

# **I Do NOT Have Cancer!**

**By:**

**Ben Parrish**

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements

Dedication

Foreword

Introduction

Chapter 1: My Background

Chapter 2: And So It Begins

Chapter 3: Spreading The Word

Chapter 4: Results and Treatment Prep

Chapter 5: Peace in Treatment and a New Attitude

Chapter 6: And My God Shall Supply All Your Needs

Chapter 7: The Long Day Closes

Chapter 8: Let Me Tell You What the Lord Has Done For Me

Chapter 9: Julie and Lee

Afterword: The Journey Continues

## **Acknowledgements**

The songs mentioned and quoted in this work are as follows:

"I Will Follow Christ", I Surrender All: The Clay Crosse Collection, Vol 1, Clay Crosse, 1999 Reunion Records

"Hold Me Jesus", A Liturgy, A Legacy, and A Ragamuffin Band, Rich Mullins, 1993 Reunion Records

"The Warrior Is a Child", Warrior Is a Child, Twila Paris, 1984 Star Song Communications

"Turning Thirty", Equator, Randy Stonehill, 1982 Myrrh Records

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“But thanks be to God, who gives us the VICTORY, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” -- *I Corinthians 15:57*

## **Dedication**

Dear Lee,

My precious baby, you aren't yet old enough to read this. We are 13 days from your 1<sup>st</sup> birthday. Daddy just finished writing a book about this past year. He wrote it for you so you could know how special it was. You see, Daddy was told in February that he was sick. He had cancer. But the good news is Daddy doesn't have cancer anymore. God healed Daddy!

Some of the story is sad. Some of it is happy. Your Daddy was scared sometimes. But God was there for Mommy and Daddy and He'll always be there for you too. You need to remember that. Lee, Jesus loves you. No matter where you go or what you do. And He wants you to love Him. Mommy and Daddy do and we hope we can teach you to do it too. This book will talk about how we asked God for His help. We pray that you will follow that example.

This year has gone by so fast. It seems like it was just yesterday that you were snuggled in my arms and taking a nap on the sofa. Now you squirm out so you can run off somewhere. Each day has been such a blessing and cancer or not, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

I love you so much, Sweetheart.

With everything I am,

Daddy

Julie- My partner, my wife, my love. A letter will not suffice and these aren't near enough words. You know how much you mean to me and how much I have relied on you this year. I love you more so now than ever before.

## Foreword

“...or, *I might have lymphoma, Dad.*” I’ll never forget the day I heard those words from my youngest son, Ben, or how they made me feel. The words came with a slight tremor in his voice, and though he is a grown man with a baby daughter of his own, I wanted to hold my child and make his problems go away.

Not long after Ben was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, I told a friend, “The only thing harder than hearing you have cancer is hearing one of your children has it.” Weeks later, as I was driving Ben to the treatment center, I thought to myself, “This isn’t right. If anything, *he* should be driving *me* to this place. This isn’t fair.”

Life isn’t fair, and we don’t always get to choose the battles we will fight or the circumstances we will face. But for the child of God, victory is always assured. And though even victory does not always come in the form we might desire, in Ben’s case it did. And we are eternally grateful to our loving heavenly Father; who chose to hear the cries of our heart and graciously grant our request for Ben’s healing.

Ben’s words to me marked the beginning of a journey that lasted well over six months, and even continues today with follow up testing. And though it was not always an easy journey, especially in the beginning, we never doubted the outcome, believing in the goodness of God to not only forgive our sins but to heal our diseases (Psalm 103:3).

With the help of the internet, many people from all over the world stood beside us in prayer for Ben’s healing, and sent us encouraging words of life. Early in the journey God gave me a very special word of promise concerning Ben’s recovery. He promised me that if I would give my son to Him, He would give him back to me. It was a call to trust in Him who is Faithful and True, and He proved Himself faithful to me, to Ben, and to all of us!

I’m very proud of my son. I’m proud of the responsible man he has become. I’m proud of his family – his precious wife, Julie, Ben’s perfect “helpmeet”, and his adorable daughter and our first grandchild, Lee. But most of all I’m proud of his faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout this journey his faith in the Lord never wavered. He stayed strong in the Lord and declared his healing by the grace of God, and by doing so actually helped us to be strong with him. His spiritual strength has been a witness and testimony that has touched many lives.

His hope – and ours as well – is that many more will be touched as they read this account of his journey. When Ben sent me his first draft of the story, I noticed the Word © document was titled, “*I Don’t Have Cancer.*” HALLELUJAH!

Be blessed as you read what the Lord has done in Ben’s life. This is his story.

Ken Parrish  
Pastor, Victory Christian Fellowship  
Lynchburg, VA

*The journey continues...*

## Introduction

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” -- 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)*

My first attempt at writing this book only took me 30 days. I'd write while I was on my breaks or at lunch at work. I'd sit at my laptop and write for an hour or so a couple nights a week. I was very surprised at how fast it came out. I had a story to tell and I guess I knew what I wanted to say.

After I finished, I took the advice of my wife and my father and sat on it for a bit. It hadn't taken me long to write over 23,000 words so surely I had missed something or left something out. I let it stew so I could see what came to mind. Sure enough I began to think of things I wanted to say or events I had forgotten. I wrote things down on slips of paper and even placed my mini-cassette recorder by my bed so things I thought of at night would not be lost.

What follows is a simple story. 2007 started off with a bang with the birth of my daughter. It ended with a bang as I celebrated my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday and got to enjoy my daughter's first Christmas and birthday. The in between is where the adventure lies. To best understand how I was affected, you need to know who I am. What better way to help you know who I am then to write it in the way I would tell it, if I was telling you the story? I am not an author. I do not consider myself eloquent in speech, and my grammar probably isn't the best. Music plays a very large part in my life and I'll quote several songs in the course of writing. I'll also insert a couple of blogs I wrote while going through treatment. These should help you understand my frame of mind, so please forgive me for not writing in a straight narrative text.

Regardless of any of these things, my simple hope is that you will be as blessed by reading my story as I was while I walked through it.

## My Background

When I was first told back in May that I should write a book about my experiences battling cancer, I chuckled. I thought, “Who would read it?” The idea of journaling my thoughts as a keepsake or reminder for my children made sense; but a book? However, the more I thought about it, I began to realize that my situation wasn’t meant for me alone. There was a bigger picture. How was God going to be glorified if I never shared my story?

My intent is not to garner attention. I do not write this to make you cry or feel sorry for me. Nor do I write this to make myself sound special because God healed me of cancer. My “struggle” was not what one might think of when they hear the word “cancer.” In fact, it was just about the complete opposite. That is one reason why I first balked at the idea. Mine is not a story of miraculous healing in the contemporary sense. It is a story of healing through God’s continual grace for a sinner who continually needs it.

From growing up as the son of a preacher in the Full Gospel/Charismatic movement, to being a Youth Leader as a young adult, to ultimately now being a Worship Leader, I have been in church almost every time the doors are open and witnessed God’s healing first hand. Whether it was my aunt dancing around on her ankle that X-Rays showed was broken just a day before, or the young girl with asthma whom we laid hands on when she had trouble breathing during a youth group lock-in, I’ve seen God move too many times to believe anything different. God still heals. As you read this book, may you would be encouraged in your faith, and even challenged to let go of the things of this world that concern you, and let God handle them instead.

I want to start by giving a little history that I wish I had understood then as I do now. As I mentioned, for almost the entirety of my life, my father has been a preacher. In the denomination (or lack thereof) in which I was raised, it was not uncommon for church members to have words of wisdom or prophecy from God for others in the congregation or the congregation as a whole. I have been the intended recipient of three such messages. The first came when I was in my late teens. It was during Praise and Worship one Sunday morning. There was a man attending at the time named John. John and his wife, Margaret, had been missionaries to the United Kingdom for many years and when they had returned to the U.S., they settled in Lynchburg. This particular morning, prompted by the Holy Spirit, my father asked John to step to the front of the church and then invited anyone who desired to step forward and have John pray over them. I responded to the call and went to stand with John. As we stood there with the church family singing in the background, John raised his hand above my head and said, “The Lord says to you, ‘Be ready. Stay close and listen to me. And I will show things and take you places you never imagined.’”

The second word from the Lord came on a Wednesday night Bible Study. It was about 4 years later in the summer of 1999. After the study portion was over, we bowed for prayer, open to whoever wished to pray. As there always is in just about any church, there was a lull between individuals praying aloud. A lady named Shirley broke the silence. She said, “Ben, God’s been prodding me all night to tell you this. He says, ‘Stay close to me and be faithful. In the next 2 years I will begin to take you down the road that I have for your life.’”

The third word from the Lord came to me Easter Sunday, 2001. Our church choir performed a song entitled “I Will Follow Christ.” The song has a male trio lead. That lead consisted of my brother Shawn, my cousin Todd, and me. Within the trio, I was given a solo. The words to that solo follow:

*“I behold your light and see the man you want me to become  
Living like someone whose heart belongs to the Kingdom  
That was sealed on Calvary I will show the world what I believe  
I will follow Christ”*

After the song, another lady in the church named Tina approached me. She said, “While you were singing that song, the Lord spoke to me and said to tell you ‘You are going to be tested in this. We will see if

you believe the words you just sang.” Just as with any Christian, my reaction to each instance was the same. “I wonder what that means...when is that going to happen...” I would think about them for days trying to figure God out, to find that hidden meaning. Eventually I would forget about it, only to be reminded of them every once in a while.

As I look back now, I can see the ways my life has taken shape in the light of those messages from God. He has indeed taken me places I never imagined. In 2002, I enlisted in the United States Army Reserve. That is certainly something I never really expected to do. I have also been tested. I am hoping that cancer was the test He was referring to. The message that I have been reminded of most often is the word given by Shirley. So, please indulge me as I go through this next portion. It’s a long story and I will try not to bore you with minor details, but there are things that happened that are crucial to the story. When I’m done, you’ll see the regression of how this prophecy over my life unfolded.

I believe my initial excitement about Shirley’s word had to do with the fact that at that time in my life I was really wondering where I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to be doing. I had dropped out of college and was working full time for my aunt and uncle at their Christian bookstore. I liked my job and the apartment I was sharing with my brother, but there was something missing and I couldn’t put my finger on it. When Shirley told me that God was saying two years, I became quite excited about life again.

Sure enough, it was August 2000, just one year later that I left the bookstore and started working for GE Financial Assurance. Unfortunately, that did not last but six months. I was now involuntarily jobless, and still had bills. I did the only thing I knew to do which was to apply everywhere I could think of. Full-time, part-time, it didn’t matter. I needed income. I prayed that God would give me the job I needed to have. I was hired by the local YMCA to be a fitness coach. Considering I was not in the best shape, that was joke fodder for my family.

But one part-time job quickly proved to not be enough. I started looking for something else. Not a replacement, an addition. I was hired by a local Wingate Inn hotel to be an evening desk clerk. But soon, even this was proving to still be too little. When I began my third job search in less than 2 months in April of 2001, I decided that I should at least do something that I knew I would be interested in pursuing as a career. One of my childhood dreams (and is still a dream now) was to run my own restaurant. I have always loved to cook—and eat. I figured something in food service would be fun, so I applied at a few restaurants for a job as a waiter. The Lynchburg Ale House hired me. It was my first job as a server, but I knew I would enjoy it so I worked hard at it.

I was now working three jobs. I worked five and sometimes six days per week on all three jobs. I was up at 4:30am in order to be at the YMCA to open at 5. My shift ended at 9. That gave me just enough time to go home and take a quick nap before having to be at the Ale House at 10:30 so we could open at 11. Lunch shifts differed in length depending on if you opened or were part of the rotation. If I opened, I stayed through until lunch was over at 4pm. As part of the rotation, I could be sent home at any given time during the day depending on how busy it was. From the Ale House, I usually went directly to the Wingate. My shift was generally from 4pm to 10pm. After a few weeks, the Wingate asked me to be the Overnight Auditor on the weekends. That meant 11pm-7am Friday and Saturday nights. It was a pay increase so I took it. I don’t guess I have to mention that this arrangement did not last long. After 2 more months, I left the Wingate. The hours were too much and I was getting burned out from working three jobs. I was constantly tired and worn down. I did not mind getting up in the morning to work, so I stayed on at the Y and the Ale House. I knew that part-time jobs were not going to last me much longer so I set out on the search again.

I had been a marketing major while at Liberty University so I figured I would try to get a job with a local advertising firm as some experience for when I went back to school. I began to get discouraged because I had been sending résumés out for a couple of weeks and hadn’t heard anything. Not even a “No Thank You.” In late July I finally got a phone call from Frank Britt, a local man who had been running a marketing agency in Lynchburg for many years. He wanted to talk to me about an internship that was opening up in his firm. I told him I was more interested in an actual job and not an internship, but he still offered me an interview. I went to talk to Mr. Britt, and the interview was very pleasant. Given the phone call that had brought me in, I was not

expecting a job offer and I was correct. Our meeting did, however, lead to a job. A few days later Mr. Britt called to ask if he could send my résumé over to a client of his. I did not hesitate to tell him it was ok. Within a week I was working for a company called Gammapar.

