

BEGINNING
A NEW ADVENTURE

**A Story About Following God
In Our Eighties**

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A PERSONAL NOTE

My recent remarriage, at age 86, came as a surprise, (and more probably a shock) to many of you. You are not alone, since Jo and I felt the same way! Since the actions we take (or fail to take) often impact deeply those around us, I decided it was important to write about these recent events.

At first I thought I would wait and tell the story when I reach Age 90 and reflect on the five year chapter for Age 85-90 of *“Four Generations: A Journey Through Life”*. But then I realized that was overly optimistic since we never know when God will call us Home. In addition, I am acutely aware of some of the questions and emotions my actions have stirred, so I knew I needed to do some explaining now. If God grants me additional years, I may try and tell you later how this late in life decision plays out after the “honeymoon” is over.

The account has been prepared primarily for family and friends. If it finds its way into other hands, perhaps it will still be of some benefit. The matters I am going to discuss obviously involve Jo in a deep and personal way, but what I have written is from my own perspective.

I do not know if what I have set out will help you in your own journey—but I hope so. In any event, I pray it gives you a better understanding of why one old man would take this important step this late in life.

From Grandpa With Love

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A Story About Following God in Our Eighties

Ellie, my dear wife of 61 years, went Home on September 2, 2009. She was the light and love of my life and it was a wrenching experience. But it was God’s will, and neither of us ever questioned it was the right time for her. We wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.

However, it did leave me in a quandary. As I described in “*Letting Go*”, a booklet I wrote about a year after her death, I knew it was to be a new life, but I didn’t know just what to do. Here is what I said:

“After Ellie left last year, I felt rudderless. I knew I had been privileged to be with her until she reached the other shore. But, then it was as if Jesus took the boat and put me back out on the river. When I asked for direction, I seemed to get the same simple answer He so often offers those who are searching:

“You must follow me.” (John 21:22)

So that is what I intend to do.”

The next several months were very difficult. Like many others who have gone through this kind of experience, I felt I was not whole. The love, time, attention, cards and letters I received from so many helped immensely, and I shall always be grateful. But it seemed half of me was gone. I felt as if my boat was not going anywhere—just sitting in the harbor, while I waited to rejoin Ellie.

I remember thinking it would be much easier if I had just left when she did. I found myself praying to see her in my dreams. And I realized that was not healthy—simply spending my life thinking and speaking about our good life together made me a prisoner of the past. I had no sense of the future, and the Bible says, “*Where there is no vision the people perish.*” (Proverbs 29:18 KJV) I knew I needed to do something, but I didn’t know what.

My dilemma came to a head in February of last year, after Ellie had been gone about a year and a half. A young man with whom I had been meeting came in one day and laid a DVD movie entitled, “*UP*”, on the table and told me, “*You need to watch this.*”

I did. And after watching it, here is what I wrote in my Journal:

“2-26-11 I was given the DVD, “UP”, an animated movie. Showing a couple of kids growing up, marrying and growing old together. They started with an “Adventure Book” with blank pages showing what they were going to do. Finally she dies. As an old, sad man, he opens the book and then realizes she had put in pictures of their life together. At the end of the last page was a note he hadn’t seen before. She had written: ‘Thanks for the Adventure. Now go have a new one.

Love, Ellie.

I wept and wept, Lord. And asked is this your word, and Ellie’s word to me—to go forward and do whatever you have yet for me to do. To reach out?

To risk more? To love and to live? I am confused. I only know I love You, I love Ellie, I love so many who are so nice to me. Dear Father, Show me now Your way and Your Adventure until you bring me home to You and to Ellie. I am willing!! Your Loving Son, Marvin.”

Over the next several months I searched in many directions. Someone told me I needed to learn how to live alone. So I asked and probed to see what other singles were doing, but I never found anything that seemed right for me.

The senior center where we lived had been a Godsend during Ellie’s illness and death. But it was becoming clear that my health and abilities did not require all the benefits they provided, so I considered moving back into a house. But this didn’t seem to be right, either.

I even thought about going to live with one or more of our children, but I had no peace about that—and maybe they didn’t either! I told them I knew something was happening but I didn’t know what it was, and I did not believe it was all going to be easy.

