Random Reminiscences of William MacDonald

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Random Reminiscences

In 1950 when my father Kenneth Engle (1924-2009) was preparing to go to the Philippines as a missionary William MacDonald handed Dad several 3X5 cards with about 20 assembly names, contact persons and phone numbers. Bill said "these are some who will want to learn about your burden to reach the lost, establish assemblies, and keep you in prayer." Dad visited each of these assemblies, and a number of them stood by and prayed for many years, and some continue to this day. Dad enjoyed many visits to Bill's dad and stepmother, 'Mac' and Mamie.

In the 50's and 60's Bill was at the pier to meet the ship when we returned from the Philippines, and when we departed. Some choice photographs and memories are from Bill's camera as he stood on the pier. He was constantly doing kind acts for others, had an encouraging word, and reminded us of his prayers.

In 1963 when our family returned to the US due to a medical emergency and health issues with my mother, Mary Lou, Bill offered Dad an opportunity to teach some of his courses at Emmaus Bible School (now College). We asked dad about this and he said: " the kids thought they were getting Bill for a professor and they show up to class and get this "green" missionary...but it was a wonderful opportunity to teach the students lessons I was learning as a new missionary." Dad served on the faculty for 2 years.

In 1969 Bill MacDonald and Bill McCotter were on a round-the-world ministry trip; they had just been in Turkey, where they were arrested and imprisoned for

distributing literature. They came to the Philippines, and Bill conducted the baptism of Evelyn Balanag and the first believers who had been won to Christ in the Baguio City assembly.

I remember he played checkers and chess with me, visited my brothers and sisters, and paid more attention to the world I was in, and asked more questions than most adults I met. This profoundly affected me, as I watched his Christlike character and humble life over the years.

The many times Bill was in our home, the dinner table was a special time, where he opened the scriptures or shared humorous accounts of some of the experiences of his life. But he did not interrupt, and he was a good listener. He asked pointed questions, and could get to the root of the matter quickly. When asked for advice, he was careful and gentle in his response, but it carried the authoritative weight of scripture and was right to the point.

Bill was a guest you would never forget, he taught through his words and his example. He never got over Calvary, and that God would become man, and allow himself to be placed on the cross for all our sin. The reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, was in his voice and in his mannerisms in all that he said and did.

He was not judgmental, but if there was concern he prayed for you. Regarding matters with which he disagreed with people he said "draw a small circle of discipline around yourself, and a large circle of love around everyone else." I was not always satisfied with the answers he gave me on some subjects, but realized over the years he must have been unfairly quoted many

times and he got tired of it. We were sitting in an airport some years ago, and I asked him some specific questions about the Calvinism vs. Arminianism debate. He said, "they both have some good points." Upon consideration, I realized that this was the careful answer given the limited time we had together.

During the 70's and until this time, Bill has been a valued counselor, and gave me advice with which I did not always agree. For example, I did not agree with his counsel in the area of my major in school. As I moved further into my studies, the wisdom of his counsel became apparent. In a December 27, 1979, letter he said: "I personally wish you could find a better major than psychology. It really is an inadequate and inexact explanation of man's behavior. I feel that a person can be a far more positive influence for God in the lives of others by immersing himself in the Word of God. The Bible really does have all the answers. But I am confident that the Lord will lead you."

As I look over the letters between us, I know that there are many hundreds of young men and women, upon whom he had a profound personal influence. I am privileged to be one of them, and honored to be able to share some of how his prayers, writings, and example impacted my life. If all of the men and women whom he influenced with his minstry and letters were to write of it, books could not contain it. As was written of Adoniram Judson, the first missionary to Burma, so too can it be said of Mr. MacDonald: "His Record is on High."

A letter of January 17, 1981, started: "It was a treat to get that call from you this afternoon. You are a brother

beloved. I only wish you could have been here in person."

"I'm sure that the Lord will guide you in the days ahead. But your part is to work with all your might, to strive for excellence, and to do all to the glory of God."

He closed the letter: "Love you, brother! As you press on toward the mark for the prize, I'll be on the sidelines cheering for you."

I could hear him saying those words, as I learned of his homegoing late on Christmas night of 2007.

