

## Thoughts of a Carpenter's Son

*Dr. James Dunn presided over my dad's funeral. I asked for permission to say a "few" words. I was compelled that for all his hard work in raising three children into adulthood and becoming parents ourselves, I should stand and remember him.*

Clark H. Smith  
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My father, Carl A. Smith, was a carpenter. After his death my brother and I went through the tool boxes that held as many memories as they did tools. There was a wood plane... how well I remember playing with the shavings it made. Dad's hammer... for the twenty-eight years of my life he had that hammer. Everything Dad made, practically everything in the house, was made with that hammer.

At the funeral, in front of us, was a beautiful oak casket. Finely matched wood, beautiful workmanship. Dad, himself, would have admired it. Yet, it too, was nothing more than a tool box. In 1913, God fashioned a tool that would serve him well for 73 years in building His Kingdom.

In front of Dad's Bible, now tattered and worn as it should be, he had written years ago: "Every Christian is a missionary. Every unsaved person is a mission field." That pretty well sums up the my father's life. At the funeral, the pastor paralleled my father's life to Abraham. Abraham was called to go into far and unknown places to carry out the Will of God. So too, was my father. The pastor wondered what Sarah's reaction might have been when Abraham expressed his calling and mission. In early 1952, on the way to the church he pastured, Dad listened quietly as Mom read a one-paragraph plea for missionaries to come to Alaska. At the end of church that day, Dad called a deacons' meeting, announced his intentions, and resigned to become a missionary in a land he'd barely heard of. My mom's reaction is expressed in the title of her favorite hymn, "Wherever He Leads I'll Go".

My parents arrived in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1952 with a 10 year old daughter and all their worldly possessions in the back of a truck they called Rosebud. There were five blocks of pavement in Fairbanks at that time and a mission field in every direction for as far as the eye could see. Their first church was at North Pole, Alaska. How's that for going to the farthest ends of the Earth!

My father's life was all a matter of timing - God's timing. In 1954, still with a young wife, a younger daughter, and an even younger church, my Dad contracted a horrible illness. Dad had been hunting and shot a rabbit. While skinning the rabbit he cut himself and soon fell ill. The doctors in Alaska then were barely more sophisticated than their patients. They thought he had cancer, Hodgkin's disease. All attempts at healing failed, my mother put my father on an airplane to come to Texas for further treatment, he was not expected to survive and return. Once in Texas, his illness was accurately

diagnosed and successfully treated, Rabbit Fever. Sick rabbits make sick hunters. Dad returned to Alaska to continue his husbanding, his fathering, and his pastoring. How I wish I had been there on his return.

In the winter of 1969, Dad took my brother and me out "ice fishing". (We actually didn't go fishing, but it was a good sounding excuse to drive out in the middle of nowhere and just play in the forests and on the frozen river ... sort of frozen. Dad and I were walking down the frozen river. In the winter, at 40 degrees below zero, the ice will freeze two feet thick on the slow running rivers. Dad saw that we were approaching a place where the river was running shallow and not frozen at all, but bubbling up through the ice over the rocks. He told me to wait up and let him take the lead, to avoid the thin ice. He took one step to move even with me and one more to step ahead. One more step and he disappeared from sight, down through the ice and into the brown water, itself not much above freezing.

In northern climates they continuously run announcements on how to pull people out of the ice. They don't talk about the fact that grown men in water-soaked parkas are far too much for two scared youngsters to pull out onto the brittle rim of the hole that just sent them down. God was there. Dad came straight back up through the hole in which he had disappeared and I gave him something to hold onto and get out. But then what? It was 30 or 40 degrees below zero, half a mile from the dry, but freezing cab of a pickup, and forty miles from home. God was there, and the trip home was a fearfully exhilarating race. Dad recovered beautifully, probably too shocked to get sick. My brother went down to the elementary school to inform my mother of the trouble. The consummate big brother, he began his tale to Mom, "Now, Mom, don't worry. Everything is alright, but..."

Five days before Christmas, my father died. Behind the podium at the funeral was a baptistery, above it hung a large Christmas wreath. That was the story of my father's life. He was personally moved by and committed to life and teachings of Jesus Christ. I cannot think of a more appropriate time of year for a person of my father's beliefs to go to his reward. I celebrate the fact that he was Home on Christmas Day.

After going through Dad's tool boxes, we moved inside to look at his papers. Dad was always jotting down his thoughts on a wide variety of subjects. I think it is important to share some of the thoughts; they tell us so much about the things Dad thought, but rarely said.

