



*My wife and I
consciously worked
to strengthen our
testimonies as we
endured my fight
with cancer—and
we bear testimony
that the timing of
what happened next
was miraculous.*

CHALLENGES, MIRACLES, & TESTIMONIES

By Jacob Aaron Black

“I’m very sorry, Jacob,” the fertility doctor said quietly. “Chemotherapy has left you with only approximately a 10 percent chance of having more children. And with Michelle’s history of lower fertility, it’s essentially impossible.” Tears filled Michelle’s eyes. The news, though not totally unexpected, was devastating. Chemotherapy had saved my life, but its side effects were difficult to bear. We went home from that visit and tearfully held our two-year-old son, Jonas, for whom we were extremely grateful.

In the midst of these feelings of devastation, we looked heavenward. It was our testimonies that had gotten us through the cancer experience. We knew we had to continue to strengthen our testimonies through hope and faith to be able to endure this new post-cancer challenge.

We had faith in our Heavenly Father and in the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We had been married in the temple five years earlier and made covenants with our Heavenly Father. We knew if we remained faithful in living our baptismal, priesthood, and temple covenants, we would be sustained and blessed according to God’s unique will for our lives. We were happy to align our will with God’s will for our family. We believed the promised

Left: Infusion bag for chemotherapy, with illustration of the chemical structure of vinblastine, a chemotherapy drug. Background: Generic cancer cells and lymph cells.



blessings of our covenants would come in God’s time.

Furthermore, a phrase in my patriarchal blessing gave us hope: “The gift of healing will be evident in your life.” When I received that blessing at age 17, I had interpreted it as my administering to the sick through the power of the priesthood. After cancer, I realized that the “gift of healing” applied directly to me.

Hope and Faith to Try Again

We had been counseled by my oncologist to wait for at least two years after I finished the cancer treatments before even trying for another child. The time would allow the chemotherapy drugs to be fully purged from my body. Two years had passed, and our lives were becoming more and more stable, post-cancer. We began discussing lightly the prospect of trying to have another child. To be honest, I was scared. Cancer had taken a lot from us physically, emotionally, and financially. Michelle wanted another baby more than anything in the world. I was scared that my body wasn’t fully healed. I was scared my wife’s heart would be irreparably broken. I was scared it would be one more thing cancer would take from us.

With these thoughts and feelings swirling within us, we settled down to watch April 2012 general conference. In the course of the Saturday afternoon session, our fears left us and we were filled with peace.



THE GOSPEL IS OUR SURE FOUNDATION

“Our journey through life has periods of both good times and bad. Each presents different challenges. How we learn to adjust to the changes which come along depends on the foundation on which we build. The gospel of our Lord and Savior provides a sure and solid foundation. It is constructed piece by piece as we gain knowledge of the Lord’s eternal plan for His children. The Savior is the Master Teacher. We follow Him.”

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Finding Lasting Peace and Building Eternal Families,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 43.



Elisabeth Hope and Rachel Faith

We learned of Michelle’s pregnancy in May—the Tuesday before Mother’s Day. We learned that our baby was, in fact, twin girls—the Monday before Father’s Day.

We began discussing what to name these girls. We wanted their names to reflect the depth of our gratitude to God that their births represented. We decided to name them after women of faith found in the Bible—Elisabeth, because it is a derivative of the Hebrew name *Elishева*, meaning “God’s Promise,” and Rachel, because the life of the biblical Rachel paralleled our life. The Rachel of ancient times faced being unable to bear children; yet as she continued to live a faithful life, God’s unique plan for her life was revealed—and she bore a son, Joseph, and later another son, Benjamin (see Genesis 30:22–24; 35:24).

Michelle wanted the twins’ middle names to be Hope and Faith as a reminder of the power of these two doctrines in our lives. The question now was, which name would go with Elisabeth and which would go with Rachel? The answer came clearly as I read a talk by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, about the Christlike attributes of hope and faith. He said, “Hope is trust in God’s promises.”¹ Decision made. Hope would be Elisabeth’s middle name because both names meant “God’s Promise.” Therefore Rachel’s middle name would be Faith.

Power of Priesthood Manifest

As Christmastime approached, so too did the birth of our babies. We discovered that one of the babies had turned. The doctor advised us to consider a C-section. We went home and prayed about it, receiving a strong and

immediate answer that a C-section was necessary. The next day our two healthy six-pound baby girls were born. Michelle and the babies came home a few days later.

Michelle, however, soon returned to the emergency room because the severe swelling she’d experienced during pregnancy wasn’t going down. An X-ray showed that the swelling and fluid retention had enlarged her heart. “It’s a really good thing you had that C-section,” the doctor told her. “If you’d tried to deliver twins normally, the strain on your heart probably would have killed you.”

We humbly thanked our Heavenly Father for yet another blessing. We were overwhelmed with gratitude for the promises of the gospel and the power of the priesthood manifest in our lives.

Blessings Always Come—in Time

This is our story. Everyone’s story is different. Yet since this experience, Michelle and I have felt a responsibility to bear our testimonies of the power of the priesthood, faith in patriarchal blessings, trust in the love of God, and hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Yes, we experienced difficult challenges, but we’ve also experienced miraculous blessings. We feel we would be ungrateful if we did not share our testimonies that living the gospel helps us deal with our challenges. We know that all stories do not unfold like ours did. Nevertheless, we all can be blessed to know God’s plan for our lives through the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost. Our testimonies are founded on truth, not whether miracles follow.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the timing of events in our life experience:



Far left: Rachel and Elisabeth. Above left: Michelle and Jonas. Above right: Michelle with newborn twins. Below: Jacob, Elisabeth, Jonas, Rachel, and Michelle.

“I think of those who want to be married and aren’t, those who desire to have children and cannot, those who have acquaintances but very few friends, those who are grieving over the death of a loved one or are themselves ill with disease. I think of those who suffer from sin—their own or someone else’s—who need to know there is a way back and that happiness can be restored. I think of the disconsolate and downtrodden who feel life has passed them by, or now wish that it would pass them by. To all of these and so many more, I say: Cling to your faith. Hold on to your hope. . . .

“ . . . Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don’t come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, *they come*.”²

Rachel Faith Black and Elisabeth Hope Black are living witnesses that the Lord is personally involved in the lives of His children. Each step along the way, the hand of the Lord was visible to us. Our testimonies, in turn, continued to grow during my fight with cancer as well as during the miraculous blessing that came afterward. The trials and challenges, the blessings and miracles that others experience in this life will certainly be different from those we experienced, but our testimony is that all who strive to follow God’s plan for their lives will be given the power that can help them endure as well as rejoice. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

- 1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Christlike Attributes,” (address given at the seminar for new mission presidents, June 24, 2005), 4, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
- 2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 36, 38.

