

In Memory of Pastor Grabill

August 2011

Throughout my life, I have had many who wished to speak into my life, and I am grateful for the Lord's guidance through many of them. But one in particular has had a profound impact on me, and as he has finally gone home to be with the Lord after a long bout with a rare cancer, I am still here, and the void of his guidance and encouragement cannot be totally filled by others. I have several chief mentors, but Pastor Paul will always stand out as one of the most influential.

I remember when I had first come to State College Assembly as a teenager, coming from a country church to a city church, from a number of close friends in a tight-knit group to not knowing anyone in what seemed like a sea of faces. And then there was Pastor Paul. I had been greatly influenced, more than I realized, by the Pastor of my formative years as a young teenager in the church that I grew up in, learned how to play the drums in, learned about God in. He is still a very strong mentor in my life. But I remember Pastor Paul as being one who seemed friendly and open, and yet, there seemed to be this regal and official part of him that quietly commanded respect and admiration.

Pastor Paul was a humble man, but influence emanated from him. I think I might have been in his office perhaps twice in the entire time that I had gone to State College Assembly. More often, I would run over to greet Pastor Paul from the front row where I sat with my new youth group. When he

discovered my call and goal to be a minister like my grandpa, he began to speak into my life and prepare me for what was to come my way. I know that he was very excited to see me grow in that calling, and he supported me as much as a mentor could, and beyond that. Every semester I was at CBC, State College invested in me through a scholarship. Pastor Paul's leadership and kindness made me want to put that investment to the best use.

I remember one time that I was speaking with some adults about getting married, a subject that comes up a lot when people find out you're a single pastor. I am legally blind, and was saying to my group that one of the qualities on my "list" was a woman with a driver's license and a car, which, as usual, elicited quite a bit of laughter. Then I heard Pastor Paul behind me suggest, "Wouldn't a godly woman who loves Jesus be more important?" I turned around and Pastor was right there, listening to my list. As everyone burst into even more laughter, I simply commented that I thought that was a given, to which he also provided a wide grin and chuckled. With a profound sense of the details and issues of life, Pastor Paul had an excellent ability to not miss the big picture in the details. He taught me a bit about seeing that big picture, although I wish that my ability to do so reflected his teaching better. In a world full of visionaries who see specific projects and details, Pastor Paul reminded me to make sure the big picture was covered.

He never ceased to support me and provide wisdom as I worked through my education. He seemed to know every one of my professors as well. And one of his closest friends, Dr. Oss, really got the discussion going. I was home during the break before my last semester at CBC when Pastor Paul asked me point blank, "Have you taken Oss yet?" I told him that I would love to, but when I signed up for one of his classes (as Pastor had mentioned him several times before now), he decided to take a professorship at AGTS. Pastor looked disappointed and told me, "You really need to take Oss. He's good. Really good. We're friends, he and I."

Not only because of Pastor Paul, but because he held Dr. Oss in such high esteem, I chased Dr. Oss to AGTS, enrolled for my Masters, and ended up taking my core expository preaching under Dr. Oss' tutelage. I couldn't thank Pastor Paul enough for hooking me up with Dr. Oss. I have never regretted any decisions I have made from his counsel. He always had laser-like insight into whatever we talked about.

At one point, I had gotten in a knock-down-drag-em-out quarrel with my mother over some of the Assemblies of God's current position papers, stating my problems with a number of them, the way they were worded and the impression they gave a first time reader, as well as the stances I was "encouraged" to take as a minister. She was so angry at me. Apparently, I had committed the second unpardonable sin by "challenging" the position papers, and so she took it to Pastor Paul. The funny thing is that he wanted to set up a meeting with me to talk about the papers, what I saw needed revised and how it could be enhanced. He took my side, and it shocked my mom. She came home and told me what he had said

about having people revisit the papers. Pastor Paul had vision like that. He knew that yesterday's decisions were never good enough for today's questions. Unfortunately, we never got to have that discussion.

When I was at CBC, one of my favorite and most inspiring moments with Pastor Paul was when he came to visit for some meeting with either the Executive Presbytery or whatever group he was involved in down there at headquarters. Hillsong was in town, and he took my sister and me to their concert at James River Assembly. When I was at State College, I often was led by the Spirit to dance before the Lord and experience a freedom in worship. While there at Hillsong, Pastor Paul, an extremely reserved guy, looked over at me and just started dancing along. He admitted later that he was learning how to enjoy moments of celebration, and that encouraged me to forget what others think and to be obedient to the Spirit.

There was also a time when I was sorting and sifting through some "liberal" positions on Scripture in my educational programs and brought them up before Pastor Paul. He confided in me that he had struggled with these systems of interpretation and other academic issues when he was working on his degrees. He helped me to figure out how I would address these issues and encouraged me to look at all the evidence and not be swayed by one argument over another, but to search for my own understanding and path on the matter. He helped me be at peace with very challenging academic approaches that seemed to be very "scientific" and yet challenged the understanding of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility. He will never know how his transparency and openness helped me to develop as a leader and academic.

I had the utmost and greatest privilege to be ordained in 2010. And Pastor Paul played the most special role in that ordination as he was the one to stand with me as my elder and perform the ceremony challenging me to the high office of pastoral duty. He smiled the whole time. I know that he was proud of me. He prayed for me words that I will never forget, once again visionary. He stood in for all of my mentors who could not be there. He made the ceremony more meaningful than I could have imagined in that moment. It was an honor to have the mantle passed from him at the end of the ceremony.

I have so many big shoes to fill, from my grandpa's to Pastor Paul's. So I continue in this humble and yet privileged ministry as a servant of the Gospel of Christ in the same order as the great ones throughout history, from the Apostles to Paul to the early Church Fathers and countless others who have offered their lives for the sake of the gospel of Christ, to pastor Paul Grabill. Such a great tradition of mentors and a great cloud of witnesses spurs me on to that fellowship of servants. I am not alone, but I am without a great mentor in Pastor Paul. It's a good thing his aim was not just to give me a fish but to teach me how to fish.

The Bible tells us that we do not mourn as the world mourns when a believer goes home to be with the Lord. I am thankful that Pastor Paul is no longer suffering. But at the same time, there's an absence, a hole in my ability to seek godly counsel and wisdom from him, a longing to remember everything I learned from him. We grieve for the earthly and human loss of Pastor Grabill, not for eternal loss. But I have indeed suffered the loss of a visionary and mentor. I will miss his wit, his wisdom, his profound

ability to show me the bigger picture, his humility and his generosity. He didn't have to invest in a kid who thought he knew everything, but he did, and with a whole heart. I am the better for knowing Pastor Paul. I look forward to having long talks with him when we have the time in eternity. But for now, I'll have to wait until my turn comes to go home.