



He leads me
beside quiet waters;
He restores my soul.
Psalm 23:2

The Seven Steps of Persistent Perseverance

Gaining the Courage & Strength You Need to Fight Cancer

By Paul J. Lawonn

A note from Paul:

In November 2005, I was diagnosed with cancer and received a rather grim prognosis. Since then, my wife and I have learned much about the power of persistent perseverance as we fought this disease together. In my fight with cancer, I learned how to withstand and overcome all the bad news, all the treatments, all the medications, and side effects; a process I call "**The Seven Steps of Persistent Perseverance.**" I share this process with you because it has been instrumental in my successful fight against cancer. Fighting cancer is a big battle and I got through that challenge by employing these steps every day. I hope you are encouraged by them and I pray you find the courage and strength you need to push through each day and eventually win your battle with cancer.

"The Seven Steps of Persistent Perseverance"

A Process for Gaining the Courage and Strength You Need to Fight Cancer

By Paul J. Lawonn

Step #1: Stay Positive

A cancer diagnosis devastates patients, family, and friends. It is a very natural reaction for people's thoughts to turn negative and to have a dim outlook. A big part of your fight with cancer will be the battles in your mind; win those battles and you improve your chances for success! Your initial struggle will be staying positive in the midst of this raging storm. Just how does someone stay positive when they've been diagnosed with cancer? Face the facts and reduce the negatives and all the suppositions.

When I was diagnosed with cancer I did what most people do – I got on the Internet to find anything I could about my type of cancer. What I found was that for all the good intentions people have in sharing information, not everything on the Internet is accurate; I ended up overdosing on too much negative information and felt helpless and hopeless. I stopped searching the Internet and relied on reputable sources for solid information.

It is also important to start filtering out all the other negative stuff that bombards your life. It's okay to tell family and friends you need to minimize handling negative issues so you can focus positive energy towards your battle with cancer. In the Bible, Proverbs 17:22 says, "*A cheerful heart is good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*" Proverbs 18:14 says, "*A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?*" Ponder the wisdom of those passages and do what you can to minimize the negative issues in your life each day.

Yes, being diagnosed with cancer is a terrible thing and a hard blow. However, when you consider the advancements in treatments and cures, there is much to be encouraged about. Start thinking like a survivor instead of a victim and your outlook will follow. Your frame of mind on a daily basis is very important to your overall physical, mental, and spiritual health; don't go negative – stay positive!

Step #2: Remain Hopeful

Right from the start, much of what you hear about cancer will be strange to you. You'll be inundated with information about your disease and treatment options; more than likely you'll feel more than a bit overwhelmed. As you absorb and process all that information, there is a natural tendency to think there is no hope – don't let that happen! The Bible tells us that with God, nothing is impossible.

In my own situation there was little hope for my type of cancer but that did not deter me from hoping that somehow, someday, something would change. Three years after my diagnosis, a new drug designed for my type of cancer was approved for use.

Treatment regimens continue to improve too. Seven years after diagnosis I underwent a stem cell transplant. That has proven to be a successful treatment when other chemotherapy treatments have failed to control my cancer. Cancer treatments

change and improve all the time so it is important to stay positive and remain hopeful!

Step #3: Cling to Faith

The foundation for staying positive and remaining hopeful is faith: an abiding faith in God and faith in your care providers.

When I was first diagnosed with cancer, my wife and I relied on our faith in God and put our trust in His word. Romans 8:28 says, "*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.*" We did not know the ultimate outcome but we had a deep inner peace that all would be well.

Throughout this journey, faith in God continues to comfort us and sustain us. We have learned how to tap into the strength God provides so we are able to endure every struggle.

Psalm 23 tells us that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we don't have to be afraid; God is with us and He is our comfort. Faith in God brought us through that valley and we were strengthened and comforted along the way!

Have faith in your medical team too and the other people who care for you. From the moment I met my oncologist I knew I could put my trust in him and his team. Everyone from the receptionists to the lab technicians to the registered nurses supporting the doctors to the infusion nurses – they are all the best and I always had complete trust in them.

Step #4: Find a Reason to Fight

A cancer diagnosis does not mean your life is automatically over. It means you're in for a new and different type of fight that requires you to be focused and mentally strong. Mental toughness comes with a strong reason to fight and survive.

Many cancer treatment regimens can be a battle in and of themselves. As you go through them, you may wonder if you have the strength for it all. You'll persevere through each treatment when you have a strong enough reason to fight and survive.

