

# **“When the Protector Cannot Protect His Beloved”**

What this husband is thinking about and  
learning from the Lord  
and is eager to help another husband who  
suddenly  
has gone from being a protector to a  
caregiver  
after one resounding diagnosis.

Michael J. Peck  
Author/Family Counselor  
Baptist Church Planters  
[www.michaelpeck.org](http://www.michaelpeck.org)

Everyone knows husbands are supposed to be protectors.

Sounds pretty dramatic, doesn't it?

You may be thinking, "Oh brother. Mike is putting on his hero's armor. Stand back and watch as he tries to mount up on the white charger!" All right, friends! Quit laughing. I have never viewed myself as a hero, but I do believe as the husband and father in our household that I should be the protector. Or at least I want to be the protector.

"You husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). The wife is typically somewhat physically weaker, (although after five back surgeries, I am not sure if this applies in our home). The protection of which I write is the outflow of honoring my wife. She is heir together with me and is in no way inferior. Frankly, in many ways she probably does things better. In spite of all these facts, Godly husbands possess a great desire to protect their wives.

The same married man who has children also knows that he is the protector of each child as well. The writer of the book of Proverbs speaks of his great desire for his children. "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction; For Whom the LORD loves He corrects; even as a father the son in whom he delights" (3:11-12). That which is the object of his delight is also the object of his protection. He wants nothing to injure or harm the children of his delight. He should possess great passion in his responsibility to provide the safe environment in which his children will learn the blessing of instruction, correction, training, and learning.

Woven into the fabric of every Godly husband and dad is the burning, consuming desire to protect his wife and children. He would never allow his child to play unattended near traffic. An

intruder in the night would not want to meet him in the hallway. The thought of a stranger coming near his child would just about push him to reckless engagement with the intruder.

But sometimes the protector cannot protect his beloved. I want to. But I couldn't keep Jeffrey from congenital heart disease. I couldn't keep Billy from Duchene muscular dystrophy. Now I couldn't keep my Karen from getting cancer.

I know it is not my fault, yet somehow in my quiet moments and thoughts, I feel a sense of what dozens of men have told me as their pastor. I can almost hear several of them as they said things like, "I've never told anyone this. I've never felt this way before. Always I have been able to protect my wife and shield her from the things that would hurt and harm her. But this is out of my control. I feel helpless. I feel somehow that I have let her down."

And I would, of course, feel my pastoral heart nearly break as I shared with them that clearly this is something that the Lord has allowed. It had nothing to do with their protection as a husband. They can trust the Lord through this experience. Watch and see what the Lord would do.

Then cancer came to our house.

I still believe all the things that I have told other men. I really do. Never have I loved the Lord any more in my life than I do right now. All the Scripture that I have shared with men as their wives faced significant health issues are the same Scriptures that are ministering to my life right now.

But it is different. I understand in a deeper way that as I couldn't protect my sons from their life-changing illnesses, now I cannot protect my wife, the love of my life, from cancer.

As you read this very brief ebook, please understand that I am writing very early in the journey with cancer. It is also important for you to understand that I am writing from the position that I am to love my wife as Christ loved the church; therefore, I am to give myself for her (Ephesians 5:25). Likewise, I truly love my children and grandchildren because I delight in them. I would do anything to protect them.

So what happens to those of us who are protectors when calamity strikes and we can do nothing about it? I have discovered that dozens of people come daily to my blogs who are themselves going through deep waters. Some are in the fiery trials of cancer or some other affliction. They identify with my Karen and what she is experiencing. I have found also that many who read my blogs are caregivers. There is a fellowship of men whose lives have changed suddenly. Their wives have been strong and healthy. These wives have given care repeatedly. But now a life-changing illness strikes, and the men now need to become caregivers. All the feelings and emotions of being the protector could be described best in two words: complicated and confusing. Somehow many men still feel responsible in the fact that they couldn't protect their beloveds.

Karen has cancer. A vicious, rotten, cancerous fluid-producing mass has invaded her lung and intruded her life. I didn't know it was coming. I couldn't hear it. I couldn't see it. I couldn't smell it. But I am the husband, and I should be able to protect my wife and children.

