

John Tefertiller Health Update - 6 August 2010

Dear Friends and Family,

It has taken longer than planned to bring forth an update on my condition, as the first few weeks after surgery have not been entirely pleasant. This is not to say that good things are not happening-- there are definite signs of improvement in several areas.

What Has Happened

The surgery at Stanford Hospital went well enough, although the doctors did have to resort to "Plan B." This has left me with yet another "ostomy," this time an ileostomy (*illy-ostomy*), which should be reversible around the beginning of October-- perhaps as a 60th birthday present!. The major difference between this and my former colostomy is that this is the small intestine brought out through the abdominal wall rather than the large intestine. Waste collection is in the same kind of external pouch as before, but it is less processed and much more fluid-- not to mention much more corrosive. This also means that the ileostomy is "productive" a good deal of the time, often making pouch maintenance a frustrating process. But enough of the raw details.

After waking up in recovery, I was moved to a private room and I discovered right away that my energy levels, even for a surgery patient, were very low. In the evening I had a pleasant visit from Pastor Sherman and Marti Williams, but not long after they departed my heartbeat became erratic and my blood pressure dropped precipitously. Suddenly I found myself in an episode of "House" or "Scrubs," with a room full of residents, interns and nurses all talking to each other about my condition and only occasionally addressing me. In spite of natural concerns, I was slightly amused to watch all the goings on. The upshot, however, was that I was transferred to the cardiac unit for observation, where I remained for the duration of my hospitalization. My heartbeat returned to normal quickly when certain drugs were administered, and I was assured that this sometimes occurs after surgery and that it was *not* a heart attack.

As I reported in my last, very brief communication, the first couple of weeks at home were quite difficult-- with reduced energy levels and suppressed appetite complicated by the numbness of my hands and feet. Everything was doubly and triply difficult to do. Things took a positive turn as I began to get some "human food," such as items from Taco Bell, or chicken curry katsu from the Hawaiian Barbecue that friends brought me. Energy levels have begun to improve enough that I have been able to be taken out for dinner a couple of times a week. This week I have finally been able to make short drives to the barber shop and such. I still have numbness in the hands and feet, but there seems to be some change, if not exactly improvement in that condition. I am still forced to type with two fingers instead of my usual touch typing-- Bah!

Third Time's The Charm

Barring unforeseen complications, the time from the July surgery to the "take down" of the ileostomy should be about 12 weeks, leaving about seven weeks to go. The take down is supposed to be a much less intensive procedure that should not require any new major slicing or dicing of the abdomen. From diagnosis to final procedure and follow up will have taken over a year and a half-- twice the originally anticipated treatment time. What a ride!

How You Can Pray

1. It goes without saying that I would ask you to pray for ultimate success and healing-- without further complications.
2. Pray for continuing improvement of energy levels and physical strengthening. There has been some atrophy of leg muscles.
3. Pray for the numbness in my hands and feet to recede. Even if I did not have the ileostomy, the lack of feeling and dexterity would interfere with many of life's functions.
4. Pray for the Light of Life to shine through me and through my circumstances.

Final Thoughts

I will be the first to admit that, apart from the obvious difficulties posed by surgeries, treatments and complications over the last year and a half, I am weary on the journey. I have been largely absent from church fellowship, absent from or working shortened hours in the workplace, and by sheer physical necessity, unable to take advantage of such "time off" as most of us otherwise dream about. And I am acutely aware that I still have it better than many people who struggle with disease, war and poverty-- so add guilty feelings to the list of debilitating life-thieves. Having said that, my deepest concern today is the same as it has been throughout: Is the God of heaven receiving any glory and honor at all in me or in my life?

I have had a lot of time both to pray and to think about prayer over these months. I have become confirmed in some beliefs that I have held for a while, one of which is that much of what we think of as prayer is merely murmuring and complaining about our perceptions of circumstances, as the Israelites did in the desert. I'm not talking about those times when we are genuinely distressed and we cry out to our Heavenly Father. What I am referring to is the tendency to constantly babble at our Creator because of a childish desire to be comfortable and to have our share of the "stuff" we see around us.

When I call on the name of the Lord, I want my prayer to be heard as that of a child reverently addressing his Father. When I use the name of God, I want it to mean something. I think that some of our "prayers" are little better than profanity, taking the Lord's name in vain. Respect as children for our Father is crucial in maintaining our relationship with Him on a right basis. We forget to whom our prayer is addressed; we are too caught up in ourselves.

Ultimately this is what will matter: Knowing God. I have found myself at times confessing to God that I know too little of Him, and that I know too little about trusting Him for outcomes. Do I merely believe in abstract truths about God and salvation through Jesus Christ, or do I know and trust in a real person? Underlying all that I think I know about God is a real person who made me, who loved me enough to give his Only Begotten at the cross, and who genuinely cares about my needs. He knows me better than I know myself.

This God who knows me also knows the end from the beginning. I can trust Him for the outcome of my circumstances because it is already in his view. I am his child; He is my Father. I really can trust Him.

Keep me in your prayers as my circumstances are brought to mind. It is no small thing to me that so many people have prayed faithfully for so long.

With warmest regards,

John T.