Since my diagnosis, I've gone through numerous types and cycles of chemotherapy regimens, two brain surgeries, brain radiation, and a stem cell transplant. Each type of treatment had its own unique challenges and recovery was far from easy. As I kept my reason to fight in sight, I was able to gather up the strength I needed, get through each treatment, get past all the side effects, and recover quickly while maintaining a positive attitude.

You can count on days when you will want to throw up your hands and quit. Those are the days when your reason to fight is essential! When you are at your lowest, keep your reason to fight in sight, stay positive, remain hopeful, draw inner strength from God, and push through. Your goal is to survive so draw on your mental toughness and fight on.

Step #5: Celebrate Every Success

As I've already mentioned, there are many ways cancer patients and their families will get negative if not careful. One key I found in staying positive and remaining hopeful is celebrating each battle won and every bit of good news.

Did a recent CT scan come back better than the last one? Celebrate because things are better! Maybe the side effects from chemotherapy were easier than before – celebrate because that's always great! For me, I'd celebrate if, after treatment, I was able to participate in a family function or I was able to function somewhat normally the next day.

From a 'big picture' standpoint, it is critical to see that life itself continues beyond cancer and treatments. Recognize there are good things happening in life all the time even though there is this great big unpleasantness surrounding you.

Psalm 118:24 reminds us "*This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*" It may not always be an easy thing to do but make a point to find some joy each day and celebrate life!

Fighting cancer is a series of little battles you win each day. Don't focus on failure – celebrate the big and little victories you experience each day.

Step #6: Keep Making Plans

The best advice I ever received regarding my fight with cancer came from my oncologist the day I was diagnosed; his counsel and advice truly opened my eyes. After telling me the bad news, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Paul, I want you to keep making plans." Those words changed my focus immediately and I began to understand I could have a future beyond cancer!

Seeing a future and planning for that future helps gives you reasons to fight and helps you get through each day. Future goals are the capstone to this seven step process – they are what you will do when you break through and survive! For my wife and me, we plan on a long life together, seeing our children married, and enjoying our grandchildren.

A word of caution: when writing goals, always use positive terminology. Don't say 'if' but always plan on a 'when.' It's not **if** you survive – it's **when** you survive. The key is to always see yourself as a survivor and to recognize you can have a future. My friend, cancer is a disease, not a death sentence: plan to overcome it and live life to the fullest!

Step #7: Reflect & Replenish Daily

If there was a battery meter on your forehead reflecting your emotional state, how many 'bars' would your 'emotional batteries' have right now? Are they fully charged and ready for today or has your fight with cancer drained them down to where they are almost empty? When I was first diagnosed with cancer my emotional state was very fragile and each day after diagnosis simply added to the drain of my emotions. As I struggled, I learned the value of daily reflection and replenishment to remain fully charged.

You will expend a lot of emotional energy as you move through your battle with cancer. If you are not diligent in keeping your emotional batteries charged, you put your emotional wellbeing at risk! Lack of emotional energy causes you to be negative and feeling helpless and hopeless. You won't see any reason to fight because you can't imagine a life beyond cancer. Soon you'll find yourself lacking the courage and emotional strength fight. Quite frankly, you'll find it hard just to face a new day.

Step #7 is all about why you need to take time to reflect on the pluses and minuses of each day so you can identify what and why things did or didn't work and what needs to change so you don't make the same mistakes. Mistakes will always drain your emotional batteries. The '*Serenity Prayer*' says, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Reflecting each day is an important step in keeping your emotional batteries fully charged.

Early in my fight with cancer I saw how my emotions controlled my attitude and my day. When my emotional batteries were fully charged, my attitude was on target and I was ready for the day. When there were people, circumstances, or issues that drained my emotions, I had to be very careful to manage each situation so I could minimize the negative impact on my emotions lest my attitude suffer. You too may find some relationships or activities in your life too emotionally draining. In those circumstances, knowing how to best manage each situation will help keep your emotional batteries from draining down so you are able to fight this fight.

Recharging your emotional batteries means you engage in some type of enjoyable activity that replenishes your emotions. Those activities help take your mind off the negative things surrounding you and bring you back to more positive and helpful thoughts. Examples of replenishing activities may be going for a walk, exercise, listening to music, reading a book, having a cup of coffee at a favorite café, or talking with another person who knows how to listen with their heart and can offer trustworthy words of comfort and encouragement. For me, pleasant conversations with my wife, listening to music, and daily times of Scripture reading and prayer are how I maintain fully charged emotional batteries.

Fighting cancer and dealing with the daily burdens of life will be overwhelming if you are not careful to manage your emotions. Find those activities that replenish you, engage in them daily and spend time in reflection and you'll find your emotional batteries staying strong.

