**STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES**

[*Rick’s Note*: I received this blog report from my friend Mike Wilson yesterday. I was in the middle of writing my daily devo when I got it. It hit me, hard! I said to myself, “Self, pay attention to what Mike just told you as a friend and brother.” His heart attack earlier this month taught him a valuable life lesson that we all need to hear. With Randy Foster’s recent sudden heart attack as an extra reminder, this is good medicine for me. Mike’s daughter, Megan Wineinger, is a member here at Northwest. He has three precious grandchildren here, and more out there in California. What he has to say is worth hearing, so I chose to suspend my article until tomorrow and let you hear his message for us. Thanks Mike. I heard you, loud and clear.]

Life as I have always known it came crashing to a halt on the morning of Wednesday, May 6. A sledgehammer of pain suddenly hit the middle of my chest, and I could barely breathe without writhing in pain. I was barreled over, as if an elephant stepped on top of me and would not budge. Even after my wife Andrea called 911, first responders rolled me from the gurney to the ambulance, and as ER medical personnel tried to get me to answer questions and sign the necessary forms electronically, I wandered in and out of consciousness, so intense was the pain.

A victim and survivor of a severe heart attack, my blocked artery was cleared, a stent was inserted, and I found myself in the hospital for the next couple of days. Heavily medicated, a sad thought overwhelmed me in more lucid moments. This was a disruptive event. Would my life ever be the same? Would I still be able to work? I have lived an active life, and I enjoy vigorous exercise, but would that be forever gone? In what ways would I be incapacitated or severely restricted?

The more I reflected on a “new normal” for me, I decided to do what I always do when adversity hits. I know from a lifetime of Bible study that for God’s people, the “testing of faith” is an occasion of joy and a chance to grow spiritually (James 1:2-4). This is counterintuitive from a worldly point of view, but God designed this life to be a testing ground, an existence where adversity is an opportunity, and setbacks are steppingstones. As my Uncle Don would say, “I am sorry you had the heart attack, but such can be a blessing in disguise. You are receiving a message that something has to be changed so that something more drastic won’t happen.”

In the weeks since the event, I have read and pondered issues surrounding nutrition, heart health, and a regimen that will give me the best chance of success in my rehabilitation. However, more than any other factor, I believe that there is a mind-body relationship that affects heart health. The heart is the seat of emotions, and my emotional well-being has been negatively impacted in the last year or more by *off-the-chart* stress levels. I have tried to take on more than one human being is intended to do, and Andrea has reminded me that I need to learn the word, “No.” She is right. Therefore, more significant than any other medicine I take going forward, I intend to slow down and enjoy life, to “stop and smell the roses.”

God is the Giver of “every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17), and I have been in too much of a rat-race to fully enjoy this abundance. Moreover, God wants us to reflect on how blessed we really are. God delights in giving us good things. Jesus says, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32). Moreover, our heavenly Father wishes for us to receive these blessings with grateful and happy hearts. He “richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

I do not know how much longer I will live on earth, or how robust my energy levels will be, but there are certain key ingredients I intend to*wholeheartedly* embrace in the time that I have left. To me, they are the keys to *healing a broken heart.*

***1. Cherish each moment.*** Life is a gift. Appreciate what you have. Spend time with loved ones. Value what you have and tell God about it in prayer.

***2. Slow down and notice great blessings.*** Take a walk. Sit in the sun near a blossoming tree. Listen to the birds sing. See how beautiful a flower is in bloom.

***3. Be thankful.*** Open the Bible and read about the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Take stock of your inventory. Stop complaining about what you do not have, focusing instead on how richly blessed you really are.

***4. Look forward to my heavenly home.*** As great as all these gifts are on earth, they are marred by the curse of sin. This is a world of corruption, death, and dying. We can never completely fix what is broken here. However, we can point others and our own *hearts* toward a heavenly home that is richly provided to the faithful. It is o.k., then, to indulge ourselves a little, to allow our thoughts to escape the wretched parts of our existence here and dream about the transcendent glories that await us. How great is heaven going to be? Answer: *greater than our wildest imaginations can conceive!*

So this is the core of my strategy for what remains of my life on earth. Will you join me? I’m thankful for your prayers and well-wishes. God has been very good to me during this time of healing, and this little “interruption” continues to shower me with blessings.

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