



**SO THE
DREADED “C”
HAS COME
KNOCKING—
WHAT NOW?**

Bob Roberts

© Copyright 2025. All Rights Reserved
Reflecting the Designer

I can't give you a roadmap that fits everyone, but I can share what I've learned walking through my own valley. These ten things have steadied me when life as I knew it fell apart. They are part survival guide, part spiritual reflection — because this journey, if you let it, will make you more human than you've ever been.



1. Pause — and Turn Panic into Gratitude

You aren't dead yet.

If you're still breathing, you're still fighting — and you still have time to live.

The first thing I'd tell you is to pause. Don't make big decisions in the fog of fear. Let your heart absorb the news, but refuse to operate from a place of desperation. Desperation clouds judgment; gratitude clears it.

Even if your body feels fragile, anchor your emotions in gratitude — for time, for love, for the chance to think and breathe and pray. Gratitude doesn't erase fear, but it reframes it. It turns fluorescent panic into the warm light of perspective.

For me, that gratitude has a foundation. It's rooted in a God who is both good and sovereign, who holds the days I can't. But even if you don't share that faith, gratitude can still be your compass. It's the simplest, most profound rebellion against despair.



2. Lower Your Expectations of the System — Raise Your Voice Within It

You're about to enter a machine that is both **brilliant** and **broken**. The Western medical system saves lives every day — but it's also bureaucratic, impersonal, and often dehumanizing.

So, lower your expectations of the system, but raise your agency within it.

You'll meet extraordinary people who truly care. But they work inside a machine that runs on protocols, not personalities. Empower yourself with knowledge. Learn the vocabulary of your diagnosis. Ask questions until you understand. Don't nod politely; make them explain it in plain language.

Insurance calls will test your patience and sanctification. You'll be transferred, misunderstood, and occasionally treated like a number. When that happens, return to your first principle: gratitude. Gratitude keeps you human when the system forgets to.



3. Build a Morning Ritual – Guard the Edges of Your Day

Cancer doesn't just attack the body; it destabilizes your sense of time. Days blur together. Motivation thins. Even simple tasks feel monumental.

That's why now, more than ever, you must fight for rhythm.

Start your mornings with something that reclaims your sanity — mental, spiritual, and physical. It doesn't have to be grand. Write down three things that are still true, still good, still yours.

For me, it was music — truth wrapped in aural beauty. I'd ask Alexa to play my morning playlist, filled with songs that reminded me who God was when I couldn't remember.

You'll have days when you can't move. I call them "coupon days." You get three. Use them without guilt. But don't let them become your norm. Life is still calling, and every sunrise is an invitation to answer.



4. Adopt a Spirit of “Giving Living”

When your diagnosis is serious, it’s easy to become consumed with yourself. Suddenly, the goal of life becomes more life. That sounds noble, but it can quietly curdle into self-absorption — and that path leads only to frustration and despair.

The cure is what I call “giving living.”

Open your eyes to others who are walking this same valley. Share your hard-won insights. Offer your presence, your words, your empathy. When you live to give, something shifts — the walls of your world expand again.

Self-focus breeds darkness; self-giving breeds light. The moment you realize your valley can be a place of ministry, it becomes holy ground. You and I may not have chosen this path, but as long as we’re still here, we can live well — not as self-absorbed agents of discouragement, but as conduits of comfort.



5. Manage Your Fears Before They Manage You

Fear is inevitable. *But unaddressed fear is corrosive.*

Your fears will often orbit around what you love most — your family, your health, your unfinished hopes. So write them down. Name them. Number them. A fear named loses half its power.

Then sort them. *Some fears are built on lies or imagination* — emotional avalanches that crumble under truth. Confront those daily with Scripture and reason. *Others are practical* — finances, wills, relationships — and they demand action, not anxiety.

One of my deepest fears was about my daughter’s future — would wise, godly men still speak into her life if I were gone? So I asked three friends and two cousins to be intentional: to write letters, remember her milestones, invite her into their families. Knowing this was in place brought enormous peace.

Some may call that morbid. I call it mercy. Facing your fears is not faithlessness; it’s faithful stewardship of the life and love you still have.



6. Intimately Know the Medical Plan — and Embrace the Unknown

You need to know where you are in your treatment — *precisely, soberly, and without denial*. Know your next two or three steps. Be able to articulate them clearly, not only for yourself but for the many who will ask. This helps transform confusion into clarity, and fear into forward motion.

Cancer puts you squarely in the valley of the unknown. Every scan, every lab result, every appointment carries its own tremor of uncertainty. As I write this, I’m two days away from my fourth PET scan. I wish I could tell you they’ve all been hopeful. They haven’t. Some have been gut punches — the kind that take your breath away and remind you, in no uncertain terms, where you stand.

And yet, here’s what I’ve learned: the way is through. Marcus Aurelius said it centuries ago, and it still holds. You can’t wish your way around the valley; you walk through it.

Knowing your medical plan — understanding the lingo, the timeline, the next date circled on the calendar — helps you find footing when the path feels like quicksand. **You don’t have to conquer the entire future. Your job is simply to make it to the next medical date.** And when you do, take a breath, look up, and keep walking.



