

Faith of My Parents: Walter & Vivian Gill by David W. Gill (2008)

I was blessed with a great father and mother. My father, Walter L. Gill, died at age 91 in 2004. My mother Vivian E. Gill died at age 89 in 2008. So I had a lot of years with them. In 1974 I wrote an essay for a book entitled *What They Did Right: Reflections on Parents by Their Children* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1974). The editor, Virginia K. Hearn, liked my piece enough to make it Chapter One in her collection of 38 such reflections. My own two children were pre-schoolers at that time.

After my essay from 1974 I have included the obituaries and memorial service messages I wrote in honor of each of my parents in 2004 and 2008.

What They Did Right (1974)

If a videotape existed of my first twenty years, I'm sure that any editor would pick out two particular scenes to represent my relationship to my parents.

The first scene would have my father, dark circles beginning to appear under his eyes, unable to stifle an occasional yawn, patiently giving an explanation for the existence of suffering in the world. The clock shows 1:16 A.M. in the study, but the indefatigable questioner, a twelve-year-old adolescent, shows little sign of weakening. The conversation will have to end soon, then four hours of sleep for the father, five or six for me. Within two to four weeks another marathon discussion will take place, maybe on a single topic, more likely ranging from the fortunes of the San Francisco 49ers to the nature of women.

The second scene would show my mother at a frosh-soph football game, one of only two or three people in the grandstand (which would be packed with 2,000 for the varsity game the next day). Oh, she was also there when I played varsity; but what really symbolizes my mother are those times when she was there and almost no one else was.

At times of course we had disagreements, at times harmony escaped us—but those were the exceptions. My father was my counselor, pastor, teacher, and friend. My mother was my number one fan, comforter, and friend. Both of them were always available to me. They thought I was important. Their authority and leadership weren't something that was beaten into me; they won my respect and loyalty with their actions.

The early years: a Christian foundation

I was the second of four children. Three sisters, one older by a year, the others two and four years younger, aided my parents in my upbringing. While I have no doubt that my relationships were special as the only son, my parents never tired of reminding us that we were all of equal value in their sight. My father would comment, shaking his head in mild disbelief, on the fact that each of us was so different and yet came from the same womb. But although, for tactical reasons, I argued that I was getting the worst of it, I secretly knew then (and openly admit now) that both my parents studiously avoided favoritism.

My church attendance began before I was conscious of much more than the existence of a warm thing called Mother. Church attendance was simply a fact of life for us, and while we belonged to a small, theologically exclusive and ingrown fellowship, it was something holy. It was a time to meet God, to worship at the Lord's Table. My father was a quiet but steady and encouraging part of the leadership. Sundays were referred to as "the Lord's Day" and you could just as well have called Wednesday evening "the Lord's Evening," for my attendance then was almost as regular as on Sunday from my earliest recollection.

Church was important to my parents for one reason: Jesus Christ was the focal point of life. My father's devotion to Christ was transparent. I think I grew to love the Lord because I loved my father, and you just couldn't separate the two. My mother entered the picture here as everywhere, though, and it was at her side that I knelt in the living room at age six wanting to "be saved." The conversion experience "took" and I have never doubted that that was the night of my "second birth."

Our family devotions were neither perfect nor cast in an inviolable pattern. But during the streaks which were frequently begun, sustained for a period, then interrupted, I learned much of what I first knew about the faith. Of even greater significance for the long run, I believe, was the reading practice (out loud), as each of us read two verses in going through a passage. We kids began participating in the reading when we knew little more than *and*, *the*, and *thee* (King James has always ruled at my father's house). There was always encouragement, never ridicule. I have no doubt that those experiences were responsible for my prematurely developed vocabulary and my love for reading during grammar school and following.

We never went in for camping trips or vacations in the usual sense. Occasionally there was an exception, but normally my father's two weeks off was carefully planned for migrations to Los Angeles or the Pacific Northwest for Bible conferences twice a year. We went on picnics or rides in the car, and my father was often interested in playing catch or wrestling in my earliest years. But recreation together as a family was infrequent, certainly not central to our family unity, and not really missed. My father was my friend and teacher, never my coach or teammate.

When I was about eleven I asked to be baptized and soon after that began taking communion. About then, too, I began to read and underline my personal Bible and my interest in the Christian faith began to intensify, a process that has never stopped. Even during the rugged years of adolescence my basic commitment to Christ was there. I faltered badly in practice but seldom or never in basic commitment. I attribute that to my parents' example and to their encouragement. As with other things, they didn't attempt to force me into the Kingdom; they preferred to lead and love me toward the goal.

Building responsibility: mainly my father

My parents aren't a lot alike, but they are a complementary team. Although they overlapped and supported each other's involvement in my life, it isn't hard for me to identify fairly precisely the kind of role each played in my life. I turned to my mother for pep talks, enthusiastic support, and instant help in activities. But it was always to my father that I turned for those long discussions (short ones as well), for counsel, for the same sort of discussion I now enjoy in graduate seminars.

