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Every life is significant and precious to God. Every life is unique. Every person has a unique personality with unique gifts and ways in which they serve God and add value to life here on earth. Some people's lives are high-profile. They achieve fame for their accomplishments and are well known. Millions or billions of other people are just "ordinary" folks, living their lives in obscurity, unknown by the masses, yet, in God's eyes, not one of them is insignificant.

My mother never achieved any sort of notoriety or fame in the eyes of numbers of people. She lived a quiet, ordinary life. The wife of a blue-collar machinist and farmer, the mother of five children, grandmother of twelve, great-grandmother of seven, and great-great grandmother of one that we know of, she carried out the normal duties of a housewife and mother/grandmother, plus working for quite a few years in various job positions. All of this, though certainly not unusual or spectacular, was of great importance to the family members involved. She did all of these things well, and is to be honored for her love and service. She was a good wife, mother, and grandmother, and those of us in her family so appreciate the love and care she showed to us.

Biographies are normally only written about extraordinary people of fame and high achievement. This will not be a biography per se, because my mother didn't do spectacular things that far exceed what others have done. What I want to highlight is her *spiritual* pilgrimage and the ways in which her life touched others in that realm. I'm sure she would agree with me when I say that is what meant the most to her and what made her life so special to all who knew her.

Why is this important? Why even spend time writing about it or reading what's been written? Because God works through ordinary people in extraordinary ways, and it is important to recognize the impact that an "ordinary" housewife and mother can have for eternity. My mother's story is very ordinary, and that's exactly why it is worth telling. Others of us who are "ordinary" need to realize how valuable we are, how important what we do in quiet ways can be, and how God can use us to change the world.

Mom was born September 3, 1922 and was raised to believe in God. Her family attended the Episcopalian Church. She told me she never remembers a time when she didn't believe in the Lord. There were times in her youth when she used to spend extra time in prayer, extra time at the altar. But the church she attended did not teach the necessity of a born-again experience, and no one in her family or among her acquaintances knew anything about such things.

It wasn't until Mom got married and had children that she began to really see her need for more of God. It's that way with many. In fact, the Bible, in Genesis 4:26, speaks of how, when Adam's son Seth had his first child, that's when men began to call upon the name of the Lord! Raising children is a real challenge for anyone, but if those children have serious problems, it is especially hard for their mothers. All five of my mother's children have had



marriage problems, three of the five have been divorced at least once, and two of the five have attempted suicide more than once. In addition, our oldest sister took anti-depressants and tranquilizers, and all the rest of us drank alcohol to excess, smoked cigarettes, marijuana and hashish, or used other drugs. Three of the five took drugs like LSD, PCP, barbiturates or speed. I myself (Warren) was a constant drug user for almost five years, and in the beginning of my drug use, I actually smoked pot in front of my mother and urged her to try it. While serving in the US Navy, I even jumped ship in the Philippines and tried to go AWOL. I called my mother to tell her what I was doing. She was very worried and troubled by the many problems our family was encountering. It was that sense of desperation which led her to seek for help.

I do not know what led her to seek help in God. I suppose her upbringing made that a logical choice, but I don't know if anyone shared the gospel with her or pointed her in that direction. It may have just been the Holy Spirit Himself who drew her. Ultimately of course, we know that is His work. But usually there are human instruments involved as well. Unfortunately, I do not have detailed knowledge in that regard. I do know that my mom read a book that greatly impacted her. The book was titled, "Come, Help Change the World" by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International (known today as Cru.) Though I have never read the book myself, I know its basic thesis. Bill Bright said if you wanted to change the world, you'd first have to experience change within yourself. That was only accomplished by yielding one's life to Christ as Lord and Savior. Bright included a prayer at the end of his book, a sort of model prayer one could pray to experience God's salvation.

I never even saw that book until years later, when I had become a Christian myself and was doing missions work in Mexico. The first version of the book I ever saw was in Spanish, which I spoke and read by that time. I got goose bumps and tears came into my eyes as I saw the cover, and realized it was through that book that God had first spoken to my mother and started her on the course that would change all of our lives. I knew I was a missionary and a minister because of the impact of that slim little book and the truth it transmitted!

My mother read that book and prayed that prayer on her own. From what I recollect of her testimony, she didn't see any flashing lights or hear any angel's voices or ringing bells at the moment. It was just a quiet decision and an unspectacular experience as she asked Jesus Christ to come into her life, change her, forgive her sins, and help her to live as He would want her to. But that was the beginning of her new spiritual life as a child of God, and as I've already said, it was to have a huge impact, not only on her personally, but on all of us, her children, and many others besides.

Mom realized she'd entered a whole new world by giving her life to Christ. She was like a newborn baby, with so much to learn! Again, I don't know the details of how she proceeded, but I do know she ended up making a connection with a group called The Navigators, a ministry that specializes in leading people in discipleship. They had small group meetings at which they taught scripture memorization, prayer, and evangelism. They were good at helping people, especially those who were new to faith, to walk out the Christian life day-to-day. The Navigators were instrumental in building a firm foundation for my mother's faith. They also instilled in her a quiet passion to evangelize,

to lead others to faith in Christ. They made it plain to my mom that evangelism was crucial, it was something every Christian should be about, and it was the main reason God had even left us on the earth. That would stay with her for the rest of her life. In addition, she made contact with people there who would play important roles later on. One couple in particular named Ken and Shirley Zenzel would later be very instrumental in getting one of her sons, Warren, saved and delivered.

