



# Carried Through Cancer

70 Days of Spiritual Strength  
from Cancer Fighters,  
Survivors, and Caregivers

Kim Harms

*Foreword by Suzanne Eller*

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To Corey, I love you and I like you.



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To my Savior Jesus, your sacrifice is my eternal gain. You did indeed carry me through cancer, and I trust that you will continue to carry me until my last breath.

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# Foreword

I was thirty-one years old the first time I was diagnosed with Stage 2b estrogen-positive breast cancer. My three children were in second and third grade (twins). I went in because I found a lump. Things moved quickly. Before the day was out, I had a diagnosis. Over the next year, chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, and early menopause followed.

A cancer diagnosis changes your life. It stops you for a season as you put everything you have into fighting it. You may feel that life will never be normal again.

On my first day of chemo, I'll never forget how a nurse named Diana put her hands on my knees, looked into my eyes, and said, "I am a breast cancer survivor. I know that you are scared. I was too. I'm right here with you."

Just seeing her face and hearing her words gave me courage. I have no idea where Diana is today, but she was pivotal on that first day of my battle.

I believe that is what Kim Harms is doing with this beautiful book. She's wrapping you close with the words of other women who get it. They are sharing their stories, their fears, their moments of joy that made no sense and yet held them, with you. Sister to sister.

I've seen cancer from both sides. Five years ago, my own daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer. There were many moments of déjà vu as we walked with her through that season. My other daughter chose a preventative double mastectomy after genetic testing. The one thing I've learned through all of this is that we can't do it alone. We need support. That can be in the form of others who have gone before us, like my nurse Diana. It can be in the form of family or friends or both. It can also take place as we gather with other survivors, like you are doing as you read the pages of this book. Just hearing someone else's story can help us feel stronger. We need connection, prayer, encouragement, and people around

us that don't just see us as our diagnosis. They see us for who we are, who we were the day before we heard the word *cancer*. We need those who make sacred space for our tears and who don't look askance at us when we find ourselves making light of something really hard because we just need to laugh.

My prayer is that these women's stories will encourage you.

Four years ago, after thirty years of being cancer free, I was diagnosed again. Having walked through it once gave me the courage to reach out and ask others to join me in the battle as I went through surgery and healing once again. You see, I had discovered the power of together. Please know that you are not alone. There are women around the world fighting this with you. I'm reaching for a hug as you begin this journey, and I can't wait to dance with you when you are on the other side of it.

Suzanne (Suzie) Eller

Bestselling author, Bible teacher and speaker, cohost of *More Than Small Talk* podcast, host of *Prayer Starters* podcast, and two-time breast cancer survivor

# Introduction

I am a reporter at heart. It makes me strangely happy to take the content of a thirty- to sixty-minute interview and find the five-hundred-word story that needs to be told.

In this devotional, you will read the stories of dozens of women. Women who walked hard and heartbreaking roads and saw Jesus care for them in the sweetest ways. These survivors represent a variety of ages, cancer types, and stages. Some endured minimally invasive procedures. Others will be in treatment for the remainder of their days. But regardless of her background and experience, every woman had her life turned upside down by cancer.

You will also read the stories of several caregivers—those who’ve watched someone they love suffer physical, emotional, and psychological pain and sickness brought on by cancer and its challenging treatments. Finally, you will read a handful of my own personal stories of Jesus meeting me where I needed him during both of my experiences with breast cancer—first in 2016 and again in 2023.

My hope is that this book gives *you* hope. That you can read the experiences of other women and be encouraged and inspired to trust in Jesus, our real and living hope, as you endure the long and arduous journey of cancer treatment. May our Lord be your Comforter, your Sustainer, your Savior, and your Healer.

The darkest parts of our lives are often the ones we look back on and see Jesus shine the most brightly. My desire is that the following pages expose you to some of that light.

