

#278 “I Want to Tell You About My Grandpa”

By Brent Barnett

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I want to tell you about my grandpa. He just passed away this last week to go and meet His Savior. He faced a long battle with cancer, and he persevered with dignity, compassion, concern for others, and joy and hope until the end. He lived well in Christ, and he died and is with Him even now in paradise. But the closing chapter with the cancer does not tell the whole story even though it does paint a consistent picture of what defined my grandpa.

My grandpa lived through the Nazi invasion of Holland where he was born. His family housed a Jewish girl and saved her life at great risk to their own. They stayed in contact even decades after the fact. My grandpa knew what it was to barely have food to eat as a young man, and he knew what it was to eat at Cracker Barrel and have more than he could eat as a grown man. Eighty-four years in the scheme of things isn't that long to be alive, but from the human perspective a lot happened during that time. He served in the Dutch navy, he immigrated to America, he learned the English language, and he, while still fluent in Dutch, could master any crossword puzzle he put his mind to. He taught Sunday School, he fed the hungry, he testified to others about the Creator while on his incredibly long hikes and walks, and his Bible was always at his bedside because he did a tremendous amount of study. He always had a Bible question to ask me as a young man and as an adult. His questions were never trivial, for he never had a trivial view of God. His purpose was always to know God more, to dig deeper into His Word, and to encourage that desire in His children and grandchildren. He never pretended to be a Bible scholar in the formal sense, but he knew the Word and believed it with all of his heart. Everything about my grandpa was clothed in humility. There was nothing arrogant about him. He didn't cower before “important” people as if he was inferior, and neither did he fail to relate in kindness to those the world might consider or label as lesser or inferior. My grandpa was always concerned for “the least of these.” His Christianity wasn't made up of empty religious acts, but it was motivated and born of love which only Christ could author and perfect. He was a gentle man but not weak in any way. He was the hardest worker I have ever known, having a true servant's heart, willing to do the most menial of tasks and do it with great fervor and diligence as unto the Lord with no care or concern for the applause of people.

I can't say that I ever took him for granted, but I think that the more I study the Bible and realize what God desires of man, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), the more I realize what a privilege and honor I was given to know this man and to call him my grandpa. He was unassuming, just a normal, nice guy, but, in retrospect, I think he was somebody great in the kingdom of God because he was indeed the servant of all.

So why do I share this, and why should you, dear reader, care? A lot of people talk about leadership, influence, and iron sharpening iron, and they think that personality, image, and imparting information is all that it takes to disciple another and leave a legacy of goodness and mercy in their lives. But I can tell you that there is nothing so remarkable spiritually and yet unremarkable by the standards of unbelieving man as to meet a person and be sharpened by him into the image of Christ without realizing he was

even trying to do so. To be in the presence of somebody who just loved others, who exuded kindness, who spoke of the things of Christ in such a natural manner that you didn't even realize you were being disciplined at the time, is truly something I am only now even beginning to recognize as being the marvelous testimony that it was. Nothing he said about Jesus and His Word was contrived, forced, or sold, but it was only spoken of and lived out in the most natural and normal kinds of ways. For my grandpa, it was never about how many church activities he signed up for or how many people he formally mentored. He just loved, he just served, he just was himself, and he just shined the light of Christ wherever he was. This is not to say that he didn't preach the gospel, hand out tracts, or give to those in need, but he never recounted all that he did as if it was a badge of honor. He just did all the right things with the right attitude and proper perspective right under our noses that, if we had ears to hear and eyes to see, we couldn't help but be impacted in kingdom ways.

He just was salt, and he just was light because Christ loved him first and taught him to love. Of course, he made mistakes, and obviously he wasn't perfect. But this is not what stands out, and it is not the legacy that was left. Things changed for him when as a young adult he came to faith in Jesus Christ, and he along with my grandmother, who also came to faith in Christ, raised his children in Christ and prayed for all of his grandchildren with my grandmother every night. I even found out the last time that I talked to him on the phone that he had made a commitment along with my father-in-law at my wedding to pray for my wife and me every day, a promise which he said he had kept. Wow! For my grandpa, ministry was never something that superseded family, but it started with family and proceeded from there. Prayer mattered to my grandpa even while on his hospice bed.

Knowing that he had only a few months left to live, I will never forget him saying the same thing that he had grown accustomed to saying over the years. He quoted from Psalm 23:6, saying, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." His other favorite was, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting," a phrase often repeated in the Psalms. Jesus was very real to my grandpa, and he knew Him and walked in Him. There was no compartmentalization of Jesus or a separating of regular life and activity from faith. Jesus was never bottled up, but he was never forced on others either. Love was the message lived, and it was the message he shared to any who would listen.

My grandma deserves great credit as well, for they were always a team, praying together, serving together, loving others together, supporting one another, and doing life together. Neither craved the spotlight or the recognition of others, but those who had the chance to know them know that they were impacted by them whether they tried to be or not.

I am so glad that as believers we will meet again in paradise. Eighty-four years is not the end for the Christian, but it is only the beginning of eternity in heaven. I can only pray that I can honor my grandpa's legacy by imitating him as he imitated Christ. I am so grateful to have known him, and it is even more special in retrospect. I hope that maybe you, too, can be impacted by his life and testimony and that one day you can look forward to meeting him in eternal bliss. I know he has been praying for Relevant Bible Teaching, and so I know that he has been praying for you. You will be missed, Grandpa,

but it was God's appointed time. Jesus does all things well, and thank you for showing us just how good and faithful He is.

If you are interested, his obituary can be found at the following link:

<http://www.atchleyfuneralhome.com/obituary/John-Henry-Koerten/Sevierville-TN/1222139>

Pay special attention to the comments in the "guestbook" section because that in many ways verifies exactly what I have hoped to communicate in this tribute. More similar comments can be found here: <http://www.legacy.com/guestbooks/wausaudailyherald/guestbook.aspx?n=john-koerten&pid=165658409&cid=full>

Lastly, by God's grace, come Thursday my third child and second son will be safely delivered, and he will be given the middle name of Johan, my grandpa's Dutch name in honor of his memory and testimony. This I told my grandpa before his passing. By God's grace, I can't wait to tell my son of his namesake!