Gammapar was a manufacturer of hardwood flooring. Their niche in the market was the added feature of acrylic inside the wood veneer. This made the flooring much harder and more durable. It was mainly designed for commercial use and was priced as such. I was hired as a sales rep. The training was quite quick and almost non-existent. I was expected to make sales calls and convince businesses to switch their current flooring or install our product in their new locations. I called malls, chain stores, even Hollywood set designers. My biggest assignment from the onset was Nordstrom's. Gammapar had been the flooring provider for their stores, but the corporate offices had recently gone with a competitor company. I was tasked with bringing Gammapar back to Nordstrom's. So, on top of making cold calls, I concentrated on them. Almost daily I spoke with Sue Brys, the contractor that oversaw new construction. Over the next 6 months I developed a rapport with her. By January 2002, I had convinced her, and she in turn convinced Nordstrom's, to return to using Gammapar. We were set to close the deal in Seattle at their corporate offices the first weekend of February. Coincidentally, I was fired the last week of January.

I was floored. I was doing well in a job I enjoyed. On top of that, I thought I was on the road God was talking about. Suddenly, I was once again unemployed. Surely this couldn't be God's will. Where was I headed? I spent the next week doing not much of anything. Discouragement was starting to set in once again. I could tell depression may not be too far behind. Then one evening I was watching TV with Shawn. I saw a commercial for the Army Reserve. Something clicked. I went to my computer and looked up the recruiting website. I submitted my contact information so I could get some brochures to look over. Within 10 minutes my phone rang, with a local recruiter on the line. The next day I found myself in the office of SGT Phoenix. I answered a few questions, took a practice test, and discussed my interests. When we were done, I went to my parents' house to talk to my dad.

One of the best things about being a preacher's kid is that your dad is your pastor. I know it sounds obvious, but it's critical. The good ones can give advice as a pastor and separate advice as a father. My dad can do just that. And he does so without pulling any punches. I told him that I was feeling like I was supposed to enlist. I needed a job. The Army would pay me. I thought maybe I needed structure and discipline too. The Army would provide both. I knew it was the right idea when Dad didn't really have anything negative to say about it. I signed my life away to Uncle Sam on Valentine's Day 2002. There is story after story that I could tell about Basic Training and how God blessed me and used me during those 16 weeks from April through July. I had peace once again and felt like I was back on track.

I returned home ready to face life. Wanting to return to school, I went in search yet again for a part time job. I started delivering pizzas for Pizza Hut in September. Whenever I think about this span of time in my life, I cannot help but think about just how much I went through in such a short period. I was only with Pizza Hut for a year and a half and that seemed like a major lull in activity.

Don't get me wrong, there was plenty still going on. There was school (when I was actually in class), ROTC, and having fun. The having fun was definitely a priority. Am I proud of that? No, not really. But it did lead to the next major event on the road of my life. I'm not saying that I was listening to God and consistently doing His will. What I am saying is that He was able to use the situations in my life to bring about His will.

One Sunday in late April 2003, my grandfather happened to run into a friend of mine from high school named Derek. He and I would see each other out from time to time but that was about it. This particular Sunday I had been ill and didn't go to church. In the course of conversation, my grandfather told him so. Misunderstanding my slight flu to be something worse, Derek called me to see how I was doing. We talked for a bit and, like most friends do, said we'd get together sometime. In this case we actually did. We started hanging out regularly. One night in late September we decided to go to a local restaurant called Backyard Grill. He said he knew some of the wait staff there. I believe there was a college football game he wanted to watch and there were TVs in the bar area.

As we ate, the manager saw Derek and came out to talk to him. Her name was Julie, and I thought she was quite pretty. I don't recall if I asked her outright, but she divulged that she was 30. Even though I was 25, in my head I was 18, and I didn't think there was any way a 30-year-old woman would be interested in me, so I let it slide. A few weeks later Derek and I were out again at a local dance club called Cattle Annie's. We mingled with people we knew and others we didn't. As we roamed the dance floor, we saw Julie again, along with her sister, Spring, and a few friends. We hung out with them for a bit and called it an evening. A local cover band was supposed to be playing at Cattle Annie's the day after Thanksgiving. Derek was going to be out of town, but some mutual friends of ours said they were going to go. I decided I would go listen to the band and meet up with the group.

It had been warm for the last few days, and with all the people in the building it gets pretty hot. I dressed accordingly. I had jeans and a short sleeved party shirt. I must have missed the weather forecast because it was freezing when I got to there. I had no jacket and the line was wrapped around the building. I waited for almost an hour to get in. People were literally throwing paper in the ash buckets trying to make small bonfires to keep warm. Unfortunately, it was rather windy too and the fires didn't last long. Inside was the normal scene; people at tables, lines at the bars, and a crowded dance floor. Missing from the chaos was the group of people I was supposed to meet. I wasn't going to waste the hour I stood in line and the \$8 it cost me to get in just to turn around and go home. I stayed and sang along with the band when they played familiar tunes. I grabbed a stool and sat at a table for a bit. I roamed the dance floor and positioned myself near the stage so I could watch the band and also have a good view of the front door as people came in. It was still, however, turning into a very disappointing evening.

The camel's back was finally broken when the band decided they were going to slow it down. They started to play the Mercy Me hit song, "I Can Only Imagine." Now, I love this song. I sang it at Granddaddy's funeral 6 months previous. It had very special meaning to me. But I wasn't about to stand there by myself with my proverbial finger up my nose while everybody else paired off to dance. I was done. I wanted to go home.

I'm a pretty outgoing guy, but I was never really all that good at asking some random person to dance. Thankfully, Julie was. She had spotted me earlier in the evening. Before I could get off the dance floor, she grabbed my arm, spun me around, and said, "Dance with me." On top of being outgoing, I'm also fairly smart, and when you're out by yourself, and a pretty girl asks you to dance with her, you dance with her. We have literally been together ever since. I asked her for her phone number, called a few days later, and asked her to marry me the following March. We got married July 24, 2004.

I know this simply sounds like a random story of some guy's life. But I can honestly look back and see how God directed my life to the place where I needed to be for what would become the fight of my life. Not just the fight of, but the fight *for* my life. As we go through the rest of the story, this will become more apparent. Right before we got engaged, I started waiting tables at the Backyard Grill. Julie and I worked together until October when she decided to finally call it quits after 10 years. She was also keeping kids in the mornings and was starting to build quite a reputation without even trying. She wanted to keep kids full time. Coincidentally, the Grill shut down the next week. I was once again out of a job.

Two weeks before the Grill closed its doors, I had gone to Ft Pickett, VA, for my reserve duty for the month of October. It was time for our annual weapons qualification. While we were there, we were given notification that our unit was being put on alert for possible deployment to Iraq. Julie and I had only been married for 3 months and we were already facing a probable separation. We weren't ignorant of this going into our marriage; it just wasn't something that seemed likely. I belong to a reserve Drill Sgt unit. Previous deployments had routinely been to stateside Basic Training facilities. Final word wasn't to be given until early spring of 2005. We were able to put it on the back burner at least temporarily.

Post-Backyard Grill I got a job at SubWay. It wasn't full time, but it was a job. Julie and I scraped by as best we could. We lived in the basement of a house owned by a friend and she gave us a great rate on rent. We weren't necessarily poor, but we weren't living lavishly either. God was providing so we were happy. Ramsey, my boss at SubWay, liked me and was quick to put me up for shift leader training after only 6 weeks on the job.

The New Year of 2005 brought a new focus. I couldn't work for SubWay forever. I wanted to put my military training to use. I applied for a job with the Lynchburg Police Department. Over the course of the next year and a half, I took tests, sat for review boards, and took a polygraph. It took two attempts for me to realize that this was not God's plan for me. It was not where He wanted me to be.

One reason I was able to be at home to keep pursuing this career attempt was that I contracted Mono in March. Because of the toll that Mono takes on your body, I was not going to be medically cleared for deployment. My unit left for Camp Atterbury, Indiana on Mother's Day, May 8, 2005. After three months there, they would board the planes and spent the next 12 months in Iraq while I stayed home. I struggled with this a lot. Part of me was glad to not be in a position of being shot at. The other part was disappointed that I was not with my buddies doing what I had signed up to do 3 years previous. I had to accept that God had a different purpose for me.

While I was interviewing with the police dept, I continued working for SubWay. In May I went back to the Ale House to wait tables as extra income. The management from the Grill had been transferred to the Ale House, since they were owned by the same company, so I was hired without a second thought. After a few weeks, one of the managers abruptly quit. The GM offered the job to me. I accepted it immediately. I had killed two birds with one stone. I had a full time job, and I was going to be getting management experience in a restaurant.

I loved managing. I went in early and stayed late. I went in on my day off. I wanted to immerse myself in order to learn everything I could. In hindsight, the problem with the arrangement was that I had not prayed about the offer. I think that if I had I would not have taken the job. The point is moot. It turned out to be the shortest job tenure to date. The circumstances being unimportant to the point of the story; suffice it to say I was fired. This one hurt the worst. I felt like I was really cut out for the job. Again, God wanted me elsewhere.

A friend of ours worked for Genworth Financial. Genworth was formerly known as GE Financial Assurance before it was spun off into its own independent company. He told me they were hiring and to tell HR that he had referred me. I went on their website and clicked on the first job opening that looked like something I was qualified for. Without knowing it, I applied for a job that was in the department that my friend was the head of. I was offered the job. It was a substantial pay cut, but it had benefits; 401k and health insurance. The second of these proved to be the most important.

Sometimes I think it was more in spite of myself rather than because of it, but God had brought me down the road He had promised. It wasn't what I had thought it would be. It wasn't apparent as quickly as I thought it would be. But I was there. That is the problem that we as Christians make all too often. We hear from God and expect immediate answers. God sometimes moves quickly. God sometimes moves slowly. The point is, God still moves. Quick or slow, it's still in His timing and His plan. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. He never promises to do anything at a specific time. He just promises to do.

## And So It Begins

In October 2006, my symptoms first appeared, and they seemed so insignificant. I developed a cough that was more annoying than anything else. It started as a tickle. It would hit me almost every time I took a breath to start speaking. From the tickle, it turned into a dry, scratchy throat over the next few weeks. It wouldn't go away. I would wake up coughing. I would wake Julie up with my coughing. We had found out Julie was pregnant in May. This meant Julie was now five months pregnant and was already having trouble sleeping simply from being uncomfortable. So the cough wasn't helping. Neither was the over the counter cough medicine. Julie urged me to go see a doctor.

I hate to go to the doctor's office. I'm not afraid of doctors. I just hate spending the money, even with health insurance, to be told what I already know. I called the doctor's office and made an appointment. I saw Dr. Eppes the last week of October. He did the usual doctor type stuff. He checked my ears and my throat, listened to my heart and lungs, and checked my sinuses. He said I sounded ok and called it bronchitis with a minor sinus infection.

I had never had a sinus infection before. My parents and sister had a history of them but it had never been a problem for me. Dr. Eppes prescribed an antibiotic and a very strong cough syrup. This cough medicine had a kick. But it seemed to do the trick. The antibiotic was gone in a week, and the cough medicine was enough for two. The medicines worked for about 3 weeks. By the end of November the symptoms started to return.

The second go around was different. The cough and sinus problems had returned. This time there was more. Around the second week of December I started to itch. Constantly and everywhere. It seemed like there wasn't a second of the day when every square inch of my body didn't itch. I've had the terrible habit of biting my fingernails ever since I was a kid, so I had no nails with which to scratch. Julie was on back-scratch duty around the clock. On top of the itching, I started to run fevers. They would reach 101-102 degrees. I started taking NyQuil and that seemed to help.

Around the same time I started having night sweats. I simply associated these with the fevers. I figured it was the fever breaking. I didn't really pay any attention to it. That was stupid, considering these were no ordinary night sweats. I would sweat so badly I had to change my clothes. One night I had to do so three times. But I still didn't give it a second thought.

I remember the last night in December I had the sweats. I had been at Todd's house for his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was sweating so much. I figured I was just hot. For the next three weeks after, from Todd's birthday, through Christmas, and ultimately through the birth of our daughter, Rebecca Kathleen (Lee), on January 1, 2007, I had no symptoms. Not just night sweats either. I had no fevers, no coughing, and no itching. I believe God allowed me relief so that I could be strong for Julie during labor.

Around the second week of January 2007 my illness returned. Julie urged me to go to the doctor again. I made another appointment to see Dr. Eppes. I do not know why, but for some reason I didn't tell him about the sweats and itching. He went through the standard tests once again. He said he felt no need to do any x-rays since he heard nothing in my lungs. He called it bronchitis and a sinus infection and prescribed an antibiotic and cough syrup. It made sense to me. He heard nothing in my lungs and the medicine seemed to work the first time. Maybe I just needed to fight it a bit more. This time, however, the medications did not work as well as the first. After about a week of relief, the fevers and itching continued. I began to wonder if my medical history could give us any clues. I'll explain.

