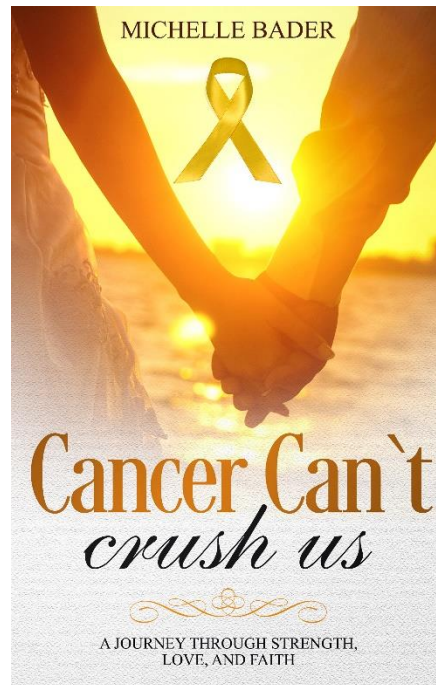


Cancer Can't Crush Us

A Journey Through Strength, Love, and Faith



SAMPLE CHAPTER 7

A Life-Changing Day Chapter 10

Beep, beep, beep. I woke up abruptly to the sound of my screeching alarm and looked at the clock: 5:00 a.m. *Why am I getting up at this time?* My mind was fuzzy. I looked over at Luke and saw him sitting at the edge of the bed. Suddenly the reality of the day came over me as I realized what lay ahead.

It was the day of Luke's amputation. I had been dreading this day as well as looking forward to it to get rid of the cancer. I had cried many tears about this day, and I didn't know what to expect.

I knew Luke was nervous, scared, and anxious about this day. His head was bent down as though he was in silent prayer. I reached over and rubbed his back. As his feet hit the floor, I couldn't help thinking that it would be the last time he would ever be able to place both feet on the ground and easily lift himself up. As he stood up and walked to the doorway, I looked at his legs. I could not picture him without one of them. I had tried to picture it many times in order to help myself prepare, but no matter what I did, the image would never come. Luke walked down the hall, and I felt myself beginning to weaken. Everything inside of me wanted to escape what was going on. *This can't be happening.*

I tried to keep the tears in and overcome my weakness with the appearance of strength. I recalled my conversation with Luke from the night before.

Luke looked down at his fettuccini alfredo and pretended to be interested in eating it, but I knew he wasn't going to eat it. His mind was far away from our pasta dinner.

"Baby," Luke said slowly as his eyes looked up to meet my own.

"Yes," I replied, reaching for his hand.

"You know I don't usually ask you for things, but I need you to do something for me tomorrow. I know everything will be emotional, but I really, really need you to be strong for me. Can you do that?" Luke said intently.

"Yes, it will be hard, but I will do my best," I said as I thought about how difficult the task would be.

Luke and I finished getting ready to go to the hospital in silence. We had been through packing for a hospital so many times that we could do it quickly and remember everything we could possibly need. In our nine months of marriage, we had spent more time together in hospitals than hotels.

The drive to the hospital was equally as quiet as at home. I knew that Luke needed to deal with things in his way, and that was to be silent. I silently prayed for the upcoming day.

Lord, I give you this day, this day you have created. Please give Luke strength and courage to make it through this day. Please help the surgery to go well. Help the surgeon to do everything correctly and to get all the cancer out of his body. God, I don't know how I am going to be strong, but I know all things are possible through you. I feel like I could break down any second crying. Please help me to remain strong, at least until he is in surgery. Thanks, Lord.

I parked in the parking garage, and Luke and I began the walk into the hospital—the last time he would ever walk outside on his own two feet. There had been many last times that both Luke and I had thought of over the past few days: the last time he clipped his toenails, the last time he walked in our house, the last time he drove a car using his right leg only, and the last time he crossed his ankles.

