

Testimony - a year on from cancer diagnosis

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[0 : 00] I have to bring it down a bit. I just want to say the deepest of thank yous to so many that have been praying for us.

! Jesus is here for however long the Lord keeps him on earth.

I know he's looking forward to heaven as well, but I'm so grateful and been so grateful for your prayers. And it's just so good to see you all here today.

Thank you. I'm going to start standing.

If I feel a bit weak, I'll just go and sit over there because the last week's been quite a testing time.

For those who don't know me, my name is Chris Fry.

[1 : 06] I've been married to Katie. For 43 years, we have two children, Hannah and Tim, who both have two children themselves. I've had a 50-year career in railway engineering.

I'm a member and elder of Calvary Church here. It's exactly one year since I stood here and told the church that I had stage 4 cancer.

That is cancer which is, humanly speaking, incurable. My cancer is in the bowel and the liver and the lung. I think anniversaries are significant.

There are annual reminders even more significant. The Bible has lots of annual reminders of important matters. So are there things worth sharing in this case?

What are the things I was thinking about 12 months ago? I kept a journal at the very beginning but only did so for 10 days. So it's not a very good representation of the whole year.

[2 : 08] I think I'll try and recover the habit. However, there are certain issues that I can't forget because they have God's stamp upon them. The first is this.

In God's hands. Katie and I are in God's hands. Psalm 31 verse 15 says, My times are in your hands.

To be a Christian is to be personally in the hands of God. What a remarkable privilege that is. Every moment of every day, whether it feels like a good or a rubbish time, God who does all things perfectly and for our good has said that this is the case.

And I have known the truth of that at the time and looking back now and in so many details in God's hands. Secondly, the power and fellowship of prayer.

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthian Christians, he speaks about hardships that he was facing. And this is what he says, What was the answer in this discouraging situation?

[3 : 28] He says, But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us.

On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers.

Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

What was happening is that many people were praying for Paul, and God was hearing their prayers. It was God who helped Paul, and as he tells people about this, the praying people are encouraged, they thank God, and God is glorified.

And this is, I feel, just as it should be, and what has been happening over the last year within the loving family of the church here at Calvary.

I thank you for your prayers, and I thank you that as God answers prayer, we give testimony to that, and as we give testimony to that, you can give thanks to God. And as you give thanks to God, then God is glorified.

[4 : 40] And so the circle carries on. Thirdly, pleasing God rather than getting better is what really counts.

I have incurable cancer, and the best that chemotherapy can do is to try to delay, hold the process of dying.

Some Christians, I know, are praying for bodily healing for me. I fully believe that God can do this if that is what he wants. But I also believe that when I die, sooner or later, God will totally heal me of everything that needs healing.

what matters now is to live to please him according to as many days as he has given me to live. I believe that God has given me particular opportunities in the last year that I've never had before. And as long as God wants me to enjoy and faithfully use these opportunities, I'll be given strength. [5 : 47] In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 33, verse 25, a promise is made, and your strength will equal your days.

Isn't that a beautiful thought? As long as God wants us to have breath in our bodies, he will give us strength to do it. It's been frequently said that the Christian is immortal until God calls him home. Towards the latter end of this year, I've been very struck by the importance of my being faithful to what God has given me to do. and not just to take it for granted.

I want to be, I really want to be faithful in what God has called me to do. Fourthly, weakness is difficult, but it's often necessary. We'd all instinctively love to be strong. So when Paul in the Bible had what seems to have been a difficult and embarrassing, weakness. He asked God three times to take it away.

[7 : 04] But God said, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. And there was a reason behind this.

If Paul had not had such weakness, he might rest in his own strength and become conceited because of some of the experiences he'd enjoyed.

And I know the temptation of that. Paul had to learn to recognise that God doesn't want the capable who might ascribe any success to themselves, even quietly, but the needy, the dependent, so that it's clear that anything good that happens can only be ascribed to God.