Perhaps this is just how you as the husband/protector are feeling. It may or may not be cancer that has intruded. Your intruder may be physical or non-physical in nature. But it has invaded, and you are feeling more than a little overwhelmed. What in the world are you going to do? How is this going to turn out? Will your spouse survive?

I am not through this thing, nor am I over it. I am in it. All these questions have been my questions. Sometimes the questions seem to rage. It is then that I find it easier to handle. Sometime the questions seem to whisper. That is a deeper struggle for me.

Cancer has not become my consuming focus; however, it does have my attention! I lay beside Karen, and in the night I hear her softly breathe, and I ask God to give her breath. I look across the room, and I thank God for giving me a beautiful wife. No, I am not through this, but I am experiencing things that I know to be true. Please don't think that I am some iron man that is beyond emotions. I am far from that. I am experiencing the good Hand of our very great God Who is holding my sweetheart and me as well as our family. We are on a journey, and I am inviting many to travel with us and to share in our blessings and learn from our hardship.

Much has been written about husbands understanding their wives. I think that is great. Not too often do I read about wives better understanding their husbands. I want to especially write about the husband/protector becoming the husband/caregiver. I want husbands to better understand themselves. For those wives who are bearing the "intruder," perhaps you will understand your husband a little more. It will be important for both of you not to lose sight of these several things.

- **You are not in charge.** Don't forget for a moment that you are not in charge nor will you ever be. Up to this point you may be a master at fixing things. You can look at what is not working, figure out what it will take to fix it, and somehow you find a way to piece things together to make them "almost good as new." But not this time. Maybe for the first time in a long time you will have to admit to yourself that you are not in charge. Think of what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples that night long, long ago, "You call me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am" (John 13:13).

There is something very important which takes place when the protector confesses this. As much as I hate cancer, there is a peace that takes over and a blessed security in knowing that I can entrust my Karen into the Hand of the One Who loves her more than I ever can and Who bought her with a price (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20). She truly does belong to the One Who is in charge. He is God. I am not.

- **You are not alone.** At times you may feel like no one else has ever experienced what is happening in your life right now, but this is not true. It is much more than “misery loves company.” It is just good to realize that nothing is going to happen that is unique to your case.

While Paul was speaking about temptation, he pointed out an extremely important principle related to sharing in common when he wrote, “But such is as common to man” (1 Corinthians 10:13). We do not live in unique circumstances and situations. In fact, just the opposite is true. Our situations are amazingly similar and shared from generation to generation.

Karen’s situation is stunning. She never smoked a single cigarette in her life. She never was around second-hand smoke. Yet she has Stage 4 lung cancer. She couldn’t possibly have cancer, but she does. The doctors are so stunned. That must mean that no one else has ever had this happen, but they have. Others have similar stories. We are not alone, and neither are you.

- **You must not waste time and energy.** You couldn’t keep cancer away. You cannot make it leave. You are doing all that your wise medical team is suggesting, and you are certainly praying, a lot! You feel tired and are easily discouraged. Sometimes you feel easily agitated. To be honest, you will need to make a conscious decision not to waste your time and energy during these days.

It is just not wise to waste energy demanding “Why” from the Lord. Some people have actually said to me, “Why would the Lord ever allow Karen to get cancer?” We have determined that we are not going to ask “why.” This kind of question almost gives the picture of a clenched fist in anger and resentment.

We have determined to open wide our hands and ask the Lord, “What do you want us to learn and do?” We understand that the trouble we are going through right now will allow us to minister to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) and glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are sure that as we come to Him, we will also learn many things from Him (Matthew 11:28-30). Karen and I have determined we don’t want to be “why” folks. We want to be “what” kind of folks who greatly desire this to be a very special time with Him.

- **You need special power.** Never face the day in your own strength. You cannot be the caregiver God wants you to be or that your spouse needs you to be until you invest time in His Word and with Him personally in prayer. Whether you call it “My devotions” or “My Quiet Time,” it will be so important that you invest time significantly in the Psalms, the Gospel of John, or the Book of Ephesians. The Psalms were written in the heartache and terror of the situation that brought the writer to his great God for refuge and strength. John reveals the breathtaking majesty of God’s own Son Who came down to earth and dwelled among us, revealing the Father to us. Paul pulls the curtains of Heaven back to show us our incredible position in Christ. What security, strength, and solace come from your moments with the Lord!

