

PAUL DAVIS CANNADA
Nineteen Years of Love, Dedication and Service

It has now been six years since Dave died. Many have suggested that the story of Dave's life should be put in writing, however, I have resisted doing this primarily because I was not certain of my own motive. Certainly Dave would not want anything said or done that would detract from his complete dedication to his Lord and Savior nor would he want anything said or done that would, in any way, indicate that he was anything more than a simple servant. Dave knew of his faults and his shortcomings and he would not want anything said or done that would indicate that he had any self-pride or self-esteem. Accordingly, even as I dictate I am not certain that what is dictated should ever be distributed in any way. Because of the continued suggestions of several people to the effect that the story of Dave's life, if put in written form, might prove to be a blessing or a help to others, I am putting down some of the highlights as I recall them.

Dave's birth and his early childhood was that of a typical boy. He was the second of three sons. He was a good athlete, an excellent student and a joy to his parents. He grew up attending Sunday School and Church, was active in the young peoples' work at the Church, and took an active part in the Christian organizations in the schools that he attended. He was popular with his fellow students as is indicated by the fact that he served as President of the Student Body of a large Junior High School in Jackson, Mississippi, and was also President of the Student Body of a large and prestigious High School in Jackson. He also served as President of the High School youth work at his Church for two years – in the Eleventh and Twelfth Grades in High School. He was a ranking tennis player and took part in tennis tournaments, not only representing his school but also in tournaments throughout the state. He was a football player and basketball player at his school and, after his illness, an active basketball player for his Church team.

It is not my purpose, however, to discuss any of the foregoing but I am simply setting these forth to indicate that Dave was an active, energetic, and well liked young man who took seriously the responsibility of utilizing the talents that his Lord had given to him, which included his athletic abilities, his personality and his intellect (Dave was at the top of his class scholastically all the way through high school and for the year and one-half that he attended the University of Mississippi he made a grade average of 4.0, which is the highest grade that can be attained).

The primary purpose in writing this story is to set forth a few of the details concerning Dave's witness and testimony during the last few years of his life. Only a

few will be given; however, it is my intent and purpose to give enough of the details to indicate the dedication of this young man to his Lord and Savior.

It was in January of 1967 that we first learned of his illness. Dave was an excellent sportsman and he usually spent Saturdays with me hunting quail or deer or other game during the open season and water skiing or other similar activities when the weather permitted. He was an excellent water skier and an excellent marksman. On this particular day, which was a Saturday, he was scheduled to go quail hunting with me that afternoon. I planned to be in the office Saturday morning and was to get with him around Noon for our hunt. At the breakfast table that morning he indicated that he had a tightness in his chest and had a rather severe cough. I suggested that he go by the doctor's office and see if the doctor felt that he should take some sort of medicine or drugs for his cough. Later on that morning I received a call from the doctor's office to the effect that an x-ray had been made of Dave's chest and that there appeared to be a large tumor in his chest. The result of this was that, after further examination, we immediately made arrangements to go to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. No details are to be given concerning that trip; however, I praise our Lord for the people and the personnel of the Mayo Clinic. It was a trying and yet a very wonderful experience. An operation was performed and it was discovered that the tumor was an extremely fast growing malignant tumor that had completely filled his chest cavity. Major surgery was performed and Dave stayed at Mayo's for a number of weeks taking x-ray therapy. Many stories can be told concerning that experience; however, Dave was, at all times, a joy and a blessing to us and never at any time doubted the fact that his Lord had a purpose in his illness. The letters, prayers and telephone calls from his friends and our friends were an inspiration to all of us and the people at the Mayo Clinic were absolutely unbelievable. The doctors took a personal interest in Dave and in our family and we will always have a particularly warm spot in our heart for the people at the Mayo Clinic.

After finishing the treatment Dave returned to Jackson and after a period of time returned to school – the Eleventh Grade at Murrah High School. Shortly after getting back in school and beginning to regain his strength he began to run a low-grade temperature and he was again examined by local doctors who discovered that he had acute leukemia. This meant another rush trip back to the Mayo Clinic where we stayed for several weeks while Dave underwent severe treatment. The treatment was apparently effective and after several weeks we were able to return to Jackson and Dave returned to school. He was determined to finish with his class and did so with all A's in all of his courses. In addition, he was elected as President of the Student Body of Murrah High School for the next year, which would be his Senior Year.