The most important lesson my father taught me was responsibility. He had two constant reminders for me, going back as far as I can remember. First was: "Remember, Dave, you're a young man now." Implication: be responsible, be mature, don't trade on your youth for irresponsibility. Second was: "Never forget that you belong to the Lord." Implication: live for Jesus Christ, think and act as though He is constantly present.

Some bounds were well defined for me: movies (except an occasional Disney flick like *The Living Desert*), dances, and parties were out. Even in those areas, though, it wasn't by way of legalism. Rather, my father took time to explain in as much detail as I desired what was implied in being a man of God. Result: I was almost invariably won over to his position and rarely felt deprived. In other areas I was given an open field, such as student government activities, athletics, drama, and music. Participation was encouraged with the ever-present reminder: "Remember who you are (a man, not an infant) and who you belong to (the Lord)."

With few exceptions the strategy worked without a hitch. I got involved in student government in seventh grade and only lost the taste for it after high school. I managed to get excused from any of the infrequent Sunday practices and got heavily involved in sports, especially football and track, all the way through high school. I picked up a guitar and, while in high school, organized a folk/comedy group called the "Snurd Brothers," which performed at school assemblies, talent shows, and the county fair. I seldom regretted missing the parties and social life of my pagan high school friends. My identity wasn't wrapped up in those things but rather in the mix of Christian commitment, athletics, student politics, and music. When dating assumed importance it took place with church activities or folk concerts in Berkeley and, when I could afford it, dinner in San Francisco.

The times I let my parents down were learning experiences for me. My outgoing and outspoken ways could become obnoxious to my teachers from about the third through the ninth grades. Seventh and eighth grades were the worst. Physically

and even spiritually I was growing, but socially I suffered the ills of adolescence. Several times my parents were called in by teachers or even the principal to discuss my case—often with me present. My mother could get weepy, and my father's disappointment, even shame, hung over me like a cloud as I shriveled into a repentant and embarrassed boy, thinking about my failure to monitor my joking mouth in some class. But my father never beat me or called me a creep in those situations. He did something more effective: he let me see in a few quiet words how I had dishonored the Lord and my family. I had betrayed his trust and misused my freedom.

The worst episode was in a school play during ninth grade. Through a drama class I won the part of a thug who had about four lines, late in the play. Without thinking through the consequences, I delivered my lines flawlessly at the evening performance. My whole family plus a cousin sat in the crowded auditorium, proud when they arrived. Although I confess to much worse in private a few times, my threat on stage, "By God, I'll leave you here to starve to death," stunned my father. When I had dressed and gone to the waiting car for the ride home, you could almost cut the gloom with a knife.

"To think . . . my son . . . using the Lord's name in vain."

I knew the commandment of course. I wouldn't argue in favor of the justice of my father's judgment. What did come through loud and clear was this: my parents had a stake in me. I carried the family name and honor. More, I carried the Lord's honor with me.

As soon as I was ten years old I got a morning paper route. Financial responsibility was a big thing with my father. He got out of high school in the depths of the Great Depression and worked for thirty cents an hour. As I was growing up, he was working his way up to a middle-echelon executive. From about age ten to fourteen I delivered newspapers. It wasn't worth it for the money (although it was nice to earn your own), but it got me started toward healthy appreciation of work and financial realities. And, predictably, my father would already be up folding papers (and reading one at the same time) when I rolled out of the sack each morning.

During high school days I worked many hours at gas stations, a donut shop, and a dairy products store. I experienced success and frustration, and I began to experience more freedom. In eleventh grade I bought a '54 Ford, but had to sell it two months later because it was too costly. In twelfth grade I bought a '56 Chevy, poured my money into fixing it up and customizing it, blew an engine or two, and learned some wonderful lessons: never own anything but the minimum means of transportation (Volkswagens have done me fine ever since); avoid monthly payments like the plague; avoid getting into "conspicuous consumption" and other ridiculous and enslaving aspects of the American automotive scene. My parents let me pay every cent of my car insurance, repairs, gas, as well as the initial cost.

Building enthusiasm: mainly my mother.

If my father and I had special closeness in our relationship, that was natural since I was his only son. My mother's attention was drawn to my three sisters pretty much, as least as far as the kind of counseling I have been describing. But my father had a weak spot, and it was here that my mother made her presence felt. He had a tendency to get discouraged and even brood over supposedly unsolvable problems. If my mother lacked the logical insight which my father so amply demonstrated, she more than compensated by her unbounded enthusiasm for life.