Regardless of how strong you have always been and what you have achieved in your own strength and skill, this time you need special Power. Watching your beloved go through this and wishing it could have been you rather than her is emotionally exhausting. Such emotionally draining situations Isaiah must have addressed when he wrote, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

King David put it this way, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14).

- **You must not hover and smother.** “Stop hovering and smothering.” Wow! Are those easy words to say but hard to do. I truly need to ask the Lord for wisdom to know what Karen can and should be doing. James explained, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Those words are ancient and may not make a great deal of sense. Listen again to that verse. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5 NKJV).

Perhaps the specialist spotted my personality when he whispered to me, “Keep everything as normal as possible for Karen.” I wanted to scream, “NORMAL? Don’t you know that there is a bad, mean, rotten mass growing in her lung that is producing fluid that can choke her breath? NORMAL?”

I realize that he does indeed know about the mass. He told us about it, and to be honest, he is right. I need to be available to help in every way that I am needed. I need to learn new procedures. I need to learn routine tasks around the house. This is probably one of the most difficult things for the caregiver and the one needing care to work through. That’s why it is so important to be fostering the kind of marriage where both husband and wife can talk about anything in a loving way (Ephesians 4:15). The spouse needing care might have to tell her husband, “Please let me do this. I appreciate your help, Honey, but this is something I really want to at least try doing.” Or the caregiver may have to say, “Honey, I really don’t think this is wise for you to try doing today. Would you please let me just do this?” What wisdom you will need to discern between those two daily situations.

- **You are so very afraid.** Understand that your fear is normal and to be expected. You are thinking, “What is going to happen to my Sweetheart? Will my wife respond to the treatment? Is my darling going to survive?” This is the most difficult thing you have faced. You’re scared. Did you know that the Psalmist did not say that he never felt fear?



In fact just the opposite is true. He said, “What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee” (Psalm 56:3). The idea of “trust” is to “lean heavily, be confident in.” The Lord wants to become even more real to you in the times you are afraid.

Have you honestly talked with your spouse about her fears? Have you shared with your spouse how you are feeling and what your fears are? Have you admitted to yourself how very afraid you are?

- **You must not lose sight of eternity.** Be sure to keep eternity in view. It’s hard sometimes to keep the proper view before us as we contend with all the doctors’ appointments, lab draws, clinic visits, scans, x-rays, drains, surgeries, and hospitalizations. If that were not difficult enough, then we must deal with insurance companies, billing departments, deductibles, what’s covered and what’s not. All these things tend to rob of an eternal perspective.

The Apostle Paul was a man who experienced a lot of troubles. In the midst of difficulty he made an interesting observation. He spoke about the operation that was taking place. Outwardly, he was experiencing troubles. Inwardly, a wonderful thing was taking place. He was being renewed internally, spiritually. Listen to his incredible words, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17).

How are you doing spiritually? Is your heart set on things above (Colossians 3:1)? Are you learning how God indeed is helping you to do things you never dreamed possible (Philippians 4:13)? Are you experiencing the Lord’s great help and strength (Ephesians 6:10)? Are you growing in your walk with the Lord and your knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18)? Does Christ have a greater place in your priorities (1 Peter 3:15a)?

- **You must celebrate.** Celebrate every day. Don't lose your affection. Find moments to celebrate the goodness of the Lord. Choose to be joyful. This might be a good time to study the Biblical concept of "joy." Stay best friends. You need to get your rest and eat well. Grow together. Share your story. Don't become hermits and so private that no one can penetrate the walls you are erecting.

Make a blessings list. Chart out the many good things that the Lord is doing. Before you go to bed in the evening, rehearse some of the good things that the Lord has allowed you to experience with your loved one! View the next day as an opportunity to share with your wife and determine to love the Lord more. Though the application is much wider than simply applying it to your day, there is a principle to glean from the Psalmist who wrote, "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). Don't live in denial, pretending the situation isn't serious; however, continue to determine to choose joy. Determine to rejoice.

Can you identify with the awful feelings that come when the protector cannot protect the beloved? Now begin to identify with the sure Help of the All-powerful God Who reminds you to be "Casting all your cares upon Him; for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

I will update you on the journey as we make our way along this difficult road with the Lord and you.