



## Summer at Woodland Hills Four Things That Changed the World

Dick Foth

It's wonderful to be back here at Woodland Hills Family Church. One of the great things about being able to be together like this is to be able to call each other friends. Jesus sets the stage for that and when we talk about running the race together, that's part of what we're talking about. I want to talk to you specifically about *Four Things That Changed the World* in that race and how that works. A lot of it has to do with how I view the world, how I view you, how I view God.

Little kids have a totally different view of life. You know, preschoolers. Some of you may have heard me share this story before, but I love this story, so I tell it all the time. Little kids are two and a half feet tall when they are preschoolers. We have a granddaughter who is now 26 years old and married, but when she was three, we were visiting her house. Early in the morning, she came and climbed up in our bed. Now if you're parents and at 5:30 in the morning a three-year-old climbs up in your bed, you say, "Oh no, not again" because they're usually wet. But if you're a grandparent and a three-year-old climbs up in your bed, you say, "Okay."

She jumped in the bed and said, "Let's talk."

I'm clawing my way up out of the darkness and I said, "What do you want to talk about?"

She said, "I'm going to have a baby sister." Her mom was pregnant, but they didn't know the sex of the child.

I said, "Well, it could be a brother." She said, "Yeah, but I want a sister."

I said, "Okay, let's think of some names."

She said, "Okay."

I said, "Why don't we call the baby Boogaloonie?" She looked at me. I said, "How about Zongabongawonga?" She started to chuckle. I said, "Why don't we call the baby Yabbaslabavich?"

She just howled and said, "Oh, Grandpa, those are boy names." What do I know?

If you think little children have a different view of life, you ought to try Jesus. Jesus is this most profound person that ever walked the planet. He, in my view, in my understanding, is the God who

speaks galaxies into existence. He's the one who is both untouchable and touchable at the same time. How does that work? I don't know how that works? I just know what I read and what I believe and what I've experienced to be true.

There's a British mystery writer, now gone - her name was Dorothy Sayers – who wrote this: *"The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore – on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium."*

If we take Jesus, the Creator of the universe, the Savior of mankind, and we make him a little religious figure, we're doing him an injustice just to do that. When I read that, I said, "Man, let me live my life so that I don't muffle up that shattering personality."

She was speaking from her church in England back in the 1940s. She said, *"We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him a house cat for pale priests and pious old women."*

The first time I read that, I said, "Man, I wish I'd said that!"

Here is this Jesus who comes to us and, at the last supper, before he goes to the cross, he's telling his disciples the key things. On that night, this is what he says in John 15, and I'd like you to read it with me; it'll be on the screen. **2 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**

He describes love, which is an amorphous word, you know, like "I love pizza and I love burgers." "I love Branson and I love the lake." "I love the Pacific Ocean" and "I love God and I love Ruth, my wife and I love the grandkids." So, it's just one of those mushy words, but he defines it very clearly. He says, **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.** Why would he talk about friends or friendship if that wasn't at the heart of what the Kingdom of God was like? For me, the word that describes the Kingdom of God, in terms of human language, is *together*. It's the place where we come together in him, for him, through him, for each other. That's how that works.

So, somebody says, "How do you start a friendship? How does that work?" I won't go into all the pieces, but it starts with story. It starts with your story. Everybody has a story.

I've just finished my 75<sup>th</sup> trip around the sun. That's how I talk about aging. I could say I'm a year older, but it sounds so cool to say... So, I'm on my 76<sup>th</sup> circuit of the sun. That's a lot of miles. I used to look better. Stuff slipped and fell off... so, here we are. But, when we think about it, when I come to a place like this or I come to a friendship, I bring a couple of gifts maybe. But, I don't know if I have tomorrow. I could have the big one on the way home. I don't know. What I know I have is 75 years and 4 months of history. That's what I know I have. And when you ask me about that, when we start sharing our stories, powerful things can happen. Simple things like I was born in Alameda, California on March 17, 1942, three months after Pearl Harbor.