Hand in hand, we walked slowly into the hospital. When we got to the waiting room, we were greeted by many friends and family who had come to show their support for Luke as well as for me. Luke and I walked up to the counter where he was to check in. He was given many papers to sign and then we were told to wait, and they would let us know when there was a preop room ready for us to go into.

There was a unique stillness in our corner of the room. No one knew what to say. I looked around and quickly counted the people we knew. *Five, six, seven,* I continued counting. *Thirty-Five.* There were thirty-five people there for us. I looked at Luke's face and knew he was uncomfortable with all the attention. Luke did not like people to make a big deal out of things and would have preferred that only a few people were there. We waited for about two hours and

were told we would have to wait longer still. I knew that Luke was anxious to get this surgery over with and start the recovery process. Friends and family continued to make small talk with us, and our pastor prayed over Luke. Finally, we were called back to the preop room. Only Luke and one other person were allowed, so naturally I went with him.

We began the walk down the long, sterile hallway, and I felt weakness trying to take over and form tears in my eyes. *I must be strong. I can hold out just a little longer. I promised Luke. I will do my best to be strong and not show my weakness until he is in surgery.* We were directed to a small room with a curtain for a door. Luke sat on the small hospital bed as I found a hard wooden chair to rest in. There were soon many nurses coming in and out of the room taking blood pressure, temperatures, etc. I looked at Luke's two legs at the edge of the bed. I could see the lump on his right leg. *We are getting rid of you today, cancer! I will not think of it as Luke losing a leg, but Luke losing the cancer!*

After a while, the room became quieter, and the people coming in and going out became fewer. Soon Luke and I were left alone.

"Come here, baby," Luke said as he scooted over on the tiny hospital bed and patted the space next to him. We had shared hospital beds many times before, so it did not surprise me when he wanted me to join him on this day. I placed one leg up and tried to balance the rest of my body to fit on the bed. I barely fit. I lay my head upon Luke's chest and listened to the sound of his steady, calming heartbeat. I closed my eyes and knew that everything was going to be okay. I pictured Luke and I on a boat; the waves crashed at us from every side, but our sturdy boat kept us safe. I knew that someday the waves would calm, and the stillness of the sea would overpower the memories of the crashing waves, and life would be better again.

Luke and I lay in silence for many minutes. We did not have to speak to know what was going on in each other's minds. It was such a foreign thought to know that in just a little while, my husband's life would be dramatically different. Not just my husband's life, but mine as well. We were one in every sense of the word. When he was hurting, so was I.

"Knock, knock," I heard a voice say. I looked up to see Luke's mom entering the room.

"Hi," Luke replied.

"I just want to make sure they get the right one," Luke's mom said as she pulled a sharpie out from her purse. She proceeded to take the sharpie and write on his left leg "NOT THIS ONE!".

"That's a good idea," I said, laughing. It felt good to laugh. Laughter had not happened very much lately in our house, and I missed it. I missed the sound of Luke's laugh and the way his eyes brightened with every bubble of laughter he produced. I prayed that laughter would soon be a part of our lives again.

"Well, I better get going. I love you," Luke's mom said as she leaned over and kissed his forehead. I could see that she was holding back tears that were fighting their way to the brim of her eyes. She turned around and left quickly before the tears could fall. Soon a nurse entered the tiny room.

"It is time to get your epidural started," he said as he moved things around on his medical tray.

I looked at Luke. He knew how much I hated needles and how much I was already scared of the epidural I would have in a few months.

"I think I will wait outside," I said as I kissed Luke lightly on the cheek.

I walked up and down the hall, trying to calm myself. I looked at my watch. Ten minutes had passed, I knew they had to be done by now. I walked back down the hall and stood outside the room. The curtain moved, and I was able to

see a tiny sliver of Luke. I saw his bare back bent over and the nurse trying to place what I assumed was the needle in his back. I quickly turned away and tried to keep myself together. I did not like to see anything that caused pain, and it looked like Luke was probably in pain. I paced up and down the hall a few times and I saw the curtain to Luke's room open. I quickly made my way back to the room.