My mother is a doer, an activist. She's an enthusiast, a saleslady, a problem solver. If her solutions don't all work, never mind, she'll come up with five more to try in their place. Whenever I did anything—piano recitals, football games, folk music at county fairs—she was there. Before I had a car I often walked or rode a bike. But she was always ready to drive me and my friends anywhere, any time. She and Mrs. Vargas would show up at those frosh-soph football games providing an audience of two—even at most away games. She claimed to be a football fan (really, I don't know if she knows the difference between a draw play and a reverse). She was really a fan of her four kids and burst with pride and enthusiasm any time we did anything she could be proud of. She thought I was the handsomest and smartest kid in the world. She thought my sisters were (though a bit overweight) the prettiest of the world's women.

I learned not to take her judgments on our merits with total seriousness! But what I did take seriously were her positive thinking and enthusiasm. Why shouldn't I try to be the best? I knew I wasn't the smartest, handsomest, or best athlete, but due mainly to my mother's infectious spirit, I gave everything I had to my endeavors and had fun on the way.

After all, in her own specialties my mother approached life in the same way. I always knew our home was open. I could invite my friends over for dinner and with a moment's notice (or so it seemed) she would lay a feast before us, bouncing up and down from the table serving us, showing interest in whatever we were doing or talking about. She would take us to the park, swimming, skating. Anything for the kids.

I have no doubt that my mother gave me the power of positive thinking. She gave me that healthy restlessness in my innermost being that always drives me toward involvement and participation if not to leadership itself. The emotional won over the rational in my mother. I still have trouble carrying on a debate or argument with her. But I am profoundly thankful for that, and so is the rest of the family. She was the spark plug that got us going. While I have an increasingly sober estimate of my abilities and limitations, I owe it to my mother that in word and deed she gave me the mentality of a doer, achiever, competitor, and sometimes a leader.

Postscript: from child to parent

In the ten years since high school many things have intervened and substantially changed my relationship to my parents. My father seems weary of thinking at times. My mother seems to wane in enthusiasm a bit. They are thinking of retirement, visiting their grandchildren, and maybe traveling. I married the girl I began dating as a senior in high school and now have two preschool children of my own. Theological differences ended the long relationship I had with the little church my parents attend. My mother had trouble understanding why God had me work with “those people” in Berkeley and why I chose to wear long hair and a beard for a few years.

Even through my high school graduation I never failed to see the logic and sense of my father’s position on various issues, theological and social. The topics that concern me now are more complex, the questions more difficult. Some topics we can’t really discuss without unsettling him. Yet my admiration and appreciation of him and his mind continues.

This all reminds me of the privilege and responsibility of raising my three-year-old daughter and two-year-old son in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” I pray that my wife and I can, by God’s grace, teach and infect them with a sense of responsibility, a predisposition to be thoughtful, a supreme loyalty and love for the Lord, and a boundless enthusiasm to become—and then enjoy—whatever God has for them.

Walter L. Gill (1912 – 2004)

Obituary

Walter Leonard Gill, 91, passed away quietly on Saturday morning, December 11, 2004. Born in Portland, Oregon, April 12, 1913, to Frank B. and Katie (Hallgren) Gill, he resided in Oakland and the East Bay Area since 1952. An accountant by profession, he worked most of his career in the Long Range Planning Department at Crown Zellerbach headquarters in San Francisco. As a young child he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Throughout his life he was a devout Christian and an active lay leader and Bible teacher in a fellowship of believers simply gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ but known to church historians as the "Plymouth Brethren." He served for many years as editor of their List of Gatherings (roster of local assemblies).

Married on April 26, 1943, he was the devoted husband and partner of Vivian (Wurz) Gill for over 61 wonderful years. In addition to his beloved wife, he is survived by his dear sister Kathryn Davis of Bellevue WA, and by four children, Dorothy Weise of Castro Valley, Dr. David W. Gill (and wife Lucia) of Oakland, Kitty Faria (and husband Ron) of Hercules, and Elizabeth Gill of Redwood City, seven grandchildren, and seventeen great-grandchildren. His family and friends are united in thanksgiving to God for the privilege of being part of his life and knowing him through the years as a wise, encouraging, and loving husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, mentor, and friend.

Family and friends are cordially invited to a viewing at Wilson & Kratzer North Chapel, 24th & Barrett Avenue, Richmond CA from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m., Friday, December 17, and to a memorial service at the same location, 12:00 noon on Saturday, December 18.

Memorial Service (18 December 2004)

"As We See the Day Approaching"

Hebrews 10: 19-26

Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entering into the [holy of] holies by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and having a great priest over the house of God,

let us approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering (for he is faithful who has promised).

And let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some, but encouraging one another, and by so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

Introduction

This passage in Hebrews provides a wonderful summary of my father's faith, thought, and life. I would like us to meditate on this text for a few minutes. May we all walk out of here this afternoon with a not only a better understanding of God's Word but a greater passion and determination to live out its truth.

