

IN THE NEWS

On Monday, Colleen Hauser, a Minnesota mother who had fled the state with her 13-year-old son Daniel to help him avoid chemotherapy for his Hodgkin's lymphoma and instead seek alternative treatments, returned home with her son. Although a warrant had been issued for Mrs. Hauser's arrest, the issuing judge canceled it and instead returned legal custody of Daniel to her and Daniel's father after the pair agreed to cooperate with an oncologist's recommendations that Daniel undergo at least five chemotherapy sessions, starting this week. Minnesota statutes require that parents provide necessary medical care for a child. The family had preferred the natural healing practices of an American Indian religious group known as the Nemenhah Band, but have now agreed to set their religious objections to chemotherapy aside.

Mrs. Hauser and Daniel were on the run for nearly a week, ending up in southern California, where, authorities believe, they may have been heading for Mexico to seek alternative treatment. During that time, the Nemenhah Band placed a statement on its Web site urging the mother and son to return. The statement said that while the group "fully sustain and support Colleen and Danny Hauser in their decision to seek alternative modalities in treating cancer," it was not the policy of the group "to disregard an order from the judge and abscond with a young person that has been placed in the custody of the court. "The statement, signed by Phillip R. (Cloudpiller) Landis, Elected Principal Medicine Chief of the band, concluded by saying, "There are better ways to handle this, come home, bring that boy home." In describing the group's general philosophy, its Web site says that natural healing is part of their spiritual orientation and that they will "First Do No Harm".

If treated with chemotherapy and radiation, the Hodgkin's lymphoma has a 90 percent cure rate in children, but without such treatments, Daniel is likely to die, doctors who have examined him say. Daniel, who was diagnosed with the disease in January, had an initial chemotherapy treatment in February, but then did not want to continue. When first diagnosed, Daniel, who has a learning disability and cannot read, did not understand the risks and benefits of chemotherapy and did not believe he was ill. Now, however, the tumor has grown significantly and Daniel describes his pain as a 10 on a scale of 1 - 10. Doctors believe that resuming the chemotherapy will likely be successful, but do say that starting and stopping the treatment could make the tumor resistant.

In another news story, last Friday, a Wisconsin mother was found guilty of second-degree reckless homicide for praying instead of seeking medical help for her 11-year-old daughter who was gravely ill with untreated diabetes. The girl died March 23, 2008, as her mother, Leilani Neumann, and her Bible-study partners gathered around her to pray after she lost her ability to walk and talk. They summoned help only after she stopped breathing. Neuman's attorney said his client is "a devout Christian" who took good care of her four children, but the prosecutor described her as "a religious zealot" who let her daughter die as a test of faith. Neumann's attorney further said that Neumann did all she could to help her daughter that was in line with the family's belief in faith-healing. No sentencing date for Neumann has been set yet, but she faces up to 25 years in prison. Her husband is due to stand trial on the same charge in July.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Regarding their sick children, both the Hauser and the Neumann families put faith in procedures outside of those prescribed by the medical community, though only the Neumanns claim Christian belief. Most people, including Christians, readily seek medical help for their ailments. Given that fact, the following questions are appropriate:

1. What do you expect to happen when you pray for someone who is sick? Why?
2. Should prayer for the sick be viewed as part of the "cure package" for a sick person or does such prayer have a different function? Explain your answer.
3. Does faith really heal?
4. Should parents have the right to choose to not seek medical care for their children when such care does not coincide with the parents' beliefs?
5. Is chemo a way that God heals? Are insulin injections a way that God sustains life?
6. Do you think the judge's decision of 25 years in prison seems too harsh?
7. Do you agree with the judge who dropped the charges whenever Mrs. Hauser returned home with her son?
8. Where does faith end and medicine begin? Where does medicine end and faith begin?
9. Is choosing medical treatment to be seen as a lack of faith in God? In prayer?
10. Did the Indian band do the right thing encouraging Mrs. Hauser to return home and by doing so, were they casting a bad shadow on their own work?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

1. James 5:14 > Mrs. Neumann might have pointed to this verse to defend her action of refusing medical help for her daughter choosing prayer over medicine.
Q: Can you think of a time when you or someone you loved was seriously ill & others prayed?
2. II Chronicles 16:12 (context 16:11-14)
Q: Occasionally we hear someone telling a sick person that the reason he or she has not been healed is a lack of "enough faith". How would you respond to the person making that statement?
3. Isaiah 38:21 > Does God approve of our use of "home remedies" to cure our maladies?
4. Isaiah 38:1-6 > It would appear that Hezekiah's prayer caused God to change His mind. Is that just the storyteller's perspective, or does prayer ever cause God to change His mind? Is it possible to persuade God do what we wish?
5. Luke 17:19 > A man with leprosy had come to Jesus to be healed. There was no medicine involved, only the man's faith. Few serious researchers in the field of modern medicine would prescribe faith alone for the healing of major illnesses, but many recognize that faith in God often has a positive bearing on the outcome. In what ways has your faith helped you to deal with illness?

Some Christians who live with a long-term illness have heard other Christians say things like:

- a) "Suffering is God's will for your life."
- b) "You are demon possessed."
- c) "Whose sin is it that you were born disabled?"
- d) "Suffering is God's will for your life."
- e) "The blemished shall not approach the altar."

What do you think would be best to say to someone who has suffered all of their life?