Luke was lying on the bed with his eyes closed and a look of pain on his face.

"How are you?" I asked.

"It really hurt. I don't think that guy knew what he was doing. He had to do it over and over, I think five times!" Luke said.

"I am so sorry," I said as I sat down beside him. My stomach was tense, and I was tired of waiting. I wanted to get the surgery over with. Within a few minutes, a nurse came in.

"Well, it is time to go. We will give you your anesthesia in another room, so you will be out for the surgery," she said.

"Yes. Please make sure that the drugs are really strong. I want to be out. I do not want to wake up during the surgery," Luke said directly.

"Yes, of course. We will make sure you do not wake up during the surgery," the nurse replied.

The curtain to Luke's room was now wide open and things were moved to the side as they prepared to wheel Luke's bed down the hall. Suddenly I felt as though I was in a dream. Everything was fuzzy. I bent down over Luke and kissed him.

"I love you," I said softly.

He looked up at me. "I love you too," The nurses began to roll his bed away. I watched his body move farther away from me. I stared at his leg one last time and wondered what he would be like without it. When I could no longer see Luke, all the strength that had been holding back my tears dissipated under the weight of my emotions. I leaned against the wall and felt my body slowly sliding to the floor. I felt the cold, hard floor beneath me. I buried my face in my hands and began to sob. I could hardly catch my breath. My chest rose and fell quickly, and the saltiness of my tears flowed into my mouth. I did not look up. I couldn't hear anyone, I couldn't feel anything but intense pain in my heart. *God, why? Why is this happening to him? I can't handle to see this happening to him!* I prayed. I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Sweetie, do you have anyone here with you?" I looked up to the kind face of a nurse.

"Yes," I said as I wiped my eyes with my shirt.

I stood up and made my way to the doors that led to the waiting room. I did not want to see anyone. No one could comfort the kind of pain I was feeling. Instead of going to the waiting room, I walked to the bathroom. I found an empty stall, sat down, closed the door, and let the tears cascade down my face once again.

"Please God, please God, please God," I said the words aloud as I rocked back and forth. I could not pray any other words. God knew the intense feelings and the prayers I felt from deep inside. I looked at my bracelet which was made up of photos of Luke and I. I rubbed the pictures over and over. "Please God, please God, please God." Those were the only words that would come out of my lips. I didn't know how else to pray. I had never felt so in need of comfort. *Please God*—those two words came from a longing from the depths of my being to be held and comforted by my Savior.

I continued crying until I felt strong enough to go out and face other people. I walked out of the stall and looked in the mirror. My eyes were puffy, my cheeks were red, and I had mascara all around my eyes. I wiped my face and tried to make myself look a little less upset. *I don't really care what I look like right now.*

I rubbed my belly and said, "Don't worry, Hayden. Daddy is going to be okay." Talking to Hayden made me feel better. I felt like I was ready to face other people. I opened the door and walked to the waiting room. I was immediately engulfed in the arms of many caring people. I was comforted by their love and touched by their emotions.

"So, he is in surgery now?" my mom asked.

"Well, he was going to the room where they put him out, and then he will go to surgery," I said. I looked down at the pager I had been given. I was told that when Luke was in recovery I would be paged, and they would let me know how everything went. I didn't know how I was going to wait the long six hours until they predicted he would be done. I sat down next to the others in the waiting room and tried to pass the time. I looked at magazines, but somehow the "*Top Ten Ways to Lose Weight*" didn't seem to keep my interest. I just kept imagining what my sweet Luke was going through. I pictured him lying on the operating table as the surgeon began to cut his leg. Oh no, it was just too awful, I couldn't think about it anymore. I decided I would go for a walk to help pass more time. I was getting rather large as I neared my eighth month of pregnancy, and I knew walking would be good for me.

As I began down the hall, I heard my cell phone ring.

"Hello," I said.

"Hey, it's Amanda. I was just wondering how everything was going."

