

INFLUENCE

For the past week or so we have been praying for Jeff Black, a member of the Lord's church over in Alabama who is losing his battle with cancer. In early 1990 I began preaching where Jeff and most all of his family worshipped. Jeff's niece, Baylie, was born during the time I preached there and now she is the mother of two children (my how time flies). Baylie wrote a note on Facebook about the influence her uncle Jeff and his family has had on her and especially during this last stage of his battle with cancer which has been ongoing for about fifteen years. I ask Baylie for permission to print what she wrote and she graciously gave it.

This week ends our first fiscal year with the church here. So, next Sunday we begin our second year with Sunnyside. As we end this year and begin another together, read Baylie's note and think very seriously about the influence you are having on others. There is also a statement from her sister, Bethany, in response to Baylie's note, which also says a lot about the influence this godly man had on his family and so many others with whom he has been associated through the years. Most of the times we do not realize just how powerful our influence is until many years have passed. Will our influence be good or bad? From this note we can also learn that no matter how bad things get, God can take the bad and turn it into something good (Rom 8:28).

Baylie Nichols Yates: "I want to say I hate cancer, but as much as I loathe it and what it has done to my Uncle Jeff, and our family--it has taught me a lot of life lessons, and has made me realize so many things. You, cancer, have taught me to not be paralyzed by fear. To fight. My warrior, my Uncle Jeff, reminds me daily that fear is a choice, and it's a choice he'll never make. He showed/has shown me how to be strong in times where I feel I could collapse. He, his wife, and boys are my definition of strong. You have taught me to love more deeply than I ever thought possible. That grudges should be non-existent. You've created an even bigger love between us as a family that can never be broken. You've also taught me that love and kindness go much farther than evil and hate. You've taught me how to give, and how to do so selflessly. You have taught me to always lean on and trust in a God that is greater than I could ever hope to understand, and certainly bigger than you, cancer. You've taught me to not dwell on the "what-ifs", or "should-haves" of life---to live the best I can right now. You, even during all of the trouble you have caused, have made me love every second of the day like it could be my last."

"Cancer. You've done so much. But remember one very real thing you will not do, no matter what the days to come have in store: you may have invaded a body, but you didn't touch the soul. You did not win.

Baylie's sister, Bethanie said: "Amazing....She says it all right here. My Uncle Jeff used to tell us all the time when he taught our Bible classes, 'I've read the back of the book, and we win.'"

It is amazing to me to see the perspective of these two young ladies in regard to the situation with their uncle. But, then again it is not so amazing when you consider all this from a spiritual standpoint. These two young ladies were taught by word and deed by their uncle and other family members, that God must be first in our life, regardless (Matt 6:33). Is Jeff Black perfect, did he always do everything right? The answer is obviously no. None of us are perfect. However, Jeff made a point of putting spiritual things first in his life and his nieces saw this and recognized that his life harmonized with his teaching. Do we really understand that we are teaching others even when we don't know about it. People look at our lives and they learn lessons about life and how it should be lived. What kind of lessons are others learning from me and you?

Remember what Jesus said in Matt 5:13-16 about us being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This passage has to do with our influence on others. The passage says "let your light **SO** shine that others may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." That means we are to live our lives in such a way that others can see that we put God's will and way first in our lives, regardless of the things that happen to us and affect our physical lives. There is quite a lot more that could be said about our influence, but it seems to me that Baylie has said it very well in a few words. (JLH)