

ONE
IN
SEVEN THOUSAND



The Life and
Legacy of
Samuel Watson
Thornton

Charles Thornton

DEDICATION

The book is dedicated to those followers of Jesus Christ who live and serve in the shadows. They are neither numbered among the Christian elite, nor lauded as the Christian “greats”. They live, for the most part, quiet lives. Their ministry goes unlauded. They serve with eternity’s values in view. They are people “...of whom the world (is) not worthy...” (Hebrews 11:38). “One of Seven Thousand” is simply the story of one of the many. Praise God for them all!

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Stephanie Randall has done me a great service by proof reading this document. Any grammatical or punctuation errors are my responsibility, not hers.

Above all else, my deepest thanks go to God, Who has graciously allowed me the privilege of having S.W. Thornton for my father. In this special relationship I have had the opportunity to observe the reality of a growing faith and walk with Jesus Christ.

SOURCES

This book has a number of sources: letters, records, family histories (both written and oral), articles (published and unpublished) and, to a great extent, memories of my siblings and others. The very nature of researching and writing such a book has its problems. The author will state things in his own way. His interpretation of events may differ from that of others. Despite the best of intentions, he will include some things that others may feel are not relevant, or omit some things that others may feel are very significant. I accept the responsibility for those differences.

All Scripture portions herein quoted to are taken from the Authorized King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

Endnotes have been added, to identify the special sources of some of the contents of this book.

Charles Thornton

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PREFACE

Why this book? Psalm 78 contains an extensive recital of God's dealings with and for the Children of Israel. Why? Verses 5 through 7 give us the answer. There we read:

“...he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.”

This book exists for the simple purpose of reminding the reader of the great God Whom Samuel Watson Thornton served. This author desires that, as a result of seeing how great God is, the reader will: “set (his) hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”

The Thornton family is a family of people who, despite human frailties, has sought to follow a great God. It is true that we often do as my father said on several occasions: “We remember with pride our ancestors, with their positive attributes, but we tend to overlook the ‘horse thieves’ and renegades. We prefer to keep them hidden in the closet.” But it is also true that many of our ancestors have endeavored to live their lives with a passion for God. Those lives were, for the most part, “little known nor long remembered,”ⁱ but they set a pattern for future generations to follow.

The aim of this volume is to remind the reader that God graciously walks with, and works through, ordinary people who trust in an extraordinary God. Samuel Watson Thornton was one of those.

INTRODUCTION

Why should the story of one man's life be called "One of Seven Thousand?" What makes this a particularly fitting title for the subject of this document?

For every Elijah, who has been much in the public eye, who has expended himself for God; who has thrilled to the victories; who has tasted the agony of defeat; and who, despite his knowledge of God and His grace, has come to despair, thinking: "I alone am left; and they seek my life to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14), there are "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal..." (1 Kings 19:18).

Yes, and all of them un-named, with the possible exception of a few, such as Obadiah (1 Kings 18:3-4). So many of God's choice servants labor in anonymity.

For every Gideon there are three hundred un-named men who go to battle for Israel in the name of the LORD.

For every General Norman Schwarzkopf there were thousands of "unknown" soldiers who fought in Desert Storm.

For every Medal of Honor winner in our nation's history, there has been any number of equally courageous men and women who were never awarded such recognition.

For every Mother Teresa there are hundreds of women who selflessly serve Jesus Christ by ministering to the helpless and needy around the world.

For every William Carey, Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, or Andrew Murray, there are those whose fame will never extend beyond their immediate family or sphere of influence, who serve God in anonymity.

Samuel Watson Thornton belongs to that body of followers of Jesus Christ who live and serve, generally speaking, in the shadows. His life never had the public acclaim of Billy Graham. His ministry never made the headlines in major newspapers. His accomplishments may never be recorded in books about missionary or pastoral 'greats'. He never wrote a book. (Is it blasphemous to suggest that in that he was not

different from his Lord, Jesus Christ?) Nevertheless there is evidence that in the records of heaven there are notices made of anyone who loves his Lord and seeks to be a faithful servant wherever he may be assigned to serve.

That service was to lead Watson from America to Japan as a child, from Japan to America for schooling, back to Japan for missionary work, back to...

But wait! Let's start at the beginning.

ACT I

Melancholy Jacques muses:ⁱⁱ

“At first the infant...”

* * * * *

“For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the LORD.”

(1 Samuel 1:27-28)

CHAPTER 1

A Son Is Born

“...Hannah...called his name Samuel, saying: Because I have asked him of the LORD. (1 Sam. 1:20)

On October 18, 1903, in Havana, Illinois, a son was born to Jesse Blackburn and Eliza Williams (Thorpe) Thornton, the second of six children born to that union. Samuel Watson Thornton was given a name well known and well ‘worn’ by previous Thornton generations.

How significant is that? After all, if you were to simply change the date, place, and names, you would have the story of roughly seven billion people on earth today.

But, names are important. They tell a story of continuity, connectedness, and historical identification. Based on family records, the name Samuel has a long history among the Thorntons. Watson’s Great, Great, Great, Great, Grandfather was named Samuel (b.1712). Altogether, seven out of the last nine generations of Thorntons have had a Samuel listed among them.ⁱⁱⁱ

”What’s in a name. A rose, by any other name, smells just as sweet.”^{iv} Still, whenever we hear the word “rose,” we immediately think of the flower, its beauty and its fragrance. Those who are familiar with the Bible have a perception of one who listens to God’s call whenever they hear the name “Samuel.”

Perhaps more than the name itself is the genuine spiritual heritage that the Thorntons shared and passed on to their progeny. God, through the author of the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, holds before us four successive generations of one family that are noted for their faith. In the same way, successive generations of Thorntons have given testimony, by both word and life, to their faith in, and commitment to, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Let’s take a bit closer look at this heritage that was passed down to ‘our’ Samuel Watson Thornton.

Watson's Great, Great, Great, Great Grandfather, Samuel Thornton (b. 1712 in Clare County, Ireland), was a Presbyterian Minister. His son James (b. 1747) was the father of Samuel (b. 1790), who became the father of Samuel Watson (b. 1818), who in turn became our Watson's Great Grandfather.

Watson, as he was called in "History of the Thornton Family"^v, became a Methodist circuit-riding preacher over the Findlay, Ohio Circuit. He was not able to read well because as a sickly child he had been unable to attend school regularly. Yet in preparing to preach, he would go into the barn or some other quiet place, carefully sound out, and then practice reading aloud the several verses that were to be his text for the Sunday message. This he did until he could ably present the Scripture each Lord's Day. In 1842, at age 24, after a very short ministry, he died of consumption. Upon his death, he left a 10 month-old son.

Samuel Watson Thornton (b. 1841) went into the army during the Civil War. He began preaching soon after, was married and went west as a Missionary. He soon became Superintendent of all Methodist Missions in Arizona and Utah and was sent to New York to collect men to serve there. When his wife died, he came back to Illinois. In 1905 he became Chaplain in the penitentiary at Joliet, Illinois.

Jesse Blackburn (b. 1875), our Watson's father came next. The story behind his name is most interesting, since it was quite a departure from the tradition of naming sons "Samuel."

It appears that the Bishop of the District, in which this Thornton was born, was an unmarried man who regretted that he had no heir or namesake. So (the story continues) he christened Baby Thornton with the name given to himself at birth - Jesse Blackburn. In those days ministers of the Gospel were held in higher esteem than many today, so Jesse's parents accepted this surprising change to their plans, and the S.W. chain was broken.

In the next chapter we shall hear more of the spiritual example and challenge our Watson received from his father, Jesse.

CHAPTER 2

Back to Basics

“...when He...was pleased to reveal His Son...”

(Galatians 1:15-16)

“Many things are better ‘caught’ than ‘taught’”, is an old, but true saw. Therein lies the significance of Jesus’ call to His disciples in Mark’s Gospel. There we find (chapter 3:14) that “He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him.” Being “with Him” meant that the Twelve, not only heard His teaching, but also that they observed His actions, reactions, attitudes and responses in everyday life.

The impact of one’s life on another cannot be adequately measured until, usually, many years have passed. While many men and women made contributions to his formation, doubtless none were more significant than his father and mother. And of those many elements from his parents’ lives that served to mold Watson’s life and character, perhaps none was more significant than the following.

In 1904, J. B. Thornton (age 29) took his wife, two-year old daughter Ruth, and one-year old son Samuel to India to assume the pastorate of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Madras. It was during the time of that pastorate that Jesse underwent a truly life-changing experience that permanently marked his life and ministry. Let Jesse relate this in his own words:

* * * * *

THE GREATEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE

AS A CHILD OF GOD

J. B. THORNTON

As I sit in the evening of my many years as a child of God, and over half a century in the service of Christ, and look back over many great and glorious experiences in the will of God, it may seem strange that any one event should stand out above all.

My explanation for this conviction (is) the fact that all that preceded that experience now seems to have been leading to that great hour, as all that followed it flowed from it.

The time and place of this wonderful event, which so stands out, is as follows: --The place was Madras, India; the year, 1904; the hour, midnight. After a ministry in the states of 5½ years as a Pastor, I was suddenly called to leave a growing work and start for Madras to be the Pastor of a large English speaking church in that city.

Within six weeks we were on our way. It was as unexpected as Abraham's call, or the apostle's call, but it was God. I was amazed at the blessings that filled my soul and surrounded us. All who obey the leadings of the Spirit will understand how true this is. I was rejoicing in many evidences of God's favor, and I was keen to do his will.

It was in such circumstances and such a mind I went to bed that memorable night. I had no thought of what would take place. The night was dark. I was sound asleep when suddenly I was wide-awake and afraid. Great fear came to me, for I heard a voice, a voice I had heard before -- a voice speaking to my soul. Those who believe God's record will understand that God can and does speak to the soul. I am not trying to defend myself from a charge of fanaticism.

God's record is full of evidence. --The boy, Samuel's, experience; Isaiah in the temple; Paul on the way to Damascus. The proof that it is God who speaks is found in what He says and the results in the one who hears.

That night I knew the Lord -- my Lord -- was in that room and I was afraid at His Presence. This fear was not terror or fright, but it was the awakening of my soul to His Holy Presence. This, I know now, was "The fear that is the beginning both of wisdom and knowledge".

(Proverbs 1:7 & 9:10) But apart from the voice I would not have known why I was visited. But, oh how thankful I am for the Voice of Him whose servant I was -- His was the right to speak to me.

He said, “You shall die tonight”. Frightened, I cried out loud in the darkness, “Lord, what have I done?” The answer came quickly, “You have despised my word. I called you. I saved you. I exalted you to be my preacher. I have honored you and given you a high place among my people, and you have neglected my Book. You have not even read it through once. You neither know nor preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. You use my Book to get texts for your own knowledge and wisdom. I have waited for you to awake and seek. Now, I am taking you away.”

In great fear and fully awake to the truth of all this, I cried out, “Lord have mercy; spare me and I promise I will lock my library up in the morning and will read no book or magazine or paper until I read Thy Book through from cover to cover. And it shall be my only book of knowledge and my only authority as long as I live.”

The fear of death left me and I sank back in peace and assurance.

The next morning I went into my study and locked up all my books, then sat down to begin to live by every word of God. And since that day I have been truly a man of one Book so far as truth and authority is concerned. “Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into the obedience of Christ.”

Christ said to His disciples in John 8:32, “Continue ye in my word and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free – and ye shall be free indeed.” Oh how great and unspeakable that freedom is!

An ever-increasing freedom has been my portion through the years.

In closing I would like to say this -- the most wonderful thing in my experience is not how it came to pass, but the fact that it came to pass in God's wisdom and grace. And my word of exhortation is, "Obey God's voice and word to you." For, after all, the truth remains that all progress in the Christian life depends upon obedience; and Christ's great direction to all who believe in Him is still and always -- "If you would be my disciple and know what I know and be what I am and where I am, deny thyself; take up thy cross and follow Me." Amen

— — —

Jesse Blackburn Thornton's life (he died in 1958, at age 82) was a source of inspiration and challenge to those who knew him. During his last years on this earth, the ravages of Parkinson's disease made him bedfast. His confidence in God, despite his infirmity, was an example to those about him.

ACT II

The Bard of Avalon continues:

”Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.”

* * * * *

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature,
and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52)

CHAPTER 3

A Time to Learn – Japan

In 1908, at 5 years of age, Samuel's parents moved from India to Kobe, Japan, where Jesse became pastor of the Kobe Union Church. This church ministered especially to the English-speaking people living in Kobe. Between 1908 and 1926 when Jesse assumed the pastoral leadership of the Hope Church in St. Louis, Missouri, his ministry was primarily in Japan.

During childhood, Watson acquired a facility in the language that many missionaries devote years to gain.

In 1911, Jesse returned to the United States for two years. Watson was ages eight and nine during that trip.

Then, back to Japan. This time Jesse would be working with the Japan Evangelistic Band (JEB) between 1913 and 1919. At age 12 or 13 Watson had a definite experience with God.

One particular event in the time following his conversion stood out in Watson's mind. During the time he was of Junior High School age, the teacher of the boy's Sunday School class would take his class for outings, such as hiking or swimming. Once, while walking on the beach with his class, he asked: "Watson, what sort of girl do you want to marry?" After some discussion about the desirability of one who loved God and was, among other things, a virgin (and good looks would not be a 'deterrent' either), he continued: "Don't you think you should make certain you are the same type of boy?"

On one occasion, during this period of my father's life, the news spread that the Crown Prince of Japan (Emperor Hirohito's son) was to pass through their town on the train. Watson and some of his Japanese friends wanted to see the event. There was a hitch in their plans, however. According to Japanese culture, the common people were never to look at the Emperor or members of his family. When the boys lay on a hill overlooking the railroad, Watson's friends dutifully kept their heads bowed, while he 'peeked.' Such are the foibles of youth.

CHAPTER 4

Away at School - USA

Between the ages of 15 and 20, from 1919-1924, Watson's parents sent him away from Kobe to 'get away from the evil influences.' Watson later wrote: "In spite of my baptism, I had no concept of the possibility and need of a holy walk with God. Consequently I soon drifted back into a sinful life, until at the age of fifteen my parents were led by the Lord to send me alone back from Japan to America to continue my education."

Watson returned to the United States, to attend Blackburn Junior College (Bible Institute) in Illinois for high school and two years of Jr. College. His parents were still ministering in Japan.

Did Watson play football? Greenfield, Illinois enjoys the historical fact that its football team competed against Blackburn and won in many instances. It is easy to forget that Blackburn had a team of high school age. Greenfield probably had players as old as college students. If indeed Dad played football, it would have been on a Blackburn team.

