." I could see how you had done that with my own illness. My whole family drew closer to You, and we all were finding strength and guidance from your Word. Pastor Johnson was an incredible help -- always refocusing us back to you love.

But now I'm not so sure about all that. How does it give you glory to strike me again? And are you the kind of God who is so zealous for praise that you have to do this kind of stuff just to keep us from feeling too good about ourselves, our lives, our hopes and dreams. Is crushing us your way of maintaining your control over us? Tell me, Lord, please tell me -- cause I'm really hurting right now.

Dear Bart,

Thank you for your honesty. I'm glad that you let out your anger and really laid it on the line, because burying all those feelings will only leave you with bitter resentment and festering rage. And that's no good for either of us. When you feel like this, I want you to come to me. I want you to pour it out and not worry about spouting correct theology or treating me with kid gloves.

Let me begin by saying this. The struggle you're experiencing now is indeed a result of sin -- but not a specific sin of yours or a direct punishment for something you have done. Rather, it is part of the suffering that came into this world when Adam and Eve first rejected my love for their own ambition. As a result, there is sin, sickness and tragedy all around. And it can strike at any time to anyone. A disease like cancer is but one of the ways it can affect you, but there are also natural disasters, crime, and injury.

How I decide which of these deadly arrows to preserve you from and which I permit to come against you is a very complex thing that is impossible to explain to you in simple terms. But please know that I am actively, personally working on your behalf to lead you gently toward your heavenly home along a path that is best for you. You are not just a victim of fate or happenstance. You are always surrounded by my strength and love.

It may sometimes seem like I don't know what I am doing. It may sometimes seem things are out of control. There will be days when you might feel abandoned and alone. The Enemy likes to lead you in that direction using every force he can muster. Remember how he came against my servant Job? He brought death and destruction, sickness and disease and then used Job's wife and friends to try and make him even more miserable.

Imagine that poor blind man whom Pastor Johnson spoke about last week. You can be sure that after years of darkness and begging for every penny that he too felt abandoned. In fact many of his fellow Israelites operated under the false assumption that blindness was a direct result of individual sin and that I was somehow punishing him because of what his parents had done or because of the type of person I knew he would be. They told him so.

Abandoned. Job and the Blind man both felt abandoned. So do you. But please let me share with you how unabandoned you are.

Here's the facts, Bart. I love you so much -- so much -- that I refused to let abandonment be the final word. 2000 years ago when all humanity faced eternal death and destruction, my Father dispatched me to earth so that I could turn things around. And you know how I did it? By carrying in my own body the sins of all generations. From the murder of Cain to the lies of Abraham -- from the adultery of David to the blasphemy of Saul. And everyone since then, including your grandparents, parents, and your children and grandchildren -- whatever

their iniquity, -- it was laid upon my back. I was held accountable for it.

And then, on that horrific cross, I took the consequences for those sins. I was punished. I was abandoned. I was left utterly alone to face the wrath and fury that those sins deserved from my Father.

On that cross I shouted it out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” At that moment, I was suffering the fury of Hell itself.

But because I was abandoned, Bart, and emerged from that abandonment as the victorious Messiah and risen Savior, you can have the fullest and firmest confidence that you are never alone.

Let me repeat that. You can be sure that the One who endured such agony for you will never allow you to know abandonment and rejection from the God of the Universe.

Quite the contrary. Just as I was there to celebrate with my Father the dramatic reversal of Job’s tragedies, and just as I was there to bring joy and hope to that man born blind, I will be there for you.

And in my time, and in my way, according to my Grand and Beautiful Design, I will bring you through this. So, open your hands, Dear Bart, and let me touch you – open your heart and let me comfort you – open your mind and let me strengthen you. For I will never leave or forsake you; and in the end I will lead you home to me according to the path I have designed for you.