



God is spirit, and those who
worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

On Worship
with Pastor Steve

Open Heart What?

I recently underwent open heart surgery to replace an aortic valve which had been defective since birth. The entire ordeal took our family quite by surprise as I was not initially aware of any symptoms of a heart problem. Here is how the events unfolded.

On May 21 I visited the doctor for what they thought was a sinus infection. I did indeed have a virus, but it was totally unrelated to my heart. While visiting the doctor he heard the heart murmur I have had since birth and suggested that I have an echocardiogram performed; which I had never had. I did that on May 27 and my doctor's office called me on May 30 to inform me that the results showed that I had some hardening of the aortic valve. They made me an appointment to see a cardiologist on the June 19. Since our family was supposed to take a trip to Washington D.C. on June 8 I decided to go back to my doctor on June 2 to see if I could get some more information. While there he reviewed the results of the echocardiogram and was spooked. He personally spoke with the cardiologist and had my appointment changed to June 3; which was the next day.

When the cardiologist came into the exam room he asked me where I was going on vacation. I told him Washington D.C. and he said, "You're not going anywhere. You need open heart surgery. There is an 80 to 90 percent chance that you could drop dead any minute. I am having you admitted to the hospital today. Don't even go home. I have a surgeon who can operate on you tomorrow." A few hours later I was being prepared for a heart catheterization. The results of that test showed that there were no blockages in my arteries. So, my only problem was my aortic valve which was not letting blood back into my body properly. They told me the valve was supposed to have had three gates, but I was born with only two. The gates had hardened over the years and reduced blood flow.

According to the doctors I was basically a walking dead man. They did the surgery on Wednesday, June 4 and I came home Monday, June 9.

God is faithful. Had I not had the virus I would have not gone to the doctor and may have dropped dead in Washington D.C. while on vacation. To add to this amazing puzzle is that fact that originally we had planned to leave on vacation June 1. However, one of my daughters decided to take a May-mester class at college which would not end until June 3. Because of that we pushed back our vacation departure date. She ended up dropping the class before I underwent surgery, but had she not taken the class to begin with we most likely would have continued with our vacation plans.

As I lay in the hospital bed the night before the surgery I, as well as my wife and kids, was sort of in shock. I just wanted to wake up from the bad dream and go home. We would just look at each other and say, "I can't believe this is happening." I felt fine. Even the doctors and nurses could not believe that I wasn't showing any symptoms of my condition.

The entire night was a nightmare. Every hour someone was coming into my room to perform some sort of procedure to prepare me for surgery. I got little sleep but did manage to get in quite a bit of prayer time. God was so sweet during those moments as he quieted my fears with promises that he was in control and all would be well. Even so, there were anxious moments when I would need to turn it all over to him again and worship him for his sovereignty and steadfast love. God was faithful to give me the grace to endure each procedure (I now know how a pen cushion feels) and I sensed his presence each time.

The next day about an hour before surgery, my wife, 5 children, daughter-in-law and my mom all gathered around my bed for a time of worship and prayer. One of my daughters led out:

Father, I can't explain this kind of love this kind of grace
I know, I still break your heart and yet you run to welcome me
This is my song of praise to you, for who you are and all that you do
From the moment my life began you have been faithful
You will be faithful, forever faithful, my Father
(Faithful Father, Brian Doerksen, © 1996 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing)

I followed with a short prayer (more out of desperation than holy boldness) asking God to fill the room with his presence. I thanked God for his wonderful faithfulness and released the surgery to his care, acknowledging his sovereignty and wisdom in all things. When I finished one of my daughters began to sing and we joined.

When storms of life assail me without warning
Though they try to steal my joy away
I will find rest in knowing you have saved me
Precious Jesus, rock of my salvation

Though times I stumble and fall short of your standard
I rest assured there is love enough for me
For I find strength in knowing you have saved me
Precious Jesus, rock of my salvation

Precious Jesus, rock of my salvation
Who bore the weight of Calvary's wood and shame
And cleansed my sin in the crimson flow of mercy
Precious Jesus, rock of my salvation
(Rock of My Salvation, Brent Helming, © 1997 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing)

Once I was moved from the Intensive Care Unit to a room following my surgery, one of my daughters brought her ipod with some worship music she had downloaded along with some speakers. She hooked it up and this song began:

I bow down before you, Lord
I bow down before you, Lord
Holy and faithful, righteous and true
You are my king
You are Jesus, you're my Savior
And with all that is in within me I bow down before you

I kneel down before you, Lord
I kneel down before you, Lord
Redeemer and Healer, Almighty God

You are my king
You are Jesus, you're my Savior
And with all that is in within me I kneel down before you
(I Bow Down, Cindy Rethmeier, © 1992 Mercy Publishing)

I wept so hard through that song (boy did it hurt) that I don't remember the next one, but the song after that ministered deeply to me as well.

Why should I fear man
When you made the heavens
Why should I be afraid
When you put the stars in place
Why should I lose heart
When I know how great you are
Why should I give up
When your plans are full of love

In this world we will have trouble
But you have overcome the world

You shine brighter than the brightest star
Your love purer than the purest heart
You shine, filling us with courage and strength to follow you
(You Shine, Brian Doerksen, © 2001 Integrity's Hosanna! Music/ASCAP)

Now it is time, barring a miracle from God, for the slow process of recovery. I can neither drive for a month nor lift anything over ten pounds for two months. At present I am unable to work my part-time job due to those restrictions plus the side effects of the medications I am taking. There is also the added burden of tens of thousands of dollars in medical bills to pay due to the fact we have no medical insurance. However, we know that the way on from here is the same path we took to get here; worship and trust in an Almighty God who is sovereign.

Many times while laying in the hospital bed the Holy Spirit brought this scripture to mind; *Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.* (Psalms 139:16 NKJV) This day did not catch the Father off guard; he was not totally surprised as we were. He not only knew about it, he planned it. He planned it so that it would bring praise to the glory of his grace; that it would bring glory and fame to his name.

We don't know what the future holds, but our resolve is to sing with Habakkuk, *Though the fig*

*tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines;
fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut
off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls
— Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the
God of my salvation. The LORD God is my
strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And
He will make me walk on my high hills. To the*

*Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the
Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.*
Habakkuk 3:17-19

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