Very shortly after her own salvation experience, Mom began to see the need to tell others about the Lord Jesus. He had made such a difference in her own life, she just wanted to share Him with other people, and especially with her family. She began to tell us about the Lord from time to time, dropping hints about how everybody needed Jesus and Jesus could help with this or that, etc. We didn't respond well to it. Most of us probably thought Mom was just getting old, so this "religion thing" was becoming an obsession. As I mentioned, the Navigators had taught her to witness, but also to pray for any unbelievers she knew, so she just began to do that regularly, especially praying for her troubled family.

She was not under any Pentecostal or Charismatic influence at this time, so her prayers weren't "super-spiritual" or especially profound or anything of the kind. She didn't "bind" or "loose" or make "positive confessions" or anything like that. She just prayed very simple prayers for the salvation of her family. I don't think it was *how* she prayed or *what* she prayed that counted, it was *that* she prayed, and prayed consistently, and it was *to whom* she prayed. She asked God to save her family, and rolled all her worries and concerns for us onto Him. She also put stickers on our mirrors and left tracts and Bibles around. I doubt any of us paid much attention to these things. If anything,

we thought they were fanatical or weird. We just weren't interested at that time. But Mom kept up the witnessing and the praying, day after day, year after year, even without any obvious results.

Shortly after her conversion, I joined the Navy and was sent to the Pacific fleet after basic training. But Mom sent me a Bible, and sent some tracts from time to time. I tried to read the Bible, but found it boring and irrelevant. I imagine she also sent things to other family members, and we probably showed little interest. I myself went deeper and deeper into drug and alcohol use, dabbled a bit in eastern religious thought, and even spoke to some cultic groups like Scientologists. My siblings were all doing the same, pursuing life as they thought best.



Some two years after her conversion, Dad also gave his heart fully to the Lord. He had been raised in a Methodist pastor's home, but had never made a personal connection and commitment to God. He was a good, moral man, a man who loved his family and worked hard, a man who definitely believed in God and went to church. But he just had never really personally sought God

and asked Christ to take over his life. Somehow though, through Mom's prayers and (I'm sure) the prayers of my father's mom (a deeply spiritual woman herself, a pastor's wife), the Lord finally got through to Dad and he was saved. He told me that one of the things that nudged him in the direction of salvation was when he was asked to pray at a

men's study group at church, and realized he could not. He said he'd been in church all his life, but no one had ever asked him to pray, and when asked to do so, he felt complete panic, and completely at a loss for words. Somehow, he stumbled through, but that experience really bothered him for some time afterwards, and was one of the things that first caused him to realize he had no real relationship with God. That experience, along with some others, eventually brought him to a real salvation experience whereby Jesus came to dwell within him. From that time on, both Mom and Dad prayed together for the rest of the family. The Bible indicates in several places that whereas one can "chase" a thousand, two can have an impact that is exponentially so much greater – they can put ten thousand to flight! (Lev. 26:8; Deut. 32:30) It certainly seems that once my mother and father were both praying for the family, the intensity of God's work among us began to increase.

Our youngest sister Dottie actually got saved before any other sibling. She first accepted Christ at an evangelistic meeting in a football stadium in Orlando, at the age of 14. But the rest of us mocked her for "getting religion," and in a short time, she fell away from that commitment. I remember giving her marijuana to smoke and laughing at her story of faith. Only years later, when I had come to Christ and Dottie had several other experiences with God would she finally commit herself fully to God and begin to walk with Him again. Nevertheless, she was actually the first to experience the impact of our parents' prayers. She wrote the following:

"If you want to know the truth Warren, my story involves you. The way you often treated me when we were young caused me to always suffer from a terrible sense of inferiority. As a result of all that, I turned rebellious, started using drugs, and all those sorts of things young people so often turn to and do. At one point, during this time, I was invited to a meeting. At the end of what

was called a revival, (it was a so-called crusade with an evangelist named Bob Harrington) the preacher asked those who wanted God's peace and eternal life to come forward. Strangely, supernaturally, really, I found myself walking up the aisle toward the front of the building, as if Someone picked me up and delivered me there. I hardly knew how I got there! I prayed that night for Jesus to be my Lord and enter my heart. I felt such joy and a huge burden lift off my shoulders!"

"The trouble with my testimony, as you alluded to, is that after I got saved, I went in and out of my walk with God for several years. Thank God though, eventually it 'stuck'."

"The part Mom played for me was that she persevered for me through all the turbulence of depression, suicide attempts, boyfriend troubles, rebellion, drugs, life with an unsaved husband, financial difficulties, rebellious children, all of it. She steadfastly prayed and always treated me in a kind way. She kept loving me, talking to me in a rational way, without emotion or preaching. She 'spoke the truth in love' at the right times. (Those last two lines came from notes I took when Pastor Alex Clattenburg was giving a sermon on prodigals.) Mom stayed calm. She didn't judge or act critical. She held fast in adversity."

"I was looking for this paper and while searching, ran across something I had printed years ago. It made me think of Mom. 'Heroic spiritual lives are built by stacking days of obedience one on top of the other. Like a brick, each obedient act is small in itself, but in time the acts will pile up, and a huge wall of strong character will be built – a great defense against temptation. We should strive for consistent obedience each day.'"

"Mom was like that....just being faithful each day." This was Dottie's story.

I believe I was next. My problems with drugs, alcohol and a disordered lifestyle got me into trouble in the Navy, and I was sent to “Captain’s Mast,” a sort of lower-level trial than a court-martial. Eventually, I was sent to the psychological ward of Tripler Army Medical Center in Oahu, Hawaii to “detox” from drugs. While there, I read a Gideon’s Bible, where I “accidentally” came upon John 14:15-18. This passage spoke about “the Comforter,” God’s Holy Spirit, who would come to someone who loved Jesus and obeyed Him. I felt a real need for comfort, so I went to a chaplain and asked about this passage. That particular officer probably didn’t even really know Christ himself, because he offered to hypnotize me instead of praying for me or teaching me from God’s Word.

