

Baby Will's Eulogy

Friday August 7th, 2009

The focus of my talk will be to help you better get to know baby Will.

I plan to share things about Will's life that only Michelle and I know.

I plan to share things about Will's death that we think are important.

And I will conclude with a special request from our family.

But before I begin, I would like to address something Michelle and I feel is important in context with the rest of this talk.

I never knew how much a Eulogy could be for the man giving it, or the people in the audience until this week.

Often times I've been to funerals which resemble a party. The Eulogy is a recount of the great long life lived, and a celebration of extraordinary accomplishments.

The reality is Will was only with us for 82 days. The period from his conception to his death spanned only 50 weeks.

There have been those who have expressed feelings of guilt for not having seen or met Will before he died. It is our deepest wish that you not do that to yourself. No one expects a loved one to die so soon. To be candid, Michelle and I actually feel the fact Will died so soon will be a significant part of his legacy. So if you are one of those harboring such feelings, please free yourself of this unnecessary burden.

I am now going to share with you some things about Will's life that only Michelle and I know

Michelle and I think it is important for you to know that Will was not planned; and that it was very unusual for us not to plan something so significant.

We believe we know exactly when Will was conceived. Now in hind sight it seems only fitting that we both laughed and cried at the same time when we found out Michelle was pregnant again. This memory actually gives us comfort because we believe God has had a special purpose for baby Will from the very beginning.

It was also unusually easy to find a name for Will. Given that Michelle is a teacher, it can be challenging to find names we like which do not remind her of certain former students. Will's name came to us easily very early in the pregnancy, and given Will's death we believe the obvious play on words associated with his name, and the many powerful meanings for the word "will," is now something which is almost divine.

For some reason Michelle had the desire to hold Will so much more than with the other boys.

Will also liked to sit up more than the other boys. Even as a new born, it was as if he could not see enough of the world.

Will and Michelle were rarely apart for his entire life. We would often joke with our neighbors about how she would always carry Will around with her. Given it was summer time and that our other boys love to play outside, Michelle would carry Will around with her in a papoose while both she and Will would watch our other boys play.

Will had strikingly beautiful blue eyes and his physical features were noticeably symmetrical. I always referred to Will as the best looking boy we had. Each of our children has obvious unique gifts, and right from the start it was apparent to me that Will was going to be a lady's man.

One of the neat things we noticed very early is how Will's whole demeanor would light up when his brothers came around. It was remarkable and we first noticed it in the hospital the second day Will was with us.

This might sound strange, and I hope I do not offend anyone... but Will loved to have his diaper changed. After Will's death last week, this memory was the first thing that made Michelle and I laugh again. We

don't know why. It seems easy to just think Will did not like to have anything wet touching his skin, but the way he would throw his arms back and smile made it look as though he was just proud to show off his stuff. It was so funny.

Will also grunted and growled all the time. I actually called him "grunt head." He would be smiling at you all the while grunting and growling. This was the one thing that gave me hope that somehow this pretty boy would be a linebacker instead of a quarterback.

Michelle and I are so grateful for the technology that is available these days. As crazy as it may sound, we are so grateful for our iPhones. We bought our iPhones a little over a month after Will was born, ironically as belated mother's day and fathers day presents. You see, given that Will was our third born, we did not get our normal cameras out nearly as much as we did with the first born. It gives us pause now to think why we ever thought it such a burden to get the big camera out of its case. But we had our iPhones. And as a result we got some amazing images and videos that we now treasure so much more than we could have ever imagined. These images and especially the videos are now so therapeutic for Michelle, me, and our boys. I know it might be hard for some of you to watch because Will has now passed away, but Michelle and I feel it is so important to share one of our treasures with you so that you leave here today remembering him as we do.

Wendy, could you please play the video...

See what I mean. Will was beautiful.

I am now going to share with you things about Will's death that Michelle and I think are important.

The fact Will was our third child enabled Michelle and I to have some sense of what was normal when having children. In hindsight, there are things which really stood out from Will's short life which now give us both comfort and pause.

Will was born on May 11th his great Grandfather Chuck's birthday, and he died on July 31st, his great grandfather Matt's birthday.

