

# EDITORIAL: A clear view beside a hospital bed

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Some moments clarify others, and you're blessed to be awake and alert when it happens. This is one of those moments. Thank God, I'm here, and my eyes are open.

It's late at night in the coronary care unit of St. Anthony Hospital in downtown Oklahoma City. My father, Marvin Knox, lies in a bed two feet from my knees. When I was growing up, he and I strung the lights on Christmas trees with fewer wires than all the cables, cords and tubes his nurses have taped, poked and spliced into his chest, belly and arms. Monitors flash green, blue, yellow and red graphs. My eyes keep following a green line squiggling across a black screen. It records how well he's breathing on his own, and eventually, it will free him from the ventilator tube snaking down his throat.

Editor Marv Knox

For several days, I've been remembering a book written by the late, great Southern humorist Lewis Grizzard, *They Tore Out My Heart and Stomped That Sucker Flat*. That's not exactly what happened to Daddy, but if the morphine in that bag over there were not sliding down an IV tube, floating up his arm and whitewashing his senses, he could relate. This morning, a cardiothoracic surgeon and a team of helpers cracked open his chest and bypassed four major arteries in his heart. Right now, Daddy looks like a techno-zombie.

But he's winning this battle. Thi, his overnight nurse, just pointed to the big screen behind his right shoulder and called across the room: "Would you take a look at those numbers? They're spot-on. He's doing just great."

To say this day has been a relief would be like saying we'd all be grateful for some rain. The sledgehammer started pounding in his chest a couple of weeks ago. Then, when the cardiologist studied his angiogram, she said he couldn't go home until, well, a surgeon tears out his heart and stomps that sucker flat. So, we're delighted he survived the surgery well and didn't have a heart attack in the meantime.

The staff here at the hospital has been kind, upbeat and professional. Nobody has noted the irony of a Baptist preacher checking into a Catholic hospital to get his heart patched up. In medicine, we're all ecumenical.

Moments like these define what matters. For the past several days, what matters most—for my mother, my brother and me, at least—has been the heart beating inside the remarkable man lying in front of me.

Sure, we've followed pennant races and presidential aspirations, the start of football season, and the ebb and flow of the stock market. We've kept up with the news and fretted over the ups and downs of our jobs. We've watched the weather and talked about everything going on at church. All these topics reflect the "stuff" of our lives, and they're at least semi-important, even sports. But what matters most is the heart beating inside the faithful man lying in front of me.

Myriad issues distract us. But the core of life is just that—life. My father's illness reminded me life is measured, fragile and short. A long life passes quickly. And a seemingly healthy life turns in an instant.

Suddenly, cares of a job and the economy and government gridlock slide to scale. I happen to think my job is important; I feel called to do it. Likewise, the economy and elections are important, because they impact millions—no, billions—of people. Still, issues pale in comparison to the single, solitary life of an individual you love. And the most valuable currency is the time you spend with family and friends, for time and tears

and laughter and conversation measure the depth of those relationships.

Of course, I realize that while my father's life is infinitely valuable to me, it is of no greater or lesser value than the other 7 billion lives on this planet. As a follower of Christ, who loves all people equally, I should place no greater value on his life than on the lives I never will know. Humanly speaking, that is impossible. We are each other's flesh and bone, spirit and sinew. I cannot imagine my life without his. But spiritually speaking, loving all people is our goal. How the world would be different if we treasured each life as dearly as the lives closest to our own.