One person encouraged me to begin dating. (I would later discover others were also praying for a mate for me.) About that time I received a call from someone in Chicago who informed me that some people in Wichita said I should date. A short time later a friend told me he had a message from a mutual friend in Washington D.C. who told him to ask me, “*When are you going to remarry?*” Frankly, that was the last thing on my mind, but since I was trying to follow God’s lead I began to consider it. Still nothing happened. While I

knew many wonderful women, none seemed right for me—and, frankly, it seemed almost disloyal to consider it.

Last summer a leader of my old church called and wanted to know if I would come over and teach a seminar I had been giving about “*The Last Half of Life*.” I still had many friends there, and I was honored to have the opportunity to share some of my journey with them.

The seminar was given on Wednesday nights following a weekly church supper. Jo and another long time friend and I began to eat and then go to the seminar together. The next thing I knew the weekly dinners with Jo turned into other times together, and with a rush we both were suddenly aware we were attracted to each other in a totally new way.

We had been family friends for over 30 years, but this was different! For the first time we saw one another in a new light, and I suppose God decided to open the “*eyes of our hearts*”. Sometime after Thanksgiving, we decided to get married.

There were only two women in my life that I ever considered marrying: Ellie in 1948 and now Jo. It was right with Ellie, and now it seems completely right with Jo.

We have had sign after sign that we are in God’s will. For example, I had looked and never found a house I liked. But in one day with Jo, the first one we looked at was just what we needed. In two hours I had signed a contract!

But others were concerned. One person asked if I really wanted to do this considering our age and that I had been a caregiver for Ellie. My response was that the Bible says,

“Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” (Eph 5:25)

It is my firm belief that we do not go into marriage to get something but to give something. I can hope for something, but I don't want ever to expect anything. Instead, if we do what God tells us, He will give us what we really need. And that isn't true only of marriage, but in everything we do. If we come to church to or go to work just to get something, we will probably be disappointed. But if we come to give what God has given us, (as so many of you do in innumerable ways), then God will give us what we need and our life will be fulfilled and complete.

PASSING IT ON

As usual, God has used all these events to teach me what He wants me to know. Since I am a firm believer that God also wants us to pass on to others what we learn, I have set forth below some conclusions I hope will also be helpful to you.

1. The Effect of Remarriage On Others

It isn't too hard to get married if you love someone and firmly believe it is God's will—no matter how old you may be. The hard part is to deal with all the waves this sets off in other relationships!

It was difficult for me to comprehend how much my remarriage would affect everyone else in our lives. I knew it was causing big changes, but I had no idea how deeply others were going to be impacted. I am ashamed to say that I was so engrossed in my own life that I wounded others by failing to see the changes from their point of view. I thank God and those of you who helped bring home this reality.

I found it is most difficult for those closest to us and least difficult for those out on the periphery. We especially need our children's support or it can be a miserable decision. Our family is rather large and it takes time and effort to be sure everyone is on board. One grandchild said it well from the perspective of their age group, *"This is just weird!"*

Looking back, I believe the most fundamental effect was to force us all to accept that Ellie was dead. As long as I was alive and single, our status as a couple remained. But my remarriage altered all we had known, and we had to grieve—and that took some time.

Somehow it did not seem right or proper for me to be with anyone other than the mother and grandmother they had always known. One of my grandchildren was brave enough and wise enough to write me and explain it so I could understand. First she posed the problem I think we all had to face when she said:

"I have had quite some time to really think about what it is that is hard to accept, and I think it is simply that I have always seen you and Grandma as a unit. You were one. You were such a special couple. I was so proud of the obvious love you still shared together after 60 years together... So to hear the news that you were interested in someone else really jolted my whole thinking. How could that kind of love be replaced?"...

I can't think of you and grandma as a unit. It isn't you and grandma anymore—it's you and Jo."

But then she gave me a great gift of inward peace and sense of gratefulness when she concluded by telling me what I have now felt from all our loved ones:

“But I want you to know that that is not something you should feel burdened to fix, or feel guilty about. It’s simply a change that I need to get used to....I know you have prayed and sought out the best way to make everyone feel most comfortable with this. And I know that this relationship makes you happy and fills a void that no one else really could. So as you begin a new journey and adventure in life, I want you to know that I support you both and the decision you have made. And I love you so very much!”

It still overwhelms me as I realize the grace that God and all of you have extended to me, and I say, “Thank You” with all my heart.

