

Matters of Life and Death – January 2017

On January 2nd, our oldest daughter, Callie, called us to tell us she was engaged. We knew it was coming because her fiancé, Josh, had met with me to ask for my blessing (she told him this was a requirement). We were elated. Later we spoke with my middle daughter, Megan, and son-in-law, Dan, who have known Josh for years. All four of us were excitedly talking about the engagement and then Meg said it would be tough to travel with three kids. Meg and Dan have two boys. It was another bit of exciting news – a third grandchild! Wonderful news all around!

Fast forward a few days to another conversation with Meg, a tearful conversation – she had miscarried. Our hearts hurt for her and Dan. They were so excited about the pregnancy and that hope was gone. Unfortunately, Meg continued to have problems. Her body was indicating it was still pregnant. After several visits to the doctor and the lab, a false tubal pregnancy was discovered, i.e., there was no fetus, but there was a sac in her Fallopian tube. Her blood and hormone levels alarmed the doctors who ordered immediate surgery on January 25th. Apparently the sac was at risk of bursting and that could prove fatal.

The week before, our church family lost a very dear saint, Dolores Flowers, who had spent the holiday season and then some in the hospital. God took her home surrounded by her family. We mourned with them in the loss of this sweet woman. And then on January 23rd, I received a call from a friend and former co-worker that another friend/co-worker, her husband, and her oldest son had been killed in an accident near Ocala. She was 56, her husband was 61 and her son was 31. It was obviously shocking news.

On Tuesday, the 24th, our youth pastor, Scott, texted me with the wonderful news that his wife, Katie, had given birth to twin boys. They were underweight and would spend some time in the NICU, but it was delightful and long-awaited (just ask Katie!) news. Two new lives, two new blessings, had entered our world.

On January 27th, while we were in Virginia helping Meg in her recovery, we celebrated Michele's birthday. Of course, I left her present at home in Florida in the rush to get to Virginia, but we did have a great day getting our grandsons out of the house for Meg's sake and spending time with them. It was a celebration of Michele's life and of the simple joy of being 4 and 5.

In a few short weeks we have celebrated a new beginning, a new pregnancy, and two births, but grieved in several deaths and the loss of a baby, and the anxiety of Megan being at great risk. These events, compressed into a few days, are a microcosm of what we all experience – the cycle of life and death, joy and grief, the highs and lows of our time on this earth.

As I consider all this, I am reminded of Psalm 30:4-5: *“Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.”* This does not mean I believe the anger of God factored into any of these events. What the verses tell us is that we must always praise and thank God because, even when He is angry, it is momentary. The greater gift for believers is His eternal favor. This great gift of salvation is what enables us to get through the weeping in the night, i.e., the dark times that come, and realize that there is joy which is fresh every day. This is the joy that comes from the

assurance that God does favor His children, that we receive His blessings every day, and that there is always hope despite circumstances because He is God and He is in control.

We will experience joy and grief, life and death, happiness and pain. But, as believers, we know that the joy is what lasts. The joy is what gives us strength. In fact, Nehemiah 8:10 tells us, "*Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" So as you experience the highs and the lows never forget who is sovereign, who loves you, who gives you strength and who promises you eternal joy.