When I arrived at Ft Jackson, SC in March of 2002 for Basic Training, I spent the first week at the Reception Battalion getting all of the administrative stuff done. We were required to get all of our immunizations. There were six mandatory and one voluntary. Both of my grandfathers served in the Navy in

World War II and I was told many times growing up that you never volunteer for anything in the military. I should have listened. I volunteered for the extra immunization. It was for pneumonia. Sure enough, two weeks into training, I had to go to Moncrief Army Community Hospital with a 104-degree fever. I was borderline delirious. After several hours of waiting, I finally got to the x-ray dept and they confirmed I had pneumonia. I spent the next 5 days in the hospital. It was the only time in my life I had ever had to do so.

I was sick of being sick. Nothing was constant anymore. The symptoms would come and go almost daily. They were never the same. It was now February and I had been fighting this since October. It was Super Bowl Weekend and I am a rabid Indianapolis Colts fan. I was going to go see the doctor, but not until I watched the Colts play in their first Super Bowl in my lifetime. Looking back, the rainy conditions, and the hazy broadcast were a precursor of what was to come.

I called Monday morning to make an appointment. I was feeling relatively ok. I decided to give work 24-hour notice that I would be going to see the doctor, and made the appointment for Tuesday. Dr. Eppes was not available. They slotted me to see Dr. Dodd. I told him about the last 2 visits. I told him about all of the symptoms. I also told him that in the last five years I had had both pneumonia and mono. I was concerned one of them may be coming back in a different way and that I wanted every test to be done so we could determine exactly what was wrong with me. He asked me about any other things that seemed out of the ordinary; specifically weight loss. I told him that I had been trying to lose weight so it didn't seem so strange that I had. I should have realized that I had lost 20 pounds in about a month and a half. That's not exactly normal. He said that considering my history and that I wasn't getting better, it was not an unreasonable request and made the arrangements for the tests and x-rays to be done.

I spent the next 3 hours being tested and waiting to be tested. They drew blood and took x-rays. The x-ray tech called me back in for another shot. She said the film was a bit blurry and she needed a clearer picture for more accurate analysis. As I sat in the hall waiting for the next procedure I heard a voice in my head. "You know, it could be cancer." I got mad. I told Satan he was not funny. I rebuked him and told him to leave me alone. I was not going to let fear take control. Even still, I didn't completely dismiss the possibility.

Those 3 hours seemed like an eternity and I knew Julie was bound to wondering what was going on. Finally, they took me back to the examining room and said Dr. Dodd would be in after a moment. I saw him in the hall as I entered the room but chuckled when she said it would be just a moment. When has a doctor truly ever been just a moment?

True to his nurse's word, Dr. Dodd came in not 30 seconds later. He had my file in his hand. As he walked through the door he said, "Well, Mr. Parrish, you don't have pneumonia or mono." I thought this was good news and told him so. "Not really", he said, as he plopped the file on the counter. My heart sank, my stomach churned, and my grip on the sides of the examining table on which I sat tightened. I said, "I already know, Doc. But go ahead and tell me." I sat stone faced as he told me that the x-rays revealed enlarged lymph nodes in my chest and lower neck. There were two possibilities. The first was Sarcoidosis. This is treatable by a daily pill, most likely for the rest of my life. The second was Lymphoma. Cancer. I do not remember but I must have quivered because he offered me the box of tissues sitting beside him. I declined and said I was ok. He said he had a suspicion that it was lymphoma. He was going to call the local thoracic surgeon specialists and schedule a biopsy to confirm his feelings. He would send his nurse to give me all the info. Then, unintentionally, he did the best and worst thing possible; He walked out.

Now, like I said, I know it was not his intent to leave me alone at my most vulnerable. He had a job to do. He needed to take care of his patient. But, there I sat, alone with my thoughts. Needless to say they were running wild. I stood up and walked over to the window. I stared out across the parking lot, past the adjacent empty field, past the highway, out into the distance. I did the only thing I knew to do. I prayed. I talked to God. I did what anyone would do in this situation. I asked Him why. Then I cried. No, I wept.

What happened next was truly amazing. I will never forget the feeling. Suddenly, I was laughing. There is only one word to describe it: Peace. Heaven heard my cries and sent help.

If you are like me, then this is not what you would imagine as the way being informed you have cancer would play out. In my head, it goes like this. You've been sick for a while and you go see the doctor. You run some tests and you go home. The doctor says he will call you soon. You hear from the doctor a day, maybe two days, later. Instead of telling you on the phone, he or she says you need to come to the office to discuss the results. This clues you in that something is wrong, so you take a family member with you to help soften the blow. I kind of wish this had happened.

My cheeks must have been tear stained because when the nurse came in, she looked at me and started crying. She walked over to me and put her arms around me and cried with me for a moment. She handed me a slip of paper with some information. She said I needed to sit by my phone the next day and wait for the surgeon to call. He would tell me when my surgery would be scheduled. We walked to the door and she told me something you don't hear much from the secular medical world. She said, "I will pray for you."

I walked out to my car. I remember thinking about how I had just bought it a month prior. Having the baby meant we needed a more family friendly car than my pick-up truck. I sat in the seat and pulled out my phone. I needed to call my dad. I have a habit of calling Dad every time I go to the doctor. We pray together before I go in. Then I call him and tell him what the doctor said when I leave. This time was a little different though. Not only did I need to tell him that I was just told that I might have cancer, but I needed him to meet me at my house so I could tell Julie. There was no way I could tell her on my own. Neither of Julie's parents is still with us. When she was 4, her father, Jim, had an aneurysm in his sleep. He died a few days later. When she was 15 her mother, Kathy, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She passed away within a few months. Now Julie would be faced with the possibility of her husband having cancer. I was going to need support breaking the news to her. My father was the only one I could think of to do that.

I dialed Dad's number but had no idea what to say. When he answered I started to speak. My voice trembled. My concern was for Julie at this point and it didn't hit me until later that I didn't prepare him for what I was about to say. I told him what Dr. Dodd had said and asked him to meet me at my house. He said he would need about 30 minutes so I drove slowly. I called Julie to tell her I was finally done and was on the way. I didn't want to simply show up at the house with Dad in tow. She would know something was wrong. After being at the doctor's office for 3 hours that was probably a given. But still I wanted to save her as much stress as possible. I knew she would ask what the doctor said so I told her I would talk to her when I got home.

I pulled in to my driveway and waited for Dad. It was only a minute or so but it again seemed like forever. We didn't say a word as we walked in the house. I had been at the doctor so long that all the kids she keeps had been picked up. I had asked her to send her helper home too. This was something that family needed to know about first. As we walked in the living room, she was holding Lee in her lap. I tried to sit but I couldn't. There was no way I could come up with to prepare her so I came right out with it. I told her about the two possibilities. I told her about what Dr. Dodd thought it would be. God made it known that He was in the room with us.

Julie didn't explode into tears. She didn't fall in the floor in shock. She simply took a deep breath and said, "Ok." One of the reasons I fell in love with her was how strong she is. Losing her parents at such a young age and surviving on her own the way that she had made her rock solid. I knew I would need that support.

Dad came across the room to make sure we were ok. He knew there was nothing more he needed to do. He was going to go home and let us be alone as a family. As he hugged me good-bye he said, "I'm with you through this every step of the way." We sat for the rest of the afternoon in almost complete silence. We talked to our baby. We watched TV. We sniffled. It was February 6; Papaw's (Dad's dad) birthday. Traditionally the whole family gathers at his house for cake and ice cream. There was a light snow falling. Julie said there was no way she could go and try to pretend there was nothing wrong. We didn't want to alarm anyone else until we had firm news. I called Papaw and told him we wouldn't be making it because Lee was only 5 weeks old and we didn't want to take her out in the snow. That wasn't completely untrue, just not the complete truth either. We put Lee to bed and then tried to do the same with ourselves.

## Spreading The Word

Wednesday seemed to last longer than Tuesday. I sat at home wishing the phone would ring. I watched TV. I tried to play with the kids. Nothing worked. I was going to have to wait it out.

The hardest part of the day was two fold. First, we had decided not to tell anyone until we had more concrete information. This meant I couldn't talk to anyone about it. I couldn't talk to Julie about it because it would still be upsetting and she needed to take care of the children. Not to mention the girl that helped her was there as well. Second, we were going to have to start telling our family once the doctor called. I was not looking forward to this at all. Julie's sister would be dropping off her daughters after school. It would be hard keeping it from her as well.

Around 5:30 the phone rang. I jumped up to answer it. It was my mom. She was calling to see if we had heard anything. Church would be starting in an hour and a half and she wanted to know if she should have Dad mention anything. While we talked, the call waiting beeped. I told Mom I would call her back. On the other line was Dr. Bell, the thoracic surgeon. He said he had looked at the images Dr. Dodd had sent and he wanted to do a biopsy the next morning to determine if it was Sarcoidosis or Lymphoma. I was to meet him at Lynchburg General Hospital at 7 am.

I called Mom and told her the news. I asked her to have Dad ask for prayer. I now had to tell my bother and sister. Shawn lived not a mile down the road from me. Stephanie was in school at Longwood University in Farmville, VA. She was an hour away. Mom wanted to tell her in person instead of over the phone. She called Steph to see if she'd be at her apartment, but she had to leave a voice mail. In the mean time, I called Shawn and told him I was coming over because I needed to talk to him. When I got there, his roommate, DeWayne, got up to excuse himself and give us privacy. I told him to stay. DeWayne and I worked together at Genworth in the same department and on the same team. He would be hearing it soon enough anyway. I told Shawn and DeWayne that I was having surgery the next morning, and proceeded to explain why. Just like Dad and Julie, Shawn didn't flinch. He stood up and gave me a hug and prayed over me. He knew I'd be ok.

When I got home, my nieces were still there. I was hoping they would have been gone because I dreaded telling their mother. I knew Julie wouldn't be able to. I also quietly hoped their father, my brother in law Brandon, would pick them up so that he could be the one to break the news to his wife. That has always seemed like a husband's role to me.

It wasn't long before their car pulled into the driveway. It was Spring. I sighed. Julie told Meghan and Molly to get their stuff together and I pulled Spring down the hall. With Kathy's bout with cancer dancing around in my head, I told my sister-in-law that I might have cancer too. I told her not to worry. I was ok and was going to continue to be. As she wiped the tears from her face, I asked her if she was all right. She shook her head yes, as I gave her a hug. She gathered up the girls and headed home.

Around 8:00 my phone rang again. It was Stephanie. She got Mom's voice mail, and had called Shawn to see why Mom was coming up. He said she needed to call me. By this point Steph was very worried. Mom had tried to be vague and sly, but my sister is a smart girl and figured out something was wrong immediately. Mom was not there yet and I tried to calm her down. I told her it was serious but not to be afraid. Mom was going to be there soon and would tell her what was going on. I told her I really wanted to but it was best coming from Mom.

This day was really trying my patience. I was tired and frustrated from having to keep everything pent up. I asked God to give me strength because it was far from over. I talked to Stephanie after Mom got there. She was, of course, sad, but just like everyone else, was strong. I was beginning to see how God was going to use the people around me to give me the strength I needed. The rest of that night was spent calling family and friends asking them to pray.

Julie called her best friend, Sarah. She and Julie had been roommates for a couple of years and worked together at the Backyard Grill. Sarah's husband, Marc, is a contractor. When Julie told her what was going on and I was having a biopsy done the next morning, she and Mark dropped everything. Sarah offered to sit with Julie and Mom at home while Marc would sit with my Dad in the waiting room. They weren't going to take no for an answer. And we weren't going to refuse.

Thursday morning Dad came by the house at what seemed like the crack of dawn to take me to the hospital. Dr. Bell had said to simply ask the help desk to page him when we arrived. We waited in the main lobby area for only a few minutes. Dr. Bell came out and talked with us. He looked at my neck and explained the procedure. He said he would be going in through my throat, just below my voice box. I didn't like the sound of that. My voice is everything to me. I love music, and even more so singing. The thought of something going wrong and damage being done to my voice box – like Julie Andrews had happen – made me cringe. Dr. Bell led us back to the wing where I would be admitted and they assigned me a room. My surgery wasn't scheduled until 1pm. We asked if I could go back home and return in time for the operation. The nurses said I could as long as I was back by 11. They gave me a body-wash cream to shower with before I returned. Dad took me back home. I showered and got dressed. He went home to work on his sermon for a bit. Marc and Sarah got there before we left to go back to the hospital. Mom took the day off from teaching and came by to be with Julie. With Mom and Sarah there I knew Julie would be ok.

When we got to the hospital we were more than 2 hours from the scheduled surgery time but it went by in a flash. Questions to be answered, forms to sign, blood work. I had to change into one of those lovely gowns. As I lay in the bed they checked my weight. 193 pounds. I was blown away. I had not been only 193 pounds in almost 6 years. My average weight was around 210. They wheeled me upstairs to the surgical floor. They took Dad and Marc to the waiting area. I was officially going through it alone.