We were then assigned to the Cancer Center at Houston, Texas, and made several trips there. In addition, he remained under the constant care, supervision, and control of local physicians. It would be impossible and probably improper for me to express or attempt to describe the loving care and attention given to Dave by the local physicians. They were absolutely marvelous. For the rest of his life Dave was under heavy medication. For a period of ten days to two weeks he would take extremely heavy doses of drugs designed to destroy his white corpuscles which eliminated any resistance that he had to disease. This meant that he must take extremely heavy doses of antibiotics and penicillin for the purpose of giving him resistance to disease. Painful bone marrow tests were taken regularly but Dave did not permit this to interfere with his regular activities of leading his Church basketball team to the City championship, making straight A's at school, developing an extreme proficiency at water skiing and leading a normal life in every respect.

During this period of time he went to Arrowhead Springs for the Campus Crusade for Christ meetings and we were able to put him under the care of physicians in California while he attended these conferences. Very few people realized his condition, he never discussed it, and it was only the friends and associates in and around his hometown that actually knew his physical condition.

It was during his Sophomore year at the University of Mississippi that he came home for semester break and developed a slight cold. This went into Pneumonia and since Dave had no white corpuscles with which to fight disease and the antibiotics and penicillin he was taking did not seem to have any effect upon the virus, Dave died on February 10, 1970, which, coincidentally, was the wedding anniversary of his parents. At that time Dave was 19 years of age.

During his college days Dave served as a counselor for a Christian Boys' Camp during the summer, was active in student affairs at the University of Mississippi, which included his social fraternity, and many academic groups. He was awarded many honors and distinctions even though he was at the University of Mississippi only one year and a half. Again, it is not my purpose to detail the many honors and the recognition that his fellow students gave to Dave. He would not want me to do that. I think it proper to mention, however, that we have a drawer filled with copies of tributes from his fellow students, friends, and classmates, including many honors bestowed upon him by honorary organizations at the University of Mississippi.

It is to be remembered that the primary purpose for writing this story is to give a few illustrations that demonstrate the strength of Dave's faith, his dedication to his Lord and Savior and his complete submission to the benevolent will of his Lord and Savior with the hope that this might be of some encouragement to those who read it.

On many occasions Dave and I had long and deep discussions concerning the purpose for which our Lord has put us here, our love for Him and our recognition of the fact that He was a loving God and knew what was best for each of His children. At no time did Dave ever question his God nor did he ever show any indication of any wavering of his complete faith and love for his Lord and Savior.

Dave regularly fed upon the Word and on numerous occasions he would come into my bedroom with the desire to discuss a particular passage of Scripture with me and to think it through in order to deepen his understanding. He was interested in all of his fellow students while he was a student at Murrah High School; however, there were a few campus leaders in which he had a particular interest. On occasion he brought by some of his fellow students and I can remember on more than one occasion Dave bringing a fellow student by the house after we had gone to bed. Dave had me get out of bed and come downstairs to discuss spiritual matters with his friend, have prayer with him and seek to guide and direct his friend toward an acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior. Dave evidenced a love for his fellow students and a concern for their spiritual welfare that is beyond description.

I can remember on one occasion while I was in Dave's bedroom and we were discussing our faith and our love for our Lord and Savior when our conversation went something like this:

“Dad, the Lord did not give me a talent that Ric has (Ric was his older brother that, at that time, was a student at Vanderbilt University). Ric has the talent of being able to bring up the subject of whether a person belongs to Christ in such a way as not to offend anyone. Ric has the talent of bringing up the subject with almost anyone that he is with and talking to that person about whether Christ is his Lord and Savior and to witness to his friends in a way that I have not been able to do. Since I don't have that talent I have been praying for the last several years in my morning prayers that God would give me an opportunity that day to witness to someone concerning my love for my Lord and Savior and my desire for that person to accept Christ as his Savior.”

Dave then looked up at me, and I can remember it as clearly as though it happened just yesterday, and said something to this effect: “Dad, you know, in a way, I have asked for these illnesses and it seems to me that this is the way in which God has answered my prayers. By continuing to show my love for my Lord and Savior, by not complaining and by not questioning what God has done but continuing to show that I belong to Christ and that I love Him with all my heart, and continuing to do all that I can for as long as God leaves me here to serve Him and being the kind of person that Christ would have me to be, then, each day, I am witnessing to all those with whom I come in contact. Those who know my condition – and most of my fellow students do – can possibly see that I am witnessing to them through the

way that I live and thus God is giving me an opportunity to witness every day – which is what I had asked Him to do.”