Now it was essential that Jonathan read this passage in the King James Version. As I wrote many years ago in a chapter of a book about Christian parents called *What They Did Right* (Virginia Hearn, editor), "King James has always ruled at my father's house." Nevertheless, there are a couple of glitches in the KJV translation of this passage and it will help us understand it better if we use a more modern translation. For that purpose I will be relying on John Nelson Darby's *New Translation*---which is not only

more accurate but has the additional virtue of being the work of my father's most revered Bible scholar and teacher.

Knowing the Living God

Our text begins by referring to a "holy place" or the "holy of holies"---and to the "house of God." These terms refer back to ancient Israel's portable tabernacle and then to its temple. In both the tabernacle and the temple there was an inner area designated as the holy place---and then within that, separated by a big drapery, or curtain, or "veil" as it is called in this New Testament text, there was the "most holy" place or the "Holy of holies." This was the place where God promised to be present in the midst of the people. Of course God was also in heaven and God was at work all over the world---but he was especially, powerfully, personally present in the Holy of Holies.

God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, was alive and real and wanting to dwell in the midst of the people he had created in his own image and likeness---people who were made to be in fellowship with each other and with him.

But a huge problem had come up: the people created in the image of their loving God had abused the freedom God gave them, had chosen to go their own way, to make or even be their own gods. Their minds and consciences were soon filled with evil schemes, with an unquenchable greed for money and material possessions, with anger and hatred toward others, with suspicion and prejudice toward outsiders and strangers. And not just their minds but their physical bodies became the instruments of lies, gossip, slander, and falsehood, of violence, gluttony, and immorality. You know the story. We have trashed God's beautiful creation and sowed discord among the people of the world. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Paul tells us. Reinhold Niebuhr once said that "original sin" is the one Christian doctrine that is empirically verifiable. There are mountains of evidence everywhere, that human beings are lost and in sin.

So here is the situation: God wants his people to know him and come into his house and his holy place. He longs to have us united with him. But we can't come in. We can't come in. We can't come into God's presence dragging along the sin and corruption of our lives. And by the way, one of the worst forms of this sin and corruption is the arrogance and blindness that says "Oh that's not me. I don't need any help, there is nothing wrong with me." You can't come in until that attitude gets cured.

With this background in mind then, it is astonishing to read this opening line "Having boldness to enter the Holy Place" and to see this talk of a way through the veil which blocked off the entrance. What happened? What is this "new and living way" into the presence of God? It is the body and blood of God's Son Jesus Christ. We couldn't come in. We were fallen and we couldn't get up. We were lost and couldn't find our way home. We were blind and couldn't see. But God, in his infinite grace and love, made a way. He paid the price for our cure; he bought our ticket to come back home to the house of God. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

If somebody died to save your life, you would think about them every day for the rest of your life. If somebody gave one of their kidneys to save your life, you would think about them every day with gratitude for the rest of your life. Well Jesus Christ gave his life on the cross for you and for me. We had a debt and we were bankrupt; and he paid it off. We had a disease called sin, that condemned us to hell; and he provided the cure by giving his own life. His lifeblood was shed, his body was broken. And now we can come back into his house, we can boldly enter the Holy Place where our eternal Father lives. Let me ask you: Have you ever thought about thanking him for this?

It's all because of the work of Christ on the cross. It's because he sacrificed his body and shed his blood. My dad knew all of this and never ceased to say "thank you" to God for this sacrifice. And as most of you know, for my dad, the high point of worship, in fact the high point of every week was to gather together with other brothers and sisters to remember the Lord in his death. The center of worship for my dad was

not the sermon, not the music, not even the reading of Scripture; it was all about entering into the presence of the Lord, remembering his great sacrifice, and offering him our humble sacrifice of praise, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. My dad loved that and every weekly schedule for him was oriented around that event. When he stood up to pray or to break the bread or bless the cup you could always see in his face and hear in his voice that he sensed that we were at that moment standing together in the Holy of Holies.

Let us draw near in faith

But let's go on in our text. With our way into the presence and the house of God opened up, there are three great challenges for our daily lives. These challenges are expressed in terms of the three famous "Pauline virtues"---faith, hope, and love. You will remember that in I Corinthians 13 we are told that "now abide faith, hope, and love, these three, and the greatest of these is love." At the beginning of Colossians Paul writes that he has heard of their faith in Jesus Christ, of the hope they have stored up in heaven, and of the love they have for all the saints.