They took me to the prep room. Here they started the IVs and shaved my neck. I can still see the room in my mind. From my vantage point of flat on my back, the room seemed large with several bays for beds to be placed in them. My feet were cold and I asked for a blanket. They pulled it out of what must have been a microwave because it was piping hot. After a bit Dr. Bell's partner, Dr Frantz, came in. He said he would be the one doing the surgery. We discussed it and I asked him to be sure he talked to my dad. After we were done, the anesthesiologist came in. He told me what he was going to be doing and what his job was. He placed a mask over my face and told me to breathe normally. I only remember two breaths.

The next time I opened my eyes I was back in the same room but it was some 3 hours later. One of the first things I heard was a song playing on the radio. I do not remember the song, but I did recognize it as the Christian group Avalon. The radio was tuned to one of the local Christian stations. I was still woozy from the anesthesia. I had a sore spot on my lip and I recall asking the guy doing the post-op work if I had bitten my lip during surgery. He chuckled and said he didn't know. They wheeled me back down to my room. Marc and Dad were there waiting.

It had been almost 18 hours since I had eaten anything. The nurse asked me what I would like to eat from the cafeteria. Thinking I was shooting for the stars, I asked for a cheeseburger. They brought one. It came with a warning of not eating too fast so that I didn't get sick because my body was still recovering from the anesthesia. I didn't heed their words as I should have. I wolfed down the burger and the pudding. Not long after I got sick. Lesson learned. They gave me an injection of anti-nausea medicine through my IV and it put me back to sleep.

When I awoke about an hour later, I could feel the far edges of the tape holding my bandages on my neck. They didn't seem like they were positioned so that the bandage would be in the middle of my throat. Dad told me that Dr. Frantz had told him that he realized he would be able to get a piece of a node off to the side more easily than the one in the middle so he cut there instead.

It was getting close to 6pm when they released me to go home. I gladly took off the gown and put my own clothes back on. They wouldn't let me walk out on my own. I had to be wheeled out. I was a bit

embarrassed. This is ironic considering that all my life I have loved being a performer. I love the limelight. I don't necessarily need the attention or feel starved for it. I just enjoy it. But now, sitting in that wheel chair, made to feel like I was helpless, I felt like everyone was watching and I didn't like it. I didn't want their pity. I didn't want their sympathy. I didn't want them to feel sorry for that young man barely 29 years old. I wanted to hide.

## The Results and Treatment Prep

When I left Dr. Dodd's office on the 6<sup>th</sup>, he had made a follow up appointment for me for the 13<sup>th</sup> to discuss the results of the biopsy. He said they may come back sooner but to expect to have to wait until then. I waited as long I could Friday, the day after. I called the office around 4 to see if there was any news. He said He had hoped to hear something by then. There was nothing. He said I needed to just take the weekend and relax. We would meet Tuesday.

That weekend I was supposed to report for Reserve duty. I called my First Sergeant and told him what was going on. I wasn't feeling sick but the week had taken its toll on me. I wouldn't be of any use just sitting around. I would call him after we got the official answers and talk about how we would proceed with my responsibilities. He said that was fine and not to worry.

I stayed home from work again Monday. This was too much for me to handle mentally. I would not be able to get any work done. I worked in the Long Term Care division. In simple terms, it's nursing home insurance. On a daily basis I spoke to elderly people or their families about them having to go into nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospice, etc. A lot of times it's because of cancer. I was in no state to handle this. I didn't need eight hours of reminders.

Tuesday afternoon finally came. Spring had offered to watch the kids until they got picked up so Julie could go to the appointment with me. Mom and Dad came by and we went to see Dr. Dodd. We waited about 15-20 minutes before they called us back. Dr. Dodd was soon in the room with us. Five adults and an infant made it quite cramped in the small space. He informed us that the results were not yet in but we could still discuss the different treatment options. We were almost done with the discussions when the nurse knocked on the door. She handed him a folder containing the results of the biopsy. I was officially diagnosed with Nodular Sclerosing Hodgkin's Lymphoma, or Hodgkin's Disease. Dr. Dodd said that was actually good news. He said if you have cancer, this is what you want. It is the most treatable form and they actually use the word "cure" when talking about it. He gave us the name of the Oncologist he would be referring us to and said the appointment was set for the next week.

It was time to start informing the friends and family that didn't know. Until now we had asked that everyone keep it to themselves and simply pray. We spent the next days calling folks and writing emails. A phone call that sticks out in my mind was the one I placed to Julie's step-dad, Ron, in western New York. He told me about a friend of his who had just gone through the same thing a year or two ago and had come out fine. He said, "He's the only guy I ever heard of who had cancer and GAINED weight!" I mentioned that we had planned on visiting over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but now that would be up in the air. Ron was not worried about it. He said, "You go kick this son of a gun and get yourself up here for the 4<sup>th</sup>." "Yes, Sir" was the only thing I could say.

It seemed like the phone calls and emails would not end. Each time I thought I was close to being done, I'd remember more people I hadn't told. I was getting tired of making phone calls and going through the story over and over. I was simply tired of talking about it in general. I hadn't met with the oncologist yet, and treatment was still 2 weeks away. I already wanted it to be over and I really wasn't even started. Blogging seemed like the most efficient way to communicate. I sat down and logged-in to my MySpace account. I wasn't sure what I would write. I put my fingers on the keyboard and just started typing. This is what came out:

*Some of you are getting an email from Dad with this same information. It is confirmed. I have Nodular Sclerosis Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Cancer. Do not, I repeat, do NOT be afraid for me or my family. God is in control. The Drs. these days actually use the word "curable" when talking about this. And we are expecting just that. To be cured. You'll ask if there's anything you can do for me.... Pray. Pray long, pray hard. treatment will not be fun. But again I say I will be cured. I have an appointment with an Oncologist next Tuesday. We should be then discussing treatment schedules. Everything is ok. Hope all is well for you too!*  
Ben

The next day, Stephanie had reposted this on her MySpace page under the title, "Why I look up to my big brother." I felt so unworthy of such praise, but glad that I was able to assure my sister of where my faith stood. I had intentions of posting regular blogs about my treatment and progress. At first I was fairly good in doing so. I quickly fell off and eventually didn't blog at all.

Because I was not feeling sick, I went back to work. If I stayed out I would eventually run out of sick time and when chemo was over, I wouldn't have any time to use if I needed it. To say that it was difficult to concentrate would be an understatement. I pushed through it and tried to make the best of each day.

Tuesday morning the family and I went to meet the doctor. Her name was Cecilia MacCallum. She began to outline all of the details of the disease. One question Dad wanted to ask was regarding the level of treatment I would be receiving. He wondered if it would be beneficial to try the University of Virginia Medical School or maybe even Duke University. Dr. MacCallum said she had just finished her fellowship at UVA and had we been there 6 months previous, she would have been the one to treat us there too. God had brought UVA to us. She also said that the treatment procedures for Hodgkin's Disease were "cookbook." No matter where I went in the country I would get the same thing. That alleviated any misgivings I had at least momentarily. She also said that Hodgkin's is a metabolic disease. It eats the body's sugars. This would explain my massive weight loss. She said I needed to eat as much as I could to fight this. Whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted it. "If you wake up and want ice cream for breakfast, eat it." Dad chimed in to remind me he was with every step of the way. The problem with that advice was she neglected to mention the anti-nausea meds were also steroids. Over the course of treatment I gained over 40 pounds. At the end I was heavier than at any point in my life.

What she talked about next was the hardest stuff I have ever had to hear. I knew she had to say it out of obligation. Patients need to know their odds before undergoing anything medical. That didn't make it any easier. She talked about the survival rates of Hodgkin's patients. Ninety percent survive beyond 5 years. Eighty five percent survive beyond 15. She said it's possible that secondary leukemias could develop. One of the drugs I would be given could burn out my heart. Another could damage my lungs. I was going to have to undergo a series of tests to determine the strength of my heart and lungs before treatment began.

The odds sounded good and I knew my heart and lungs were strong because I was in decent shape thanks to the Army. Then she dropped the bomb. The odds of being able to have more kids after chemo were seventy five percent against me. Julie and I wanted more children. She suggested we speak with a fertility specialist. After that she reminded me that I had a very serious disease. "If you do not treat this, it will kill you." Those words echoed in my head for days. Anything can kill you. Car crash, choking, or freak accidents. But being told that you are sick enough to die is a very sobering thought.

The idea of me dying never really crossed our minds. Sure it was a possibility. But even the doctor said it wasn't a probability. We knew God was involved in every aspect of this situation. He was going to guide the doctors. He was going to be sovereign. He was going to heal me. There was no need to worry about wills, life insurance or anything. We also were not worried about the children aspect. Fertility procedures were going to be drastically expensive. My parents told us not to worry about that end of it. They would help us find a way to take care of that. Even still, Julie and I decided we were going to place every issue firmly in God's hands. If we were meant to have more children, we would. Regardless of any preemptive measures we took. He gave Abraham a child at 100 years old. I had faith he could work in the body of a 29 year old who had just fought cancer.

We could tell immediately that Dr. MacCallum was the right doctor for me. She had a genuine heart for her patients. She wasn't there solely for the paycheck. She wanted to help. She scheduled the series of tests; four in 4 days: CT scan, Heart Mugga, Respiratory test, and a PET Scan, as well as a consult with Radiologist, Dr. Driskill, and a Port-a-Cath inserted in my chest to make the administering of the drugs easier. Chemotherapy would begin Wednesday, February 28 and continue every 2 weeks. She also suggested staying out of work for the duration of chemo. I might be strong enough to work between treatments, or I might not. That was going to be six months. I knew I would be able to take disability but I wasn't sure how much. This could hurt financially.

The port was inserted Tuesday the 20<sup>th</sup>. I returned to work the next day, Wednesday, February 21. First thing on the to-do list was sit down with my Team Leader, Judy. I explained to her everything that was going on. She knew the initial reports but we discussed at length the procedures. She was familiar with what I would be going through since her husband had fought and survived lung cancer some 15 years before. Judy said the first thing I needed to do was call the disability center and start up the claim. I dreaded doing this because I didn't want to hear how little I would be getting. After that she said I needed to go to talk to Amy, our Group Leader and fill her in on the situation.

I returned to my cubicle and dialed the disability center. I gave them my information. They were going to send out the information packet that I had to fill out, and have Dr. MacCallum fill out, and return to them. I asked the lady what I should expect while I was out. She said that Short Term Disability was for a duration of six months. I was happy to hear that since I would be out for that long. Then she said I would receive 100% of my normal pay for that time. I wanted to cry. I wasn't going to lose a penny? I thanked her for her help and hung up the phone.

After I regained my composure, I asked Amy for a few moments of her time. I sat down in her office and filled her in. She too had experience with oncologists in the Lynchburg area as an underwriter with Genworth. Though she didn't know of Dr. MacCallum, she said they were all very thorough. I asked her specifically about the disability. I told her I could come in to work in between treatments. I wanted to make it absolutely clear that I would do whatever I needed to keep my status with the company on good terms. Amy told me not worry. It would be too much paperwork to have me go on and off disability. She told me to stay home for six months. I offered again to come in. I would be willing to do the paperwork. She again assured me that all would be fine and that my job was now to stay home and get well so that I would be able to return to work after treatment.

I could not believe what I was hearing. I was going to be at home with my wife and daughter for 6 months, getting paid exactly the same as I would be otherwise. There was no burden. God had put me where I needed to be. He was providing for all of my needs.

The next few days were hard. The tests, the poking, the prodding, and the needles made these days go so slow. Thursday morning I woke up with an awful stomach bug. I called Dr. MacCallum and she prescribed an anti nausea medication called Compazine. It wasn't helping and by the time I went to visit the radiologist I was still quite miserable. The appointment took a lot longer than necessary because I felt so bad. The nausea was terrible. He gave me a sample of a medicine called Zofran. He said this was like gold as far as anti-nausea was concerned. He was right. I was feeling better by that evening. The heart and lung tests went well and Monday morning I had the CT scan. No one had told me I would have to drink barium. Even if they had they could not have possibly adequately prepared me for just how disgusting that stuff is. It took me close to an hour to finish the 8 oz bottle. After all the suffering with the barium, the CT scan only took about 10 minutes.

Tuesday morning I woke up to the phone ringing. It was the imaging consultants who were doing the PET scan. The machine was broken and wouldn't be fixed until Wednesday. They only did scans 2 days a week and the other day was already full so we would have to reschedule to the following Tuesday. I wanted the tests to be over with but I was glad to have a day to rest before my first treatment.

Dad came to pick me up Wednesday morning to take me to chemo. We had discussed him taking me to my appointments. Before we left he said he wanted to talk to Julie. He was afraid of offending her by assuming he would be taking me to the doctor all these times. While it was true that it would be hard to arrange for someone to watch the kids, she was still my wife and might want to be with me. "When you got married we gave him to you," Dad said. "Please tell me if I'm overstepping my bounds." Julie told him it was ok and not to worry about it. With that we were off to see Dr. MacCallum. Initially, the treatment process itself was not bad. It took about an hour. Four medicines pushed intravenously. I'd pop a Tylenol and a Benadryl to help fight body aches that could be caused. They also administered a healthy dose of anti-nausea meds. I was pretty tired by the end because it was a lot for my body to absorb. I went home and took a nap.

