

KINGDOM COME

Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.

Three Things I've Learned from my Recent Brush with Death

It was 10:30 PM on Thursday, February 2. Linda had already gone to bed and had been asleep for half an hour when I suddenly felt pain in my chest that radiated to my back. I ran upstairs and woke her up, "Call 911!"

The paramedics treated me as if it were a heart-attack and rushed me to Mercy Medical Center in Canton. It took a while for the ER doctors to figure out what was wrong with me because all the tests for heart-attack came back negative. They took an X-Ray that revealed the problem: My ascending aorta that

leads up from the heart had dissected—the tear had ripped through two of the three layers of the aorta and was threatening to burst, which would result in death. The aorta had ballooned, looking like a football.

I was immediately sent to surgery. Dr.

Mark Tawil operating on me from 2:30 AM to 3:30 PM (yes, that's 13 hours!).

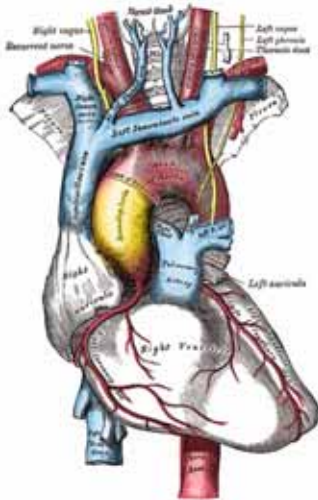
Linda had my very good friends Matt and Miche by her side (Matt drove her to the hospital; Miche, a nurse at Mercy, was working that night). Linda made some phone calls at 3:00 in the morning to friends and family and the news of the situation spread like wildfire. In those early morning hours, we were blessed to have many, many people already praying for me. By daybreak, Linda had several friends

and family with her—listening to her, comforting her, and praying with her at the hospital.

Here are the three things I've learned from this recent brush with death:

1 Prayer This is the major news of this ordeal: By the time I had come out of surgery and was placed in ICU, there were more people than we can count praying for my life. People were praying for me from several different churches and several different states. The doctors and nurses I've spoken to have all said that I should not have survived. One nurse that was assisting in the surgery said that when they opened me up and she saw the aorta it was "as if somebody was holding it together." It should have burst. Dr. Tawil stated it clearly: "It was your faith and the faith of your family and friends that saved you."

There is ongoing skepticism that prayer works in healing. I, for one, have no doubts that it was prayer that moved God's hand to heal me. God agreed with these prayers that I should remain alive for His glory—so that my wife Linda would not be a widow with three children to raise, and that Joel, Kaira, and Trey would have there daddy to lead them into adulthood. And that I have much more ministry to do with the CCO, the local church, and in various other



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ways. And that I am to re-develop my relationships with my extended family and with my friends.

This was God's will. I have a new life to live for God's glory. Thank you to all who prayed. Praise goes to God for his power to heal.

2 Kairos After my surgery, I was placed in the cardio-vascular surgical ICU.

But my recovery was not going smoothly. I developed Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)—a life-threatening condition in which inflammation of the lungs and accumulation of fluid in the air sacs leads to low blood oxygen levels. I had to be on mechanical ventilation to deliver oxygen and a continuous level of pressure (called PEEP [positive end-expiratory pressure]) to my lungs.

During these four weeks battling ARDS, I had to be deeply sedated

with medications—basically placed in a medically-induced coma—because if I would awaken, my blood pressure would skyrocket and my oxygen levels would plummet.

This was a tremendously stressful time for my family and friends—a rollercoaster ride of their daily asking the nurses, "What's his PEEP?" The higher the PEEP, the worse the news: my oxygen levels were so low that the machine had to keep my lungs expanded to help get oxygen



from the lungs into the bloodstream.

At three weeks, 6 days, my wife, Linda, asked my pulmonologist when I would be able to come out of the coma, and he said he did not know if or when I would. This was a jolting revelation. The next day, by the grace of God, I woke up without complications!

That next week I would sleep a lot. But when I was awake, I found myself surrounded by family, friends, and many people I know from different local churches and even the Starbucks at which I frequent. Without my knowing it, they had been visiting me the entire time I had been in the ICU. My Dad missed maybe one visiting hour. Our friend Amber had spent night after night at our home, keeping Linda company and helping care for the children. Wendy and Tim sent out emails to a large number of people, keeping the prayer warriors up-to-date.

And it struck me: **These people are precious. My life—every day and every moment—is precious.** How many days have I taken life and friends and family for granted? How often have I made it a priority to love the people in my life? Not very often. God has placed me on this earth and has given me opportunities to reach out to people and care for them, and yet I had often just lived as if I'll always have those opportunities tomorrow or next week or next year. I am not guaranteed a tomorrow or a next week—none of us are.

We named our daughter Kaira—we feminized the Greek word “kairos,” which means a measure of time, often as the “opportune time,” a specific and decisive point, a divinely allotted time or season. Kaira and her twin brother Joel were born at a particularly difficult time in our life, and we wanted to remind ourselves that God’s timing is always good.



While I laid there in the ICU, I thought of the kairos times of life—the times of opportunity that I had allowed to slip by, the opportunities wasted. I pledged to live fully in those kairos moments—“While we have opportunity (kairos), let us do good to all people...” (Galatians 6:10) “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time (kairos)... (Ephesians 5:15).

The Bible passage that has been a constant comfort to Linda in these stressful times is 1 Peter 5:6-7.

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (kairos), casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

What a comfort—God has a kairos reserved for us as well! In those darkest times in the hospital, I wondered if I would ever see a time when I’d be home again—hugging my children, holding my wife, laughing with my friends, talking about spiritual things with my family, doing the work I love, and even blogging again...

And here I am...God has brought me through. He is good!

3 Holiness As I’ve been reflecting on what a precious gift human life is, I have also been struck by the greatest desire in my life for holiness.

Even though I’ve been in ministry for 16 years, I’ve seen the call to purity as a burden. You see, holiness is godliness, and since I’m not God, I found God’s demand, “be holy because I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16) to be burdensome, calling me to be something other than human.

But I’ve come to realize that the very definition of being human is to be a

genuine image-bearer of God.

“What the world hungers for today is the discovery of what it means to be truly human. Holiness is not primarily about submission to authoritarian rules or narrow or conformist notions of acceptable behavior. It is about the celebration of our humanity” (Chris Brian and Robert Warren, as quoted in JI Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, p. 27-28).



JI Packer affirms this thought, saying, *“Genuine holiness is genuine Christ-likeness, and genuine Christ-likeness is genuine holiness—the only genuine humanness there is”* (p. 28).

Life is too short to goof around feeding and obsessing over addictive sin. There is too much joy to be found in submitting to the Holy Spirit.

I had somehow missed that fact that among the fruit of the Spirit is **JOY!**

What is Bob’s Call in Ministry?

Bob is the Area Director for Northern Ohio with the *Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO)*, an interdenominational campus ministry organization. Our mission is “transforming college students to transform the world.” Bob sets up cooperative ministries with churches and educational institutions, providing well-trained staff to these partners and creating unique ministries on campuses and in churches, making disciples of Jesus Christ on college campuses.

Bob supervises campus ministers placed at schools like Akron, Kent State, Malone College, as well as those in the Cleveland area, as they reach out to students, training this generation to be God’s transformative agents to redeem all of creation for His glory.

To support the work that Christ is doing through Bob’s ministry with the CCO, you can send your contribution with a note including my name to:

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Find out more about the CCO on-line:
www.ccojubilee.org