I was working with some Japanese leaders in small groups, which was unique for them. Some years ago, they had 50 some people in the room and they had small groups. They had said that the Japanese people wouldn't do small groups because they are very self-contained. I said, "Well, let's try it." I had a friend named Kogi Yamasaki. Kogi was high in their economic system. He had a PhD from the University of Edenborough and he found Jesus at the University of Edenborough and was baptized in Knox Presbyterian Church on the High Street.

We were talking and I said, "Let's just do this together Kogi," and he said, "Okay."

I said, "Kogi, where were you born and brought up?"

He said, "I was born in Tokyo; brought up in Tokyo my whole life." He said, "And where were you born, Dick?"

I said, "Alameda, California."

A Japanese man in another group called out and said, "That's near Oakland, isn't it?"

I said, "Yeah, how did you know that?"

He said, "That's where IBM trained me." Afterwards, he came straight up to me and I was speaking with the President of IBM Japan. We were buds just because he knew where Oakland was.

Every time you share a piece of your story, it's a Velcro ribbon to which other people can connect. And when you start sharing your story, it gets exciting because if you are a Jesus follower, if you have given your life to Jesus Christ, if you have known his salvation and his redemption in your life, when you tell your story, you're telling part of his story. And when you tell his story, you're telling your story in some way because that's what he does, that's how that works.

The cool thing about telling your story is that you always get an A. Every place in your life, you compete – on the ballfield, in school, at work. You're always in competition. But, your story is uniquely yours out of seven and a half billion people. So, you have an A before you start, you have an A in the first third, you have an A two thirds of the way through, and you get done and you still have an A. I'm saying that's cool; let's do that more.

When you tell your story to me, it helps me know where to love you and how to love you. When I get to know what you've been through, when I get to know your joys, the good, the bad, and the ugly, it helps me know how and where to love you.

So, these are the four things that can change the world as we run the race. They are centered in a word called **affirmation**. Affirmation is a four-dollar word that means I like you. You said, "I know what affirmation is; it's when you say good stuff about people like 'great cake that you made' or 'I love it when you walk in and you're smile lights up the room.' That's affirmation." Well, part of being affirming as a friend is you can also be confrontative because you don't confront, in a good way, people you don't

care about. But don't go there with 80% confrontation. That friendship will never work, I'm just saying. Ninety-five percent affirmation and five percent confirmation... whatever it is. But, that's part of the mix. But, affirmation is the fuel of friendship.

I want to give four illustrations of Jesus and Simon Peter to talk about their relationships. Jesus is King of the world, he's the master, he's the leader, but he brings Peter in as a follower and a friend and then he gives him power to carry on that message. So, the first way to build friendship, apart from telling your story is...

## 1. WORDS TO GOD

This is what we call prayer. Listen to this exchange between Jesus and Simon Peter. This is toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. Luke 22 says **31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."** I prayed for you. Here is Jesus the Son, speaking to God the Father, about Simon Peter.

I had the privilege of living for 15 years in Washington D.C. from 1993 to 2008. Part of our function was to walk with people in places of leadership wherever the relationships took us. Often times, in hundreds of conversations, at the end of the conversation, I would say, "Congressman who's its or Senator what's its or whatever, there are people out in the world here who believe the biblical injunction, pray for those in authority so that we can have peaceful and godly lives through Jesus. They think it works, I think it works. Is there anything we can pray for?" Never, in 15 years, did I ever have one person so no. There is something intrinsic about somebody saying, "I'll pray for you" or "May I pray for you?" that lets us know it's affirming. I believe that prayer, words to God, is the highest affirmation we can give somebody.

When I was 17 in 1959, Elvis was in Germany, I think Alaska became a state at that time, Castro had just taken over Cuba, and I was a freshman at the University of California at Berkley. I'm a kid from a very warm and close, conservative, religious background in that way. I go to Berkley, California for school at UC Berkley. It was slightly different. I tell some people that I probably was sowing my wild oats, but, by today's standard, I didn't have many oats and they weren't very wild; that's just how it was.