To emphasize our love and concern, and to make sure everyone understood we were simply completing our lives and not replacing our former spouses, (or others in our lives) we asked the Pastor to read the following comment at the beginning of the marriage ceremony:

“...we both recognize and thank all those who have contributed to our lives over the years; and we take this step, not to replace our former spouses and families whom we shall always love and honor, but rather to complete and fulfill God’s plan for this late chapter of our lives after our former spouses have gone Home to be with Him.

Thanks for joining with us in this ceremony.

We love you all!”

A few days later we traveled to Texas to visit each of Jo's children so they would begin to know me, and realize I wanted to know them.

And it wasn't just family who were confused by my actions. One good example was a dear lady who sought me out and explained that she was really angry with me, because she had loved Ellie so much, and it did not seem right for me to do this. But she, too, then gave her blessing and told me she understood.

Here let me emphasize again, I did not get married in order to avoid being lonely, or to have a woman in my life. Instead I got married because God made it clear to me in so many ways that I was supposed to get married to Jo. It was as if I were in a giant current or perhaps a tornado funnel like Judy Garland in "*The Wizard of Oz*". I was not in control. It was only after it has happened that I have begun to realize the unimaginable gift and treasure God has given me for the last half of the last chapter of life. I do not know what is to be, but I am convinced it is necessary to carry out the role God has for us as we complete our race and finish the course.

2. Premarital Agreements

I now realize it is very important to have a premarital agreement before we remarry. As one person told me:

"Second marriages are not always easy."

So we need to do everything possible to make them work well.

This is not a new idea. One of my sons, who has worked in the Holy Land for many years, told how much these were used in ancient times, not just for property issues, but so both parties would know their responsibilities. We need complete disclosure. Both of us need to have lawyers and be fully informed so we have a clear understanding about what we are doing. For us it was not merely who owns what, but who takes care of each person when we can no longer care for ourselves, who has powers of attorney and who plans the funerals.

3. Keeping Our Sense of Humor

We have had lots of jokes and laughed, mostly at ourselves, more than we have done for years. For example:

- A daughter said, *“Oh good, Dad. This gives me hope!”*
- When Jo called a credit card company to give her change of name because she had gotten married, the operator asked her birth date. When she answered, *“December 8, 1928”*, the lady exclaimed: *“And you just got married? Oh! You made my day!”*
- One old friend and I lost our wives the same year and told each other we would never remarry. I decided I had to “eat crow” so I called to tell him. I asked, *“Are you sitting down?”* He seemed puzzled and said, *“Yes, Why?”* I told him, *“I’m getting married.”* There was a pause, and then he said, *“I should have been lying down!”*

One final observation: We find we will often refer to each other by our former spouses' name. It happened to us three times in one day! It isn't so bad when you are alone, but it really shocks others when we do it in public. But it is reality and so we simply chuckle and go on with life. One person told us the answer was to call each other "*Honey*" and then we won't embarrass ourselves. So when you hear us often use that term you will understand why!

CONCLUSION

We were married in a little chapel on February 10, 2012. As I looked out on the family gathered for our wedding and the small family reception that followed, I thought about all the little children running around. I told Jo,

"Just think. Someday those little children can tell their grandchildren, "I attended my great grandfather's wedding!"

I have discovered that not only are God's ways not always our ways, but also God's timing is not always our timing. A short time ago, I attended the memorial service for a former law partner who attended our wedding a few weeks before. He was a good friend and a fine lawyer who had loved and served the Lord, his family and a host of clients and friends. He had died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 61. We were terribly shocked and deeply saddened.

At the close of the service, an older partner who also attended our wedding, commented ironically,

*“I attended the wedding of my older senior partner, and now
I am attending the memorial for my younger partner.”*

He didn't say it, but we both knew it would have seemed much fairer in our eyes if it had been reversed.

But God determines the times and places. And the Bible makes it clear that He makes

“...everything... beautiful in its time.”

For Jo and me, that seems to mean beginning a new adventure as we approach this last part of life. We do not know how much time we have. That really isn't too much of a concern. The important thing is that we follow Jesus and make ourselves available to God to use for as long as He has us here on earth. We do not believe it will all be easy. But we are convinced our being together has a purpose. And our conclusions were confirmed again when one friend noted,

*“I believe you will be more together
than the sum of each of you acting alone.”*

Sometimes we wonder if the rapture may be near. It would be good to go Home together wouldn't it? But whenever and however it occurs, we can be sure God will use everything in our lives for His Glory, for the benefit of others, and ultimately for our own benefit, as long as we follow Him.

From Grandpa With Love