Ironically Will's middle name Mathew is in honor of great grandpa Matt who would have had a birthday the day Will died.

In the first days following Will's death I struggled with the idea of whether Will's spirit in heaven was Will the baby or Will the man he was to become. I desperately wanted to talk with the Man he was to become. It might sound strange, but as an entrepreneur and business man, I got peace from the vision of Will the man handing me his first business card. I envisioned him being so proud of the enterprise he was building and the difference he was making for the world.

I ended up settling on the notion that Will's spirit is paradoxically what I needed it to be at the moment I thought of him; sometimes a baby, sometimes the man, and I love to talk with him in heaven.

Michelle and I believe it is important for you to know that the Coroner ruled our son died from something called SIDS. It stands for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Based on what we have learned of SIDS in the past several days, nothing currently known could have been done to save him. It was just his time.

Michelle and I count the fact Will died from SIDS as one of the significant blessings associated with this profound loss. It gives us comfort to know that Will died a peaceful death. Will dying from SIDS also gives us pause in that it was so far out of everyone's control. When coupled with his unplanned birth, Will's unplanned death truly makes us wonder if we are receiving an important signal of God's greater plan for Will and our family.

We are so thankful for the incredible outpouring of financial support to help our family. It is humbling. We are committed to doing something important to support those who are impacted by SIDS. While we are not yet certain how this mission will unfold, we are recording this eulogy to provide the option of using it later.

We think it is important for you to know that Will died at our Babysitter's home during his afternoon nap. This was only the third time Will had been to the babysitter, and that even upon learning of Will's death neither Michelle nor I ever suspected her of any wrong doing. In fact, and quite to the contrary, Michelle and I want you to know we feel so grateful that Will was with our babysitter the day he died.

She is an amazing woman with an amazing family. Neither she nor her beautiful home deserve the burden they now bare for us. But they know we are eternally grateful.

Earlier this week we stopped using the word “tragic” to describe the loss of Will. It is not a “tragic loss,” it is indeed a profound loss, but there are far too many good things occurring as a result of our son’s death for it to be characterized as tragic.

Michelle and I think it is important for you to know two of Will’s heart valves we able to be harvested through organ donation. We count this as another significant blessing associated with our profound loss. It gives us great peace to live with the possibility that Will’s short life saved the life of two other small babies.

Earlier I mentioned that we believe God has had a special plan for Will all along. But it is important to Michelle and I that you know we do not believe God caused Will’s death. We want you to know that we believe God came to us in comfort only after the death of baby Will. We want you to know that throughout this whole ordeal in losing baby Will, we have not experienced any anger toward God. In fact, and quite to the contrary, we feel fortunate to be able to see many of the significant blessings associated with the loss of our Son, and our faith in God has never been stronger.

The power of prayer has been palpable for Michelle and I throughout this entire week. Years ago as a student at Ohio State I was fortunate to meet others from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. I believe the thing I found most profound was that despite all the obvious differences, prayer seemed to be the one constant commonality.

As a people throughout the world I have seen that we are all for the most part raised believing in the power of prayer. And I think that on the whole most of us believe and use this gift as liberally as God intended. But ladies and gentlemen I stand before you today as a stronger man to give testament to the awesome power of this underutilized resource. Do not fall into the trap of believing God somehow has limited capacity, and please never underestimate what a network of people united in prayer can accomplish.

I personally want you to know that Will’s death has shown me many things that I have taken for granted. A great example of this is the network of great people which constitute our families and friends. It was humbling for Michelle and I to see the hundreds if not thousands of people who were

able to make it to Will's showing yesterday. It is humbling for us to see the loved ones who dropped everything and drove days to be here just for us. It is humbling to go to the mailbox and see the door open because it is so full of sympathy cards. And it makes me a little uncomfortable to hear people talk about how well we are doing, because we would never have made it this far without you.

Another important thing I have taken for granted are my boys and wife. I am a better father and husband today than at this time last week. I want you to know last Thursday baby Will could not sleep... I was supposed to be cutting the grass, but because he could not sleep I held him and we rocked in my lazy boy watching TV instead. While I enjoyed that time, I kept thinking about what I needed to get done around the house, and as a result I had no idea how valuable that moment was until Will died the next day. That moment was the last time I held my boy when he was alive.