Although he never talked to us children much about his family, he was frequently thinking about his family:

*The world seems to stop and my mind starts running backward to by-gone events and times. I become lonesome. Thoughts of family and friends seem to pile up in my emotions. A family for whom I held great respect as a teenager.*

Dad goes on to talk about brothers and sisters still living and those who have passed

away. His quietness on this topic is quiet like Dad, saying the least about the things that moved him the most.

As I have said, Dad's purpose and accomplishments in life took the sting out of his passing at Christmas. No long before his stroke, Dad must have been thinking about his own Christmases as a child.

*The Christmases I remember were those between age 5 to 15. There were no gifts given or received nor seldom a toy of any kind.*

*The best part of our Christmas was to get up early and run to our stocking which we had hung on the back of chairs, on the dining table, or on a nail on the wall. The stockings were filled with apples, oranges, and Candy. (Dad capitalized the word Candy) We always looked forward to the ribbons of Candy with multicolored stripes.*

*At noon came a large dinner of ham and chicken. There was usually pumpkin pie and cake.*

*There were usually a few cousins, nephews, and nieces along with older brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles.*

One of the last papers we found was indicative of Dad's truest passion in life (next after his love for my mother). He titled it "Locating Possibilities", with his subtitle, "Locating A Building Site."

*It has been my thinking that every person should have a Baptist Church in walking distance of them, but that is about obsolete these times since people don't walk so much anymore.*

*I believe any new work should be a respectable distance from any other established church, but many times a railroad, a river, vacant land, etc. creates a break that separates people from a church they could easily attend.*

*At one place where I started a mission that later became a good church, there was a highway, or actually a busy street that divided a community. People would travel that street going into the city, but would not go away from the city.*

This writing shows how my father studied his mission work. Throughout his house there were 3x5 cards (a trademark of my Dad's which he was never without). These cards contained the names, addresses, and ages of every member of a family that he thought was a prospect. He usually had some special notation as to the family's needs.

In 1977 or 1978 my dad heard of a man who wrote his pastor a "love letter" every day. The man was president of a large, successful home building company in Dallas, but he always found time to write his pastor. Dad was very moved by this, I think he was

touched in large part because it was the kind of support he had needed so badly in his mission work, but seldom received it. Not wanting to be found guilty, himself, of failing to show support, one of Dad's last notes reads:

*Dear Pastor,*

*I know a man who is rather busy on a large scale, but he claimed that he wrote his pastor a love letter every day. I promise not to bother you that much, but maybe "one letter, one time."*

*Thank you for letting us become a part of Harris Avenue Baptist Church.*

*At our age and health status we will not be as active as we would like to be, but we hope, as we always have, to be able to find some small way of contributing.*

*I have often felt that every member of every church should have a special task or contribution to his church more than the minimum of giving money or filling a pew.*

Their pastor, Dr. Dunn, told Mom and Dad that he hoped they would feel at home in their new church. When I heard this I told Dr. Dunn that he would have to peel the paint off the walls and pull up the carpet. Mom and Dad were always building a church and would scarcely know what to do in a finished one.

And yet, they always did feel at home, because home is where the heart is. The people of Harris Avenue Baptist Church and the retirement center were great friends to my parents and are my mother's greatest earthly comfort in her time of loss. I do praise God for their lovingkindness.

As I said, my middle name is Hopkins, named after a great preacher and dear friend of my parents. When I was born, Dr. Hopkins' widow wrote a letter telling how pleased she was that I had been given the late Dr. Hopkins' name. She told us that Dr. Hopkins' favorite Bible verse was II Timothy 4:7-9. I read the verses boldly and clearly at my father's memorial service. It remains me so much of his life and his purpose for living.

*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.*

I closed my father's memorial service with this prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Your Son, Jesus Christ, taught us to pray: 'Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.' Today we are here to pay respect and state our love to our earthly father, husband, and friend. Dear God, I praise Your name for the man that he was. I praise Your name for blessing us with his

time among us. We know that you had your purpose in sending him. Your Son also taught us to pray for Your kingdom to be established on earth. Oh Lord, we pray for that great day, the day we will be with our Father again. Amen.

At the service we sang "Amazing Grace." This song has become somewhat of a standard in many churches and like most standards, we tend to take them for granted. This is unfortunate because of the beautiful thought behind them. The last verse of the song is now so important to me. I knew my father for a short twenty-eight years, and we now must live without him until we, ourselves, can join him in paradise. When you sing these words, please, I pray, think of the celebration we will have when we are all together again, forever.

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise,  
Than when we'd first begun.*

Clark H Smith

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