

every divine image bearer to reflect the goodness of a good God.

People change, even when systems don't.

When we learn to zero in on individuals, our focus shifts from macro-level progress to spotting small pockets of hope.

I do despair, sometimes, that the reputation of Christianity is irreparably damaged, but my hope is kindled when I encounter *Christians from all along the theological spectrum who are speaking and doing beautiful things.*

Even in the darkest periods of human history, there arise individual heroes—there are Oskar Schindlers in Nazi Germany, and Malala Yousafzais in Taliban-controlled Pakistan.

Isn't it hopeful that in every horrific tragedy there are *always helpers to be found?*

I believe our best hope for sustaining a work of *barely, poorly and slowly* changing the world for the better is to counteract cynicism against the system with the enduring hope of every individual light.

This, after all, is the Christian story. That the dramatic reversal of human history comes not through an upheaval of the powerful systems but through unlikely individual characters we encounter in the biblical narrative.

Miracles will come through the ordinary. Heroes come in small sizes. Hope will be inconspicuous.

Pay attention, lest we lose heart. □

Cindy Brandt is an author from Taiwan. She blogs at www.CindyWords.com and writes about "raising children un-fundamentalist."

The Rose by Eden Jersak

I recently had surgery to remove half my thyroid and two growing lumps. When I went in to see the surgeon, I heard some news I hadn't expected.

The good news is that I do not have cancer! The pathology report had taken unusually long—the reason for this was changes to the rules about what constitutes "cancer." In his words, I "dodged a bullet." The sobering truth is that three years ago, I would have been diagnosed with cancer and given aggressive treatment. For now, doctors will monitor my blood-work and my remaining thyroid functions, keeping watch with regular ultrasounds.

With my husband Brad out of town, I planned to go to the appointment on my own, but my friend Lorie graciously offered to accompany me.

I had honestly not expected to hear just how close a call this was, so having a friend by my side was much appreciated. After the appointment, we headed to the coffee shop to sip a nice hot "cuppa," and to enjoy a bit of sun on our faces.

I called Brad with the news and waited for Lorie to bring our drinks to the patio. I was enjoying the warmth of the sun and the view of Mount Baker.

Lorie and I were talking over my results and sipping our drinks when I felt a presence come up from my right.

I looked up to see a homeless man. He was holding a white rose wrapped in a black cloth. He looked at me and said, "I feel like I'm supposed to give you this right now."

I looked over at Lorie and then back to this presence and had no words. He laid the rose down on the railing beside me, and repeated, "I'm supposed to give this to you; it's freshly picked."



I took the flower and laid it on the table. As he walked away, he never turned back, and then disappeared into the parking lot. We were both left speechless for a few moments, and then the tears came.

I have been very aware of God with me in this journey, but that morning's more vivid demonstration of how close he is has me moved to tears again.

I'm so grateful for all the prayers, thoughts, acts of kindness and love I've received. My prayer is that you will be aware of God's presence with you today. I pray that you will be open to receiving God's presence in whatever shape or form it might take, and that you might even be willing to demonstrate God's presence to someone else.

My God's name is Emmanuel, and he is with me. □

Eden Jersak is the author of Rivers from Eden: 40 Days of Intimate Conversation with God.