

Facing a cancer diagnosis

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Preacher: Chris Fry

[0:00] Well, it's really good to see all of you and I'm grateful for the privilege of sharing this morning on the subject of facing a cancer diagnosis.

! For those who don't know me, my name is Chris Fry. I'm 68 years old. I've been married 41 years to Katie. I've done a sterling job at the back with her dear sister, with children Hannah, who is 40, and Tim, who is 38.

I'm going to read what's here because I'll definitely finish it in a better time and I want to make sure I do cover the page, as it were.

I've had a career of 50 years in railway engineering, almost all of these being in bridge repair, refurbishment and replacement or new build. I thoroughly enjoyed the work, something new every day, especially working with a great bunch of people.

Working in the railway is working in a family of people who share a concern to do a good job, work the hours as necessary and be proud of the finished article. So, I was actually due to retire in my head next year, next year, next month, August.

[1:16] But something else intervened. I've enjoyed good health except breaking my arm, falling off a shelf when I was very small. What was I doing on a shelf? Then having a mild heart attack a few years ago.

So, very little to do with health or hospitals in between. My only tablet has been paracetamol, which has worked constantly throughout my life. But I now have a cocktail of tablets to take.

A few months of a persistent cough in the autumn and winter of last year, nothing showing on a chest x-ray, led to me being referred to a respiratory consultant. Having a CT scan and the bald but clear statement from that consultant on the 17th of January of this year, that the scan showed that I had cancer in the bowel, the liver and the lungs.

After telling my family we saw an oncology consultant, that's a cancer specialist, on the 24th of January who explained that the cancer was essentially incurable, that without intervention I might have a remaining lifespan of between 6 and 12 months.

Surgery was not an option, but chemotherapy might hold or prolong life by a year or so. I have what is known as stage 4 cancer. Together with my family I elected to start chemotherapy immediately.

[2:41] Six months on I've now had nearly two rounds of six sessions of chemotherapy. There are some modest negative side effects, but essentially I actually feel quite well and energised mentally, emotionally as well as physically.

But I still have stage 4 cancer. I had a prognosis of a near death. I want to talk about this today because everyone has some contact with this subject.

I'm very confident, I look around this room, every single one of you will have had some contact with this subject of cancer. Someone in your family, a work colleague, a neighbour, or someone in the news, or even yourself.

Can we make sense of this difficult subject? Men are not articulate about health and personal stuff. We're unlikely to see a GP unless we're desperate or told to be a wife.

The cancer conversations are often between women, but we're having this conversation as men today because we need to have this conversation too. Cancer used to be covered over.

[3:56] Even the word wasn't spoken. Generation back, when my wife's father died of cancer while she was in her teens, she didn't know, and her mother didn't know, what the problem was.

They weren't told. It's still a chilling word. It's typically painful and discouraging to live with untreated cancer. It's typically painful and discouraging to live with treated cancer.

It typically leads directly to death. So, we find it hard to speak about, and there will be painful memories in this room which make this a doubly difficult subject.

Six months in, these are my personal reflections on how people tackle this issue and then how I'm facing this. My wife and children also have their own personal journeys to make.

shared but different. The first part of what I have to say is likely to be hard to listen to, but I think it's realistic.

[5:09] The second part has a message of real hope which I believe is for everyone to enjoy and which overwhelms the first part. Let's start with the subject of death and facing death.

Cancer typically, and at some point, leads to death. People die of many things, but the equation with cancer is very stark. Cancer typically leads to death. And death is where we are all heading. This is where we all struggle. The writer George Burnish Shaw put it this way, death is the ultimate statistic. One out of one dies.

And we find it impossibly difficult to be quiet and calm in the face of this inevitability. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau said, he who pretends to face death without fear is a liar. He who pretends to face death without fear is a liar. Edward Gibbon, the historian who wrote the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, when he was dying said, all is now lost, finally and irrevocably lost.

[6:25] All is dark and doubtful. Thinking people have always struggled with this. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who lived a very long time ago, said, death is a dreadful thing, for it is the end.

Having cancer and having cancer treatment can be a very vivid daily reminder of our mortality. Many people, not all, but many, deal with it by some form of death denial or avoidance, by seeking to get out of life as much as they can now.

So here's a phrase, eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. It's a very old phrase, actually, but it's still used. Others are more productive, fulfilling bucket lists of what they want to do whilst they can.

And let me just say, I'm not into bucket lists, so you don't need to give me a bungee jump opportunity off the I-360, because it really isn't top of my agenda.

Quiet night in, man. Some try to leave lasting memories for their families. You read this, don't you? Words and gifts to be opened on future birthdays, to keep connections as if the loved one was still there.

[7:54] The hospice movement seeks to bring calm instead of frenetic activity before the inevitable occurs. These methods may superficially look different, but each of them comes against the massive wall of death, and there everything is stopped.

So funerals and Thanksgiving services understandably look at the life that's been lived with only a glancing reference to the giant and overwhelming reality of death.

death. I understand that. Death is not a friend. It's frightening in its apparent bleakness, darkness, and loneliness.