At school breaks or summer months during this period, he stayed in Greenfield at the home known as the Henderson place. This was his Grandfather Henderson's home and was placed under the oversight of Mr. Ned Prindle, caretaker. Horses were bred here for commercial use, one use being to provide the U S Postal service the animals necessary to haul the mail. The animals were rotated back to the farm for rehabilitation and one such animal was used on this occasion.

On a given evening Watson took this seasoned horse with buggy and proceeded to the city of Greenfield for a night out. On this 6-mile journey he would have most likely passed as many as 15 homes, each having a mailbox. On the return trip fatigue overtook him and he fell asleep. He fell asleep, as many times as there were mailboxes because without any directive the animal had been trained to pull up at each and every mailbox. Prior to leaving the animal waited for the familiar "cluck" before proceeding further.

At some time during these years a major battle ensued between Watson and God. The primary issue was over Watson's life work. Watson wanted and planned to be a farmer. God wanted him to be a preacher. After some time of intense struggle, guess Who won? Interestingly enough, in the years after returning from Japan, Watson managed the farming activities at Tadmor. Years later in a conversation between two of his sons, Sam and Charles, one of them observed that "it took both of us to fulfill the dreams of our father (both farmer and preacher)."

Snippets

He told of an assignment, which involved milking a cow on an eight (8) hour schedule (3 times daily) instead of the normal twelve (12) hour schedule (2 times daily). The midnight "milking" became a very real challenge for him. (I do not recall the precise purpose for his sharing this experience, but think it involved a confrontation with his roommate over Dad's disruptive midnight activity.)

- Sam

Watson then returned to Japan, attending the Japan Self-Help Bible School. The school lasted five years, teaching 15-20 boys at a time. Ten Japanese leaders came from that school. Watson was there the last two years of the school. The students worked at the school's peanut butter factory between classes and ministered in the churches on weekends. The business is still called 'Sonton' (Thornton) Peanut Butter Factory in Japan. This is in honor of J.B.Thornton, who brought the first peanut butter making machine to be used by the students.

One incident from these days of which Watson spoke reveals the seriousness with which he sought to apply God's Word in his everyday life. When he was 12 or 13 years of age, Watson had stolen a spiral bound pocket notebook, worth perhaps ten or fifteen cents, from a Japanese store. In America, after surrendering to God regarding his life goals, the Spirit of God began to remind him of this sin of theft, along with the biblical demand for restitution. No matter how he might endeavor to explain it away: "I did it so long ago that the shop keeper either

never realized the loss or has forgotten it,” or “the item was so inexpensive that it isn’t important,” or “I am in America, so how am I to make restitution in Japan?” But God would not allow Sam (as he was called in College) peace in the matter. Therefore, upon returning to Japan in 1924, he went to the shop owner and confessed his sin, along with his offer to repay the cost of the notebook. Although the loss had been forgotten by then, and the financial loss insignificant, Watson’s commitment to make God’s Word the guiding light in every arena of his life, motivated him to insist on repaying the value of the little notebook. It was yet another way in which he was able to give testimony to his faith in, and commitment to, Jesus Christ.

It was during the five-year existence of the Japan Self-Help Bible School that Watson’s father, Jesse (J.B. Thornton) took four separate mission trips into the interior. Each time he took with him some of the Bible School students. Watson’s cornet served to announce the Gospel meetings. The students were able to observe and assist Jesse as he preached the Gospel through an interpreter.

When his father moved to St. Louis, Missouri to assume the pastorate of Hope Church, Watson (age 23) attended Shurtleff College. This was in 1926. During this time of schooling, he also ministered at the Presbyterian Church, in Mitchell, Illinois (his first pastorate). It was a dying church, but he decided to give it a try for three months. Two years later it was a strong church. (Some plans are changed by God’s direction and blessing.)

ACT III

Shakespeare's next age:
"And then the lover..."

* * * * *

"It is not good for man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18)

CHAPTER 5

Taking a Wife

“...the LORD God made...a woman, and brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:22)

“The Rev. and Mrs. J. B. Thornton and Mr. & Mrs. Charles Herbert Gash request the honor of your presence at the marriage of their children, Samuel Watson Thornton and Mary Scott Gash, on February 25th, 1929 at Hope Church, located at the corner of Semple and Cote Brilliant, in St. Louis, Missouri.”

Such words often mark the result of either days, months or even years of acquaintance, dating and courting. For Watson and Mary, this announcement revealed the culmination of God’s direction in bringing together two of His children for a lifetime of service for His glory.

Mary (age 22) had completed a year of study at Wheaton College, with an emphasis in her field of choice – Piano. She had early shown a remarkable ability in accompanying musicians. On one occasion, a vocal soloist had sung at a special performance at the Kiel Auditorium (a well-known location for concerts in St. Louis). The following Sunday, he was invited to sing at Hope Church. Since his accompanist was unable to be with him, Mary was asked to substitute for him. He had been requested to sing one of the songs from his preceding concert program; however, he had no written music for that particular song. Mary, when asked, accompanied him, although she had no music and had heard it played only the one time in concert.

One episode (repeated on several different occasions) they delighted to relate reveals not only the fact that they frequently dated on “short rations” financially, but also that they determined to enjoy their relationship despite that fact. Often at the conclusion of a concert or some other event, Watson would say: “Mary, we have sufficient funds to either a) take the trolley home, or b) eat some ice cream and walk.” Mary’s sweet tooth

usually won the day, so they would walk home, all the time thoroughly appreciating the taste of ice cream.

Mary became the wife of a 25 year-old pastor. Their marriage took place during his two-year stint (1928-1929) as pastor of the Bethlehem Church (Congregational) in St. Louis (Watson's second pastorate). Since that time, Mary's ability on both piano and organ were great additions to Watson's ministry through the coming years.

Snippets

It is true that Mary set aside the joy of playing classical music to become a missionary's wife. It is also true that, many years later, at an age when the six other accomplished pianists from her high school class were retired, she was able to accompany a vocalist who specialized in classical music.

Then came the years of ministry and family growth in Japan.

ACT IV

“Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the bard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.”

* * * * *

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this
life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a
soldier.”

(2 Timothy 2:1-4)

CHAPTER 6

Heeding God's Call

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God...”

(Ephesians 6:13)

Shakespeare's words (see previous page) do not fitly describe Watson, with the exception of two phrases: “Then a soldier” and “Jealous in honor”.

Perhaps the meaning of the first is best explained by the words of the hymn writers: “Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on...” or “Am I a soldier of the cross, a foll'wer of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His name...No, I must fight if I would win, increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word”, or again “Rise up ye men of God. Have done with lesser things. Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of Kings.”

The second is seen in a life lived with the goal of obeying the Word and will of God, regardless of the consequences.

This jealousy for God's honor motivated Watson to seek to know God's will and then to obey it. One example of this is the steps he and Mary took as they prepared to go to Japan as missionaries. Having prayerfully determined that God wanted them there, they approached a couple of Mission Boards about serving under them. The answer from both was to the effect that Watson had never stuck at anything long enough to demonstrate his ability to “stay by the stuff” in missions ministry.

The problem now was this: Since they believed that God wanted them in Japan, what should they do about it? They were greatly helped by the knowledge of experiences of people with whom they were familiar.

Dad was acquainted with Irene Webster Smith, who ran an orphanage in Japan by trusting in God for His provision.

They knew of Hudson Taylor, whose total dependency was on God to supply all the needs of the China Inland Mission.

They had heard of Amy Carmichael, whose ministry needs to save both girls and boys from the insidious trafficking in human slavery of India, were supplied by trusting God.

My father grew up in the home of J.B. Thornton, who responded to God's call and, accordingly, left the security of the Methodist Church to launch out depending only on God for both direction and resources.

Therefore, Watson and Mary believed they should go in simple dependence on God for support. Hope Church committed to pray for them and send any funds so designated on to them.

God honored their faith and commitment. For the first three or four months, the finances were low and sporadic. Then, for the rest of the seven years they were in Japan, at least \$100 came in each month. Only upon returning to the United States did Watson ever learn "the rest of the story."

One day, after their return, Charles Mellis, a contractor in the Hope Church congregation, asked Watson, "Tell me, just how did the work in Japan go?" Watson was a bit surprised at the question. But he answered, telling of God's hand in the ministry. He then asked, "Why do you ask?"

To which Charles answered: "You see, I am a businessman. I am always interested in what my investments yield. Shortly after you and Mary left for Japan, God put you on my heart to support. So I made a contract (if you will) with God. I said, 'Lord, if You provide the work and income, I shall send \$100 per month to the Thorntons.' He has kept His end of the bargain, and I have maintained mine. That's why I want to know how the ministry went."

Does not that one incident (of many) reveal Watson's deep confidence in, and commitment to the glory and honor of God?

When my Dad told me of that incident, I was all the more emboldened to trust God, even when I could not see all the 'how' of His plan.

Two other incidents from Japan resound in my mind as a tribute to my father's zeal that God should be honored in his life.

The first involved my older sisters: the twins – Ruth and Alice. It also harks back to the days when Dad milked cows at Blackburn College. When the twins were quite small, there was a period of time when they were extremely colicky. One evening Dad was at home, and they were very unhappy (to say the least). Nothing would appease them. Slowly Dad’s anger (revealed at Blackburn by his beating the cows with a milking stool, when they a) stepped in the milk bucket, b) hit his face with a cocklebur-filled tail, as they swatted at flies, or c) stepped on his foot as they moved about) rose. Then he exploded. Suddenly he realized that, in his anger, he had begun beating the twins! His daughters!

His heart broke! He left the house and ran out into the night.

“Oh God!”, he prayed, “I can’t control my anger. You must do it. If You don’t, I have no hope.”

And God did His part. He stepped in take the control Watson did not have.

Years later, at Tadmor, I had the privilege of watching as my father received a blistering tongue-lashing from a neighboring farmer.

It came about like this: During an early fall flood, some fences were washed out. Some of our cows got across the Meramec River and into this farmer’s cornfield. They proceeded to destroy several acres of corn. The neighbor was furious, and berated Dad for allowing his cows to a) get out, b) cross the river into his cornfield, and c) destroy his crop.

(I might add, here, that Dad stood at least 5 inches taller than the other man.) My father listened quietly, and patiently. Then he spoke.

The precise words I cannot recall. But I do recall the intent. It went something like this: “I regret deeply that you are offended by this incident. They are indeed my cows, and they have indeed done damage to your corn. I am a Christian and, as such, take the Word of God as my rule of faith and practice. The Scriptures tell me that I am to make this thing right. I offer you

two possible ways to work this out: 1) I am willing to give you (at harvest time) an amount of corn equal to the amount you have lost, or 2) I will pay you for the lost corn an amount equal to the value of harvest from a portion of field equal to what has been destroyed.”

Upon hearing these words, the farmer visibly wilted. His truculent manner changed and he became amenable to Dad’s proposal. At harvest time, Dad drove a wagonload of corn over to our neighbor, and everything was all right. Watson Thornton was “jealous for God’s honor.”

At a later time, this man acknowledged that Dad’s response led him to change his attitude about things spiritual. This was one instance where God revealed His answer to Dad’s commitment to pray regularly for the men in the surrounding areas.

Another instance comes to mind in which my father demonstrated his deep commitment to the ultimate authority of God’s Word.

There came a time when the leadership of the JEB (Japan Evangelistic Band) felt it necessary to develop a Doctrinal Statement. Upon completion of this Statement, all the JEB workers were asked to sign it. When my father was approached, he declined to do so. Upon being asked for a reason, he stated essentially the following: “While I am in full agreement with the Doctrinal Statement, I decline to sign because I think this Statement contains a twofold subtle danger: first, that it may well exclude some who would and could well serve with the JEB, except that they have not yet grown enough in their understanding of Scripture to be able, in good faith, to sign; and the second is that it may exclude those whose understanding of God’s Word has moved farther than the understanding expressed by the Statement.”

He continued to serve with the JEB, but not as a “card carrying” member. He also, for his entire life, had a delightful openness to working alongside anyone who sought to follow Scripture and promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 7

Family...Phase One

“...a troop cometh...Gad” (Genesis 30:11 – KJV)

On June 12th, 1931 (during Watson’s twenty-eighth year), Ruth Esther and Alice Jane (the twins) doubled the household. Nineteen months later (January 24, 1933), Charles Gash arrived. And that event carries with it a story:

While Watson anticipated naming this son “Samuel Watson” as a continuing Thornton tradition, Mary desired to honor her father by naming this son after him. (Most couples are able to discuss this sort of thing and arrive at a mutually acceptable solution. But this was an exception.) In order to settle the question in a biblical way, they applied Proverbs 16:33 as God’s answer to their dilemma: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”

So...they wrote each name on a separate slip of paper, placed them in a hat, shook them up, and drew out one. The name drawn was...(drum roll here!) Charles Gash. The debate was over. Both my father and mother were satisfied that I was named as God decreed.

Elsie Lois arrived 12 ½ months later (February 3, 1934), and Martha Henderson followed her by another 13 months (March 10, 1934). For approximately 3 years there was a lull in the tempo of family growth, until after the return to America in 1937.

This completes the number of the “Japanese half” of the family. These knew some experience with tatamis, sliding paper walls, hibachis, sitting on the floor, and other uniquely Japanese cultural matters. For most of us children, however, this had little significance in our growth, since we were all below school age when we moved to America.

(This author does experience periodic longings to eat rice. The question logically arises: Is that a matter of heredity or environment? Perhaps it is simply a matter of hunger.)

CHAPTER 8

Tent-making 101

“...he stayed with them...for they were tent-makers.” (Acts 18:3)

In 1937, Watson and Mary brought their family back to the United States. They had had seven years of uninterrupted service in Japan. Now there was a need to provide schooling for the growing children. (How much, or how little, awareness they had of the impending World War II, this author has never heard.)

Aboard ship, during the return trip, all five children became sick with measles. Upon arrival in San Francisco, they had to be quarantined. God graciously provided a home (in a city far from home) for Watson’s family to use while recuperating.

Then, on to St. Louis, where the Thorntons stayed in the home of the Frank Widben family. These gracious people provided a safe haven for the little children as they entered the English-speaking world of America.

Within six months, Watson, Mary and their five moved 100 miles southwest of St. Louis to Tadmor, a farm owned by the Hope Church, which J.B. Thornton pastored. There Watson began his “tent-making” career – managing the farming operations of Tadmor, while overseeing the ministry of the Tadmor Self-help Bible School, and preaching in area school-houses, and wherever neighbors were willing to meet to worship God.

Watson was keenly aware of the call of God on his life. The years in Missouri (1937-1953) were filled with active service as he preached and taught the Word of God. It was not unusual to have a Sunday morning service at one location, an afternoon meeting at a second, and, at times, yet another meeting at a third. Mary usually went along to play piano and aid in the singing. Often the children participated, as well.