During my eight-year fight with cancer these seven steps became an important part of my day. They helped me stay positive, remain hopeful, and cling to faith. They crystalized in me my reason to fight and I didn't let the good things in life slip by without recognition or celebration. Even now, after cancer, I apply these steps in my life each day so I can face whatever challenges life may bring.

A Closing Comment: My goal in sharing these steps is to provide a source of encouragement to cancer patients and their families. In my fight, there were good days, hard days, and days when I really wondered if I had anymore fight left inside. These steps got me through all the tough times. I'm certainly not unique when it comes to fighting cancer – sadly there are thousands of people who go through similar struggles each day. Many have found their own special ways to push through each day. My purpose is to equip you with some tools you can use to fight cancer. In your fight, you may give out every now and then, but don't ever give in to it – fight it hard!

Paul's Cancer Survival Story

Paul Lawonn is a cancer survivor who was diagnosed with Mantle Cell Lymphoma (MCL) in November 2005. From a personal standpoint, Paul married his high school sweetheart, Cindy, in 1978. They have two children; Dan (born 1985) and Laura (born 1990). Since diagnosis, Paul has been able to see his son and daughter graduate from college and his son get married. In July 2012 Paul realized another life goal when he and his wife became grandparents for the first time!

When Paul was first diagnosed with MCL, there were some aggressive treatments available but none that would put the disease into remission for prolonged periods of time. In 2005, the prognosis for a MCL patient was rather bleak; MCL patients typically expired within 3 to 5 years of diagnosis. Shortly after his diagnosis, Paul's medical team recommended a 'watch and wait' approach meaning there was no need to rush into treatment. Considering Paul's age (49 years old at diagnosis) and overall good health this was a very appropriate course of action. On a quarterly basis, Paul had a CT scan to track the progression of the disease. Then, when it became necessary, chemotherapy would begin.

In November 2007 Paul suffered a seizure at home and tests showed the cause to be a tumor in his brain. Paul underwent brain surgery to remove a glioma. The resulting diagnosis was Oligodendrogloma; a type of brain cancer unrelated to lymphoma.

In 2008 several lymph nodes on Paul's face and neck began to enlarge and it was obvious his MCL was at the point when chemotherapy was necessary. In January 2009 Paul's oncologist informed him that a new drug designed specifically for MCL had recently been approved by the FDA. This drug would help control MCL and keep it 'in check.' Paul began a chemotherapy regimen in February 2009 with this drug and other proven cancer-fighting drugs. In the months to come, there were marked improvements.

In May 2009 a MRI revealed another glioma had developed in Paul's brain and, due to its location, it needed to be removed. Therefore, in June 2009, Paul underwent brain surgery for a second time in as many years. Because both gliomas were of the same chromosomal makeup it was determined that brain radiation therapy would be necessary to prevent additional gliomas from forming. In December 2009, Paul began a two-month course of brain radiation treatment. Since that time, MRI's consistently show there are no more brain tumors.

Paul's second brain surgery interrupted his lymphoma treatment. When he was fully recovered from brain surgery, lymphoma chemotherapy started again. By the end of April 2011 he had completed several chemotherapy treatment cycles and a CT scan showed his lymphoma was in remission. However, a hallmark of lymphoma is its tendency to return. In January 2012 visibly enlarged lymph nodes made it obvious his lymphoma had returned and a new fight with an old enemy would begin again. Early in 2012 Paul was back in chemotherapy treatment but what became apparent was his MCL had become chemo-resistant and a more aggressive course of treatment was necessary. The next step was a stem cell transplant.

Having a perfect stem cell match with a brother, Paul underwent a successful transplant in October. In the weeks that followed transplant, Paul remained in the hospital vigorously battling various types of graft vs. host disease (GVHD). In January 2013, tests confirmed there was no active disease in his body. However, within three months, lymph nodes were enlarging again and a biopsy proved MCL had returned. In June 2013, a successful cancer-fighting drug was approved for use on relapsed MCL patients after stem-cell transplant. This drug was successful in controlling Paul's cancer and as of November 2013, by the grace of God, Paul remains in remission and is free of all cancer-related drugs.

Paul is passionate about helping others find the courage they need to persistently persevere through their fight with cancer or other challenges in life. To that end he provides inspirational speeches on his seven-step process to all types of organizations and groups. Paul is very happy to speak individually with other cancer patients to encourage them in their battle. To contact Paul or to arrange to have him deliver an inspirational talk at an upcoming church, business or social event, send him an email at pjlawonn@yahoo.com.