Dr. Mac had prescribed 2 more anti-nausea meds, Dexamethazone and Phenagrin. This made four active prescriptions for nausea. She told me to take the one she had prescribed first and use the others as back-ups. Thursday morning I felt great. There were no side effects whatsoever. I ignorantly thought I would have 6 months of vacation from work. Then I woke up Friday morning. I was not violently ill but I could feel it coming. My stomach churned and everything I put in my mouth tasted funny; metallic. The only way I can describe it is it was like licking a lead pipe. By Friday evening my whole body hurt. Around 10 or so the nausea kicked in. I took the "Dex" as Dr. Mac had said to. It didn't seem to help. So I took the Zofran because it had worked so well the first time. That didn't help either. I took the other two. Each time I put something in my mouth it was back out within 30 minutes; even the water I was drinking to take the pills. I could keep nothing down. This lasted the entire weekend and beyond. I was absolutely the most miserable I had ever been; worse than 5 days with pneumonia or two weeks in bed with mono. I began to worry that this is what I had to look forward to for the next six months. I could not sit up. I was not very comfortable lying down. I was weak.

The worst part was I could not hold my daughter. I would get tired of lying in the bed so I'd try to come out into the living room and get comfortable on the couch. It's a loveseat that is 4 feet wide. I am about six feet tall. The attempts were futile but I needed to spend time with my family. I would go crazy if I had to be sequestered to my bedroom for days on end. I wasn't contagious so I didn't have to worry about getting anyone else sick. While I was in the living room, Julie would offer me Lee. She needed help and I was determined to give it to her. Unfortunately, I was simply unable. I could only hold her for 5, maybe 10, minutes at a time.

We didn't talk about it but it was like an elephant in the room. How were we going to get through this? Julie is a very strong woman but taking care of six kids on top of our own, and now me, was going to be too much. We were scared. We knew God could still move, but it was going to take a miracle.

Monday evening my strength was starting to return, as was my appetite. I needed to eat something before midnight because my PET Scan was scheduled for the next morning. I told Julie I would go to the store to find whatever I thought I could keep down. I hadn't left the house since Thursday and needed to get out. When I got to the grocery store I stood in the middle of the store and just looked around. Something was bound to catch my eye. I saw a box of fresh Krispy Kreme donuts. Bingo! I grabbed the box and made my way home. This was the first thing I had eaten that stayed down.

## Peace in Treatment and a New Attitude

Dad came by to pick me up the next morning for my PET Scan. We were to be there an hour and a half before the scheduled scan time. This was to allow for the radioactive dye to be administered and work its way through my body. I was still very weak. I had eaten only once in the last 4 days, and now that I wanted to I couldn't because of the test. It was a small waiting room with very uncomfortable chairs. There was a gurney in the back corner of the room. It seemed very out of place, but it must have been there for a reason. I asked if I could lie down while I waited. After about 30 minutes they finally called me back. I laid down on the table but it was not wide enough to hold my arms in place and I could not place them above my head because my Port-a-Cath had been put in and the scar on my chest was still fresh. So they strapped me down. All of a sudden, I had a feeling I had never before experienced; claustrophobia. As the table moved back towards the tube I could feel myself reaching the breaking point. They said it would take about 20-25 minutes to complete the scan. If I did not do something I was going to completely freak out. I was staring at the ceiling and my mind was swirling. I closed my eyes in an attempt to not focus on my surroundings.

But the hum of the scanner grew louder as I slid closer in. Then I heard a still, small voice say, "Sing." I grew up in the 80s listening to virtually nothing but contemporary Christian music. The first thing that popped into my head was one of my favorite Petra albums, "Beat the System." So, I started with the first track on the album and started singing to myself. I got through the first two songs but it wasn't really working. I had succeeded in passing about eight minutes but that was all. There was no relief from the fear. I heard the voice again. "Sing hallelujah." Chills ran down my spine, like they did just now as I wrote this. "Sing hallelujah, the Almighty reigns. Sing hallelujah to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." With the words came a melody. God knew that writing music is one of my passions in life. He was giving me a new song to write and by doing so was giving me peace in my heart.

Before I knew it the scan was over and I was released from my bondage, physically and spiritually. I could not wait to get home so I could grab my tape recorder and sing what I had so I would not forget it. Over the course of the next week I would hum the tune and sing words into the recorder. I completed it one afternoon as I took Lee for a walk in our neighborhood. It reminded me of what God had one for me, and it put Lee to sleep. I gave the words and music to Dad and offered it as a new worship song for the church. I knew it could be of help to others, and it reminds me of God's grace every time we sing it.

Wednesday, I was supposed to have a follow-up appointment with Dr. MacCallum to see how the first treatment had gone. She was surprised at how frail I looked and how sick I had been. She instituted a plan for the anti-nausea medications. I was to begin taking them each Thursday following chemo whether I was feeling sick or well. She had me take the Dex every twelve hours, and the Zofran every eight from Thursday through Monday. I would take the Compazine and Phenagrin as directed as needed. She was confident this would help with the nausea. She also informed me that a major part of the problem was these medications could cause constipation. She suggested milk of magnesia or colace pills along with the prescribed medicines.

Thursday was the turning point for the week. I woke up feeling better than I had since before the treatment. I told Julie I needed to get out just to do it and I ran some errands. I felt great and had peace about the future. Dr. Mac was on point with the medicine regimen. For the next five and half months, I was never again ill because of the chemotherapy. I was certainly tired and significantly taxed energy wise but, overall, treatments went extremely well.

This is something that not many people think about. We pray that God will remove the cancer. We pray that he'll use the doctors and the medications, but until I went through it, I had never thought to ask Him to fight the side effects of the medicines. In retrospect, it seems silly that we don't. If He's going to heal, and if we're going to ask Him to do so, then why not ask for relief in every aspect. We take the slight negatives as signs that the medicines and procedures are working instead of trusting God to take complete control.

While the after effects of the chemo were mild, the preparation was not. Even today I still cringe when I think about going in for a visit. I got to the point that certain smells reminded me of the treatment room and would make me gag. About three months through, they had to prescribe a sedative for me to take before treatment so that I could relax, and even sleep, during the procedure.

The pre-chemo blood work became a pain as well. The port-a-cath is designed to take the medication directly to the heart. This is, of course, the fastest way to distribute it to the body. From the port, a tube runs to the jugular vein, directly into the heart. Because of the proximity of the jugular to the salivary glands, I could taste the solutions used to flush out the port during each visit. When I would arrive at the office, the nurses would give me peppermints to help keep the taste from coming on so strong. I can no longer bear the taste of peppermint either.

We were warned that one of the hardest things to endure throughout the process is the mental aspect. In a vast majority of cases, regardless of the extent physical strain, emotional and mental fatigue is rampant. I found this to be true myself. After about the fifth dose of chemo I was done. I had had enough. I had not quite hit the wall, but I could see it barreling towards me. As I've stated a few times, I found relief in song. The Bible says to "put on the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness." I grew to love Sunday morning praise and worship more than ever.

In the physical, over the course of the next six months, it was generally life as normal. I was able to do just about everything I always had. The port-a-cath prohibited me from repetitious motions with my right arm. No throwing baseball or football. But I could still mow the lawn and do yard work. I had to take more breaks than usual but I got it done. Because I did not have to go to work I worked outside a lot. My yard now looks almost nothing like it did in February. I dug out bushes, cut down trees, and tore down an old useless shed. I borrowed a Kubota lawn tractor with a front-end loader from a friend, spread a dump truck load of dirt all around my yard, and reseeded it. With the help of Marc, Shawn, Brandon, and Todd, I installed a chain link fence around my backyard. By the end of the summer, we had been in the house for a year and it was finally starting to feel like ours.

Once I realized my journey would not be as difficult as it could have been, my attitude toward the disease changed. It was no longer this life-threatening situation that I had to desperately pray to God for protection from. It was now an illness that I could very easily thank Him for healing from. I learned the true meaning of Philippians 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I was determined to not let this disease get me down. I purposed in my heart to set my mind on God and let Him deal with all the issues. I never once uttered the words "I have c---r." Nor have I ever typed them. I would not allow myself to speak such a negative confession over my life. I wasn't trying to deny the fact that my body was fighting an illness. I just wasn't going to allow a defeated attitude to creep in and set up shop. I believe that once you let the words proceed from your mouth, you open the door to trouble. Cancer was defeated on the cross 2000 years ago and I saw no need to talk about it.

Another way I dealt with it was humor. One afternoon Shawn called and said he wanted to take me to lunch. We drove down the road to Arby's. After we ordered Shawn took his cup, filled his drink, and sat down, leaving me with my cup and the tray of our food. Unabashedly, I looked over at him and said, "You're gonna make a chemo patient carry all this?" Shawn replied, "Dude, your cancer is not in your arms!" We both laughed, and needless to say, drew looks doing so. Another time, he had said if I needed, he would help me with the lawn mowing. The strain on the port-a-cath from pulling the starter cord could be too much. While discussing this one Sunday evening at church, he said he would start the mower for me. When I asked him about actually mowing he said, "The port aint in your legs!" This again drew laughter, but that time it was more than just he and I doing it. Even when we were going to visit Dr. MacCallum for the first time, we were cracking jokes in the parking lot and on the way into the building.

It wasn't always fun and games though. My dad has often said that you know you're doing something right when Satan keeps trying to attack. He'll do whatever he can to disrupt you. I remember a couple of

instances in April I was having very restless sleep. I would wake up and lie in bed for hours wishing I could go back to sleep. While I was wishing for sleep, he'd go to work on me. "You know, this is serious and you could die...If you die what's going to happen to Julie and Lee...They'll be mad at God for taking you so young..." On and on it would go, attacking me where I was most vulnerable. He knew I didn't care about myself. My concern was always for my family. One morning on the way to chemo an old Rich Mullins song came on the radio; Hold Me Jesus. (As a completely unrelated aside, we lost a great songwriter when he died in 1997. If you want to hear songs purely about the love of the Lord written by a man who so obviously loved Him, find a Rich Mullins album.) I had heard this song plenty of times before, but this particular morning when he sang the second verse and chorus it hit me hard.

And I wake up in the night and feel the dark.  
It's so hot inside my soul I swear there must  
Be blisters on my heart  
**So hold me Jesus 'cause I'm shaking like a leaf**  
**You have been King of my Glory**  
**Won't you be my Prince of Peace**

He was singing to me. 2am is the worst time to do spiritual warfare. You're tired and simply wanting sleep. And, yeah, you definitely feel the dark in the heat of your soul. But it was yet another reminder that God was in control and I did not need to worry. He was going to heal me.

God has always used music to speak to me. Whether it was inside the tube during the PET scan or facing the fear of this trial, He's been faithful to give me peace through song. And he was doing it again.

I remember at the beginning of the process I was battling within myself the issue of the reality of my faith. I guess Satan realized he wasn't going to completely rattle me with concerns for my family, because he started attacking the confessions of my mouth. "You aren't being true...You're just SAYING the words...Lip service...You aren't really this strong...You're a coward." One afternoon I sat at my computer and typed out another blog:

...I have a plug inserted in my chest. Instead of being stuck fresh each time, the nurses can just plug me in to the IV and give me my Chemo. The Dr told me I can't do anything strenuous with my right arm for about 2 months. I'm right handed. This renders me virtually helpless. I'm not used to using my left side. Rich Mullins sang "...surrender don't come natural to me..." Yeah, that seems about right. My biggest concern in all of this is that my brave face and words of faith don't become a false front. At the same time I don't want to portray a stronger faith than I truly have. Paul I am not. I'm not even Peter. I'm a guy who knows that God can and will heal him; who's holding on to that and knows that others worrying about him won't do any good; but at the same time needs all the prayer and support he can get because "...deep inside this armor, the warrior is a child..."

The last line referenced a song that God had reminded me off. It is nearly twenty years old and was written by Twila Paris. The song follows:

Lately I've been winning battles left and right  
Even winners can get wounded in the fight  
People say that I'm amazing, wise beyond my years  
But they don't see in side of me I'm hiding all my tears  
**They don't know that I go running home when I fall down**  
**They don't know who picks me up when no one is around**  
**I drop my sword and cry for just a while**  
**Because deep inside this armor the warrior is a child**  
Unafraid because His armor is the best  
Even Soldiers need a quiet place to rest  
People say that I'm amazing; never sound retreat  
But they don't see the enemy that lays me at His feet  
**They don't know that I go running home when I fall down...**

The words were telling my story. They were also reminding me that everyone has these

moments. I had no reason to worry. I had confessed that I was not going to be afraid and that I was going to stand strong. I knew I could not do it on my own and it was foolish to try. God was going to provide the help I needed as well as the people able to provide that help.

I had been receiving chemo for about a month and a half. When we were leaving the office after a treatment, Dad mentioned a response he had gotten from an email he had sent out about me. He asked me if I had read it. I told him I had not and that I didn't know what he was talking about. I checked my email settings when I got home and found that somehow the church's email address had been blocked. I had not received emails about myself, prayer alerts, newsletters, or anything. I unblocked the address and he forwarded everything he had.