Then there were opportunities for holding Bible studies in various homes. Watson seized these as uniquely prepared by God

for reaching families and friends in a more informal setting. His greatest joy was to help people understand the teaching of God's Word.

Snippets

From Mary's notes, Dec. 1944, - while living at Tadmor: "Sunday, a full day. County Farm service & 2 Jones families there. Invited to John Jones' for supper (5 sons in army-she's so lonesome). Wesco P M service. They surprised us with gifts of food. First such demonstration of the "congregations".

"Some gave us money, roots, canned goods, beans, coffee, etc...2 feed sacks for each girl. (butchered 2 hogs in Dec.) Xmas party at Mound Ridge."

Whatever Watson did, he constantly endeavored to minister to the hearts of men and women for the cause of Christ. Arthur McCann, the son of a neighbor, was one such individual. At the age of nine he became deaf. In his autobiography^{vi} he stated:

"...The summer months were spent in the fields cultivating the crops and harvesting hay... One of the distant neighbors had purchased a large threshing machine powered by a huge steam driven tractor. He would go from farm to farm threshing oats and wheat. All the neighbors would follow him to help each other, and large dinners were prepared by the farmwomen. No money was involved as all help was voluntary and the owner of the equipment took his pay in a percentage of the grain, which he sold. Some farmers, who had no grain, would volunteer to work in return for the large dinner.

It was during my first summer of helping (1940 – CGT) that I met Rev. Watson Thornton at his farm. He had been a missionary to Japan before coming to our area as a minister. He would hold Sunday services in the Benton Creek schoolhouse and there were carry-in dinners afterward. We became close friends and would talk a lot about his travels. He would never accept money

for helping a neighbor and was loved by everyone. He was instrumental in helping me to accept my handicap and did much in leading me to have faith in God.”

Halfway between the Big House and the Farm House stood an old-fashioned gas pump. Gasoline was pumped from the underground tank up into a glass vessel, from which it ran, by gravity feed, through a hose to the car or tractor tank or can. The pump supplied petrol for the farm equipment. Occasionally neighbors would stop by needing gasoline. Watson would sell them sufficient to meet their immediate need. If they stopped by on Sunday, he would give them the gasoline, rather than sell it, because he believed that God forbid doing business on Sunday.

Snippets

Picking blackberries was often a family affair. Grandpa (J.B) and Grandma Thornton, Uncles, Aunts, cousins, and maybe some other friends, would join our family on a berry-picking outing. Dad would place several ten-gallon milk cans, 2 ½ gallon buckets and various other kitchen pans in the trailer (we children always wanted to ride there too). Then, off to the Taylor’s home. There we seemed to always find plenty of berries. Of course there was a picnic lunch – eaten with berry-stained hands putting sandwiches into berry-stained mouths. (What child could resist eating a [major?] portion of what he or she picked?)

Then, back home, where adults labored to can berries for later use. Not infrequently we would have fresh-baked pies or cobblers. Oh yes, hand-cranked ice cream would round out the menu to complete a wonderful day.

During those days, most of our neighbors were pretty self-sufficient. Gardening provided many of the vegetables needed for meals. Canning preserved fruit and berries for use through the winters. Hunting and fishing also were a means of providing food. Watson had a rifle (a Mossburg .22 caliber,) but he used it for only two purposes: 1) to kill hogs at butchering time, and 2) for ‘plinking’ (shooting at targets, cans, etc.)

Raising and butchering both hogs and beef was another common practice in our community. One late fall day, I recall that Dad, with the help of other men, butchered 7 hogs. After killing, dipping into water (boiling in a barrel over an open fire), scraping to remove the hair, and cutting into halves, the carcasses were laid out on tables in the screened-in porch of the Big House to cool. The next day they would be cut into hams, bacon, and jowls, with a considerable portion being set aside to make pork sausage.

That was a Wednesday. That evening we went to Asher Hollow School house for prayer meeting. When we returned, we discovered that someone had stolen the butchered hogs. Gone was the meat provision for the winter. Gone was the result of a day's hard labor by the men. While I do not recall any other details, it seems that my father faced this as another of the tests God often allows His children to face. It was another opportunity to trust Him for the supply of their daily need.

CHAPTER 9

Family...Phase Two

“...a troop cometh...Gad” (Genesis 30:11 – KJV)

Samuel Watson Thornton, Jr. was born on January 24, 1938 (the same date, removed by five years, as his big brother, Charles). For five-year old big brothers, some things are more memorable than others. For ‘this’ one, the best memory of that time was not the birth of Sammy. It was the fact that Dad...well:

“It was a dark and stormy night” (as the proverbial “Who-dun-it” begins). Actually, it was a rainstorm the night Sammy was born. Such a storm, in fact, that Benton Creek flooded, making it impossible for Dad to drive across, as he returned from the hospital. So, parking on the west side of the creek, he proceeded to wade across. He had no raincoat. But, he did have an umbrella. Holding the umbrella (under which the strong wind drove the rain), he managed to keep his footing through the swirling waters.

Once across, Watson’s clothes were soaked, but he proceeded to walk home, carrying his ‘faithful’ umbrella with him.

Regardless of those things, Samuel Watson Thornton, Jr. was now a member of the family.

Five years later (February 21, 1943) John Williams made his entrance into the family circle. Not every child had a memorable entrance into our family. But every child was loved, cared for, and deeply missed, even if he (as John did) had an untimely departure (at age 37) from the earthly family circle.

Snippets

At John’s funeral, Watson stated: “I am certain that God could have simply placed His finger on the end of the gun barrel (John lost his life due to a gun shot) and prevented this human loss. But God knows His purposes best.”

Mary Catherine (March 16, 1947) was the next child to arrive on the scene. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She

marked the beginning of the second “set” of sisters (the Japanese “four”, followed by the Missouri “three”). At age 2, three of her siblings left home for either Nurses Training or College. Along with his pastoral ministry, Watson was kept busy providing for the material needs of the family during those years.

* * *

“Bread corn is bruised”, the prophet declared (Isaiah 28:28). Even as meal for fine bread or cakes must be crushed all the finer, so it is with God’s people. Some He crushes and pummels with His mill wheel of experience so they will be made usable for special service. Even so it was with the next Thornton baby.

“We’re going to have a baby!” That “we” part is how the Thornton children must have reacted to the news. God, however, had different plans. On one day (or night) in early 1949, our father made hurried arrangements for us to be “farmed out” to various families in Wesco. He then, as Martha relates it: “rode in the ambulance to Rolla with Mom. She delivered the baby in the ambulance. He described her as a beautiful baby who fit in one of his hands.” This child, as God in His wisdom had decreed, did not live.

Let Ruth continue the story: “Yes, it was a cold winter. Dad had the undertaker make a small pine box, which we placed in the back shed. “Mama would awaken, crying: ‘Yes, Lord. I know You have her, but it is so cold out there.’ I believe we had snow (we did – CGT). I stayed at home with Mama while the rest went to the cemetery.”

Martha continues: “The cemetery was on the road that went past our house and the saw-mill, past the spring, up the hill to the right past Monroe Barnacle’s house and on towards Cook Station the back way.

“Our father, two or three neighbors and we older children, walked to the graveyard. Dad carried the pine box containing Susan’s body – it seemed so small. There, under a tree, the box

was buried in a small grave after reading some Scripture of hope and confidence in God, followed by prayer.”

(Jake Barnacle and his wife, Helen - our first Wesco schoolteacher - took some care of that cemetery in later years and put up some sort of a headstone for our baby, Susan Wesley.)

* * *

Baby Susan

Today I learned that you would be -
A child that God entrusts to me.
My heart is light, my outlook gay,
I can't imagine 'black' or 'gray'.

Today I wait, excitement high,
Your birth date rapidly draws nigh.
Husband and children share my joy.
Will you be born a girl or boy?

Today – too soon – the hour is near;
It should not be, but now is here.
My baby will be born today;
My body will not brook delay.

Today I weep, my Susan's gone.
She is not here, I feel alone;
She's living now, in Jesus' arms
(That place of joy, where nothing harms).

Today she's more alive than I -
This daughter that God chose to die.
But God is good, e'en through the pain.
I know I'll see Susan again.

- Charles Thornton

* * *

Nancy Agnes was born on October 11, 1951, in Rolla, Missouri. She began to 'replenish' the family residence count,

which had been reduced to 5 by the departure of Alice, Ruth and Charles for further schooling two years previously. At age 2, the family moved out of state, so the bulk of Nancy's growing years was spent in Greenfield, Illinois.

On April 3, 1953, Susan Wesley Thornton was born. Alice relates the following: "Mama went into labor and Mama, Daddy and I (Alice is a registered nurse - CGT) drove to the Rolla Hospital. There our youngest sister was born...with some severe complications. In addition to having her right forearm essentially end with one finger, she had some serious internal complications.

When Alice asked Watson the age-old question: "Why?", he replied: "God gave nine whole, healthy children to Mary and me. He must have felt that we were ones who would accept, love and care for one that had such physical disabilities, as Susan has."

Susan spent approximately half of her first two years of life in the hospital. During that time she had several surgeries for the correction of her internal problems. After that, she received a prosthetic device for her arm. She took great delight in carrying teacups held by her 'hook'. At times she would stand beside her Daddy, as he greeted people after a church service – with her hook clamped onto his suit coattail.

Five short years after her birth, God again saw fit that yet more tragedy should enter the Thornton home. Just six years earlier, Grandmother Gash had died. Only a few months before, Grandpa Thornton (Jesse) had been released from the ravages of Parkinson's disease. Now, as the result of being struck by an automobile while crossing the street in front of our home, Susan was taken from the family circle.

Many friends and neighbors came to give Watson and Mary comfort. Watson and Mary were sources of comfort to many who sought to comfort them.

"Blessed...the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are

comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), is a passage that many people saw lived out in the lives of my parents at that time.

Snippets

“I followed to the hospital, at Carrollton 13 miles distant. She was on life support, but lifeless.

After an appropriate, time Dad and Mom were asked to decide whether to continue life support or to withdraw the support and permit her imminent death.

With sorrow, but not despair and in pain, but not devastated, they quietly entrusted her to God's keeping.

The gentleman driving the auto lived some distance away in Galesburg, as I recall. He passed thru town on occasion of business. Some time later he stopped by and visited with Dad about the accident. He had approached his insurance carrier with the facts of the accident and stated his desire to see the death benefit forwarded to Susan's family. The agency agreed the sum (\$10,000) was payable, but would require that Dad file a lawsuit against them. (This was the era of "friendly lawsuits", a means by which big business began to welch on their obligations.)

This was not going to happen! Although our father had just gone through a few very hard years financially, he refused to pursue this possibility of riches, neither did he hold any ill will toward any persons involved.”

- Sam, Jr.

CHAPTER 10

Mentoring

“He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach...” (Mark 3:14)

Paul Mellow, born in China to missionary parents, provides one glimpse into the heart and ministry of Watson Thornton when he writes^{vii} in a portion of his memoirs:

That summer I reached the magic number, 21 years old. "Now what's next, Lord?" At the time, I had no idea what was going on - I did not even realize that this was a quality education situation, but there at Tadmor, from 1938 to 1941, the Lord provided for me an education far beyond my expectations. First of all, Watson and Mary Thornton took me into their home, just as though I were a part of their family. The impressive, two-story house stood on a hill in the center of the farm's 430 acres. On one side the Meramec River (according to Ben Love, a Missouri State agent) provided the best ten-mile stretch of bass fishing anywhere in Missouri. The clear water of Benton Creek flowed across the bottomland and emptied into the Meramec. Some 210 acres were cleared, and planted in corn, sorghum, wheat and hay. The 220 acres in the surrounding hills were covered with a huge variety of trees, including oak, hickory, red cedar, willow, walnut, maple, sassafras, and black gum, providing spectacular colors in the fall of the year. Tadmor certainly provided a delightful place for me to live and learn what God had in mind.

As I look back I cannot even imagine how difficult it must have been for Watson and Mary Thornton to have me in their home as they raised the first five of their ten lovely children. At first they had neither

electricity nor running water. They rarely had an opportunity to do anything as a family without me tagging along. Because of the chaotic conditions of growing up in a boarding school in China, with just a very short time with my parents in the winter months, I was - as I realize now as I look back - a pathetic misfit, pitifully lacking in social graces of any kind. Yet, out of their love for the Lord, they provided an excellent training on which to build my life. Yes, I had certainly received an excellent high school education at Chefoo, followed by three years of superb Bible teaching at Prairie Bible Institute, but before the Lord would trust me with a pastorate, He gave me a course of training in basic Christian living.

In addition to demonstrating a truly Christ-centered home, Watson introduced me to work on a farm, plowing and harvesting, putting up hay, milking cows, planting and maintaining a vegetable garden, looking after cattle and building fences, butchering hogs, and raising chickens. He showed me how to chop down trees, and then cut some of the wood into manageable pieces for fuel in the long, cold winters, and split more of it into wood for the kitchen fire. We worked together in building roads, plowing fields, harvesting crops, cutting sorghum cane and producing molasses. It was a whole new world of which I had been totally ignorant.

One of the men on the farm, Charlie Heuchan, introduced me to the problems of building houses when money was scarce.

Watson demonstrated how a father should lead his family, teaching them the Word, and practicing his faith in his daily actions. He showed how faithfulness applied to the work of a pastor, as he visited the sick and needy, and faithfully discharged his duties as the pastor of the tiny congregation at Asher Hollow, seven miles away. One rainy night I remember him trying in vain six or seven times to drive his car up a steep hill through

slippery mud, in order not to fail the folks who would be meeting at the schoolhouse. He showed me how a servant of the Lord will go into the highways and byways to help fellow Christians and point the lost to Christ. He introduced me to schoolhouse visitation, as we visited every schoolhouse in the surrounding areas twice a month for a couple of years, giving a simple Bible lesson. I remember riding with him as we looked for a school we had not contacted. We drove through the woods, following a blazed trail. We had to look for the blaze-mark, where someone had cut through the bark of oak trees, to point the way to the school.

All this time I never realized the high privilege that was mine in learning from a faithful servant of the Lord. I had seen other "giants" in the Lord's service, men and women who received the adulation of thousands, but here was a man who never had great recognition, but who loved the Lord deeply and served people faithfully.

Watson and his father, Rev. Jesse B. Thornton, gave themselves to another aspect of Tadmor. They intended to use the grounds as a Bible Institute where young people could study God's Word as they prepared to serve Him in other places. It was with this purpose that three other young people came down from St. Louis in the spring of 1941 to study: Jess Kellerman, Harold Saladin and Bernadine Bailey.

Worldwide conditions however, became more difficult as World War II raged in Europe and then in the Pacific. Indeed, with the rationing of gas and other items, the future of the school looked doubtful. The school would probably have to close before it even had a good start, and then wait till conditions improved before it could really function in the way that the Thorntons envisaged.

