

# Chapter 1

## My Family

*“His name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing;” – Psalm 68:4-6*

# Meet My Family

## Psalm 127

*Children are indeed a heritage from the LORD, and the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.*

Mom was the stable spiritual influence on each of us. She held the troop together. She had to bind up our wounds, and more often than not, to pray us through sicknesses, accidents, and the crises of life. Mom was the prayer warrior sitting in her favorite rocking chair every morning with her Bible and prayer list as she interceded on our behalf. Mom grew up in a non-Christian home with a lot of dysfunction. I didn't realize how bad it was until late in her life my mom told frightening stories of her home life. We are so glad that mom did not drag those dysfunctions into her home. God knows we all had enough dysfunction of our own. I thank God over and over that mom came to know Jesus as her Savior and brought us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Dad was the hard working absentee father much of the time. Mostly I remember dad sitting in his chair behind a newspaper. He read it every day, cover to cover. Dad came to know the Lord early in my life. I have vague memories of dad carrying cigarettes rolled up in his t-shirt sleeves. He would go to church with mom but would get out quickly for a smoke with some of the other smokers outside the church. I remember the day dad got saved. He had hightailed it out of the church as soon as the last verse of the closing song was sung. The pastor pursued dad outside the church and asked him if he didn't think it was time to ask Christ into his life. Dad followed him back into the church and knelt at the altar to receive Christ.

In many ways my dad carried the scars of his previous life that often interfered with him showing affection. I never knew my dad to say, "I love you." He didn't know how. He was not a touchy-feely kind of person. Dad had an explosive temper. He was a Jekyll and Hyde father, alternating between spiritual on Sundays to a carnal angry man on weekdays. Dad would have been called a "son of thunder" as Jesus nicknamed James and John. He grew up in a large family and was probably happy to go to work each day to escape the chaos in our home.

## My Siblings

I grew up in a family with six children. I was the third child born into this family. As I look back on those days growing up together I thank God that He put me in a good family with four brothers and a sister. We had a lot of fun, many adventures, frequent mishaps, hilarious events, and bad things we did. But we were a pretty happy lot, at least that is what our spouses and children think when we get together and start to reminisce. Our stories provide lots of laughter and we have often heard our children say, "You ought to write these stories down."

Norma, the eldest and our only sister was the know-it-all big sister. She had her own room, unlike the rest of us. We boys shared one room and later in our teens, two or three to a room. Norma was our big sister. We looked up to her vast sum of wisdom in our early years. She taught us how to play baseball and instructed us in the sciences. Once as we lay on the grass contemplating the skies my brother asked her where thunder came from. Norma responded, as any big sister would, that thunder was clouds bumping together. I remember that because my brother David's teacher asked his class if they knew what caused thunder. David quickly raised his hand and said, "I know! It's clouds bumping together!"

David was a year and ten days older than me. He was the loud mouth, talkative, "say-whatever-comes-into-your-head" big brother. I remember mom and dad asking him if he ever thought before he spoke. To me it seemed that whatever he was thinking came directly out of his mouth with no filter. Dave was held back a grade in school because of missing much of the year with pneumonia. Being only a year apart in age put me in the same grade as David, to his eternal chagrin.

Dick, that's me, the quiet, shy, quick tempered middle child, who always felt cheated. I wore hand-me downs from my bother David when he outgrew his clothes. My other siblings inherited my cast off clothes when I outgrew them, which wasn't often, because I was short and my clothes fit longer than normal.

Mike, the next in line, was the handsome cunning, sneaky cheat. He was two years younger than me. Mike didn't look like the rest of us. He had dark hair and a Roman nose. I say he was a cheat because he could trade almost anything for something better. One day he came home from school with a transistor radio, which back then was a big deal. When my parents asked where he got it he responded that he traded it for a fountain pen.

Tom was born a couple of years after Mike. He was the runt of the litter. He became the comedian and goofball brother. He says he developed his sense of humor because he was picked on by the bigger boys at school. One day they even held him by his ankles dangling perilously over the school staircase. His one defense was to joke about it and make everyone laugh. When Tommy was just about two years old I remember coming into the living room and seeing my dad holding him on his lap in the rocking chair. I clearly remember it because it stopped me in my tracks. I remember thinking I had never been held by my dad like that and it made me jealous.

