

## *Through the Valley*

Breathe—breathe, now move. “Oh, Jesus!”

The call shook her—the urgency in the doctor’s voice slammed into her, crushing the air from her chest. “Get him to the nearest emergency room. Don’t wait. Don’t stop.”

Fear sliced through her.

Which one? The closest or the best? Beth knew she should be reaching for Christ’s peace, but the pounding of her heart drowned out any whisper from God as she hurried to Kevin’s side.

“What are you doing?” he said, leaning to see past her to the television. “You’re in the way.”

“Shut that off,” she shoved his jacket into his hands. “Put this on. I’m taking you to the hospital.”

“What are you talking about?” he frowned. “I’m in the middle of my favorite show.” He waved her off. “The oncologist said we could manage the cancer. I don’t need a hospital.”

*The cancer.*

They had only just learned how bad it was. Stage four. Untreatable—but controllable. Beth thought that was the worst thing that could happen.

Now this.

“It’s not the cancer. It’s your heart.”

The color drained from Kevin’s face. “My heart?”

“There’s something wrong with it.” Tears blurred her vision, spilling down her cheeks.

Kevin set the jacket on the arm of the chair and stood. The remote slipped off his lap and clattered to the floor. He bent to retrieve it, and Beth's breath caught.

"No!" She lunged forward, panic flushing her face. "I'll get it."

She pitched the remote onto the chair, and Kevin caught her hands, holding them, offering comfort.

With a calm, steady voice, he continued. "How does he know? I feel fine."

"The scan they took yesterday for the cancer." She grabbed the jacket to help him put it on.

"Stop. I've got this," he said, shoving his arms into the sleeves. His eyes locked with hers. "I'm okay."

"No, you're not. Don't rush. Take it slow."

His hands began to tremble, his voice faltering. "Tell me what the doctor said."

Beth looked into his blue eyes, now wide with fear. Her panic was spilling over—scaring him.

She had to calm down.

Had to keep him calm.

"He said to get you to the nearest hospital as quickly as possible." She hesitated, swiping at her tears again. "Maybe I should call an ambulance."

"Don't get crazy," he said, zipping his jacket. "I mowed the lawn this morning, and I'm just a little tired."

*He mowed the lawn.*

He could have died right there in the yard, just a few feet from where she was doing morning dishes.

Beth wrapped her arms around him. “I love you.” She took a shaky breath. “I’ll get the keys.”

She wiped her tears and grabbed her purse from the hall table.

The doctor’s words echoed in her mind. *I’ve never seen anyone with an eight-centimeter ascending aneurysm who was still alive.* Harsh words meant to frighten her—meant to stress the seriousness of the situation.

They did.

She chose the closest hospital. It wasn’t the best, but Kevin would be seen immediately.

As she drove, prayers spilled quietly from her lips. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul.” Her voice barely carried. “You are my Shepherd. A shepherd cares for the sheep. You lead me by the still waters where I find peace. You care for Kevin—you care for me.”

She sucked in a shuddering breath. “Jesus, you have a plan—but is it the one I want, or the one you’re asking me to walk through?”

Her gaze drifted to Kevin, staring out the window, quiet.

“Will I lose him?” She swallowed—a hard lump lodging in her throat.

This was the stubborn man she loved. For months, he’d sensed something was wrong and refused to face it. Now, with the oncologist’s report, she understood why. Somewhere, deep inside, he believed that if he didn’t acknowledge it, it wasn’t real.

She should have pushed harder. Forced him to see a doctor when he grew distant and withdrawn. Maybe then the cancer diagnosis wouldn’t have been so devastating.

But this?

She pulled up to the emergency room entrance and let Kevin out.

“I’ll park and be right there,” she called after him. “Walk slowly!”

Relief surged as she watched him head toward the doors. Help was just inside.

Kevin waved dismissively and went in.

When Beth pushed through the doors moments later, she looked frantically around the crowded room. Kevin stood casually at the registration desk.

She hurried over, nearly throttling him for not explaining.

“He has an aortic aneurysm,” she blurted.

The young receptionist blinked, confused, then handed them a buzzer. “You’ll be called in a few minutes.”

“You don’t understand,” Beth insisted. “It’s his heart.”

The receptionist inhaled sharply and pressed a button. A nurse appeared from a nearby room and approached the desk.

“Do you have chest pain?” she asked. “Shortness of breath?”

“No. None of that.”

“He has an eight-centimeter aortic aneurysm,” Beth said.

The nurse frowned. “That’s not possible.” Her condescending tone ignited Beth’s anger. She planted both hands on the counter. “It is possible! The doctor just called and told me to get him here—fast.”

“Get him a wheelchair,” the nurse called to an orderly. “Take him to forty-six.”

They were swiftly ushered into a small, private cubicle.