Nevertheless, I called or sent a letter to my mother and told her of what I had read and prayed, and that really spurred her and others to pray for me even more diligently. I eventually had a very powerful and dramatic conversion experience, and I know it was because of the years of my mom’s (and then my dad’s) prayers. They just plodded along in prayer year after year, when it must have looked as if their prayers were going no higher than the ceiling.

At one point, they came to visit me at the rehabilitation center, and all the guards were smoking pot. They could smell it as they entered the place! My dad later told me he lost all hope that evening, and thought I’d never change. Coupled with that experience, he remembered that a few years before I’d enlisted, he’d come by the machine shop where I was working as a laborer and had tried to teach me how to do some simple machine work. That night, unknown to him, I was so high on PCP I could not do the simplest of math problems he asked me to do in order to complete one of the tasks he was trying to teach me. He told me later that after

that experience, he'd said to my mom, "I guess I'll have to take care of that boy for the rest of his life."

Fortunately, though they sometimes had such doubts, they never stopped praying! God eventually did more than they could even have imagined. Today I'm a pastor and Bible teacher who has traveled all over the place teaching and preaching. Who would ever have thought such a thing possible, even a few years before?

My oldest sister was the next to come to Christ. Very shortly after I was saved, she and her husband were visited by some Methodists who were participating in an "Evangelism Explosion" course at their church. I'll let her tell her own story in the next few paragraphs:

"Growing up as the oldest of 5 children, I believe our upbringing was pretty normal. We lived on a farm and attended schools in a very small town. We did attend church sporadically but I don't recall any real talk of salvation or being born again."

"It seems to me that I was always on the pessimistic side of life and felt a cloud of depression surrounding me. I don't think we even used that term back then, so there was no 'treatment' or medication. I carried that depression with me into marriage at age 19. By this time the family had relocated to Florida. The depression became worse after the birth of each of my three sons and adversely affected my marriage. There were several suicide attempts but Mom actually had some sort of vision or visitation from Jesus once when I was being taken to the hospital. Jesus told her I would be alright. It took time and lots of prayers from my mom and dad, but what Jesus told Mom was true."

"After recovering from one of my suicide attempts, I got a job at a construction company where, unknown to me, there was an Egyptian man and fellow employee who started praying and

fasting for me. Pretty soon I thought I must have a sign on my back saying “this person needs to be saved” because people started telling me about the Lord wherever I turned. I couldn't escape! Mom and Dad were participating in an “Evangelism Explosion” Bible Study at the Methodist Church and they had those people praying too.”

“One evening, one of the participating couples called and asked if they could come by for a visit. We had been at the beach all day and I was tired and my hair was in rollers, but I didn't want to be rude to friends of my parents. I told them to come over. In the course of the evening they asked my husband and me if we'd like to pray to receive Jesus. Again, I said yes, as I didn't want to be rude. At first nothing seemed to happen but Mom and Dad encouraged us to attend a Sunday-School class for new believers. They volunteered to take the boys home with them after church so we had no excuse.”

“I began to read the New Testament even though I told Mom I really had no time to spare for such things. She said to just read a few verses or one chapter at a time, which I started to do. Soon I was reading every chance I got. During that time period, things were extremely slow at my job and my bosses didn't object to me reading at my desk.”

“Lots of little ordinary occurrences day by day and parents faithfully praying just shows how God is at work all the time whether we're aware or not. As I look back, I'm encouraged to continue praying for my sons and for my nieces and nephews as my mom made us promise to do before she left for Heaven. We all want to do and see great and awesome things but through my parents I can see that's not necessary. We're called to be faithful in the little things and God is doing the awesome things. How blessed we were to have praying, believing parents.”

Susie's story, especially those last few lines, really illustrates again the importance of "one ordinary life," doesn't it?

My older brother was actually hostile to the gospel when I first shared it with him. For some reason, I guess it threatened him. I would talk about the Lord around him all the time, and he would move to another room, or go outside to smoke a cigarette. One day when we were visiting him in California and talking enthusiastically about Jesus, my brother exploded with anger, and jabbing his finger into my chest, told me he didn't want to hear anything more about it ever! Then he went out the front door, slamming it so hard behind him that it caused pictures hung on the wall to come crashing down. My brother's wife comforted me, but all of us in the family left behind in the house that day were very sad. After that, we were much more subdued and tried not to talk too boisterously about Christ around him. We all just prayed for John regularly, and were sad to not be able to bring him to the Lord.

A year or two later, we had a family get-together in the mountains of Southern California. My parents rented a cabin for us in Big Bear or Arrowhead. We had lots of fun sledding, throwing snowballs, and enjoying nights around the fireplace and such. But on the final day, as we were heading down the mountain, back toward Costa Mesa, where my brother lived, the discussion turned again to Jesus and His salvation. We had to stop off at a friend of my brother's house, because John needed to speak to him about something. As we waited for this friend to come home, the conversation got very intense. Suddenly, my brother asked what he had to do to become a Christian. I told him he needed to pray with us. Amazingly, he agreed, and we were all thrilled! We joined hands around a round table, and bowed our heads. I began leading us in prayer.

leading us in prayer. But just as suddenly as he had expressed interest, my brother withdrew his hands from ours and simply said, “I can’t do this!” Standing abruptly to his feet, he bolted from the room and the house. We waited for him to come back, but when time kept stretching on, I went out to look for him. There he was in the driveway, sitting in his van, smoking pot! I got in the vehicle with him, and he offered me a joint. I said no, but stayed there talking with him. As the pot began to take effect and he got higher and higher, however, I quickly saw the witnessing for that day was over.

