**A Tribute to My Dad**

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When I was five or six years old, I remember asking my dad at the dinner table if we could go swimming. Since it was already dinnertime and, therefore, already near time for the pool to close, my dad joked that if he took me swimming, I would jump into the pool just in time to hear the lifeguard blowing the whistle to tell us all to leave. “You jump in! Whooo!! Time’s up!”, he would say. And though I tried my best to cry so my dad would know my deep dissatisfaction with his refusals, I couldn’t help but uncontrollably laugh as he continued to act out the scene, whistling (“Whoooo!!!”) into the air while saying “Time’s up!” with a playful smile. It’s an early memory that I’ll always treasure of my dad’s disarming, yet delightful, sense of humor.

Around that same time (ca. mid-1980s), I would also often pester my dad and mom about things I wanted them to buy for me. This was during the era when people in America used personal checks to pay for pretty much *everything* (most notably, at the supermarket). When my dad told me that he didn’t have money to spend on whatever it was I was asking for, I took it upon myself to “explain” to him (i.e., “repetitively whine” to him) that he was speaking nonsense because he could “just write a check.” Little did I know as a five or six year old that I was attempting to demonstrate my naïvely flawed understanding of checking to a man who had earned a PhD in economics from one of America’s top universities and whose job at the World Bank involved traveling to different countries around the world for the purpose of training high-level government officials within those countries about western economic theory. And while my immature stubbornness refused to allow my dad any opportunity to intelligibly respond to my misconceptions of checking and banking (and, later in life, other more important things I should probably have been more open to his knowledge and wisdom about), I have to say that my dad has never once “pulled rank” on me. Rather, from my earliest memories of him till now, he has always been most winsomely patient, kind, gentle, and humble—character traits which are not always found in accomplished persons of his stature and pedigree.

About two months ago, two days before my dad died, I shared my most recent teaching evaluations with him over email. On a scale of five, all of my scores came back as five’s and four’s except for one student who seemed not to think much of one of my classes. My dad wrote back and said “Looks great! Do not mind one or two outcasts” before telling me that, when he was a professor in Taiwan, he was *never* late for class but would always arrive fifteen minutes early. Yet, from time to time, even he would receive teaching evaluations from one or two students rating him as “sometimes being late.” Reading this made me laugh, as I’m sure he also laughed when receiving such ridiculous feedback. But I especially laughed at my dad’s choice of the word “outcasts” to describe his critics. From now on, it’s the word that I will also be using to describe my own—with humility and within reason, of course! On a more serious note, I recount this story to point out how even my dad’s passing comments could often be laced with much needed life lessons—life lessons whose wisdom I know I will carry with me for the rest of my adult life.

Nevertheless, it is exceedingly difficult to bear the thought that the rest of my adult life will be lived without my dad being with us. A year ago, we could never have imagined the recent turn of events that would lead to his unexpected passing. Though the past couple months have been incredibly hard for me and my family, one of the interesting things about this season (at least for me personally) is that I’ve learned so much about my dad that I never knew before. I didn’t know his “life verse” was Proverbs 3:5-6 [Chinese]. I didn’t know his high school was a militarized boarding school for high academic achievers and that he sang in a choir there that won three national championships in a row (cf. Chinese version of biography). I didn’t know he knew so many people in so many places and that he played a seemingly vital and integral role in almost every social circle and ministry team of which he was a part (cf. KRC and Forevermissed sites). I didn’t know he was “famous”­­ for his drawings (or that he even drew anything at all!).

Most poignant, however, was that I never knew my dad saw his life story as being “a tale of two halves” (à la the popular book by Bob Buford). And yet, when I made this discovery through someone recently sharing a link with me of an autobiographical piece my dad wrote a few years ago, it was as if a veil had been removed from my eyes in a way that all the details about my dad’s life began to make sense like never before. Along such lines, it’s interesting to me that the story of my dad’s “second half” finds its symbolic beginnings in a decision he made to commit his life to full-time Christian service at AFC’s Chinese Missions Conference in 1995. What’s not mentioned in the essay is that my dad’s own father (my grandfather) had passed away shortly before that in the same year. The confluence of these two events makes me wonder if my dad’s recent passing (not to mention the fact that I just turned forty this past November) is somehow meant to symbolize the beginning of my life’s own “second half.”