There had to be the dark and muddy waters,  
so that the sun could have something  
to background its flashing glory.<sup>1</sup>

—*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Betsy Smith



Day 1



# Carried Through Cancer

*Marissa*

*Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am  
he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will  
carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

ISAIAH 46:4 (NIV)

Diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma (cancer that originates in milk ducts) at thirty-nine years old, Marissa spent eighteen months in active treatment, undergoing chemotherapy, radiation, a bilateral mastectomy (removal of both breasts), and reconstruction surgeries. It was an extremely hard time for her whole family, but she was amazed at God's provision through it all. Especially on the morning of her bilateral mastectomy.

"Realistically, I should have been a hot mess."

A self-proclaimed worrier, Marissa tends to get anxious in stressful situations, but she was not anxious on that morning in the fall of 2019. Instead, she was at complete peace as she awaited the surgery that would not only remove her breasts but also included a biopsy of her lymph nodes to determine whether or not the cancer had spread outside her breast tissue.

She was surprisingly relaxed and easily chatted with the nurses as they came into her little exam room to check on her. She wasn't anxious or scared as they drew on her chest with a sharpie to give the surgeon a road map for surgery. She even remembers smiling contentedly while she held a nurse's hand and counted backwards in the brief moments before the anesthesia put her to sleep. At a time

when she should have been overwhelmed and scared and anxious, she was simply calm. Looking back, she's certain it was because God carried her through all of those tough moments in the hospital.

"That (Footprints in the Sand<sup>2</sup>) poem probably best mimics what God did for me. When the person in the poem looks back at the tracks in the sand and is like, 'There's only one set of footprints? Why would you do that? When I went through the hardest things you left me.' And Jesus says, 'No, that is when I carried you.' I'm convinced he scooped me up and walked me through the doors of that hospital that morning. If I could look back and see footprints, they would be God's, not mine."

A few years removed from her treatments and surgeries, Marissa is thankful to remain cancer-free but also thankful for the gift of seeing God work in such a personal way on one of the hardest days of her life.

---

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, Thank you for carrying me through my hardest days. When I don't feel your presence, remind me you are still here. And when I know I only made it through because of you, help me rejoice that I am loved and cared for by the God of the universe. Amen.*

**Reflection:** *Take a moment to reflect on your life of following Jesus. Are there moments you can look back on and see that the only reason you made it through was because God carried you? What is an example or two you can use as a reminder when life is hard?*

## Day 2



# Harnessing the Strength Inside

*Alex*

*That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses,  
in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.  
For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

**2 CORINTHIANS 12:10 (NIV)**

Alex, a retired lieutenant colonel in the USAF, was deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

One night on the ground in Iraq, she ran for shelter as mortars flew overhead. She knew if she didn't make it to a safe place, she might die in that desert. Pictures of her oldest son, just two at the time, and of her husband, flashed through her mind as she ran the gauntlet to shelter. It was a scary moment, and her life was in danger, but for her, a cancer diagnosis was scarier.

"I'd faced my own mortality before. I was in Iraq."

She signed up for the military knowing the risks. She did not sign up for cancer.

As Alex sat in the radiology exam room trying to come to grips with the fact that her life was now tied to breast cancer, her mortality stared her in the face once again, and she had a frank conversation with God.

"I [said], 'Okay, you've chosen this for me for a reason. And like every other challenge you've put in front of me, I'm gonna be a leader.' That's my strength. That's what God has given me. The ability to lead."

But what does being a leader mean in treatment for invasive lobular carcinoma (cancer that originates in the breast lobules). For Alex it meant fighting well. It meant not bowing out of life as she fought. It meant showing up at her 5:00 a.m. exercise class and doing her best while in the midst of chemo. It meant sitting at her twelve-year-old son's baseball games, knowing the Neulasta on-body injector (a shot to counteract chemo side effects) taped to her arm would inject itself halfway through the fifth inning. It meant daily walks with her boys and her dog, even in her exhaustion and pain.

But it also meant embracing the sadness. It meant bawling the entire thirty-minute drive home from the radiologist. It meant crawling back into bed some days when it was all just too much.

"Just because you accept the path God has you on doesn't mean you don't feel a plethora of emotions. It doesn't mean life is all sunshine and roses. Or that you don't get angry, or you don't cry. I still did that. And that's okay."

