Mission Possible

It was Mother's Day, and even though some people roll their eyes at the cliché Hallmark holiday, I cherish it — especially in life after cancer.

May 14, 2019 By Avie Barron

I woke up this last Sunday morning to a small, bright yellow package sitting on my nightstand from our son, Eli, and next to that a pretty paper bag hand painted by our daughter Paige, and next to that a sweet card, hand-drawn by our oldest, Jamie. It was Mother's Day and even though some people roll their eyes at the cliché Hallmark holiday, I cherish it — especially in life after cancer.

One of the major side effects of chemo is infertility. Even before my own diagnosis, this is something that Tim and I had to face because of Tim's cancer before we were even married. We were still dating in 2004 when we had to have a conversation of whether or not I would be OK with the possibility of going through in-vitro fertilization treatments or not even being able to have children at all with him. It was a pretty heavy conversation to have at the age of 20 when most people my age were still deciding on moving out of their parents' house or what college major to settle on. The doctors explained to us that what chemo didn't destroy in Tim's reproductive system would be wiped out because of Tim's following surgeries and that getting pregnant the natural way would be "nearly impossible."

We got pregnant without IVF or medical intervention three years after Tim went into remission and our first daughter was born in 2007. Soon after we had our firstborn, I had some major medical issues of my own and had to have one of my fallopian tubes removed due to an ectopic pregnancy. Once again, the doctors sat with us and explained that with Tim's history and my medical situation, another pregnancy would be "nearly impossible." Our second daughter, Paige, was born in 2011 and then our son, Elijah, was born in 2012.

> "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" — Jeremiah 32:27

When I was diagnosed in 2017, infertility was not something that I was worried about any more — we had been blessed with our three miracle babies and we had already decided we were done growing our family. While we had defied odds and done the "impossible" by bringing three tiny humans into the world — cancer slapped me in the face with the possibility that my kids would be forced to grow up without their mom.

Realistically, I knew that my chance of survival was super high — but it didn't stop my brain from sometimes playing out the worst case scenario and letting morbid thoughts run rampant. There were lots of times during my treatments where I would be in a good place mentally and then all of

a sudden the thought would cross my mind: what if I don't make it through this? Satan would find a crack in my confidence and allow fear to fester — not just my own fear but also those of my family.

The fear of me dying was something that my kids — especially the younger two, would constantly be worried about no matter how hard Tim and I would reassure them. If the chemo was being particularly nasty and I was sleeping more often, my kids would freak out and start watching me extra closely. I spent a few times trying to hold back tears as my son would look at me and ask if he could visit me in heaven if I did die. I remember one time feeling like a big fat liar, looking at Paige and telling her that I would still be around to watch her walk across the stage at her graduation and secretly asking myself in my head if that was really going to happen.

Thinking of a future where my kids and husband would have to continue on without me around was overwhelming and unsettling. It's not impossible that at any given moment cancer could come back, I could be in a freak accident, I could be here one moment and then be gone the next, Avengers: Endgame-style.

"Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." — James 4:14

While it's heartbreaking to imagine a future for my children without me there — it's also heartbreaking to imagine me leaving behind a legacy of my children living in fear instead of knowing God's promises. My children are not my children…they are His before they are mine. My job, for however long that I'm allowed to be here is to make sure that my children know they are loved unconditionally, that they are never alone, that they were created with purpose and intention, that there's a plan for each of them, and that someone is always fighting with them and for them…that the love Tim and I have for them is minuscule compared to the love that God has for each of them.

Mother's Day is not a reminder for my kids to buy me flowers or make me breakfast — its a reminder for me that it's impossible for me to know how long I get to be their mom and that my life — beautiful, messy, complicated and chaotic — is possible only because of Him.

"She is clothed with strength and dignity,

and she laughs without fear of the future." — Proverbs 31:25

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