

## The Song – A memorial to our dad

Some of my earliest memories of my dad involve music. You may not know this, but my mom told me that the night before I was born, my dad was singing with a quartet and she was at home starting to experience labor pains. She prayed that he would get home to take her to the hospital before I came into the world. He did and I waited till we were in the hospital to show up.

It is both mine and Dwight's memory of our dad that the way he would wake us up on Sunday mornings was to the sound of quartet music. He would go to his phonograph and pull through his hundreds of records and wake the family up with the selections from the Blackwood Brothers, The Statesmen Quartet, The Weatherfords, The Cathedrals, The Rambos, The Florida Boys, The Kingsmen, The Inspirations, Happy Goodman Family, The Speer Family, The Bill Gaither Trio or numerous other possibilities. I must confess, it was not always a spiritual experience for me and Dwight. Sometimes loud nashes of the teeth would be coming from warm covers of little boys to be woken up in such a fashion. But that was our dad. He had a love for quartet music as long as we can both remember.

At family gatherings, if there was a piano present, you knew at some point, there would be singing. He would see to it. He usually had Albert E Brumley song books in the trunk of the car just in case there were singers present. He would assign you parts and say "let's make it pretty boys". Even if he had started to get a little antsy and say "Dalph, load up the boys and let's head for home." Once the music started, a large smile would appear on his face and the need to hurry home suddenly eluded him. He was now in his element. We would probably be there at least two more hours. All the time, telling you "now don't drag it."

He was never ashamed of his love for gospel music and for his savior of whom those songs were about. Everybody at his work place and those that worked for him knew of his love for music. If we were singing somewhere in concert, he would let everybody know. At the Mitchell Oil Christmas parties, each year, he would have his group sing the gospel in song along with the songs of the season because in his mind, Jesus was the reason for the season and he was not ashamed to be hooked up to Jesus in any form or fashion. He would even read the Christmas story out of the book of Luke right out of his own bible. We could have had the chairman of the board of a major corporation like Diamond Shamrock in the audience (which we did on more than one occasion) and the program would be the same. He had a love for the things of God and didn't hide it under a bushel, but put it on a hill for all to see and be drawn to the Savior. Jesus put it this way, if I be lifted up; I will draw all men unto myself. Those are just some of the memories of our dad. Also, every time we got into the car, he would play gospel music either on a tape or listen to a gospel radio station. We could be just getting out of church, in went a tape of some group usually singing right along with it as we drove down the road.

Later in life, I got to join him in his love for southern gospel music as his piano player. He bought me a piano when I was in high school and put it in my bedroom of all places. He said learn how to play so that someday you can play for me. I did, we did and the rest is history. Some of our best memories involve the various groups that I got to be in and be able to minister in music with my dad and his close friends.

If I heard it once, I heard it a thousand times, "put a little Pentecost in that playing and don't drag it and don't be afraid to play that thing". He wanted a large sound to build his harmonies on. We spent hours working out the parts on songs. We did the same for the snazzy endings on songs. He used to tell me, "Dwain work on the intros and the endings. Especially the endings, that's the last thing that people will remember. Even if you do a bad job on the song in your mind, they will remember how you ended the song." He was doing it the best he could because it was for his Savior and you don't do anything halfway for him. He always gave his best. He never had much use with anybody who did a halfway job on anything in their life.

It was always an interesting experience when he forgot his words. On more than one occasion, he created words on the spot that would sometimes turn out better than the way the songwriter had written. Once in a while, somebody would come up after a concert and say that they sure liked that new verse and wonder if they could get a copy of the

arrangement. We just smiled.

You say, what started the song in our dad's life?

It started when Raymond was a young man. It was in his youth that he was given the opportunity to express himself in music. He told us of the day that he was playing ball at Wesley. It was a hot day and he had been playing ball with some of the locals at the community building. He was hot and the sun was beating down and he went inside the building to get a drink of water and take a break. Inside the building, he heard a few guys singing music like he never had heard before, among them was a man named C. L. Wydeman. They were standing around an old dusty upright piano that was out of tune and seen better days but still singing harmonies that he had never heard before. Raymond was so taken by the music and the harmony that the men were generating and the words of the songs they were singing, that he said in his own words, "that day I put my ball glove down and never played ball again". Up until that time, playing ball had been a large part of his life after the chores on the farm were done. C. L. asked Raymond if he would like to sing with the guys and learn about shape notes singing a part of the song called baritone, one of the harmony parts. The rest is his life's love for southern gospel music. Sometime after that, Raymond found the one he had been singing about to be real and personal to him. He could say "**He's a Personal Savior**, He's mine I know, I love him so.