Before we get to that, though, it’s perhaps worth mentioning that, in retrospect, my dad’s life truly did change a lot when his “second half” became actualized through a move he made in 1996 from the Washington, DC area back “home” to Taiwan to take up a professorship at the then newly-founded National Dong-Hwa University (NDHU) in Hualien. In this regard, when I say “truly did change a lot”, what I’m referring to is a deep transformation in him that was motivated by his faith and actively spurred on by his work, service, and ministry in Taiwan and beyond—so much so that photos of him post-1996 seem (at least to me) to increasingly exude a spiritual maturity and “glorious quality” in him in a manner that his pre-1996 photos don’t. In many ways, there’s a sense in which—in God’s providence—my dad would not have become “complete” (in the sense of Phil. 1:3-6 [Chinese]) had his return to Taiwan to teach not happened. It was during that time that, among other things, he began receiving invitations to preach at local churches, that he served as the faculty sponsor of NDHU’s student Christian fellowship, and that he was part of a small group of professors who teamed up to teach an “Introduction to Christianity” course for formal general education credit at NDHU, Tzu-Chi Buddhist University, and what used to be Hualien Teachers’ College. Even though the course was designed to be academically descriptive rather than explicitly evangelistic, many students came to know Christ through it—some even going on to seminary and entering full-time ministry afterwards.

Sadly, this part of my dad’s life was hidden from me for several years as I finished high school and college in the States. But after college, I was invited by a church near NDHU to serve as an English ministry intern for two years. It was during that time that I lived with my dad in his university dorm where my witnessing of his private disciplines of waking early to swim, to pray, and to read God’s Word made a deep impression upon my own sense of who he was and what drove him in his daily life. I was further inspired by his hidden acts of service that most would never have seen or ever have heard about. An example of this was that, during the week, he would regularly volunteer to help wipe the pews and sweep and mop the floors at the small local Presbyterian church of which he was a faithful member over the course of his tenure in Hualien. Further, during the first graduation ceremony that I attended at NDHU (in support of my own students there), I saw random student after random student come up to my dad to ask to take a picture with him. What struck me wasn’t so much that there were students who wanted to be in a picture with my dad, but rather, that many who approached him that day had never even taken a class with him (nor did he himself know who they even were)! That was how well-known my dad was on campus. I would later be told by an older friend of mine, who taught in NDHU’s Applied Languages department, that my dad was one of the most highly respected faculty members at the school, and that though my dad was typically quiet during faculty meetings, whenever he did speak, *everyone* listened.

After my dad’s time at NDHU, I continued to be impressed by all the ways in which he made the most of every opportunity, leveraging all that God had given him, in terms of both worldly and spiritual blessings and experiences, to influence the church and the world for Christ and His Kingdom. Whether it was through his various academic posts at different Taiwanese colleges and universities, or through his annual grading of CFA exams in Charlottesville, Virginia, or through his president-invited position with Taiwan’s Central Bank to help regularly decide the nation’s interest rate, or through his preaching, teaching, writing, and administrative service with Crown Financial Ministries, Kingdom Resources for Christ, Inc., By Streams of Water (a ministry to single-parents), Ambassadors for Christ, and the many other churches and organizations and conferences which invited him to bless their attendees and congregations—my dad lived a full and abundant life that not only espoused the scriptural calling given in Colossians 3:17 [Chinese], but also thoroughly embodied the disposition of Acts 20:24 [Chinese].

As for me, my dad’s return to Taiwan in 1996 to begin his life’s “second half” also continues to serve as the most significant turning point for my own life to date, but I wouldn’t realize this until years later. Looking back, it was because of his decision to follow the Lord back to Taiwan that I later would also follow the Lord to Taiwan in 2003 to live with my dad and to serve at the aforementioned church plant near NDHU for a couple years. Through my time at that church in Hualien, I met my wife, Tracy, and I also received an inner confirmation from the Lord of my own life’s calling to full-time service and ministry.