And in our Hebrews passage, the first challenge is: "Let us draw near in faith." Now faith in the New Testament has two basic aspects that are suggested by the phrases "believe that" and "believe on." The Christian life begins by believing that certain things are true. We have good reasons to affirm these things as true but we can't prove them in some scientific or philosophical way. For example, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." "If we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved." It's about believing that Jesus was and is God's Son...believing that he died on the cross to take away my sin...that he rose from the grave...believing that he loves me...believing that he forgives me...believing that the Bible is the Word of God...and so on. My dad believed that those things were true. It's not about being naïve or gullible but about making a choice about what you are going to believe. Some people believe that we all emerged accidentally from some sort of evolutionary slime; my dad believed that God created the heavens and the earth and man and woman in his image and likeness.

I wish I could share more with you about how my dad taught me about what to believe, about innumerable conversations we had long into the night, as I was growing up, when we went back and forth about different things that people believed. I will just make one point: it is the Word of God---the living Word of Jesus Christ and the written Word of Holy Scripture---that must ultimately decide what we believe. No other authority can trump the authority and insight of the Word. The biblical commentaries don't judge the Scripture, the Scripture judges the commentaries; the traditions of men, even men from Plymouth, are subject to the authority of the Word of God, that's what he taught me.

So my father sent me off to public schools and then to the University of California to learn all I could. But he always said to me, "Remember who you belong to; remember that your mind belongs to Christ." "Question authority...in the name of the Word of God." Think critically. So I didn't get my basic views of business and economics from the Haas School of Business, I got them from what Jesus and Scripture say about money, property, wealth, and poverty. And I didn't get my views of politics from the political science department or from the Berkeley radicals and leftists or from the neo-conservatives, American nationalists and the religious right. No, my dad taught me to get my political views from the King of the Kingdom of God. It's because of what my dad taught me that I say to you today that George Bush is not my president, except in a very secondary sense. Jesus Christ is my President and I pledge allegiance to the cross and to the eternal kingdom for which it stands. I am an ambassador to the USA from the Kingdom of God.

So you can see how this stance of faith brings revolutionary changes to our ideas and our values. But even more profoundly than this "believing that" kind of faith is the "believing on or believing in" variety. Faith is not just an intellectual revolution; it is a relational revolution. Faith is expressed in a relationship of trust and commitment. When my son Jonathan passed me up at Gold's Gym when he was a high school kid, I believed him that he could now bench press 300 pounds; but I believed in him when I actually got on the bench and trusted in his strength to lean over me and spot me attempting to lift a heavy weight. About the same time I came to believe that our daughter Jodie had learned how to drive a

car; but I believed in her when I gave her my car keys and got in the passenger seat. My faith grew enormously in those days!

So faith in Jesus Christ is not just about believing certain things about Jesus Christ, it is about entering into a personal relationship of trust, of daily conversation and activity. It is about drawing near, approaching, coming close to Jesus Christ. Grace and faith go together in the Christian life. I've often said that grace is God pursuing us even as we are running away, it is his throwing his arms around us and saying "I will not let you go." Everything begins with this gracious action of God. But faith is our turning around and responding to God's grace, it is our throwing our arms around God and saying "I will not let you go." So faith is the movement, the gift, the inclination that links us to God. Faith is about drawing near to God, about longing to be close to God. My dad was a man of this kind of faith. Psalm 84 expresses the will to draw near that my father displayed:

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.

For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. . . . O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

How many of us in this room have even a clue what this is all about? Do we know what it's like to actually fall in love with God, to pursue God, to cling to the living God—or is our faith just a comfortable set of theoretical beliefs? My father's life challenges us: let down your defenses and put away your fears. Love the Lord and let him know it. Draw near in faith.

Let us hold fast our hope without wavering

The second challenge growing out of the new and living way into God's presence is: "Let us hold fast the confession of hope unwavering." Here is where the King James translation is wrong when it says "faith." As Darby and all the other literal modern translations point out, the correct word is not faith by "hope."

Hope is sometimes defined as the "future tense of faith." If faith is clinging and drawing near to the unseen Jesus who walks beside me now—then hope is walking forward on my path in confident expectation that Jesus Christ is up ahead on my path and even coming toward me. Hope is confidence about a future that is in God's good hands, that God will have the last word on my life and on the universe, and that his words will be those of a good God, of a loving Father.

So the "blessed hope" in the New Testament is not death, and it is not the gradual improvement of the world. It is the return of Jesus Christ. Anybody who ever spent much time around my dad knows how focused he always was on the promise of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. That was his steadfast hope and expectation. In fact we had to buy a grave plot this week after he died because up to the last moment he hoped for the rapture to occur and didn't want to waste the money on something he might never use.

When our grand perspective on history is shaped by the Blessed Hope and grounded in the resurrection of our Lord, then we become the bearers of hope. Like our Lord, we do not go into the world to bring it condemnation but rather to bring it the good news of salvation and new life (John 3:17). We are not the heralds of doom and gloom but the representatives of a Bright and Morning Star. We have Gospel, Good News, to bring to the world. I wonder if that's how your Christianity comes across to your neighbors and colleagues? I wonder about me. I want to be a man of hope—neither a man of resignation and pessimism nor a man of wishful thinking and baseless dreaming. My dad had his times of discouragement and depression but throughout his 91 years he never stayed down for very long before the Spirit of God would stand him up to fill his and our minds and lives with joyful hope.