For some 20 years after that, we all kept praying for John off and on. We’d often have spiritual conversations around him, and he gradually became less threatened or uncomfortable about that. He even began going to church with us. Often, our pastor would preach some really terrific messages that I thought would surely bring my brother to Christ. I would pray silently, and glance over at him to see if there was any sign that the message was getting through. But there never was any sign at all. He’d come and go, and it seemed nothing penetrated. Honestly, I sort of gave up. Sure, I’d still pray for him from time to time, but I hardly looked at him during church services, because I just knew he was aloof and unaffected.

One Sunday, however, a new and different pastor was making an altar call. I had not felt much impact from the sermon myself, and certainly never dreamed my brother was being touched. We were all standing at the end of the sermon as the altar call went forth. My brother turned to me and asked if I’d go with him. “Go where?” I asked. I had no idea! Suddenly, he grabbed my hand and began pulling me down the aisle toward the front of this mega-church! I couldn’t figure out what was happening until I was almost to the front.

But when it finally dawned on me, I burst into tears! As we came to the altar, I'm sure the pastor there thought I was the one getting saved, but no, it was my brother! It took a long time, but he finally gave his heart to Jesus. I'll let him tell his story here:

“My journey to Christ was very slow and covered many years. I had always been independent. I took pride in the fact that I didn't really need anyone. I could do life my way and myself. For many years I viewed Christianity as a crutch for those who couldn't cope with life as it is. I thought I would never need this crutch. There were plenty of ups and downs in my life but no matter the challenge I always rose to meet it with my own power. I left Florida and the family and went to California to make my way.”

“I had many good things happening in my life. I survived Viet Nam. I got some pretty good jobs, owned a house with a pool and nice cars, got married and eventually had a wonderful son. Whenever I saw Mom & Dad it was clear to all that Jesus had become the center point of their lives. I still didn't need it but I could surely see that Jesus had changed the lives of my parents and some siblings. I was not close to my brother Warren but it was clear that his life had been saved. I don't mean that so much in a spiritual sense as in a physical sense. Warren was killing himself with his habits. Without some very powerful intervention Warren would have been lost. I could not deny the powerful change that happened in Warren's life. There was no rational explanation for the changes he went through.”

“Once we had a son, my wife and I decided to begin attending church more regularly. Both of us were raised in families that went to church. There really was no connection for me but my wife was always very much a people person and she got connected with some Baptists in San Bernardino. I travelled a lot and worked all the time and didn't even realize that she was really longing for a relationship with Jesus. One night at our

house with the Baptist folks Rita prayed the prayer and gave her life to Christ. She had spoken with Mom many times about spiritual things. There is no doubt in my mind that Rita is one of the many people reached by Mom.”

“At this point in my life I had a phone conversation with Mom & Dad and I sensed that some things were happening there in Florida that they were not sure how to handle. Their home of 30 years was being surrounded by warehouses and crime was spreading into the area. I felt compelled to come back for a visit. Mom & Dad were getting older and maybe I needed to move closer to help. Nine months later we had sold our house in California and moved to Orlando.”

“I have come to believe that God puts people in our path for His purposes. When we relocated to Orlando I played softball with Dad and his church team. I attended church every Sunday with Mom & Dad at Calvary Assembly. I also needed to get my son into Little League. At one of his first games a nice couple struck up a conversation with us. When the game ended they asked us if we would like to come to a Bible study at their house on Wednesday night. We were new in town, so this seemed like an opportunity to meet some people. Up until this day I had managed every challenge life threw at me. That was about to change.”

“Without repeating the whole story we began a more intense Bible study with the pastor and another of the church elders and his wife. This study was designed to lead to baptism. This church had a system of separating husbands and wives during this study. I remember telling the elder’s wife that Rita and I had gone everywhere together for many years. One of the things I always appreciated was Rita’s loyalty and willingness to follow me anywhere. I was concerned that this separation might lead Rita and me to different places.”

“As the study progressed I became more and more doubtful about

the teachings of this church. On one particular night I went into the study planning to tell the teachers that my participation in the study would end. I had enough knowledge from my years in church and from the teachings of Mom & Dad to know that something was wrong. On that night Rita and the wives emerged from the other room to announce that Rita wanted to be baptized.”

“This started a long and very painful time. Rita became immersed in the church, attending functions multiple times a week. We were drifting apart and Rita took my son with her. There was no way to reason my way through this. If I criticized the church it was me against God. The members of the church knew of my doubts and they latched on to Rita. Pretty soon Rita and I had no mutual friends. The only friends she had were in the church. The only place she ever went was to church functions. If I ever attended with her I was treated very much like an outcast.”

“Years went by and our relationship was almost non-existent. We made several attempts to reconcile including four different counseling attempts in 10 years. Many people thought we were such a “wonderful couple” and had an “ideal marriage” and life together. I began to feel guilty about the charade we were living. I had finally reached a challenge that I could not meet.”

“Thanks in part to Mom’s prayers, guidance and teaching, and because of the very powerful changes I had personally witnessed in the lives of my siblings, I had an understanding of the power of Jesus. On that Sunday morning when I went forward I had reached the end of my own power. Here I was again in church with my family while my wife and son were at their church. We were completely separated – mentally, physically, and spiritually. I believe the sermon that day related to giving our problems to God. I had gotten that message from Mom many times. Don’t fight it alone – just give it to Jesus. I chose to do that and He has carried me through every day since.”

“It took me a very long time to come to understand the truth. Mom’s absolute consistency over those many years convinced me. She never wavered on any subject. She always had a Bible verse to fit the problem of the day. Her consistency and quiet faith seemed always to trace back to her love of Jesus. I know for sure that I would not be here today without her incredible example.”