There were messages from family both local and nationwide. There were emails from pastors here as well as missionaries we support. Friends from all over sent their promises for prayer. With each email Dad sent, more people responded. There were old friends that I haven't seen in easily 20 years that offered support. I was floored. I sat and wiped tears from eyes as I spent the next hour and a half reading upwards of 50 emails.

One email that always stood out in my mind was from a couple, Tom and Sue Wood, who used to pastor a church in Appomattox, VA, about 20 minutes east. Dad had sent a progress update about my condition. I was not ill, but I was a little more tired than I had been. Sue replied saying, "Tom is on his knees in his prayer closet as we speak." I don't mention them to single them out, or make them any more special than anyone else. This is just indicative of the type of responses we constantly got. And not just "I'll pray for you" either. There were plenty of accounts of others' friends and family members that had gone through the same thing I was going through and had come out just fine. Some of them were some 35 years removed from their bouts. Some of them had fought cancer and afterward still had children. Support and encouragement were overflowing and I did not know how to handle it. I simply thanked God every night before bed and waited for what the next day would bring.

I had another significant attitude change during this time as well. Genworth is a major local sponsor for the Relay for Life, a fund-raiser event for the American Cancer Society. Each year, around the middle of February, we start to get email reminders that the Relay is coming up in June. For the first couple of years I worked here, I was honestly a bit annoyed by the constant reminders. It seemed like it was every week, and sometimes multiple days a week, that we'd be asked to help support the event in one way or another. I was all for giving of your time and/or money but enough was enough. My vision was a bit skewed.

I decided that I was going to check out the Relay and found that Survivors and currently treated patients were invited to attend special functions throughout the evening. I signed Julie and myself up and we went over to the event site. Survivors were given a special t-shirt to wear to distinguish them from Relay participants, and their care givers were given a gift back of various promotional goodies from local businesses.

The first item on the agenda was the opening lap around the track. They called for all Survivors to the starting line and we took a leisurely stroll around the oval. The track was lined on both sides with volunteers and participants applauding as we walked. I was surrounded by hundreds of others who had fought cancer and won, and I was wearing a shirt that was calling me a Survivor. There is also a window decal on my car that says the same.

I am now going to make it an annual tradition to attend the Relay for Life. Not just to raise money for cancer research but also to be a part of that same support network that made me feel so at ease. Undoubtedly, there will be someone at the next Relay that will be a first timer and they just might need a little emotional support. The reminder emails at work won't be so annoying.

## **And My God Shall Supply All Your Needs**

One of my chief concerns going in was finances. God had already shown that He was going to provide the income to sustain us for normal expenses, and we thanked Him greatly. But this seemed like it was going to be a major expense. I have health insurance through Genworth, but we did not know the extent of it. Dad called the offices of the physicians and asked them to explain how it would work and what might be covered. The answers we received were astounding. All I was going to be expected to pay was co-pays. Each chemo treatment was more than \$6,000. PET and CT Scans were \$10,000-15,000 each. Radiation was going to be several thousand for each treatment as well. The total bill could run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. At the end of the day my expected portion, including prescriptions, would only be around \$2,500. Adding to my astonishment, Dad told me that I would not need to concern myself with that either. Members of the church had individually approached him about establishing a fund to pay for my medical bills. My support network was tightly woven. God was not going to let me fall.

The final piece to the life as normal puzzle was my duty to the Army reserve. When I called in February to inform them what was going on, they said not to worry. The Army would work with me. I understood, but I wanted to do what I could to be sure I remained in good standing. I may have been a “broke Soldier,” but I was still a Soldier. I took my list of duty dates for the year and began to mark my calendar. Much to my chagrin, the weekends for Battle Assembly coincided with chemotherapy. It seemed, at first, that I would miss almost an entire year of duty. Once we realized we had the nausea under control, I returned to duty in April.

Before I was assured that my standing with the Army would remain in a positive position, I was certain that I would have to end my career. My initial enlistment was set to expire in February 2008 and while I had contemplated letting my term end, I had not decided what I wanted to do and I didn't like the idea of not being able to make my own decision.

I began to wonder what I would do with myself not being in the Army. It had become a major part of me. I hadn't realized it but I had begun to find my identity in the military. I thought that was who I was. I felt important when I was in uniform. The Lord spoke to my heart and reminded me that I was to find my identity in Him. In the long run, neither my music, nor my Army career, nor even my legacy to my family really mattered. I was His child and His servant. That was to come first, and the other things were tools I was to use for that purpose.

I decided to test the waters to see just how normal Army life would be. I was up for a promotion from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant. Even with Hodgkin's Disease I met all the requirements so I submitted my packet. I was pinned Staff Sergeant on May 12. While trying to accomplish this I knew there was more I could go for so I did. I had debated for several months whether I wanted to continue with the Army or let my time expire. It was a struggle. I liked what I was doing. But I also realized that there was a lot that can happen here at home. Did I really want to be sent to some foreign country to be shot at? After lots of prayer, I decided I wanted to re-enlist. Julie said she would support me no matter what I did. Though it was not a determining factor, the re-enlistment cash bonus didn't hurt either. I went to my unit's Retention office. The only thing that stood in my way was an expired physical. I would have to take and pass a new one in order to be eligible. I took the “it never hurts to ask” approach and put in for a physical. I was told to report May 1.

I went to the office to endure my military physical. Like anyone would imagine, it was not pleasant, just a necessary evil. I turned in my forms with the medical history questions filled out. I was upfront about my condition, though most recruiters will tell you, very tongue in cheek, that you shouldn't lie, but you don't have to volunteer information that is not requested. I told them I had Hodgkin's but made sure it was clear that it was not limiting my ability to perform my duties. I waited eight weeks as the review board looked at my case. At the end of July, we got the word. I was fit for duty. I passed my physical, re-enlisted, and received my bonus. It happened just as it would have had I not been sick. By the end of 2007, we were in a better financial state than we were at the beginning. Not at all what you would expect to hear from a man who was fighting cancer.

## The Long Day Closes

Part of knowing how much progress was being made was intermittent testing. Midway through, Dr. MacCallum ordered a CT scan to determine the size of the nodes. The results showed that they had shrunk to between one-half to two-thirds the original size. She said this was fine because scarring could be keeping the nodes at a larger than normal size and it showed that the disease was dying.

My final treatment was Thursday, August 2, 2007. This happened to be my Aunt Bonnie's birthday. We had moved to Thursdays because the 4<sup>th</sup> of July had fallen on a Wednesday and was a scheduled treatment day. The office being closed that day, we moved it to the 5<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Mac ordered a PET Scan to see if there was any residual disease, and if so, to map out further treatment. The test was Tuesday, August 14<sup>th</sup>. I returned to work the next day since my short-term disability had run out and I did not have Long Term as I thought I had. I removed it from my paycheck deductions the previous October thinking, "Why would I EVER need Long Term Disability?" It turned out to be a blessing because LTD was only two-thirds of my pay. Returning to work kept my income constant.

Friday, August 17<sup>th</sup> was the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of my cousin, Aaron. It also happened to be the date I was supposed to meet with Dr. MacCallum to discuss the results of my PET Scan. (Three important dates in my journey, three family birthdays. It may be a completely unimportant coincidence, but it was one I felt was worth mentioning. It also guarantees I'll never forget them.) Spring came by to watch the daycare kids and we all once again piled into Mom and Dad's van to make our visit. We went through the usual weigh-in and blood-work, and were taken to the consultation room to wait for the doctor.

Dr. MacCallum did not make us wait very long, and she chuckled as she walked through the door. "The whole family always only comes at the beginning and the end", she said. Then she looked at me and said, "And, yes, it is the end." Words cannot possibly do justice to describe the feeling. I bowed my head, clinched my fist, and gave my leg a hit. I honestly do not recall much of what was said afterwards. I do know that I interrupted her so that I could step across the room, kiss my wife, and then say, "I do NOT have cancer!" Most everything after that is a blur.

I hadn't requested the entire day off, so I had to work that afternoon. I was not much good for anything. I was so excited. I tried to concentrate and do what I could but when 5pm hit I was out the door. I had to go home and celebrate.

Radiation was the next and final step. I hate to make it sound unimportant but there was really nothing to it. The treatments literally took 5 minutes and I was done. The worst part of it was the appointment time of 5:45am. I had a sore throat starting midway through that required me to eat soft foods and lasted for about a week afterwards. Other than that, there's really not much to say about it.

It's kind of funny to talk about this portion of my experience because I tend to refer to it as the beginning of recovery. I guess I call it that for lack of a better term. I never really felt like I had anything to recover from. Chemo was hard on my body though, and starting in July I began running with the director of the Liberty University Army ROTC dept, Major Foy. We would meet on a local trail and run/walk for a total of about 2 miles. We increased our run distance when I was feeling strong enough and eventually I was able to complete a mile straight without stopping. It had been a long time since I had run at such length and it was painful at times, but I had to do it. I needed to return to pre-treatment/Army standard condition. MAJ Foy was gracious enough to allow me to also join the ROTC students for their 3-time per week PT sessions when classes resumed in the fall. Radiation began at the same time classes resumed so I was unable maintain a regular schedule for about a month or so. I knew I would be set back a bit and would have to work up to where I had already gotten.

In October, my reserve unit conducted a semi-annual APFT or Army Physical Fitness Test. It is comprised of 3 timed events. The first two test how many push-ups and sit-ups that you can do in two minutes each. The third event is the 2-mile run; a timed event graded on the time it takes to complete. I told my First Sergeant that I wanted to participate, since in recent months I had simply been a grader. I wanted to see where I stood.

I have never really had difficulty with the push-up portion of the test so when it was my turn I did as many as I could to pass and stopped. I wanted to conserve my energy in an effort to help myself in the sit-ups and the run. We went through the rotation again and I got in position to do the sit-ups. I used the entire 2 minutes and fought and struggled to knock out as many as I could. While I wasn't being graded on effort, it wasn't going unnoticed. Other Soldiers commented on my determination. I did not pass the sit-up portion, so I could not pass the test as a whole. The next part would truly determine where I stood.

As we got in position on the track to begin the run, I grabbed my grader and told him I did not know how much I would be able to handle. I would go as far as I could. He said he understood and told me to push it as far as I was able. The command to begin was given and we were off. I knew that a finish time of 17 minutes flat was a long shot but I was going to go for it. I finished my first lap in 2:05. It must have been adrenaline because my pace slowed from there. I reached the 17 minute mark near the end of my 7<sup>th</sup> lap. I had one more to go. I wasn't going to pass this either but I wasn't going to give up. My legs were both numb and burning by that point. I rounded the back turn and crossed the line beginning my 8<sup>th</sup> and final lap. Plenty of others had already finished and were yelling at me to keep going. It seemed like all eyes were on me. I was in a position to be an active witness of what God had done for me. I continued down the front straightaway and approached the first turn. Suddenly my legs didn't want to move and my chest throbbed. I had to stop. I had gone far enough; farther than anyone or even I expected. They would be proud. I should be proud.

In the moments of thought that really only took about five seconds, I was reminded of an incident at basic training. One afternoon, we were taken to the track to do more running. The Drill SGTs thought we needed more work. As we ran laps, I caught up to a buddy, PVT Keeling. He and I had grown fairly close and I was not going to let him fall behind. I began to try to encourage him.

"Come on, Buddy", I said. "Keep it moving." "Parrish", he said, "I can't. My legs are killin' me." "Let's call cadences", I suggested. He said he didn't like any of them. I said, "You'll like this one." I started calling out Philippians 4:13 in a cadence rhythm. "I can do...all things...through Christ...who gives me strength..." We yelled this as we ran. We regained strength and we completed our run with power.

I found myself again in this situation. This time, it was me that needed the help. I started calling the cadence to myself, out loud. As I rounded the turn, there was a lady setting up a table to sell tickets for the peewee football game that was about to be played. She heard me and said, "Amen, Soldier! You can do it!" I charged as hard as I could down the back straightaway and rounded the last turn. As I approached the finish line I looked up to see a crowd of my fellow soldiers cheering me on to the finish. I crossed the line and heard myself yelling, "Thank you, Jesus!"

We returned to the reserve center to be weighed and then measured for body-fat. I knew I was well over weight as far as the Army was concerned, and because of my recent eating habits, my body fat was probably above standards too. Surprisingly, I came out exactly at the maximum allowed. I passed.

I showered, shaved, changed uniforms, and gathered my things to take to my Jeep. As I walked through the parking lot, the morning's events played in my head. I began to cry. It was the first time I had cried since reading my emails from Dad six months previous. I felt such a release. I called Julie to tell her what had happened. When I came home at the end of the day, I laid in the floor to play with Lee. I grabbed her and held her on my chest. I started to cry again. I had held it in for 6 months and it needed to come out. How was I to deal with what I had gone through? How do you cope?

One of the first things I did in August when we were told I wasn't sick anymore was email a friend of mine. His name is Trevor, and he battled non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2006. Julie and I had eaten dinner with

him and his family over Easter and we talked about my treatments compared to his. I wanted to pick his brain about how he coped with what he had just endured. I told him that I thought about cancer more now than I did while going through it. It was never so serious that I might die, but it was constantly on my mind. My life had seemed like a big dream and it was as if I was just now waking up. Trevor told me I would never really forget about it, and that I shouldn't try. He said that God had given us a second chance and we should treat it as such. He said not to look at it as "what did I just go through." Instead, treat it as "look at where I am now."

