

A TRIBUTE TO DR. RAYMOND HANCOCK

Today we welcome Dr. Raymond Hancock. This man has been a father to me in the ministry -- helping, teaching, rebuking, exhorting and always encouraging me. I can still call him up at any time for advice. Dr. Hancock is a native of the Tampa Bay area of Florida. He has pastored three churches: Providence Baptist Church of Riverview, Florida (a suburb of Tampa); Thrifhaven Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee and Pinecrest Baptist Church, just south of Atlanta, Georgia. I had the privilege of ministering in all three of those churches, which were phenomenal in growth and impacting on their respective communities. I have been blessed beyond measure through the ministry of this great man of God. He was married to Mary Annell ("Nell" or "Mom Hancock") for almost sixty-seven years and he has been faithfully preaching the Word of God for sixty years. Dr. and Mrs. Hancock have four children and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When he pastored Providence Baptist Church he led them to become the largest country church in the state of Florida. Dr. Lee Roberson called it "America's Most Unusual Church." When he was pastoring Pinecrest Baptist church, he became the founder and moderator of the Independent Baptist Fellowships of Georgia. There is no larger statewide gathering of Independent Baptist preachers in America.

There are so many accolades we could extend to our brother today, but I would like to speak from my heart about what Dr. Hancock has meant to me in my life.

1. A Witness in the Community

The first time I heard of Dr. Hancock was when I rode the school bus in my school days in Brandon, Florida. Our bus driver was also the pianist of Providence Baptist and she would often tell of the glorious day at her church on the previous Sunday. I soon came under the impression that every Sunday there was something great going on at Providence.

My dad was a professor at Florida Baptist Institute and Seminary and I remember asking him about this prophet of Tampa Bay and Central Florida. Dad named off the most aggressive, soul-winning students in his classes and he said they had all enrolled in Dr. Hancock's Bible Institute to sharpen their evangelism and learn better how to affect their communities for Christ. There was not a preacher that Dad

had more respect for than Dr. Raymond Hancock. It has been said the church is to be the conscience of the community and I believe that. Providence Baptist affected our populace, my high school, and surrounding neighborhoods.

I shall never forget the opportunity Dr. Hancock gave me to preach at Providence while I was still a teenager. It was a great opportunity to preach to people I knew in my youth. God used him to give me some of my first big breaks in preaching opportunities.

2. A Model in Marriage

Shortly after the initial attack by the Japanese in 1941, Dr. Hancock was commissioned by the United States Navy to Pearl Harbor. During World War II is when he met Nell Swann, the great love of his life, and soon afterwards they were married. I know we will hear this term, said, often flippantly, "That was a marriage made in Heaven." This marriage was truly made in Heaven! They were together all through their lives. They lived, they loved, they laughed, they languished and they loved and served the Lord together. They enjoyed each other's presence. They were always looking for a way to be together, never relishing being apart. Their biblical convictions matched perfectly and they could quite easily finish each other's sentences.

I was blessed to have known them before I was married, so I had a good role model to follow. It only seemed like yesterday, I can remember after a long Sunday morning with a bountiful evangelistic harvest, walking over to their home not far from the church and smelling Mom Hancock's Sunday dinner waiting for us. And as we bowed our head for grace, my silent prayer joined Dr. Hancock's audible prayer – he praising God for the blessing of the Lord's Day in God's House and for the food we were about to eat -- while I prayed, "Lord, grant unto this young preacher the help that is 'meet' for me. Father, you did it for my mentor, Brother Hancock." And he did it for me in His good time. Dr. and Mrs. Hancock were so pleased to meet my new wife and through the years we both felt adopted into the family and they were always so free to give us advice for each other and our children. Outside of our own parents, no one has given us better advice on child rearing and how to handle the mountains and valleys of life together than Dad and Mom Hancock. We love appreciate them more than we will be able to express.

3. A Clarion Call to Preach

I mentioned earlier that Dr. Hancock was used by God to give me some of my first great preaching opportunities. On several occasions when he was moderator of

the great Southwide Baptist Fellowship, he extended the invitation for me to preach. Several times Dr. Hancock had me preach at Highland Park Baptist Church, home of Tennessee Temple University of Chattanooga, Tennessee and once at Beth Haven Baptist Church of Louisville, Kentucky where I preached to crowds of upwards of six thousand. He will perhaps never realize this side of eternity what it meant to me to be entrusted to preach at the church where he pastored as well as at international venues that he, through the Lord, provided. If you were a pianist, it would be like Van Cliburn inviting you to play at his concert. If you were an author, it would be like David McCullough asking you to the Library of Congress to give a book review of a book you had just written. If you were a budding heart surgeon, it would be like Dr. Denton Cooley asking you to give a lecture on surgical procedures at the Texas Heart Institute.

Perhaps the best blessing Dr. Hancock has been to me has been in the one-on-one encounters as he gives me advice and counsel on preaching and life in general. He drives home the power of expositional preaching with an emphasis on Jesus. I remember early on in my ministry I was preaching on Christ from a type in the Old Testament. He pulled me aside and was kind enough to encourage me to keep preaching Jesus, just get the "type" right. Rightly dividing the Word of God was always important to Dr. Hancock and he instilled that in my heart. I love the fact that he was not a "hyper-dispensationalist," meaning that although we rightly divide the Word of God we do not dissect the Word of God allocating only some sections to the Jew, other sections only to the church and so on. He believes the whole Bible for our whole lives. Dr. Hancock is one of God's strongest voices to me to preach, preach it straight, preach it true, preach it hard and always with compassion. One of his favorite saying is, "It's not enough to care; we must care enough."

4. A Man of God Serving the Local Church

Dr. Hancock believes in the local church. He has written and preached about the importance of the local church and being filled with the Holy Spirit. I was reminded again and again through him that everything that God wanted to do in the world today was through the ministry of the local New Testament Church and I was equally reminded that unless we were filled with the Spirit of God that goal would not be successfully accomplished. When I was a young preacher there were many parachurch organizations that were start-ups as a rebuke of the local church. Although those parachurch organizations can fall, (and many have fallen by the wayside) the local church is still here and shall be here until Jesus returns. Jesus promised, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Dr. Raymond Hancock is a man of the Word and a man of the Church.

5. A Reminder That We Serve a Supernatural God

In 1967, when I was a junior at Brandon High School, Dr. Hancock was injured in the crash of a light plane he was flying. Television and radio announced he had been killed. However, unbeknownst to the media, God was keeping him alive. The doctors told him that his vocal cords were severed and his larynx was destroyed and his life as a preacher was ended. God miraculously restored his larynx and vocal cords and performed a miracle enabling him to preach with even greater power and strength.

Only the Lord knows when I have needed a miracle or extra faith, how many times I have reflected back to those days when Dad Hancock was hanging between life and death and then through the silent wondering if he would ever speak again. Through the years my faith has buoyed up and reinforced by the testimony of God's miraculous healing in his life. *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"* (Ephesians 3:20).

Thank you, Dad Hancock. Thank you for teaching me to love the Lord Jesus, my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my church members and the world for whom Christ died. From the bottom of my heart, thank you, Sir! I love you!

Your Son in the Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.