I was happy that she remembered even from Canada to call and check in on me. Amanda had always been such a good friend to me since we met when we were fourteen years old. It was comforting to hear her voice. I proceeded to explain the events of the morning and told her I would call her again when Luke was out of surgery.

I hung up the phone and continued walking down the hall. I was still feeling sick to my stomach yet a bit hungry. Although I didn't feel like eating, I knew that Hayden needed me to. I went back to the waiting room and noticed that several people had left. There really wasn't much good in them waiting around all day. There were still several people left to support me and be there for Luke when he awoke. Both mine and Luke's family remained.

I walked over to the corner where everyone was sitting. Well, my dad was sleeping on a couch but everyone else was sitting quietly reading or pretending to read.

"Does anyone want to get some lunch?" I said.

"That sounds good," my mom said as she stood up. My sisters-in-law and Luke's mom and sister got up too. We walked down to the cafeteria. I decided on a chicken-and-cheese sandwich. I ordered and sat down at a booth. *How can I eat right now? This is wrong! I feel so guilty eating while Luke's leg is being cut off. How can I do this?* I took a small bite off my sandwich; it did not taste good to me. I pushed it around on my plate absentmindedly and hoped that no one would notice.

"Aren't you going to eat?" my mom asked.

"I don't feel like it," I said.

"Well, you need to eat," my mom said in a very motherly tone.

I took one more bite and decided I couldn't eat anymore. When we were done, we walked back to the waiting room and tried to pass the time once again. The hours seemed to drag on forever. Six hours had passed and my pager had not gone off. I began to get a little nervous. *What if something went wrong? That would be too much for me to handle.*

Dinnertime came and went, and I suddenly felt a buzz at my hip where I had the pager attached. Luke was out of surgery! I rushed to the counter and told them I had been paged. They told me the surgeon would be with me shortly.

I tried to wait as patiently as I could, but my patience had already been used up over the entire day. I looked up from where I was sitting and saw the surgeon—a woman dressed in scrubs, in her mid-thirties—walking toward me. She looked directly at me.

"Hi. It went really well."

I felt relief spread throughout my entire body.

"We had to keep him in recovery for longer than expected because he was out for a long time. We got the tumor out, and I had room to leave a large margin of space from where the tumor was to where the leg was cut. Luke is doing well and is now in his own room on the tenth floor. I will be back tomorrow to check on him," she said.

I wanted to find the elevator and see Luke as soon as possible. She continued talking for a few more minutes, but all I could think of was seeing Luke's face. I was given his room number and we went toward his room. We got off the elevator and got closer to his room. Luke's mom was the only one with me.

"You go ahead," she said to me. I appreciated that she would give me and Luke a few minutes alone. As I continued down the hall, I was overcome with emotions. Since the first date Luke and I had been on, I had never felt so nervous to see him. *What would he be like? Would he be angry? Upset? Scared? Tired?* I was unsure of how I would react to seeing him with part of his leg gone. *Would it be bloody?* I had a hard time with blood, but I was ready to face anything to see my Luke. He would still be my same wonderful, caring husband, and I couldn't wait to lay eyes on him again.

I entered the doorway to Luke's room. I saw him sitting up in his bed. His body was covered in a pale blue blanket. I could see that underneath the blanket was his left leg and foot, and the blanket lay flat below his right knee where his leg should have been. His face looked peaceful.

"Hey, baby," I said as I walked to the side of his bed. "How are you doing?"

Luke looked up at me with a smile. "Much better than I thought I would be. It was so scary, I woke up in the recovery room and I couldn't move. I tried to move my arms and legs, but nothing would work. I was so scared that something had gone wrong in the surgery and I would be paralyzed forever. I called the nurse over and asked her what was happening, and she told me that it was the anesthesia, and it would soon wear off. It wasn't long until I could start to move again. I thanked God. It really put things into perspective for me. It made me thankful that I only lost a leg compared to being paralyzed forever."