I tried to reconcile his words with my experience. They made sense and helped me a lot but I still wasn't completely able to make peace. I had told Julie that when it was all over, I was going to go out and get a new tattoo to celebrate my journey. Being that tattoos are permanent, I was going to have to think a lot about what I should get. It should be meaningful. I wanted to get something that could represent exactly the difference between where I stood now as opposed to where I was at the beginning.

One day while I pondered the decision, an old praise and worship song came to my head. In the chorus of the song, a few of the Hebrew names of God were listed. Jehovah Nissi-(I AM) *The Lord your banner*, Jehovah Jireh-(I AM) *The Lord your provider*, Jehovah Tsidkenu-(I AM) *The Lord your righteousness*, El Shaddai-God *Almighty*. Then one name in particular jumped out at me: Jehovah Rapha- (I AM) *The Lord your healer*. I had my tattoo. I searched the Internet for an image of the Hebrew lettering for the way it would have been written in Biblical times.

The husband of a lady I work with is a tattoo artist and was holding a convention for artists from other states to show their talents. So, I took my print out to get my artwork done. The atmosphere at the convention was not one that I grew up in or one that I frequent. Tat shops are generally clean because of health codes. The clientele are sometimes not. They're your stereotypical rough looking, heavy metal listening, and foulmouthed bikers. Not all, but a lot. And I knew it would give me opportunity to talk about God. Sure enough, the artist doing the work asked me what it meant. I told him the meaning and how God had healed me of cancer. I am forever branded with a positive mark to remind me of God's grace and mercy, not to mention a conversation starter and a means to tell about what God has done for me.

The end was here. I no longer had treatments, constant appointments, or anything else to worry about. Things were winding down and returning to true normal. I wrote an email and asked Dad to send it out as the final update to my condition:

There's a beautiful Gilbert and Sullivan song I learned while I was in the choir back in high school called "The Long Day Closes." In its original context it's actually about the process of growing old and passing away. As I was recently nearing the end of my treatments, I was constantly reminded of this song and particularly the last stanza. In it, Gilbert writes, "Go to thy dreamless bed, where grief reposes. Thy book of toil is read. The long day closes." Death was not the final outcome for me, but the book of my "toil" was read and the 7-1/2- month-longest-day-of-my-life is done. Chemo and radiation are done. The Port-a-Cath has been removed. I am back at work, and now back on the phones. Life now is almost exactly the same as it was in February when I was diagnosed. The biggest difference is my beautiful daughter is now 9 months old.

I suppose this part of my life will never fully be over. Short of ignoring my doctors' advice and never returning for checkups and follow-ups, there will always be reminders. The good thing is they will be reminders of what God has done for me and my family, and not what could have happened. Anything can kill you. But I praise God that He can heal anything! And He has.

I've been told by several people I should write a book or at least journal my thoughts and experiences. I've already been inspired for one song and am working on another. Maybe a memoir isn't so far off.

I am eternally grateful for all your prayers and support. So, please allow me to say it one final time. On behalf of my wife and daughter, thank you.

I now had closure. The only thing left to do was write it all down.

## Let Me Tell You What The Lord Has Done For Me

I would be remiss if I did not take time to discuss a few of the things God taught and showed me along the way. He most certainly used my trials to bring me closer to Him and give me new insight into truths I already knew, and teach me things I didn't. In late April, I was going through some cards and old mail that had gotten put aside during the diagnosis period and been forgotten. I came across a card from two sisters that attend our church while they are in school at Liberty University. The card read, "...*(we) pray that this is a good new year full of blessings and miracles. Psalm 119:165: Great peace have they who love Your law, and nothing can make them stumble.*" As I read the card I smiled. "How nice of them to have sent a card after the word of my illness", I thought. As I put it down, I noticed the date written in the corner where my thumb had been. January 2007. It was sent before any of us knew, except God. There was a Wednesday evening, somewhere in July I believe, when our weekly Bible study topic turned to "Why do bad things happen to Christians?" A lady at the study had been struggling with the idea. God says in Jeremiah 29:11 His plans for us are for prosperity and not calamity. The answer given was that everything is for God's glory. No matter what the situation, God will be glorified. It wasn't God who was making things happen. He was simply allowing us to go through the test. How we came out would show where our faith really was.

I spoke up and mentioned that I had a disease that the doctors said could kill me. Yet, every night I lied in bed and asked God to heal me, and I expected Him to do so. He may do it. He may not. He may choose to use the doctors. Regardless of how it happens, He will be glorified. Some would say, "How is God going to be glorified?" The simple answer to that is, "I'm still here aren't I?" I will glorify Him.

Shawn is always good for at least one deep thought in these types of discussions. He brought up Job. We know the story. Job was very wealthy and well respected. He loved God and was considered as a very righteous man. Satan made a bet with God that if he lost everything, Job would curse God and turn away. Job lost it all and did exactly what any human would do. He asked God why. He mourned and he wept. He questioned God and the motives behind the test, but he never blamed God or renounced Him. He argued with his "friends" for days and he never budged. Job tells them in chapter 13 and verse 15, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...." Shawn reminded us that Job realized God was just and would spare him when He saw fit.

I sat and thought about this the rest of the evening. I looked up the verse again when I got home. My translation read, "...I will trust in Him..." I wondered why the difference in wording. The original Hebrew word is "yachal", which means to hope or wait for expectantly. I understand that some people translate meanings in different ways with different contexts. But to me, "hope" and "trust" have completely different connotations. I'll give a couple of examples.

Mowing my lawn was an initial concern of mine at the beginning of treatment. I hate doing it but I despise my yard looking like a jungle even more. Shawn had said he would do it if I were not feeling strong enough. The problem was that Shawn travels a lot for his job. He could be gone for weeks at a time. My uncle had said he too would be willing to help if I needed. Jimmy has one of those fancy, zero-turning-radius mowers and could make quick work of the yard.

It happened one particular week that Shawn was gone, I wasn't feeling up to mowing my lawn, and it was getting rather tall. I called Jimmy and he was glad to come out and be of help to me. I trusted these men to keep their word. I had no reason not to. They've proven themselves to be trustworthy. I did not, however, put my hope in them. This would be stupid. If I had, and had they not been able to help me, it could have given me a whole new area to be worried over. Instead, by not hoping in them, I simply could have found someone else to do it.

Along the same lines, I can talk about my dad. He told me in February that he was going to go through this with me every step of the way. That's a wonderful sentiment, and it helped in giving me some reassurance.

Dad was faithful to be at my house in plenty of time to be at the various doctors' offices when we needed to be. We put a lot of miles on his van this year. I trusted my father. He's never given me any reason not to.

In May, Mom and Dad were out on a walk in the late evening. There's a fairly new neighborhood in town that's well lit and popular amongst walkers. While they were out, Dad experienced a shooting pain in his chest. It got so bad it doubled him over. He struggled to make it back to the car and Mom drove them home. They ended up calling 911 and having an ambulance take him to the emergency room. Their initial thought was possible heart attack.

My father is an amputee. He was accidentally electrocuted in August 1977. The doctors tried to save his left arm but they could not. They had to remove it just below his elbow. Because of this, there's not much sensation in his arm anyway, much less any tingling that might be considered a warning sign for possible heart attack, so it's always hard to tell what is wrong without going to the hospital. In previous times it had been severe "chest wall pain." This time it turned out to be a very infected gall bladder with gallstones. Dad was hospitalized for over a week.

"How was this fair?" I wondered. I was the one with the disease, yet my dad was the one in the hospital. I was really bothered by this. The week he was there was also the week for a chemo dose. Again, had I placed my hope in him, this would have really been a stressful time. I could have ended up scurrying around like a squirrel trying to find someone to take me to my treatment. Instead, I knew there would be plenty of people available to lend a hand and I had nothing to worry about.

Most critical in this is the perspective of the physicians. I had to place my trust in them to know exactly what they were doing. They are highly trained and educated professionals. However, had I placed my hope in them and complications had arisen, then assuredly my entire world would have come tumbling down around me.

The principle is the same on a spiritual level. The difference is we should not only trust in Him, but we should be *hoping* in Him as well. I can trust in God. I can believe that what He says He will do. But if I am not hoping in Him to do it, then where's my faith? The point is this: placing your hope in anyone or anything aside from God is going to eventually end in failure.

Some people say, "Well, hope and faith are different." I say they're not. I saw a guy walking down a sidewalk at a local shopping center some years ago. I do not remember the exact wording but his shirt was talking about faith. The back of it said, "Hope is just a 4 letter word." At the time I was only 14 or so, but even then I saw the error in this reasoning.

The very definition of faith given to us by the writer of Hebrews says that, "...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hope is included in faith's definition. You cannot have the one without the other. It is mentioned throughout the Old and New Testaments and never in a negative way. David wrote, "Why so downcast, o my soul? Put your hope in God." God wants us to do more than simply say we trust Him. He wants us to actively wait on Him and rely on Him. There were also times that I would sit and think about not why was I going through it, but why was God being so good to me? Did I truly deserve this? Satan would try to use this too. "You shouldn't have been so rude...Did you just lie right then...Your life isn't right...Keep it up and God isn't going to heal you..." I knew none of this was true but I am human and sometimes I stumble. The devil can make sense. He just lies about it.

One afternoon I was reminded a passage in Ephesians. Paul writes to them in the third chapter that he prays that they may understand "the breadth and length and height and depth" of God's love. I believe this is why Paul prayed the way he did. In the letter to the Ephesians he was reminding them that they too were heirs to the Kingdom, regardless of their birth origins. By accepting Christ they were deserving of all of His blessings, including healing.

God was working on my witness through this time as well. I believe he was preparing me for the time when all was said and done, and it would be up to me to tell my story. When I sat down and wrote the blog

about the reality of my faith, I was not anticipating an evangelical message. I was simply expressing my concerns about talking the talk simply because it's what others expected.

One afternoon in August, Todd called to see what my plans for the evening were. The local minor league baseball team, the Hillcats, was having an all-you-can-eat event. Every Tuesday home game, for an extra \$3 admission, you could eat all the pizza, popcorn, hot dogs, burgers, and peanuts you wanted until the 6<sup>th</sup> inning; two items per person, per visit, with unlimited visits. This was beautiful. They were combining two of my favorite things, food and baseball. Julie said she didn't mind if I went so I told Todd I would meet him at the stadium.

I arrived about fifteen minutes before he did so I paid for my ticket and went in to grab a seat. As I waited, I saw a guy out of the corner of my eye who looked familiar. I didn't want to turn and stare at him, but I could feel him looking at me. As he approached I realized it was indeed a friend from high school, Glen. He and Todd graduated a year ahead of me. Glen told me that he had heard of my condition from another mutual friend and was glad to see me out. He said I looking good all things considered. He was clearly just being nice at this point. I had gained 40 pounds, was bald, and had no eyebrows. Glen then talked to me about my blog. His daughter was having medical problems of her own and the doctor visits were constant. The strain was hard on the family. He said one night he read my posting about keeping my faith genuine. It really made him think. He said he took a long hard look at his own faith and made a much-needed re-evaluation. He said he was amazed at the strength I showed and had wanted to tell me so.

I was thrilled to hear that I was having such a positive effect on people's lives. I was even more excited to know that it was done indirectly. I told Glen that I had fairly quickly come to the conclusion that I had two options. I could run and hide and cry, "woe is me", or I could stand up and say, "I serve a risen Savior and a God that still heals and this will not defeat me." God is bigger than cancer.

That is the reason I decided to listen to the advice of others and write this book. This ordeal wasn't just about me. My daughter needed to know how interesting her first year was for us, and others need to know that there is a God, and He loves us all very much.

God continued to press the issue. I was out running errands with Lee one Friday in September. Genworth had insisted that I take the remainder of my time off through the end of the year. They wanted no one to be able to say they were not given the opportunity to use all of their allotted time. Apparently, this included recently returning cancer patients who were out for six months.

While Lee and I were out, we stopped at McDonald's for lunch. She was getting big enough to eat "big people" food, so we split a McNugget Happy Meal. I was wearing an old camouflage hat that I had been issued by the Army and was no longer wearable with the uniform. As we looked for a table we passed a man that I at first thought to be a bit slow. His demeanor was almost incoherent and his clothes were disheveled. He saw my hat and made a comment about the Marines. I smiled and said I was in the Army. I found a table and put Lee in the high chair. As we ate, the man kept trying to talk to me. "Hey Army, thanks for your service...Hey Army, you guys are great...Hey Army..." Each time I smiled and nodded and kept eating. I didn't want to be rude but I just wanted to have a nice lunch with my baby.

When he wasn't talking to me, he was talking about people coming in. I then started to realize this guy was not slow; he was drunk. He was saying some of the meanest and most hateful things about people as they entered. He was saying them under his breath so they wouldn't hear, but I was close enough that I could. I started to eat a bit faster so that I could leave sooner. I didn't want to be around when he said something too loud and to the wrong person. He was liable to get his head beaten in.