Let us stimulate one another to love and good works, encouraging one another

And finally, the third challenge: "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching." If God has made a way back into his holy presence and into his house, then let's not stay away; let's not forsake our assembling together. If the Day of the Lord is approaching, our calling is not to huddle up on top of a mountain and wait. If we embrace that blessed hope, the Bible tells us over and over, "what manner of people ought we to be as a result of knowing and hoping in this God?"

The answer is: provoking one another---and encouraging one another---to love and good works. And what is this love and good works exactly? Christian love is about sacrifice for others, about generosity, about forgiveness. It is about fellowship, about bringing others a message of reconciliation and peace with God---and with others. It is about bringing strangers as well as friends to the feast table of the Lord. Look at what Jesus did in the Gospel stories and what the Apostles and early church did in the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament. Feeding the poor, liberating those possessed by various demonic forces, healing the sick and injured, teaching the ignorant, challenging those who trusted in wealth and power, calling and building a community of faithful disciples, and spreading the Good News throughout the world. We've got work to do and love to share, if we know God and come into his presence, and so much the more as we see the Day approaching.

One frequent expression of Christian love is kindness. My dad was one of the most gentle, loving, and kind men I've ever known. I told him again last week that the Bible verses that I most closely associated with him were the Ephesians passage that Rob read for us:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us . . . in the ages to come [will] show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

We kids were taught to begin our childhood prayers "Dear kind God..." They say that we get our view of what God is like partly by our experience of what our father is like. It will not surprise you to know that we Gill kids know a God of compassion and kindness, a God of tender mercies and forgiveness, a God of grace and acceptance. That's what we read in the Bible and that's what we saw in our father. Day by day, year by year, decade by decade. God is love. Love is kind.

But I also love the language of "provoke" and "encourage" in this text. My dad did a lot of both of these things. He provoked (some translations say "stimulate") and encouraged me to love and good works. Let me share with you in closing two of his techniques. When I was in junior high school a couple friends and I disrupted a school assembly with some juvenile stunt. I was promptly marched to the principal's office and then sent home. The next day my dad had to delay going in to work so he could bring me and my mom to the principal's office. The principal recited my misdeeds in detail and told my parents what a trouble-maker I was. When he finished, my dad said the following to him: "I'm sorry to hear about this behavior, sir. But this is not who my son really is. He is a young man of God and a leader, not a trouble-maker. He knows the standard that God and his family have set for him and I am confident that he will live up to this in the future."

My dad provoked me to love and good works by challenging me to live up to my identity as a man of God--rather than threatening me and haranguing me about falling down to my worst impulses. If you would like to do something this week in honor of my dad's memory, find somebody who is hurting or who has fallen and tell them how precious and good they are in God's sight and in your view as well. Lift them up and encourage them. Provoke them to love and good works.

Second example: when I was 20 I complained to my dad about the appalling lack of outreach and concern in our fellowship. "How," I asked, "can we meet together and talk about all this Gospel truth and how we have been blessed to know it better than any other church or denomination-----and yet we don't

reach out.” I was really bothered by this. But my father’s response to me was “Well, what are you doing about it? It’s easy to criticize others, and maybe we all deserve it. But what are you doing about it?” Well that comment got to me; it provoked me. This was on a Saturday on a Labor Day weekend in 1966. I got up out of my chair, walked out to my ’56 Chevy, and drive straight to the Alameda County Juvenile Hall a couple miles from our house.

All the way as I drove the Devil was on one shoulder saying to me “Hah! You are nobody. You have no credentials, no experience, no nothing to qualify you to do anything at the Juvenile Hall. Furthermore, it’s Labor Day weekend you fool—nobody will be in the office. Give up and go home!” But meanwhile, on my other shoulder my dad was saying “You are a young man of God and a leader. We prayed for God to give us a son like you. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. What are you going to do about our lack of outreach to the world.”

My knees were shaking as I pushed the bell at “Boys Receiving”---the only door I could see in the fortress, the door where new arrests were brought in. A gruff prison guard finally answered and asked me what I wanted. I managed to ask if somebody like me could volunteer to come in and lead a Bible study or something of that nature. He said, “here kid, call the chaplain next week and ask him. He is in charge.” To make a long story short, the next Sunday I was speaking to a group of about 70 girls and 300 boys in two different services. For the next five years I was out at these facilities almost every Sunday, early in the morning for one, two, or three sessions with these troubled kids. Most of those years I also led a Thursday night Bible study with a dozen older guys at the Senior Boys’ Ranch. For four of those five years, I wrote and published a two page Christian paper, custom-made for this tough urban audience. Of course I had a terrific team of people that joined me in this effort and then kept it going for a while after I retired. Some of them are sitting among us this here today. It wasn’t all me. But I share this story to give credit to my dad for the way he provoked and then encouraged me to love and good works. I could tell you ten stories the equal of that one. It was all about being guided away from negativity, pessimism, and blaming---and toward hope and love, imagination, courage, and bold good works.