I must confess that I had difficulty in hiding my tears as I agreed with Dave and we joined in prayer in thanking God for answering his prayers.

On another occasion I can remember talking with Dave concerning the fact that he should not study as hard as he was studying – that it was not necessary that he make the highest grade in his class but that he should be more interested in taking care of himself physically. I can remember Dave looking me in the eye and stating substantially as follows: “Dad, God gave me certain mental ability and He expects me to use it to the very best of my capacity. Accordingly, unless I am doing the very best that I can with the talents that God gave me, then I will not be happy. As long as I am doing the very best that I can with all the talents that God gave me, then I will be happy regardless of what grade I make. On the other hand, if I am not doing my very best, then I will not be happy”. After that, the only discussion we had concerning his studying and his other work was simply that he wanted to utilize his talents to the very best of his ability, including not only his studies, his trips to California to Campus Crusade Conferences, and to other Christian conferences, his serving as Counselor at the Christian Boy’s Camp, his work with the young people in the city and the other activities in which he engaged.

Many thoughts flood my memory as I think of the many things that happened between January 1967 and February 10 of 1970. I do not believe any useful purpose would be served in attempting to list them. Dave had a wonderful sense of humor. He continually kept us amazed at his physical stamina and the smile on his face. When his mother or I would express some concern about the condition of the economy or some other matter that was bothering us, he was quick to remind us that we were “taking our eyes off of Christ”. His regular reminder was that as long as we kept our eyes on Christ, the problems of this world disappeared or became unimportant.

While Dave was on his deathbed and his brothers had been called home from school and we knew that the time of his death was eminent many things happened that I do not feel can be put in writing. Some, I feel, however, are appropriate.

When his older brother Ric arrived from Vanderbilt he was greeted by Dave with an expression substantially as follows:

“Ric, I believe that I have witnessed to every nurse on this floor and I believe that they are all Christians. There is one orderly, however, that is causing me some concern and I want you to pray with me concerning him.” Right up until the end Dave was smiling and witnessing to all who came into his hospital room.

When his younger brother, Barry, reached his hospital room (Barry was in the ninth grade in an out of state private school) Dave reminded Barry of Romans 8:28 – and assured his concerned and extremely close younger brother that their Lord and Savior had a purpose in the illnesses and that everything was going to work out for their good.

On the night before Dave’s death, while Dave was under an oxygen tent, packed in ice in an effort to reduce his temperature, his mother, his brothers and I gathered around Dave to read Scriptures and to pray together for the last time. I asked each to read his or her favorite passage of Scripture, which we did and I then asked Dave to give me his favorite passage of Scripture so that I could read it aloud. Dave was having extreme difficulty in breathing and I had to lean over closely to hear him tell me his favorite passage of Scripture. It was barely audible but quite clear – Psalm 139, the concluding verses of which are as follows: “Search me, of God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Right up until the end Dave was asking his Lord to search his heart and wipe out any evil thoughts or wicked ways and to lead him in the way that Christ would have him to go.

Dave died that night. The impact of his life and his death is still being felt. Many letters have been received by us from his friends giving testimony as to what Dave meant to them. Several have written to us and others have stated to us that they are Christians (many have gone into full time Christian work) as a result of Dave’s testimony. His life has strengthened his parents and his brothers. We are grateful to God for the blessings in our lives that resulted from Dave’s life and his testimony. Our Lord used Dave in a marvelous way and we count it one of the great blessings in our lives to have been permitted to know him, to experience his love and his dedication, and to worship with him for nineteen long and wonderful years.

Probably this story should be concluded with what was said at his funeral service at which the Church was overflowing with people, young and old. During this service the Minister stated that during the last days of Dave’s life he had visited him in the hospital. In his conversation with Dave they had talked about spiritual things and Dave said “I don’t know what the Lord has planned for me; but I know that, whatever it is, it is going to be neat”. Yes, our Lord did have a “neat” plan for Dave – just as He has for all of His children.