Steve, being the youngest, was born out of time, maybe he was an accident. I remember being in the car when my dad picked him and mom up from the hospital. He was a scaly looking kid. It looked like his skin was peeling off. Steve became the spoiled brat of the brood. I'm sure we picked on him a lot so he had to develop defense mechanisms to survive in our tribe. As a teenager (the rest of us were out of the home by then) he would disconnect the odometer in dad's new Volkswagen Beetle and cruise around while dad was sleeping from working midnights. Dad got so frustrated at the poor gas mileage he was getting that he traded in the VW for another car. Only much later did he learn what Steve had done.

We were all different. Each came under the same household, same parents and disciplines but each of us uniquely different. I am sure each has their own flavor of memories of the events that I tell.



**Norma**



**David**



**Dick**



**Mike**



**Tom**



**Steve**

# Dad Memories

## Proverbs 23:24

*The father of a righteous child has great joy;  
a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.*

My dad grew up in a large family. I think they had five boys and three girls. His dad was at one time a motorcycle cop during the roaring twenties. When I knew "Pipi" (French for grandpa), he was a chain smoking, lower middle class hunting, fishing, and trapping farmer. My memories of him were of our rare visits to dad's parents. Usually they were gathered around the kitchen table smoking, playing cards, and drinking beer. I can clearly see my Pipi leaning on the potbelly stove smoking his cigarettes while other family members played cards. All of these activities were sinful vices so we were scurried off to the living room to sit quietly as the old folks visited.

### Dad in the Army

Dad was in the army in WWII as a corporal working alongside a pharmacist, who often told my dad he would have made an excellent chemist or pharmacist. Dad worked in a psych ward for men who had post traumatic stress disorder, or who went berserk when they got that inevitable "dear John" letter. Most notable to me was the story Dad told of a huge man who went ballistic on the medics in an uncontrollable rage. Dad took him out with one punch to the jaw that left the man unconscious. Dad was short, but tough.

### Dad, the Hunter

My first memory of my dad was that he had a shotgun and would go hunting pheasants out in the back of our property on Keagan Road. I remember that mostly because my brother Dave got to go hunting one day with my dad, which made me mad because I wanted to go. My mom had insisted on him taking my older brother though I don't think dad was too keen on the idea. They weren't gone very long before they were back. Probably because Dave was a talker and that would have driven my dad to distraction. Soon after that my mom insisted on not having a shotgun in the house with little boys around.

### The Wild Game Dinners

Regardless of dad giving up hunting I have memories of his family providing us with occasional treats of small game. I remember dad bringing home a brace of wild ducks or geese they bagged on a hunt. Dad would pluck the feathers and mom cleaned and prepared them for a meal. She did not enjoy that, especially since we had to be careful not to bite into the buckshot still in the birds. Then there were the occasional fish we were given by my uncles. We kids hated fish. It made no sense to eat something that you had to pick bones out of your mouth to eat.

### Muskrat and Turtle

One day dad brought home muskrat from his family's trappings. I am sure they meant well but muskrat tastes like mud. I think that only happened once and my mom said no more. Someone in dad's family caught a turtle so we were to eat turtle. My brother Dave had a fit about it and stated that he would never eat turtle. My mom then secretly made turtle soup, or perhaps it was a stew, and served it to us without David knowing what it was. He asked for second helpings saying how good it was. Then mom asked if he knew what he was eating. He said no, but it sure was good. She then revealed that it was turtle. I don't think Dave was hungry for seconds after that.

### Killing Rabbits

Dad decided to raise rabbits. We had a crawl space under our house that served as an ideal pen for the rabbits. We would occasionally get to coax one out and play with it. Then came the day that dad said the rabbits were big and needed to be killed and eaten. Oh, we kids had fits. Why would you kill our rabbits and eat them? But dad insisted that this was why we raised the rabbits. He then took them up to the unfinished attic and proceeded to knock them unconscious with a big club. I remember. I saw him do it. We all cried and ran downstairs to tell mom what a horrible dad we had. None of us wanted to eat rabbit stew.

### Killing Chickens

Later in our childhood dad brought home a couple of live chickens that we were going to kill and eat. I remember dad saying, "You all like to eat chicken. Where do you think that meat comes from?" We had a small fenced in yard and dad let the chickens run around in the yard until he caught one to wring its neck and dip it in boiling water to prepare it for plucking. We thought that was so cruel. Dad said, "Well I can cut off the head if you think wringing their necks is cruel." He had left one chicken for last. He caught it and this time he didn't tie its feet. He laid it on a stump and chopped off its head. To our amazement the chicken jumped up and ran around the yard without a head as blood squirted out everywhere. We screamed, "Daddy, he's still alive!" Dad said, "No, he's

dead, he just doesn't know it yet." Sure enough, the chicken soon flopped over and died. Later in life, that became a good illustration of Jesus' victory over Satan through the cross. Satan's power is destroyed and his doom is sure. His head is cut off but he doesn't know his doom is sure.

