

What is the single, most valuable gift you could leave your family when you depart from this life?

We might say "love," and affection and support is truly powerful and abiding.

We might suggest "faith," which helps them know God and lean on God unto their own passing.

But in that moment, when you pass through the dark veil, and to a place of separation from those you love, is there any stronger, more sustaining gift than HOPE. The expectation we will meet again.

*Eternal hope that as you leave this life you go to the comfort and care of Jesus, AND, that if your loved ones live with faith and serve the Messiah, they will be with you there and enjoy heaven together forever.*

**I Thessalonians 4:13-18** – There is a reason this is read at funerals where a Christian has passed. We are not together, but we will be together again. Death is not a divider, but a doorway to another place, wherein a loved one has simply gone first. And with Jesus, we will all be united forever!

Long after memories fade and the instant feeling of pain subsides when someone dies, hope lives in the soul and never diminishes or fades or disappoints. *However, if hope is that powerful, is not the lack of hope just as impactful? In fact, the single most unloving, hurtful and painful thing a person can do to their family is... live a life outside of Christ and die without His grace.*

The legacy of faith, love and hope we leave our loved ones are the greatest gifts we have to offer. With that in mind, I want to tell you about 3 Phone Calls. These are the most significant phone calls I have ever had in my life thus far. I remember them well and I remember the feelings that followed.

### 1. May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1992 (13 years old)

- a. My grandmother had been battling lung cancer for months. I was at home and my dad called me from the hospital: "Kris, grandma is gone." Those words are not easily forgotten.
- b. I immediately felt the kind of sadness and emptiness that most of us understand.
- c. In the hours to follow, I filled that void with memories of the good times. I remembered her mastery of "Legend of Zelda" on Nintendo. And the candy bowls she used to put out the minute my health conscious parents walked out the door. It felt warm and safe.
- d. After that, something settled in that has been present for 22 years and counting, and I'm not sure what word to use to describe it.
- e. You see, I was 14 years old and a Christian. I knew the Truth from Jesus:
  - i. **Matthew 7:21-24** – Jesus expects a penitent faithful life devoted to Him.
  - ii. **Matthew 15:7-9** – Honoring Him and God by following His will, not man's.
  - iii. **Mark 16:15-16** – And this began with baptism in water for salvation.
- f. I had done those things. And yet, to my knowledge, **my grandmother had not**. She had not given her life to Jesus, worshipped in Truth, or been immersed for the forgiveness of sins.
- g. I will not determine or surmise where she is eternally. But I know what the Bible says and that Jesus said, "he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." And what she has left me with after her passing can be best described as the absence of hope.
- h. Sometimes it fills with anger. Other times guilt takes resident. But the lack of expectation that I will see her in the arms of Jesus is a pain that does not subside.
- i. Listen to me, please. If you have people you love and who love you, they do not need you to make an investment so you can leave them with money. They do not need you to teach them how to catch large fish or have nice things. They need you to make a commitment to believe in, obey and serve Jesus. It is the only true abiding gift you have to give: HOPE.

### 2. November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1996 (17 years old)

- a. This phone call carried a shock value that I'd never felt before. My best friend growing up is named Michael, and his family and mine had been close for years. His mother Judy had been battling cancer for a while and it didn't look good. However, after repeated treatments, she was improving.
- b. I was called by Michael's older sister to tell me that Mrs. Judy, on her way to her last doctor's appointment, was in an auto accident and passed away. I went numb.
- c. The process was much the same as before. I felt pain for hours. Then came memory lane. She was an amazing mom to Michael and his siblings. I remembered very fondly how she would coat our hands with butter and we'd make massive popcorn balls. I loved the fact that she bought all the coolest video games for Michael and me.

- d. But then, as days turned to weeks, and now 18 years later, something else has settled in for good.
- e. **You see, Judy was a Christian.** She obeyed the Gospel, was baptized in water, and worshipped faithfully at our local church. That's how we all came to be so close.
- f. She WAS a Christian. At least, until after her divorce a few years earlier. She and her husband parted ways and she fell in love with another man. She had no right to marry that man. My parents and the elders talked to her. She stopped coming to worship. Our relationship broke down. In the last years of her sickness she did not return to Christ.
- g. Again, I am not here to tell you where she is today. That is not my right. But I know what the Bible teaches and I live by the words therein:
  - i. **Matthew 19:9** – I know that unlawful marriage is adultery and adultery is sin.
  - ii. **II Peter 2:20-22** – We have been haunted by the strong words of Peter.
  - iii. **I John 1:8-10** – Confession and penitence would have saved her and might have.
- h. But she did not say so or behave as such. A very, very sweet, tender hearted, kind woman, who left her children and those who loved her, empty of genuine hope.
- i. Please. If you have drifted from Christ and know your choices, your marriage, your attitude has separated you from Christ, look into the eyes of those you love, and turn back. If you drifted away, you can come back. And you can give them something and ultimately leave them with something no other decision can: HOPE.

### 3. July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (29 years old)

- a. This last phone call has special significance to me, though my relationship with the one discussed was much shorter than the previous two. My sister in Christ, Regina, called me to tell me that her mother Elizabeth was non-responsive, succumbing to cancer, and would be gone within hours.
- b. The feeling was much different than before. Yes, there was sadness for the family. But very quickly, within minutes, set in a feeling that I desperately want to share with you.
- c. I was on a four hour car ride with my dad, and I used the last hour of it telling him all about Elizabeth Dubois. I could use that much time today.
- d. After years of begging by her daughter and grand daughters, she came to services and gave her life to Jesus. After her baptism, her sickness got worse. She would have her husband read Scripture to her at home when she couldn't worship. He then came to church with her and was baptized into Christ. During the last weeks of her life, as she finished this life in hospice care, a long time friend would come visit her. Mrs. Donna was asked by Elizabeth to read Scripture by her bed. The Word sank in. In nearly Elizabeth's dying breathe, she beckoned for Donna to go to worship services at Eastside in Baytown. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, Donna was baptized. To this day, Mrs. Elizabeth's husband and her friend are both as faithful as anyone you have ever met.
- e. I preached her funeral with a smile in a room full of smiles. Why? Because of the Word:
  - i. **Romans 6:3-7** – She and her husband were worldly, but they were made new.
  - ii. **Romans 12:6-8** – Even in sickness and the doorstep of death, she exercised gifts.
  - iii. **I Thess. 4:13-18** – So, at her funeral, I read this. This is what she left us!
- f. How do you think her daughter, granddaughters, husband, and friends remember her? There is sadness at the loss. There are laughs at the old memories. But above that, there is PEACE and HOPE for seeing her again. I have talked with her husband, a new Christian, quite often afterward. He deals with health problems himself, but is on the second row every service. How do you do it? He looks me in the eye almost every time and says, *"I love her. And I will see her again."*
- g. There is no gift you can leave your family and fulfilling and wonderful as that.

Conclusion: Let's be clear as we close, when it comes to how you and I live and what happens to our souls after death, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to consider ALL who will be affected.

- 1) You owe it to your loved ones who will carry on to be saved and welcome them to follow.
  - a. **I Thessalonians 4:13-18**
- 2) You owe it to yourself to preserve our souls and fulfill our true purpose for living.
  - a. **I Thessalonians 5:23-24**
- 3) You owe it to God to live for Jesus and bring glory to His name.
  - a. **II Thessalonians 1:9-10**

The day of are parting is certain to come, though we don't know what day it will be. We will go, our loved ones will stay, but what will you leave them? Where will you go? Will God be glorified?