

# DEALING WITH FACT

**O**ne of my major mistakes, as I was finishing radiation treatment, was to read Michael Landon's biography. I didn't read much. Only the last pages describing his death from cancer. But I shouldn't have done it.

It was the night before my last treatment. I was feeling good. The doctor was optimistic. The earlier treatment had been successful. This one was a mop-up to melt a small tumor on my lung. My faith was high.

On Thursday night before the last treatment, Jackie and I went mall-walking. We wandered into a bookstore. On the best-seller stand was Landon's biography.

When Landon had first been diagnosed with cancer, Pat Boone had called to ask if I'd be willing to fly to California and pray for him. Pat and others had witnessed to Landon. He was a good man but decided to reject Jesus.

I was drawn to Landon's book as a moth to a fatal candle. Before Jackie could discern what was happening, I was flipping through the pages. I read quickly of his last days. He had put up a heroic fight but died in three months.

I only read for a few minutes, then returned the book to the shelf. I knew I had made a mistake. I could feel hope and faith draining like water through a cracked dam. I desperately needed to stop the leakage. I glanced at the other books

on the shelf. Eight had death as title or theme.

I almost staggered from the bookstore.

Jackie sensed something wrong. She gripped my hand tightly, praying against the black spirit of despair. That night we refilled my nearly empty reservoir with water from the Word of God: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You" (Is. 26:3, NKJV). I was back on victory ground.

The next day, in the car, we listened to a tape of one of John Hagee's powerful sermons. He was preaching from Psalm 11:1: "In the Lord I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain?'"

My mind raced back to my college days when I was a church soloist. On occasion I had gone to the back of the Broadman hymnal and sung an old un-gospel song: *Flee as a bird to your mountain/Thou who art weary of sin...*

"No!" John shouted at me from the tape. "Don't

flee when the wicked bend their bows to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. Stand and fight!"

Hagee preaches like Abraham Lincoln said a man ought to preach—like he's fighting a swarm of bees. The bird referred to in Psalm 11, he said, was a field sparrow—a frightened little creature who, once spooked, never returns home.

God's people, when assaulted in mind and body, need to fortify themselves with the power of the Word—then stand firm. By Saturday, my mind in the promises of His Word, I was able to skim off the unbelief that crept inside me that night in the bookstore. Those of us living close to the edge, I've discovered, cannot afford to listen to nay-sayers.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You," David said in Psalm 119:11. What kind of sin? Well, unbelief to start with. Does that mean I deny fact? Absolutely not. Later in that same psalm, he says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (v. 71). Why? So "that I may learn Your statutes."

Facts must be faced. The path to learning God's ways is through affliction. Pain, sickness, grief—all are real. But the purpose of the affliction is to draw us into His presence.

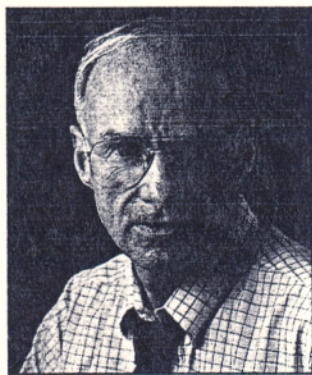
Adversity and faith are the two great necessary components for wholeness. Sometimes "faith people" give the impression of constant success. I run from such. I need people who walk with a limp—who have been to Gethsemane but have also experienced resurrection.

Conversely, I avoid the company of Christian fatalists. My newly given faith is too fragile to submit it to those who say there are no miracles. Even Jesus had to clear the room of wailers and mourners before He could raise the little girl from the dead (Mark 5:40).

That's why it is important to belong to a church where faith and hope balance the message of adversity and suffering. That's why, if possible, you need a doctor who will not only diagnose and treat your illness, but who will also infect you with faith for healing.

Faith and fact are not separate tracks in life. Their combined positive and negative forces form a great magnet called reality. It is this reality that draws others. ■

*Jamie Buckingham won first place at the Florida Magazine Association Awards for his "Holy Kiss-ing," which appeared in Last Word in June 1990.*



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