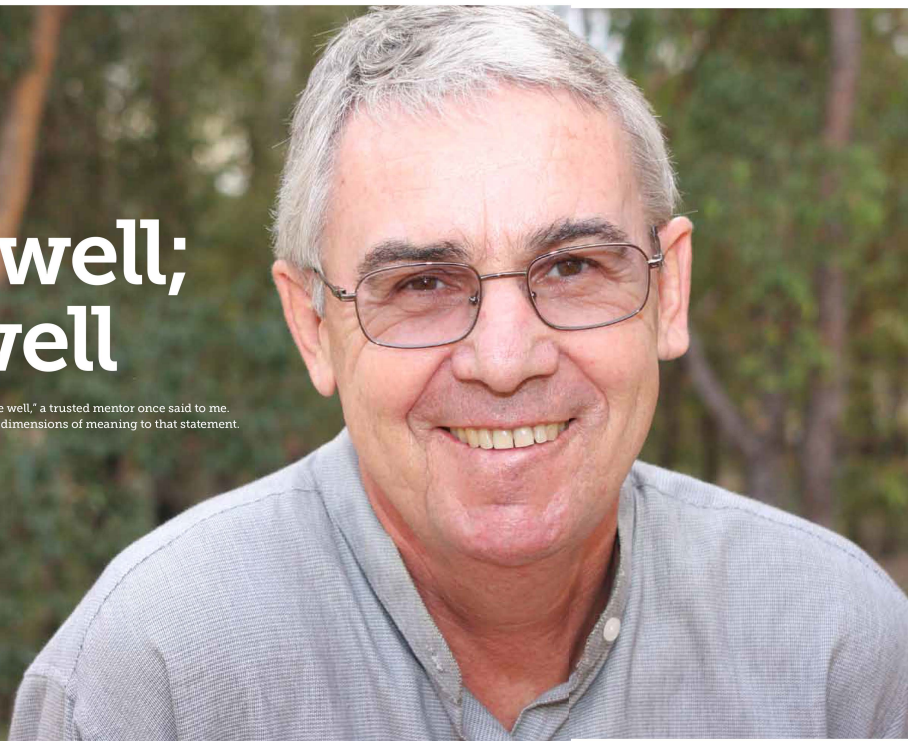


Live well; die well

"Teach people how to live well and die well," a trusted mentor once said to me. The past four years have added some dimensions of meaning to that statement.



By Peter Birt

"It's bowel cancer and we need to operate. Unfortunately you'll end up with a permanent colostomy," my surgeon explained in 2007.

I said, "What's that?" Believe me, I now know! I responded well to chemo and radiation. But, two and a half years later both lungs were riddled with cancer metastases. More chemotherapy. More encouraging signs. Until on the first night of a speaking trip to South East Asia in May this year — I regained consciousness on the floor of my hotel room with no idea what had happened. I continued my trip, but when I returned home tests revealed a brain tumour. It was removed on 24 June. I start more radiation treatment in late July.

How do you live well with

Jesus, in these situations?

There will be many answers to that question.

Here's one thing that doesn't help: spending any time thinking about whether it's fair or not. Fair just isn't the point.

I wake up to a new day, and with it a new context in which to live out life's greatest adventure: living and moving and having my very existence with Jesus in His Kingdom. The day unfolds. And in the midst of the unfolding — whatever that might be — I either meaningfully interact with Jesus the master of my life, or I don't. Doesn't it all come down to that for you too?

Unanticipated surprises cause us to laugh for the sheer joy of being alive to beauty and hope, love and friendship, and the living presence of Jesus alive and active right where we are. Priceless, isn't it?

Uninvited intruders team up too, smashing down doors and setting in, taking up spaces we'd set aside for more desirable guests, demanding attention and sapping precious life out of our often already over-taxed systems. Fair? Just life.

Part of the car wreck of a world where, in the words of that great theologian Bob Dylan, everything is broken? Everything twisted out of shape yet still retaining the image of the Maker.

I have grown weary of people saying, "How could this happen to someone like you?"

At times I want to respond, "If you want to play the, who-deserves-what-game, let me show you just how dark my heart is and perhaps that will answer your question and help you see that what really isn't fair is that Jesus suffered for me, the sinless One for the sinful one."

"You've just got to be positive," people have said to me over and over again.

What does that actually mean? I think being positive is over rated. By nature I suspect I land towards the positive end of the

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scale. I'm not about to curl up in a heap of woe-is-me. However, having hope is a whole lot more significant than being positive.

Having spent a fair bit of time in hospitals and doctors' offices, I've overheard and had heaps of conversations with people who talk up the 'be positive' angle, but do not have a hope big enough to

carry the weight of bodies that are being ravaged by diseases they may not recover from.

So what helps? To have within me, Christ the hope of glory, to have a grateful spirit no matter if my numbered earthly days are

and been scorched by the burning sands of the valley of the shadow of death to know that we need help.

We keep on finding it in a bedrock conviction that's grown in our souls. I have watched Jill

The Psalmist gave us much to ponder when he said of God, "You are good, and what you do is good," and then added, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." (Psalm 119:68-71)

And for us, the end of Psalm 23 has been gold. "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." We look back over our lives, through all kinds of trials and rebellious times and find ourselves lost in the wonder of saying, Lord, it's true. We turn around, and like two faithful sheep-dogs, Your goodness and love are there. And with the pressure of living with the constant uncertainty of cancer causes anxiety and doubts to rise, we pare things back to the goodness of a God who, "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" and who "along with him, graciously gave us all things." (Romans 8:32)

Years ago we asked Jesus to introduce us to His Father. And as we studied Jesus' biographies, He did. And we saw that His Father was good, to the core of His being.

longer or shorter. Jill, my wife, and I have spent countless conversations doing what we call "paring things back to the goodness of God." We've waded our way through enough leech infested swamps, been wounded with each other's unique expressions of having hearts that are sinful and desperately wicked.