

BIRTHDAY REFLECTIONS: REMEMBERING AND HONORING MY MOTHER'S MEMORY

Good day! I share a few "bits from bob...." First, personal reflections today--the day before my mother's birthday. Second, spiritual reflections for the day after my mother's birthday. Were my mother still living, tomorrow would be her 103rd birthday. She was born 2-2-22. My sister and I always thought that was special.

Part One: called to be history-makers. Challenging words from Paul, "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, we seek not to please man but to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4). Paul knew that God test hearts. The goal is to pass the test. Where can we see God's testing today? Will we pass the test?

God calls his people to make a difference in the history of the world. We could say that God calls us to be history-makers. That does not mean we can expect to have our names written in the history books. Many important people live their entire lives with no mention in history books. Their story is never written. Great men and women have lived and remained unknown.

In one of my undergraduate Bible classes, Brother Kelcy was asked, "Who's the greatest preacher in our brotherhood?" I have not forgotten his response. "Well, it is probably some preacher we have never heard of, working in some out of the way place that we have never heard of." A lot of people live their lives in obscurity.

We remember those who have gone before us and we rejoice in what they taught us, their influence, how they shaped us, what we learned. This weekend I pay tribute to my mother. With gratitude I honor her. She made a difference in our world because she made a difference to me -- and in the lives of many others.

You and I are called to be the history-makers—impacting future generations. God's plan for the advance of the gospel is a generational chain. In 2 Tim. 2:2, four generations are mentioned -- Paul to Timothy to faithful Christians who will teach others. Merely living in this world makes us a part of history. We are making history. We are a part of a story that could be written. What will be written matters little. Here is what matters! What will the next generation remember? What will they say about us? What will be our influence on their life?

My mother was a significant influence in my life. The most memorable events in our personal histories often come out of difficult experiences. My sister and I still talk about the Great Blizzard of March 1957, several weeks without electricity. I remember mother packing things from the refrigerator in snow in a #10 wash tub which was placed outside. That blizzard is described online -- 48 hours, endless wind, blowing snow, no visibility. Jan and I talk about the almost two feet of snow the first Thanksgiving weekend that we lived in Michigan. We talk about the January 1978 Great Lakes blizzard when I was stranded at Great Lakes Christian College in Canada. In our nation we remember tragedies and hardships.

Let us resolve to be history-makers. When no one else notices, God notices. God knows. I want to live a life that honors God and honors my mother, especially in difficult days. May my life be a blessing to others. I pray that we all will take time to say thank you and honor those to whom honor is due.

Part Two—history-makers step up and distinguish themselves in times of difficulty

Difficulties and challenges raise the question, "Will we pass the test?" My mother was to me a hero in the Christian faith. She endured, kept on, always faithful. I seek personal applications. How can we be history-makers who model faith? I have learned much from missionaries who went before me. I learn from listening to their stories, following their examples. Every passing year confirms the importance of mission work focused on facilitating the work of national workers and national churches. During the pandemic, the national workers were exactly where they wanted and needed to be. Many national churches flourished. The importance of churchwide leadership training was validated--churches could function when they were forced to meet in smaller groups. The potential for outreach during difficult days was demonstrated.

Historically the church has flourished during hard times. That potential becomes reality only if a church can change and adapt and meet new challenges in new ways. I see the value of empowering local churches, fulfilling God's plan for evangelism and church planting. I rejoice to walk alongside churches and leaders providing counsel and guidance, helping them toward healthy spiritual living. Churches have doubled and multiplied church planting even in difficult days, reflecting hearts that are shaped by the gospel as they reach out and evangelize, establish more churches using their own resources with little or no outside help.

In the fall of 2019, Dwight Pierce encouraged me to consider virtual learning opportunities possibilities as a part of my mission-ministry work. During the last part of 2019 we developed a plan for virtual assemblies and classrooms using various technology platforms. My biggest question was, “How are we going to help the churches across Latin America adapt and adopt the new possibilities of technology? Then the pandemic hit. Suddenly hundreds of churches were interested in virtual classrooms and meetings, conferences, and workshops. I had thought it would take several years to communicate with churches to encourage and train them to use the virtual technology. God brought it to a reality in a few weeks.

The use of technology—audios, videos, written materials available on websites, and social media exploded. Evangelism moved online. Souls are being won. A brother in Cuba reports that my online video series is bearing tremendous fruit. The power of the word of God. In every moment, God uses difficult times to draw Christians closer to him in their daily walk, fortifying foundations, opening new vistas for the gospel.

I am celebrating history-makers whose story has never been written—my mother and many others. I pray that future generations will remember our vision, our commitment, our confident faithfulness, our renewed spirits, our leadership, our flexibility, our persistence. May we be history-makers. In a world where darkness often seems to have the upper hand, I pray that others will see in us a reflection of those who made a difference for us. Their example, calling us to be examples. Heroes of faith—generation after generation.