

SOMETHING



UNEXPECTED

Life is filled with the unexpected. While most of his classmates were preparing for another day at school, things were beginning quite differently for 16-year-old Jona Torres, who was battling cancer. At 7:30 a.m., Jona suddenly began to cough up blood and pieces of cancerous tumor. During an episode that should have sparked panic, the Torres family was characterized by calm—as well as by Jona's infectious sense of humor. As his dad quietly instructed his mom to take Jona's younger brother on to school, he and Jona climbed into the truck and headed for the emergency room. The scene was heart-wrenching as Jona's body was racked with coughing, and he struggled even to breathe. But in scattered, poignant moments of stillness, he and his dad found opportunities to laugh quietly together and were aware of an overwhelming peace in their hearts. As they reached the hospital, the coughing miraculously ended; so rather than stopping at the ER, they checked in to the oncology department, where the doctors knew well Jona's broad smile and story-telling ways. Upon entering the building, Jona began bantering with the doctors who, when seeing how well Jona looked, could hardly believe the story of the morning events until they saw for themselves the evidence of the traumatic episode. But a blood test showed all counts normal. Rather than go home and rest, Jona opted to return to school and, with typical humorous flair, share what had happened in a way that belied the life-threaten

ing incident. For the time being, God had chosen to spare his life.

As Jona faced his cancer battle head-on, everyone around him could tell there was something different about him—something special. It certainly isn't normal for a teenager to respond to a near-death experience as Jona did on that frightening school morning. But really, Jona was just an ordinary guy.

Every kid likes to be liked. During upper elementary school, Jona wanted so desperately to be liked by his friends that he began to tell incredible lies in an effort to make people accept him. He was also a gifted athlete, and soccer was *his* sport. His movements on the field were precise and effortless. But, as with the lying, he tried to use his skill as a means of achieving greater happiness. And, as with the lying, it didn't work.

A miserable Jona came to his dad one day, saying, "I can't live like this anymore. I don't like who I am." All his attempts at happiness were failing, leaving him empty. His dad asked pointedly, "Do you know Jesus?" Years before, Jona had come to a point where he realized he habitually did wrong; but God loved him so much He sent His Son Jesus to take the punishment for those sins by dying on the cross. Jona had believed and accepted that

long ago. “Then,” his dad told him, “even though I do not see you acting like a Christian right now, I know I will begin to see it because God promises that He has made you a new person. Jesus Christ has made you free. You are not a slave to doing wrong anymore. Believe in who you are in Christ. He promises He will continue His good work in you until He returns. Be who you are.” And as Jona quit trying to make happiness work *his way*, *God* began to change him and bring him true joy.

Then came the cancer diagnosis on his fifteenth birthday: osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. Young and full of life, staring suffering and death in the face, the Jona who once thought he needed friends, sports, and pleasant circumstances to be happy would have responded with fear or anger. The Jona who was now free in Jesus Christ did not. Christ enabled him to pray when he was afraid. Christ gave him peace when his suffering seemed too great to bear. Christ filled him with love of others when he might otherwise have focused on himself and his trial. Christ proved Himself worthy of Jona’s trust and made him content and joyful. In spite of his great physical struggle, Jona often told friends (with his trademark smile), “God is amazing!”

A year later, on an evening in the springtime, Jona was seized with an episode of the same

suffocating cough he had all those months before. This time, as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he recognized the shadows of fear as just that—shadows not to be feared. His eyes were set intently on the door to Heaven, and he anticipated its opening to him. This time God did not choose to leave him here on earth. He did something far better. He took Jona through that door where he now knows no pain, no fear—where he is forever alive with his risen Savior.

What about you? Do you have Christ? In the Bible God makes it very clear that “**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23). Jona was a sinner. He realized as a young boy that “**the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**” (Romans 6:23). He trusted Jesus to be his Savior, believing that “**God showed His love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us**” (Romans 5:8). Today Jona is in heaven, and though his family misses him terribly, they are confident they will see him again. Perhaps you are experiencing some of the same struggles Jona had, but you don’t know what to do about them because you don’t have Christ. God says: “**Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved**” (Romans 10:13). God loves you and wants to set you free just as He did Jona.

For more information about what Christ did for Jona and what He can do for you, please visit www.jonatorres.com.

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that makes the LORD his trust.

Psalm 40:1-4