

Pay Attention to the Giants

“He’ll stand forever as a giant in these eyes.”

That’s a phrase I often whisper to myself when I think about my granddad. Next year, he’ll turn 80 and probably a few hundred of us Jenkins’ folk will rally together somewhere in Pearl, Miss., to celebrate the last true patriarch our family has until the torch passes to the next generation. I’ve been graced with a few heroes to emulate, of which my grandfather rests at the top of the list.

My grandfather knew hard times, sacrifice, and harder work.

Granddad ‘finished’ school with an eighth-grade education before working full time to help support his family and his future wife, Vina Mae. He said of those days, “one worked at a mill before going on to work at the next mill.”

Like many 80-year-olds in this country, my grandfather knew hard times, sacrifice, and harder work. Yet my granddad knows the Savior. And it’s for that reason why hundreds and hundreds of men and women have visited his home, his Pastor’s study, and his Sunday afternoon dinners to hear his wisdom and feel his support.

My life is inundated with his stories. Dad told me in tears once of what he and his siblings went through when Pearl desegregated their schools in the 1960s. Through burning crosses from the Klan, firebombs thrown at his home, and having to take turns with his brother to take off from work to protect their front door with a shotgun, my grandfather stood the test of adversity and protected his family in the darkest shades of America’s past.

I’m inundated as well with stories of this venerable pastor who visited the sick (still does), paid bills for others, and loved the churches he led with humility and grace that’s all

too rarely seen. I watched myself as he and my grandmother would spend all of their mornings, noons, and nights with my family as they were the caregivers to my mom, who eventually died of cancer.

And the day she died, there he was literally holding me up when all I wanted to do was fall down and cry. He is indeed a giant in these eyes.

He's an encourager. Every ninth grader in Pearl, Miss., knows that one hurdle he must leap before going to the 10th grade is the Insect Project. We're forced to collect dozens of insects and array them on a board for our biology teachers to grade.

Me and my cousin Jamie were struggling with the task. There we were on my Granddad's field, with makeshift nets, struggling to catch even one bug. Methodically the old man walked out, discerned our problem, and said softly, "Just take your time ... and let them come to you."

As if it was a movie scene, suddenly, a monarch butterfly flew right past us to be swooped up by Jamie's net. Continuing the drama, we turned around to see the old man with both hands clasped behind him (as is his custom), already walking back towards the house. He'd pause. Turn back toward us, and say with a handsome grin, "So that's the way it's done." That lesson still guards my soul today.

"It'll be alright. And if not...I'll see you on the other side."

I'll never forget the day I told him about April, my beautiful (and white) wife. The old man, who's likely never read Tony Evans, John Piper, or Tim Keller said, "Thanks for giving me the heads up ... but of course, racial reconciliation is right in line with the gospel."

I'll never forget the dozens of calls I sent his way as a new pastor in Oakland, Calif. Problems I thought so complex were

met with brief whispers of wisdom that made it all make sense.

I won't forget either the many times of prayer we've enjoyed.

Nor will I forget the first few sermons I was allowed to preach because he didn't mind sharing his pulpit. I won't forget the adversities I saw him face and stand triumphant amidst challenges that would've made most buckle. I won't forget the day he was about to go into surgery for a quadruple bypass. He sat there with a confidence so unshakable it forced me to exude the same. As we prayed, with Grandma there doing all she could to hold it together, the old man glanced at me and said silently, "It'll be alright. And if not ... I'll see you on the other side."

My point is in all this, brothers, is watch the giants. The heroes in our lives are only such because they paid attention to the heroes in their own pasts.

Our heroes aren't perfect. But in every one of them; whether family member, senior in the church, leader from our city, or whatever ... they show us a glimpse of the ultimate hero, Jesus.

A piece of God's character rests in the noble heroes around us. And we as men following them can take those pieces to produce a courage more resilient than theirs.

It takes prayer. It takes risks. It takes experience. But remember, it takes paying attention to the giants around us as well.

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