

## The Greatest Generation

Today we welcome to the pulpit of Christchurch a very special person, C.F. Edwards...my uncle. He is a member of that group Tom Brokaw defined as "The Greatest Generation." I could try to stay formal by calling this man C.F. or Columbus Franklin (this is where my middle name came from), but I must affectionately refer to him as I have known him all my life, Uncle Red. In his youth his Irish roots worked out in his hair, not to speak of his temperament.

Although he is in his 80's, Uncle Red is my mom's younger brother. I'm sure you'll discover spryness must be a genetic thing. He and my mother were reared not just depression America, but Arkansas Ozark depression America. When World War II broke out, he signed up with the Navy and he was soon one of the famed Seabees stationed in the Pacific theatre. While in harm's way, he served his country with bravery and abandonment to our righteous cause. Upon returning from the war, he and my dad struck up a friendship that was to last a lifetime. He was probably my dad's closest friend. Dad was privileged to, by God's grace, lead Uncle back to the Christian faith of his mother.

Uncle Red became a successful businessman in the field of baking. At the height of his career, having started Edward's Bakery with branches working across Little Rock, he resigned to enter full time ministry. This was quite a leap of faith coming later in his life. After Dad passed into glory, it was only natural that my uncle should step up as the patriarch of our family. To say I look at him with admiration would be a serious understatement.

If my uncle is from the greatest generation in America, he ranks in my book, as the greatest of the greatest. I would like to list some reasons why he, Dad and others were great.

### I. Worked Hard

When my parents thought I needed a good dose of the Protestant work ethic, they sent me to Little Rock to learn at the hands of perhaps the hardest working man I ever knew...C. F. Edwards. He was the driving force behind Edward's Bakery. When I went to work for Uncle Red during my sixteenth summer, I was half hippy. By the end of the summer, he had disciplined all the hippy out of me! We got up at 2:00 a.m. and had a day's work in before noon. Those donuts, bear claws, cream horns and his pride and joy, the wedding cakes, had to be fresh, delicious and look good, too!

As I look back, those were some of the greatest days of my life. We talked about the Bible, the grandfather I never knew and history – especially World War II. Even though he worked hard and made sure I did, he always had time to answer my questions about life. *"And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What [mean] the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."*

### II. Honored Authority

One of the great attributes of that great generation was their willingness to pay the dues of honoring authority in their youth. He called his dad "Pappa" and Pappa had the final word in the household. The dialogue would always be full of yes, Sirs, no, Sirs, yes, Ma'ams and no, Ma'ams. Back talk was not tolerated. You didn't have to emphasize the directive from Ephesians 6:1-3 to honor father and mother "...and thou mayest live long on the earth" because you didn't live long enough to escape your house if you decided to live the short life of "sass." *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher power... honour to whom honour"* (Romans 13:1, 7). No wonder this generation fought and won the most famous war in history. *"For them that honour me I will honour..."* (1 Samuel 2:30).

### III. Practiced Self-Denial

A serious problem of my Boomer Generation is that we, as a rule, never tell ourselves, "No!"

Uncle Red's generation thought if they could have an orange in their stocking for Christmas, they were fortunate. They traveled in wagons on cold Sundays to go to church. When they were young, America was still a mighty agricultural society. Milking cows, picking cotton and plowing with a mule was not novelty; it was a way of life. They did not have to have luxury. Life was more beans and corn bread and less dessert. The young families knew how to be frugal, put God first and be happy with what they had. *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."*

#### IV. Willing to Risk

From this generation came some of the greatest preachers, businessmen, farmers, doctors, lawyers, nurses and politicians. One trademark was their willingness to lay their life on the line for what was really important in life. This helps a nation's economy, politics and above all, her churches. Luke-warmness was not in fashion for this group! *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content."*

#### V. Laid Necessary Groundwork for Succeeding Generations

Uncle Red and his peers always had us in mind. They searched for ways their business could profit the ones coming after them. Many practiced a moral life-style because of the influence fidelity would have on their children. They counted the cost and paid the price. *"Through wisdom is an house builded"* (Proverbs 24:3). *"...the house of the righteous shall stand"* (Proverbs 12:7).

#### VI. Espoused a Devout Faith

The greatest generation taught us by example how to live our faith. They did not just talk it – they walked it! My first invitation to preach was to my uncle's church in Newport, Arkansas. I spoke a series of sermons for a week when I was only 18 years old. I remember those long talks into the night after the services. Simple wonderful nuggets of wisdom were imparted. I remember Uncle Red teaching me to always honor God's name when I spoke it. I remember building my sermons with the same tenacity I would ice donuts in the wee hours of the morning. *"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also"* (II Timothy 1:5).

I would be remiss to leave off a big thank you to my Aunt Henrietta who saved my life on a couple of occasions when Uncle Red was not real happy with me. She was always there to remind me that the greatest generation had heart!

- Pastor Pope -

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