Doctors moved in and out. Kevin was wheeled away for scans and tests. Vital signs were checked every fifteen minutes.

She picked up his hand. It was cold.

“You haven’t said much,” she said, careful not to let her fear spill over.

He shrugged. “What’s to say?”

An older physician entered. “Mrs. Larsen, may I speak with you in the hallway?”

She squeezed Kevin’s hand and stepped out.

The doctor clutched the chart to his chest. “We aren’t equipped to handle this. We’ll need to transfer him to Westmont Hospital.”

“Westmont?” Her heart dropped. “That’s two hours away.”

He pulled her aside. “Look,” he said, lowering his voice. “We’re affiliated with Westmont. I’m obligated to recommend transfer there.”

Beth caught the unspoken message in his eyes. There was another option.

“What about Franklin University Hospital?” she asked. “It’s closer, and I thought they were leaders in cardiac care.”

A faint smile touched his lips as he nodded. “It’s your decision. They can provide excellent care—but the request must come from you.”

“Do it.”

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Beth hurried down the ICU corridor at Franklin University Hospital. Visiting hours were long past, and she’d been surprised when the nurse waved her through.

“Just fifteen minutes,” she’d said.

When Beth stepped into Kevin’s room, she blinked, certain her exhaustion was playing tricks on her. The man standing at Kevin’s bedside couldn’t possibly be real.

“Pastor Miller?”

For a moment, it felt as though Jesus Himself stood there—a quiet reminder that He was in control.

Peace washed over her.

Driving home later, Beth thought of everyone praying for Kevin—church brothers and sisters, friends, neighbors, and family members. All of their prayers rising together, flooding the heavenly realms. She realized how complacent she had become, believing she had control over her life. Moving through her days, she'd taken the ordinary moments for granted.

“Lord, we think we're in control, but we're not,” she whispered. “We pray and expect answers, but when they come, they aren't always the easy way we wanted.” She swallowed. “For months, all my prayers have been focused on Kevin. I've asked you to replace his heart of stone with a heart of flesh. And I believe, Lord, that through this You're restoring both his physical heart and his spiritual one.”

She paused, the words settling deep. “And I believe you're changing my heart, too.”

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The next day, Beth stood before three doctors.

“Why can't you operate?” Her voice wavered. “I thought this was an emergency.”

Kevin lay beside her, an oxygen mask covering his face, wires and tubing trailing from his arm. His hand tightened around hers.

“His kidneys aren't functioning well enough for us to proceed,” the youngest doctor explained.

“I don't understand,” Beth said, her pulse quickened. “His kidneys were fine.”

“The contrast dye from the scans can cause complications,” he said gently. “We're optimistic it will resolve. Until then, we're monitoring him closely.”

Beth turned to Doctor Elton, the surgeon who would perform the procedure. His salt-and-pepper hair and calm demeanor reflected years of experience. He held the ends of the stethoscope draped around his neck.

“Now we wait,” he said, patting Beth’s hand before following the others out.

That was all they’d been doing.

Waiting.

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Beth clung to God’s promises. The valley felt lonely—but God promised never to leave her. Never to leave Kevin. She refused to let anything the doctors said shake that truth.

Pastor Miller’s recent sermon surfaced in her mind. The shepherd’s staff guided the sheep, but the rod—studded with stones—was a weapon used to drive away predators.

“Lead me with your staff, Lord,” she prayed softly, “and protect Kevin with your rod.”

The week dragged on. Each day brought another doctor’s visit, another delay. Beth slumped in her chair, disappointment sapping her strength. The Bible rested open on her lap, its words blurring through tears.

“I’m still here, Lord,” she whispered. “Still believing that you are creating new hearts in us both. But it’s hard.”

“I know—but trust is all I ask.”

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The sun was just peeking above the horizon when Beth arrived for another long day. Two emotionally draining weeks pressed down on her as she sank into a chair and leaned her head back. Exhaustion clung to her—early mornings, late nights, and too little rest in between.

She looked up as Dr. Elton entered with an intern trailing behind. He stopped at the foot of Kevin's bed and studied the chart.

"Tomorrow," he said, meeting Beth's questioning eyes.

"Tomorrow?" The word barely made it past her lips.

"Everything is set and ready." He listened to Kevin's heart, then glanced at the chart again. "Looks like you've done your job—your kidneys are working just fine. Now it's time for me to do mine," he said to Kevin.

"Thank you," Beth murmured as Dr. Elton nodded and left with a satisfied smile.

She wasn't sure whether to feel relieved that the surgery was scheduled—or terrified that this might be her last day with Kevin. She stood holding his hand, the silence heavy, broken only by the steady beeping of the monitors tracking Kevin's heartbeat.

"It's okay," he said, squeezing her hand. "Whatever God has is okay."