And this is humbling. I've known a lot of weakness in the last year, which I've never known before. I remember this morning, I dropped something on the floor and I looked at it and I just said, I don't think I can pick that up.

So it stayed on the floor. Fifthly, open doors.

[8 : 23] Pray for us too that God may open a door for our message. Says Paul, pray that we may proclaim it clearly as I should. Speaking about Jesus Christ in a clear and unashamed way is not easy in a secular or multi-faith society.

We live in a secular world in the West and Paul lived in a multi-faith world. To have clear opportunities to speak for Jesus is not easy.

But in answer to prayer, they come. And I've been privileged to have these open doors over the last 12 months. The key to these doors is cancer.

If you have terminal cancer, you have the privilege of being able to talk with almost anyone and they will listen. I may have had certain keys before January 2019, but nothing like what I've been kindly given subsequently.

So thank you for your prayers. Six, boldness. Pray also for me, says Paul, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

[9 : 46] Ephesians 6, 19. This is just the sort of prayer that the Christians of the early church were constantly praying. Not just to have opportunity to speak, but to speak boldly without inhibition.

I haven't known that in my life before. God has given me help in this matter. And I think it's interesting that the early church who were very equipped in so many good ways were constantly asking God to give them boldness as they spoke.

Seven, deep seriousness. I look back on these 12 months and I'm thankful and humbled to see God's hand upon my life. But I am also disappointed that I haven't loved and followed the Lord Jesus as I should.

Time has been wasted. I wanted deeper seriousness in my life. To realize what the real priorities are.

I was reading this book three days ago about revival in Scotland and I came across this rather interesting story which I'd like to just let you know about.

[11 : 18] It's 1773 and a minister called William McKenzie has been ministering without much success in the very north of Scotland near Thurso.

One Sabbath day in 1773 a horse was bought and sold at the church door. I don't expect that to happen this morning. Next Lord's Day therefore when the usual rush took place to get out after the

sermon McKenzie addressed his congregation in a voice of somber authority and told all who had Gaelic in other words Scottish language to resume their seats as he had something to say to them. All obeyed at once they were for the moment awed and amid breathless silence he addressed them as follows. I came to this parish four years ago on your unanimous call and I had then the impression that I had God's call as well but I fear being mistaken.

I'm doing no good among you. The gospel is making no impression on you. What is worse you are hardening under it.

Instead of receiving it you flee from it and leave God's house on his own day to buy and sell in the churchyard. I trust the Lord will remove me to some other place where I shall not be utterly useless as I am here.

[12:58] Woe is me that I sojourn in Massach that I dwell in the kents of Cedar. Mackenzie then burst into tears sat down at the pulpit and for the next five minutes wept and sobbed his feelings too strong for utterance.

When he at last rose again to preach a new power was apparent so deep was the impression made and so great the power of God in their midst that it was said that no fewer than thirty souls dated their conversion from that exhortation.

That was the day when they began to take the things of God seriously rather than just muddling them up with other matters of life.

And my dear friends especially the friends of Calvary Church I want to exhort you to take the things of Jesus Christ extremely seriously.

May they have a top place in your life. I fear for some of you because I see some of you who come and come regularly and hear the word of God but I don't know that I see a life change in you.

[14:22] I don't know that I'm seeing Jesus Christ be born in you. how we need to examine our own hearts and put ourselves in that place where we allow God to speak seriously to us.

We're not here to impress each other. We're here to be very very close to the Lord Jesus Christ. Well time is short.

There was another anniversary I wasn't focusing on. Sunday the 26th was one anniversary when I spoke to you the church here. But on Friday the 17th January that was the day when I heard for the first time I had cancer.

Friday the 17th this year was a bit of a strange day. I don't remember the first part of the day at all actually.

Katie was trying to wake me up get me to the toilet called an ambulance because I had a fever and the one thing about having cancer is you've got to be very very careful about temperature.

[15:50] So I was running a temperature as it turned out of 39 degrees. The dear impatient ambulance people stood like shadowy figures at the end of the bed and they asked me some very sensible questions.