I can remember driving my 150cc Vespa motor scooter home from Berkley ten miles. I lived in Oakland with my parents. I drove up and pulled up into the driveway, walked into the little bungalow house... I was raised with the theology that said Jesus could come back at any time. My mom was a stay at home mom. I walked in and I couldn't find my mother. I am going *this is not good*. I wandered into their bedroom. I heard a sound over in the walk-in closet. I walked over there and I heard my mother. She was on her knees, literally. You talk about a prayer closet. She was there and she was praying one of those mom prayers. "Oh, God, don't let Dick do anything more stupid than he's already done." And here I am. It apparently worked because I had the spirit of dumbness all over me when I was a freshman at Cal Berkley.

There is something about prayer like that that's profound. Just please hear this part. **When you pray for somebody, it does not set their value. When you pray for somebody, it acknowledges their value.** You may think very highly of them, but the God of all the universe, through Jesus, loves them more than you or I do. That's how that works. When we think about prayer, if my theology is correct, Jesus sits at the righthand of the Father as I speak and he talks to him. It says he intercedes for us. I don't think just with his life on the planet and his redeeming love on the cross, but I think he speaks about us to the Father. That's just my thought.

When I think about prayer, I think about the first friend I ever had. I lived in Missouri for a year. That's how we say it here is Missouri. Is that right? No, no obviously these are St. Louis people over here... No, no, I don't want to go there. Don't let me get into that.

I lived in Springfield in 1950 where the biggest thing, musically, was Ozark Jubilee. Some of you are older and you remember that. I lived on Williams Street on the North side of Springfield and three doors up, there was this kid named John David. John David and I became friends. I got a red Schwinn bicycle, a used bicycle, and we road everywhere. We went to the zoo, to the Doling Park Lake. We found tadpoles out in Doling Park Lake and we caught them in Folgers coffee cans on furring strips and brought them home and grew them to froghood in my mother's basement. That was another stupid thing she probably prayed about or she smacked me or something.

We left at the end of that year. I thought we were just catching tadpoles. What was happening was that I was developing my very first real friendship. We had been in India for four years as missionary educators (my folks) and this was my very first real friend. I went off to California. We connected over the years every now and again, but then when we went to D.C., he came there.

I should have known that time when it snowed and we had ice with snow on the top of it like you have here... You have those ice storms and then it snows. It's tremendous sledding. We went to a hill and my friend, John David, said, "Why don't you just lie down on the sled and you guide it and I'll sit on you and we'll just go down the hill." I should have known then that he would end up being Auditor and twice Attorney General and twice Governor and Senator of this state and then the 79<sup>th</sup> Attorney General of the United States. I should have known that John David Ashcroft would be my friend 67 years later. He's here somewhere this morning. John, are you here? You are here somewhere. Would you stand up and come join me? John said yesterday he might come second service and he did come second service and here he is.

**John David Ashcroft:** The first promise I ever kept.

**Dick Foth:** That's also on tape. That's fantastic. John Ashcroft has been a huge influence and blessing in my life in lots of ways. I'm two months older than he is; it's the only place I'm ahead of him and that's cool; I love that. But, one of the things that I found is that not only is he a great playmate, if you will, a great player, but he's a great prayer.

When we were in D.C... He came in 94, we got there in 93. You had a practice of having devotionals in your office. You did that here before work hours when you were governor, I think, and also as a senator

and also as attorney general. And anybody could come. There was sort of a template that you used for how we spent that time. Could you just share that with the folks?

**John David Ashcroft:** Let me just say how much I love this man. He's so easy to fall in love with. When he starts telling these stories, bang, he has you. And he's great at raising tadpoles. But, I had the judgment to keep them in his mother's basement, not in my mother's basement. I never really knew why they moved to California. It may have had something to do with the odor that decaying tadpoles and semi frogs make. Where were we, Dick?

**Dick Foth:** You were going to say something deep, but I don't know what... Oh, it was about RAMP or how the devotional piece got started.

**John David Ashcroft:** I've always wanted to welcome the presence of God and the wisdom of God in anything I've done. I think it comes from a feeling that the world is a little bit more demanding than I am supplying, so I need the presence and the grace of God, the goodness of God. So, really, when I became State Auditor in 1973, I started having a little devotion in my offices and we had that through my time as Attorney General and Governor and Senator and then as Attorney General.

