

Someone to Reach Back For

My wife and I have had a wonderful week together! Every year we have had allocated in our budget an item called "Pastor's Conference." It has been several years since we took advantage of it. This year I sensed the need to do so more than ever. It was a conference for which much of the cost would be defrayed because the Southwide Baptist Fellowship was flying me up to Chattanooga anyway to speak at the fiftieth annual conference. Quite frankly, Mrs. Pope and I could use a little more time together away from our normal day-to-day activities. But we have had enough time to have been refreshed.

We were blessed to have been in conference with Dr. Lee Roberson, ninety-six years old, who preached fifty years ago at the first Southwide Baptist Fellowship. It was also good to hear Dr. Jerry Falwell, another great man of God who has carried the torch of faith as pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia and founder of the Moral Majority. Even though he had two close brushes with death this past year, he still had the fire for preaching in his bones!

The greatest blessing unpredictably came when my wife and I drove over to Dalzell, South Carolina. This is a small community outside of Sumter. More importantly (to us), it is the home of our oldest daughter, Heather, her husband, Jared and our oldest grandchild, Caleb. It wasn't long before Caleb, like most children who have a visit from grandparents or someone other than the normal residents such as Mom and Dad, will test the parameters of restrictions to see what he can now get away with. This is somewhat disconcerting for young parents, who so desperately want their kids to be on best behavior when company comes over. Be comforted in knowing, misbehavior at a time like this is normal and it becomes your duty to remind them right is still right and wrong is still wrong, with or without company. By the way, you will be in for a lot of trouble if your child ever discovers there are zones where disobedience is acceptable. It takes time to lay down the law and you will be embarrassed as they push the envelope to the edge, but be patient, be consistent - the pay off will be well worth it!

The blessing in disguise came when not long after we had arrived, Caleb began to "push the envelope." His dad caught him and the little guy was in trouble. Daddy took him by the hand and began to walk him down the hall for a very personal father-to-son conversation of a very punitive and corrective manner. I knew what he was in for and as a grandfather, I felt compelled to go to another area of the house so I would be protected from what might happen in that room. The cutest thing occurred as Caleb was being escorted down the hallway - he spotted his grandmother, whom he calls "Amma" and in an act of desperation, as his dad was taking the doorknob in his hand, Caleb reached back and took the hand of Amma. The worried look on his face pled with her to please be with me, go with me into this room, and deliver me from this trial. At his young age, he has learned, alas! If my grandmother can be with me, whatever happens in this room will go much better for me. I smiled, walked away and knew exactly what he was doing. Not to leave you hanging, his dad took him by himself and made him face up to the music. One day when the lad is older he'll be reaching back for his dad's hand long after we are gone and may the Lord help the little guy to find in his predecessors what we found in ours.

This has been a hard year on our son-in-law; since on a Sunday this year his grandfather passed away and then the next day, his wonderful aunt joined her dad in the glory prepared for God's children. Jared allowed us to see some pictures dear to his heart. The opening picture was of his Papa in his World War II uniform, seated lovingly beside his little girl, who just a few decades beyond would be seated with him in Heaven. A soldier who fought in the Battle of The Bulge with Patton. Strong enough, brave enough to fight the Nazis in inclement weather in harm's way, yet tender enough to dote over his little girl once he's back in The States much like the others of this greatest generation, a renaissance man who possessed values and absolutes. Jared and his family, full of preachers and servants of the Lord paid tribute to Papa and Aunt Carolyn as their bodies lay in tandem in caskets in front of them an old soldier of the cross, who ministered the Word of God and the church organist, an incomparable mom and

grandmother.

Tying these two events together, I see something that makes an important point in a sometimes-pointless world. Gordon Victor Day, Jared's grandfather died on a Sunday. The hero, who fought under Patton, considered it an even greater honor to fight under the banner of His Captain, The Lord Jesus Christ as one who ministered the Gospel. On that cloudless Sunday evening in April Papa mounted the pulpit, announced his text and began to preach on "Being Grounded in The Faith." While standing between heaven and earth, the Lord called him home. The great man fell in the pulpit and, while preaching about His Lord, was soon in the presence of His Lord. He received an honorable discharge and now awaits his medals of honor at the Judgment Seat. So, I see Jared, a grown married man of his own, able when life gives forth it's testing to reach back for the faith of his ancestors. Two boys, one reaching back for support from Amma when in trouble, another boy able to reach back to Papa and take by the hand the same values that saved America from the world's threats and even more importantly, the values that preserve our faith that grounds us to the unchanging, always rewarding Word of God. What are you reaching back for today? If you have relatives who have been champions for the Faith, reach back, and take hold of those same promises - they will still work today! If you don't have a rich legacy of faith, then under God let the Lord give you "*...the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" (Jude 3). And remember it's not real until you own it for yourself, whether first, second, third, or fourth generation Christianity!

- Pastor Pope -

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