My second oldest sister came to Christ somewhere in this same time period, but I don’t know the details. She was never hostile to the message or to us, but neither did she usually show much interest in spiritual things. She liked to drink. She was mostly conservative in her values, but she never showed any sign of a born-again experience. I’ll let her tell her own story here:

“I, like my sisters and brothers, was on the wrong track, for whatever reason, rebellion, to get attention, who knows. But as I look back upon becoming a true orphan on April 9th 2015, I realize what the most valuable gift that both parents gave to us really was.”

“Last night in honor of Father’s Day, my Pastor Doug preached on integrity, do what you say, and say what you do. That to me sums up Jack and Betty. They were a model, as “out dated” “out of touch” whatever labels you put on others when you are young and stupid, they never quit being a model of Jesus’ love and follow-through. I remember when their lives changed in the 70’s – they kept talking about being saved. I heard, but didn’t grasp. But I watched what they did, though I didn’t realize it, I was learning by osmosis, this is the way to live.”

“My daughter Betty and I were baptized in the baptismal at Calvary Assembly, located high up on the wall behind the stage. It was the mid ‘70’s. I never felt so clean as when I came up out of that water! I sort of did it for my parents, but soon learned, it was for me (and of course, my daughter, Betty). I wanted what

they had and I wanted them to see how I loved them by following them.”

“Though I backslid, many times, and still do (I’ve been told that being saved is a process – I’m saved, but I’m also being saved), it’s like Mom and Dad still speak to me. Mom always used to tell me, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” ...whenever I get depressed, especially, now with the loss of Mom, my beloved and best friend, it’s like I can hear her saying, “Keep your eyes on the Lord.” She also always told me that a single log never burns; it has to be close to others in a bonfire or fireplace. Likewise, we need to have fellowship. So, when I feel like not going to church, I hear her voice. Of course, we were so blessed as they both sang out of the same hymnal....constant repetition and ceaseless teaching by them, sank in.”

“I’m not perfect and am disappointed that many, including my daughter Betty at this point in time, have not fully followed their voice, yet. But like Mom said, I’ll keep praying for those who aren’t yet in the family. Even as we sang “How Great Thou Art” last night at church, I saw their faces. I thank God for Betty and Jack Hoyt and how they told me and showed me about Jesus.”

As any good mother, Mom saw her family as her first and primary “ministry.” She wanted us all to know Christ and live for Him. To that end, she was a consistent prayer warrior who never stopped praying that God’s Kingdom would come to each of us, (we would submit our lives to Him as King), and God’s will would be done in us, (so that each of us would live as He wanted us to.) She seemed to have a patience and persistence that inspires all of us to this day. She so wanted all of us to have the joy and assurance she had found in the Lord Jesus.

Even in her final days, sometime in March of 2015, she cried

one night as she reflected on the fact that many grandchildren and others were not yet “in the family,” or “in the Kingdom,” and she prayed and urged us to pray for all of them after her passing. Mom saw the extended family as her main ministry and mission.

But her desire to serve God didn't stop with the family alone. She wanted to do more. She began early in her Christian life to seek opportunities to



work for God full-time. It's unfortunate, but I can't remember now the exact order of things. I do know she began as a volunteer at the churches she attended. Later, she took a job with a local para-church ministry, working in their offices in secretarial and administrative roles. That was an area she had lots of experience in, so she went to work helping in practical ways. She knew that by doing this, she freed up the ministers at those places to do more of the ministry work to which they felt called. I believe the first such job she took was at a ministry headed up by the very minister who had led me to Christ, a man by the name of Larry Kennedy.

Later, she worked at the tape department of her local church, making copies of the sermons and teachings of the pastor there, an Englishman who was a very dynamic speaker by the name of Roy Harthern. I'm sure it was a rather tedious job, and I doubt she was paid much, but by copying those tapes, she knew she was helping to get God's Word out to the many who ordered them.

That church was one of the fastest growing churches in America at the time, and the tape department was just one of many bustling ministry departments there. The interesting thing is that, even in that little office, which was located some distance from the various pastoral counseling offices, Mom sometimes was called upon to do more than make tapes. People would stop by to buy a tape, and Mom would end up praying with them or giving them some words of spiritual counsel. Sometimes, all the pastors would be busy with other people and someone would come in seeking help, and Mom would end up being the person to care for them.

Sometime after she'd left that job, I had a painting company. We were always hiring new painters because it wasn't the sort of job that people stayed at for years. One young man I hired, after he got to know me more and learned my last name, opened up one day and told me how he had come to that church at a very low point in his life, seeking to talk with a pastor. When none were available, he happened to stop by the tape department, where he ended up speaking with Mom. "Your mother is the one who led me to Christ," he told me. "She actually prayed the sinner's prayer with me, and pointed me toward the first steps of discipleship." I know that young man wasn't the only person Mom prayed with, counseled, or encouraged in some way while supposedly just doing the routine, "unspiritual" job of making tapes.

Mom and Dad were also very faithful members at their local church. Dad served for years as an usher, as well as starting various softball teams, where he not only played ball with the guys, but also served as a spiritual mentor. Both of my parents also volunteered to serve in children's Sunday-School classes. Being part of what's called "The Greatest Generation," they were people who, if they stepped up to serve in some capacity, just stayed at it, never wavering.

I think they ended up working with that children's class for 15 or 20 years! Would to God that more volunteers had their steadfast character today!

Mom and Dad also did other ministry-related projects during their lives. There were several times when they participated in door-to-door evangelism, or follow-up evangelistic visits with families that had visited the church. They were involved in such projects with more than one church, and I know they went through more than one training program to equip them for evangelism. Through these efforts, I know they often had the privilege of leading people to Christ right in their homes.