We called it RAMP. It's to read the scripture, argue about it, then memorize some of it, and then pray. We really didn't argue that much, but read, discuss, memorize, and pray didn't spell anything, so we used... As a matter of fact, we did that pretty much regularly until 9/11 when early mornings got devoted... I mean way before work time got devoted to intelligence reports about the terrorism activities and all. But it was great to have you come by and participate in that and remind us of the goodness of God in your unique way.

**Dick Foth:** And your parents, Jay Robert Ashcroft, who was president of four colleges in his lifetime, and your mother, Grace, were very different from each other in the sense that, if I have this right, your dad was conceptually... He had a foot in the eternal, I think is how you said it. A transcendent view of life here. Your mom was industrious and had the gift of hospitality and all of that. But, your dad would... I think this is right. When you boys would go off to school... You're the middle of three boys. He would pray for you often times. And you've told me some of what he would do in those times. Could you just talk about that just for a couple of minutes? You can tell this is unscripted. He doesn't know where it's going. I don't know where it's going.

**John David Ashcroft:** My dad would pray every morning before he would leave the house. It's a habit which I have neglected myself very substantially. But I remember that as a very small child, I would sometimes go and snuggle up next to him. He would be on his knees and I would just move in next to him. Other times I could remember hearing him pray that God would lead us to do noble things, things that would demand of us our highest and best and that we would not get involved with the threshold things, just at the base of things, but that we would try and do those things which would elevate us and elevate the world and our families and the world around us. It was really a measure of significant inspiration to me as a boy to have my father have that kind of petition to God, that kind of ask. He made the ask. It was a big ask. He wasn't afraid to ask for big stuff and it was... I guess if I'm going to fit it in with what you're saying, it was pretty affirming to me at the time. How am I doing, Dick?

**Dick Foth:** You're doing great! How many would give the Attorney General, or John, my friend, an A? So now you've achieved, by many people's standards, and you're being sworn in as the Senator from Missouri as a United States Senator and your dad, as was his practice, came to be with you for that swearing in. He was sick at the time. I think you said he said he was hanging by a thread. He'd had a heart condition. On the morning of your swearing in, a number of us gathered. I think there were maybe nine or ten in the room. And, because you wanted to be prayed for... anointed with oil even in that time as the blessings from scripture and your dad was there. Could you just describe that in your succinct way?

**John David Ashcroft:** Yeah. Make it short; that's what your trying to say. Okay. We were at a little retreat house close to the Capitol and before going into the Senate, I wanted to invite again, in a significant way, a special way, the presence of God in what I would do and ask him for strength and wisdom. So, the group that was there gathered around me and my father was sitting in a sofa. It was one of those sofas that kind of capture you when you sit down and my father was weak. He told me he was hanging on by a thread and he said a very thin thread at that, but he said, "I want to see you sworn into the United States Senate."

So, he was in the sofa, I was kneeling, folks were standing around me and my father began to swing his arms pretty aggressively to try and get himself out of the sofa. Everyone was standing there and I said, "Dad, you don't have to struggle to stand and pray for me."

He said, "John, I'm not struggling to stand, I'm struggling to kneel." When my father eventually just rolled out of the sofa, he knelt in front of me and there we were, kneeling. I like to say that I think if more fathers would deal with their friends on a knee to knee basis instead of an eyeball to eyeball basis or a nose to nose basis, it might make the difference.

But, he said to me, "John, the Spirit of God is humility, the spirit of Washington is arrogance, so put on the Spirit of God and have the Spirit of God in what you do."

You know, there is a sense in which some of my father's prayers were answered. Some of them were answered fully, some of them were answered partially. I've always felt that I, somehow, didn't always live up to my dad's prayers, but they were always something that would try to call me to do what I think the Lord would have me do. My father was good at praying for God's will.

**Dick Foth:** I love you, Ashcroft. Thank you.

**John David Ashcroft:** That's all, right?

**Dick Foth:** Yeah, you're done. One time, I asked John, "What's the most profound thing your dad ever told you or taught you?" and he said, "**The most profound thing my father ever taught me was there are some things in this life that are more important than I am, like the Kingdom of God and redemption and forgiveness and reconciliation.**" I love that.

