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"From the Pastor's Desk..."

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MY TRIBUTE TO A LIFELONG FRIEND

This past week we suffered the loss of a very dear friend and colleague in ministry, Evangelist Gayland Allen. When he closed his eyes in death the American church suffered the loss of another great warrior of the faith. Gayland was rather soft spoken in normal conversation among his friends, but had a powerful beaming voice when he stood in the pulpit to proclaim the message of the cross.

Gayland loved God and he loved people. His warm spirit attracted people to him and his humor matched any comedian anywhere. I loved his stories and was fascinated with his unique mind. He was educated but was humble about it. He held his audience when he spoke and left them when he was finished wanting to hear more.

I was privileged to meet Gayland while we were both in our teens. He, like myself, had become a youth evangelist. While he came from Dallas, Texas, and I from Oklahoma, our paths crossed in California. While we both spoke in the same churches, camps, and church organizations I did not ever feel that we were in competition with one another, but rather co-laborers in the work of the Lord.

However, he may have wondered about that on one occasion when he was invited to speak at the Annual Convention of what was known at that time as the CEA (but now known as Grace International, Inc.) The night before he was to speak he was our guest overnight at our home in Los Angeles, CA.

On the morning, he was to speak, my wife and I headed out to the Convention to attend one of the morning sessions. Gayland planned to come later, so we bid him farewell and said that we would see him at the Convention. But he almost didn't get to speak that day because for some unfortunate error on my part I left the house leaving his car in my locked garage.

Later when he did arrive and after he was introduced to be the morning speaker, he opened his remarks by telling the audience that he felt honored and privileged to speak to the elite audience, especially after his friend and colleague in ministry almost prevented him from doing so by locking the garage door preventing him from obtaining his car to get to the meeting. But determined to keep his commitment, he busted the lock and came anyway. Of course, we got a lot of laughs and teasing over that incident for many years afterward.

Gayland seems to always take a situation in his life even when it would have normally upset other people, and seems to be able to put a spin on the situation and make it sound funny and entertaining. I remember one incident when he was speaking on a little island out in the Pacific Ocean. He was staying in a small hotel that promised breakfast with the room. So, on the first day he went and ordered breakfast he asked for bacon, eggs, and toasts. The waiter told him, "No bacon." The owner failed to buy bacon. On the next day, Gayland went down for breakfast, he ordered: eggs and toast. The waiter said, "Sorry, no eggs."

On the third day, Gayland went down, and hoping that by now the hotel had surely restocked their supply, asked the waiter once again for eggs, bacon, and toast, only to be told this time "No toast." Well by this time it looked like he was about to go on a morning fast whether he wanted to or not. So, on the very next day, he thought he would try at least one more time to obtain what the hotel promised with the room. But he was only to discover that the breakfast dining room was closed as well as to be told by the management, "No waiter!" He had quit. Somehow, Gayland was able to see the humor more than the inconvenience, and you could not help but love him for that.

GAYLAND LOVED GOOD PREACHING

Gayland loved to preach and he loved preachers. We spent many hours over the years talking about various ministers and their sermons and ministry. His pastor was J.C. Hibbard, who pastored a great church called "The Lighthouse" in Dallas, Texas. Gayland often times would tell me stories of the Hubbard's and the outstanding sermons he would hear both J.C Hibbard as well as his wife who was an outstanding speaker as well.

My pastor was Rev. C. L. Thacker and while Gayland would share with me about the Hibbards sermons I would bring up Brother Thacker's sermons as well as many other ministers whom we had both come to admire and loved to hear. It was these kinds of ministers which inspired us to preach the Gospel with the same intensity in making a difference in people's lives. These men were our teachers who paved the way for us as well as opened the doors for us that allowed us to be recognized and accepted in what we had come to believe as the greatest profession in the world.

Gayland Allen had his trials and testings in life. It was not easy for him to suffer the loss of a wife, twice in death. Yet, he held his chin high, his faith intact, and stayed faithful to his calling until his own body began to deteriorate and began to limit his travels and stamina. He never wavered in his faith and devotion to God though he was tested severely. He was a true soldier of the cross and remained faithful until the day the Lord allowed him to go to be with Him.

The news these days is filled with stories of people who continue to make a mess out of their lives. We hear of people who failed in their personal lives and careers. But such could never be said of Gayland and we loved and admired him for such high principles, and Godly conviction. You never wondered where he stood on such things as abortion, same-sex marriage, drinking, and immorality. He had a code of conduct that the Apostle Paul would have admired. He couldn't have cared less whether he was considered old fashioned, or uncompromising. He knew what he believed and he held to that truth unwaveringly.

Isaiah said, "*We all do fade as a leaf.*" (Is. 64:6) Which I believe he was speaking more of the deteriorating aspect of the flesh, if not that of the wicked. But the Psalmist spoke of the Godly and their leaf in which he "*...shall not fade or wither; and everything he does shall prosper [and come to maturity],*" (Ps. 1:3). Adam Clarke in his commentary added this comment to this verse by saying: "*The godly man's "...profession of true religion shall always be regular and unsullied; and his faith shall be ever shown by his works. As the leaves and the fruit are the evidences of the vegetative perfection of the tree; so, a zealous religious profession, accompanied with good works, are the evidences of the soundness of faith in the Christian man.*"

Someone has said that we cannot influence death, but we can influence the style of our departure. I have been told by those who have been near Gayland these past few weeks preceding his death, that when it became certain that unless he wanted to continue to be hooked up to machines for a continuance of his life his final days were approaching very soon. He did not flinch, give in to despair, or seek a possible way to extend his life, but confessed that he knew where he was going, looked forward to the hour in which he would see his beloved Savior.

You see when a man has learned how to live the way that the Scripture teaches, he learns from that same book how to die as well. The Apostle Paul said, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" Philippians 1:21 While I live I am Christ's property and servant, and Christ is my portion; and if or when I die I shall be saved from the remaining troubles and difficulties in life, and be put immediately in possession of my heavenly inheritance. You see such people who live with their faith in Christ intact, have discovered you cannot lose no matter what may be the final verdict.

We who knew Gayland Allen throughout these many years will never forget him because he left his mark upon our souls, not only through his preaching, but through his living as well. So, farewell my friend; enter into the joys of the Lord, for you have been found faithful unto the end and a crown awaits you for your faithfulness. Amen.