Meanwhile another factor made things more complicated, as I fell in love with one of these prospective

students. I had met Bernadine at a party in her home, a home that some of the young people of Hope Church seemed to regard as their recreation center. While on our trips to St. Louis to sell butter, eggs, milk, pork and other farm produce, I enjoyed stopping here to visit Bernadine's mother, Margaret Bailey, who took an interest in me long before Bernadine did. In fact, two years before Bernadine came to Tadmor her mother arranged for Pastor Thornton, Watson's father, to pick up my dirty clothes when he went down to Tadmor each week. Margaret would wash them and send them back the next week with the Pastor. Now, in that spring of 1941, Bernadine and I made a life-changing decision, to give ourselves to each other in marriage. Little did either of us have any idea how that decision would alter our lives.

Snippets

When measured by its impact on Bernadine Bailey, Harold Saladin and Jesse Kellerman, the short life of the Ozark Self-help Bible School was a success.

CHAPTER 11

Tent-making 201

“I have filled him with the Spirit of God, and with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.” (Exodus 31:3)

Watson’s “tent-making” activities were quite varied. A quick view is as follows:

In addition to farming, Watson transported school children to Wesco during the 1943-44 and 1944-45 school years.

Watson taught at Faith Bible Academy, which was located on the shore of the Lake of the Ozarks at Roach, Missouri, during the 1945-46 school year.

Snippets

The evening before the Thornton family moved to Faith Bible Academy, cars and trucks, filled with neighbors, began arriving at Tadmor. The people brought baskets full of food. The women quickly set out the dinner on tables set up by the men. Farmers did their usual thing – discussing the state of crops, cattle, and the war. Children ran around everywhere, simply...being children. What an occasion! The people came to express their appreciation for Watson and Mary’s life and contribution to their community.

Watson’s teaching career at Faith Bible Academy was short-lived. During the fall semester, he learned that the President and Vice President had spoken glowingly of God’s provision, “by faith”, of a substantial amount of money, when those funds were actually a bank loan. Upon learning of this, Watson spoke to the administration of his concern. When told that this was consistent with their understanding of living “by faith in God alone”, he told them that he would complete his year’s commitment to teach, but that he could not, in good conscience before God, be associated with an organization that misrepresented (“lied”) to supporters about its basis of operation.

In the summer of 1946 our family moved back to Tadmor. That fall, the twins and Charlie attended high school at St. James, while Elsie, Martha and Sammy were transported to Wesco.

Before the school Christmas vacation, Watson again moved his family. This time it was to Wesco...and into what had been originally a hotel, with two bedrooms on the first floor and five upstairs. The 'outhouse' was where it should be – outside the house. The five acres provided room enough for a cow, garden, and children to play.

In short order Watson turned one of the upstairs bedrooms into a bathroom.

In order for the twins and Charles to complete the fall semester at St. James High School, they stayed with the Colliers and Wynns respectively. These were two families that attended the church meeting at Asher Hollow School. After the Christmas vacation (1946), they began attending High School at Steelville.

Meanwhile, Watson never lost his vision of reaching Japanese people with the Gospel. He applied to return to Japan in response to the call of General Douglas MacArthur^{viii}. In anticipation, he sold the car and, with the proceeds, built a bathroom on the ground floor for Mary's sake during his absence. (Later, when Grandma Gash moved into our home, this proved to be a great boon.) **But God closed that door of opportunity to him.**

Watson began substitute teaching at the Wesco School during the 1949-1950 school year, as well as the following year.

Sam adds to the story: "In my 7th grade, one of the classes in the Steelville School was under the direction of a young lady who was not prepared to deal with and handle the group of rowdy's that were under her care. They threw books out the windows, played musical instruments in class, and all the other things that these young folks could think of. She had absolutely no skills in the area of discipline. So, Superintendent Talent said to Dad: "I need you to change places with her". Dad went to the Steelville School as requested. In addition, his transportation was provided in that he drove a bus. The young teacher came to Wesco and awed us with her abilities as an artist.

This was 1950 - 1951 term. My next (8th) year I spent in the Steelville School.”

Watson worked for the Rural Electric Association (REA) either wiring houses or reading electric meters. I recall riding along with him a couple times on his meter-reading rounds. Dad was willing to put his hand to anything that God provided as a means of support for the family. Through the remainder of his working years, Watson put his hand to carpentry, electrical, plumbing and teaching school.

Snippets

I went with Dad to wire a house some distance from Wesco (maybe Davisville?). The house was an extension of the chicken yard. They (possibly) gathered eggs in the bedroom inasmuch as chickens perched on the footboard.

Despite these conditions Dad made a professional installation. Wall openings were made with precision, boxes were attached firmly by hand-drilling pilots and installing screws. The ground rod was not cut-off and hidden, but driven to it's proper depth. Framing to hold the weather head and entrance was reinforced if found less than adequate. His work was more than adequate to meet the "code" of man; it was done as if God himself might drop by to make the inspection.

My effort was little more than to be a gofer and to punch wire. Interior wire was simple in most cases because few homes had insulation. But, as simple as it was, I managed to fall through the ceiling - into the living area. It was not a closet or some inconspicuous place. This accident on my part was quite costly - he may have had to make an extra trip, remove damage, frame for repair, install, plaster and paint. Dad would have expended the same effort to repair the damage regardless of its location.

I think God was very pleased with Dad's ethics in labor.

- Sam

In the spring of 1952, my father worked at building a house in Steelville, Missouri. I worked with him a couple days, and discovered how he responded to the changeable ways of

people. The lady of the house came by each day. She changed her mind continually about where different things should be. For example: she had Dad move the location of the steps to the second floor some five or six times. This meant tearing out the studding and/or joists, reconstructing any walls or openings in the floor above, and beginning again. Dad accepted this graciously. Then he finally told her that unless she made a final decision about the steps, then let him finish the project, he would find it necessary to stop working for her. His reason: every change she wanted made cost her extra money. Dad felt that he should not be an “aid” to someone wasting money (even if it was their own).

Watson continued teaching at Steelville until the family moved to Greenfield, Illinois in December of 1953.

Due to a delay in obtaining a valid teaching certificate for Illinois (transfers of documents, etc.), a check on the date of his first employment reveals that he began as a bus driver on March 4, 1954. He was paid \$100.00 per month.

It is obvious, by this time that Watson was willing to do whatever it took to provide for the family. One rather unusual job called for ‘mucking’ out cattle barns, using shovel and manure fork. This backbreaking work paid \$1.00 per hour (according to my brother, Sam, who was in high school in those days.

In later years, Watson wrote the following to his daughter, Elsie: “You asked what major courses I took while in school. My major in college was in English and Literature. However, after I began to teach here in Greenfield, in order to qualify as a school counselor, I took several graduate courses in the field of guidance and psychology, from Southern Illinois University.”

In the spring of 1970, he retired after twenty years involvement in public education. Whether teaching, driving school bus or counseling, Watson was well received and highly respected for his integrity and positive contribution to the schools in which he served.

CHAPTER 12

Lessons from Home (1)

“Train up a child...” (Pro. 22:6)

Home was a place of laughter. Often it was on the occasion of a surprise visit by Mary’s two brothers, Percy and Charles Gash that the dinner table rang with laughter as they regaled us with funny episodes or jokes. (It always seemed to this writer that his Uncles seemed to appear, without fail, on the very day my Mother completed the baking of homemade bread. But then, she baked bread at least once a week, usually on Friday, in preparation for the weekend.) If one of the children didn’t quite get the point, that child might become the object of laughter as well. All of this was done in the family spirit of love that made the laughter not aimed ‘at’ someone, as much as laughter ‘with’ someone. On one occasion we observed as Uncle “Perce” and Jess Kellerman (another close friend of the family) sang to each other across a shallow valley that ran between the “Big House” and “Grandpa’s House”, about 1/3 mile away. The songs ran between operatic and folk, with a smattering of nonsense in between. What fun that was!

We learned that humor need not be vicious, or at the expense of others, especially those who are physically or mentally handicapped (“impaired” or “challenged” appear to be the current politically correct terms). Rather, it may be an expression of sheer joy at being alive with all the possibilities and vagaries of human nature.

Watson (who signed his name “S. Watson Thornton”) was neither a jokester nor a humorist. Neither was he a proverbial “sourpuss”. He displayed a spirit of joy in living that, while many people have it during the good times, remained constant even through the dark seasons of life. Perhaps the words of the Apostle John express the basis for such inner joy-filled life: “I (Jesus Christ) am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10 – NASB).

My father could laugh at himself. On one occasion, at Tadmor, some visitors were talking after dinner in the back yard. The conversation drifted to the subject of birds and shooting. Watson brought out a shotgun and offered to shoot some sparrows that were in a tree a short distance away. He took aim, pulled the trigger, and lowered the gun. Imagine the surprise when not a bird fell, even though the sound of pellets could clearly be heard in the branches. Then, a shout of laughter arose! At Watson's feet was pile of shot pellets. He had inadvertently loaded the gun with the wrong size shell. When he fired, the sound we heard was that of shot pellets running down the barrel to the ground. Dad laughed also.

Home was also a place of discipline. In our home, we learned the meaning the biblical phrase: "The hand of the LORD was heavy on me." For our father, rarely used, nor did he require the use of, anything other than his hand in disciplining us. As a result of discipline at home, we children early on learned what it would mean to be obedient to the will of God

On one occasion that discipline took a slightly different tack. We lived in the "Old Farmhouse" at the time. (During the time we lived at Tadmor, we lived in each of three houses – The Big House (14 rooms with two kitchens and a screened-in summer porch that served as dining room for 60 Campers plus total Camp Staff, or all the attendees at Labor Day Bible Conferences), Grandpa's House and the Old Farm House.) At dinner, one evening, for some reason we children 'got tickled' at something or other. When we failed to obey our Mama's instruction to be quiet and behave, Daddy told one of us to get down from the table with his plate and eat on the floor in the corner. Now THAT was funny! Immediately the laughter became even more infectious. Next, another child was sent to another corner. More laughter. And all despite the fact that our Father was seriously endeavoring to bring order into the home. To make a long story short, soon there was no one at the table but Daddy and Mama, while the children (with the exception of John, the baby – still in a high chair) were now spread around the Dining

room, in the Kitchen, and even up stairs in one of the bedrooms. Need I add that the house was “shaking” with barely suppressed laughter? Even Mama had trouble keeping some degree of serious demeanor. (I suppose you might say that that was an occasion for “multi-tasking” - providing both discipline and humor at the same time.)

Watson believed firmly that he, as father, was given a mandate from God to train his children to obey their parents. It was not only right, but also it laid the foundation for their subsequent obedience to God, as He began to reveal Himself to them.

Snippets

Dad enjoyed fun songs.

Mom would play some of the old, turn-of-the-century songs, like “The Yorktown Strutters’ Ball”, and Dad enjoyed the alternate words: “I’ll be down to get you in a wheelbarrow, honey; Taxis, they cost too much money...”

He would look on with obvious delight when Mom would play songs with her hands behind her back, or else piano-logues, such as “When the Apples Grow upon the Lilac Tree”, or “In the Usual Way”

- CGT

CHAPTER 13

Lessons from Home (2)

“By this shall all men know...that ye have love...” (John 13:35)

Home was a place of love – both received and given. Perhaps we children learned more about love by watching our parents practice it than by any overt teaching they may have done. Three specific examples come to mind regarding this:

The first involved their care for Mary’s mother. Grandma Gash came to live with us not long after we moved to Wesco, MO (1947). The fact that we moved into what had once been a hotel was fortuitous, in that we now had sufficient rooms for her to have one on the ground floor. From her arrival until her death (June 2, 1952), she was part of our household. I do not recall ever hearing either of my parents speak ill of Grandma, despite the fact that she could not (especially in the later years) be left alone. During the time I was away at college, Grandma entered the twilight land of dementia. On occasion she would be observed, lying on her back in bed, stitching away at invisible cloth with an invisible needle, making some article such as she had done in much earlier years. Love meant selflessly caring for her until God called her “home”.

Dad and Mom, meanwhile, viewed this care for Grandma as simply fulfilling God’s biblical instruction: “If any provide not for his own, and especially they of his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8 - NASB). They demonstrated their love by action – respecting, providing and caring for Grandma.

The second takes me back in memory to elementary school days, when our family went once each month to hold service at the County Farm. There we children observed a quality of love demonstrated that has ever since been a pattern for us to follow. Whether it was to “Fat” Ida (who laughed ‘all over’ when the Thornton children sang “It’s Bubbling”, with the motions), or men and women who were simply old but without means of

caring for themselves, or Sam (who, in his simple-mindedness, took an ax and tried to chop off his crippled right hand, after hearing another pastor speak on the text: “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:30 – KJV). The Director of the County Farm promptly called Watson Thornton to come and give solace to Sam, as well as to help other residents with their confusion. He discerned that my father made no distinction between any of the people at the County Farm – a trait, I have observed, he consistently demonstrated to others throughout his life.

(As an aside, our brother Sammy had already acquired a fixation for farm machinery...no matter what type, especially if an engine propelled it. Nine year-old boys sometimes become engrossed in things and, as a result, forget to be where they are supposed to be. Because of this, on one occasion, we left him behind when we left the County Farm to go home and we had to return to pick him up.)

Yet another instance that reminds me of my parents’ love for others was the occasion of the death of our baby sister, Susan. During the time immediately following the accident (Susan was hit by a car on the street directly in front of our home in Greenfield, Illinois), many of the neighbors and church people came to give support and encouragement to our parents. It seemed, however, as though both Dad and Mom were giving more than receiving. Love “seeketh not its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5) became incarnated for me at that time.

CHAPTER 14
Lessons from Home (3)

“...preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

During the summer of 1945, Watson again revealed his passion to reach out to people with the Gospel. He traveled to Denver, Colorado to check on the possibility of ministering to Japanese people who had been interned as a result of WWII. Although God did not open that area of ministry for my father, he continued to be open to opportunities for preaching the Gospel.

This passion was also revealed by his willingness to work with men of other theological “stripes”, provided they declared the way of salvation “by grace through faith.” We often attended revival meetings at churches in our area of Missouri.

Watson shared in constructing a “Brush Arbor” at the Crossroads, near Wesco. This was a rustic place in the woods, covered with branches of trees, with sawdust floor and benches made of tree stumps with 2X12 planks laid across them for seats. Frequently a portable pump organ was used for musical accompaniment. At other times guitars, banjos and fiddles provided the music. All were welcome to attend. After spirited singing, the Evangelist would preach.