That was the longest first point I've ever had, but it may be the best point that I've ever had.

## 2. WORDS TO YOU

Words to God is prayer and then there's words to you. That's what we usually think of as affirmation. "Love ya." "Great job with the ballgame." "I love it when you smile." You know, all that sort of stuff. Jesus says it this way to Simon Peter in Matthew 16.

***16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Because he had said, "Who do men say that I am?" 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.***

You know, Simon Peter was not a stable person apparently. I mean, he was a natural leader, but he promised more than he could produce. I identify with Simon Peter. Not necessarily as a natural leader, but... You know, I've made too many promises that I only did partially or didn't quite get done. And he was this way and Jesus comes along and says, "I'm going to change your name to Cephas, to Peter, the rock, the stable person.

You could almost see the other eleven guys looking at each other going, "Dude? What's that about?" Either Jesus saw something in Peter he was calling out or he was putting something into him. That's what you do when you affirm people, a lot of times. You're not just recognizing, sometimes you're planting when you do that. That's how it works.

When I think about that, I think about when I was dating Ruth. I was a stutterer from age five to about age twenty-eight. I stuttered horrible... or well, depending on how you view that. And I was dating Ruth, who's here with me. I was dating Ruth and one night, I was feeling insecure and I said essentially, "Ruth, I don't know if you want to keep going because I stutter."

She just looked at me and smiled very sweetly and said, "Oh really? I hadn't noticed."

That started unlocking my door and letting me out. Now, I talk all the time because I have hundreds of thousands of words I've saved up and it just runs off. But, my whole speaking style comes out of stuttering. I'll speak rapidly for a few moments, stop, say a few more words, stop, say something. When I finally took a public speaking class in graduate school, I got high marks in the effective use of the dramatic pause. I was just trying to keep from stuttering. **God will take the bad things in our lives, when we offer them to him, turn them inside out, put them on like a glove, and use them for his glory.** I believe that. I believe he does that. That's who he is.

When I think about it, I think about a time when I was in a small group session. They had this conference in the St. Louis Holiday Inn back in the fall of 1972. They put us into small groups. Three hundred people in small groups of six. All morning, we did that story thing. "Where were you born and brought up?" "What did you do for fun as a kid?" All that kind of stuff. It's amazing how close you can feel to somebody when you ask the right questions over just a couple of hours.

After lunch, we came back, they told us to rearrange the chairs. They put them in a horseshoe with one chair in the open end of the horseshoe. One person sat there. He said, "All of you are going to sit in that chair and you're going to rotate through that chair and everybody in the group, on the basis of what they've learned about you, about your story, will be able to affirm you because when I hear your story, I learn how and where to love you. And all you can say in response is 'Thank you.'"

The first person in the chair was a young kid, 18 or 19 years old; a young guy. There was a girl in the group about the same age. She said, "I see you as a dog because you're able to..." You were to do it in terms of a quality or a color or animal (good animal). She said, "I see you as a dog" and he was disappointed. She said, "No, no, no, I have a beautiful golden Cocker spaniel at home. It has brown eyes and you have brown eyes. I love that dog. I just like to hold him and... The kids said *alright, now we're talking.*

The second person in the chair was a 28-year-old Christian Education Director from the Catholic Church in a different state who had received a bad critique. She sat in the chair. She did not want to be there. All morning, she was, as they say in Kentucky, flaunching' and bellerin'. She was cranky, she was saying... And she was a chain smoker.

The same girl said to her, "I see you as a warm and spontaneous person. I see you as the color of your dress." It was fall and she had all these fall colors: reds and oranges. She said, "I would like to take you to my home in Rockford, Illinois on a snowy winter's night, sit in front of the fire, eat popcorn, drink hot chocolate, and just get to know you."

The woman took the cigarette out of her mouth and stubbed out on the floor and said, "Say that again."

