

Why Do We Mourn Departing Friends?

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Why do we mourn departing friends
Or shake at death's alarms?
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to His arms.

Are we not tending upward, too,
As fast as time can move?
Nor would we wish the hours more slow
To keep us from our Love.

Why should we tremble to convey
Their bodies to the tomb?
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay
And scattered all the gloom.

The graves of all His saints He blest
And softened ev'ry bed.
Where should the dying members rest
But with the dying Head?

Thence He arose, ascending high,
And showed our feet the way.
Up to the Lord, we, too, shall fly,
At the great rising-day.

Then let the last loud trumpet sound
And bid our kindred rise:
Awake, ye nations under ground!
Ye saints, ascend the skies!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

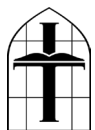
A Tribute to Roger Peterson

Roy Beacham

There are probably four or five men in my experience whom I would consider mentors *par excellence*: men who doubtless changed my life, as well as the trajectory that it took. One of them entered the presence of the Lord last week, September 22, 2021, at the age of 89. I first met Roger Peterson on the evening that I responded to an invitation at Fourth Baptist Church to indicate my desire to become a member. I was reared in a small church in Kansas and I was reticent, to say the least, about joining a congregation of 1,500 members. I had moved up to Minneapolis in order to enroll at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. I figured that a large church would have no need for me. There were so many people in the congregation that surely there could be no place that I could serve. Yet after visiting for a couple of Sundays, I felt compelled to join the church despite its size, hoping that someday I could fit in somewhere. Immediately after that evening service, Roger Peterson was waiting for me outside the auditorium door. He introduced himself and asked me if I would be willing to serve in the church's children's program. As they say, the rest is history.

I'm now nearly 70 years old and I have been a member of Fourth Baptist Church ever since. Roger Peterson became one of my closest mentors and friends. I served under Roger for years as a Sunday School teacher and spent two summers under his direct (and intense) supervision as a "Preacher Boy." Most young men only lasted one summer in that program. Eventually I served alongside Roger on the pastoral staff for over a decade and taught with him as a fellow professor in the seminary. On more than one occasion, we had the joy of teaching in Romania together. I think I knew Roger just about as well as anyone, and he me. That was truly a life-altering experience.

Roger Peterson was so like the NT character of Barnabas, in my experience, that I have often wondered if God cut them from the same cloth. Barnabas was a "Son of Comfort" (Acts 4:36), of the same quality, in fact, as God's Holy Spirit: a helper, a counselor, an advocate, and an intercessor. Roger was outgoing and personable, as well as innocent and good-humored. There wasn't a mean bone in his body. He loved people and he loved to serve people. Like Barnabas, Roger was a "good man" (Acts 11:24a), moral in person and kind in disposition. He was also "full of the Holy Spirit and of



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faith” (Acts 11:24b). Roger’s carefulness with regard to his sense of the Holy Spirit’s leading in his life was legendary, especially when it came to sharing Christ with those in his sphere of life’s experiences. No one but God knows how many times Roger redirected his own plans to follow his sense of the Spirit’s leading to minister to someone in need. It happened multiple times a day and affected hundreds of people. It was truly a gift.

It’s no surprise, then, that Roger became a Barnabas-like mentor to dozens and dozens of folks in so many ways. Barnabas took Paul under his wing when Paul was an outsider (Acts 9:27), and Barnabas took Mark under his wing when Mark was hurting and vulnerable (Acts 15:37-39). I can’t begin to recount all of the ways that Roger shepherded men, both young and old, to grow in Christ, to think biblically, to love the Scriptures, to love souls, and to serve selflessly. Here are but a few of those ways. Roger personally wrote (or occasionally co-wrote) and published an entire series of through-the-Bible Sunday School lessons for both adults and children, the “Bible Light Series.” Those lessons are still used by multiple churches around the world. Roger also “taught the teachers” every Sunday afternoon for those who were teaching Sunday School the following week at Fourth Baptist Church. As I mentioned, Roger was in charge of the “Preacher Boy” program every summer, meeting every day with a dozen or so seminary students who basically “sold their souls to Roger” in order to spend well over 60 hours a week learning at his feet and serving in the church and community for an entire summer. Roger also prepared and delivered a “Soul-Winners Challenge” at every mid-week service in order to encourage and exhort the church to share the gospel faithfully, widely, lovingly, and intelligently. Roger organized and led the outreach and evangelism program at Fourth Baptist every Tuesday evening for years on end. Roger championed and distributed a published Bible memory system, having memorized large portions of the Bible himself. Mentoring was at the very heart of Roger Peterson and countless people have enjoyed the benefit of his shared heart.

Like Barnabas, Roger was an exhorter, constantly challenging men and women “to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (Acts 11:2-23). Besides his weekly “Soul-Winners Challenge” to the church, Roger taught the Evangelism class at Central Seminary for somewhere around 30 years. It was one of the most difficult courses that I ever took in my life, one of only two seminary classes that I couldn’t ace. Very few could keep up with Roger’s expectations, not to mention his experience. Roger lived what he taught, and expected no less from his students. Yet Roger, like Barnabas, was a humble man. Just as Barnabas was out-shadowed by Paul for most of his early ministry (cf. Acts 11:30 and 12:5 with 13:43, 46, 50 et. al), so Roger served as a second man for the first 30 years of his ministerial career.

Roger Peterson was not without his flaws and neither was Barnabas (Gal 2:13), and neither am I. But Roger Peterson left his mark on my life, and I will forever be grateful. I will miss his exuberant spirit, his infectious smile,

his inveterate joy, and his unforgettable humor—but not for long. Thank you, Lord, for men like Roger. And thanks, Roger, for your investment in my life. I will see you soon!



This essay is by Roy Beacham, Distinguished Professor of Old 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.