### **Liver and Onions**

By far the worst meal we had to endure as children was the loathsome liver. Liver didn't often make it to our table, but maybe a couple of times a year we had to endure it. It was a disgusting mass of bloody slime before mom cooked it, and it wasn't much better after she cooked it. Mom would fry the thing till it was dry as a bone and shriveled up. Maybe she wanted to be sure it was dead and bloodless. We gagged it down with threats that we were not allowed to leave the table until all on our plates was gone. We were thankful to be able to drown it in piles of catsup. (When we had a dog we would secretly feed her under the table.) The worst of our liver-detesting world was when another poor and equally large family in the church invited us to have Sunday dinner at their house. They lived in a converted chicken coop, of all places. Mom warned us to be on our best behavior and not to mention their house being a chicken coop. To our horror they were serving liver for dinner, and NO CATSUP! Mom threatened us all with the belt if we so much as made an ugly face during the meal. We got through it and had a wonderful time with our friends, but we will never forget that liver meal.

### **Dad's Temper**

My dad had a temper. I inherited my dad's temper. I tell these stories not to blame or shame him but to illustrate where I got my temper. My grandfather probably had a bad temper too, and I know my great grandfather had an evil personality and a bad temper. Later in life my dad told the story of going to his maternal grandfather's funeral and hearing the priest put him in the deepest hell saying, "This was the most evil man I have ever known." Dad said that made him furious and influenced him not to want to return to church.

As I previously stated my dad was saved when I was young. I'm glad dad got saved. Perhaps that was the only thing that kept him from walking off on his family. Mom, for all her good traits, was a nag. Like too many women she didn't have enough sense to let a matter go. She would harp on it non-stop until dad would blow up. I think he learned that blowing up was the only thing that would stop her. From my earliest age I remember dad's temper being his defining feature. Dad would sometimes throw violent fits of rage. I think it was to keep mom in tow. I thank God that to my knowledge my dad never hit my mom or was physically abusive in any way. Yet, dad had that temper.

My dad had his ups and downs spiritually. There were periods when he hungered after God. He became our Sunday School Superintendent and an elder in the church. I remember he even preached when our pastor was absent. I remember the sermon title, "Are you a Thermostat or a Thermometer Christian?"

The tenderest moment in my dad's life was during one of those spiritually alive periods. He and the pastor had been talking about going to visit my grandfather who was not a believer. Dad wanted to lead his dad to Christ but didn't know how, so the pastor agreed to go with my dad to talk to him about Jesus. They made the appointment but something came up that week and they had to postpone the visit until the following week. Early that following week my grandfather had a massive heart attack and died. I remember it vividly. As we drove to visit my grandmother Dad was so overcome with grief that he could not see to drive. He had to pull to the side of the road and wept bitterly. I can still see him beating on the steering wheel and saying, "Oh, why, oh, why didn't we keep that visit. My dad is in hell today because I failed to lead him to Christ."

### **Dad's Work Ethic**

Dad was a hard working man. When he came home from the war there weren't many jobs available because so many men had come back at the same time. I remember my dad saying he would go to the local paper factory every day and ask for work. Finally, when they began to hire dad was one of the first to be hired. The personnel manager told him he got hired because he proved he desperately wanted to work. Dad worked at Consolidated Paper Company the rest of his life, often working seven days a week, twelve hours a day, and at times pulling double shifts. Though my dad made good money while he worked, too often the company would go on strike and dad could be out of work for months. Other times they didn't have enough work and would lay people off. At those times dad would not be content to sit around pulling unemployment. He would work roofing jobs or whatever jobs that became available to bring us through.

Those were often tough times for my parents. In times of prosperity dad would buy a house, but within a couple of years layoffs and strikes would leave us penniless and they would have to sell the house. We moved quite a bit throughout my life. That was not easy on my parents and didn't make them very popular with us. Having to move

from school district to school district, always being the new kids coming into classrooms, was upsetting to all of us.

### **Easter and Christmas**

Mom and dad tried to give us the best. I remember always having Easter egg candies and squirreling them away in our pockets as we went to church. I can't ever remember a bad Christmas. Mom and dad would somehow find the money or credit to give us a good Christmas. I have fond memories of looking at the Sears catalog to pick out what toys we wanted for Christmas. We were to circle several items and put our names by it so mom and dad could keep straight who wanted what. Mom and dad decided it was too difficult to keep us in our beds until Christmas morning, so we had the tradition of opening gifts on Christmas Eve. My parents did not believe in teaching us to believe in Santa Claus. They would send us up to our rooms as they put our presents under the tree and around the room. Most presents weren't wrapped since we would only tear into them and leave a mess. It was always thrilling to walk into the living room and see the gifts under the lighted Christmas tree.