You die alone. It's a journey you have to make by yourself. Why would we want to look at it if it could always be pushed to the margins and appear to be nothing by not being thought about? But it is worthy of thought. Some people with terminal cancer do try to think about dying. They write blogs to try to make sense of what they're facing.

[9:14] Here's the questions. Is this the end for me? Does everything stop now? Is the life that I've lived eventually of any significance?

These are hard thoughts to think. Hard for me. Hard for you. Most people can't believe that death is truly the end.

And for the very good reason that as the Bible puts it, God has put eternity into the hearts of men. We have a deep sense that there is something more, something which is enduring, the infinite, the ongoing, that death is not the end.

There's more. We know this instinctively, but don't know how to find out what the more might look like. So let's go into death and beyond death, facing life after death.

Many people, yourselves included, have some vague hope of some kind of positive experience and existence after death, but hesitate to give it any content or description.

[10:31] So in reality, whatever that hope might be, it appears hardly worth looking forward to compared with the vivid realities of good things that we can enjoy here on earth.

Some might even dare to face up to the thought that what happens after death might not be positive, but rather a time of pain for life's misdeeds.

How can we know? We live in an age where instinctively we look to science to tell us the answers, but science seems to leave us with a blank on this one.

Cremation or burial offers nothing but silence. No evidence of anything happening afterwards. Total shutdown.

But I'd like to challenge that view with the story of one man who died, was buried and then experienced and showed a life after death. It is this story that's become very important to me over the last six months.

[11:45] This story is so helpful for the modern age because it's not based on theory or philosophy or traditions or folklore or wishful thinking but are historical and verifiable facts.

So I'll give you five. Fact one. His life, death and life beyond death was predicted in words written hundreds of years before he actually lived.

You can read them now and see how everything was fulfilled just as had been predicted. You can put this through the scientific sieve and ask yourself the question how can this be?

Is there something in this? Fact two. Jesus of Nazareth the carpenter's son lived 2,000 years ago mostly in some obscurity and then with three years in a blaze of public teaching and miracle working even resulting in two people being brought out of death into life.

As already predicted in centuries old writing thousands of people saw this and heard this. It was written down and you can connect that with the old predictions.

[13:10] Put this through the scientific sieve. What does this mean? Fact three.

he predicted how he would die and that he would rise from the dead. He said it and it was written down. Though no one could believe that it could actually be like he said. It had never happened before.

Fact four. We know more about Jesus' death than almost anybody else in history. That's an interesting fact, isn't it? It's more recorded about how he died and the reality of his dying than any of the great figures that you could think of.

Alexander the Great. No one really knows what happened with him. Julius Caesar sort of made into a play. But these famous names we don't know much about their dying but Jesus there's a lot written about how he died in great detail.

It's as if we were meant to really face up to our own death in the mirror of his and learn whatever lessons we can about death from this one man's death.

[14:23] We can read about it. Put this through the scientific sieve. What does this mean? Fact five.

He died and was buried but three days later he came alive. Wonderfully alive. And appeared to many individually in groups and crowds. multiple occasions.

Those who wrote about this gave the names of many who saw talked ate and touched this after death living man. And they say to us put this through the scientific sieve.

Ask us eyewitnesses what we saw. So what has this meant for me? My cancer diagnosis and the sense of near death has forced me to consider and get close to these facts very carefully.

I've known these things since I was young but now I want to be 100% clear on this because there's no other story that I know that tackles the realities of death and what lies beyond with so much touchable verifiable reality.

[15:37] more than that my cancer diagnosis and the sense of near death has forced me to consider very carefully how I can face death and what lies beyond with confidence and hope.

And I know that this story of Jesus is not just to dazzle and intrigue us but to call me to put my confidence and hope in him by being a learner and follower of Jesus so that when my lonely

moment comes it will not actually be lonely because he will be there and he will take me with him through death and into an abundant life that will never end.

And all of this is for you as well as for me. And my life purpose now is very clear. I'm still doing some work online.

I'm still enjoying the everyday of life. I'm not into bucket lists or filling every moment with something that will in the end fade away. But this is what I want to do. I want to live very close to Jesus and take every opportunity to speak with people like you about how we can all have confidence and hope facing death because of a life beyond that we can enjoy because of Jesus Christ.

this may well be a different personal story than the one you're expecting after a Saturday morning breakfast.

[17:22] But it may be the one that causes you to want to know a bit more. I hope it is. I have a hard copy of what I've just said. You're very welcome to take that away and read it yourself again and share it with others.

this talk has been recorded and within a day or so you can listen via the church's website. I want to recommend this particular book here making the most of the rest of your life.

I've got many copies of that and please take that. No charge. Have a chat with me now or at a later time.

this is the subject matter we cover every week here in Calvary Church and we'll be meeting again tomorrow at 11 o'clock at 6.30 to go through the things which are recorded which are spoken which are written down which have been there for 2,000 years and more for us to look at and to take benefit from.

We can ask a question now although I think you might find that hard but if you want to do that you're very welcome and I'll do my best to answer. So thank you for listening.