

Tribute To Stanley Olson

by Ross Olson

Stanley. M. Olson was a godly mentor to many and an example who is hard to follow. He did not give us a complete program for his funeral but made it clear in advance that he wanted his granddaughter KaWan to sing, his grandson, Luke, to speak for the grandchildren and me, Ross, to speak for the children.

Among the condolences we have already received, there are many who said, "Stan taught my Sunday School Class," or "Stan met with me for Bible study." Many said that he had been a particular encouragement to them or gave them special insight. My cousin Dwight said, "Uncle Stan told me that he believed in tithing both his money and his time." Many described him without hesitation as always positive and friendly. His influence was far-reaching and his optimism was contagious.

As children, we had a different view. Part of it was generational. He was the disciplinarian. I sometimes heard those dreaded words, "Wait until your father gets home." I was not a perfect child, but I don't think I heard that more than the others. And Bryan, you really were the favorite. Yes, Dad was encouraging, but he expected a lot from us. He had high standards, just as he did for himself.

Also, he came out of the era when men were not present in the kitchen unless the meal was served there. And after eating, the adult males retired to the living room although we kids of both genders were trained to wash dishes. But Dad did later begin to help out, especially as Mom grew weaker.

Another cultural piece that he overcame was in accepting grandchildren and great grandchildren of other races. His love for all his family was boundless and he was constantly bragging about them. This ability to accept all people was anticipated in all the guests he and mom had in their home, including foreign students.

And, in that vein, when years ago I heard the grandchildren describing their times with him, I wondered why it sounded like it was nothing but fun. Of course, now that I have grandchildren, I know the reason. You change personality when the kids leave home and when grandchildren arrive, you revert to a playfulness that rarely came through during the child-rearing years. But I also understand the sacrifice when he and mom watched, with total support, as we took grandchild number 2 off to Hong Kong, where we also lost our next child at 6 weeks of age and where our oldest daughter was born.

As a young child, I knew that my Dad was an important person. He was sought-after for advice and opinions. He knew everybody and everybody knew him. He lived in the world of business and the world of church government and knew his way around. I also knew that he had an older brother who was even MORE important -- Dr. Arnold T. Olson, who was a national and internationally known speaker and leader. I noted that they both mostly took it with good humor. After Arnold retired from 25 years as president of EFCA, Dad was chosen as the Layman of the Year. When Arnold later got up at that

conference to comment on some issue, he said, "Let me introduce myself, I am Stanley Olson's older brother."

But I also noted that he loved the Bible and read and studied it. He spent hours preparing Sunday School lessons and I noticed that the questions he asked were invariably life application questions. For instance, he asked a class, "When He fed the 5000, why did Jesus want the disciples to know how much food they had and how many people there were to feed?" The answer was, of course, so they would know that it was humanly impossible. When things look dark, wait for a miracle!

He had the salesman's gifts, friendliness, ability to make connections with people and remember them, a sense of people's needs and an articulate ability to influence people. We have seen in our day that some with those gifts use them for their own enrichment and deception of others. But not so with my Dad. He was true to God's Word and willing to sacrifice for the sake of others, such as when he voluntarily resigned from Douglas Company to make room for the owner's son to be groomed for leadership. He also retired early from First Federal and took leadership of the small Christian Investors Foundation of the Evangelical Free Church and built it up to a very respectable size. Although he loved the work, he left after 10 years when there was a experienced younger man, perfect for the job, who became available and he did not want to stand in the way.

At church, he held nearly every leadership position at one time or another but most enjoyed teaching and always sought out young men to mentor. And he prayed for us his children as well as for many others. And it was not in a generic sense and not just for our problems or certainly not just for our happiness, but for our spiritual growth and courage to face the challenges and opportunities ahead.

A card by his bedside said, "Prayer for my family, Ephesians 1:17-19." "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe..." When he and Mom were separated during the war and he was in physical danger, they covenanted to read Philippians 4:4-8, especially, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

He had genuine concern for people and I vividly remember that as a young child, every Sunday at First Covenant church he took me greet a man with cerebral palsy, Elmer Gunderson. I saw my Dad responding to this warmhearted man, trapped in a disabled body, who even struggled to speak to me, and it impressed me indelibly. I credit it as one of the reasons I went into medicine.

In 2006 he wrote that he often used Romans 8:26, when not knowing how to pray, "God's Spirit takes our inadequate prayers, breathes into them the Father's will and turns them into meaningful requests." His verse for 2008 was "Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in his great mercy He has

given a new birth (life) into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." I remember that as a college student, I thought that Dad's Bible teaching was not academic enough but always devotional. But then I realized that the ultimate purpose of the Scripture is to change our lives. The academic is for background understanding, enrichment of the message and confirmation of authenticity. But finally, it is all devotional!

Also, Dad and Mom raised a brood of righteous troublemakers. We four have all stood up against things that we knew were wrong, and we have made a difference, although sometimes putting ourselves at risk. What we need to continue to learn is that the actions must be covered with prayer, for like with the loaves and the fishes, the task is too great and our resources too small. The power must come from the Lord, as it did for Dad.

Dad and Mom both inculcated in us a zeal for missions and backed it up with a faithful prayer life. We have inherited that vision, and now that we have lost both of our strong prayer supporters, we are going to have to step up and take the responsibility. Please pray for us.