When I began to feel a call to missions ministry, my wife and I joined first one, then another parachurch ministry as we sought to fulfill that calling. Mom and Dad wanted to come see what it was all about. They bought an RV and drove all the way out from Florida to El Paso, Texas, on the Mexican border, to join us. Both of them helped us with the various ministry duties we had taken up, going to Juarez, Mexico on many occasions and observing or working with us in outreach. They learned about the poverty of the "third world," and forever after were sensitive to the needs of the mission fields of the world.

Mom began to feel called to work full-time in this sort of thing. She wanted to join Youth With A Mission, the second organization we had joined. There, she knew they could get training and find places of service out on the mission fields of the world. She was very keen to do this, and began to diligently look into where and in what capacity they might be able to fulfill this desire.

Alas, it was not to be! As Mom became more and more serious about it, my father began to have doubts. He just

didn't see himself serving full-time in such a ministry. As a result, my parents never ended up full-time with YWAM or any other missions organization, though I know it was my mother's desire to do so. Being a godly wife, however, she submitted to her husband's wishes, but she always remained interested in the needs of the world and in missions.

During the six year period of my life in which I was in a traveling ministry in various parts of the world, she would always pray for me, show interest in what I was doing, and would often send me encouraging emails which helped me keep going "out there." She and Dad also gave faithfully to missions causes. Some years later, when I was visiting them in their home, I happened to pick up a book or a Bible from the mantle of their fireplace, and a slip of paper fluttered out and fell to the floor. I stooped to pick it up, and noticed it was a receipt for a donation they'd made to some missions organization. I smiled as I contemplated how faithful they were to quietly give to the Cause of Christ throughout their lives, both by tithing to their church as well as giving offerings above and beyond the tithe to the cause of missions and ministry. Mom wanted to be in full-time ministry. She wanted to serve God as a missionary, but that was not to be. Nevertheless, she never let that keep her from doing all she could to serve the Lord!

The Bible says in Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." The apostle Peter tells us that women should not put the emphasis upon external beauty, (1 Peter 3:3-5), "3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. All of her children can testify that our mom

really lived these scriptures. She truly feared, honored, and respected God above all, and she really had that inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

In all the years I knew her after she came to Christ, I never heard my mother say a profane word. I never heard her say an unkind word about anybody. I know it may be hard to believe, but it's really true! Sometimes I or another family member would say something unkind or critical of others, but usually Mom would gently rebuke us if we did. She'd say something like, "Well, that may be true, but we need to pray for that person. God will bring them along and they won't always be that way." We often had joint family prayer times, when we would lift up other family members who weren't believers yet, or were going through tough times. Mom would quietly pray for whoever it was we were interceding for at the time. And we knew she didn't only do that when we prayed together. She was praying all the time.

Mom had a quiet and gentle nature. She was always loving and patient, and always showed concern for others above herself. That's why all her grandchildren loved her. She would ask them about themselves, and how their lives were going. She showed genuine interest in all of them. It's very telling that when my brother and two of my sisters divorced, their ex-spouses never said anything bad about our mom or dad. In fact, two of those exes came to mom's funeral and the family get-together afterward, knowing they were accepted and welcomed. They both told me how special it was to them that Mom never rejected them, though they'd broken up with her children. That's not very typical at all for families. But it illustrates the goodness of our mother's character and personality. She was just a godly person, who didn't display character traits that could cause strife.

Her character was also displayed in that, during her last years, Mom was a tremendous care-giver for her family. She was there for her mother and father, driving 150 miles from Orlando to Stuart, Florida on a regular basis, to help in caring for them. She would often stay with them for weeks or even months, while Dad stayed back and kept our home running. Mom cared for her mother, then her older sister and her husband, leading our uncle Ted to Christ before he died. She cared for her brother's ailing wife for almost ten years as she was totally bed-ridden. Finally, she had to care for her own husband in his last years, as his health steadily declined.

All of this caring was something Mom knew she had to do, and wanted to do. But that doesn't mean it was easy for her. Once I suggested we rent a video, "Driving Miss Daisy," to watch together, but she vehemently declined, saying to see a movie about an elderly woman's last days would not be entertaining to her. It was too real, too close to home, and too much about things she was going through every day. I didn't quite agree with her at that time, not being sensitive to all she was enduring. But I came to appreciate her feelings later.

As Dad declined, Mom was more and more alone. After her passing, we found a little piece of paper on which she'd written some of her thoughts and feelings of that time. She wrote it on Dad's birthday, 7-21-06, just a little over seven months after his passing:

"I do not feel grief over Jack's dying. 1) For 3 or 4 years I was preparing for this. 2) Almost every night I was alone from 7 till bed time so I found things to do – reading, puzzles, etc. Not much TV. I cried. 3) So I made plans of what I would do. I cried. 4) I knew he was slowly slipping away from me – then is when I cried. 5) As I became his caretaker and assumed more and more of the duties of a nurse and less and less of a wife, I cried. 6) When I

saw him lose interest in almost everything except the Lord, then I cried. No more could we discuss much of anything. I was without him. I miss his presence but not the constant concern for his physical health. It is a relief that that is lifted off me. Now all I have to do is learn to live alone and make my life count – to be a blessing to whoever needs me. So I don't have to cry. The Lord sustains me.”

This note shows the inner struggles Mom went through, something she never shared with any of us. Mom's maiden name was Phillips, and her family was known for being very prim and proper, very English in their mannerisms. They kept things to themselves, hardly ever sharing any real feelings with others. The Hoyt family, on the other hand, was known for being very emotional and expressive, wearing their feelings on their sleeves, and telling every detail of what they were thinking and feeling to complete strangers. Thus, in our family, we developed the habit of saying one or the other of us siblings was more of a Phillips or more of a Hoyt. It's kind of a joke among us to say, "That's the Phillips in him coming out," or "she's more of a Hoyt."