With each word that Luke said, I was amazed at his calmness and peace. It was truly a miracle from God. There was no other way to explain the peace that came from deep inside his soul. I was in awe of my husband. He was so strong, even after his leg had been taken.

"Do you want to see it?" Luke said as he studied my face for a reaction. "It's not bloody or anything." Luke reached for the blanket covering his legs.

"Okay," I replied, nervous as to what I would see.

He pulled the blanket off and revealed a white plaster cast. The cast extended about two inches below his knee where his leg now ended. I let out a sigh of relief. It was not such a scary sight.

“You are right, it isn’t bloody. Does it hurt?” I bent down and examined the cast.

“Well, I can’t feel either of my legs very well right now, but it is starting to throb a little.”

“What is this?” I asked as I looked at a small blood-filled tube at the end of his cast. Even as I looked at it, I was surprised that I did not become weak from the sight of blood.

“That is for the blood that is still draining out of my leg,” Luke replied.

“I am so proud of you, Luke. You are being so strong,” I said as I kissed him gently. “I need to go get your mom, she is waiting outside.”

Luke’s mom walked in and gave Luke a hug. They talked for a while and then she said she would leave and let him rest. I could tell by the way Luke’s face was tensing up that he was beginning to feel more pain.

“It hurts.”

I knew it must be bad because Luke never complained about pain. “Did you get pain medicine?” I asked.

“Yes, and there is some going through my epidural, but the pain is getting worse!”

I closed my eyes and prayed that somehow, we would make it through another pain-filled night—a night that was to be the worst night of our lives.

For the full book click [here](#)

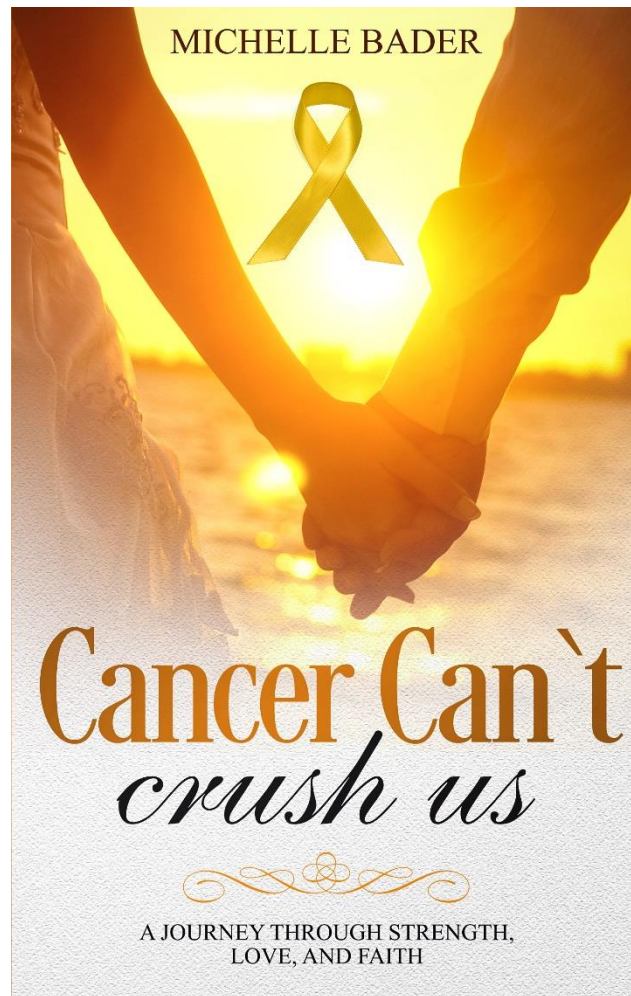
About the Author



Michelle is a passionate writer, teacher and speaker. She lives in Vancouver, WA with her husband Luke and three kids, Hayden, Hayley and Payton. She is a freelance writer and is in the process of writing more books. She loves spending time with friends and enjoying time with her family in the outdoors.

Michelle loves using the trials she has endured to help others and point them to God. She loves leading teams of people and speaking into people’s lives.

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