

John (Ford) Clayton Facebook Posts – June 2015 – May 2016 – Dealing with Cancer

June 17, 2015

I have cancer.

Those are three words I never thought I would say, but that is an adventure that I am getting to experience.

Here's a brief background. Over the winter and spring I have found myself getting increasingly tired, out of breath and somewhat dizzy. A couple of months ago I had a blood test which revealed I was anemic. Next I had a test that showed the anemia was due to an internal loss of blood. The blood loss led to a colonoscopy, which revealed that I had three polyps. Two of the polyps were removed during the colonoscopy and samples were taken from the third. There was initial concern about cancer because of the size and unusual shape of the polyps, but the biopsies were all benign, which seemed like great news. All that was left was removal of the final polyp, which I was told would require surgery. I was expecting this to be a minor procedure. Then, I met with the surgeon a little over a week ago and it was obvious things were more serious.

The surgery would remove 12 inches of my intestines. It would take 1-2 hours. I would be in the hospital 3-5 days. I would be out of work 4-6 weeks.

The surgery was performed this past Saturday. It was a bit more complicated than expected, and took 2 and a half hours. We got the news from the surgeon yesterday that it was cancer. He feels certain that he removed all of the tumor, but there was some cancer in a few lymph nodes, so I am facing approximately 6 months of chemo starting in late July. The doctor said because I am young, in good health and fit (I can hear the chuckles from my friends now) they are going to hit me with the hardest dosage possible. The good news is my surgery recover was more rapid than expected and I got to come home from the hospital last night (Tuesday). I slept a lot today and am still sore, but glad to be home.

People often ask what they can do for me, so here is my list:

- I truly covet your prayers, especially for my wife Kara, and sons Ben and Eli. I will get lots of attention and focus, but please remember them.
- Other things you can do are for yourself.
- Please get annual physicals. I had not had one in approximately 4 years.
- If you are over 50, please get a colonoscopy
- Be assertive with your family doctor if you don't believe you are getting the care you need and don't be afraid to change doctors.

The handful of friends and family, with whom I have already shared this news, have been amazing. I have had cards, flowers, visits to the hospital, texts, emails, calls, flowers, balloons, gift cards, and magazines. Each one has meant so much to me and my family!

I believe that God is not done with me and if He is not done, I am not done. I fully expect to be healed and have this experience be just one chapter in the rest of my story.

I am ready for this adventure with an unyielding reliance on almighty God, Jehovah Rapha, my healer.

John Clayton

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July 19, 2015

Since I shared the news about my adventure with cancer, I have been humbled and moved by the kindness that so many people have shown me. I have received numerous calls, texts, emails, cards, care packages and visits; each one has really lifted my spirits!

A few people have asked about my current status, so I thought I would provide an update of how things are going.

I feel really good now and I am 95% recovered from my surgery. In fact, my family and I just got back last night from a week aboard the Disney Fantasy where we cruised through the Western Caribbean with stops in Cozumel Mexico, Grand Cayman, Jamaica, and The Bahamas. It was a wonderful way to complete my surgery recovery and to prepare for all of the fun that goes with chemo.

Speaking of chemo, I will have my first treatment tomorrow. I will have my chemo port put in at 6am, with my first treatment around 10am. The chemo I will have will involve a ~6 hour stay at my oncologist. Each treatment (typically on a Monday) will involve three drugs, one of which requires two days to deliver the dosage, so I will be bringing a pump home after each treatment that will be removed two days after the treatment starts (typically on a Wednesday). I will have a total of 12 treatments, one every other week. If everything goes according to plan I will have my last treatment on December 21, which will be a great Christmas present!

I am very blessed that a highly qualified oncologist is in my hometown of Oak Ridge. I will be treated by Dr. John Foust of the Thompson Oncology Group. I have been in contact with several people who have completed chemo, some of which used Dr. Foust. Every person has given him their highest endorsement. When Kara and I met with Dr. Foust we were both informed and comforted. He spent a full hour with us, explaining my cancer, the treatment protocol, and patiently answering every question that we had. Dr. Foust explained that, since the cancer was in my lymph nodes, there was a 50% chance that it would come back without chemo. With chemo there's only a 20% chance that it will come back, so it is definitely worth the 6 month investment to go through the treatment protocol.

I plan to stay active during the chemo, working part time, going to football games this fall, going to the movies, and maybe even playing some golf.

I have been told - and more importantly I can sense - that I am in the prayers of family, friends, and even people whom I don't know. Those prayers are very much appreciated. I would selfishly ask that you would continue to pray for my wife Kara, and sons Ben and Eli.

In the week after my surgery I had a night or two where a bit of anxiety crept into my thought life, but in the days that followed God very specifically and thoroughly addressed every worry that I had. Heading into tomorrow I feel like I am in a very good place mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

I don't know exactly how things are going to go during and after chemo, but I know that God does and that He has my best interest in His plans. I completely trust Him.

Thank you,

John

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September 30, 2015

50% complete.

I unplugged from my chemo pump earlier today marking the completion of my 6th treatment and the halfway mark in the 12 treatment regimen.

I have tried not to inundate my Facebook page with lots of chemo and cancer talk, but I know many people are praying for me and my family, so I thought the halfway point would be a good time to provide an update.