Entering God’s house and family with bold confidence and deep gratitude for the forgiveness and new life we have in Jesus Christ---then living out the great adventure of faith, hope, and love---that was my father’s legacy. My father wasn’t perfect---nobody ever is---but he was way ahead of second place. These truths and insights from Hebrews were inscribed on his 91-year life. May God inspire us to follow in the same path.

Amen

Vivian E. Gill (1919- 2008)

Obituary

Vivian Gill, 89, passed away quietly on Friday evening, April 18, 2008. Born in Wausau, Wisconsin, January 24, 1919, to Herman Wurz and Erna Block Wurz, she grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As a young child she accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior and throughout her life was a faithful, devoted follower and servant of Christ. Her joyful personality and loving, generous heart were amazing gifts to everyone who ever encountered her. Her warm home and bountiful table were always open to family, friend, and stranger alike. Her piano playing and zest for music were an inspiration. Wherever she arrived she could be expected to bring flowers from her garden or some other gift.

Married on April 26, 1943, Vivian Gill was the devoted wife and partner of Walter Gill (d. 2004) for over 61 years. She is survived by her four children, Dorothy Weise of Castro Valley, Dr. David W. Gill (and wife Lucia) of Oakland, Kitty Faria (and husband Ron) of Hercules, and Elizabeth Gill of Redwood City, sister-in-law Kathryn Gill Davis of Bellevue WA, seven grandchildren, and nineteen great-grandchildren. Her family and friends mourn her absence but rejoice that she is in the presence of the Lord forever and unite in thanksgiving to God for the privilege of being part of her life and knowing her through the years as an encouraging and loving mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, mentor, and friend.

Family and friends are cordially invited to a viewing at Wilson & Kratzer Mortuary, 24th & Barrett Avenue, Richmond CA from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., Friday, April 25, and to a memorial service at the same location, 1:00 p.m., Saturday, April 26.

Memorial Service (26 April 2008)

“The Virtuous Mother”

Proverbs 31:10-31 (Revised Standard Version)

A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

“A virtuous woman, who can find? Her price is far above rubies” (KJV)

It's hard to find a really good, virtuous woman, King Lemuel says in Proverbs 31. When you find her, she is way more precious and valuable than rubies and other jewels. Of course, some say it's even harder to find a good, virtuous man, but that's another topic for another day.

We're here to think about a virtuous, good woman who is worth way more than precious jewels. What would she be like? Well, we don't have to guess. In Proverbs 31 the Bible gives a divinely-inspired description of what makes for a great wife and mom and woman.

Who can find a virtuous woman? I think we found a nominee. Of course, only God can make the final judgment about the value of anybody's life. But we are often told in the Bible to consider the life and walk of those who have gone before us. What we want to do this afternoon is think a little bit about what Proverbs says makes for a good, virtuous woman---and share with you some ways Vivian Gill attempted to live in that biblical, virtuous way.

The first lesson is that a good woman is long term:

Our text says, “She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.”

Her love is not fickle and short term. Her character and her behavior are consistent over the passage of the years, through good times and bad, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want. I only knew Vivian Gill for a little over 62 years but I knew her really well. She was a solid rock in my life every year, every month, every day. She did her husband and family good all the days of her life, not just some of them.

Oh Lord, help us to be faithful, reliable, long term, solid rocks to those around us.

The second lesson is that a good woman has a great work ethic.

Our text says “She works with willing hands.” “She rises while it is yet night and provides for her household.” “She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.” “Her lamp does not go out at night.” “She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.” “She does not eat the bread of idleness.” “She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant.”

Actually the only thing I remember her selling was Avon products. I can't speak to the verse on girdles. But one thing we can say about Vivian Gill is that she was a dynamo, an indefatigable bundle of energy, tirelessly working for others.

Oh Lord, deliver us from laziness and strengthen us in our weariness; help us run and not be weary, help us put our hands with diligence to whatever tasks and opportunities you give us.

Third lesson: a good woman knows food, hospitality, and generosity.

Our text says “She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar.”

I'm thinking Costco here: ten miles. I'm remembering also how she was a lifelong coupon-clipper and bargain-hunter.

“With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

Remember what an amazing gardener she was?

“She provides food for her household. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.”

