

# A Providence-Full Life

*The attitude of a Christian towards the providential order in which he is placed is to recognize that God is behind it for purposes of His own.*

Oswald Chambers, Biblical Ethics, 99 R

---

“Well, we have a bit more investigating to do here.” This from the ER doctor at St. Anthony’s Hospital in Gig Harbor, WA on Sunday, November 10, 2019, upon reviewing the results of my abdominal CT scan. “You do not have diverticulitis (my expectation). You have a major blockage in your colon. It looks like a tumor, possibly cancer. You need a colonoscopy immediately. Do you have a primary care physician in the area that can refer you?”

Thus began a whirlwind series of doctor’s appointments and tests that led to colorectal surgery twelve days later to remove a cancerous tumor from my body. This is *not* what I planned when I flew from Italy to the US in early November for what I thought was going to be a ten-day visit with family in Michigan and Washington State.

So what exactly does my cancer have to do with providence? It *does* take a bit of explaining.

## **Providence: A Theological Definition**

*Providence is the means by which God directs all things — both animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, good and evil — toward a worthy purpose, which means His will must finally prevail.*

(J. Vernon McGee)

I have seen God work in unexpected ways to guide me before. But this latest series of events takes the cake, for sure.

To begin with... Well, where exactly *to* begin? Perhaps the beginning was my move to Italy in 2017 to work at the U.S. naval base in Naples for three years.

I value much about my time in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, I found living in Naples very frustrating. The heavy traffic and Naples’ chaotic driving habits made my daily commute an ordeal. Daily life in the community was stressful given the language and cultural differences. High unemployment, poverty, hostility towards immigrants, and petty crime typify southern Italy. When I think of Naples, I think of spiritual darkness, superstition, racism, and

oppression due to widespread corruption and organized crime.

After two years, I was frustrated professionally as well. The Navy’s bureaucratic inefficiencies are multiplied in the overseas environment, and I felt continually stymied. In addition, I had been unable to find a good church there. Life in Naples was detrimental to my spiritual well-being too.

So by the fall of 2019, I was bereft emotionally, professionally, and spiritually. I felt rotten physically, too. I chalked up the sporadic episodes of nausea and cramping that began in September to local bugs or food poisoning, both of which are common there.

I was also concerned about what would happen to my unofficial foster son, Abraham, when I returned to the US. An immigrant from Liberia, Africa, Abraham, 19, had no family in Italy or any resources of his own, no job, and no other place to live. Our earlier attempts to obtain a student visa to study in the US had failed.

Every aspect of my life had become confusing, frustrating, uncertain. Then I learned that my brother Gene had been given six more months to live.

God was not unaware of my distress. In fact, He was about to intervene in my circumstances with His providential direction and care in amazing ways that would astonish me and many others.

I wanted to visit Gene again before it was too late. And if I was going to cross the Atlantic, I might as well go to Washington State afterwards to see my son Eli too. So I booked a flight for November 6, the day after a major work deadline and before the winter weather would begin to interfere with air travel. I became quite sick again on my way to the airport though and had to re-schedule my departure for the next day. Fortunately, I was fine the next and following few days, and my time with Gene was very precious, a gift.<sup>2</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup>, I flew to Washington State and had a wonderful reunion with my son over a large dinner salad (uh-oh). The next day I became uncomfortable again at church, and my pastor’s wife, a nurse, convinced me to go to Urgent Care. They sent me to the hospital Emergency Room for a CT scan. That’s how I ended up in ER on the 10<sup>th</sup>, facing a diagnosis of colon cancer.

---

<sup>1</sup> I blogged about my overseas experiences. If you are interested, see: <https://anamericaninitaly.shutterstock.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Gene passed into eternity on March 30, 2020.

Cancer?? No one in my family gets cancer. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, yes. But cancer?? And how do I find a doctor here to see me quickly?