A February 11, 1981 letter opens: "Your letter arrived this morning, and since I am devoting today to correspondence, I am going to answer you right away. Another reason for my promptness is that you asked a lot of questions for which you are presumably looking for answers."

The letter I wrote expressed concern about challenges to the authority of God's Word, and asking his counsel.

He continues: "We really need men of conviction and courage who will stand up for the truth of God's Word and refuse to bow at the shrine of scholarship when the latter starts to drift." he continued: "To summarize, I am tremendously pleased at the staunch stand you take for the inerrancy of the Word of God. My heart beats with yours. I grieve over those who do not consider it a matter worth striving about, or who call the rest of us divisive."

These words were a tremendous encouragement to me as a young man. He was a valued counselor to me as well as many others.

In a May 21, 1981, letter he informed me of changes with the DITP: "In September we expect an ex-Air Force officer, Carl Knott, to join the teaching staff at the DITP. He will serve as my assistant. Carl was originally from North Carolina, then lived in Lubbock, Texas. He was stationed in Turkey with the Air Force on his last duty assignment. He has a wife Ruth, and two lovely children, Emily and Ben. I don't suppose you've ever met Carl."

"Also there is the possibility of another young fellow coming to help me with my clerical work - Don Robertson from Vancouver. Prospects seem good at the moment. We should know for sure by the end of the month."

He closed: "Kind regards beloved brother Kevin, and best wishes, and press on toward the mark for the prize."

He stayed in close touch with Dad through the years. I remembered a July 27, 1982, letter to me in which he said "I was in touch with your dad recently about the possibility of using his tapes on a broadcast out here. I think that Fairhaven Bible Chapel may be interested if they can get a good spot on station KFAX. It is still in the planning stage."

A fellow I served in the Navy with, and later roomed with for several years had shared Bill's apartment in California for a period of time. He gave Bill a sweater that he could not use, and he said years later every time they met, Bill vigorously thanked him for the sweater. Such was his gratitude and high manners.

In 1986 when Cheryl and I were married, Bill gave us a guestbook as a wedding gift. He was constantly encouraging hospitality.

When the publication "Watch & Pray" began in January of 1989, he provided one of the first articles, and gave valuable counsel and guidance during its four year run.

The story is told that thieves once broke into his apartment, and finding nothing of interest to steal, and seeing how simply the occupant of the apartment lived, they left a ten dollar bill on the table.

I walked into a large Dallas Christian bookstore recently, and there in the corner was a display of the ten best selling Bible study resources, and in the number 3 spot was "Believers Bible Commentary." He would accept no royalties, refused to do book tours, and wanted to work and write, and leave the marketing and profiting to others. The written ministry is going far and wide, and this huge resource is being translated continually into additional languages.

In 2004 Bill gave permission to use his material on this new website which had begun on September 1 of the same year. He leaned forward and said, "Absolutely, I would like the Word of God, and my written ministry on it to go as far and wide as possible."

By God's grace, we have and will continue to follow Bill's wishes.

He has kept up over the last few years with the website, and I have reported to him usage statistics, and how many countries access the materials. He expressed happiness at this.

A year later Jean Gibson wrote us a letter, then called and said, "It is my understanding you have Bill's written ministry on the website, is there a reason you do not have mine?"

We were more than honored and pleased as an unknown website to have much of Jean's written, audio and video ministry as well, as Bill and Jean labored together in ministry and the Discipleship Intern Training Program for many years. Several hundred men are now active in ministry who were in this intensive Bible Study and ministry training program.

In keeping with Jean's request, his assistant helped me acquire much of his material, and as well he sent a handwritten list of what was available.

What an honor to have the privilege of providing the written material of these two great men to those around the world, many of whom could never afford to buy it, but do have internet access.

In recent weeks I called Bill, as I do often, to report on the latest countries logged in on the website, and toward the end of the conversation he asked me, "How is your father?" I gave him an update on Dad, especially about his health. Bill said, "I pray for your dad's memory every day." Such was Bill's prayer life. I know his prayer list was long, and think of the joyful hours in communion with his heavenly Father that it took him to get through his list.

