

Jerry Thomsen

Hearing a doctor tell you that you have Stage 4 throat cancer is definitely not the words that you ever expect or want to hear, but it's not the end of the story it's only the beginning of the story.

Cancer can be scary and very difficult, but it does come with some unexpected blessings. I was initially diagnosed in July of 2021 and immediately began Chemotherapy and Radiation treatments. My medical team and my treatment team at The Cancer Center in Mitchell were unbelievable and amazingly helpful and supportive. I can't say enough positive comments about the treatment experience I had in both Mitchell and Sioux Falls!

After nine weeks of Chemotherapy and forty-five Radiation treatments a Pet Scan showed that the two tumors near my voice box were gone, but the two remaining tumors in the lymph nodes of my neck still showed signs of active cancer. The decision was then made to surgically remove the two remaining cancerous lymph nodes. The doctors also decided to remove approximately twenty other surrounding lymph nodes in my neck to lower the chance of the cancer spreading to other parts of my body. The surgery was successful and the following PET Scan in May of 2022 showed no signs of active cancer. That was a "Good Day" and I was super excited to be "Cancer Free." Unfortunately, I later learned that the Doctors don't consider you cancer free until they see two years of clean scans after your treatments end.

During a routine follow up Pet Scan in February of 2023 I found out my cancer had returned and actually spread to other parts of my body. The Pet Scan showed active cancer in another lymph node in my neck and another tumor in the upper portion of my right Femur. I am currently in treatment for round two of my cancer battle. This current treatment includes 18 Weeks of a very aggressive full body Chemotherapy and Immunization therapy. I have also been fortunate enough to be enrolled into a clinical trial for a new cancer drug that has shown potential for treating my type of cancer. Treatments are going very well and I am experiencing only minimal side effects. My cancer is no longer curable, but it is treatable. We are praying and hoping that with God's grace my body will react well to the treatments and that my time here on this earth will be extended for quite some time.

While my story may or may not end with the desired happy storybook ending, I am still feeling very blessed and thankful. I have been absolutely overwhelmed and humbled by the outpouring of love, support and prayers from so many people. You will never know the impact that has had on me and my family. The doctors and nurses have been amazing and have been so supportive and encouraging to me and my family.

Throughout this whole experience I have had a real sense of peace. It is a sense of piece that only God can provide. Philippians 4:7 says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds." Because of my faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ I realize that there is no downside for me. While I am very thankful for the quality of healthcare that I have received, my Faith is what has really helped me navigate this journey. I've told many people that "I'm going to fight like everything depends on me and pray like everything depends on God!" None of us are truly in control of our lives and we must learn to trust and have faith in God's plan for our lives.

My cancer journey has helped me to step back and realize how blessed my life has been over the years. It has also helped me realize what's really important to me. Things I may have previously taken for granted are now much more cherished and appreciated. Life is not about

material possessions or worldly success, it's about the relationships you develop with the people in your life. I have been blessed beyond words to be married to such my amazing supportive wife in Pam. I also have a family that has been there for me through the good times and tough times.

A cancer journey like this one doesn't just affect the patient it also dramatically affects everyone around them. The impact on spouses and family members are often overlooked. They go through a tremendous amount of stress and they are effected in many different and difficult ways. My family has been amazing and I love them dearly!

As part of this journey I have learned to choose faith over fear. To be thankful for the many blessings in my life rather than being angry with my current health situation. To be more deliberate in appreciating and cherishing the ones that I love. Our legacy will be remembered and lived out in the ones you love.

In closing, I would just urge each of you to step back, reevaluate your lives and determine what is really important to you. No one really knows how many days they have on this earth so live each day so though it may be your last. If you need to make that all important Faith decision or tell someone you love something that has been on your mind, do it now and don't wait!