

My original plan had been to make a video for my service. Jason and I had discussed it on several occasions and unfortunately my speech became too garbled for an impactful message. So you are stuck with my final thoughts in written word.

Last August when Elizabeth and I stood in the parking lot of the neurologists office after the second and final EMG confirming my ALS diagnosis we made a decision. We decided that ALS, although terminal, was a gift of sorts. We were going to live the time we had left together well. We would say what needed to be said. Forgive what needed forgiving. Love who needed loving. We decided from that day forward God had given us an opportunity. He had a plan for me, Elizabeth, our marriage, Olivia, Carrington and our family. We could be devastated and angry and retreat from the world or go live.

Although we were scared, we asked God to put people in our path to help us through this journey. People gave freely of their time and talents to help us with ramps, our bathroom demolition, yard work, meal train, prayer chain. Every corner we turned we were met with provision. He has been faithful to us every single day. We are so

grateful.

My first prayer upon diagnosis was that I would never become locked in. Elizabeth and I prayed that the Lord would just let the CO2 build up in my lungs and I would go to sleep before total paralysis set in. Upon my first appointment at Duke last October I was sent home with a respirator and cough assist. I was told I had a year to live maybe fourteen months. It was most probable that I would die from CO2 build up before being completely locked in. God was already answering my prayers.

The second thing Elizabeth and I did was laugh. I had been so entrenched in my career and the stresses that came with it that I had truly forgotten how to laugh. We laughed over anything and everything. With that laughter came great thanksgiving and appreciation for all of the good in life that God has done. The bad didn't seem so significant. Yes, I was dying but I was happy and loved and this led me to want to do for others. The laughter gave me purpose and appreciation for all that I did have rather than all that was being lost.

Next, We prayed and we prayed a lot. We prayed as a

couple. I got in the habit of praying out loud in the mornings for our daughters. I had never done this before. I had always said the blessing at meals and my prayers in my head at bedtime or before a big business meeting. I read the Christmas story out of the Bible to my girls every Christmas morning of their childhood and I said prayers with them at night. But I had never intentionally prayed without asking for anything in return. This time alone with God helped reconcile my thoughts and brought me great comfort. He clearly showed me that all of the things I had worked for so hard during my career didn't really mean much. I thought that success and providing for my family was demonstrating my love for them. And it does to some extent. But this year I learned that love is telling my wife she is beautiful inside and out. And she is but this year I really saw how precious she is in His eyes. How beautiful her heart is. This year I really saw her. I also learned that love means telling my children I believe in them even when they falter not just when they are successful. True love, I learned this year, is only possible if you love others first and I learned this year that is only because of Jesus and the cross. I thought true love was because of me and what I earned in my paycheck and chose to spend it on. God showed

me otherwise.

I learned how to be a better version of myself because I let Christ guide my life instead of trying to control everything myself. When parts of your body are paralyzed, and you can't swallow, and when you rely on your wife and daughters for just about everything you have to learn to surrender. That was my biggest challenge. As men we are taught to never surrender. Never relinquish control. As fate would have it I made friends with another man living with ALS in Greenville. I know God placed Nelson Cooper in my path. Nelson taught me that in order to die you have to live. That involves letting go of controlling things ourselves and trusting that God is able and then waiting to see him do it His way and not necessarily my way.

Elizabeth and I have had an amazing year. Nothing extravagant or over the top just enjoying every single day, thing, moment, place and person. I've never really had that luxury before. My entire career I was straight commission. This was another gift God gave us. The gift of this time to just relax, laugh, visit and enjoy life. Your friendships, visits, calls, cards, food, pies, flowers, gifts,

and prayers have been humbling and overwhelming. There are no words to express our gratitude. We simply stand in awe of your kindness and Gods grace.

In closing, I'd humbly like to ask that you please pray for peace for Elizabeth. We've been together since we were 18 years old. We literally "grew each other up" we've shared a lifetime together. I often tell her I'll see you again one day soon but it's still hard. Pray for Olivia to find joy and laughter in the sorrow. Pray for Carrington and Tyndall as they begin their first year of marriage that it's a Godly marriage full of love and patience. Pray for my parents and my brother to find healing. Pray for my aunt and my cousins whom I love dearly. There are so many of you who have left profound impacts on my life and Elizabeth and my life I am so thankful for each of you.

My take away? I've had an extraordinarily ordinary life that I have loved. Im pretty simple I love Eastern NC hunting fishing and I got to do it my whole life. I married my best friend. I have two extraordinary daughters. A son in law who loves my daughter. Parents who raised me to love my wife and respect others. A brother who has

always loved me even when I probably wasn't always there for him.

Life is never what you think it will be. You can plan, you can save, you can spend, you can travel, you can work yourself to death and it can all change in a second and what are you left with? Do you have peace? Do you have laughter? Do you love your spouse unconditionally? Do you have the love of your children and your family? Your friends? Do you trust that Jesus is the only one who can save you, heal you, fix you, cure you? Your things are a comfort but they are of no eternal value.

A dear family friend brought me Psalm 23 typed on a piece of paper when I was first diagnosed. He asked me to pray it every single day. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I am not afraid because He is with me. I'm at peace. I think I've served my family well and the Lord well. Im ready to meet Jesus face to face.

My bible study teacher tells me everything that I love doing here on earth is in heaven. I'm looking forward to being able to see my grandfather again, maybe dropping

a fishing line with Nelson Cooper and hopefully doing some marlin fishing with Eddie Evans. Until then know that it truly is well with my soul.

Godspeed,  
Robin

