

## A TRIBUTE TO CALLIE NEESE

As most everyone who reads this knows, Mrs. Callie Neese went home into the presence of her Lord and Savior the day before Thanksgiving. She lived for nearly 104 years on this side of eternity. Hers was a life well lived! She was born before the Titanic sunk in 1912. She lived through World Wars I and II, Korea, Viet Nam, Desert Storm and Afghanistan, 9/11, and the Iraq War. Think of it, she lived through 18 Presidents of the United States. Way to go, Grandma Neese! Our connection with Callie Neese goes back quite a few years and for me, it is very personal. It starts with her granddaughter, Cindy, who was best of friends with my wife, Barbara starting in elementary school. It would include the fact that Mrs. Lord, Cindy's mom was Barbara's Sunday School teacher back in the fourth grade. When I transferred colleges and moved to Indiana, Cindy was the person that set Barbara and me up for our first date. The Lords were at our wedding forty-one years ago this December. They moved down to Houston before we did and Mrs. Lord is one of the few people who was at our church before we were. She was a Sunday School teacher for the struggling mission on the northwest side of Houston. Shortly after our charter, Mrs. Lord became the official girl's Sunday School teacher and has been ever since. Our two grown daughters, now both mothers of three children had the privilege of having Mrs. Lord as their mother did years earlier as their Sunday School teacher. For over three decades Mrs. Lord has been the executive secretary of our church and her presence on our staff is priceless.

A few years ago Grandma Neese, Mrs. Lord's mother moved down from Oklahoma and became a vital part of our church family. It has been a joy to be in the same community of faith with this grand dame! To know her was to love her. There are so many things I would like to say about Mrs. Callie Neese, but I shall be limited to this venue. Allow me to begin.

### **1. A Virtuous Wife**

The Bible says, *"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies"* (Proverbs 31:10). *"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband..."* (Proverbs 12:4). The fact that the Word of God asks, *"Who can find..."* means that she is rare. And Grandma Neese was part of this rare breed. *"Favour is*

*deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised"* (Proverbs 31:30). She loved unconditionally and kept her vows.

## **2. A Queen in the Kitchen**

For several consecutive years Callie Neese's apple pie won the blue ribbon in Oklahoma. Although her competitive years had long past, she still graced us with her trophy pie. When she was in good health I used to get one on my birthday and at Christmas. I have to tell you, I ate a piece of homemade apple pie this past Thanksgiving, and it could not hold a light to Grandma Neese's pie from heaven. As God is my witness, I have never tasted a better apple pie than hers. *"She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household..."* (Proverbs 31:15).

## **3. A Caring Mother**

Grandma Neese exemplified motherhood in her highest apex. After Grandma Neese moved down to Houston, Mrs. Lord (although qualifying as a senior citizen herself) was now required to be home on time from work. It was rather humorous because Mrs. Lord was prone to ignore "store hours" in the office. More than once I would remind her it was time to go home, but in her diligence she often ignored the clock. I remembered a paradigm had taken place when Mrs. Lord said in a delightful way, "Pastor, if I am not home by a certain time, Mom is going to be calling." No matter how old we may be, a mother can never stop being mother; she can never stop caring. *"She looketh well to the ways of her household..."* (Proverbs 31:27).

## **4. The Perfect Grandmother**

A grandmother is the matriarch that serves as the strongest superglue to the family. By virtue of statistics, the ladies live longer than the men. The grandmother reminds us who we are, where we're from and where we should be going. She tells us of the wars the men fought and the battles they have overcome. One of the very sentimental pilgrimages Grandma Neese would annually make was to her family cemetery on Memorial Day. Grandma Neese, like all good grandmothers, was a buoy in the sea of her family's life reminding us how to navigate and what is important in this life. *"...Forsake not the law of thy mother"* (Proverbs 1:8; Proverbs 6:20). The grandmother draws from the accumulation of time and "bottles up" that which is important and gives her wisdom a spoonful at a time. And if we listen we will learn her wisdom by proxy. *"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness"* (Proverbs 31:26).

## 5. The Best Friend

My 94-year-old mother and 103-year-old Callie Neese talked on the phone everyday and on any given Sunday morning, evening or Wednesday night were seen sitting together in church. I was always touched by the fact that Grandma Neese was concerned if she did not hear from Mom at least once a day. A friend is not someone you only talk to when you have something to say, a friend is someone you want to talk to simply to hear her voice. Sometimes it says more about love and friendship when you are spending time with someone with absolutely no agenda. Mrs. Callie Neese was the best kind of friend; she asked nothing more than just to be with you, not re-invent you, reconstruct or rearrange you. You could be you and I assure you she will be Callie. And Callie is a very nice person and the most loyal friend you'll ever have. *"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Proverbs 17:17). *"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend"* (Proverbs 27:17).

## 6. The Wonderful Christian

If I could define a good Christian, I would say a good Christian is someone who has received by faith Jesus as Savior and Lord of their life and lives everyday in concert with the overall effect of the presence of Christ who is in total benign dominance of both their inward and outward faculties. A good Christian doesn't remain a good Christian as long as circumstances are favorable. A good Christian is a good Christian from an intrinsic nature that makes doing right irresistible. The good Christian has *"...put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him"* (Colossians 3:10). The reason this is so significant is because putting *"on the new man"* is synonymous with putting *"...on the Lord Jesus Christ..."* and in turn not making *"...provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Romans 13:14). The good Christian has willingly and happily rejected conformity to this world and has instead been *"...transformed by the renewing of (their) mind..."* (Romans 12:2b). In my first year of college, a preacher in the town we were living died. My pastor said to me, "Johnny, did you notice how kind and forgiving this preacher had become in his last days?" I had to admit I did notice. Then I'll never forget what my pastor said to me, "When God is ready to take one of His children home, He 'sweetens them up.'" Through the many years that have followed, I have noticed this is most often the case. The Bible says, *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"* (II Corinthians 4:16). For the good Christian the renewal process doesn't stop. We have the promise of becoming sweeter and sweeter as we approach the day we

graduate to heaven. *"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day"* (Proverbs 4:18).

Grandma Neese was always kind to me. It especially became noticeable in her last days here. I would come up to her and she would align her face in my direction and look toward me as best she could and tell me how much she loved me and enjoyed my sermons. Now in truth, there was probably little she could hear of my sermons, but she was on my side. Perhaps that is another earmark of good Christians -- they are on your side, even if others are not.

In conclusion, I want to commend Mrs. Lord, her brother Johnny and sister Irene for showing us the way Christians should treat an aging parent. The Word of God commands us, *"...despise not thy mother when she is old"* (Proverbs 23:22). This family beautifully obeyed that command with love. Mrs. Callie Neese nearly made it to 104 years on this side of eternity. She lived well in this life and she went peacefully into the arms of her Savior. One reason Grandma Neese's exit from here to her entry into glory was so good is because she was surrounded by some of the best Christians in the earth who served as her escort.

I love Callie Neese. We all did. She is already missed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.