In those songs, Dad heard the story of a God who would send his only begotten Son into the world to save him if only he would believe Jesus. Raymond couldn't just take the faith of his family, some who were in the ministry as county lay preachers or volunteer song leaders, he had to say for himself just as you must who are here today, **I Believe Jesus**. He had to meet for himself **The Master of the Sea**. He had to see that Jesus was the **Gentle Shepherd**; he had to hear with his own ears, **What a Lovely Name** the name of Jesus. He had to say **I Believe in a Hill called Mt. Calvary**. He came to understand that **When He was on the Cross, I was on His Mind**. He heard in the Gospel of John 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter that **Somebody Loves Me**, and that somebody is Jesus and I know he's mine. He could see Jesus as **The Lighthouse**; he could understand that **His Robe**, the robe that Jesus wore in Pilate's hall was stained with the precious blood of his Savior that died just for him and Jesus, the God of creation, wanted a relationship with Raymond. He had to see that **He Touched Me** and the day that Jesus touched him our dad became **A Child of the King**.

**After Calvary**, Jesus made **Something Beautiful** of Raymond's life. He could say **Then I Met the Master**, and Lord, **Thanks for loving Me**. Dad came to say and sing **I will Serve Thee, Because I Love Thee**, You have given life to me. I was nothing before You found me; You have given life to me. He could testify that **I'm standing on the Solid Rock**. After Dad came to know Jesus, he was truly on the **Glory Road**. Dad had become part of the blood bought **Church of the Living God**. He would learn to take **One Day at a Time**, he would have his own times with the Savior as he would profess **I want to Be Just like my Lord**. Dad could tell the word **He'll Stand By Me**. He could state to those around him, **I Want To Walk As Close As I Possibly Can**.

Life has a way of throwing curve balls at us at times and the sunny picture can turn rather dark and bleak in an instant. It was in those times that Raymond could proclaim for all the heavens to hear **Because He Lives** I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. He could say to himself and others **Get That Frown Off Your Face** put a smile in its place. He could say as Paul states in his letters inspired by the Holy Spirit, whatever is lovely, whatever is pure, whatever is of a good report, if there be any praise **Think On Theses**. Raymond was as positive as any human being can be.

If dad were standing here today after experiencing heaven, he would say to his loved family and friends that for a fact; heaven is sweet, hell is hot and eternity is long. Don't let pride stop you from crying out to the Master and say from your heart of hearts, **Pass Me Not O Gentile Savior**. He would ask you **Do You Know My Jesus?**, do you know my friend? and have you heard that he loves you and will that that he will abide to the end? He would tell you **Jesus Is Coming Soon**. He would say it's almost time for the Father to say to the Son **Son Go Bring My Children Home**. He would say, get ready **Come Morning** it's all going to be over. Are you ready?

Today, dad is experiencing the bliss of heaven and the **City of Gold**, He has seen **Beulah Land**, and he will just be

starting heaven's eternity with **Ten Thousand Years**. He's telling each one of us here today if we make Jesus Lord and Savior of our lives then **I'll Meet You in the Morning**. He says to all of us here today; **Look For Me At Jesus Feet**.

Dad's love for southern gospel music can best be told with the words of one of his favorite singer and songwriter. Mom and Dad would travel miles to hear Squire Parsons in all kinds of weather and try to bring others along for the experience. Squire penned these words that say it best for dad.

### **I Sing Because**

I've been singing 'bout my Lord for so many years;  
I've sung when I've been happy, I've sung when I've had fears.  
Some folks may even question if it's all been just a show,  
But the reason that I'm singing, I want the world to know.

I sing because thee is an empty grave,  
I sing because there is a power to save,  
I sing because his grace is real to me.  
I sing because I know I'm not alone,  
I sing because someday I'm going home  
Where I shall sing through all eternity.

I have sung to those walking through the fiery trails.  
I've watched their saddened faces turn into happy smiles.  
I've bowed my head and whispered, Lord do the same for me,  
And I'm glad that I can tell you,  
He always given victory.

I sing because thee is an empty grave,  
I sing because there is a power to save,  
I sing because his grace is real to me.  
I sing because I know I'm not alone,  
I sing because someday I'm going home  
Where I shall sing through all eternity.

It's no accident that Dad heard and was drawn to the song at a little community building on a hot afternoon that changed his life forever. It's no accident that a man with the initials of C. L. asked Dad to join his singing group. It was the design of eternity, from a God that loved Raymond so much that used such a small beginning, to create lasting memories and an anointing of the Holy Ghost on a man life that would touch so many people's lives. Just take a look around you today in this place. How about you today? We're here today to honor dad and his memory. He spent most of his life in the ministry of music telling people about his Jesus. He's asking each of us here today the most important question that can be asked. **Do You Know My Jesus?** Do you know my friend? Have you heard that he loves you and that he will abide till the end?

**Little Is Much When God Is In It**, labor not for wealth or fame, there's a crown and you can win it, if you go in Jesus' name.

*-Dwain Mitchell*

*Raymond's Funeral Saturday, August 7, 2010, 10:00 AM*