



*Dan Nolta*

While writing this series my seventy-second birthday has come and gone. This whole year has been a time of reflection: we older guys tend to do that.

Through my years of ministry as a pastor and police chaplain God has given me the privilege of being involved in his work with others as they have sought, found, and begun the adventure of living with and for him. It has been a special privilege to remember certain individuals who have faithfully lived out their commitment to the Lord. I share some of their stories this week in the hope that you might be encouraged and blessed as you consider your own ministry to those he brings across your path.

My wife Judi and I (on the right) took a vacation to Mexico. Next to us is John and his wife Laurelyn. Her story is featured in Saturday's writing.

*BIBLE READING: John 15:13-16*

I sat in my hot little upstairs bedroom slowly rocking in the wicker chair that graced the room. My heart overflowed with conviction, and I was intent on hearing the Lord.

My baby faith was listening hard when I heard, “The harvest is white, the laborers are few.” I knew how much I valued being a part of that harvest just a few years before, so I committed myself to being among those who would labor for him. I didn’t know how or where, but I felt assured that I would roll up my sleeves, put on my gloves, and be somewhere in his harvest field.

It wasn’t until my senior year at George Fox College that I gave in to the Lord and said yes to pastoral ministry. A number of years later the Lord put me among police officers and their families, as well as victims of crime and crisis. I had entered a new harvest field, and I remained one of his laborers.

What a privilege to labor for him in our appointed place—we all have one. We may be in the pulpit, in foreign missions, in the classroom, in the factory, or in the ditch; but we all have our place.

Now retired, I take time to reflect on the past. My heart is encouraged as I see “fruit that has remained.”

*SONG: When We All Get to Heaven*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for the joy that comes as we remember both being a part of the harvest and seeing others come to you over the years.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Titus 2:6-8*

My first pastorate ended twenty-five years ago, yet there I was, back, visiting a Sunday service. I looked at him several times during the service. He looked only vaguely familiar, but his reactions showed he obviously knew who I was. As soon as the service ended, I quickly found a place beside him. The questions just popped out of my mouth: "Who are you? I know you, don't I?" The answer shocked me: "It's me, Mike Posey."

"It can't be Mike Posey. He is just a little fifth grader. Oh yes, wait a minute, that was twenty-five years ago." A quarter of a century ago Mike had been a faithful member of my fifth and sixth grade boys Sunday school class.

After a stint of working away, Mike was back at the church, a grown man with his own children. It seemed impossible. Mike had been "just a kid," part of a hardscrabble group of community kids whose parents seldom came to the church; yet somehow Mike had found his way to the worship gathering where he learned about Jesus.

It could have been the class swimming parties, the overnight stays in our backyard, or the dozens of cookies; but whatever it was, the Lord had been tugging at Mike's heart, inviting this kid into his family.

*SONG: Jesus Loves the Little Children*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, thank you for the children who come to our Sunday school classes, daycare, or youth group. May we never think of them as "just kids."*

*—Dan Nolta*

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 10:35-39*

The slide was long from being a church kid to lying on the rotting, filthy floorboards of that house. There was no running water or usable toilet, but plenty of rats. With a wife, three kids, no money, and a raging drug habit, there seemed to be no way back.

At forty-two years old life seemed to be over for Scott. The many years of alcohol and hard drug use spent his body. His mind was desperately clouded with delusions of “black SUVs” following him in the night. Sometimes in the delusions he would call Pastor Dan just to vent and to touch base with his childhood faith that somehow, just somehow might hold an answer.

Pastor Dan had given up on Scott multiple times over the thirty years of straying and showing up at church when things were tough. Sometimes he called from jail: “Can you come and see me?”

But lying on the floor that night, Scott’s spark of faith and God’s miracle met in a glorious example of “only God could do it.” Scott was reclaimed, redeemed, and made new.

Today, Scott calls me at least once a week, always at 7:15 a.m. before he starts work. “God has been so faithful to me and my family: I have two jobs, and I am catching up on the years of bills that have piled up. I am ministering in the jail! God is so good to me.”