### **Being Poor**

What I remember most about growing up was being poor. There were times when we would have to go to school with worn out knees in our pants that mom had ironed or sewed on patches. I remember the soles of my shoes coming unglued and flopping as I would walk to and from school. Dad would dutifully glue our soles and put them under a leg of the kitchen table till morning and send us off to school or church only to have the glue come undone. We often wore hand-me-downs, either from older siblings or from used clothes from other church families. That was embarrassing because sometimes kids would recognize the used clothes we were wearing, and being kids, they would call attention to it having been theirs.

Saturday night was shoe shine night and religiously we were to lay out our shoes on newspapers and shine them with liquid black polish. I also remember having holes in the bottom of my shoes and having to stuff folded newspapers in them to keep from wearing out our sock through the gaping holes.

# Mom Memories

## Proverbs 23:22

*Listen to your father who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old.*

### Discipline at home

My mom had her favorite verses while we were growing up. One was *"Spare the rod and spoil the child."* (Proverbs 13:24) We got lots of spankings. We deserved it. We were rowdy, mean, disobedient, and deserved much of it I'm sure. We were always jealous of other children who didn't get spanked or who got discipline through a smack on the hands with a ruler, or a paddling with the flat of mom or dad's hand on the bottom. We were not so lucky. Mom always prefaced our spankings with, "This hurts me more than it hurts you, but God said, *'Spare the rod and spoil the child,'* this is for your own good." I'm sure when we were little mom might have used the flat of her hand on our bottoms, but soon she graduated to a belt. When the belt elicited a stubborn, "You're not going to make me cry" response from us boys, she started to use an electric extension cord. (Not plugged in.) That hurt!!! In fact, it left welts and bruises. My parents were fortunate that our teachers never saw our legs and buttocks or they might have called child social services, if that even existed back then. Too often mom would hold the spanking of us boys for when dad came home from work after a 12 hour day. Dad never said, "This will hurt me more than it hurts you." No, he made sure that it hurt us. We learned to scream and beg while being spanked hoping for some mercy. It never worked.

One time while waiting upstairs for dad to come home we decided to pad our backsides with extra clothes and magazines to lessen the effect of the electric cord. It still hurt.

### Mom the Spiritual Leader

Mom could be counted on to be up well before the rest of us sitting in her rocker with her Bible open and her prayer sheet in front of her.

My mom was the spiritual director of our family. Dad was often off working, so much of our upbringing fell to mother. My maternal grandmother was the first to get saved, soon after my mother and my aunt came to know the Lord too.

My parents took us to church as often as the doors were open. Really, if the church doors were open, we were there lined up in the third row from the front on the right side. That was our pew. We attended Sunday School, morning worship and Sunday evening services every Sunday, plus prayer meeting on Wednesday nights. Then we were also in church for every weeknight Missions Conference and any revival or deeper life conference, sometimes two weeks at a time.

### Devotions

Mom also made a habit of having family devotions with all of us children. We weren't allowed to go off to play without first having Bible reading and prayer. As we grew older mom was sensitive to the reality that this was very boring for us. She began reading us stories from Christian children's books and missionary stories. That helped. Our favorite was Paul Hutchens's series titled, *The Adventures of the Sugar Creek Gang*. It was funny, neighborhood children would come to the door and press their noses against the screen door to ask if we could come out and play. We always embarrassingly had to say, "Not until we have had devotions." They would ask, "Devotions? What is that?" I'm sure we responded with something like, "You don't even want to know." Devotions had an effect on us. Most of us prayed to receive Christ as our personal Savior at a very young age.

### Leading Friends to Jesus

I remember in our first house on Keagan Road I was in the first or second grade. My good friend, Floyd Davis, would come over almost every day to play with me in our sand mound in our backyard. I was always envious of him. We had our cheap plastic trucks while he had those heavy duty Tonka trucks with backhoes and front loaders. We'd play and sometimes the subject of going to church would come up. I would tell him about heaven and hell and that he needed to pray to receive Jesus into his heart. I remember asking him day after day if he had asked Jesus to come into his heart. He would say, "Oh, yah, I forgot. I'll do it tonight." One day when I asked him he burst into a big smile and said, "Yes, I did. I asked Jesus into my heart last night." I never knew if that conversion really stuck with him or not, but after my college days I returned home and I heard that Floyd became a minister in the Lutheran Church. I guess something stuck.