My hope is that sharing this small part of my story will be especially helpful for you fathers in the audience. I think as men we are often so driven toward accomplishment and our various manly vices that we mistakenly treat time with our children as one more thing to check off the list or some kind of burden that gets in the way of whatever it is we need to go do. I would wager that even those of you who are not guilty of this probably are also not providing or receiving the full value from your role with your children.

I am without question a better father today than I was prior to Will's death. It is unfortunate that it took the death of my best looking son to jolt me into action, but thankfully it did, and I pray that it does not take such a jolt for you to become the man and father you aspire to be.

Before I get to the special request from our family, I want to share with you one final thing about Will's death. Michelle and I feel it is important for you to know that we do not want to "move on." It is important for you to know that we want to "move forward." We will always be the same people; we just have a profound new perspective on life.

Upon receiving the call informing me that Will had died, it was instantly clear to me that forward was the only way out: We would learn from this, somehow become better people, move forward, and Will would always be with us.

I would like to now conclude with a special request from our family

We want you to know that we pray with the boys every night at bedtime. Our prayer follows a set pattern: first we ask for blessings, then we spend time giving thanks (we help the boys participate and we end up giving thanks for some of the neatest things), then we always conclude the same way, and we play it up quite a bit to make it fun for the boys like this:

God, please help daddy and mommy make good decisions, and please help Sam, Nate, and Baby Will grow up to be grea-----t men. Thank you. Amen. Alri----ght.

We'll often then give each other high fives, or great big "giant" hugs, and we laugh.

As a dad one of my favorite things to ask kids is "what are you going to be when you grow up?"

This past week I thought a lot about what Will may have become when he grew up. I think it is the hope of every father that their children become something great. You consider all kinds of possibilities: maybe he'll be a great entrepreneur, Senator, or President. Maybe he'll be a great soldier. Or perhaps he would be a great police officer... that did not think twice about performing CPR on the body of an infant, or a paramedic who sat steadfast with a family as they held the body of their little boy and wept. He might even have become a great pediatrician that personified everything healthcare is supposed to be. Or maybe even a great babysitter who took such care of kids that they often wanted to stay at her house instead of their own. Or maybe he would take after his great grandfather Matt and become a great funeral director who turned on a night light in the room where the little boy's body lived while it awaited its final resting place so that symbolically the boy was not afraid.

It is therapeutic for me to consider what positive impact Will might have made on the world.

Like others who grieve, we are desperate to find meaning in the life which was lost. Michelle and I believe that the only way this death makes any sense is if it forces others to discover or recommit themselves to the things in their own lives which will make a positive impact on the world. In addition,

we feel that our little boy has provided us a powerful example of accomplishment in just two short months of life, and that his accomplishments serve as a challenge for all of us to try and live up to.

In conclusion, Michelle and I feel it is important to draw a distinction between saying and doing. The death of our son has caused us all to take pause and as a result many of us are committed to making some positive change in our own life. This gives Michelle and I peace and we are grateful. But the number of you who Will actually take action as a result of what you now feel is entirely out of our hands. It is now in your hands.

I am certain that Michelle and I Will see each of you many times in the future, and there is little doubt that when we meet you will often recall the loss of baby Will. It is our solemn wish that when you do think of us you also force yourself to consider one very important word: Action.

It is not enough for you to leave here today committed to making a positive change in your own life. It is not enough for you to talk about making a positive change with your spouse, your children, your brother, sister, or your pastor.

We are asking you to thoughtfully consider what it is you Will do to make a difference, write it down, and then do it. Michelle and I do not care what you do or what aspect of the world you try to improve. We just want you to take action.

When you leave this holy temple today, we ask that each of you, children and adults, take one of Baby Will's business cards. And that sometime this week, you write down on that card one thing you Will do.

This is for you to keep. If you take more than one card, or you write on it and send it back to us you are missing the point. Will had some business to take care of and Will's card is for you.

In the end, we are hopeful that if everyone jolted by the death of such a young child actually takes action in making a difference, that the gifts provided by our little boy Will have an exponential effect.

God bless you, and thank you so much for helping us in our hour of greatest need.