

Holy Trinity, Thanks and Praise to Thee

Lorenz T. Nyberg (1720–1792)

Holy Trinity, thanks and praise to Thee,
That our life and whole salvation
Flow from Christ's blest incarnation
And His death for us on the shameful cross.

Had we angels' tongues, with seraphic songs,
Bowing hearts and knees before Thee,
Triune God, we would adore Thee
In the highest strain for the Lamb once slain.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

In Praise of Ordinary Men, Part Three: Elmer Jahn

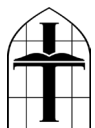
Jon Pratt

Elmer Jahn went home to be with the Lord on February 10, 2018. He had lived 88 years. I am privileged to have called him my father-in-law, and he had a profound impact on me, his other relatives, and many, many others. How did this man with very humble origins come to be used by God in the lives of so many? In a word—grace. He knew how desperately he stood in need of grace, and once saved, he manifested the gift of grace to everyone he met.

Elmer grew up in difficult circumstances. His parents were nominal Catholics, but his family never went to church. His alcoholic father physically and verbally abused him, his mother, and his three siblings. It is quite a wonder, really, that he graduated from high school. But he did, and he married Joanne, his high school sweetheart, two years later. The Lord gave them two boys, but they had great difficulty carrying future pregnancies to full term. Since they loved kids, they decided to take in foster children and they cared for over 20. But foster care was not the same as having children of their own, so they decided to adopt. And God added two girls to their family, one of whom would become my wife, Elaine.

During those early years of his marriage, Elmer worked at the post office and by his own admission he was a lazy and dishonest worker, taking advantage of the system to gain every possible advantage. Though he and Joanne went to mass regularly, they did so only out of obligation, and their lifestyle as a whole reflected Paul's description in Ephesians 2:3: "We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

But then when Elmer was 43, God came calling. Woodcrest Baptist Church hosted a VBS that summer, and the canvassing efforts of a teenager from the church resulted in Elaine and her sister attending the VBS. Amazed by how much Bible the girls learned at VBS, Elmer and Joanne responded to an invitation to attend evangelistic meetings held at the church. And both Elmer and Joanne heeded the invitation to repent and believe in the gospel.



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God's work of grace in Elmer's life was evident to all who knew him. The verses God used to save Elmer were Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast." And he was still quoting these as his favorites as he lay in hospice care prior to his death.

What distinguished Elmer in the years following his conversion? God's grace filled Elmer's heart with love which he poured out in service to the church, in care for people, and in dedication to his Savior. His example in each of these areas provided me with a wonderful model in the 35 years I was privileged to know him.

Elmer was an active member in three different churches during his 45 years as a Christ-follower. He was expert in teaching junior age children in Sunday School, often creating vivid object lessons to explain the important truths of the Bible. The pastors at each church appreciated his loyal support and faithful service as a deacon. In his later years he actively participated in small group Bible studies and served as the greeter at the Wednesday evening church-wide meals.

Elmer loved people. When I first met him, I was amazed at how kind Elmer was to me. At first I figured this was special treatment reserved for the man who was dating his daughter. He would regale me with stories about his adventures serving subpoenas (he had purchased a process serving business in his early 40s), and I couldn't believe that one man could have so many amazing tales. But his accounts and special treatment weren't just for me. After seeing him interact with other visitors to his home, I realized he treated *everyone* with Christian grace and love. He had a way of speaking with you that made you feel like you were the most important person in the room.

Space requires that I limit myself to three stories showing his love for others. During my engagement to Elaine, I accidentally drove my car into Elmer's new fiberglass garage door, creating a large, ugly crack. But Elmer refused to take payment from me to repair it; instead he smiled and said, "As long as you marry Elaine and never leave her, you don't have to pay for it." When Elmer sold the house 30 years later, the door with its crack was still there.

Elmer and Joanne showed their love for others in opening their home not only for morning conversations around their table but for extended periods of time. His son's family of 6 lived with them for nearly a year and his other son's family of four for several months. When their granddaughter lost her parents, they took her in for five years. Besides the foster children mentioned earlier, they also took in parents with children for months at a time. Yes, Elmer knew how to obey God's command to be hospitable and to meet the needs of the saints (Rom 12:13).

He also knew how to show concern for the poor and unlovely. Elaine recalls a time when as a young girl riding in the car with Elmer, they drove by a drunk man who was passed out and lying on the roadside. Elmer stopped the car, helped the man into the car, and drove him to a place where he could be helped.

Elmer loved to talk about Jesus and loved sharing new insights he had heard about Him from his favorite radio preachers. He also showed his love for Christ by living out the truth of Ephesians 4:32 when he led his family in granting forgiveness to his other son-in-law, who tragically murdered Elmer's other daughter in 1995. Despite this horrific act, Elmer extended the grace of forgiveness to this man before repentance could even be evidenced. Furthermore, Elmer loved Christ by caring for his wife of 50 years when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He took those five years of her sickness in stride, even smiling when she inadvertently hid his car keys or called the police to report an intruder (him!).

I learned much from Elmer Jahn, an ordinary man who loved and served and was transformed by an extraordinary God.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