7. Get Comfortable Being a Burden

Most of us spend our lives trying not to be a burden. We pride ourselves on strength, independence, usefulness. But when cancer comes, those illusions collapse — and that’s okay. Because now it’s time to let others carry you.

You’re going to need valley walkers — people willing to say the hard things and do the hard things on your hardest days. Don’t wait until you’re drowning to reach for them. *Think now about your three closest friends, or maybe your ten most trusted relationships.* These are the people with whom you’ve built relational equity over the years. It’s time to cash in those chips — and do it without guilt.

I’ve done this with what I can only describe as embarrassing audacity. But you know what? It’s been beautiful. My dying has become a rallying point. My suffering has awakened mortality in my friends and made our relationships more honest, more raw, more sacred. There’s a strange mercy in that.

There’s something holy about letting others bear your weight. It reminds them of their own fragility and teaches them compassion. So don’t rob your friends of that opportunity. Sometimes the most selfless thing you can do is let others practice love on you.



8. Protect Your Mind — Don’t Chase Every Cure

When there’s death in you, the mind becomes desperate — grasping like a thousand hands reaching for any lifeline that promises life. You’ll hear about diets, supplements, miracle protocols, and cures they “don’t want you to know about.” It’s endless.

Here's my non-medical but deeply lived advice: **try what you want, but tell your oncologist. Communication is sanity.**

I've swallowed ivermectin, fenbendazole, mebendazole, and apricot seeds like PEZ candy. Do they work? I have no idea. Maybe a little. Maybe not at all. But if they help my faith or give me the placebo of hope, I'll take it. A good placebo can be better than a bad attitude.

Still, there's a danger here. When you spend your mental energy hunting for the one magic bullet, your hope becomes fragile. You start to feel like your healing depends on whether you've checked every last box on a cosmic to-do list. *That's not living — that's panic disguised as control.*

There comes a point when you have to let go of the chase. My trust is ultimately in God, who can heal through medicine, through miracles, or through heaven itself. If you live in the frantic swirl of “what haven't I tried yet,” your mind will never rest. And if your mind doesn't rest, your soul won't either.

So guard your peace. Trust that the path you're walking — however imperfect — is enough for today. **Let go of the myth of total control.** *It's not the cancer that will steal your quality of life; it's the anxiety of trying to outrun it.*



9. Don't Fake Fine

As a Christian, I believe that when Jesus spoke about salt and light in Matthew 5, He was talking about influence — the kind that helps people see God through your life. **Strangely, the greatest influence of my life has come through my sickness, not my strength.**

In my faith tradition, we sometimes have a tendency to “plastic-

coat” everything — to slap on a verse or two and wrap our suffering in a neat little bow. But that’s not reality. We are sinful. We are messy. We are living in a broken world. *And the great irony is that the brightest I’ve ever shined has been when I’ve allowed myself to be most broken.*

When we recorded the Dead Man Talking podcast’s first episode, I was sick from chemo — deathly ill, uncertain if I was dying or just exhausted. It was awful. Embarrassing. And it became our most listened-to episode by far. Why? Because it was real. People don’t need polished perfection; they need authenticity.

So take off the mask. Stop pretending. Let people see the cracks — because that’s where the light leaks through. You don’t need to have it all together to influence others; *you need to be true.* The world doesn’t need another example of composure. It needs an example of grace in the raw.



10. The Weapon of Your Suffering

I’ve come to see my suffering not as a random tragedy, but as part of a much bigger war — a cosmic conflict between good and evil that runs through every human story.

I believe we live in a created world that was desecrated by a foreign evil — a corruption that entered through sin and rewrote the goodness of creation with malignant code. Cancer isn’t from the heart of God; it’s a symptom of the serpent’s vandalism. My good cells were hijacked, re-scripted by an intruder.

But in Genesis 3, right after the fall, God gave humanity a promise — that a Deliverer would come, one who would crush the serpent’s head. That Deliverer is Jesus Christ. Through His death and resurrection, He secured a sweeping cosmic victory over death, sin, and hell.

That's the story I'm living in. *My suffering has meaning because it's tethered to His victory.* What was meant to make me fear death has instead made me long for resurrection. What was meant to silence my faith has only amplified it.

The cancer that was supposed to destroy me has become my testimony. My valley has become my weapon — because I'm part of a story that cannot end in darkness.

And so, dear reader, I invite you into that same sweeping victory. Connect your pain, your questions, your suffering to the One who conquered death itself. His name is Jesus. Through Him, every valley — even this one — ends in light.

Final Note:

You may not have chosen the valley of cancer, but you can choose how to walk through it.

Walk with gratitude. Walk with honesty. Walk with grace. And above all, walk with hope — because the way through the valley is lit by resurrection light.

If you know someone recently diagnosed, please share this with them. I so desire to be a help and blessing to fellow valley walkers.

You can find the Dead Man Talking Podcast and other resources at ReflectingtheDesigner.org/DeadManTalking.