

A Son Remembers

Reflections by Pastor Chuck Smith Jr.

There is a question that frequently comes up regarding Christian leaders. Did this person really live and practice the things that he or she preached? I've made a short list of things about my dad that you may not know, and I think that it answers that question regarding his life.

First of all, Dad was definitely amazed by God's grace. In 1971, the Calvary Chapel services were being held in a big circus tent on the west side of the property. It was Sunday night after Dad had been teaching the Bible, and talking, and praying with a dozen people afterward. He and I were the only ones left. We walked into the parking lot, and when we reached his car he turned around and said, "Look at that!" And I remember seeing a full moon hung in the sky with its silvery light spilling on top of the canvas of that circus tent. Thinking about the growing ministry in that circus tent, Dad said, "Chuck, did you ever in your wildest dreams imagine that God would be doing something like this?" He said it with joyful wonder—he was always surprised God was using him.

You know, King David was taken from the sheepfold to shepherd His people, Israel (2 Samuel 5:2). God brought David from obscurity into a significant role of leadership. And I think in a similar way, God took my dad from serving in small rural churches into a role of leadership in one of the biggest Christian movements of the 20th century. And my dad never forgot that it was not his cleverness or great talent or strategic plan that dropped this ministry into his lap, but that it was the grace of God. He knew that it wasn't about him.

Dad sincerely believed what he taught. The times that Dad was in the hospital, my brother Jeff and I would trade off spending the night with him. And the last few times that he was in the hospital he would talk in his sleep. It will be two weeks ago tonight that I was lying in his room at Hoag Memorial listening to the respirator and the occasional cough or muttering that came from my dad. Then as clearly as you can imagine, he said, "We shall all be with the Lord, and it will be glorious." That

particular statement came out as fluent as it ever had when he stood here [in CC Costa Mesa] in his best days. Dad's head and heart were filled to overflowing with the Scriptures, and that's why it came out in his sleep. The Scriptures were the lens through which Dad looked at everything. It's how he understood things. He'd go to the Bible and say, "Well, what does the Bible say?"

Dad also laughed in his sleep. Isn't that precious? It was a quiet, joyful laughter. If you want someone to rejoice with you, well, my dad's the man. He genuinely rejoiced over God's work in your life. There were many times that I observed him while he was on the telephone with someone who had called to report some great thing in their life and he would say, "That's wonderful! Praise the Lord! That's glorious!" And you know, he did not just say it with his voice like an actor; he said it with his whole body and with exuberance. Whenever you called to tell him that a prayer had been answered, a relative had come to faith, a marriage had been saved, or a timely verse had turned the tide, he really took joy in your success.

Dad was full of surprises. One of my favorite images of Dad is something that my brother filmed. We were at the river, and Dad was water skiing. Jeff is standing on the shore filming as Dad was coming in. Dad whipped the ski rope as he came past the wake and into shore, and immediately it was obvious that Dad was coming in way too fast. And I saw it in front of me and there was nothing I could do to stop it—he was about to do a face plant. And sure enough, his skis, as soon as they hit the sand, stopped, and he went flying forward, and his legs were moving so fast trying to catch up to the other part of his body. And as soon as he had caught himself, I mean, he was still in motion, but as soon as he caught himself and

knew he wasn't going down, he looked over at my brother with this huge smile and gave a victory fist punch, "Yeah!" I wondered, *Where did he pull that out of?*

Dad seemed most comfortable and himself around carpenters, plumbers, and auto mechanics. Of course, Dad could settle in to conversation with anyone who was sincere. I think he just liked real people, and he liked being real. Try to engage him in chit-chat or small conversation; you wouldn't hear a whole lot out of him. If you wanted to get Dad going, ask him a question about the Bible and he could go and go and go, and love every minute of it. Then you had touched something close to his soul.

Dad loved God's creation. He seemed drawn to nature. And Dad could point out all kinds of constellations in the heaven, he knew the name of almost every flower, he definitely could identify any fruit-bearing tree even if it wasn't in season. He just loved God's world.

Dad lived for your growth in the knowledge and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why was he here teaching, as sick as he was, disregarding his doctors and his family? Because he loved you. He loved being with you and teaching you. He cared about you and your progress. And he felt that if he brought God's Word to you, in the power of God's Spirit, and helped you to see Jesus here and now, that he could help you find your way.

I loved it when I had Dad all to myself. I was a junior high school kid, and Dad had been asked to speak at a summer camp in the mountains, and he took me with him. I was assigned to a bunk in a cabin with 15 other guys who did not know that Chuck Smith was my dad. But one night he came up to me at my table in the dining hall, and he said, "Chuck, come with me." Now, no one at the table knew why he had singled me out. They probably assumed I was in trouble. I know I did. So I followed him out of the dining hall and over to the swimming pool, and when he produced the key and put it in the padlock of the gate, he had a big smile on his face. And for 45 minutes, he and I jumped off the board, diving under water; we were racing across the pool and having fun together, just the two of us.

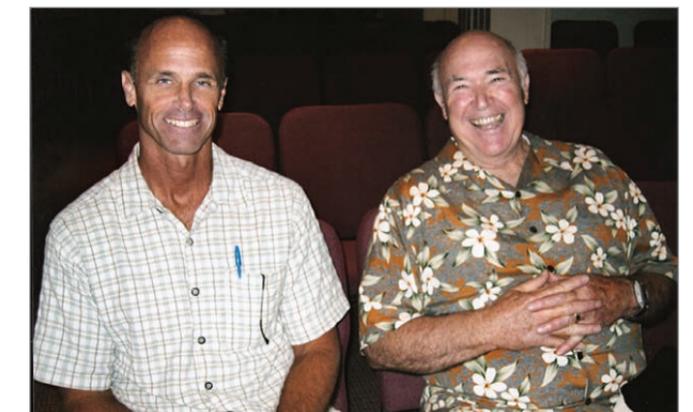
Usually we had to share Dad with the world, and he knew that we had not volunteered for the sacrifices that were required for his ministry. So he tried to make up for it

when he could. Mom once explained it to me. She said, "Your father is a great man, and God has given him a great mission. And sometimes the people around a great man must sacrifice to fulfill his calling."

Now I'm sure some people are wondering, *How will Kay survive without Chuck?* The same way she has always survived his absences—by surrendering Dad to the will of God. Think about this: Every time you see a photograph of my dad with a group of pastors or with various people around the country or the world, that represents a moment when Mom was at home holding down the fort by herself. But, she found encouragement in 1 Samuel 30:24, where David gave a formal decree that the share of those who went into battle would be the same as those who stayed to guard the supplies. She felt her calling was to stay and guard the supplies while Dad went into battle. Of course, Mom's heart is broken, for until now, her hero has always returned home after his adventure. But Mom has learned how to find comfort in the Lord, and she will continue to do that.

Now as for Dad, if someone in heaven would go to him and say, "Chuck Smith, how can you be here? What about those thousands of people at Calvary Chapel who look to you for your guidance and your scriptural teaching and leadership? What about your wife and children?" I'm quite certain that Dad would look around at the splendor of heaven where it is obviously shining with the infinite goodness and power of God, and with a big smile, say, "They'll be fine." ☞

This is a summary of a message given at CC Costa Mesa on the first Sunday after Pastor Chuck's passing.



Chuck Jr., pictured with his dad, is the second of Pastor Chuck and Kay's four children.