One such evangelist was Bill Wynn. He had a unique style of preaching... starting in a normal tone then building gradually to a large crescendo, dropping dramatically to a low pitch and starting all over again. This was repeated numerous times throughout his message. To one who was accustomed to hearing God’s Word communicated in a calm, thoughtful way, Rev. Winn’s manner of preaching was, to say the least, ‘different’. Dad might well have said something like this: “God has all sorts of tools in His box. Some are strong and blunt. Some are fine and sharp. He fits the tool to the job at hand, and, ultimately, the work of salvation is His alone.”

We children remember the community Gospel Singing in which we took part. Church groups from all over met together for an afternoon of singing, each church singing something they

had prepared. The St. Louis Globe Democrat, on one such occasion, sent out a photographer and ran a picture of our Wesco group singing "The Land of No Unsetting Sun" (note what they did with the title), and the group was comprised primarily of our family. During this time Warren Perkins said to Daddy: "This is one of those times when I wish Wesco had not changed its name from Boaz, which it was originally called." At any rate, the churches were all called up alphabetically, and being Wesco--we were always one of the last ones.

Dad firmly believed that there was to be a balance in every Christian's life. That balance was between zeal and knowledge. It was during Dad's absence at Denver that I placed my trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior. Upon his return, I happily told him of my decision, and expressed my desire to be baptized (zeal). He felt that I should wait a bit before such an action, in order to be assured that I understood (knowledge) what the act of being baptized implied. Two years later, at age fourteen, he baptized both my mother and me in the Meramec River, just above the bridge at Wesco. My sister, Elsie, was to have been baptized also, but she had become ill and, therefore, was 'excused'. (I hasten to add, that Mom had been a believer and committed Christian since well before she married Dad. It was that she had never taken this public step of obedience to Christ until now.)

Snippets

"How everyone did love to hear Mama play--regardless of the condition of the piano. How often I have thanked the Lord for the blessing to be a part of her life and have the glory of hearing her play. "

- Ruth

CHAPTER 15

Principles of Parenting

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father,
and forsake not the law of thy mother:
For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head,
and chains about thy neck.” (Pro. 1:8-9)

Someone has well said: “Some things are better ‘caught’ than ‘taught’. Or (as a ‘back-country’ friend was prone to say: “Some things are better ‘felt’ than ‘telt’. Here are a few of the things Watson, and Mary, taught their children – both by word of mouth and example:

□ “An ounce of example is worth a ton of words” (Uno Who)

“I remember seeing Dad, early in the morning, every day, on his knees in the Living Room at Tadmor in prayer. That is the lasting impression I have of His commitment to a personal relationship with God. The overflow of course was the ministry through preaching and sharing his life with others. He desired to know the Lord through an intimate knowledge of His Word. The importance he placed on reading and study of the Word...It is wonderful that He used our parents to begin this search.”

- Martha

□ “The greatest thing you can do for your children is to love their mother” (Author unknown).

“My most vivid memories are of him with Mom. Without a doubt I knew he loved her and thought she was pretty terrific. He was gracious. He'd hold her hand as they walked. Like Cathy, I remember being upstairs and hearing them talk and talk and talk. Or else he'd read to her as she ironed...I always knew I wanted to marry someone who would love me like dad loved mom. (By God's grace, I did!)” – Nancy

□ “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity...” (1 Timothy 3:4)

“I remember thinking that his expectations of me were different than his expectations of others because he expected us

to live as Christians...that was hard to do, since I didn't have a strong faith at the time...it was the faith of my father, not my own faith..."

— Cathy

□ “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

“Prayers” (as our Family Altar time was called) was a daily event. Just after breakfast, we would all gather in the Living Room. We would frequently sing, with Mom playing the piano. Then we read Scripture (usually one chapter each day – straight through the Bible), even the parts with all the hard names. Each child began reading (2 verses each, in order) as soon as he or she could recognize the simple words – Dad would pronounce the rest, for them to repeat.

□ “He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not” (Pro. 15:4)

Watson regarded his word as an inviolable commitment. He learned that electrical work was done on a “per unit” cost (i.e.- \$1.50 per outlet or switch for electrical work). After doing a couple of jobs at that rate, he discerned that it cost more for him to drive to the job than he made at the job (for example, to put in a switch and wall outlet for an elderly widow). Then, in order to break even, much less to make some profit, he had to include the cost of travel to his estimates. Nevertheless, he still would occasionally do a job, for someone who had little resources, for little or no profit. It was simply a means of doing good in the name of Jesus Christ. What an example that was for his children to see and follow!

□ “...provide...for his own, and specially for those of his own house...” (1 Tim. 5:8)

“I remember going with him on some of his odd jobs and his teaching me the basics of carpentry, electrical, etc. One of my biggest regrets is that I didn't understand that what he did, he did for me personally...not just because it was something to keep him

busy. I had no sense of how little money we had (lots more than when the older kids were growing up, but little by the standard of the day).”
- Cathy

□ “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...” (Luke 11:13)

“Dad believed that God would provide what we needed, and he interpreted that often to be what we wanted as well. I remember one winter going to St. Louis with him and Mom, and probably Nancy, to look for a winter coat for me, and probably Nancy too! ...I found an absolutely wonderful fake suede coat with a rabbit collar that I fell in love with. Dad wanted to check the bargains in the basement, so we went there next. I'm sure there were some very practical coats, for less money on the lower level, but Daddy led us back upstairs where he purchased the one with the rabbit collar for me...Dad's only comment was that he'd evidently trained me well in picking quality...never a word about what he wouldn't be able to buy for himself when I took the chunk of money for the coat.”
- Cathy

“When I returned from Colorado to attend Grandpa Thornton's funeral, Dad noticed that I had very old dress shoes, and he gave me enough money to buy two pair (red and white heels). I was on an academic scholarship, but had to work as a nurse part time, so money was tight.”
- Alice

□ Children do not need to know everything that concerns their parents.

When Dad and Mom wished to discuss things in private, it was not always feasible. Their, rather innovative, way to solve that dilemma was to speak Japanese. For instance, we lived at the end of a “14 party” telephone line. There were 14 customers on our line – who knew they were being called by the series of rings (1 long ring for Central, 2 short for someone else, while ours was 2 long rings, as I recall). It was common practice for several people to listen in on someone else's call. When they spoke Japanese, the neighbors were politely ignored, while their inquisitiveness was unsatisfied. This system worked just as well

at the dinner table (the only Japanese I remember is counting to 10 and asking my mother for pancakes).

□ "...well reported of by the brethren..." – Acts 16:2

"This is the most beautiful of any testimony to our parents that I have witnessed. At Dad's memorial I tried to suggest that Dad seemingly was not recognized for his faith as so many "evangelists", or "scholars", but his insight of the "TRUTH" and it's application was incomparable." - Sam

□ "...a lover of hospitality..." (Titus 1:8)

An excerpt from Mary's journal follows: "DEC. 1944 (P.O. COOK STATION) Our hired man, Ralph, had a sore hand so couldn't milk, so we could not go St Louis. Folks & Earle & Nelle came for 6 P.M. dinner at farm. Prendergasts & Mary Jane Sanders, Rufus, Evelyn & Joel Beezeley were here too - 19 of us. I roasted 2 chickens 5 & 4 3/4 lb! We used Mama's red table in living room & our big one in dining room. New set of Kroger dishes my Christmas from Watson & kids. Used Aunt Nan's Eggshell China plates to make out the necessary number. (Dishes have always been one of my joys - I gave Okadasan a set of teacups for a wedding present. She told me she still has these when I saw her in 1970.)"

Without a husband's agreement, such ministry would be well nigh impossible.

□ "...able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2)

"I recall that you (CGT) were strong enough to load the loose hay as it was dumped from the loader. Dad had instructed in the proper means of stacking: 'If you place each fork of hay on the perimeter of the wagon frame and progress with each fork in a circular fashion, the hay will be tied together and you, being in the center will tend to tie the sides to each other, the result being that it will ride to the barn or stack.' He was a show and tell instructor with the patience then to permit mistakes that were bound to happen. I think that you built a haystack in the south field next to the creek. If hay was placed in the loft, the wagon was pulled along the east end of the barn; Bess was unhitched (unless neighbors were helping), led to the west end and hitched

to the derrick rope. A grapple was used to lift the hay to the track as she pulled. ‘No, Sammy, you cannot ride while she is working and you best not dilly-dally around getting back to the barn, we don't want to damage her legs if the single-tree hits her.’” - Sam

Whether it was teaching God’s truth, driving a car, or other ‘mundane’ matters, Watson excelled at teaching. His greatest “failure” was (perhaps) that of teaching Mary to drive a car. This woman, who could play an organ with foot-peddles, was unable to make sense of accelerator, brake and clutch peddles...but Watson happily served as her chauffeur all her life.

□ “...but prayer...was being made fervently...” (Acts 12:5)

A ‘non-family’ illustration will suffice here, since the ministry of pastoring parallels that of parenting in many ways: Rebul Collier was one of the women in the group that met for worship in the Asher Hollow School House. Prior to her conversion, she had led a seriously worldly life. When faced with major surgery, during which she would be “put under” by anesthetic, she asked for fervent prayer by Watson and the others who met for prayer each Wednesday. Her reason: she understood that frequently (when people came out from under anesthetic), they would unwittingly use language from an earlier part of their life. Her ‘before salvation’ language had been very coarse and God dishonoring, and she wanted the Spirit of God to control her tongue, so that, even unwittingly, she would not bring dishonor to her Lord. Watson’s teaching of God’s Word, coupled with the testimony of his life, had convinced her that God could (and would) do as she requested.

□ Living by faith

“Elsie and I left home in the fall of '52. We were 3 years behind the twins and Charlie. Yes, I had 2 years at Bryan. The return the second year was a bit iffy. We didn't have the money for the bus ride to St. Louis, then on the Dayton. The day I was to leave, as I recall, I was all packed and we waited for the mail to come. With the mail came some form of money, so Dad and Mama drove me to Steelville to catch the bus. The Lord provides for His own.” - Martha

□ Some Pain in Discipline

No, this is not just the pain given by discipline. It refers to the pain felt by parents as they discipline their offspring. I never learned the “why”, but my youngest brother, John, drove down to Belle Glade, Florida in an old jalopy in the summer of 1959 following his sophomore year in Greenfield. While there he lived with Elsie (his sister) and Vince Marquess until he graduated from high school in Belle Glade, FL in 1961.

□ Tough Choices of Discipline

While desiring to recognize the positive traits of my parents, I am not endeavoring to portray them as faultless people. Some of what my siblings and I saw, heard, and experienced while under their tutelage may well be attributed to the same thing our children experienced under ours: as-yet-unperfected people endeavoring to honestly, lovingly, and with integrity before God and man, apply our understanding of biblical standards in light of our personal backgrounds and experiences. The spiritual culture in which our parents grew was different from that in which we grew. Our children, and now their children face different issues than we did. Our father's primary objective in parenting was to bring us up as Christian children. Without a doubt, Watson's understanding of Scripture was somewhat different than that of many who read these words. His temperament, family up bringing, and community standards were elements that conditioned how that understanding was applied in parenting.

We grew up under rigid rules regarding Sunday observance. Those were the days of Sunday “Blue Laws”. We did not swim or play ball on Sunday. Naps, walks, or reading were the order of the day. Watson endeavored to apply the Scripture: “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy”, to our day and time.

Watson and Mary addressed the questions of attending movies, wearing makeup (for the girls), clothing styles, and other such matters, in a manner consistent with their biblical and cultural background. While we children may not have whole-

heartedly accepted every aspect of their discipline, we were taught to obey, and, in later years began to appreciate the spirit in which they disciplined us. Watson knew that each child would need to answer the questions of practice just as he and Mary had.

Snippets

We were living at Grandpa's Green house on the hill next to the cemetery. It was a hot, Sunday afternoon. We begged and pleaded with Daddy to let us fill up a big washtub with water so we could play in it. Remember, we were to never go swimming on the Sabbath. Daddy finally conceded to the request, we put on our swimming suits, filled the tub, splashed and threw water at each other. Someone was dipping water with a can, and as they threw the water, they sent the can as well. The can hit me over my right eye, there was lot of bleeding, and Daddy had to take me into St. James to the doctor to sew it up. - Alice

Yes, Watson and Mary taught ("telt") us well. There was much that we "caught" from watching them live daily. Then there were the times that, to use the words of my country friend, we "felt" their instruction.

CHAPTER 16

The Fledglings Fly

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth...And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:14-15)

Watson was like Joshua in that he constantly called upon people to follow Jesus Christ. His fervent longing was that his children follow his steps in following hard after God. While they may have taken some side roads along the way, some by-paths to temporary dead-ends, God graciously lit a flame in each child’s heart that eventually burned brightly for Him. And while each one may have taken a somewhat circuitous path, this author believes that Watson’s heart longing for each has been granted.

Ruth and her husband, Paul Caldwell, helped start two churches in America. She has led a fulfilling life in the nursing profession. Her career did not exclude having a family. It also included a stint in Nepal where, along with Paul, they ministered spiritually while supporting themselves financially.

Alice has had an extensive career in nursing, having an earned Doctorate with teaching as an objective. She and her husband, Kenneth Hees, have three sons. Her passion has been to honorably represent Jesus Christ in both public and private life.

Charles has followed Watson (by God’s gracious design) in serving as a pastor (some 46 years, at the time of this writing). He and his wife, Janice, have six children.

Elsie (who stepped out of college to assist her mother when Baby Susan was born) married Vincent Marquess, and endeavored to “fill the earth” single-handedly, with eight children. She operated a restaurant for a time, and then assisted Vince in his work in Nursing Home administration. All along the way she has ministered in music in various churches.

Martha married Don Miller. They devoted a number of years to working with the Navigators, both in the United States

and Germany. They still serve Jesus Christ in Southern California. Their progeny number four, plus grandchildren.

Sam, Jr. fulfilled the “farmer” portion of Watson’s heart passion. Having retired, he now does “windshield farming” in the Greenfield, Illinois area. Two sons (including Samuel Watson, III) and a daughter comprise his ‘heritage’ (Psalm 127:3). His insights into the Word of God have been an inspiration to me (his older brother) as well as to others.

John completed the number of Watson’s sons. He and his wife, Marcia, contributed four sons to the Thornton clan. These included twins. At the time of his untimely death, at age 37, John was endeavoring to serve God both as a seed salesman and churchman.

Mary Catherine and Daniel Beebe had twin sons. Cathy (or Kate, as her work associates know her) is currently retired after working as an air traffic controller, and then moving up into mid-management responsibilities. She has also discovered the joy of seeking to be a faithful servant of God as she grows in her knowledge of God through His Word.

Nancy Agnes found her life-mate a bit later in life than any of her siblings. She and her husband, David, have adopted a beautiful African-American baby, who brings great joy to them both, as well as to others. Nancy, along with others of her siblings, has sought to discover and follow the path of discipleship that her father spoke and preached about. That path, which some seem to find so easily, has not always been so for her. But the biblical promise: “Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” (Matt. 7:7) is becoming a rejoiced-in truth to her.