She said, "I see you as a warm and spontaneous person. I see you as the color of your dress because it reminds me of the fire in my fireplace and I would like to take you to my home in Rockford, Illinois on a snowy winter's night and sit in front of a fire and drink hot chocolate and eat popcorn and just get to know you."

By the time she finished the second time, tears were streaming down this woman's face and she said, "No one in my entire life has ever wanted to sit with me for an evening just to get to know me."

I saw somebody transform in a snap. I don't know where the grouchy woman went. She was a totally different woman all afternoon because somebody used language to affirm, words to you about you. Prayer is words to God about you, words to you about you.

### **3. ACTIONS TOWARD YOU**

You say words are cheap; how about some action? I won't read the text, but the text where Jesus is in the Garden and they come for him and Peter whips out the sword and takes a whack at the servant's ear. Do you remember that? Where Peter tries to defend God, if you will. And he whips out the sword. His aim is not great and he just gets his ear and you can almost... It says that Jesus reaches out and touches it.

He said, "Stop that!" And he reached out and touched the ear and healed. It. You can almost hear Jesus saying, "Oh, Peter again..." Because the last thing he needs is an attempted murder charge. But now, if the servant who gets his ear cut off tries to take Peter to the judge and say, "This guy tried to kill me!" The judge would say, "What evidence do you have?" The servant would say, "Well, he cut my ear off." The judge would say, "Which one?" The servant would say, "Well, this one. And the judge would say, "Case dismissed for lack of evidence."

What Jesus does to take an action toward us is to destroy the evidence. He comes into my life and the enemy of my soul is saying, "Foth has got a list of sins as long as that..." And on that day, I believe God says, "I've got the original right here. I know what that is, but this says paid in full, stamped in the blood of my Son Jesus Christ that he destroys the evidence. That's how that works."

#### **4. ACTIONS TOWARD YOUR WORLD**

John 21: **3** *"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you."* This is at the end of John 21 and you know the story. They go out and fish all night. They are commercial fishermen, fishing with nets. It's terrible and they get nothing. Jesus has breakfast on the beach. My friend Gordon Fee says, "What do you do when you totally foul up, you have a God who hunts you down and fixes you breakfast. What do you do with a God like that?" You follow him; that's what you do with a God like that. And you know the story. They have a net full of fish and he speaks into their world. He takes an action toward Peter's world.

***So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"***

***"No," they answered.***

***6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.***

I'm 30 years old, I walk into our house, and I'm just tired. Some of you who are older say 30-year-olds have no idea what tired is. But, I walk into the house, start playing with the kids, romp around with them.

Later, Ruth comes to me and we're talking together and she said, "I love it when you play with the kids."

They were little kids, four under the age of seven. I said, "Why? They're my kids."

She said, "No, no, no, they're your kids when you come home. They're my kids 24 hours a day. You're out there as God's man of faith and power, leading people to Jesus, having business lunches, learning new stuff." This was at the University of Illinois where we did a church plant.

She said, "But I'm here at home, trying to find a three-year-old. Her clothes are by the little pool in the back, but I can't find my naked daughter anywhere. She's somewhere around..." How many moms know that's true? They just leave their clothes and walk off somewhere and you have no idea. She said, "When you come home and play with the kids, what you're telling me is that how I spend my time is worthwhile. When you play with the kids, what you're telling me is that where I'm investing my whole life is valuable. When you play with the kids, what you're really doing is loving me." I didn't get that. I didn't know that.

Sometimes, you need a person who does all four of those things: words to God, words to you, actions toward you, and actions toward your world.

I'm a ten-year-old, going to my first summer camp in Santa Cruz, California. They have a young guy there, 38 years old. He's a pastor and loves kids. He comes to just bless kids. He talked to us as ten-year-olds like we were real. He talked to us like we had brains and hearts. His name was Roy. He dressed up like a military guy. He had a .38 revolver, which is always great for kids' camp, and he had a dummy named Jimmy. He was a ventriloquist.

I sat right there in the front row because I love Jimmy. One night, Jimmy, the dummy talked to me and said, "Hi, Dick, how are you?" and I said, "I'm good. how are you?" The next day, I'm the big man on campus. You know, they don't have Sesame Street; there are no televisions in 1952. They said, "Hey, there's the kid the dummy talked to."

