

Remembering Harry Akers (1933-2019) By Patrick Swayne

Paul said, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Philippians 3:17). This simple instruction encourages us to follow Paul’s own example in Christianity, which he teaches elsewhere (1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:9). However, this passage adds something: we are also to look amongst ourselves for other good examples. Though Harry would have probably been embarrassed if I had written this article while he was alive, his passing presents a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the amazing Christian example he was.

Harry was an example of Biblical perseverance and faithfulness. Give 100 church going people the aches and pains that Harry had, and I wouldn’t be at all surprised if 99 of them were irregular attenders. Harry was anything but that – if the doors to the church’s building were open and Harry wasn’t in a hospital bed, Harry was there. I was especially touched when Harry came to our VBS this year. There was nothing for him to do and no classes for him to attend, but he was still pleased simply to sit upstairs while the kids had their classes downstairs.

Harry was an example in spirituality. Paul said, “If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness,” (Galatians 6:1). Harry would certainly be called “spiritual” by Paul. There is no telling how many letters Harry wrote or calls Harry made to those who either fell away from the faith or were at risk of doing so.

Harry was an example of mission-mindedness. Harry loved all souls made in God’s image and lived for the spread of the Gospel worldwide. He believed with his whole heart in our Lord’s instruction to take the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Harry left basically his entire estate to fund mission work.

Harry was an example of generosity. We’re told to not let our right hands know what our left hands are doing when we give (Matthew 6:3), and Harry fit that description for to a T. Harry never bragged about his giving or used it as an opportunity to wield influence over others. However, Harry was not only incredibly generous, but he was also incredibly conscientious. Harry would often sit to see the contribution numbers posted on Sunday night. I remember one time when he did so, and, upon seeing the numbers, walked away muttering to himself, “I just should be giving more.” Moses had to stop the Israelites from giving to God on one occasion because they gave too much (Exodus 36:5-6). If both of them were still alive here on earth, Moses probably would have had some words for Harry.

Harry was an example of self-examination. Daily reflection upon our relationship with Jesus is part of the life of faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). 8 days before Harry passed from this earth, Harry was still reflecting on where he stood with God. Many would have been too prideful to do what Harry did that Wednesday. However, after examining himself, Harry determined that he was not confident in what he had and understood at his baptism, and, like those in Acts 19:1-5, decided to be baptized again. Moses also said, “Be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you,” (Deuteronomy 5:32), and while Moses might have had to have had a conversation with Harry about his giving, he never would have found any fault with him in regard to this instruction.

The reality of time passing is that memories fade. However, some memories ought never to fade. Let’s resolve to remember Harry not only as a great engineer, fisherman, or friend, but as a great Christian example.