

# Through the Looking Glass: Spirituality Amidst Cancer

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# Through the Looking Glass: Spirituality Amidst Cancer

## Framework 3 Sections

1. Embracing Reality

Being present to what we are experiencing in the cancer journey.

2. Bearing Witness Together

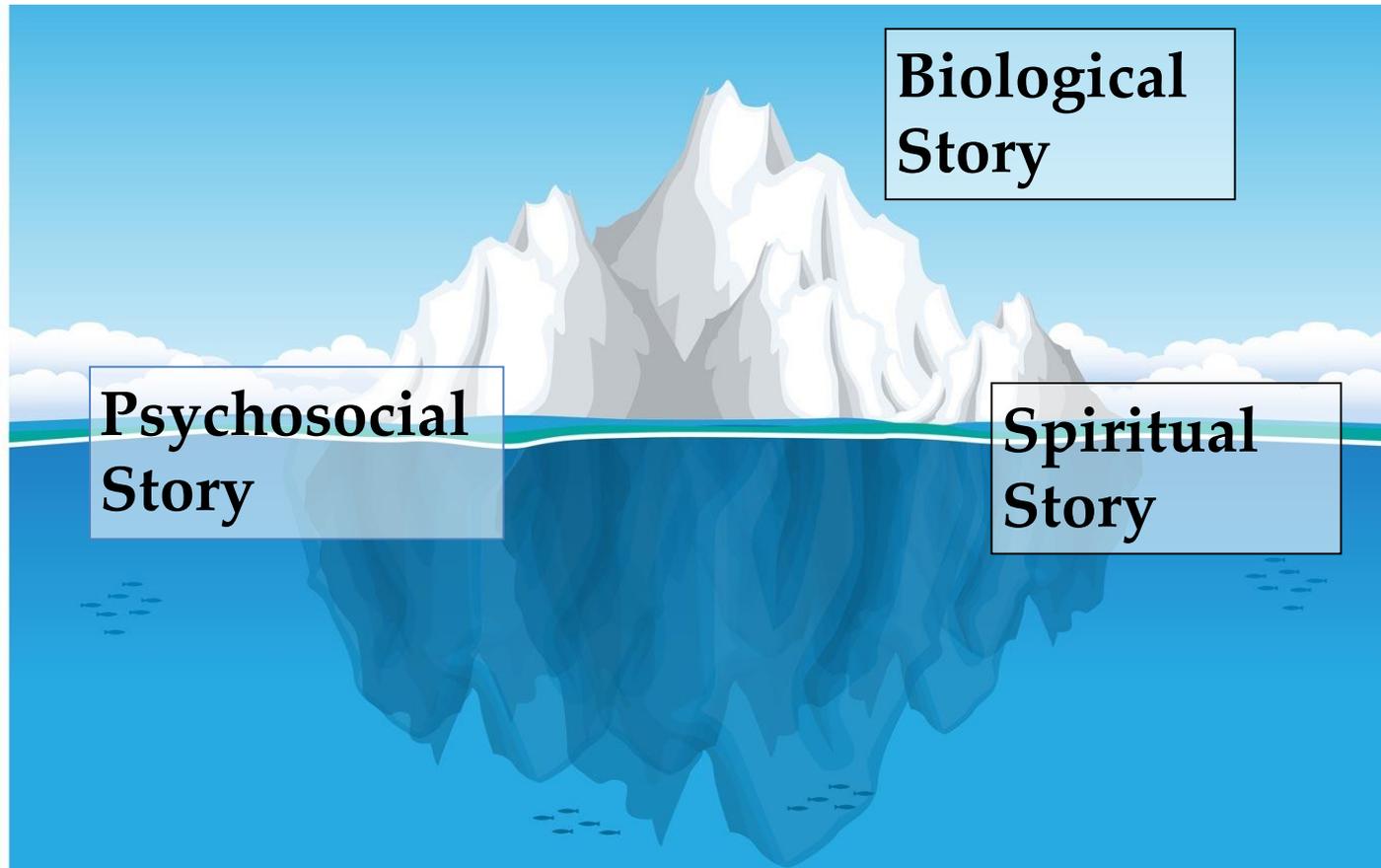
Being open to the invitation to accompany another's life.

3. Embody

The Natural Call of Spirituality

# Embracing Reality

Who are We?



# Embracing Reality

## Who are We?

Three Individual Stories make up Our Greater Narrative:

- Biological: The physical aspect of humanity
- Psychosocial: The valued relationships to others & self
- Spiritual: Belief system & relationship to the Sacred and Creation

These three stories are interrelated to form a Sacred Narrative.  
This greater narrative leads to Meaning and Purpose.