I'm standing in the cafeteria line and Roy comes over and says, "Dick, thanks for sitting in the front row."

I said, "I like Jimmy."

He said, "Jimmy likes you." He said, "Always follow Jesus, Dick; you'll have a good life."

I'm ten, so I was like "Okay."

Eight years later, I transfer from Cal Berkley to a Christian college and meet a tall, sandy haired, green eyed girl by the name of Ruth who turns out to be Roy's eldest daughter. I didn't know he had kids. I thought he just had Jimmy. I didn't know.

When I asked for her hand in marriage, I was nervous as a cat. I'm sitting in the cab of his pickup because he's a pastor who has a farmer's heart. He's a planter, nurturer, harvester. I said, "Pastor Blakely, I really love your daughter Ruth."

He said, "We kind of like her too." He's playing me like a fish.

I said, "I'd really like to marry her."

He said, "I think that could be arranged."

I said, "But, I'm scared because my parents' marriage is coming apart and I think maybe it's hereditary, I think maybe it's in the DNA.

He did something that has shaped me. He put a hand on my shoulder and he said, "Look, why don't you love Ruthie and follow Jesus and Opal and I will love you both and we'll pray for you and we'll be with you and we'll just walk together and it's okay, I trust you." It will be 54 years in a couple of weeks and so far, so good.

When we went to Washington D.C. in 1993, he said, "Dick, you need to go to D.C. because folks there need some help, so you go ahead." Six months after we got there, he passed away. We got a call saying... Father Blakely we called him. "Father Blakely died in the night." We went back to do his service, to be part of his service. They had all kinds of people. The grandkids were all there. They had five kids, twenty-three grandkids, and a thousand people. I was supposed to wrap it up. Well, if you're the last guy, everybody else has taken the good stuff.

I'm driving to the service and I have this thought. He has a farmer's heart. He's a planter, he's a nurturer, he's a harvester, but he's also a salvager. He'd have all kinds of junk in his garage. It was what I call junk. I'd say, "What is that?" and he'd say, "Stuff." I'd say, "What are you going to do with it?" and he'd say, "I'm going to use it." I'd say, "When?" and he'd say, "Sometime." And it dawned on me on the way to the church that he saw people like he saw things, that they were too good to throw away. And that's how he dealt with us, that's how he reached out to us.

That morning early before the service, Mom Blake had said, "Any of you kids or grandkids want any of granddad's old greasy caps..." Because people would give him caps to ride on the tractor and stuff. We all took some caps. At the end of his service, the thirteen pallbearers, all the grandsons from age seven to age twenty-nine, sitting in the front row, got ready to carry out their granddad's body and they all reached down under the pew and pulled out one of those greasy caps and it just wiped us out.

They said, "We're going to go past the old home place on the way to the country cemetery."

We drove to the corner of Carver and Ladd Roads north of Modesto, California in the Central Valley and spring is just coming to the orchards and the vineyards. As they get to the house, the hearse slows just perceptively and when that happens, the boys in the second car start honking their horn. All of the sudden, 50 cars are honking horns. Suddenly, the windows come down and those old greasy caps come out the window and the boys start shouting, "Granddad, you did it! Granddad, you did it!"

I'm saying, "What did Granddad do?" Because now hankies are coming out of sunroofs and cheers are ricocheting out through the orchards. What he did was that he loved the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and he loved his neighbors – his wife, his kids, his grandkids – as himself. He was not just their father, the husband, the grandfather; he was their friend. He loved them the way Jesus loved them. And those kids, to this day, many of them now adults, will say that Roy Blakely, Grandpa, left his fingerprints on their soul and they looked a lot like Jesus.

Father, thank you for your grace. Thank you for your mercy. We just want you to know this day that we want to be receptive to your truth. We want to love by your Spirit like you love, so that when we say friend, it has a depth to it, a richness to it, a saving quality to it, a redemptive part. We want you to know that we will never get over you and we stand on tiptoe to see what it is you want to do next.

In Jesus' name... Amen.