Correspondence was another of his great ministries. It has been said he had a goal to answer letters the same or next day. Rarely in Dad's years of correspondence with Bill (since the 1950's), or in mine (since the 1970's) did he wait as long as a week to respond to one of our letters. Most of the time, he answered and placed it in the mail, the same day! And he corresponded regularly with many people. Amazing!

A missionary friend called since Bill's homegoing, and we were reminiscing about Bill's life. My friend said when he and his wife were home on furlough, they stayed in Bill's apartment while he was away. They found the fridge stocked with steaks, and some fine food. A dear friend of Bill's told them, "He does not live that way, he does this for others." We were wondering how many he blessed in this way, while living extremely frugally himself.

During his final hospital stay a good friend of ours who was honored to be asked to sit with him, was sharing with him at my request some brief memories of our fellowship with him over the years, specifically about his playing board games with me and attention to a 12 year old. I recall he would get to eye level when speaking with me (or any child). I wanted him to know how he had turned the heart of a little boy. I am thankful that he remembered those times. As the visit continued, he told our friend that he was dying and that it didn't matter. It is now clear that the Lord whom he trusted was guiding his thoughts toward heaven and gently taking down his tent.

Bill left little in the way of assets, and several thoughts were stated at the Memorial Service: the investment analyst had no stock portfolio. He lived simply, yet his mind retained hundreds if not thousands of hymns. He studied passages so thoroughly that he had them memorized without that being his primary intent. He had the ability to make complicated theological things, understandable by the rest of us, while not coming off as superior, or using words many of us can neither spell nor pronounce.

His attention, his example and Christlike response to an array of people and situations cause us to give thanks for his life, his prayers, his writings, and his audio ministry. His encouragement and ministry are a large part of why this website exists in the first place. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for William MacDonald!

We rejoice with you, dear brother, that you are now face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and gave Himself for us, whom you loved and served with your heart, your life, your all. May we have the grace and discipline to love and follow Him, as you loved and followed Him!

Thank you, Mr. MacDonald for the fragrance of the Lord Jesus you have left us, we will miss you, and look forward to seeing you soon.

Warm Greetings & High Regards

In Calvary's Eternal Bonds

Kevin

Books Available at Gospel Folio Press

“The Savior is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him - or their years of retirement. Rather, He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives.”

"Darkness about going is light about staying."

Bill was asked: "How are you" his response: "It would be a sin to complain."

"we often succumb to the chill of our spiritual environment."

"you can always tell a Harvard graduate, but you can't tell him much."

"People who want to get married in the worst possible way usually do just that."

"Our lives should crackle with the supernatural."

"I did all the sinning, Jesus did all the saving."

Favorite Poem of Bill's by Anna Jane Grannis

I want my heart so cleared of self

That my dear Lord may come

And set up His own furnishings,

And make my heart His home.

And since I know what this requires,

Each morning while it's still,

I slip into that secret room,

And leave with Him - my will.

He always takes it graciously,

Presenting me with His,

I'm ready then to meet the day

And any task there is.

And this is how my Lord controls

My interests, my ills,

Because we meet at break of day,

For an exchange of wills.

Bill's (who when he went to be with the Lord, was two weeks short of his 91st birthday) comments on Psalm 91:

Psalm 91: My Psalm. In 1922, in the Western Hebrides, a five-year-old lad was dying of diphtheria. A mucous membrane was forming across his throat, and breathing was becoming increasingly difficult. His Christian mother turns her back so she would not see him take his last breath. At that very moment there was a knock at the door. It was her brother-in law from an adjoining village. He said, “I’ve just come tell you that you don’t have to worry about the child. He is going to recover, and one day God is going to save his soul.” She was distracted and incredulous: “Whatever makes you say that?” Then he explained he had been sitting at his fire reading Psalm 91 when God distinctly spoke to him through the last three verses:

Because on me he set his love,

I’ll save and set him free;

Because my great name he hath known,

I will set him on high.

He’ll call on me, I’ll answer him;

I will be with him still,

In trouble to deliver him,

And honour him I will.

With length of days unto his mind

I will him satisfy;

I also my salvation

Will cause his eyes to see.

—from The Scottish Psalms

In Metre.

I was that boy. God delivered me from death that night; He saved my soul thirteen years later, and He has satisfied me with long life. So you will understand why I refer to Psalm 91 as my Psalm.