*SONG: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach us to be patient and unyielding in our faith as the fruit ripens to maturity.*

*—Dan Nolta*

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 61:1-3*

“After years of physical and emotional abuse I was so scared for my life that I took a leap of faith and said to God, ‘If you really exist, I will wake up tomorrow, and you will tell me what to do.’ And he did!”

Jen left her abusive boyfriend who fathered her child, got a restraining order, and started to build a new life for herself and her little son. At twenty-one years old she was all alone in the world. “I had to find a daycare, and I would only put him in a Christian daycare. So I thought I would attend the church so he would feel better and feel connected to some friends.” She came to us at Olympic View and became a part of our family.

God became her Father, Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. She went to Bible school and later married. Now she has three children and is back with us as the lead teacher in the infant room of the daycare where she had brought her son years before.

The broken and abused is now a healer. The weak has become strong. The lonely one befriends many. The one in need of love now gives her love to a roomful of infants and toddlers as well as their parents. She’s Jen—fruit that remains.

*SONG: The Doxology*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you God for your love that gently encompasses the broken life, rebuilding it into one that is usable and glorifies you and your kingdom on earth.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Romans 13:8-10*

I just got off the phone with my former neighbor named Jane. At eighty-four years old she says of her life, “I am not nearly as cranky now, and I am at peace.” That was not always true of Jane.

Rewind the clock ten years. The phone rang, and it was neighbor Jane crying, “Can you come and talk to me? I need help.” Jane’s gruff-on-the-exterior husband of many years, Chuck, had died of cancer about a year before. He had been the love of Jane’s life, and she was now alone and lost.

Before I left her home that evening, Jane prayed to ask Christ into her life. A new child (about seventy-five years old) of God was born. Before I got back to our house, about some two hundred feet away, Jane was on the phone to my wife Judi exclaiming, “This is your sister!” She truly felt that she was now a part of the family of God.

Since that time Jane has moved from our neighborhood, found a new church, and faithfully serves the Lord. She is going blind and has had to retire from the work she loved so much, serving disabled veterans; yet, she has not stopped in her service to the Lord. She is fruit that remains.

*SONG: 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Please pray for each of your neighbors by name. If you don't know them, please take time to get acquainted.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 3:12-14*

“I had read in the Bible that I needed to make a public profession of my faith. So, one Sunday morning during open worship I stood up and laid out my sinful soul to the congregation. You had an altar call, and I went forward with Ben by my side to ask God for forgiveness of my sin. I invited Jesus Christ to be my Savior and Lord. The rest is history and growth in the Lord. Today, I can’t imagine how people can turn away from him.”

Steve and Terry Rae have had thirty-five years of growth in the Lord. Their spiritual story began with previous marriages and seven kids between them. Divorce now threatened this marriage as well. The wedding ring had already been thrown into the woods when Officer Steve went looking for one of the police department chaplains that had ridden with him and his partner.

Counseling, soul searching, attending church, and finally, surrendering to the Lord led to them being new creatures in Christ. Growing in the Lord has been a daily goal for them. Steve, now retired from the Tacoma Police Department, frequently sends e-mails from their condo in Honolulu detailing their adventures with the Lord.

Officer Steve and his wife Terry Rae—arrested by the Lord. Fruit that remains.

*SONG: Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for all of the police officers and their families, especially for those who love you and daily seek to serve you.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 5:11-15*

Today she is a grown woman, a mother, even a grandmother—she was none of these things when she first came to our home. At fifteen years old her mother had recently died, and home was not going well. Her aunt placed a phone call, and in a few short days, she was staying in our home.

Her stay with us was relatively short—about nine weeks. During that time she finished up the school year, played with our three little kids, and missed her mother: sometimes she cried herself to sleep as we sought to provide what comfort we could. Then she moved back home. But somehow, Laurelyn became more than “for a short season” person in our lives.

Never a birthday, Mother’s Day, or Father’s Day goes by without a card from this gracious, mature, Christian woman whose stay in our home deeply affected all of us in wonderful ways.

Only eternity will reveal all that is behind such an innocent phone call that asks, “Would you be willing to take a fifteen-year-old girl into your home for awhile?”

Laurelyn: she is fruit that remains.

*SONG: Blessed Assurance*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for the privilege of allowing us to be used, even when we don’t understand all of the implications of our obedience to your will.*

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