I couldn't articulate a single answer. I was just in a complete model. Eventually they got me down by one of their clever sliver down the stairs chairs.

Got me in one of the nice bumpy ambulances. That's the one thing that does keep you awake. And straight into A&E.; And lots and lots of tests and many things happening most of which I can't remember.

one thing Katie did see was at some point in the process I kind of fainted I kind of fell back in the bed eyes open don't know what that meant but they called the crash team on that Friday. they didn't do anything because I recovered out of that situation but when I heard about this afterwards I thought whoa isn't time short?

[17:07] I suppose in my naivety my thinking about cancer had a kind of gradualness about it. I just get more and more ill and unwell but the thought of sudden death I was very sobering isn't it?

And I wasn't aware of it. I wasn't aware of what was going on. So I've been in hospital the last eight days and I so much wanted to be able to do two things.

I wanted to be able to speak to you this morning and I wanted to be able to speak to my son's friends we'd arranged to have a time together where I could talk to them which was last night and as it looked it was a little bit unclear that that could be possible at all because the infection because that's what was causing the temperature was causing my arm to actually balloon up and a very sort of vivid discoloration taking place pumping me with antibiotics trying to find the right antibiotics I've had a great experience of the NHS I've never been in a hospital that long in the whole of my life but

what tremendous staff what a tremendous thing it is how much love and care being displayed time is short but I look back on those days and

I'm so thankful that many of the things I've just been speaking about this morning were actually coming to pass in that short period of time so I was on a ward with five other beds all people with cancer all people struggling with some sort of setback some of them with more major setbacks than I was facing at all and well I can say God's hand was in the situation I really appreciated the love and support of the church here and the way that's been conveyed and the sensitivity of that I know the power and the fellowship of prayer and I know that pleasing God rather than getting better is what really counts and I felt desperately weak but I'm here today and there were open doors so I had a really nice conversation with a retired policeman who was in the diagonally opposite bed and we are in a ward of six any conversation is not private and it's such a nice conversation with him gave him a copy of the of the talk I was going to give to my son's friends last night we had a good conversation and I think I was given boldness and as I say the staff were lovely there were two occasions that really surprised me one was when a

Filipino said to me why are you so nice no one's ever said that to me why are you so nice so the answer I gave was I belong to Jesus that your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father who is in heaven that's right isn't it I was puzzled with that one how it works how it works but I saw that on several occasions during the during the last week and as the week went on it's so amusing seeing the the head oncologist in this case with a bevy of junior doctors running behind trying to keep up anyhow the numbers grew smaller the hope was more positive and I think it was probably

[21 : 45] Friday when she said you can go home you can go home on Saturday so last night we had a really special time at the sportsman with the 25 of us 90% of those with no church background at all and I was able to talk to them about having a cancer diagnosis and why there can be hope in Jesus I just think it's a remarkable thing that was possible to do that no one had ever been to a talk like that I asked them have you ever been to such a talk about cancer no men don't but they were there and I had such positive feedback such positive feedback I said to one or two of them look if this is in your workplace situation if this would be helpful

I'd be really happy to do this what might God do in these situations I'm proud of this gospel it's the power of God to salvation there is no other Jesus is wonderful Lord Jesus who came to earth became a man lived a perfect life dies on the cross for us he's risen from the dead and reigning at God's right hand now there's nothing like that and we're privileged to be living and having received that truth in our lives what a blessing and on that theme of the time is short because it certainly felt short suddenly last week I was reminded of this passage in 1

Corinthians 7 where Paul is talking about relationships and having these things in the right place and he says this what I mean brothers is that the time is short from now on those who have wives should live as if they had none those who mourn as if they did not those who are happy as if they were not those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them for this world in its present form is passing away that's true for all of us because we're all going to die one day and the question is are we going to die with the confident expectation that when we meet the Lord Jesus after we die he will say welcome or will he say I never knew you if you're on the wrong side of that question today I just want to encourage you to get on the right side put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who is your only saviour thank you