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In May of 2008, my father-in-law was diagnosed with a form of leukemia that was incurable. The specialist told him that her best guess, according to his blood count, was that he had three weeks to live, best-case scenario three months, and if a miracle happened, he may have a year. As I look back over the past eight and a half months, I believe that I have witnessed a miracle, and have been the recipient of grace from one very special family doctor.

After the initial shock wore off, we as a family did some

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A Recipient of Grace

Being the hands
and feet of Jesus.

by Kim Pappel

investigating into our Dad's diagnosis, and came to understand that three years prior Dad was diagnosed with *myelodysplastic syndrome*. Being 78 years old at the time, he was not a candidate for a bone marrow transplant. His specialist monitored his blood every three months, and then when his red blood cell-count numbers improved, he was only required to have his blood checked every six months. He never understood what his condition was, which was why he had never told our family of his condition. At first, this was very upsetting to us, but we began to see it as an act of grace. Dad lived a wonderful life, living each day to the fullest, instead of living under the weight of what many would view as a death sentence. On May 29th, when he better understood his diagnosis, he told our family that until that day he had felt only 65 years old, but in that moment, he became 80.

My *dad-in-law* was left in the hands of his family physician to receive care until the end of his journey. His doctor came to my parents' home and gently walked

them through what to expect and what options were open to them. He was very caring and very loving with them, patiently answering their questions, and he has continued to conduct himself in this manner ever since.

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The past eight months have been filled with blood transfusions, diuretics to drain the fluid build up around his heart and lungs, oxygen, antibiotics, and pain management as he suffered from kidney and bladder stones. Through all of this, our family has received grace in the form of care from Dad's family doctor. He was always available to us and answered any questions that we, as a family, had. All of these interventions have allowed us to celebrate Father's Day and our niece's wedding in June, our parents' 60th Anniversary in July, Thanksgiving, Dad's 82nd birthday in December, and Christmas. His

community also nominated *our Dad* for an award from the Manitoba Society on Aging. In October, he attended the awards ceremony at the Legislative Building where he received an award for going above and beyond to help seniors in his community. These have become special memories for us a family.

Dad was hospitalized on Christmas Day, and his condition has grown steadily worse since then. His doctor had to tell him that he likely wouldn't leave the hospital again. He told Dad that his job as a doctor had now changed. His responsibility now was to walk him as far as he could, and then he would be handing him over into the arms of Jesus. These words, said with so much compassion, have brought much comfort during this difficult time. We have often pictured the open arms of Jesus waiting to receive our Dad.

In spite of that, Dad was able to go home again for a short while. It had been important to him to move *our Mom*, from the home they shared, into a seniors complex. Once that happened, Dr B. gave Dad an extra litre of blood so that he could spend some time in their new home together. Dr. B. knew how important this had been to our Dad. Mom and Dad had 10 days together in their new apartment—this is a time our Mom will cherish.

Last week, my father-in-law decided to stop the fight. The last transfusion hadn't worked, and he spent most of his days sleeping. He made the decision to stop having transfusions, and to stop receiving medical interventions to keep him alive. The next day our family met to share communion with Dad one

last time. As he expressed his heart to us, he told us that his doctor was more than a physician; he was a healer. He wanted us to make sure we expressed his deep appreciation to his doctor for all that he had done. He also shared with us that throughout this journey, Dr. B. had

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moved from being his doctor to being a friend whom he cherished. Those were some of the last words I heard my father-in-law speak. He is now incoherent most of the time, and is being kept as comfortable as possible with morphine.

As I worked on this edition of *focus* magazine, and read the articles on grace, I kept thinking of the grace that has been extended to us as a family. Dr. Neufeld, in his article, refers to grace as “*the huge flood of God's generous kindness and action toward people.*” Brad Burke refers to *common grace* as a “*divine, nourishing rain.*” As I transcribed the article “*Grace through Sickness,*” I fought back tears as Dr. Galloway's experience helped me to understand more fully some of what my Dad has suffered over this past year, and yet “*He giveth more grace!*” God has been gracious to us as a family by giving us a chance to celebrate, a chance to say goodbye and the opportunity to have no regrets. He has

also been so gracious to us by allowing us to be in the care of a doctor that understands the wonderful grace of Jesus.

As a doctor, the opportunity is there for you to be “*the hands and feet of Jesus*” in ways that are *deeply moving and impacting on those that you come in contact with.* This is the legacy that Dr. Dieter Bueddefeld, a CMDS member and physician in Altona, Manitoba, has left for our family. Although this is one story of one physician, I'm sure many families that are in the care of a Christian physician in times of difficult illnesses can echo this sentiment. As a family member of a patient, I want to say *thank you* for what you do. I have come to see that being a physician is a calling. *Thank you* for responding in obedience to this calling; and I encourage you to keep pressing on in the work that God has called you to.

*You are making a
tremendous impact for
the cause of Christ!*

(Kim's father-in-law passed away peacefully the day after this article was written.) f

