

My Faith was Rocked

Direna Cousins

A tall, strong, 6-foot-7 athlete would walk around Montreat College campus with a broad smile that brightened everyone's day. Described by his soccer coach Brenton Benware as a gentle giant, Howard Fisher never once showed any sign of illness. Fisher's roommate and best friend Stephen Jackson tried not to cry as he sat in a Jamaica t-shirt, representing Howard's home country and retelling the last moments spent with Fisher and how his faith and the faith of the Montreat community were greatly impacted.

"The passing of Howard rocked my faith," Jackson said. "It definitely strengthened my faith in the Lord. Howard was one of the healthiest guys I knew on the soccer team. He was very kind and loved the Lord dearly; even throughout his sickness he never complained. People would call him, checking up on him, and he would always say, 'I'm fine, how are you doing?'"

"I knew he was sick but never knew it was that bad until I learned of his condition from his girlfriend, Camelia Campbell, and realized that it was almost three weeks into the semester and Howard was still in Jamaica. There were talks that he would have to sit out the semester because of his illness," Jackson said.

After the school learned how serious Fisher's illness was and that he was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, they decided to get Fisher back to the States where he can get better medical treatment and care. Aplastic anemia is one of the most serious types of anemia, in which the bone marrow does not produce enough new blood cells.

Fisher's health was deteriorating by the

day, and the hospital in Jamaica had negligible care. They did not have enough platelets to supply Fisher.

Jackson wanted nothing in this world but to be by his side. The college nurse, Linda Thompson, who also worked hard on trying to get Fisher back to the States, asked Jackson where he would be, if he could go one place in the whole world. "By Howard's side," Jackson said.

The process of getting Fisher back to the States was taking longer than expected. He could not fly commercially and the requests of Duke University Hospital, who took on his case, were delayed. The school decided to send Jackson down to Jamaica as a mediator between the hospitals.

"When the nurse said to me 'Stephen, I am going to send you to Jamaica'. I just broke down in tears because I knew that the Lord had gone ahead of me and I should just trust and believe in him," Jackson said.

Faith was everywhere in the hospital room. Fisher had a small radio in his room and it only played Christian songs that were encouraging and uplifting. Almost every day he was in Jamaica, Jackson would be at the hospital from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., reading the Bible and praying with Fisher and just being a friend to him.

One of the most profound impacts on Jackson's faith that strengthened it and made him trust God even more was how Fisher's family are strong believers of Christ. Some of the biggest moments Jackson's faith was really rocked were when Fisher's family would visit the hospital.

"I saw people whose son was very sick, but they never complained.

They prayed, giving God thanks, and never asked why this happened to their son. Instead they continued praying to God and telling God how good he is. And they thanked him!" Jackson said. Jackson was amazed by this, and it made him want to do the same in times of sickness and tragedy.

Jackson would never forget the day Fisher passed away. "I got to the hospital and I saw his body and remembered how, physically, we are just a shell; our soul belongs to Jesus. It was comforting to know that his soul has gone home."

"One of the nurses at the hospital called to me and said, 'I know that you believe in God and you're a strong Christian, but are you ok? How is your faith?' I said I was fine. I do not doubt because there is no reason to doubt."

Though it was a sad experience for Jackson and it tore him up to lose such a close friend—Fisher was supposed to be the best man at Jackson's wedding—it was one of the most comforting things he had ever been through, because he knew his friend had gone home to God and he will see him again.

The Montreat community, mainly students and faculty, prayed hard for Fisher to receive a miracle recovery, but he did not. 82 percent of Americans still believe in miracles, according to a Fox news poll that was done back in 2004.

The sudden tragedy strongly impacted the community and strengthened students' faith.

However, Sami Bin, a Jew at Montreat, did not find his faith impacted in any form. "I didn't even think about my faith when Howard died," Bin said.

"Though we share two different beliefs I loved Howard and I know I'm going to see him again."

Attending the funeral in Jamaica, Heather Hable, Jackson's fiancée, saw how another part of the world views faith.

"In the American culture," Hable said. "We do things such as spending quiet time with God, maybe writing in our journals, and raising our hands in chapel. These are not bad, but we tend to check them off a list, believing that we are right with God once we do them. We don't often take the time to really evaluate our lives

and think about how they speak to people, the way Howard's spoke to everyone."

Howard Fisher lived an unselfish life; he was always about love and had genuine faith in God. As Hable said, "The way Howard lived his life really strengthened and encouraged my own faith."



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