The story of Susan Wesley, who died at age 5 (1958), has been related elsewhere. She, along with the earlier Susan (1949) and John, remind us all that we have a home in heaven...far better and more enduring than the one down here.

ACT V

“And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part.”

* * * * *

“I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this mountain...”
(Joshua 14:12)

CHAPTER 17

And the Next Generation...

“(Joseph) took his two sons...with him”. (Genesis 48:2)

- Craig (Kathy’s son)

As for grandpa, I remember visits to the lake house, and fishing on the dock, but the only real memory of grandpa was one time, I must have been less than 10 years old. I was sitting straight across the table from grandpa at dinner. On the menu that particular evening were mashed potatoes with gravy and peas. I was preoccupied with the fact that my peas were mixing with the gravy and potatoes and I was dutifully doing my best to separate the two on my plate while everyone else started eating. I remember looking up briefly to see grandpa staring imposingly at me, and frankly it scared me half to death. Then, he subtly said, "It's all going to same place anyway, you know..." I don't recall worrying about my food mixing since. Thanks!

Snippets

The year was 1958. The season was Christmas. I was a student in Seminary. Janice, sons David and Daniel, and I drove to Illinois to visit my family. We were going ‘home for the holidays’. When we arrived, others of the family had already come and family activities were in full swing. I was amused to see several of my young nephews watching as their Grandpa showed them how to drive the electric train he had set up on the living room floor. Their eagerness to play with the train was temporarily suspended by Grandpa, who had seemingly forgotten them in his own pleasure at being a “rail road engineer”. They did get their turn, eventually. But that’s what home and family is all about.

- Charles

- Deborah (Charles’ daughter)

Two memories of Grandpa come to mind. The first is a clear

picture of him in my head, sitting in the living room with you (Charles), discussing, and debating, Biblical truths. His gray white hair, his smile, and his enthusiasm for discussing the Word with you are what I always remember. I don't recall him being anywhere else in the house, and the picture is always the same, so it must have occurred every time they came to visit.

He also wrote me a card when I was graduating from high school. I was so surprised to receive it, because I really didn't think of him as being close to me at all, yet he wrote and told me he was proud of my accomplishment, and that he prayed for me. I kept that card for years and years. It was special to learn that I was important to him.

- Susan (Sam's daughter)

I remember when Doug and I had a car ride with Grandpa going south "somewhere". It was in the late 60's and we were small. I think we were going to Carterville or Carbondale. It was just the three of us and Doug and I sat in the back seat. I recall we were on a 4 lane Interstate road that sometimes divided the 2 roads with trees. As the road would curve, Grandpa would swerve to the inside lane. He explained to us that by doing that, he was taking the shortest distance to "wherever our destination was", allowing us to arrive sooner and therefore, saving gas too. I just remember giggling in the back seat when he would swerve into the other lane but then he said he needed to stop for fear another driver might think he was under the influence - which made us giggle even more.

Another memory I have was at a family get-together at Aunt Elsie's restaurant in Nokomis (IL). Grandma played her Children's story monologue^{ix} on the piano in the back room. Later, sitting with the grandchildren, Grandpa asked if we had any questions of him about his life. I was a teenager and wasn't interested in knowing about his life so I didn't ask anything, and I don't recall many other questions being asked either. I have never forgotten that moment and the feelings he might have had when we didn't inquire of his life. An opportunity lost on my part.

CHAPTER 18

“Retirement”

Aah! Retirement! That looked-forward-to period of life when one may sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of his life of labor.

Snippets

It has been well stated that very few Christians maintain a vital spiritual life and ministry in their retirement years. While Daniel and Caleb are biblical examples of men who ‘kept at it’ at an age when many settle in to relaxation, they prove to be the exception, rather than the rule.

During Watson’s 20th year of teaching (1969-70), he was invited to go to Japan and participate in the Golden Anniversary of the Kobe Union Church. His passion to reach Japanese people with Christ’s Gospel burned as hotly in his soul as ever, so he pursued the possibility. Especially after learning of an opportunity to teach – in Japan.

Let my sister, Martha, tell this in her own words^x:

“Do you know how Dad learned of the teaching position open in Fukushima, Japan when they went back in 1970? Let me tell you. Don and I received a regular prayer letter from friends with the Navigators in Japan, Bob and Jean Boardman. In one letter Bob wrote about Bud and Beverly Chase (missionaries over there), looking for a replacement teacher of English as they felt God calling them to another form of ministry in Japan. I sent Dad and Mom that letter. Dad contacted Bud Chase, and subsequently was able to fill his position.”

Now, few people simply “go” to Japan without first considering the matter of living costs. Dad was completing 20 years of teaching with the completion of the 1969-70 school year. Upon checking this out, he discovered (to his chagrin) that there were four (4) missing days to complete 20 years of teaching. After very careful checking, however, they discovered that Dad

had 4 days of substitute teaching not yet included in the total. The result – Dad received full pension for his teaching, which, plus Social Security for both Dad and Mom, provided the financial resources for the rest of their lives.

So, in the summer of 1970, Watson and Mary returned to Japan, to begin the next five-year adventure of a life given to obeying God. Mary was able to go with him, since Nancy (the youngest of my living siblings) was a student at John Brown University. My brother, Sam, lived in the community and therefore, was in a position to give assistance, should need arise.

Dad spoke at the Kobe Union Church Anniversary. Afterward he had opportunity to speak in various Japanese churches. His interpreter was also his ‘chauffeur’ to take him to speaking engagements. Upon arriving at the location of the second appointment, Dad got out of the car...only to have his interpreter drive off. He then had to speak in Japanese. I’m not certain what Dad prayed on that occasion. It may have been something like: “Well, it’s You and me, Lord. You be the ventriloquist...I’ll be the dummy.” (It’s clear that my father and I have a different sense of humor...these are my words) But, “God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13)

Anyway, God enabled Dad to speak both clearly and simply. His use of the language spoken (during their youth) by the grandparents, who were in the audience, was readily understandable by the younger hearers.

Watson was involved in teaching the next two years (1970-72) in Fukushima. Japanese businessmen supported the school. His primary task was to teach English. He used The Living Bible as a text to accomplish two things: 1) to enable the students to grasp the idiom of the American English language, and 2) to open doors for presenting the Gospel to students. (During this time both he and Mary taught English as a Second Language to adults, as well.)

Snippets

The school was a technical institution; Dad had an English class of 30 boys who did not want to be instructed by an old man. Dad took the approach of sharing parts of his life with them, his travels, and his involvement in sports. When they found that he had played tennis their attitude changed for the better. The administration stated the previous (Christian) instructor had proselytized and they stated this could not be done. He asked if he could be permitted to place a Proverb on the board at intervals, explaining their likeness to some of the Japanese instructional material. This request was granted.

- Elsie

Watson was asked to pastor a Japanese church in Fukushima Ken. This is especially significant, in that he was the first non-Japanese to be asked to minister in what was actually an indigenous Japanese Church Fellowship. He accepted on one primary condition – that the people of the church would assume responsibility for sharing in the work of the church. If they wanted a Sunday Bulletin, they would need to compile, produce and distribute it. The believers could do visitation for evangelism and outreach; Dad was willing to train them, but they must do it. His primary task was to be “prayer and the ministry of the Word”. (Acts 6:4)

CHAPTER 19

Japanese Poetry

“They read in the book in the law of God distinctly,
 and gave the sense,
 and caused them to understand the reading.”
 (Nehemiah 8:8)

The following poem was written by a Japanese man both in Japanese and English. The date (based on the text itself) appears to be in the early 1970s (when Watson and Mary went back to Japan to minister after a 33 year absence).^{xi}

“Pine trees green
 Sea and mountains fine (serene)
 There come the two
 Husband and wife
 To save sinners

Parting from their land,
 In this country
 Sow seed of Gospel
 Every day and night

Ah! Father, Rev. Thornton
 How many times
 I heard your preaching

Again today
 He opens the Bible
 In the morning service”

To Mary and Watson Thornton

Japan

ACT VI

“The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.”

* * * * *

“That the aged men be sober,
grave, temperate, sound in faith,
in charity, in patience.” (Titus 2:2)

CHAPTER 20

The Wanderer Returns

* * * * *

Thomas Gray^{xii} expressed it this way:
“The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o’er the lea,
The farmer homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.”

* * * * *

In 1975, at ages 71 and 66 respectively, Watson and Mary came home from Japan. Their first residence was connected to the local Funeral Home. Kenneth Hees (Alice’s husband, and an accomplished craftsman in wood) quite ably contributed to some most appreciated improvements for their comfort.

An opening came for Watson to preach in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Vienna, IL. For 1½ years they lived in Vienna, then they returned to Carterville, where they lived in a small cottage for the remainder of their stay in Carterville.

Watson continued to provide pulpit supply on occasion. He also had opportunity to meet with various pastors to provide encouragement and challenge. On one occasion, he led a group of them in a study of the Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures. He compiled a list of all the references to the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible. The men then proceeded to take them each in turn, with the goal of seeing what each taught on this subject. All went well...until they arrived at Acts chapter two. Then, as different pastors began defending his ‘position’ on the work of the Holy Spirit, the unity of fellowship in searching the Scriptures together, was lost. After a couple weeks spent endeavoring to “keep the unity of the Spirit”, Dad finally stopped going to the study. His purpose was to see what the Scriptures said, not to debate personal viewpoints.

During this time Watson and Mary agreed to attend different churches. Mary's love for music led her to become accompanist for the Presbyterian Church in Carterville, while Dad's love for expository preaching led him to attend another area church.

During this time, they started a Bible study for Japanese War Brides. A number of WW II brides lived in Carbondale, IL (just a few miles distant), and they 'jumped' at the chance to have a Bible study with someone who knew their mother tongue and could help them understand the nuances of the language difference. Whether it was for the purpose of learning English better, or to learn about the God of the Bible, my father wasn't too concerned. He sought to buy up every opportunity to get people thinking about God and the Scriptures.

It was at the conclusion of one of the Monday night studies, that Mary was quietly released from this life to go home to glory. As she and Watson were beginning to prepare for bed, she lay back (seemingly to simply relax for a couple minutes). My father continued his preparation, turned to Mom and discovered that she had quietly slipped away from this life to a far better one.

Following Mary's death, the Bible study continued...with one change. Whereas the Japanese ladies had been bringing dessert to be eaten after the studies, they now brought dinner, which was eaten prior to the study. They brought enough for Dad to save for several meals later in the week. This provided a unique opportunity for them to enjoy some of the Japanese cooking their American husbands may not have especially cared for.

CHAPTER 21

Personal Memories and Observations - #1

(The following notes were written from Watson's residence at:

1008 James St.
Carterville, Illinois 62918

2/4/1983 – Lately I have been visiting a very interesting “Southern Baptist” Church. In just 3 years it has grown from a handful to almost 200 in attendance. They are so Bible oriented that people are coming from all denominations, Pentecostal to Catholic. In fact, they have even asked me to lead a study of “The Person & Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments”. We usually spend about 3 hours each Thursday in Study and Prayer, with ministers (6 – 12) from several churches within a radius of 20 miles.

The church services are rather unstructured and informal – at times even loud – but the spirit is delightfully Christ centered.

The thing that intrigued me the first time I went there was to hear the minister say that they needed some church officers, and as he was searching the scriptures he had noticed that “the officers of churches of Christ after Pentecost were called “elders” and not “deacons” as in the Baptist churches”. Therefore they have appointed some “elders” who will be recognized publicly this coming Sunday.

3/3/1984 – I do believe we are living in very significant times. We hear of great emotional movements in churches all over the world and it troubles me, because we can go into spiritual ecstasies in church gatherings but most churches do not even have prayer meetings any more.

Someone once said; a) The Sunday morning attendance is a measure of the popularity of the minister; b) The evening service measures the popularity of the church; c) The mid-week prayer hour measures the popularity of Jesus Christ.

Lately, Mary and I are more and more impressed by the fact that there are churches in practically every part of the earth.

Two years ago one of our grandsons with his family were in Indonesia. Right now Ruth and Paul are in Nepal, and two of Charles' children are in Alaska with their families. They are active in their churches – one of which has just recently been established.

Actually we are all living in a “foreign” land, because our eternal citizenship is in heaven. We are here on earth as Christ's ambassadors to show others what it is like over there. We have to eat and work and live like other humans, but God wants us to be changed into the image of His Son, so that they want to become Christians, too.

7/8/1985 – There is a great deal of discussion among “Christians” on the pros and cons of tything. To me there is no problem about “tything”. If we do not give God 1/10 of our income we are stealing from God – that is, we are really not giving anything to God in the tythe. If we give anything above the tenth, that becomes our free-will offering to God from our hearts.

Of course this is Old Testament doctrine! So, I like to look at the New Testament teaching on giving to bring me up to date – look at 1 Cor. 16: 1 – 4. From verse 2, my father often spoke of “God's Storehouse” in the homes of the saints.

In 1974 in Japan I had spoken at a Conference along these lines, and at the close a Japanese Christian came to me and said, “I know just what you have been talking about. In my business my wife and I decided to give God his tenth of our profits, and He has blessed us so much we do not know what to do. Do you have any suggestion for us.”

And I had one from my Greenfield days – I suggested they go into partnership with God, giving themselves an adequate salary, and all other profits go into a fund to be used as God directed. I believe that the founder of Caterpillar Co. of Peoria did something like this and the head of the Mentholatum Co gave all of his profits to the Lord's work and missions.

8/3/1985 – I have felt led to discontinue ministering to the country church near Vienna, Illinois.

It has been a great joy to see their growth in Grace and in the knowledge of the Word over the past 6 years or so.

However I sensed on the part of many of them a desire for more emphasis on “speaking in tongues”, and this I do not feel free to do. So, rather than to cause discord, I felt it better to step aside and trust the Holy Spirit to lead them in his infinite love, patience, and wisdom.

Isn't it wonderful to believe that the Lord Jesus is in control “of building His Church”, (Mat. 16: 18) He is the builder, we are His helpers, by His grace.

11/10/1986 – The Lord continues to let me study the Bible with several groups: -

Monday – 4 PM – Asiatic's - Japan, China, Malasia – Woman + College students (Genesis)

Wed. – 10 AM – Senior Citizens (the Psalms)

Thur. – 10 AM – Intensive Old Testament Bible Study Group (3 hours)

Fri. – 7 PM – I attend a Bible Study with Chinese in Carbondale

Sunday – 7 PM – Study in Revelation at Methodist Church (small group)

This schedule gives me something to do, and the preparation is giving me new understanding of the Bible. What a Book ! - 1,300 (plus or minus) pages, starting – “In the beginning God”, in the ages past – through all the vistas of time – then taking us into the eternity of the future – with God!

