



# Life, death *and truth*

**As his newborn son struggles to breathe, a new father encounters his Heavenly Father.**

TRUTH IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT IS A polarizing discussion and one of many issues that continually threatens the unity we've been called to as the church. As the pastor of a young missional church I am often asked to give my perspective on truth. My immediate reaction is to duck before the doctrinal punches start flying. But as a pastor and a fellow Christian I can no longer sit idly by, bandaging the wounded from both sides of the debate. As I consider describing a personal perspective on truth I can't begin by wading chest deep into philosophy or science. It is something much closer to my heart.

In August 2007 my wife and I were blessed with the birth of our first child, Luke. He was born two weeks early but was fully developed and considered full term. As I finished cutting the cord and the doctor laid our new-into-the-world son on my exhausted wife's chest, it became clear that something was not right. Sometime during labor Luke had contracted an aggressive lung infection. Since the lungs are one of the last organs to develop, his breathing was an issue.

Immediately the nurses snatched Luke and began doing things to help him breath better. Initially they gave him oxygen, and I watched as his fragile body strained against the mask that was providing him with 100 percent oxygen. The monitors indicating the oxygen content in his blood continued to drop, and it was clear this wasn't the solution.

Five hours later I was helping my wife, who refused to wait for a wheel chair, hobble down the hall to watch as our newborn son, now a gray bluish color, was whisked away on a ambulance cart with one of the four paramedics manually squeezing air into his lungs. They quickly pushed a Polaroid of Luke into our hands and explained that he was being transferred to another hospital that was better equipped to handle the severity of his condition. About five minutes later I realized the staff had given us the picture because there was a very real chance we would never have another.

Shortly after Luke arrived at the new hospital we were told by phone that he was not improving but in fact was getting worse. My wife, her intravenous line still attached, was



allowed to leave the hospital she had given birth at just hours before so that we could be with our son. When we arrived at the hospital now caring for Luke we were told they did not expect him to live.

We entered the room where they were caring for Luke, and amid noisy machines, monitors and fast moving personnel we saw his small bed. It took a few moments for me to find Luke's small gray body beneath the tangle of wires, respirator tubes and almost a dozen intravenous lines. But once my eyes found him, all else became background. The attending physi-

**It took a few moments for me to find Luke's small gray body beneath the tangle of wires, respirator tubes and almost a dozen I.V. lines. But once my eyes found him, all else became background.**



cian compassionately told us, "He's hanging by a thread."

This was by far the darkest hour of my life. If ever there was a time to doubt God, this was it. This was the moment to question the reality of God, the truth of God. But as my wife and I walked out into the waiting room to allow for a shift change by hospital staff, we were greeted with the open arms and tear-filled eyes of Christ. Unknown to us, members of the church I pastor had gathered at the hospital at 4:00 a.m. to pray and to offer support. They did not offer descriptions of the objective truth of God's sovereignty or well-formed arguments to remind us of God's omniscience or omnipresence. What they did offer was a relationship.

Luke was transferred by air to his third hospital where he received a last-hope treatment called ECMO. We were told that only 50 percent survive the treatment and if Luke did survive there was the strong possibility that his major body systems would experience permanent damage due to the diminished amount of oxygen and increased level of CO<sub>2</sub> in his blood for such an extended period of time.

Almost one month to the day after he arrived in this world, my wife and I brought Luke home with nothing more than a few stitches where they had made an incision to filter his blood through the ECMO machine. He had responded incredibly well to the treatment and made an amazing recovery. For over nine months Anne and I have been enjoying the joyful presence of our son Luke.

Though our journey through darkness ends happily there are some that do not. During our days at Luke's bedside and our nights at the Ronald McDonald House, my wife and I developed relationships with mothers and fathers who did not bring their precious babies home. I don't understand all of this, and I don't think I will ever understand it this side of heaven.

Why were my wife and I blessed while so many others were left to deal with the pain and loss?

This story reminds us of the fragility and miracle of childbirth. But this is also a story of a time when my certainty in God was challenged and when I found that I do not possess the truth but rather it possesses me. I don't know why our son still lives and others die. I don't know all of God, as if God were something I could remain relationally detached from while conducting experiments over a Bunsen burner.

But I am confident that God is faithful and reliable. I am confident in the character of God that can only be known and seen in relationship. I am confident in the truth of God and thankful for an account of God's historical working in the world described in Scripture. I am looking forward to each day as I continue to learn more of that truth just as I did in the shedding fellow church members' tears that morning at the hospital.

Reflecting on this experience has led me to a time and a place where I had the greatest opportunity to doubt God, to question his faithfulness and his love. Would I have the same perspective had Luke not made such a wonderful recovery? I know I would be different. I would have suffered differently and doubted differently, but I am convinced that I would look back and see the same relational presence of Christ through the church.

It's fair to say that a truth about God is that he can be doubted, because God makes contact with reality. God is not a distant other but enters into history and works through an imperfect people called the church to bring about his message of purpose, redemption and future hope available for all humanity. The truth of God is close to my heart in a way that no sensible argument or treatise can explain. I have experienced the truth, am left with no other option but obedience and expectantly await what new aspects of truth God will reveal to me each day.

*Steve Bomar is a student at MB Biblical Seminary and is pastor of InnerSection Church in Fresno, Calif. He wrote this essay on truth last fall for Ministry in a Postmodern World, a class taught by Rick Bartlett.*