

The Life of Wayne Hall

How does one measure the success of life upon this earth? Since we are all travelers on this journey, it is an important question to ponder.

Some gauge it by the number of years, and that is a significant consideration. Many say it all has to do with wealth, fame or power, and the degree of achievement of one or more.

But the best determination of a life well lived is the quality of it – the number of people touched and influenced in a positive way, the ability to make others laugh and to feel good about themselves, the art of communicating to individuals how important they are, and a faith that inspires friends and strangers to seek to know God in a personal walk.

That was Wayne Hall, a Life Care associate who worked in the Media Resource Group from 1997 to 2002, and with Life Care until 2003. Since then, he was vice president for business banking at AmSouth Bank. Only 41 years old, he left an amazing legacy of witness for His Lord, of love for family and friends, of exemplifying the value of relationships and of the need to savor every moment of life.

Jerry Nunnery, one of Wayne's closest friends, tells of a recent golf outing the two had taken. "It was a very rainy day, and it was one of those times that every shot Wayne took, it went awry. You know how he was – everything he did had to be perfect. But it wasn't so on that day, and we sloshed from one hole to another, and Wayne's score kept mounting.

"We got back to the car, got seated and ready to go. Wayne gave a huge sigh, as if to resign himself to probably the worst day of his golfing – and then began to sing. I looked at him and said, 'Wayne, even your worst days are better than my best days.'"

Everybody – and I mean everybody – who knew Wayne Hall loved him. Few people who ever walked the streets of Cleveland commanded such respect and affection as did Wayne. His hospitalization and death have cast a pall across the entire city. Morning radio talk shows on Tuesday were urgently beseeching the prayers of their listeners on his behalf. On Wednesday, the air waves were filled with a somber tone, reflections of Wayne's contributions to civic activities, and the sense of loss with which the community is wrestling. Virtually all who knew him felt as if a family member had died.

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What created, in a relatively short span of years, such regard for a young man who moved to Cleveland in the fall of 1982 to attend Tomlinson College? Among the attractions:

- His joy. Life was exciting. Positive by nature, Wayne never let adversity or setbacks rob him of the peace and happiness that radiated from his countenance. People enjoy being around someone like that.
- His sincere interest in people. If you met Wayne, he carefully recorded your name in his mind, and he remembered you the next time you met, no matter how much time had elapsed. He wanted to know about the things that were important to you. "Early on, he said to me, 'Lola, what about your family? Tell me about them,'" my wife recalls. "And on nearly every occasion later that we met, he wanted to know how my mother, who was in a nursing home, was doing, and he always called her by her first name. When you talked to Wayne, he listened intently to know exactly what you were saying, and what your mood was."
- His caring nature. Relationships were important to him, and building them was constantly his mission. "I couldn't take him to the grocery store with me, unless I knew we had two hours to spend, because he knew everybody we would meet, and he wanted to ask how they and their families were doing," his wife, Susan, said.
- His faith. Christ came first for Wayne, above all else, and he was never ashamed to give a witness to his faith. Upon his passing, the most commonly heard expression has been, "Well, we all know where Wayne is now. If anybody is going to be in Heaven, it is Wayne." His reputation as a prayer warrior, interceding on behalf of others, endeared him to many. A talented singer, his music inspired his audiences.

But he lives on! That's the good news. Christians understand that he inherited eternal life when he accepted Christ as Savior. But he lives on in a physical way as well.

Susan made the decision to harvest his organs for people who needed them. Wednesday afternoon, she told me that already she has learned that his liver went to a 44-year-old man in South Carolina who had less than a week to live; his heart went to a 56-year-old man in Memphis; one of his kidneys went to a woman in Knoxville; his pancreas to a man in Indiana. Wayne would have wanted that. Concerned about Jerry Nunnery's sister, who received a transplanted kidney, Wayne had told Jerry that if he were ever asked to give a kidney, he wanted to have the strength to do so. Even in death, he continues to touch people's lives.

And of this we can be sure: Wayne Hall will be singing with the saints. It will be a praise gathering that is wondrous to behold.

--Beecher Hunter