Alex knew that God created her to be a leader, but in cancer she was not immune to weakness and days when it was hard to get out of bed and fight. But in her weakness she was blown away by the nearness of her Savior. During times when life really sucked, she could still step outside and find joy in small things, like green grass and sunshine, and feel a strength for the day she knew she was not mustering up on her own.

"Rarely are you so dependent on God. But that is where he is," she said. "In my weakness is where I found his strength."

---

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, Thank you for your strength that is made perfect in my weakness. And for my weakness that points me to your strength. Continue to provide the strength I need when I can't provide it for myself. Amen.*

**Reflection:** *What gifts has God given you? Are you seeing your strengths as an asset during your cancer journey? How has God shown himself to be strong for you when you don't have the energy to be strong for yourself?*

## Day 3



# Circle of Life

## Annie

*Even while I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me,  
while I proclaim your power to another generation,  
your strength to all who are to come.*

**PSALM 71:18**

Annie was diagnosed with peritoneal (abdominal lining) cancer in 2017. She was tipped off that something was wrong when she noticed that a shirt she wore to play tennis, which should have been loose, was tight around her belly. When she mentioned it to her husband on the drive home, he told her he'd noticed that when she lays down it looks like there is a basketball in her stomach.

When a series of tests and scans revealed the cancer, which includes ascites (fluid build-up in her abdomen), she had two procedures over a two-week period to remove a total of twenty-three pounds of the fluid from her abdomen. Then she started chemo. She has undergone chemo every three weeks for nearly a decade and will continue for the rest of her life.

"At first I didn't even know how to pray, but my pastor said he was going to pray for complete healing."

Though there is no cure, and complete healing will not likely come in this lifetime, God did bless her with another gift.

One of the first times the elders of her church came to her home to pray for her, her pastor said, "I know you've got grandchildren, and God gave me a verse for you. Psalm 71:18."

Annie held onto that verse and was encouraged, even through her tears. But cancer is hard, and there are days when darkness and depression push their way in.

"There was one day when my husband and I were both really down, and there was just a heaviness around the house. It came upon us suddenly, and we basically just sat around depressed."

As they sat under what felt like an impossible burden, their phone rang. It was one of their four children, a son who lived out of state. Annie's spirits lifted a little, thinking she had such a caring kid who would call just to chat with his mom. When he asked if his dad and little sister were home, Annie knew something out of the ordinary was going on but wasn't sure what.

When everyone was on the call, her son announced that he and his wife were going to have a baby.

"That incredible blackness, if you will, of our moment was lifted. And that verse came back to me. It said, 'Do not forsake me so that I can tell the next generation of your mighty acts and tell those who have not yet come.' And now God was sending us this baby who had not yet come. It was a wonderful gift."

---

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, Thank you for the gift of babies and for the opportunity to share your truth with the next generation. Help me walk through the dark days, and show me your goodness to draw me back out into the sunshine. Amen.*

**Reflection:** *Have you had dark days in your cancer journey that have turned to light with some good news or a gift from someone you love? Think about others in your life who may be struggling and ask God to show you a way to give them good news or encouragement.*

Whether it's yours or a loved one's, a cancer diagnosis changes everything. It stops you in your tracks as you put everything you have into fighting for life. Being thrown into the unknown chaos of treatment can feel isolating.

## But you are not alone.

With **uplifting stories** from dozens of women who have been where you are, *Carried Through Cancer* provides emotional and spiritual support, encouragement, and community in its true stories of God-filled moments within the hard and heartbreaking road of cancer.

God meets some people in their fear in the exam room and others in the shower where the flowing water drowns out tears, but regardless of the location, this **70-day devotional** demonstrates that God shows up when people reach out to him, and he is there to carry you through your story.



**Kim Harms** is a breast cancer survivor and author of *Life Reconstructed*. She has a degree in English (Literary Studies) from Iowa State University and has more than two decades of writing experience. In addition to her book, her work can be found in a wide variety of publications including *Joyful Life*, *Christianity Today*, *Guideposts*, *Wildfire*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and more. Kim lives in Huxley, Iowa, with her husband Corey, two of their three sons, and one crazy dog.

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