As I continue to reflect on who my dad was, I have to say that I’m more in awe of him today than I’ve ever been before in my entire life. I see this growing sense of awe as a glorious gift from God that I believe was meant for me, so that the rest of my life will not only be lived with the intention of adding honor to my dad’s name, but that in doing so, the *whole* of my life will ultimately give utmost glory and honor to our Heavenly Father.

I think I see things in this new way because I’m beginning to realize that my dad gave me the greatest gift a father could ever give to a son. Through his demonstrable and ever-deepening faith in Jesus Christ, through his loving presence, through his thoughtful and often humorous instruction, through his conscious and unconscious example, through what I’m sure were his many longsuffering prayers, through his seemingly-endless practical and financial support, through the freedom he and my mom gave to me and my sister to pursue God’s callings upon our lives, through his unceasing life-giving encouragement—through all these things and more, I believe my dad’s life has prepared me as best as possible for the “second half” of my own.

I say “as best as possible” because only time will tell how my own “second half” of life will actually unfold. But in terms of what my dad could do to prepare me, in terms of what my dad could do to inspire me, in terms of what my dad could do to model for me what it looks like to follow Christ and to love and serve others in the name of Jesus Christ with everything he had been given, with every opportunity he was afforded, and with everything that he was—I think he gave me the best preparation he possibly could have as my earthly father, and for that, I’m forever grateful. I hope I’ll be able to do the same for my own kids one day.

There’s so much more I could say, but at the end of the day, I’m grateful for my dad’s life. I’m grateful for his enduring legacy. I’m grateful that, especially over the last ten years, I’ve been able to sense more and more through his words and actions that he’s *genuinely* proud of me as his son, as I am also of him as my earthly father. In this regard, I’m deeply grateful that before he died, he was able to come in person to Edinburgh last November to watch me graduate from there with my PhD. In the final two weeks of his life, he was also able to watch a YouTube video of me preaching in Chinese for the first time—an event that he, as my proud father, lovingly broadcasted to his entire world via email and social media. (I mention this not as an act of self-promotion, but as an eternally grateful, awe-filled son who was lucky enough to truly feel the pride and joy of his earthly father’s immense love, care, and life-giving affirmation for me. It is precisely this feeling that I hope to also give to my own kids. On a somewhat related note, I should perhaps mention here that I’m also grateful that my dad’s advice to all grandparents was to “shut up and open your wallet” because me, Tracy, and our two kids, Ethan and Micah, have benefitted greatly from him and my mom doing just that for us.)

I really love my dad. I miss him so much. I’m so grateful to the Lord for him and for his impact and influence upon my life and upon the lives of so many.

On July 7th, almost a month after my dad died, my family and I were making final preparations for his Maryland memorial service that was to take place the next day when we “accidentally” (or perhaps “providentially”) discovered, in his iPhone notes, an additional line to his now well-known “last testimony” that we had never seen before. It was almost as if the Lord knew we needed just one more comforting word, from heaven, so as to let us know that my dad truly is with Him there. The additional line read: “I am happy to be resting with the Lord.” Though we’re sad that my dad is no longer with us, we gratefully join in his happiness, sure of the hope and promise that, because of our shared relationship with Jesus Christ, we also will one day join him in that most glorious rest.

In the meantime, for all who have been present to me and my family over these last two months, thank you so much for your prayers and support. Thank you also for remembering and celebrating my dad’s amazing and wonderfully full and abundant life with us. I pray that my dad’s life’s story will continue to inspire all of us, spurring us on to greater faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he gave his life to love and to serve, and in whose name alone is found the salvation that we’re not only all meant for, but that we’re also all looking for. Truly, thank you all again! May we all, like my dad, finish the race well [Chinese]. -CYW

For Editor – Accompanying Photos:

01 – My dad and mom holding me when I was a toddler.

02 – Me looking up to my dad in front of the White House at age six, 1986.

03 – My dad and mom celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary, 1996.

04 – NDHU Graduation in 2003.

05 – Whole Wen family in 2014.

06 – With my dad on his final birthday, October 2019.

07 – My graduation from Edinburgh, November 2019.