

## A Reflection for the “Honouring our Elders” Service

By Geoff Wraight

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### 2 Timothy 1: 1 - 5

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, **2** To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. **3** I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. **4** Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. **5** I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

When I was a young teenager growing up in a conservative evangelical Open Brethren Assembly, I and my friends were often reminded that we must make our **own** decision to accept Christ. Our faith could not be inherited and unless we made that vital decision for ourselves we were as lost as the heathen in the street no matter what our Christian pedigree might be.

I have memories as a young person, of hearing this reference we have heard read this morning about Timothy’s mother Eunice and grandmother Lois and that one verse in Paul’s letter to his friend and mentoree Timothy that has left us with a fascinating little insight into the ordinary circumstances of a first century young Christian leader.

I do not remember hearing mentioned that these women were most likely key leaders or even founders of an early Christian Community and nor did I hear anyone reflect on the clear implication of verse 5 that somehow the seed of faith was passed on from generation to generation.

As a way of reflecting on this, I would like to share with you a little insight into my own paternal grandmother Clarice Ruby Wraight who died almost exactly 11 years ago aged 95 years.

At her thanksgiving service on 3 March 1995, I was asked to speak briefly about our Grandma’s faith. This is what I wrote..

Last Sunday afternoon the phone rang. “Mrs Wraight is dying” they said, “she’s on the last road - someone should be here.”

Mum and Dad were temporarily un-contactable, so I got in the car and drove to Strathallan - wondering what I would find and how I would react when I got there...

I walked into the old nursing home - was Grandma still here? But I found the familiar room and went to the side of the bed, “We’ll get you a chair” they said with understanding eyes and a concerned voices. But I felt numb, not sad, not frightened, just numb.

Is Grandma still here? I thought, I looked at the frail form on the bed, the gaunt and drawn face, the deep sunken eyes, the open mouth taking shallow, laboured breaths.

She's not here - this isn't Grandma - at least this isn't how I remember her. Grandma is dying they say, but she's not even here to say goodbye to.

Is Grandma still here? Perhaps she is obscured from me by all the years that have passed since she sat us on her knee or recited "Gentle Jesus meek and mild" at our bedside before we went to sleep. Perhaps I've not spent enough time with her.

I look at the figure in the bed again. Is this *really* my Grandma? Then I look down and notice her hand lying gently on her chest – tentatively, I reach over and take hold of it. That bony hand with bumpy knuckles and blue veins - that gentle hand that has worked so hard and cared for so many. Those same hands that cooked for the family and prepared Sunday roasts and Christmas dinners for us as kids, that same hand that caressed us as babies, that patiently crocheted rugs, created wonderful hats and beautifully detailed pencilled drawings. The same hands that thumbed the pages of that old black Scofield Bible and underlined so many of those Psalms and promises that she loved.

Memories and tears welled up as I realised that Grandma *was* here - that she was obscured to me not because of her frail and dying body, but because of the layers of work and life and concerns that prevented me from finding the place of my grief - that part of me, of all of us, that *is* her and was feeling the pain of losing her. And by coincidence and circumstance I was at her side for three short hours as her life slowly ebbed away.

Where's Grandma? Where's Mum? Where's Auntie? Where's our friend, Mrs. Wraight? She's gone now. And we give thanks for her life, and we give thanks for her faith - simple, sincere and rock solid. A faith in God that was expressed as much in who she was as in what she did. "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit".

"...in order to be a living reminder of the Lord," writes Henri Nouwen back in the seventies, "we must walk in his presence as Abraham did. To walk in the presence of the Lord means to move forward in such a way that all our desires, thoughts and actions are constantly guided by him. When we walk in the Lord's presence, everything we see, hear, touch or taste reminds us of him. This is what is meant by a prayerful life. It is not a life in which we say many prayers, but a life in which nothing, absolutely nothing, is done, said or understood independently of him who is the origin and purpose of our existence." (*The Living Reminder*, N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1977, p. 28)

And found on a slip of paper in her Bible, this little prayer,

"Just where I am, oh let me be  
A faithful witness, Lord for thee  
While others choose a wider sphere,  
Oh, keep me faithful lord just here."

This was Grandma. This was the person lying on that bed in front of me. This was the person who was known around Strathallan as "a beautiful gracious lady" as the

one who never complained about her life, but who, even when in great pain and discomfort, was heard to pray for the other occupants of her room because she was so concerned for their own condition. This was the lady whose faith was all pervasive and yet unselfconscious, and whose hope was so sure and clear that she felt caught between this life which she fought so courageously to hold on to, and the place where she knew she would meet her husband again and be with the Lord she loved so much.

How can we speak of Grandma's faith? I think I have finally realised. To understand Grandma's faith I need look no further than myself. Any faith in a God of grace that is within me is her faith - for the seed that was planted and watered in her son - was planted in me, was planted in us. And just as her life will always be part of us, her faith too will be a living part of us...

Perhaps all I need do is to peel off the layers of the years and baggage that obscures the kernel of my own faith and find that Grandma is there - that the God of mercy and Grace that she loves so much and who was so real to her - is there too waiting for me to respond. More than just a legacy, her faith is a living faith that was a gift to her - and is now ours to give again.

I'll conclude with what was perhaps Grandma's favourite poem: (found in her Bible.)  
***He Giveth More Grace***

*He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,  
 He sendeth more strength as our labours increase,  
 To added afflictions he addeth His mercy,  
 To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
 when our strength has failed ere the day is half-done.  
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources  
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,  
 His power no boundary known unto men;  
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus  
 He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

Perhaps the most profound realisation that any community of faith can make is this simple understanding that faith and love are born in us through each other. The spirit of God is alive in our relationships.

We honour our elders for they have carried the seed of faith and they can offer it as a gift to those of us who are younger in the journey – a gift wrapped in wisdom and sealed with love.

Do we have the courage to receive this gift and the responsibility that comes with it?  
 With all my heart I hope so!