

Give Me the Wings of Faith to Rise

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Give me the wings of faith to rise
Within the veil and see
The saints above, how great their joys,
How bright their glories be.

Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.

I ask them whence their victory came,
They with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death.

They marked the footsteps that he trod,
His zeal inspired their breast;
And following their incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest.

Our glorious Leader claims our praise
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Shows the same path to heaven.



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In the Nick of Time

George Houghton

Kevin T. Bauder

The campus sweltered in late August of 1973. I was seventeen. Registering for my first semester of college, I needed my faculty advisor's signature. He was a new prof, somebody I'd never heard of. But even though I was only a lowly freshman, George Houghton took the time to chat with me as if I were someone who mattered.

A few weeks later I stood on the brink of drawing my first theological conclusion. I was nervous about committing myself, so I took a chance and stopped at George Houghton's office. He welcomed me into a spirited, half-hour conversation.

Those moments were typical of the man. George was a good scholar. He had degrees from Bethel College (where he studied with Clarence Bass), Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and Dallas Theological Seminary. He had taught at Dallas for some years. But he was interested in people. He was interested in students. He loved spending time with them. He loved conversations. That's how he changed minds and lives.

George Houghton was a man of conviction. He left Dallas Seminary over its involvement in Explo '72. Three fundamentalist institutions tried to convince him to join their faculties. He was offered deanships at San Francisco Baptist Seminary and at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He accepted an offer from David Nettleton to teach at Faith Baptist Bible College. He remained at Faith for the rest of his career.

His terminal degree was in church history. As a college professor, however, George was pressed into teaching all sorts of classes. I had him for at least one Bible survey course. He was my professor for apologetics, which turned out to include a very good survey of Neoevangelicalism. He taught me Romans and 1 Corinthians. I loved all those courses.

His strength, though, was history. He was my professor for two semesters of church history survey. By the end, I had fallen in love with the discipline. That course is where he taught me an important principle; I still think of it as "Houghton's Principle of Institutional Decay." It states that the older an organization becomes (age), the larger it grows (size), and the wealthier

and more influential it becomes (affluence), the greater is the tendency for people to transfer their loyalty from the founding principles of the organization to the organizational structure itself. This dictum ought to be learned by every pastor, because it operates all the time.

The best course that I took from George was in the history of fundamentalism. My impression of fundamentalism had been shaped by figures like Carl McIntire and Lester Roloff. During a break on the first day, I opined that I didn't think that I could ever be a fundamentalist. Taking it in stride, George said, "If fundamentalism is what they represent, then neither could I. But I think fundamentalism is something better. I'd like to show you what it is." By the end of that course, he had convinced me.

After graduation from college, I attended Denver Baptist Theological Seminary. There I was taught by George's twin, Myron. Then I became an instructor for two years at Denver Baptist Bible College. During those years I saw George seldom, but we did touch base occasionally when I was in Iowa.

By the time I took a pastorate in Iowa, George had become the academic vice president at Faith Baptist Bible College. He brought Robert Delnay into the institution to start Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. At about that time, the Denver schools became financially unsustainable, and they merged into Faith. Around then, Faith achieved regional accreditation. George was an important leader in that effort.

During the six years that I pastored in Iowa, I saw George frequently. Those were invariably good visits. I had a ThM in church history, and I continued to pursue historical research. George was very generous with his time and materials. He would often share his files with me, and several times he gave me documents that he thought I would treasure because of the signatures on them.

The relationship continued irregularly when I went off to Dallas to pursue doctoral work. Whenever I was back in Iowa, George and I would try to meet, and he always wanted a report of what was happening at Dallas Seminary. When I came to teach at Central Seminary in 1998, I was able to see George more frequently again.

When I became president of Central Seminary, our relationship continued to deepen. George was a trusted ally and advisor. He was also amazingly tolerant. I'm sure that I blundered in ways that he could have found offensive, but he was never anything but kind and encouraging. When Central Seminary had to decide which accreditor to go with, I spent a week with George at the North Central Association (now the Higher Learning Commission). He made sure that I met the people who could help me to make a good decision.

George was a bridge builder. During the years when fundamentalism was fragmenting, he encouraged the different factions to pull together. He wasn't a highly visible leader. He was never out front. Instead, he worked from behind the scenes to erect a stronger fundamentalism, one built on ideals rather than on personalities.

A churchman as well as a professor, George was ordained by Faith Baptist Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota, under the pastorate of Robert W. Myrant. He spent decades as a member of Urbandale Baptist Church in Des Moines under Pastor Richard Dayton. During part of that time, he also served as one of the church's pastors.

In 2013, Central Seminary awarded George the Doctor of Humane Letters diploma. This is an honorary degree, but he is the one who honored us by accepting it. That was a great day, but the end of his career was already approaching.

Within a few years, George was forced to retire. His body was weakening. Then his residence changed to a care center. Even while his health declined, he conducted Bible studies and wrote a little devotional for the residents. He served the Lord for as long as he had breath in his body.

For a while, Myron was in the same facility with George. Then they both contracted COVID. George survived, but Myron did not. Every time I would visit George after that, he would tell me how much he missed Myron, and how he longed to meet his brother in heaven.

That wish was granted on Monday, October 27. His weakened body could no longer sustain life. Yet George's life did not end. He fell asleep in Jesus, absent from the body but present with the Lord, until the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout. Few have left this world more victoriously.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology 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.