Three pictures in my mind:

First: I'm in the 5th or 6th grade and I come rushing in the house “Mom, could Julius and Wally stay for dinner?” My mom wipes her hands on her apron, beams a big smile at us and says “Yes! That would be wonderful boys. You stay!”

Second picture: the dining room table will only seat twelve so we add a second long folding table that extends out of the dining room halfway into the living room. It's crowded but it feels so good to have everybody around the table.

Third picture: my mom is digging in her purse to give some gas money or lunch money for someone short on resources.

Lord: help us be generous and cheerful givers, help us open up our hearts, our kitchens, and wallets and bring others to a feast at our table.

Fourth: a good woman has good economic sense.

Our text says "She considers a field and buys it."

My dad was the financial whiz, the accountant in the family. But did you know it was my mom who discovered the house for sale on Revere Avenue that would be their home for 40 years? She is the one who persuaded my dad that it was a great deal and oh man, did he live to be grateful for that!

My mom loved to shop but she was such a good steward of what were always limited resources. Almost all the shopping she did was trying to find good things to give to others. It was not about herself but about helping others. Even the house on Revere: it was all about having a place to host and care for others.

Lord: Help us be good stewards of our resources. Help us use what we have for your glory and in service to others.

Fifth: a good, virtuous woman speaks with wisdom and kindness.

Our text says "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."

My mom came up with some, shall we say, interesting ideas and comments at times. For example, in recent years she told us she thought she might be half Jewish. I always responded that this would be just great if it was true but why was she thinking this? Well, it was just a feeling she had.....

But underneath her playfulness, behind her little giggle, she was full of strength, dignity, and wisdom.

She had good advice. And nothing could be truer than to say that "the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." She was one of the kindest, sweetest people who ever lived.

Lord, help my words be wise and my mouth filled with kindness.

Sixth: a virtuous woman cares well for her children and household.

Our text says "She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet."

"She looks well to the ways of her household." "Her children rise up and call her blessed."

Vivian Gill was an incredible mom, grandma, and great grandma. Her four children, seven grandchildren, and 19 great grandchildren are amazingly different from each other by almost any criterion you could pick. But one thing we have in common is that we all rise up and call her blessed.

Oh Lord, help us care not just for ourselves but for our families and households.

Seventh: a virtuous woman honors and cares for her husband.

Our text puts it several ways: "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life." "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land." "Her husband praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."

Our mom and grandma was a model of a great wife. We loved watching our mom and dad love and care for each other. She was so proud and supportive of him. And our dad was crazy about her. Today is actually the 65th anniversary of their marriage. "Many women have done excellently but thou excellest them all" was something our dad really believed and actually said to our mom.

Oh Lord, help us in our marriages to rejoice in love and faithfulness all our life.

So you can see we have a pretty impressive resume for our nominee for "virtuous woman." But there is one more crucial characteristic in our text. Our text concludes by saying "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates."

The bottom line is that a good woman "fears the Lord."

What this means is that she lives her life with respect for who the Lord is. "Fear" means "serious respect."

Now no one who ever spent more than fifteen minutes with Vivian Gill could fail to pick up on the fact that she respected and loved Jesus Christ as her Lord. She was a woman of prayer and a faithful member of her meeting, her church, all her life. She read her Bible regularly and her little daily devotional calendar.

So the real story here, is that Vivian Gill was a good woman and displayed all these great character traits not in her own strength but by relying on the Lord. She was who she was because of Jesus in her life.

I know my mom would love for all of us to leave this place more committed than ever to the seven characteristics we have considered: being long term, having a good work ethic, practicing generosity and hospitality, having good economic sense, speaking with kindness, and caring for our family and friends and neighbors.

But I can tell you that what she would really like is to think somebody here might decide today to commit their life to Christ. My mom was a tireless evangelist. It was kneeling by her side that I confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior of my life when I was 6 years old. And it was at age 15 that a cute girl from my high school kneeled by Vivian Gill's side and accepted Christ as her Savior and Lord (she's still cute and we've been married 40 years now).

Last month my mom opened a letter from the IRS which included a warning that anyone not paying their income taxes on time could be fined or even put in jail. She had not made enough money in recent years to need to pay taxes but she got very worried about this form letter, even though I tried to assure her she was not in any trouble. Still full of doubts, she finally said with a sigh "Well when I'm arrested and put in jail at least I'll have a chance to share the Gospel with my fellow-inmates." She was serious.

And I'm serious now: this really is Vivian Gill's main message to us all—a warm and enthusiastic invitation to live as a follower of Jesus.

So the matriarch of our four generation family has passed on from this world to the next. Absent from the body, present with Christ.

We thank God for that reality.

We pray that we will be inspired by her example to live our own lives in faithful discipleship.

We are so utterly grateful to God for the life and love of Vivian Gill.

Let us pray.