

The spirituality of hope: Living with a cancer diagnosis

By Rev. David Watson, Salem Health chaplain

All life is beautifully and wondrously spiritual. While a cancer diagnosis interrupts life and living, and while living with cancer may challenge our life more than ever before, the spirituality of our life remains the same. Spirituality may be thought of as a deep well that never runs dry, from which we may draw and be quenched and sustained.

Consider this: *What we believe is very important. What we do and how we live our life is even more important. Who we are is even more important!*

That *who we are* is the spirituality that connects all life (along with belief and action). Life with cancer does not make us *the* cancer; rather we are human beings, loved and loving human beings (and so much more) who *have* been diagnosed with cancer. The cancer does not change the essence of who we are — it does not change our love and humanity — and it does not change our spiritual essence (our soul).

The spirituality of hope has endless lessons to teach us about life (and also death). What do you believe? What do you do and what action do you take? Most importantly, who are you today? Asking these questions may be a private affair — or we may seek out a trusted other with whom to talk.

Consider this: The spirituality of hope is the greatest medicine of all! When we emotionally, intellectually and spiritually adjust to a medical diagnosis, our spirituality of hope becomes our foundation for everything else that follows:

Hope for a cure. Hope for healing. Hope for treatment. Hope to fight. Hope for pain relief. Hope for family and friends. Hope for the world. Hope for acceptance. Hope for love, forgiveness and grace. Hope for a good and peaceful death. Hope for the end of suffering. Hope for a miracle. Hope for healing. Hope for peace. Hope for contentment. Hopes you have voiced to God and/or others...?

Whatever our hopes are today or may become, the spirituality of hope is nurtured and fostered with our attitude, with our faith and often with our plan of action. The outcome of this attitude and plan is hopefulness (trust, faith, peace, love and much more).

1. Share with someone you trust and feel safe with what you believe today (*belief*), what you do with your life today (*action*), and who you are today (*your spirituality*) — each with no judgment.
2. Create a basic, simple plan for your spirituality of hope for today. *Example:* In the morning, I will do this positive thing _____ and before going to bed, I will do this other positive thing _____. Develop this routine; keep it simple and keep it up! Adjust your plan as needed to experience success with accomplishing your plan. When it is not happening, ask for help.
3. Create time and space in your day to name your fears, to name your pain and anxiety, and to name your hope. Consider sharing this with another human being. Pray or meditate on your fears, your pain, your anxiety, your questions and especially your hope. Write down or share with another what you have discovered.

While sometimes it is terribly normal to feel hopeless, each and every one of us deserve and can experience *hopefulness* (that is our humanity).