Well, mom was definitely a Phillips! She kept things inside. This was both a strength and a weakness, I'm sure. It was a strength in the sense that she was always unflappable and didn't show it when she was troubled. Instead, she calmed our fears. We never knew her inner struggles because she didn't share them. It could be a weakness if these struggles were kept inside to her emotional and mental detriment. But as she wrote in that note above, her focus was on being a blessing to others, and making her life count, and she did not simply bear her struggles in silence; she took them to the Lord in prayer. She had learned that lesson many years before, when all our family problems first caused her to turn to Jesus. She did not forget this discipline as she passed through the various phases of her life.

I remember calling her from the road one day during the last months of Dad's life. I was driving a truck at the time, and was worried about my dad. I got emotional on the phone and expressed sadness and concern. My mom answered me very firmly, "Warren, do we believe this stuff (Christian teaching) or not?!" She strongly affirmed my faith, telling me that my father was going to soon be with Jesus in glory, and making it very clear I was wrong to worry or allow sadness to overwhelm me. I have often referred to my mom's stiff rebuke when conducting funerals for other families, because I'll never forget her strong words. She reminded me that day that faith is a choice!

As the scriptures say, "I have been young, and now I am old, and I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." (Ps. 37:25) Another psalm says, ¹⁷ O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works. ¹⁸ Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come. (Ps 71:17-18) Mom leaned on the Lord throughout the different phases of her life, and God got her through, even the very last phase.

As her health and strength declined, Mom suffered and struggled, but she remained very brave and positive. I began to call her every Monday, knowing my time to speak with her was limited. We would talk about how life was going, my latest sermon series, political events, and so forth. I would always start off the conversation asking Mom how she was, but it was a pretty useless exercise! She would answer, "Fine, how are you?" Sometimes I would even insist that she tell me about herself, but she would rarely tell me much of anything. She just preferred to speak of other things. Every once in a while, she'd say something about how tough getting old was,

and how she was ready to go to the next life, but those times were rare.

She passed away on April 9th of 2015, but years before, in '09 I think, the family told me I should fly to Florida to be with her, because it was likely she would be leaving us soon. I flew over from Texas, but Mom's health had perked up, and she was no different than I'd ever seen her. We had a week-long visit, but everything seemed as it had always been.



Finally though, things began to change noticeably. I had my normal conversation with her on a Monday in March of '15, and she seemed the same as always. She was very sharp mentally, and I remember she told me to always be faithful and keep preaching what I'd been preaching. More than any other person, she always encouraged me in my ministry. But after that call, my oldest sister called me and asked how the conversation had gone. I was puzzled, telling her it was very ordinary, and asked why she wanted to know. Susie informed me that Mom had been slipping fast, and often showed lapses of memory and such. She told me the time was probably short.

My wife and I flew over in late March, and I took a suit and tie, thinking I might have to conduct her funeral. We arrived and spent a day with Mom, and all seemed normal. She was able to get out of bed and come out in her wheel chair to the living room to be with us. We took pictures together and enjoyed the time. But the next day, everything changed dramatically. Mom couldn't get out of bed, and she kept

saying the same things over and over, asking when our other sister would come, though we'd told her many times before. We knew that this time, the end really was near.

Mom told me in a moment of lucidity that she never dreamed it would take this long or be this hard to die. She wanted to leave her suffering in this life and be with the Lord. And she truly began to suffer a lot, being unable to sleep at night, and experiencing the terrible restlessness that comes upon the dying. We siblings all took turns giving Mom her medications and helping her to the bathroom. She would never have wanted anyone to be involved with such things, but there was no remedy. We prayed with her over and over, asking God to please take her swiftly, or to relieve her suffering, but we saw no immediate answers to our prayers. One day she just begged God over and over in our presence to take her, a heart-wrenching experience for all of us. It was also during this time that she cried over the lost ones of our extended family, the ones who had still not “come in” to the peace and rest of God. I shall never forget her anguish as she cried out that there were many who still were not saved, and urged us to all remember them in prayer. We assured her that we would.

One night we had a young black hospice nurse named Amby, a Christian girl. She told us she'd not seen such love and care for a dying family member in any other case she'd handled, and asked if we were Christians. We all nodded and pointed toward our mom as she lay in bed. “We're Christians because she prayed for us” We said in unison. “She prayed us all into the Kingdom of God!” The young nurse's eyes filled with tears, as did all of ours.

Sadly, my mom's departure didn't come while my wife and I were there. We had to return to Texas to attend to the business of our church. But we hadn't been home long at all

when the call came that she had passed. It was a Thursday, April 9th, of 2015. I knew when I saw on my cell phone who was calling, what the news would be. Soon I had to relay this sad news to all my children, and we all cried together. Still, we knew her suffering was finally over, so we could rejoice at that. It had been so very painful at the end that we were all pleading with God to take her speedily. It was a relief when death finally came. We made preparations for returning to Florida to conduct the service and be with the family.

As we made the preparations, it saddened us to think that most of mom's family and friends were no longer around. They had all passed on to the other side. The last church of which she was a member had been too difficult for her to attend anymore at the end, so we thought there might not even be people there who would remember her any more. It seemed sad that she who had always faithfully attended church and interacted with so many people should die and not really have a church family to honor her passing and come to the funeral! We decided to hold the service at the assisted living center where she'd spent her last days. At least some of the people there would remember her.

I spoke to a lady chaplain who had conducted Bible studies Mom had attended, and she agreed with the plan to do it there. She told me how much my mom had blessed her and helped her to invite and minister to others at the center. The chaplain was known as "Pastor Penny," and she told me it was Mom who had been her greatest partner in the work of ministry in that place. Mom was always witnessing to other elderly people, knowing all of them would soon have to face the final frontier of death. She helped Penny come up with a list of songs they could all sing, songs that would encourage them and point them to Jesus. She would zoom around on her electric scooter to invite others to the studies.