Well, my pastor's physician *just happens* to be in the same medical network, and he *just happened* to have an opening to see me the following Tuesday, and he *just happened* to get me in for a colonoscopy the following Monday, November 18. (Waiting periods for colonoscopies are many weeks normally.) I cancelled my November 16 return flight to Italy.

On Monday, the gastroenterologist confirmed the ER physician's preliminary diagnosis, stating that my colon was 85% blocked with a tumor that was almost certainly malignant. He referred me to a surgeon for whom he had highest regard. "I'd let her operate on me." She is in very high demand, but they *just happened* to be able to squeeze me into her schedule two days later, Wednesday afternoon.

As I sat in her office that Wednesday, a petite young doctor from India talked through the indecipherable (to me) scans displayed on her large monitor. She explained that she would attempt to perform the surgery laparoscopically but could not guarantee it beforehand. Okay fine. When? She *just happened* to have availability for that Friday.

The surgical outcome was as good as it possibly could have been. Dr. Kanneganti, a world-class surgeon in my opinion (and others'), removed the entire tumor and a portion of my colon by laparoscopy. I did not require a colostomy or bag. I am certain the result would have been quite different – perhaps even fatal – had this occurred in Italy.

Now, what to do about work? Eventually, I received an early release from my three-year overseas commitment, but my "return rights" were to Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois. Would Great Lakes allow me to stay in Washington for my six-month chemo period? I also began to have a strong sense that I wanted to stay in Washington permanently to be close to Eli.

*And your ears will hear a word behind you,  
"This is the way, walk in it," whenever you  
turn to the right or to the left.  
Isaiah 30:21 (NASB)*

Well, a couple weeks after my surgery, I *just happened* to look up the online job announcements and discovered that the Northwest office of my agency was recruiting for the same position I had held at Great Lakes. I applied, interviewed, and was offered a position at the top of the pay scale (more than I was making before). I started back to work at the end of March. I checked out of Naples remotely with the help of good friends in Italy who superintended my job and housing closeout, sale of my car, and shipment of my household goods to Washington – All just barely before the coronavirus shutdown in Italy.

In the meantime, I *just happened* to find a home in Port Orchard that could not be more perfect for me, with many features I love including a dream kitchen and a yard packed with flowering plants; three organic raised beds for vegetables; established apple, plum, pear, and fig trees; multiple kinds of berries; artichokes; and my favorite, asparagus!

*The LORD your God in your midst,  
The Mighty One, will save;  
He will rejoice over you with gladness,  
He will quiet you with His love,  
He will rejoice over you with singing.  
Zephaniah 3:17 (NKJV)*

As I write this, I have been in my new home for several months now, gradually settling in. I enjoy my new job and have a great supervisor and co-workers. I am very happy to be near Eli again and to be back in my church in Port Orchard. I am re-connecting with long-time close friends in the area. Spring has been sunny and the vegetable garden I planted is flourishing. I am fully healed from surgery and just finished my six-month chemotherapy treatment.

As for Abraham, the Lord raised up someone "out of the blue" to help with his financial support. He is now settled into his own apartment and pursuing a computer science degree online. My church here will be applying for an R-1 visa for him, which, if approved, would allow him to come to the US for a two-to-five year ministry training period.

*There is an appointed time for everything.  
Ecclesiastes 3:1a (NASB)*

From bereft to blessed beyond measure, from confusion to clarity, from frustration to freedom and peace; all within a few months and perfect timing of all the logistical details associated with this major transition. It only took cancer – and Jesus – to bring me home again.

- Jane Albright  
July 2020

*For the LORD is good;  
His mercy is everlasting,  
And His truth endures to all generations.  
Psalm 100:5*

P.S. If you have never experienced the providential care and peace of God that comes with having a personal relationship with Him through faith in His Son, Jesus, please contact me, and I can explain how you can: [jalbright318@gmail.com](mailto:jalbright318@gmail.com). Or see [calvarypo.org/knowgod/](http://calvarypo.org/knowgod/).