# Embracing Reality

## What is Spirituality?

### **2013 International Consensus Conf on Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care**

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Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, community, beliefs, values, traditions and practices.

Spirituality describes an awareness of relationships with all creation, an appreciation of presence and purpose that includes a sense of meaning.

# Embracing Reality

## Spiritual Distress

As is widely recognized, the onset of an illness, such as cancer, represents an assault not only on the person's physical self, but also on the person's sense of identity, possibly calling into doubt the person's self-worth.

**Loss of confidence in the body often leads to loss of confidence in social interaction.**

Social interaction is deeply related to one's spiritual well being.

*Michael Bury, Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption*



# Embracing Reality

## Spiritual Distress

- **Biographical Disruption**

Cancer can produce a change in life trajectory and self, therefore it represents a potential threat to maintenance of a coherent life narrative.

Spiritual Distress can be the result of having your Life Story threatened.

# Embracing Reality

## Spiritual Distress

- **Meaning is at Risk**

In response to chronic illness, individuals constantly question the meanings attached to their altered situation against the reality of everyday experience.

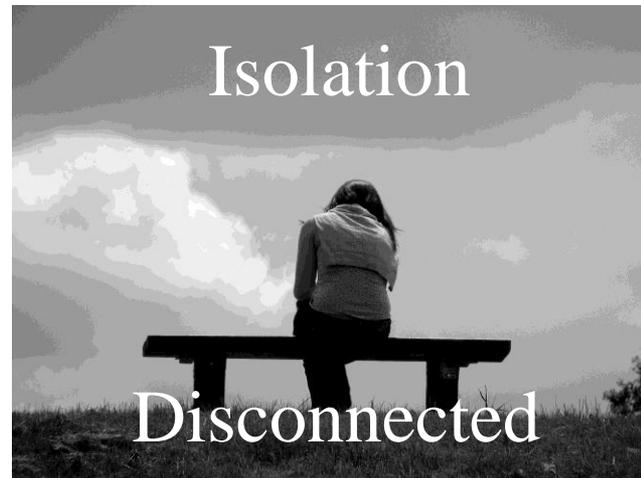
Patients cannot be sure that their own developing perceptions and definition of the situation will be shared by others.

*Michael Bury, Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption*

# Embracing Reality

## Spiritual Distress

**Spiritual Distress** can be defined as the impaired ability to experience and integrate meaning and purpose in life through connectedness with self, others, art, nature and/or a power greater than oneself.



# Bearing Witness Together

## Accompaniment with Others

### Existential Thoughts of Life:

- Why Me? What is Truth? Who am I? This isn't Fair.

### Seeking and Searching Thoughts

- Cannot be answered alone.
- This is our Inner Voice or Spirit calling us to be in relationship with others who are also seeking meaning and purpose.

### Meaning Making and Life Giving Actions

- Sign and Symbol that we are entering a Liminal Space

# Bearing Witness Together

## Accompaniment with Others

### **Liminal or Liminality:**

...is a word that comes from describing what happens in a ritual. Liminal or Liminality represents the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of ritual, when people have left behind the past but have not yet begun the future.

During a liminal stage, people "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of living and a new way of possibilities.

Seeking and Searching Thoughts can be a sign that we are transitioning to a Liminal Space.

# Bearing Witness Together

## Accompaniment

### We Begin To...

- Differentiate between Transactional Dialogue and Relational Dialogue. We long to join (and be joined by) another person in their journey.
- Relational Dialogue is valued because...
  - Unhurried, Unscripted, Authentic and Real
  - Empathic, Culturally Competent, Compassionate
- Listening becomes Active. We Listen Differently.

# Bearing Witness Together

## Accompaniment

“Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by the lack of meaning and purpose”.

*Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning*

# Embody

## The Natural Call of Spirituality

Our Call: Through Relational Dialogue we remind people that they are human and we cultivate...

- **Courage**
- **Compassion**
- **Connection**



# Embody

## The Natural Call of Spirituality

Our Call: Through Relational Dialogue we remind people that they are human and we cultivate...

- **Courage**

“Radical hope is the courage to live after losing the world. Courage is believing that new practices can be found that will provide new ways to live virtuous and excellent lives amidst great loss.”

*Arthur Frank, Wounded Storyteller*

# Embody

## The Natural Call of Spirituality

Our Call: Through Relational Dialogue we remind people that they are human and we cultivate...

- **Compassion**

“The call to compassion is not about somebody 'doing for' somebody else. Rather, its value is in the connection, the relationship, and the transformation in which everyone is changed.”

