



*“Why did cancer
happen to me?”*

Confronting **spiritual and faith issues**
after treatment

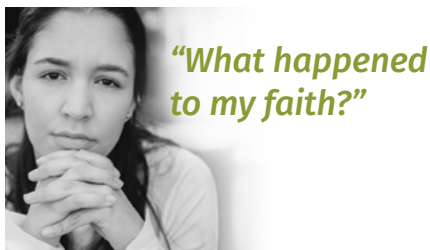
HELP FROM
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Having cancer can challenge your view of life and its meaning.

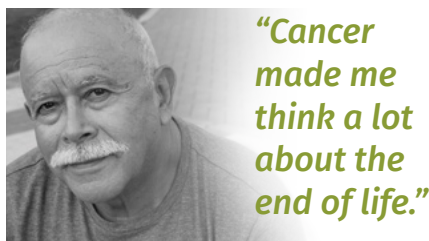
From the moment you became a survivor, your experience may have opened up all kinds of questions and feelings about spirituality, religion and faith.

Here's what Georgians who have finished cancer treatment often say about the spiritual issues they face:



“What happened to my faith?”

If you follow a religion or belong to a place of worship, that may have been a source of comfort – or not. A serious illness like cancer makes emotions more intense. This intensity can deepen faith and beliefs; or it can cause you to question them altogether.



“Cancer made me think a lot about the end of life.”

As a person with cancer, your first goal was to survive. When you focus on survival, you're inclined to reflect on the purpose or meaning of life. You may question how you've lived your life or start thinking about what's most important. These deep thoughts are sometimes hard to sort out.



“I just feel alone in the world.”

The weeks and months of treatment bring all kinds of interactions with doctors, caregivers, family and friends. After treatment, you continue to heal, but you may feel this web of support has disappeared. Some look for new kinds of support in people and experiences tied to spirituality.



“It's not fair.”

If you believe in God or a higher Being, it's possible you're wondering why something as bad as cancer happened to someone as good as you. You might feel punished unjustly. This can cause resentment and anger that affect you and others around you.



“I really need some kind of support.”

Your diagnosis and treatment began a bewildering journey. As a survivor, that journey continues. While family and friends may have helped you, it's understandable if you're looking for someone or something extra to help make sense of it all.

▼ **If these thoughts sound familiar, here are a few things to keep in mind...**

It helps to know



Religion and spirituality are two sides of a coin.

In other words, both religion and spirituality are about feeling connected to something larger. Religion involves formal study and organized beliefs that make up your faith. Spirituality is broader; it's been described as relating to some kind of force beyond yourself.



Faith and spirituality affect your state of mind.

More hope and optimism. Less anxiety and depression. Greater satisfaction of life. People who practice religion or engage in spirituality say their experience provides great emotional benefit. It can also help you resume activities and deepen relationships after treatment.



They also contribute to your physical health.

Research shows that spiritual and religious factors are tied to lower blood pressure, better control of pain and reduced alcohol and drug use. In a study of 32,000 survivors, those who said they had higher levels of "spiritual well-being" also had better physical health.



"Spiritual distress" can make other aspects of survivorship harder.

A loss of faith or an absence of spirituality can bring anger, despair or anxiety. With any of these, healing fully from cancer becomes more problematic. Thus, there is value in exploring your beliefs and coming to terms with your feelings.



You can find peace even if you don't consider yourself "spiritual" or "religious."

The key, experts say, is to reflect on what is most meaningful to you. When you engage in thinking about life and what's important, that can bring calm and peace.

Now, the good news: You can enjoy the benefits of faith or spirituality... ▼

What you can do right now

You know from cancer treatment that medicines and procedures are physical ways to help the body heal. But other practices involving the mind and spirit can help, too.

If you're struggling with spiritual or faith issues, it's worthwhile to explore these practices. Below are some ways to get started.

Talk to your doctor.

You may be surprised to learn that doctors are aware of the medical benefits of spiritual beliefs and practices.

