

Higher Ground

My heart is full today as I write. As most of you know, this issue finds us in the midst of coming to grips with sober reality of the unthinkable loss of our dear Bro. Denny Kenaston. *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* is a work we inherited from Bro. Denny. Today, we remember the man whose hard work, burden, and vision gave birth to this publication, and who continually inspired and challenged us to higher ground.

A few months ago, Bro. Denny called and invited me to breakfast. He was coming to Lancaster County to finish up a few things since his recent move to Berne, Indiana. As you can imagine, I really wondered what the topic of conversation was going to be. I figured he had some questions or encouragements for me about the recent difficulties that the churches of Lancaster County had experienced. But that is not at all what he wanted to talk about. After a bit of customary small talk, he began to share what was on his heart. He and a few brothers in Berne were going through a book called "*The Holy Fire: The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church.*" This is a book about the testimony of some radical early Christians. Primarily, the book focuses on their sold-out, even ascetic lifestyles. He admitted that some of their strange practices didn't make sense to him, but that the zeal of these men who "took the kingdom by force" was inspiring. The conversation got exciting as we talked about many of their examples. After breakfast, we continued the conversation as we walked across the street to the Ephrata Cloister. Standing around the graves of these men and women who had also lived peculiar, radical lives for their faith, the conversation continued and grew. We spoke of future dreams and my heart was stirred—stirred for many reasons—not only because of the stimulating topic that we were engaging in, but I was impressed that not a word was uttered about old problems; not a hint of bitterness was in him. He just wanted to press for the next level—the "higher ground" he so often spoke of. After we parted, I thought, "Wow, I pray that I will always have that kind of passion and zeal for Jesus."

Bro. Denny's yearning for higher ground was ultimately satisfied on July 4, 2012. His son, Daniel, record-

ed the last minutes of Bro. Denny's life on this earth. Here is Bro. Daniel's account of those final moments:

We decided to split up the night and take turns sitting by his side (as we have done many times throughout these months). It felt to all of us like this could be Papa's final hours, so even those not on for their shift sort of hung around for a good part of the night. My wife and I started our shift at 11:00, just sitting by his bedside and whispering words of affirmation and



Bro. Denny's fervent preaching against carnality and vanity was instrumental in birthing a church and a movement.

encouragement in his ears. Sometimes it seems like people hold on to life, waiting for reassurances from loved ones before allowing themselves to go, so we spent time confirming our presence and promising future care for Mama after his passing. We also talked a lot about heaven and the great reward waiting for Papa there. Obviously, we have no way to know how much of this was registering with Papa, but it sure felt like we were holding his hand spiritually as well as physically during those final hours.

Around 1:00 on Wednesday morning I started to recount memories and blessings from my childhood, thanking Papa for his love and guidance in my life. It was a very emotional moment for me, feeling that I would not have many more chances to bless Papa for his input in my life. Somewhere in this time period Christy and I started to pray with Papa, asking God

to release him and take him home. We kept reassuring him that he could go, that Jesus would be waiting for him, and that Mama would be cared for here.

Just a few minutes before 2:00 in the morning, we noticed that his breathing was slowing rapidly, and I jumped up to call Mama from the adjoining room. She came immediately, as well as three of my sisters who were resting or waiting nearby. We all rushed back to his side for the final breath, and waited together wondering if this peaceful passing was for real. After so much pain on Sunday, we had all hoped that Papa could pass on without pain and at peace. As the moments passed and we realized that the battle was over for Papa, floods of thoughts and emotions poured through all of our hearts. Relief that Papa had passed on so peacefully, tears for the finality of the loss we were experiencing, and somehow a thrill in our hearts also as we imagined the trumpets or drum roll that must accompany the entry of a man of God into heaven!!

We decided to wait on calling the funeral home for a few hours to give us time to process Papa's passing with our families. As we brought our children in to say goodbye to Grandpa, we were all amazed to see the peaceful, almost smiling expression on his face. After all the months of somewhat uneven smiles as the left side of his body stopped functioning, and days of pained expressions, the restful look on his face was so special to each of us! One of my children commented that it looks like Grandpa has a secret he wants to share! Surely he does!

If you will allow me, I'd like to share my own personal feelings as I kept returning to the room where the shell of my dear father's body lay. I felt like a junior officer entering the office of his commanding general. I wanted to snap to attention and salute! Farewell to the general and pacesetter of our family! Farewell to the man we have been honored to call Papa!

Farewell to a spiritual mountain climber, always ahead of us and shouting about the view just a little higher! Sometimes the pace he set for us was tiring, and we wrestled with weariness in following him, but he always believed in the thrill of the mountain peak just ahead. Sometimes he stumbled as he climbed above us, and the gravel that came scattering down around

us concerned us as we climbed, but within moments would come the shout we were waiting for as he gained another foothold, just above the last one! That he has slipped into the clouds further up the mountain is sad, as we have drawn much strength from watching his climb. But even from the misty peaks where he now rests and thrills in the views, we hear his challenge and encouragement to climb higher! Farewell! Farewell!! We follow with greater zeal because of your example and the shouts of victory we have heard from your life and now your death!

My heart resounds a hearty "Amen!" to Bro. Daniel's beautiful epitaph to his father. Though we are saddened by our loss, we can't help but rejoice with Bro. Denny. He has finally reached his highest destination and is rejoicing in the presence of the Lord, forevermore—hallelujah! Yet, his passing causes my heart to pause and reflect, and even to tremble a bit. Bro. Denny's life has made such a huge impact on my life and the lives of so many others. When a fellow soldier departs the battle scene, it provokes a sense of introspection, as we consider our final steps on this earth. Admittedly, Bro. Denny was more than a fellow soldier. Though only an earthen vessel, God used his gifts and passion to stir the people of God to greater fervor. In his

wake, Bro. Denny's preaching and ministry have left an army of men and women behind, inspired by his intensity and fury for the things of the Lord. I wonder, "How can he be replaced? Who will fill his shoes?"

After the funeral, Bro. Emanuel Esh mentioned to me that he would have liked to have displayed 100 pairs of shoes on the stage and challenged each of us, "Who are the 100 men that will fill these shoes?" Clearly, the mental image of all those empty shoes signifies to us the closing of a chapter. But the closing of one chapter also means the beginning of a new one! Jesus promised that when we bear fruit, He will prune us so that we will bear much fruit. It hurts to be pruned, and it certainly hurts to lose Bro. Denny—but oh, in his passing, may we each draw inspiration from the image of Christ that was so beautifully demonstrated in his life, to cheer one another onward and upward with renewed zeal and enthusiasm! With God's help, we can fill those empty shoes, as we continue our ascent to that Higher Ground! ~Bro. Dean



**Bro. Denny's shoes.
Who will fill them?**