

First testimony

The Lord has chosen me

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

- **John 15:16**

Prologue

The average Singaporean lives to 80.9 years of age. 49 years ago, my father passed away at 61 due to a gastric ulcer, considered a terminal affliction then. For the times, my father lived to a reasonable age. 9 years ago, my mother passed away at 83 in her sleep. 4 years ago, my husband's father passed away at 81. My husband's mother is still healthy and active at 92 years of age. If genetics have anything to say about the matter, my husband and I should be able to live to 80.

Just reaching 80 is not enough, if my health does not hold up. From the age of 40, I have paid close attention to my health. My diet was adjusted to minimize intake of oil, salt and sugar, while increasing fiber, fruit and vegetables. Every day, I walked for three kilometers and practiced yoga. At 58, my health was excellent. I had a BMI of 21, healthy blood pressure, low cholesterol levels, good glucose levels. My health check-ups had been clear of any problems since I was 35.

In April 2010, we returned from vacation overseas, and I immediately found myself overwhelmed with housework and business matters. In the midst of my busy schedule, I found that I had lost 4 kilograms. My friends and sisters were envious, and I was quite pleased with myself. I attributed the weight loss to my busy life, and did not think too much about it.

On April 19th and 20th, I suffered extreme headaches. A neurologist did not find any issues, but found that my blood pressure was 160. I was prescribed medication to calm my nerves, and my blood pressure dropped to 140 after 5 days. I increased the frequency of my yoga sessions, and my blood pressure dropped to between 115 to 130 by June.

Life eventually returned to a normal cadence, but I remained worried about the weight loss and elevated blood pressure. I scheduled my first health check-up in three years on June 9th.

The nightmare begins

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

- **Luke 12:40**

On June 10th, I noticed ten missed calls from the same number after my one hour yoga lesson. Dr. Chua, my family doctor, wanted to see me immediately. He had discovered an abnormality on my chest X-ray. Further scans revealed a 2x2x3 centimeter growth in my lung. It was unknown at the time whether it was malignant.

I was referred to Dr. Tham at Mt. Elizabeth Hospital. Dr. Tham had treated me for Legionnaires' disease 7 years earlier. On June 11th, I had a CT scan, biopsy and tumor marker checks performed. At this point, I was still calm and optimistic. I had no relevant family medical history, and I felt that this could not be serious.

Dr. Kwok performed the biopsy. He applied localized anesthetic, then inserted a needle into my lung to extract two samples of the growth for testing. The results would only be available in two days.

Black Monday

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

- **Proverbs 17:22**

On Monday June 14th at 3 pm in Dr. Tham's clinic, I learnt that the biopsy had revealed the growth to be cancerous. I tried to maintain a calm demeanor, but my mind was undergoing turmoil. How could I, of all people, have cancer? I had no family history of cancer, did not smoke or drink, exercised regularly and was careful with my diet. Dr. Tham scheduled me for a PET scan the next day, to determine the next course of action. If the cancer had not spread, the growth was small enough at 2.5 cm to be classified as Stage I, and surgery had a strong chance of curing me.

As I walked across the street to Paragon to retrieve my car, the full weight of the situation struck me. Despite this, I told myself that I had to remain calm and avoid despair. God had given me this trial for His own reasons, and I would leave all things in His hands.

We informed my sisters and our three children. Da Yu was in Singapore, while Dazhou and Da Xu were in the United States. The news was a shock to everyone. When I was asked how I remained calm and strong, I simply quoted the Bible verse above.

Stage I? Stage IV?

"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you"

- **1 Peter 5:7**

On Thursday June 17th, Dr. Tham explained to me that the PET scan had shown activity in my left hip bone in addition to my lung. If the cancer had spread to my hip bone, it would be classified as Stage IV, the most advanced stage.

I was referred to Dr. Lee, an orthopedic specialist. The subsequent MRI confirmed a growth, but it was unclear if this was cancerous or the result of a past injury.

I was then referred to Dr. Wong, a thoracic surgeon. Dr. Tham and Dr. Wong concluded that surgery was necessary to remove the growth in my lung. A further MRI was conducted for my brain in light of my frequent headaches. On June 18th Friday, the MRI came back clear of brain cancer. In a week of bad news, this was the first bit of good news.

On June 20th Sunday, Dazhou and Da Xu flew home from the United States to keep me company.

This is the day

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”
- **Matthew 6:27**

On June 21st Sunday at 11 am, I arrived at the hospital to prepare for surgery. At 1 pm, I was wheeled into the operating room. Surrounded by family and confident that the Lord was with me, I was calm and sure that the operation would go smoothly.

The operation went well, and I awoke at 6 pm. Despite the lingering effects of the anesthesia, I was dimly aware that my family was near. After a night in the High Dependency Unit, I was moved back to a regular ward. There was surprisingly no pain, likely due to the heavy painkillers. The many tubes connected to me were more bothersome. Recovery post-surgery seemed quite rapid. I could sit up partially by the first day, and completely by the third. The greatest discomfort was the helplessness that came with a lack of mobility. I was entirely dependent on the nurses for everything, from adjusting the thermostat to a drink of water in the middle of the night. I came to empathize with the plight of those patients who are bedridden for years. By the fourth day, I could move about a little on my own, and felt much greater freedom.

The same day, the doctors decided to take me off morphine, and the pain started that night. The pain was immense and unbearable. The oral painkillers were ineffective, and even stronger injections did not help. Without other recourse, I prayed that I would be granted an hour of respite in sleep. When I woke from the pain, I prayed again.

On the seventh day, the last tubes were removed from my lungs, literally allowing me to breathe a sigh of relief that I could go home.

Home Sweet Home

On June 28th Monday, I returned home from the hospital. I thanked God earnestly that this major operation had been less of an ordeal than I had feared.

Epilogue

“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom”

- **Psalms 90:12**

On June 27th Sunday, one day before I left the hospital, Dr. Wong informed us that he had found a second tumor in my lungs, and cancer cells in the surrounding lymph nodes. The diagnosis of Stage IV lung cancer was confirmed.

Dr. Tham and Dr. Wong both assured me that recent advances in medical science had improved the odds tremendously. In fact, some patients with Stage IV lung cancer had lived for 7 years to date. Statistically speaking lung cancer has a 12.6% survival rate. Less than 5% of Stage IV patients live longer than 5 years from initial diagnosis. The recent medical advancements that my doctors referred to extend the average life expectancy of a Stage IV lung cancer patient from 8 to 10 months, to two to three years.

Our time on Earth is in the hands of the Lord. Whether we live to 60, 70 or 80, is out of our hands. Worry cannot extend our lives by even a minute, so is it not better to live each day in joy and contentment?

“Rejoice in the Lord always ... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- **Philippians 4:4-7**

***Kwek Soon Soon
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