Overall I am doing very well. I am sharing the list below to show the grace and faithfulness of God, the power of prayer, and as encouragement should you or someone you love have to go through chemo. There are many different types of chemo and every individual is different, but I have been blessed to be able to do the following over the last few months while undergoing treatment:

- Return to work approximately 60% of the time
- Make a four day trip to Disneyland in California
- Play full court basketball
- Play golf, while walking and carrying my clubs
- Push mow my yard
- Go kayaking
- Go to 2 University of Tennessee and 4 Oak Ridge football games
- Go to a concert (David Crowder was awesome!)

To tell the complete story, every day hasn't been perfect. The days that I have chemo I usually spend much of the time in bed, really, really tired. I have also been a bit nauseous and have been experiencing some neuropathy. One of the drugs I take is platinum-based, which makes my food taste like metal, especially sweet stuff, so that's been a bit of a bummer.

Mostly, I feel incredibly blessed. Many people have had a much more difficult time with chemo than I have had thus far, and I'm already halfway done!

If everything stays on schedule I will have my last treatment in late December. After that I will have a PET Scan to determine how effective the treatment has been. I am believing and expecting to be cancer free.

We really appreciate all of the support everyone has shown me and my family and we selfishly ask for your continued prayers for a few more months.

Thank you!

John Clayton

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November 21, 2015

Earlier this week I finished my 9th chemo treatment. I am now at 75% complete. I am still making it well. I have continued to work as much as I can, been to football games, played basketball on my off week, etc. Mostly I am just ready to be done with treatments.

If my counts stay up, my remaining treatment schedule is:

#10 - November 30 - December 2

#11 - December 14-16

#12 - December 28-30

DONE!

I am very excited for the upcoming Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. I will get to travel to see friends and family, many of whom I haven't seen since my surgery in June. I am also expecting the holiday season to make the time go by faster. Not sure if I mentioned it, but I am really ready to be done with treatments 😊

Over the last several months I have "rehearsed" in my mind many long, detailed prayers. However, when I have actually gone to God in prayer, all that comes out is "I trust You". Although it is a simple prayer, God has given me the strength to get through treatments, the hope to believe I will be cured and cancer free, and the confidence to help others who experience extreme trials, medical or otherwise; much the same way that so many people have helped me and my family.

Everyone has been so kind and generous to us. I can't begin to count how many people have told me they are praying for us. It has been a huge source of peace and encouragement. We are living in a time where there appears to be so much acrimony in the world. We are distressed by cowardly attacks like we saw in Paris, we have disagreements about what to do with the refugees, we get angry because our Starbucks cup doesn't have the right decorations, and we see college students trying their darndest to find something about which to be offended. All of these things divide us and bring out the worst in humanity. I am happy to say that through my adventures with cancer and chemo that I have found not only the best in humanity, but what I think is the real humanity. Most of us want to live a simple existence, love our families, enjoy time with our friends, and be willing to lend a helping hand to those in need. I have seen that a hundredfold in those that have reached out to help us, and it has made all of the difference in the world.

Thank you for your continued prayers for me and my family.

John Clayton

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December 30, 2015

After 7 loooong months, I am happy to say that I unplugged from my last chemo treatment earlier today. Whew, am I ever glad that's over! My heart is so full of gratitude for everyone that has supported us through this rough patch for our family.

I want to thank everyone that has prayed for us during this time, many of whom I will never know. I truly believe in the power of prayer and that it has sustained us during this difficult time.

Thank you for all of the ways you have reached out to us. We have received many cards, emails, texts, Facebook messages, phone calls and visits. I never knew how much this would mean to us!

Thank you to everyone that wore a "Team John" bracelet. I want to especially thank Missy who organized that effort.

Thank you to my good friend Art who had to carry the burden for me while I was out of work so many days. You never complained once for the added work and long hours that my illness has caused.

Thank you to my brother Bob who has maintained weekly calls with me and has continually lifted my spirits.

Thank you to my beautiful (both inside and out) wife Kara who had to listen to my gripes, whines, complaints, fears, and general grouchiness. You simply listened, calmly offered wise counsel, and prayed for me without ceasing. I love you more than you will ever know.

My next step is to have CT scans on January 13 to see how effective treatments have been. I will meet with my doctor on January 15 to discuss the results. I am believing that, by the grace of God, my scans will be clear and that I will be cancer free!

Again, much love and many thank you's for everyone that has supported us!

John Clayton

January 15, 2016

After a not-so-fun surgery and 6 months and 12 treatments of chemo, I got the great news today that my scans were all clear and have no signs of cancer!

I am so thankful to my nurses, doctors, prayer warriors, friends, family and mostly almighty God, my healer!

May 1, 2016

Over the weekend I realized that it had been a while since I provided an update on my health. We know that many people have prayed for me and my family and we appreciate it more than you will ever know.

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Last week I had my first three month post-chemo checkup and all of my lab work came back clear and everything was back within range! Yay! I'll go back every three months for the next couple of years and then start tapering off thereafter.

I have regained my strength and am feeling back to normal. I didn't realize how weak I had gotten until I went through the recovery process. The primary remaining issue is neuropathy, which is numbness and tingling in my hands and feet. This is a side effect of the chemo. My doctor says this could go away somewhere between one month and never. But, to be honest, the greatest fear I now have is that I will forget what God has brought me through and that I will live my life like cancer never happened. I want to be changed. I want to be eternally grateful. So, if the "never" option is what I have, the neuropathy can be a constant reminder that God chose to intervene in my life and heal me physically while continuing to refine and perfect me spiritually. I have SO FAR to go, but maybe I'm a step closer than I was a year ago.

Again, thank you for your support and especially your prayers.

John Clayton