

By Jim Langham

I will never forget my mother's description of my dad's first prayer, as she recalled it. My dad, you see, had at one point participated in his share of drinking and "less than Christian" living, as I was told. In fact, there was a point, so said my mother, that she was going to break off the relationship, not because he wasn't good to her, but she wasn't going to put up with his lifestyle at the time.

Then, one night, following an evening with her, he decided he was going to do something to change things around. So he drove into the country, sat on the hood of his car, looked at the stars, and said so sincerely, "Okay, Whoever You are, wherever You are, I need You!" Miraculously, he went back to his apartment, poured out his alcohol, and it was done, forever, done.

But there was another simple prayer just as touching in my father's life. The day that he and my mother were married, Sept. 3, 1943, they drove to Oakwood Park, near Lake Wawasee, in Syracuse, Ind. There, my mother and father decided that they were going to start their marriage on a Christian note: my mother was going to read the Bible and my dad was going to say his first prayer of their young marriage.

That night, my dad said, "I choked up, but God knew my heart. 'Lord, I thank you for Elnora, I thank you for our new life together ... long pause, and then ... 'God, I'm stuck but I thank you for Jesus.'"

By the time I came around, my first recollection every morning was the smell of bacon wafting up the stairway, reminding me that our 6 a.m. breakfast around the table as a family was ready. It was also custom at that time to pass out Bible verse cards to read, and then my mature Christian father would lead in a prayer before we started our day together.

But there are other prayers that still touch my heart to this day, prayers that strengthen and

continue to give foundational living many years after they were given.

Take Grandma Hirschy, for example. She, at age 88, was bedfast in our family home, passing away just three weeks before my birth. But my father told me how for the last year of her life, she prayed by the hour for future generations in her family, “Lord, be with the second generation after me, the third generation after me, and family members for generations to come. Call them, use them, may they honor your word and come to grips with their faith in you.”

Every so often these days, I visit her grave and thank her for that heritage, the heritage of telling my children to have faith, because their great, great grandma already prayed for them.

Perhaps one of the most moving prayers occurred one time after Max Sprunger, brother of my friend, Meredith that I often refer to, was in a serious accident. Max was mentally disabled and was taken daily to a special services school to work and spend his days. One morning, there was a serious accident and a couple of students on his van were killed. He wasn't, but he was injured quite severely and taken to a hospital.

I will never forget the morning I went to have a prayer with him. Max, whose speech was disabled, could only say one word at a time, but when I walked up to him and told him I was going to pray, he folded his hands, looked at me through his bruised eyes and said, “Jesus.”

Simple prayers, the prayers of children, the beautiful prayers of those new in the faith, the believing prayers of mentally disabled, and the powerful but sincere prayers of those who have faced the tough times in life.

Back to my father, Christmas, 1990, my parents were visiting our home for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we were about to open the gifts. Our son, Jason, said, “I want Grandpa to thank Jesus for the gifts.” My father bowed his head and said, “Thank you for our family, the grandchildren, the gifts, and the best gift of all, Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tonight.”

Three days later, he passed, leaving our family with the legacy of a simple prayer, the best gift of all, in the end, that we carry in our hearts to this day.