### The Stereo Record Player

When we were in our young teen years mom must have been very frustrated trying to keep our attention at devotions. One day a door to door salesman stopped by selling a stereo record player console cabinet with a package of Gospel music and a series of audio stories by Ethel Barrett. It also contained the audio Bible (King James Version of course) and Clyde Narramore's *Psychology for Living*. I don't know how they managed to afford it or how she convinced my dad this was needed, but they bought the set, which proved to be invaluable in giving me a desire to be able to tell stories like Ethel Barrett.

### **Mom's Prayers**

In the LaFountain family you couldn't get away from prayer and a consciousness that God's presence and watchful eye were about the place. If we were going off to school mom would often want to pray over us before we went out the door. If we were sick mom would pray, usually with a hand on our fevered heads, and rebuking the fever in Jesus' name she would commit us to God.

There were times when we were bad and deserved a good spanking that mom would first stop to lecture us on obedience and say she was praying for us. Sometimes she would take us aside for a one-on-one conference about our relationship to God and what our disobedience and rebellion would bring later in life. She'd always want us to pray too and ask God's forgiveness before getting that whipping. I don't remember that our prayers ever saved us from a good thrashing, but it certainly left an impression. There were occasions as we grew older that she would add that she expected a trip to the altar at church the next Sunday if we really were repentant.

### **Going To Church**

Getting ready for church was a hoot. Can you imagine getting six children in various states of chaos dressed and ready for church on Sunday morning and that with only one bathroom? It was chaotic. There were many arguments and so much fighting going on you'd think fire would come from heaven to consume us. But a miracle happened every Sunday morning, as soon as the car doors opened to get out at church we were little angels and mom and dad were all smiles like nothing ever happened.

### **Our Church**

We had the privilege of going to a church under the ministry of some great preachers. Rev. Swaney was one of my favorites. He preached with passion. I don't remember any messages but I remember him sweating as he preached his heart out. His shiny bald head would pour down sweat as he preached. We had great musicians in our church. Ira Bleyaert on the piano, my Uncle Gene the organ, Mrs. Dunbar on the xylophone, and a full drum set where normally you would see the communion table. There were trumpets, trombones, an accordion and harmonica to enhance our worship. This was all back in the 1950's during the time period of Rev. Don Swaney.

### **Shekinah Glory Came Down**

I remember one church service in Monroe in which the Holy Spirit came down in awesome power on the congregation. They called it revival. I remember hearing Mom and Dad talking about it in the car on the way home. They mentioned the shimmering fog-like presence that appeared on the platform. When they said that, I remember thinking back to the service and remembered seeing that fog above the preacher. In my childlike heart I said to myself, "Huh, so that's what that was!" I never forgot it. I have preached about the *Shekinah* glory and used that illustration. I later found out that Jack Hayford has seen the same thing in his church. Mom may not even remember that experience, but it impacted my life greatly with a hunger to see and experience that presence of God.

### **Children's Programs**

We also had the benefit of a children's program called *Jet Cadets* that encouraged Bible memorization through prizes and awards. We also had some amazing leaders and Sunday School teachers that loved us and taught us well. Many of them followed us in our spiritual journeys on into adulthood. Of course as with most churches we had the few boring teachers that simply read the lesson, but for the most part our memories are positive despite the damp church basement with mildew and peeling walls.

I always enjoyed having men for teachers, not because they were better than women teachers, but because we needed heroic male role models. One of my favorites was Glen Wilkins, an ex-boxer with a cauliflower ear. He impressed us. Then there was one pretty young mother who was loving and kind but to whom the boys in our class were relentless in their godless challenges to the existence of God, just to get her upset. I will never forget the day she ran from the class in tears because she could not answer their questions.

### **Vacation Bible School**

Vacation Bible School was always a special treat. It sometimes went on for two weeks. We didn't mind. There wasn't anything else to do with our summers. When we lived out in the country on Keagan Road we were

encouraged to invite our friends and neighbors to bring them to VBS. Mom didn't drive and Dad was always at work, so we arranged with a farmer to pick us up with his old truck. We all sat in the back singing choruses during the 20-minute ride to church. I don't ever remember getting rained on and no one ever fell out either. Many of our friends came to Jesus because mom and dad were faithful to encourage us to get our friends to Vacation Bible School and church.