

### Pebbles in the Pond at Sunset

This past November we took the newlyweds, Sean and Sarah (our son and his wife) up to Kissee Mills, Missouri to spend Thanksgiving with Grandma and Grandpa Wright. We were delighted to see our daughter Heather, her husband, our grandson, Caleb and the newest branch to our family tree, Christopher. We had a wonderful, fun-filled (and because we are Christians) faith-filled holiday. When we have the Spirit of God, we need not the spirits of the world to refresh us! And when we wake up the next morning, we are not hung-over; we are overcoming through power the Holy Spirit alone can provide. You will forgive me, it is hard for a preacher to write or say anything without preaching.

After we returned to Houston, Sarah shared a picture she had taken that totally captured my imagination, but more so my heart. The picture was taken at sunset at the lake near Grandpa Wright's house. Please try to see what I am describing: Sean and Caleb are standing at the water's edge; they have just thrown pebbles across and into the water. Both of their bodies are symmetrically speaking of the act they accomplished. Their throwing arms are extended over and beyond their left shoulders and their faces are focused on the pebble dancing and finally sinking into the water. The road in the background rises and at the very crest is the bright, setting sun centered in the horizon. I was so impressed by this picture that I asked Sarah to set this up as wallpaper on my laptop. As I write these words I am preaching in Kentucky. So whether I am at home in Houston or on the road, this picture is ever before me when I open up the computer. It is a timely reminder of a watershed that is coming much faster than I anticipated. Peter said, *"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance"* (II Peter 1:13,14). The great apostle understands that soon he must die, but he is insatiably consumed with leaving something behind. And what was that? He reveals this in the opening words of his second epistle: *"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"* (II Peter 1:1).

As I reach this mature age of my life and all our children have become adults and now, they, too, and are becoming parents, I find the desire to leave them safely in the faith is all consuming. As pastor, I feel this same urgency with our flock. The urgency is maximized with our offspring.

In Sarah's photograph we have our youngest child, our last installment of a generation, once removed and Caleb, our oldest grandchild, our kid's first installment in a generation twice removed. Our youngest child just wed and finishes his bachelor's degree this year. In so many ways, his sun is rising into his sky of destiny! I wish you could see the look on Caleb's face in the photo. His eyes are wide and joy is spreading on his expression. Now for Uncle Sean, this is simply one of many pebbles he's thrown into life's pool, but for Caleb, well...he looks like he has never done this before. Perhaps they are counting the number of skips their pebbles make before finally sinking. Caleb has just recently given his life to Jesus in the salvation experience and his grandfather who writes these words had the privilege of baptizing him as expression of his new-found faith. Ah! His sun is just beginning to rise. Then in the distance I see the sun setting. Soon I shall join my dad, my grandparents, my preacher great-grandfathers, all the way back to the Reverend Jeremiah Pope of Northern Ireland. I am beginning to see my sun going behind the horizon line. It only disappears to earthly eyes, but never eclipses in God's eyes...we just find ourselves sharing His sky in the celestial rather than this sky in the terrestrial.

Please allow the use of metaphor to make some points significant to others and me in my situation. I do not know how many more pebbles I have to throw in life's pond. But here is what I am determined to do:

### **1. Throw hard.**

I want my little pebbles to count. I want to make as many skips and ripples as I can before I leave. So when it comes to the faith once delivered to me (Jude 3), I am determined to deliver it to the next generation with all my might. The Bible says, "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). There is a poem that illustrates the desire of my heart: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." So much of what we are tempted to do will not matter; let us therefore throw hard for Christ and what really matters in life!

### **2. Throw accurately.**

It is not enough to throw hard; we must throw accurately. A baseball pitcher who concentrates only on speed without accuracy will throw wild. Paul said, "*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*" (I Corinthians 9:27). Paul had a fear that even after giving the greater part of his life in service to God, he would blow it in the last inning. So therefore, we must never take anything for granted. We must pray with fervency. James said, "*...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James 5:16). The words for "effectual fervent" comes to us from one Greek word: "ἐνεργέω", (energeo), which means to be active, efficient, be mighty in. This is the root of our English word "energy." So God is saying, put energy in our prayer life. If we were as concerned with advancing our prayers to God as some were to see their team win the super bowl or some institution they work for get ahead in the world, I am convinced we would see more miracles. God says this kind of prayer "availeth much." We never discover the "much" of God until we make much of Him and much of communicating with Him to advance His kingdom in the earth. This burdens me to say with Paul, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (I Corinthians 9:26). Paul was saying I am going to be in shape when I run. And when I fight, I am not going to box the air; I am going to make every blow count for God. By the same token, I'm going to discipline myself to the important task before me. I want to live dedicated to Christ and be holy. I am going to throw accurately.

### **3. Stop and trust God when my pebbles are gone.**

If I have run this race to the best of my ability; if I have fought the good fight and made every blow count, if I have thrown every last pebble across this pond God has allotted to me...then I can face my sunset with honor. I believe we reach a point in child rearing when we have finished our course. I am tempted to harangue my adult children when they make decisions or do things that I do not believe would be best for them. Although they are not under my roof, they will always be my children. As long as God gives me health, ability and life, I want to be here for them when they want counsel, advice or just a hug that says, "I love you." On the other hand, the Bible says, "*...For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh*" (Matthew 19:5). When our children wed, they now have a new home. Our home is where they used to live. Now is the time when I have to say, "God, they are in your hands...and now I realize, they were the pebbles their mom and I threw across the sea of life. Oh Lord, let them skip, let them stay on top, let them leave their mark for you and as I sink into the horizon of your Heaven, may they sink a life that matters for Thee into the pond you have given them. In Jesus Name, Amen."

- Pastor Pope -

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