I thought back to conversations I'd had with Mom about these Bible studies. She'd told me about some Jewish people who'd attended, and asked me what scriptures to use in witnessing to Jews. She'd told me about this one or that one, people who came sometimes, but weren't yet believers. Mom was still being an evangelist, even in her last days! In fact, that might have been one of the most fruitful fields of ministry she ever worked in, because all the people there knew they were in their last days of life. I even got to go to a couple of those Bible studies while visiting my mom, and as she introduced me as a pastor, I was able to witness to some of the people there as well. I especially remember one Jewish lady, who told me she didn't believe the New Testament. "Oh," I said, "You should read it. It was written by Jews, you know."

"That can't be right," she answered. When I assured her it was, she told me she was going to have to ask her rabbi about it. Mom and I had a good laugh about that, and prayed for the woman to learn the truth of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah. Mom was a soul-winner and minister to the very end of her life! I only hope to be as faithful and fruitful when I reach that age!

As we came to the Center to conduct the funeral service, we expected only about 10-15 people. But we were pleasantly surprised as more and more people began to show up, and we had to hurry to the next room and begin bringing in chairs for them.

Our children and their spouses had put together a bulletin to pass out, but we ran out of them in no time, never expecting the number of people who showed up. We sang some hymns as Pastor Penny led us on the piano, and a few family members and friends shared some fond thoughts of Mom's life. As I stepped up to lead the service, I prayed for God's



help, and whispered, “This is for you, Mom! I hope you’ll be pleased with this service.”

About a month or so earlier, she had told me that one day a Methodist minister had stopped by her room to ask how she wanted him to conduct the service. She told me that she had firmly but politely told him that her son would be doing her service. I know some people thought it would be too hard for me to do my own mother’s funeral service, but I had

done my father’s service, and considered it a great honor to do it for both of them. I wouldn’t have wanted anyone else to officiate the funeral of someone I knew and loved so much more than they ever could have.

I led the service, sharing my own experiences and appreciation for my mom and inviting others to do so. What I and other people said about Mom was truly a God-honoring testimony that uplifted and inspired us, instead of just making us sad. The funeral of a person who has lived to please God is really a celebration, a graduation, and it’s not hard to do. As I concluded the service, I told the people there that I knew what my mom would want me to tell them. She would want them to know she was definitely with the Lord in a far better place, and she would want me to urge them to seek God themselves and make sure they had all received His salvation. It was easy for me to speak those words, because I knew my mom’s heart, and I knew that I knew this was what she would want her son to say.

Rarely have I held a funeral where I had such a strong assurance of the deceased wishes. Rarely have I felt such strong assurance of what my duties as a minister were. That day, I felt like my mom and I were partnering to preach the gospel to the lost of that place and of our family. It was a thrill to sense that my mom and I were working together in that way, even after her death. She had set me up to be a spokesman for her and for God!

After the service, we all went to my sister Dottie's house for a reception, and the women of the last church my mom had attended were very kind and diligent in bringing wonderful food for all of us. It truly made us feel honored and blessed, and it met a need we could not attend to at that point, so we were very thankful for the service this women's group rendered to our family. Ordinary people who performed an ordinary service made an extraordinary difference for us that day!

A day or so later, we went to mom's apartment to help clear things out. There were three elderly sisters who lived there and knew our mom. We passed them as we got out of an elevator. They were working on a jigsaw puzzle. Looking up, they greeted us and told us how much they had enjoyed the service and knowing our mother. One of them said to me, "I could listen to your preaching every day. You did such a good job!" We happened to be carrying out some things from Mom's place, among them a series of my teachings on the Life of Christ on CD. We gave that series to the sisters, and they lit up with joy. I hope the teachings will be a blessing to those ladies, and will strengthen their faith in the One of whom I taught. They and others in that place showed a lot of love and concern for our mother and for us. We were so thankful for that, and the knowledge that Mom had touched others there and they had reached out to her as well.

I share that testimony because I believe it shows how my mom's life and legacy live on, even after her death. She sowed gospel seeds everywhere she went, and some of those seeds are still germinating in people. I know the final tally of her fruitfulness has not even been counted up! I believe she probably will see people from that assisted living center in heaven very soon.

We so love our mother and even her memory. We so thank God for her exemplary Christian life and witness. We are forever indebted to her prayers and loving lifestyle. We will so miss her during what remains to us of this life. But we will look forward with assurance of that coming day, when we will all be reunited with her and our earthly father in heaven, along with all the other people they both brought to Christ. We will all rejoice together that day, and forever afterward, as we see Jesus our King, God our heavenly Father, and the saints of all the ages. Oh what a day that will be!

My mother never achieved any earthly notoriety or fame. Her accomplishments will never be written about in any newspaper. She lived a quiet and ordinary life. But Jesus touched her, so that her inner self shone with the beauty and glory of God. What's great about her is that she shows the beauty and value of ordinary life. And what does "ordinary" even mean, when you get down to it? Faithfulness in all the little things is far more significant and valuable than we might ever think.

As Mom lived her life with God in quiet, ordinary ways, she was a source of strength and guidance, and helped her family and a lot of others along the path to God. Thank you, Jesus, for the beauty of Mom's one ordinary life! It surely was an

extraordinary treasure to us, and we know it was precious to you as well. (Ps. 116:15; 1 Pet. 3:4; Mar. 8:36) Thank you for working in and through her to touch us and so many others! Thank you too, Mom, for being faithful in so many ordinary little ways that made such a difference for all of us. Good-bye for now. We'll see you on the other side!





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