To be honest, a small part of me wanted to see it because he deserved it. That's when God stepped in. "Why don't you tell him I love him instead?" I said, "Because I don't want to, Lord." At this point I started to nervously tremble. I knew God was not going to let that be my final answer. We argued for a moment.

I cleaned our table, threw away our trash, and put the high chair back in its place. I wanted a drink refill before we left but I was going to have to pass him again. I got my drink and went to step away. Lee's diaper bag fell off my shoulder so I stopped to adjust it. When I did, God spoke again. "Do not walk out that door without telling him that I love him." He was no longer asking, He was commanding. I could not refuse and expect to feel good the rest of the day.

I stepped over to his table and thanked him for his kind remarks about the military. The smell of alcohol was so heavy on him I do not know how I missed it before. He shook my hand and said he was happy to say such things. Then I leaned in and told him that God loved him and sent His Son to die for him. As soon as the words fell from my lips, it was no longer me speaking. I just opened my mouth and the words flowed. He said, "Oh, I know about Jesus." I pulled him in closer to me and was almost nose-to-nose with him. I said, "Well, if you know about Jesus then you need to let Him fill that hole in your heart instead of all that alcohol."

His face froze. You would have thought I had hit him in the stomach. He looked me dead in the eye and in the clearest, most sober voice said, "You've got me there, but I want to talk about the world." I told him that I wanted to talk about God. After that statement, I felt in my heart that I was done. I was hunched over a very intoxicated man and holding my 8 month old daughter too. I did not think he would do anything stupid but I needed to get her out of the situation. I told him one last time that God loved him and went to put Lee in the car.

This was the first time I had ever approached a complete stranger and told them of God's love. It felt great. I am not sure how far God is going to take this experience. But I do know whatever he tells me to do, or wherever he tells me to go, I'll be ready. As you can tell, there were many poignant moments for me throughout the year. Lots of things stick out in my mind as life changing, enlightening, or simply a sure fire life long memory. Reaching my 30th birthday was another of these.

In my family, as I'm sure it is with many others, 30 is a milestone. But for us it's a little deeper. When my dad's brother, Lee, turned 30 in December of 1978, Dad gave him a shirt that said "Over the hill at 30." Five years later, Lee gave the shirt back to my Dad for his 30th birthday. Lee had been fighting brain tumors for some time and they had gotten worse by the end of 1983. The shirt had a newfound special significance. Uncle Lee died in February 1984. Ever since then, every member of our family that has turned 30 has been given "the shirt." Needless to say, my circumstances throughout 2007 had added anticipation of that day. I thought about it often. Again, I wasn't afraid of not reaching it; it was just another goal in my journey.

In September, I was thinking about 30 and "the shirt", and I was reminded of another gift that Shawn and I had given Dad for his 30th. There was a song that had come out around that time by a Christian singer named Randy Stonehill. It was simply titled, "Turnin 30." I could only remember a couple of lines from the song so I did a search on the Internet to see if I could find the lyrics. When I found them I could not believe what I was reading. It was as if I had written the song. It fit my life to a tee.

I got a wife who really loves me  
She makes my life so sweet  
And a little baby daughter  
Who plays games around my feet  
And my life is very different  
From those lazy bachelor years  
And if I had the chance to go back  
I'd rather stay right here  
**Turnin' thirty**  
And I have friends who care about me  
They're the best I've ever had  
And they always stood behind me  
Whenever times got bad  
And I love to play my music  
Though the road can be a trial  
But every time I walk on stage  
It's worth each dusty mile  
Turnin' thirty

Of all the songs I was reminded of this year I think this one was the best. Each song had its meaning for their situation, and each gave me peace in times of turmoil. But this one summed up the whole year. This song was about me.

## Julie and Lee

I do not think I can correctly finish this book without discussing my wife, and my daughter. The rest of my family was wonderful and supportive, but God set my girls where they were for such a time as this. I was going to devote some space to my dad, but throughout the book I've already said most of the things I was going to write here. Suffice it to say, I am very thankful to have a father who loves me as much as he does, and who loves God even more. I am here today in large part because of him. Not just because of his support during treatments, but for his support of my life as a whole. As I sat down to write this portion, I started to draw a blank. I was not quite sure how I would say what I needed to. Then I pulled out our video camera. I wanted to get the tapes ready because at the time of authoring, we are approaching Christmas. It will be Lee's first. I began to watch some of the video we had already shot. I then rewound it to the beginning because I could not remember what the first filmed images were of my daughter.

When I hit play I saw my newborn child wrapped in a towel and being cleaned by the nurse. Lee was crying, of course. She'd kick and whimper. But when I talked to her and touched her hand or face, she'd stop. I was now officially a daddy, and was responsible for a life.

All of the emotions of that day and week came flooding back to me. I remembered the joy of holding my child and the agony of helplessness as she lay under the blue lights to rid her of jaundice. God gave us a precious baby, and it wouldn't be long before I realized exactly how precious she was.

Just like with most of my memories from this past year, it seems like it was just yesterday I was holding my five-week-old daughter in my arms. It was Monday, February 5. She and I sat on the sofa. I watched TV, she laid there and slept. I kissed her head and held her helpless little hand in my fingers. I leaned over and talked to her. I told her how much I love her. I told her that I would do anything for her and all she had to do was ask. I told her that I was going to be around for a long, long time. Ironically, the next day I was told I might have cancer. I had just made a promise to my daughter that I now so desperately wanted to keep.

She was already a good baby. She didn't cry much or really make very much noise at all. I knew that some babies grow into it so I didn't hold my breath. Julie and I were blessed to be able to watch our child grow up together. Too fast it seems at times. There were no worries of missing any of the milestones because I was at the office. Even though I feel like 2007 was stolen from me, I am so very thankful for the time I was able to spend with them.

I know I will sound like a proud father, and that's because I am. But I honestly cannot stress how good Lee was, and how much God blessed our family through her. Lee is one of the happiest children I have ever been around. Sure she cries and gets upset. But it is not as bad as a lot of kids I have seen. This should not have caught me off guard. When she was still in the womb, she would dance every Sunday morning at the end of church when Dad would give the closing prayer. Also, getting her to sleep is usually as simple as singing to her. Various songs work, but predominantly its Jesus Loves Me (which her Uncle Shawn changed to Jesus Loves Lee), Jesus Loves the Little Children, or other praise and worship songs. It's amazing to watch the peace of God invade her heart as soon as a song begins.

As of February 2008, over 1 year since she was born, Lee has never been sick. She's never run a fever. No ear infections or any other "normal" illnesses that most infants go through. She had an occasional runny nose or slight cough. She would fuss or snuffle while teething. But there was never anything that we had to make a special appointment for the pediatrician to check out. I know that not every child gets sick, so our experience is not necessarily abnormal. But I am convinced that God blessed us with this child, with this temperament, and this protection from illness all because of what I was about to go through. It is by no means a stretch to believe so.

As much as Lee was well behaved for us, Julie was equally strong for me. How she put up with me for six months at home I do not know. I'm not the easiest person to live with. I'm not neat and organized. I wouldn't necessarily say a slob, but I'm probably pretty close. Julie was very understanding and patient. She allowed me more slack than I deserved. She would remind me though, joking ever so slightly, that once I was deemed healed, I would be held to standard again.

I mentioned earlier that when the port-a-cath was inserted in my chest, I was told to lay off with the right arm for a while. I could not use it for anything strenuous and was not supposed to get it wet for several days. This meant I had to take a bath instead of a shower. If you've never tried to get in or out of a bathtub using one arm, and the arm you do not normally use to boot, I do not suggest you try it. I was going to have to not only let Julie help me in and out of the tub, but she would have to help bathe me too.

I also mentioned earlier in one of my blogs that I do not surrender easily. I am still learning to let go of the little things. But bathing is another story. I felt helpless and very frustrated. Julie, though, was amazing. She was encouraging and gentle. She reminded me it was temporary and would truly be over soon. There's something about having to allow your spouse to help you when you are disabled that draws you closer together. I hated having to be helped. But I loved being close to my wife.

Along the same line of being in control, I am stubborn. I was always outside longer than I needed to be, working harder than I needed to be. Julie was sure to make me take a break, or if I took one voluntarily, make me stay inside long enough for it to be useful. As much as taking care of her was my concern, keeping me safe and healthy was hers.

Julie was a constant source of encouragement. There were days that I could look in the mirror and not recognize myself. I've gained and lost weight before and, I used to periodically shave my head. Baldness and a few extra pounds were not too hard to deal with. However, throw no eyebrows and a constant look of fatigue into the mix, and you've got a pretty sad reflection staring back at you. It was depressing, but Julie was faithful to tell me I looked just fine.

I know that this really has no spiritual value, but my favorite thing regarding Julie and treatment, actually had to do with baseball. When I was diagnosed and told I would be staying home and would probably be quite ill, we decided to add an extra DirecTV receiver in our bedroom. This way, I could watch TV while I spent the day there, and Julie could watch whatever she wanted to while the children napped. Because I could possibly be confined for hours at a time, Julie agreed to let me order the Major League Extra Innings package. I am a Mets fan living in Virginia so I rarely get to see them. However, since I was not as sick and weak as we thought I would be, I did not spend very many hours alone watching baseball.

I should have known what would happen but for some reason it took me by surprise. In 2006, Julie took an extra special interest in baseball. She hadn't been a huge fan previously, but she'd tolerate a game now and then. By the end of that season, she was able to name the Mets starting line up top to bottom and what position they played. Now, in 2007, we had access to almost every Mets game. Out of 162 games, I got to see about 145, and Julie was right there beside me. Not only was she naming the starters and their place in the batting order, she was naming bench players and even questioning coaching and the general manager's decisions. I was proud of my wife and I loved every minute of it.

I could go on and on about how much she means to me. I do not know what I would have done without her. God gave me the perfect helper, and I thank Him for her every day.

Through it all God was so faithful. He gave us such peace. We could feel the effects of the prayers of everyone every day. God knew what He was doing and set us in the place we needed to be. I thank Him daily for my healing. It is nowhere near enough. I have been done with chemotherapy now for the same amount of time as I was taking it. The last few months of reflection have been hard at times. Writing this book has forced me to come to terms with things that I had shoved into the background. But as hard as that has been, God's grace has proven stronger. The reminders of the good have far outweighed the bad.

I guess the book ends here, but the story will continue. I will always have more tests to endure, but they are of the follow up variety. I have once again been forever changed by God's grace. In 1985 He saved me. In 2007 He spared me. I hope this has been as helpful to you as it has been for me and that God has spoken to your heart through my experience. If one person is brought to the Lord through reading it then my prayers are answered.

Amen.

## **Afterword: The Journey Continues**

The journey certainly has continued. The 5 years since my illness and treatment have flown by but there's not much that doesn't remain fresh in my mind. Hardly a day goes by that I am not reminded in one way or another that I have been blessed beyond compare.

We threw a party as soon as treatment ended. We invited friends and family and combined an end-of-summer cook out with the celebration of my healing and dubbed it the Parrish Family Cancer-Free Cook Out. Little did we know that this would become a tradition and we have not missed a year yet. In 2012, we kicked it up a notch and threw a big shin-dig as we celebrated the 5 year milestone. We grilled, rented an inflatable slide, bounce house, and obstacle course, and even had a dunking booth on hand. We asked for donations for a turn at dunking the lucky individual in the booth and raised close to \$200 in less than 2 hours.

In 2009, after some months of hard-work to verify my condition, I was officially cleared medically by the Army to resume all duties and activities related to service. This came just in time for me to be mobilized and spend 1 year at Ft Benning, GA. Along with a group from our reserve unit, I worked on Sand Hill, the designated training home for Basic Combat Training and Infantry Training Soldiers. We had a hand in turning more than 700 civilians into Soldiers and watched with pride as they moved on to their next assignment. I was not in the field with them daily but when I did have time with the Soldiers I made sure they knew where I stood with the Lord and tried to be an example and mentor to them. While being activated was more evidence to my healing, it was not the easiest of times as I had to leave my family behind in Virginia and be on my own for the first time in my life.

I've had many opportunities to share my story and speak of the grace God has shown me and my family and the one thing I never leave out is the best part of the story. You may recall that the doctors told me to consider fertility options and I shut the door on that almost immediately. I placed my complete trust in God to provide. The odds were 75% against me to have any more children, but on December 11, 2009, Julie and I welcomed a son into our family. Benjamin Joel Parrish, Jr. (J.J.) was born very early that Friday morning and has been a joy to us ever since. Julie and I have been blessed with two of the most adorable and loving children ever. I am most definitely a little biased but we really have been given children who enjoy church, singing, and praying to God. Truly a parent's dream.

The journey has continued and it will do so for a long time. Every test has come back clear. Every check-up is a reminder of God's grace. The bottom line to all of this...the reason I sit and write...and the reason I re-read this story from time to time is quite simply that my God, our God, is so amazing. He's proven time and again that is more than able and willing to provide for all of our needs. What more could we possibly ask for?

God bless you and thank you for allowing to me tell you about how I do NOT have cancer!