*Jim Wallis, Who Speaks for God?*



# Embody

## The Natural Call of Spirituality

Our Call: Through Relational Dialogue we remind people that they are human and we cultivate...

- **Connection**

“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”

*Brene Brown*

# Embody

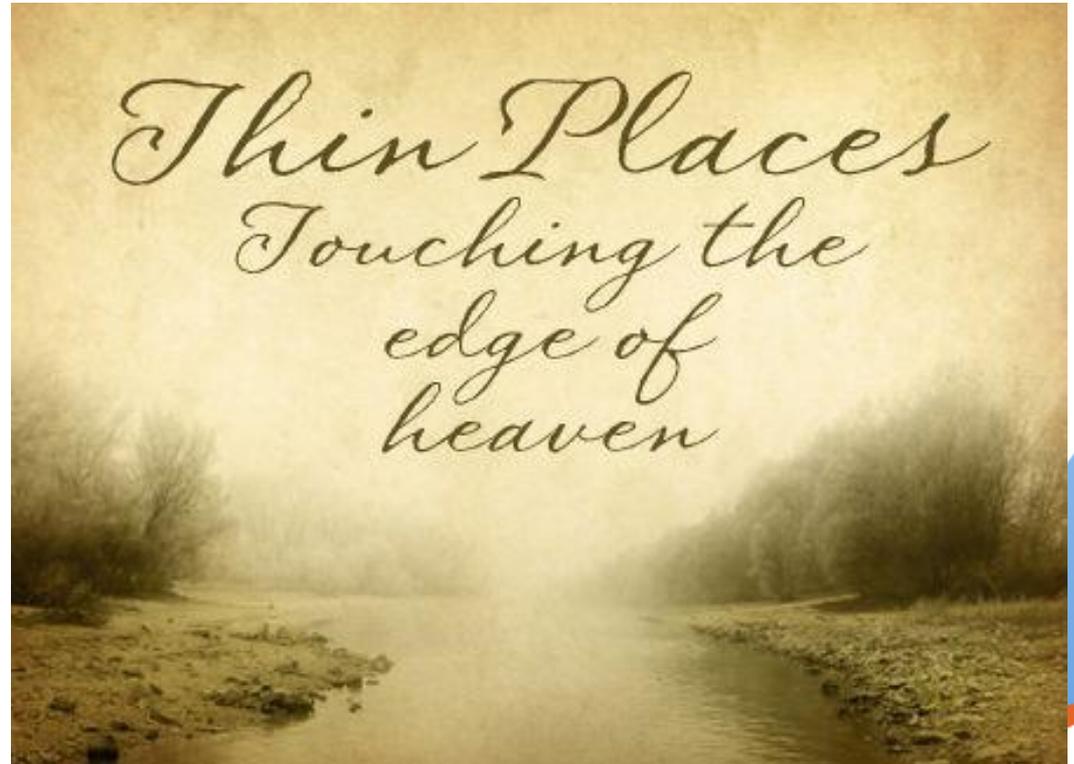
## The Natural Call of Spirituality

Our self-awareness of Spirituality is grounded in Relationships:

- Spirituality begins with Me and always transforms to We.
- Spirituality may be personal, yet it is only lived out with others in community.
- There is no such thing as an individualistic or solitary spirituality. Spirituality needs to be lived out in relationships to thrive.

# Embody Thin Place

In Celtic theology there exists the term “Thin Places”. It is used to describe places or situations where the sacred space between this earthly realm and the heavenly realm are separated by only a thin veil. Hence, the term Thin Place.



# Manifesto of The Brave and Broken Hearted

Brene Brown

There is no greater threat to the critics  
and cynics and fearmongers  
**Than those of us who are willing to fall  
Because we have learned how to rise.**

With skinned knees and bruised hearts;  
**We choose owning our stories of struggle,  
Over hiding, over hustling, over pretending.**



# Manifesto of The Brave and Broken Hearted

Brene Brown

When we deny our stories, they define us.  
**When we run from struggle, we are never free.  
So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.**

We will not be characters in our stories.  
**Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.**



# Manifesto of The Brave and Broken Hearted

Brene Brown

We are the authors of our lives.  
**We write our own daring endings.**

We craft love from heartbreak,  
**Compassion from shame,**  
Grace from disappointment,  
**Courage from failure.**



# Manifesto of The Brave and Broken Hearted

Brene Brown

Showing up is our power.

**Story is our way home. Truth is our song.**

We are the brave and brokenhearted.

**We are rising strong.**