Beth rested her head on his chest and sobbed as he stroked her hair.

"I love you."

His words should have comforted her, but she only shuddered and cried harder.

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Beth sat in the surgical waiting room with her son beside her, enduring the long hours, watching the clock, and listening as others received calls announcing good news. Through it all, Jesus kept whispering the same reminder: *Trust Me. I'm holding Kevin.*

When she ran out of words to pray, she leaned on the ones tucked deep in her heart.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.” She exhaled slowly. “Thank you, Lord. You’ve invited me to sit at the King’s table while my enemy watches you fight for me—while you hold Kevin in Your hands. Your word says that my cup overflows, and it does—with gratitude. I don’t know how this will end, but I know I can trust you.”

Another scripture surfaced. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

She drew in a shaky breath. That had been her prayer for months. “Is that what You’re doing, Lord? Are you answering my prayers?”

Joy flooded her, sudden and overwhelming, and a broad smile spread across her face.

“Are you okay, Mom?” Jason reached for her hand.

She squeezed his fingers. “I’m more than okay. I’m in awe of the miracles God is performing.”

Jason frowned, confusion clouding his eyes.

The phone rang.

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In the weeks that followed, the doctors continued to marvel at Kevin’s recovery, and Beth grasped the magnitude of God’s miracles.

Finally, Doctor Elton announced that Kevin was out of danger. “It’s been an interesting few weeks,” he said, smiling at Kevin. “Looks like you had angels watching over you. You’re the talk of the hospital.” He leaned against the bed frame. “I’ve never operated with so many onlookers. There were more cardiac surgeons in that room than at my last lecture,” he chuckled. “Everyone wanted to see what was going on inside that chest of yours.”

He straightened, sobering. “I’ll admit—I’ve never seen anything like it. And between us? I hope I never see it again.”

He extended his hand and shook Kevin’s. “You’re a lucky man.”

Beth shook her head gently. “It wasn’t luck, Doctor. It was God.”

Dr. Elton paused, then nodded. “Considering what I saw in Kevin’s chest, I have to agree.”

Gratitude bloomed in her smile. “We’re blessed that God brought us to you. Thank you.”

He returned her smile and walked away.

Beth stood at Kevin’s bedside, listening to the strong, steady cadence of his heart. Once fragile and now restored.

God had kept His promise.

A heart of flesh.

And hers, too.

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Had it really been six weeks? Beth could hardly believe they were finally going home. Kevin was still weak, but he was able to walk, and, praise God, he would be okay.

That first evening, when the house was quiet and Kevin was settled safely into his recliner, Beth sat alone in her bedroom with her Bible resting on her lap.

“Lord, I’m in awe of all the miracles,” she whispered. “I shouldn’t be. You’re a God of miracles—but I am.”

She began to count them, one by one.

Miracle one: We needed to see an oncologist, and you opened the door to the best one in the area, even though he wasn’t accepting new patients.

Miracle two: Because of the cancer, the doctors discovered the aneurysm. If Kevin hadn't had the cancer, they would never have found it, and he most likely wouldn't be alive today.

Miracle three: Kevin mowed the lawn! You kept him alive when every medical expectation said he shouldn't have been. The doctors were astonished. None had ever seen a patient with an eight-centimeter aneurysm—at least not a live one.

Miracle four: No one was willing to attempt the surgery, but the department head agreed—while a large group of surgeons crowded in to witness the outcome.

Miracle five: Kevin is back to himself—laughing, talking, loving life... and me.

Miracle six: We walk closer with You now. My faith has grown stronger. The Holy Spirit is teaching me more each day as I hide your word in my heart.

Miracle seven: *Your perfect number*. You gave Kevin a heart of flesh, then you restored it physically and spiritually. Along the way, You renewed *my* heart and revealed Your glory.

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After eight long weeks, Beth and Kevin slipped quietly into church and took their seats as Pastor Miller approached the podium.

“This is a special day,” he said, his voice warm with emotion. “Many of us have been faithfully praying for Kevin. And today we celebrate, not just his healing, but the faithfulness of our God.”

The congregation rose to its feet. Applause swelled through the sanctuary—joyful, reverent, overflowing. Tears blurred Beth's vision as praise washed over her.

When the room finally settled, all eyes returned to Pastor Miller. Beth opened her Bible and journal. Her heart—once fearful, once worn thin—now brimmed with gratitude and awe.

Beside her, Kevin's heart beat strong and steady, filled with fresh anticipation, ready for whatever God still had ahead.

Beth closed her eyes in quiet reverence, resting her hand over his.

"Your Word sustains me," she whispered. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

She smiled as the truth settled deep within her.

*This story is based on the life experiences of two very special friends. It demonstrates God's great mercy and the fulfillment of His promises in Psalm 23. NKJ*