3/5/1987 – Something very wonderful has happened here. A 65-year-old Japanese lady, wife of an ex – US Army officer, was very lonesome. One of my Monday evening Bible class Japanese ladies, called on her and brought her to the study.

She happened to be a member of a very strong, militant branch of Buddhism called “Soka Gakkai”. However she seemed to be intrigued by my Japanese, which I use once in a while, and

came regularly and enjoyed the Bible study, meals together, and companionship.

About the 3rd time she came she asked if it wasn't about the same to pray to Jesus as to pray to Buddha, but none of us felt led to say anything about it.

4 days later she called up the lady who first called on her and told her – “I have decided that I cannot be a “2-god person!” I must worship either Jesus or Buddha, and I have decided to worship Jesus. So – I have taken my idols (2) of Buddha and have burned them, and now worship Jesus.”

Can you imagine the thrill that came over us?

For me, it has been especially nice, because God has said: “even unto old age we will bear fruit”!

2/2/1988 – Yesterday I had a very interesting time. I was wondering where to go to worship when the phone rang and a young man who is a Catholic asked if he could come and visit with me. I said “yes.”

He and his wife (4 children) are having serious marital problems, so, we talked at some length.

Then, he asked me to visit his wife and children who had left him that morning.

She was willing for me to come, so I went to call on her. She was much disturbed at first, but as she opened up her heart, I was enabled to point her to the Lord Jesus and the Bible and encouraged her to read some of the Psalms and the Gospel of John.

She said something to me that I have never heard before – “I love him deeply but I don't like him.” - An interesting statement.

To think that the Lord brought these two Catholics to me for help is wonderful. Please pray for me that the Holy Spirit will use me to help them to see the Lord Jesus in all His wonderful salvation for them.

Chapter 22

Personal Memories and Observations

(The following notes were written while Watson resided with his daughter and son-in-law, Elsie and Vince Marquess.)

7/6/1988 – I am gradually getting adjusted to “family living” again. But the Lord renews His blessings from day to day.

For the past couple of weeks I have been fellowshipping with the Lord’s people at the Pekin Bible Church, and it has been refreshing to my soul.

I was wondering why the preacher’s messages have been so satisfying and even challenging, and it came to me that he is not trying to argue nor prove, nor convince or convict anyone. He simply expounds and explains the scriptures, suggests ways of applying God’s truths to our everyday walk with the Lord.

Maybe, I like it because it seems to be a perfect illustration of what took place in Nehemiah 8: 7-8: “(The Levites) ---- read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.”

9/2/1988 – During June and July I visited two rather large churches in Pekin, 8 miles north of us, but just did not feel at home -- “kinda lost in the shuffle”. Without Mary, I find it hard to get acquainted. I am coming to realize how much of our ministry can be traced to the gifts that God gave me in Mary.

Well, on the 3rd of August at 9:00 AM I prayed asking God if there might be a small country church near us, where I might feel more free.

At 11:30 I went to Green Valley Post Office to mail a package. The town does not even have a filling station for gasoline – but I parked across the road from an old dingy storefront, with the title “Valley Chapel” on it, and some children running out from their DV Bible School.

After mailing my package, I stopped in and introduced myself to the young pastor, his wife, and some of the teachers.

They took me right in and I have felt very much at home – almost like Greenfield Bible Church.

(This prayer was answered in 2 ½ hours.)

8/5/1989 – I have just received a letter from a young Japanese attending seminary at Asbury Seminary at Wilmore, Kentucky, who is the grandson of a minister with whom we worked in central Japan in 1932, and again in 1972.

And today I am enjoying fellowship with my son Charles, a minister in Ohio, and his son, a minister in Alaska.

Truly “My cup runneth over”. And you dear ones are helping to keep the cup full.

9/5/1989 – ...The young pastor (of the Valley Chapel calls on me for fellowship. Recently, they have begun to build a chapel to meet their needs of S S classrooms, etc.

The Lord’s portion of my income is quite taken up each month as I have tried to keep up some of the interests Mary had before the Lord called her “Home” – such as the Christian orphanage at Dohnavur, India.

So – I prayed that the Lord would enable me to share with the Church building fund. Within a week, I received a check for \$300.00 from a Christian Japanese living in Kobe, Japan.

I immediately “thought” of giving 1/3 to the church, and that “still, small voice” seemed to answer saying, “Didn’t you pray for something to give? And I have given you \$300 in answer to your prayer.”

So, I gave it all. No! I passed it along.

Then the wonder of it all hit me!

In 1930 some American Christians sent Mary and me to Japan to give God’s message of Salvation and rebirth.

The seed was sown, and now, after almost 60 years, the Lord has reversed the situation and a Japanese Christian has sent \$300 to help a body of American Christians build a building to meet their needs.

And to think that God would let an 86 yr. old preacher share in the miracle.

3/5/1990 - --- In 1919 I came home from Japan to attend

Blackburn College – but Greenfield was home to me – including the Presbyterian Church. No matter where I have gone, I have always felt that my roots were in Greenfield. And, even now, my name has already been inscribed on the gravestone in the cemetery north of town.

10/2/1990 – I have a lot of time to spend in reading the Bible, and I am realizing more and more that the Bible means just what it says.

The least we can do is to walk in the light as it is revealed to us individually by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And I have come to believe that He does not always lead all of us by the same WAY, because of the differences of our background and training.

But the goal is the same – “To be like Jesus”.

And the guidebook is the same – “The Bible”.

7/1/1991 – One time a gentleman who had supported Mary and me in our first ministry in Japan, after about 10 years, asked me how many people we had led to the Lord in our 7 years in Japan and then 6 or 7 in the Missouri Ozark Hills.

I had to answer him that I did not know that I could claim even one. I found that those who responded to my ministry had almost without exception been exposed to the Gospel as presented by someone else, and I was just reaping the result of another person’s effort.

2/5/1985 – Let me tell you of my recent “dreams”. They have taken me back to about 1919. I dreamed of the tent my father used to pitch in different cities around Kobe, Japan – north and south – till a typhoon came and tore it up and blew it away.

But he was not yet old, and God gave him a “vision” of all the small towns and villages back in the mountains of Japan near Kobe without any life-giving witness to the Gospel.

So, Dad bought a Japanese two-wheeled cart and with 3 - 4 Japanese helpers, they started walking over the mountains and through the valleys, preaching on the

roadsides in the towns and villages.

Then they settled in a city halfway across the main island, and had a Bible School at a city of 5000 people, Kaibara. – So the “vision grew”.

Later on, 1933-35, Mary and I were led of the Lord to go to Kaibara and help a little in carrying out the “vision” in the nearby towns and cities of Saji, Nishiwaki, Narimatsu, and Kuroi, - the main church being in Kaibara, all through the years. So the years went by.

Then (after my 16 years in Greenfield, Ill.) We went to Japan in 1970 - 1975 – in “a DREAM”. Now there were 4 strong churches with yearly conferences + Bible camps. From the Bible School God had raised up more than 10 or 12 outstanding Bible Teachers and Church leaders all over Japan, and some have gone to other parts of the World with God’s wonderful message.

Snippets

10/24/1994 –Since Dad’s home-going the house seems strangely quiet. I still have the sense when I’m out that I need to hurry home to see about him. But how his longing heart has been satisfied now that he is in the presence of the Lord he loved and served.

The years he spent with us were learning and growing years. I was always amazed at his continual studying and rethinking the scripture and single mindedness in following the Saviour.

He truly was a faithful servant.

- Elsie

- - - - -

CHAPTER 23

“As a man thinketh...”

Throughout his life my father maintained an inquisitive mind – always wanting to learn, ever wanting to improve, willing to do something a different (if it were a better) way.

Before the REA (Rural Electric Association) introduced electricity to the rural areas of Crawford County, Missouri, we had a Delco electric generator at Tadmor.

Snippets

This generator was housed in a small building (approximately 4' X 6' in size) to protect it from the elements. That building served many purposes, during its life:

1st – to house the Delco

2nd – as a playhouse for my sisters

3rd – as a bedroom for cousin Ralph Page Klages, during his summer stay with us (he could close the windows while still lying in his bed which consumed the majority of the floor space)

4th – We hauled it to Roach, MO when we moved to Faith Bible Academy. There it remained when we left.

Dad brought the first rubber-tired tractor (made by Case Company), despite the laughter of farmers around who declared that only tractors with steel lugs on steel wheels could get adequate traction to pull heavy loads. (They were proven wrong.)

I recall when he brought a Hay Loader to the farm. Previous to this time, hay was loaded by hand – pitching it up onto the wagon with pitchforks. When he cautioned the farm hands that they should be alert to the new method of loading, they laughed. From their previous experience, they were always able to keep up with the amount of hay coming onto the wagon. As I watched them work, I laughed (even though it is extremely impolite for 9 year-old boys to laugh at their elders), because the hay loader kept piling hay up to them, and they were unable to spread it around the wagon bed fast enough. Dad then showed

them how to work ‘with’ the loader rather than try to ‘fight’ it. Sometimes I was allowed to drive the team as we loaded the hay.

During the Wesco years, he experimented with putting sawdust around tomato plants to conserve moisture and hold down the growth of weeds. He learned that the acid in fresh sawdust worked against the health of the plants. He next tried another experiment. Sam, my brother, reminded me of the times he and John (our youngest brother), with me driving the old Nash car, would go out along the roads, fill gunny sacks with old dead leaves from the ditches along the County roads for the same purpose. Back home we went to spread leaves among and between the rows of tomatoes, potatoes, corn, beans, and a few other things planted there. It worked!

Later, when He and Mom visited Janice (Friend Wife) and me during Seminary days, he made “inside storm windows” for our apartment, using plastic sheeting because it was inexpensive. These were designed to fit inside the window openings to prevent frost from forming on the inside, melting and running down our walls.

Even after becoming very restricted in his ability to get out, due to deteriorating health, his mind was active. On one occasion of visiting him at the home of my sister Elsie and her husband Vince, he was excited to show me what he had done. On a map of the United States, he had superimposed an outline of the size of the Holy City that the Apostle John described in the Book of the Revelation. He then proceeded to describe how far into the Mediterranean Sea that same sized (1500 miles square) city would extend.

Again, he traced on a map of Japan the four missionary travels his father (J.B.Thornton) had made with his students at the Japan Self-Help Bible School. These journeys were made with two objectives in mind: 1) to take the blessed message of salvation in to the interior of Japan, and 2) to give his students actual “hands-on” (or On Job Training) experience in reaching out with the Gospel. When Dad showed me the map, he referred to the fact that my Grandfather had done somewhat as the

Apostle Paul had done on his missionary journeys – preached the Gospel, while training workers for Christ.

Snippets

“One of Dad's signatures in life was his ability to solve problems with a creative and practical approach. In planning the move to Japan he was faced with the need for shipping crate(s). Using quality plywood and proper framing he designed a crate that he could reassemble, upon arriving, in the shape of a desk, storage cabinet, or some such useable item. Of course, when the time came to return to America, it could then be used again as a crate. When the crates were properly packed we loaded them onto a pickup and trucked them off to the Great Lakes shipping dock in Chicago. This was done in adequate time to arrive at the destination prior to their arrival.” - Sam

ACT VII

“Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.”

* * * * *

“The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree,
He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
Planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still yield fruit in old age...”
(Psalm 92:12-14)

CHAPTER 24

When Evening Stars Appear

“I am now ready to be offered,
and the time of my departure is at hand.
I have fought a good fight,
I have finished my course,
I have kept the Faith...” (2 Tim. 4:8)

Following the death of Mary in June of 1986, Watson continued to live in Carterville for about 2½ years. He then accepted the long-standing invitation of Vince Marquess (Elsie’s husband) to join them in their home, which now (late 1988) was a rural home that overlooked the Mackinaw River at Green Valley, IL, near Peoria. After settling in Dad made the comment that now he had come full circle – having been born in Havana, just 25 miles distant.

It was while living there that Watson met Pastor John Keossler and began yet another meaningful acquaintance. This was to help make the latter days of my father’s life more meaningful. In the next chapter, we will allow Pastor Koessler to speak.

I penned the following words on the occasion of my father’s 85th birthday. It seemed an altogether appropriate thought, since my own faith has been so greatly influenced by observing his faith in every-day action:

Old Caleb started up the mount
when he was eighty-five.
Through forty years of wandering,
his faith was kept alive.
E'en though his enemies were huge –
their strongholds tough to take;
His faith in God's great faithfulness
did make the giants quake.

My father is now eighty-five –
he, too, has Caleb's God.
He doesn't battle giants but,
like Caleb, he has trod
The path of faithfulness, which leads
through pastures green or rough.
Just waiting for the Father's call:
"Come home, my son. Enough!"
Oh, Father, help me walk in faith
the path you have for me.
Like Caleb's faith, or my Dad's too,
may mine shine bright for Thee.
My children want to see a faith
that proves that God is ample.
Through good or ill, like my Dad's faith,
Lord please make mine a sample.
- Charles Thornton (10-6-88)

At a later time Vince, Elsie and Watson moved to Raymond, Illinois. It was from that home that Samuel Watson Thornton was finally released from “this mortal coil” to his heavenly home.

Snippets

An apt picture of this time in Watson's life comes to us from nature. When two trees grow together for years, they become so entwined that they literally become one. If one should die, the result will often be seen in that, while the other tree remains, there will be seen huge gaps in its bark and trunk, where its partner for many years had been conjoined. Even so, to those who were close to my father, there was now a huge empty place in his life, left by the loss of my mother from his side.

CHAPTER 25

Let Others Speak Well of Thee

Yielding fruit in old age..."(Psalm 92:12-15)

John Koessler^{xiii}, who was Dad's pastor during the final days of his earthly sojourn, wrote the following about him:

"I met Samuel Watson Thornton when he was in his 80s. He literally walked into our church off the street. He had been looking for a place to worship that was closer to his home, and our little church had somehow attracted his attention.

Watson had grown up on the mission field in Japan, as the son of a pastor who was himself the son of a pastor. When the time came to decide on a career, he made the obvious choice. He decided to become a farmer!

One day, however, during a chapel service at the college he attended, he sensed that God wanted him to be a pastor.

"Lord," Watson prayed, "I don't want to be a pastor. I want to be a farmer." But the Lord seemed to say, "Watson, I want you to be a pastor."

When the chapel service ended and the rest of the students filed out, Watson remained in his seat, deep in prayer.

"Lord," he complained, "I don't want to be a pastor. I want to be a farmer." Still, he felt the gentle urging of the Spirit, as the Lord insisted: "Watson, I want you to be a pastor."

Finally, late in the evening, still sitting in the darkened chapel, Watson gave in: "Okay, Lord, have it your way. But I want you to know that you are losing a very good farmer and gaining a very poor pastor!"

