

You Can Help Defeat Cancer

You might forget his name, Aron Ralston, but you won't soon forget what he did. After having his arm pinned by an 800-pound boulder for five days while hiking in Colorado, Ralston broke the bones in his arm and used his dull pocket knife to cut through the skin and tendons to free himself. He then rappelled from a 60-foot cliff and walked about six miles down the canyon before encountering two hikers who assisted him.

The will to live is a powerful emotion that gives human beings the courage to take extraordinary measures to keep death at bay. We are drawn to stories like that of Aron Ralston, not so much because he would go to such extreme lengths to save his own life, but because he survived to tell about it.

Thousands of people each day face a similar struggle when a doctor diagnoses them with cancer. Receiving that news is like being pinned by an 800-pound boulder. In some cases, the disease wedges people between life and death.

Every day, thousands of cancer patients also take extreme measures to keep death at bay. They don't make front-page news like Aron Ralston, but many of them demonstrate just as great a will to live and just as much courage in facing life-and-death issues. Like Ralston, each person, along with his or her physician, must make decisions about how to survive, be it for months or decades.

Thankfully, some cancers can now be cured or their advance can be slowed. But other cancers devastate the body quickly. In either case, radical medical treatments are often needed.

One of the more promising research projects for a cure for slow-growing cancers involves taking stem cells from a patient's sibling and injecting them into the patient's body in order to grow healthy marrow, which will then attack the malignant cells. This treatment, along with the standard course of chemotherapy, has extended life of patients by over a year in a New Zealand study. The best news is that some patients have gone into remission after receiving the stem cell

transplant.

Though some cancers have a high cure-rate, cures for most cancers are still many years away. In the meantime, we continue to rely on scientists and medical personnel to look for and discover a cure for a disease that robs our country of nearly a million and a half lives each year.

You can show your support to cancer survivors, to their families, and to those who have lost loved ones to this disease by attending a Relay for Life rally in your community. More than 3,800 communities across the United States and in eight foreign countries take part in what has become the signature activity of the American Cancer Society.

My wife's first cousin has been battling cancer for almost a year. Eric has demonstrated great faith and courage in facing each trial along this difficult journey. His wife, Andrea, has been equally as brave and has found it therapeutic to keep family and friends updated through frequent e-mails about her husband's condition.

In a recent e-mail, she shares these words: "Due to what we have had to face in the last 11 months, we have become very interested in cancer research and searching for a cure. We have been given the opportunity to participate in the Henry County Relay for Life event. If you are unfamiliar with Relay for Life, it is a nationwide event sponsored by the American Cancer Society. Its goal is to remember those who have lost the battle with cancer, to honor those who have survived, and to raise money for cancer research and education. It is a very noble organization and cause."

In a later e-mail, Andrea reported that Eric was so sick the night of Relay for Life that he was able to attend for only a brief time. However, she was thrilled that their team raised more than \$6,000 and their county in excess of \$57,000 for cancer research.

Andrea realizes the odds are heavily against her husband now. They have told their young children of the severity of his condition. A caring hospice team will

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work to keep him comfortable through the months ahead. You don't know Andrea and Eric, but you probably know people like them: brave, courageous and God-fearing people who have suffered in their struggle against death and don't want others to have to walk the same path.

You can walk beside such people at a Relay for Life event at your local high school, park or fairground. Share a few laps with them. Listen to their stories. You will be inspired by their courage and their will to live. And you'll want to do your part in helping eradicate a disease that robs so many people of the most precious thing on earth-- life.

[Michael Helms](#) is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Moultrie, Ga. A version of this column first appeared in The Moultrie Observer.

[Click here](#) for information about how to become involved in a Relay for Life in your community.