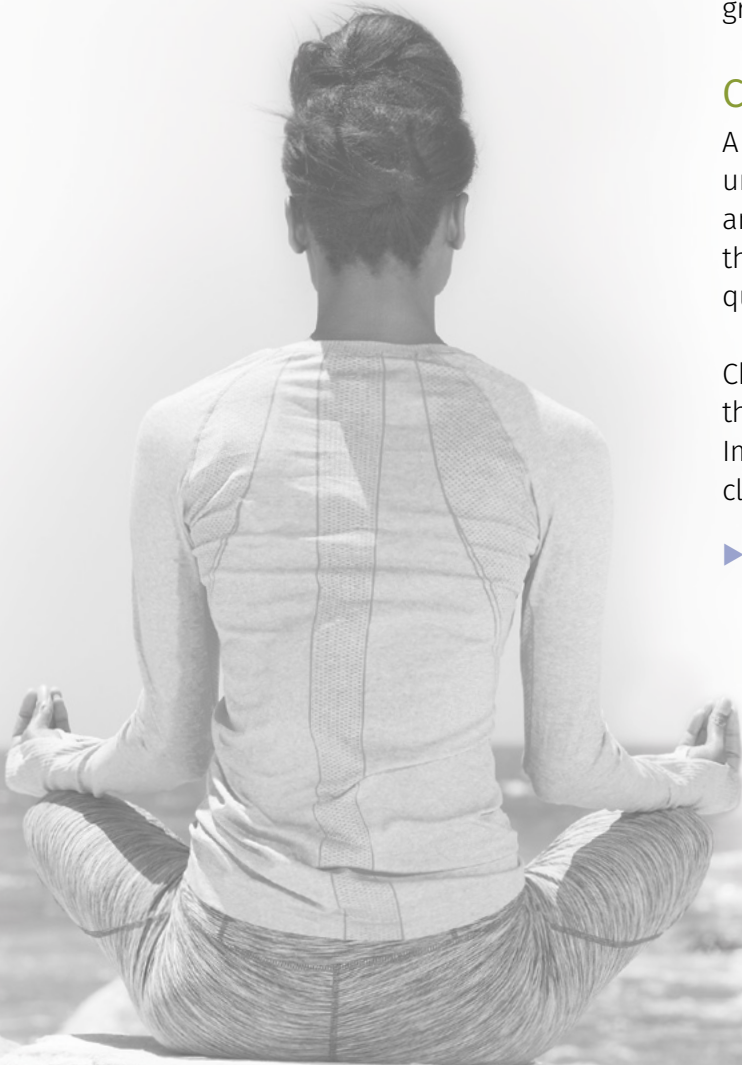
So, it's OK to call your doctor or bring the matter up at your next appointment. Your medical team can build your survivor care plan in a way that meets your needs and refer you to programs or support groups that strengthen spiritual well-being.

Chaplains are a good resource, too.

A chaplain is a trained clergy member who understands both healthcare and issues of faith and spirituality. He or she will have insights into the kinds of spiritual thoughts, beliefs and questions you have as a survivor.

Chaplains typically help people of many faiths, and they don't try to convert you to a particular religion. Importantly, a chaplain can put you into touch with a clergy member of a particular religion that you prefer.

- ▶ A hospital near you may offer pastoral care. To find out, visit the hospital's website and enter chaplain services or pastoral care in the Search box.



Meditation is a good way to concentrate and connect.

People who meditate say it brings them many benefits, and studies have found this to be true. Meditation is a way of focusing the mind to relax. It has been shown to reduce depression, pain and anxiety as well as improve sleep.

There's more than one way to meditate. You might use movement, as with the practice of tai chi. Or you might chant or repeat a word or phrase out loud to focus the mind. Or you could simply close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

If you'd like to try meditation but don't know how to start, here are a couple of ideas:

[Learn the basics on how to meditate >](#)

[Download a good meditation app >](#)

Here's one place you might find harmony.

Many of the benefits of meditation also come from yoga. In fact, yoga combines meditation with physical movement and breathing techniques. These form an experience that feels spiritual to many people.

Harmony is the goal of yoga. When you practice yoga, you may feel like your mind, body and environment are all coming together. This can bring a sense of peace and focus that will help you adjust to other aspects of your post-treatment life. If you think you'd like to try yoga, look into these options:

[Learn more about the benefits of yoga >](#)

[Find a yoga class near you >](#)



“I didn’t want to die. However, I later shifted from ‘trying not to die’ to ‘trying to live.’ Cancer has taught me that life is short, and I need to be patient and live day by day.” – Marquita Bass

Open your mind to mystery and meaning.

Research has shown that being outdoors – even looking at scenes of nature – benefits the mind and body in many ways. Not only do you get exercise and Vitamin D, you can also improve sleep and lower stress.

Spirituality has a relationship with nature, too. Experiencing the earth and sky have a way of opening up thoughts and views of life and its mystery and meaning. You might see that by taking walks and hikes, biking a path or just lying in the grass, looking up at clouds and stars. If you're an indoors person looking to go outdoors more, consider these resources:

[Learn 10 ways in which nature can help you >](#)

[Find a nature trail near you >](#)

A good place to learn (much) more

It's GeorgiaCancerInfo.org – and it offers you quick access to many websites that promote spiritual health. You'll also find helpful info about other aspects of survivorship.

[Go to: GeorgiaCancerInfo.org/Survivorship](https://www.GeorgiaCancerInfo.org/Survivorship)