Watson went on to have a ministry of building up several failing churches in Southern Illinois and later

served as a missionary to Japan. During several of those years, he worked to support himself...as a farmer.

Watson became a mentor to me during my years at the church. I tried to visit him weekly and listen to his stories. I was impressed by his devotion to the Word.

Even at that late stage in his life, Watson was still an avid student of Scripture. He had determined to finish his life studying the Book of Revelation, and every time I visited him, he seemed to have gained some new insight.

He told me remarkable stories of God's leading in his ministry, the kind you read about in missionary biographies. Yet he never lost the sense that he was just a farmer that God had reassigned.

Watson helped me see that having a healthy sense of self was a matter of being realistic about my ministry. It meant knowing where I was strong, where I was weak, and where I could get by. It meant building my ministry on my strengths, striving for competency in the areas where I just got by, and pleading for mercy in my areas of weakness. Left to myself, I, too, was "a very poor pastor," no matter what my gifts might be."

- John Koessler

CHAPTER 26

Awaiting the Call

“Man goeth to his long home” – (Eccles 12:5)

“In the days that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim...and one will arise at the sound of the bird...

furthermore, men are afraid of high places...”

(Eccles. 12:3-5 – NASB)

Of all the seven stages of life envisioned by Friend Jacques, this last one might appear the least applicable to Watson. Still, the Preacher, speaking of the days of old age (Eccles. 12:10 – above), described some of the ravages of time and age.

One visual reminder of that truth is a picture we, Janice and I, have of Dad, our son, Daniel, and me. In it the man who once stood, not “head and shoulders above”, but 6’ 3” tall, was now shorter than both Daniel (6’ 1”) and myself (6’ 2”). (Now why should that surprise me, who has already ‘shrunk’ to just over 6’ at this time of writing?)

“If any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Watson took this verse at its face value...even in the ‘waning’ days of his life. Although he was limited in his ability to get around, due the onset of time, he still felt that unless he was doing something he shouldn’t eat.

Someone has well said that there is ‘no discharge’ in spiritual war. He not only had a deep prayer concern for missionaries and mission work around the world. His commitment to support missionaries was highlighted even more, when he made a choice that some would have found quite difficult.

Watson’s knees had bothered him for a number of years. Some time after returning from Japan in 1975, he was invited to go back again. His ministry of encouragement meant a great deal

to the Japanese brethren, and they desired for more teaching from him. My father was keenly aware of the implications of returning. One point of concern was the fact that, in most of the Japanese homes that he would visit, chairs were not common, so the people sat on the floor. Dad's knee condition made it very difficult for him to get down on the floor as well as to arise again. The burden of their providing a chair for him (or his taking one with him wherever he went) was more than he wished to place on his Japanese friends. He desired no special treatment.

Someone suggested that he have knee replacement surgery. To that he replied that he would be getting "not only new knees, soon, but an entirely new body (when Christ called him home). And besides, just think how the money spent for surgery could be used to further the cause of the Gospel." No surgery. No return to Japan.

All too often we look at the actions of one another and make judgments about them. And, all too often, we make poor evaluations, due to our inability or unwillingness to understand their motives. Watson (in the mind of this author) had such a deep passion to glorify God by preaching the gospel that he considered no sacrifice too great to see that accomplished.

At this time Watson asked Elsie, with whom he was living, to assist him in making certain his missions support commitments were faithfully met each month. This he did, in light of increasing difficulty in writing.

CHAPTER 27
Lessons from Dad

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. (Proverbs 1:8-9)

Ruth:

Dad taught us the wonders of God’s creation. Once, at the Big House, I remember that it was hailing profusely. He took us to the front porch and he explained the scientific phenomenon, then watched as we ran outside in it. Fun!

Another occasion of remembrance was at the farmhouse: He brought us girls together at our upstairs (girls’ room) window. We watched howling tornadic winds bending trees and throwing trash around. We showed no fear, and to this day I love being in a healthy, rainy, wind experience. “Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy winds fulfilling His word.” (Ps 148:8), and this: “The God of glory thundereth” (Psalm 29:3), reflects God’s greatness.

Alice:

FORGIVENESS LESSONS: Eagerness to please parents is inborn in infants and young children. In some instances, that desire to please continues to affect the actions of individuals into adult years. I recall, at age 59, looking forward to a Saturday of leisure after a hectic workweek of teaching and nursing. I planned to visit some select furniture stores to dream of a new sofa. Then Mama called saying that Marcia and Larry and the 8 children were coming by for lunch. She invited me to join them. Although I had no desire to visit with my extended family that day, I said, “Maybe I can make it if I get through with my trip to town.”

Of course I missed the meal, and stopped by their house later to offer my regrets. The first thing Mama said was: "Oh, Alice! You missed them!" Dad said, "Mary, the family were your guests, Alice wasn't part of the planning". I interjected that I wanted their forgiveness for being dishonest about my feelings and misleading in my speech. They forgave me. Then I asked them to join me in a prayer for forgiveness. I prayed, "Father, I confess my sin of deceitfulness. I ask your forgiveness. I thank you that you will forgive me." Dad touched my arm and interjected "It's not will forgive, but "Thank You for having forgiven this, and all my unrighteousness".

I then recalled the truth of 1 John 1:9. Forgiveness from before time could be claimed. This was a giant step for me to walk always in the moment with God. I realized anew that the folks had pure motives and love for wanting God's blessings for me. So too, now I no longer fear 'not living up to their standards', but can live in the moment of God's mercy, His passionate love, and acceptance of me.

Charles: - - - - -

How has my father influenced me? "Let me count the ways" (my apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning). But I have been asked for the Reader's Digest version, so...here goes:

My father influenced me greatly by his attitude toward the place, people and means of ministry that God assigned to him.

"Where" was irrelevant. Why would a man choose the Missouri Ozarks (a "no-place", in some peoples' opinion) as the place to serve God? Why would a preacher be content to serve a small-town church (Greenfield, IL) for 16+ years, when he would never be recognized as more than a 'supply pastor', due to the denominational guidelines? The Scripture: "At Parbar westward, four at the causeway, and two at Parbar" (1 Chron. 26:18) seems, at first sight, to be irrelevant. However, on closer examination (verse 12), one discovers that this merely identifies the location

of service, not the significance of that service. Dad viewed the place of God's appointment as the opportunity for service – service that had as its only objective – to please the Master.

“To whom” was not the issue. Since Jesus' objective in life was to “...preach the gospel to the poor; ...to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19), Dad saw that as his commission also. Whether in Japan, the Ozarks or Illinois, the brokenhearted, captives, blind and bruised were there to be told of God's love and grace.

“How? It was to be determined by the need God placed before him and by the Holy Spirit's guidance.

I came to desire to follow and serve God with the passion and devotion I saw in my father. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

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Elsie:

When I think of Dad's legacy, I can't help but think of the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes (from the Amplified Version). Dad did remember His creator in his youth and now that the:

v.2) “sight is impaired” and clouds “of depression” return

v.3) “hands and the arms” tremble and the “feet and the knees” bow themselves, grinders - “the molar teeth” - cease, and “the eyes” are darkened

v.4) the doors “the lips” are shut when the sound of the grinding of the teeth is low.- the voice and the ear brought low

V.5) “White hair” blooms – the almond tree, a little thing is a burden, desire and appetite fail

His response was: “YET WILL I PRAISE THE LORD!”

Oh, to have this attitude – God is so good and how good to serve a Risen Saviour, one who knows our sorrows and is acquainted with our grief.

Martha:

“I remember, early every morning, seeing Dad on his knees in the living room at Tadmor in prayer. That is the lasting impression I have of His commitment to a personal relationship with God. The overflow of course was the ministry through preaching and sharing his life with others. His desire was to know the Lord through the knowledge of His Word. He placed a great importance on reading and study of the Word. I am afraid that I often did some measure of Bible reading as a perfunctory obligation. It should be done, it was required, and one wasn't really a very committed Christian if he didn't read at least a chapter a day, even if it was Psalm 117. Just how LEGAL can one get in his thinking? Thankfully it is the Lord Himself Who puts the desire in the heart to really know Him and to discover that knowledge through the reading and study of His word. It is wonderful that He used our parents to begin this search.”

Sam:

“I cannot do justice in honoring this man, my father! He had such a broad understanding of God's purpose for our lives. His thought and action were the result of this knowledge. The Third chapter of Proverbs may well reflect the guidance of his life. Verse six seems to define his life.

Some thoughts about...

CHORES- I might be 5 or 6 years of age. Dad sends us to the truck garden to pick green beans. (The truck garden was a piece north of the road to Benton creek crossing) We were armed with pails and a washtub. That tub was mighty big and would require an awful lot of green beans to fill. So someone came up with the idea that a couple small melons would fill the cavern more quickly. By and by the task was terminated and the tub had to be carried back home. Whether we were disciplined

individually is not in my recollection, but I am certain that carrying the added weight and the fact that eventually all the beans would be picked were lessons well learned. Some years later I came to appreciate how much effort was required on Dad's part to maintain such a garden. (The bottom was cursed with "Johnson grass" which spread by tubular root extensions and choked all other vegetation.)

Lesson: At this age doing this chore is a matter of obedience, not an issue of (child) labor, but the value and purpose of working began in my life at this level. It seemed at the time that I (we) should be "thanked" for providing this dish of beans, flavored with pork and onion, but Dad acknowledged (1) God as the sole provider, pointing out (2) that our obedience to parents was pleasing to God - Col. 3: 20, (3) the fruits of our effort (labor) is actually God's gift to us! Eccl. 2:24-26a. (4) Eccl. 5: 20 gives perhaps the greatest personal blessing for those who labor in the manner prescribed by God. ("He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart." - NIV). (5) Dad also knew God's promise of "sweet sleep" to the laborer as shown in Pro. 3: 24 & Eccl. 5: 12.

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Marcia (John's widow):

"Yes it's true. Samuel Watson Thornton was my father-in-law. I guess my early memories of time in Mary and Watson's home were centered on Dad Thornton's gracious testimony of the living Jesus Christ in his life. I remember one evening, a man and woman stopped by the house with three young children. They were hungry and not very clean. We sat at the dining room table and, along with Mary's wonderful ability to extend a chicken to feed a multitude, we shared a meal with that family. They didn't know much about table manners, but they did know they were accepted JUST AS they were, and given what they needed--a warm meal for their tummies. Later, Dad went uptown with the man and filled his car with gas. You know, all the rest of

you saw your father as a leader, a teacher, a task master if you will --when it came to duties and responsibilities in the home, and in the community. You had the history of growing up in his home. I didn't have that. But what I did feel from your Dad was 'acceptance' and love. He accepted me right where I was --as John's wife, his daughter-in-law and the mother of his grandsons. He was always an encourager of my faith, and I have been blessed a thousand times over for having him in my life.“

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Cathy:

“He demonstrated a calm faith that God would take care of everything while also demonstrating that he needed to work hard to hold up his end of the deal. Though God doesn't make deals, I believe that each of us has a responsibility in the life he has to offer - we don't "earn" what we get, but we can and should reflect God's goodness in our work habits and ethic. While prayer for things and events was a routine in our home, Dad also worked hard as part of his ministry here on earth. Dad was involved in many activities, more than most husbands/fathers of that day. I'm sure that my confidence that God will provide (and provide more than sufficiently!) comes from Dad (and Mom) and that my desire to do the best job I can also comes from their example.”

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Nancy:

“Throughout the years, whether living at home or visiting. I was impressed with the love Dad had for his children and his wife.

Although he was severe at times in his punishment and held high expectations for his offspring, I saw and experienced deep love for us all— especially in the later years.

My experience was that no matter how much I challenged him (and I did), he loved. He was forgiving. Kind. Once I revealed to him a secret of mine, one I knew he would totally

disagree with. Rather than harsh reprimands or condemnation, he wept and encouraged me. He revealed a very personal thing about himself. He accepted me and showed great love...great concern that I would be hurt. I think at this moment I realized how much Dad did love me.

In this instance, as in many others having to do with the lives of my siblings, I observed and experienced a deep, deep love for his children. One that went beyond words he preached.

He talked to me (at least on one or two occasions) about the importance of family in Eastern traditions. He respected that loyalty to family and priority on each member. (I am a bit vague on the specifics, but I think he was just trying to tell me that he wouldn't disown me, even at my worst!)

When push came to shove, Watson Thornton was on the side of his children. Never would he forsake his beliefs or his principles, but he demonstrated grace in situations that I never expected.

In my personal experience, he spoke law but lived grace with his children in times of crisis. His actions revealed more about his love than his words could.

Dad contributed a tremendous amount of positive things to my life...but I believe his example of love, support, encouragement and standing by his children has personally meant the most to me.”

Endnotes

ⁱ Abraham Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg

ⁱⁱ "As You Like It", act II scene VII) - William Shakespeare

"All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing."

ⁱⁱⁱ Names since 1712: 1712 – Samuel, 1747 – John, 1790 – Samuel W., 1818 – Samuel Watson, 1841 – Samuel Watson, II (D.D.), 1875 – Jesse Blackburn, 1903 - Samuel Watson, 1938 – Samuel Watson, Jr., 1960 – Samuel Watson, III

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- iv “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet...” – “Romeo and Juliet,” by
William Shakespeare
- v “History of the Thornton Family” –written by the hand of Minerva
Thornton Bickell, in 1901
- vi “The Glass Cage”, p.109-110, Arthur E. McCann, ARC Press,
Lincoln, Arkansas
- vii “Testing the Waters, Phase 1 (1938 – 1942)” - Unpublished
Memoirs, written by Paul Mellow
- viii “In October of 1945, barely a month after he accepted the surrender
of Japan on the deck of the USS Missouri, General Douglas
MacArthur sat down with a delegation of American clergy at his
headquarters in the Dai-Ichi Insurance Building in downtown Tokyo.
The four churchmen had come to Japan to rekindle a dialogue with
Japanese Christians cut short by World War II. They were the first
Americans in civilian clothes to enter postwar Japan.

“MacArthur, a lifelong Episcopalian, asked them to send 1,000
missionaries as soon as possible. ‘Japan is a spiritual vacuum,’ he
said. ‘If you do not fill it with Christianity, it will be filled with
communism.’” – “Red Flags and Christian Soldiers” by Tim
Shorrock
- ix “The Storybook Ball”
- x Martha Miller – in an e-mail received October 14, 2006
- xi It is likely that the date was late 1970, since the bulk of their time in
Japan was spent to the north of Tokyo. Initially, Watson spoke at the
Golden Anniversary of the Kobe Union Church that his Father, J.B.
Thornton had pastored.
- xii “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”, by Thomas Gray
- xiii “Finding True North” (Leadership Magazine - October 1, 2005), by
John Koessler.