



# William Solomon Hottle Piper

January 8, 1919 – March 6, 2007


**A TRIBUTE TO MY FATHER**

John Piper

## A Tribute to My Father

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This is a fragment of the legacy of truth imparted to me by my father. The word *imparted* was no mere transmission of information. It involved a whole life of proclamation and demonstration. I will mention eleven precious truths imparted to me by my father.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Piper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and the last name "Piper" clearly distinguishable.

John Piper  
March 2007

## 1. There is a great, majestic God in heaven, and we were meant to live for his glory.

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Most of these truths that I will mention are rooted in my memory of particular texts that were branded on my mind at home. Few texts were more often on Daddy's lips in relation to me than 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

I am sure that in heaven some day the Lord will make plain the unbreakable chain of influences that led from that verse when I was a boy to the mission statement of Bethlehem Baptist Church: "We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ." This won't be the only influence you will see of my father on that mission statement.

## 2. When things don't go the way they should God always makes them turn for good.

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Even more prominent in my growing up was the presence of Romans 8:28 in our family: "God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose."

I have several vivid memories of this truth. One was in 1974 when I rode with my father in the ambulance from Atlanta to Greenville with my mother's body in the hearse following behind. They had just been flown in from Israel where Mother had been killed in an accident and Daddy was seriously injured. All the way home, for three-and-a-half hours, he would weep and talk and weep and talk. He was fifty-six. They had been married thirty-six years. And when he talked, it was Romans 8:28. I remember the very words: "God must have a reason for me to live. God must have a reason for me to live." In other words, God governs our accidents and makes no mistakes.

I will never cease to be thankful that I heard and saw the truth of Romans 8:28 in my father's life, "When things don't go the way they should, God always makes them turn for good."

### 3. God can be trusted.

How many times did I hear the words of Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.” And Philippians 4:19: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

I can see us as a family when I was just a child. We were all (Mother, Daddy, my older sister Beverly) sitting around a card table in my parents’ bedroom folding letters and stuffing envelopes which would be sent to pastors asking them to consider having my father come lead their churches in evangelistic meetings. This was Daddy’s life—he was a fulltime evangelist—and our livelihood. The answers to these letters meant bread on the table and paid bills. Then we prayed over these envelopes, and Daddy closed in a spirit of utter confidence: God will answer and meet every need. He can be trusted.

He told me more than once of a financial crisis when I was six years old in which he almost lost everything. And he said that God used Psalm 37:5 to sustain him and bring him through: “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will act.” And so I saw and I learned: God can be trusted.

### 4. Life is precarious, and life is precious. Don’t presume that you will have it tomorrow, and don’t waste it today.

My memory of my father’s preaching was that he always began with humor, but within seconds, he was blood-earnest and talking about heaven and hell and sin and Christ and life and death. One text above all others rings in my ears with terrible seriousness. He squinted when he said it, and his mouth pursed tightly the way it does after you taste a lemon: “It is appointed unto men once to die, after that comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). It made a huge impression on me as a boy.

The motto on Daddy’s college wall was “The wise man prepares for the inevitable.” The plaque in our kitchen when I was growing up was “Only one life ’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”

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## 5. A merry heart does good like a medicine, and Christ is the great Heart-Satisfier.

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That's a quote from Proverbs 17:22. My father has been the happiest man I have ever known. Here is the kind of things he said in a sermon called "A Good Time and How to Have It."

*Right from the start, let's get one thing straight: a Christian is not a sour puss. I grant you that some of them look and act that way, but you simply can't blame God for it.... Some folks seem to have been born in the objective case, the contrary gender and the bilious mood....*

What a legacy of joy my father has left!

## 6. A Christian is a great doer not a great don'ter.

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We Pipers were fundamentalists—without the attitude. We had our lists of things not to do. But that wasn't the main thing. Here's what my father preached in a sermon called "The Greatest Menace to Modern Youth."

*Millions insist upon thinking that Christianity is a negative religion. You don't do this and you can't do that. You don't go here and you can't go there. To the contrary, the Bible constantly sounds the triumphant and positive note. "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." ... "Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do with all your might."*

God wants us to be doers, not don'ters. A Christian who is only a don'ter is a sour saint who spreads gloom wherever he goes. A don'ter is usually a hypocritical Pharisee. Years ago, I heard the late Dr. Bob Jones say, "Do so fast you don't have time to don't."

That left an indelible mark on my life. We had strict standards, but I never chafed under them. They were not the point. Enjoying Christ, doing good, and loving people was the point. The rest was just fencing to protect the good field of faith and purity.

## 7. The Christian life is supernatural.

I have one precious DVD of my father preaching. It is a message on the new birth from John 3:7: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” Becoming a Christian is not a mere decision. It is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

And therefore he believed in prayer—crying out to God to do the miracle of the new birth. We prayed together every night as a family, because the great need in life is supernatural, divine power to live a life of sacrificial love with joy—and that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, not a work of our own. I saw that my father’s work was not a human work. It was divine work. Impossible work. But with God all things are possible.

## 8. Bible doctrine is important, but don’t beat people up with it.

At this point, he admitted openly to me with grief that our fundamentalist tradition let him down. There was great truth, but too many of them were not great lovers. I can remember him saying: If they only understood Ephesians 4:15, “speaking the truth in love.” So from as early as I can remember, he showed me the importance of both right doctrine and the way of love. They must never be separated.

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## 9. Respect your mother.

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If you wanted to see Daddy angry, let one of his children sass our mother. He not only knew the command of God to honor our mothers; he also knew the extraordinary debt that every child owes a mother. Time and again, he would compare true love not to married love but to mother's love. He knew the price my mother paid for him to be away so much in fulltime evangelism. Therefore, he would tolerate no insolence or disrespect toward her. I trembled at the fierce gaze in his eyes if I said something sarcastic to my mother.

“He would tolerate no insolence or disrespect toward her. I trembled at the fierce gaze in his eyes if I said something sarcastic to my mother.”

## 10. Be who God made you to be and not somebody else.

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My father was short—a good bit shorter than I am. But he was content and could joke about it. The one I remember is his recollection as a boy that he was part of a football team called “Little Potatoes but Hard to Peel.” I think God delights to make short men great preachers. (Remember John Wesley!)

For me, this contentment with being who God made us to be meant freedom. Daddy never forced me or pressured me to be an evangelist or a pastor or anything else—just holy. “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Daddy's counsel was always: Love God with all your heart and be what he has made you to be. Then, what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might for the glory of Christ.

I close with one more truth—the central truth of my father's life. This was what he preached and what he loved. So I will let him preach it again.

## 11. People are lost and need to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

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My father was an evangelist. His absence from home two-thirds of the year (in and out, in and out) meant one main thing: Sin and hell are real and horrible, and Jesus Christ is a great Savior. Here's a direct quote from my father:

*In my evangelistic career I have had the thrill of seeing people from all walks of life come to Christ. I have seen many professional people saved. I have knelt with Ph.D.'s and led them to Jesus. College professors, bankers, lawyers, doctors. I have seen them all saved.*

*Then I have seen many from the other side of life come to the Lord. I have put my arm around drunkards in city missions and prayed with them. I have sat by the bedside of dying alcoholics and led them to Christ. I have seen the poor, the forsaken, the derelicts, the outcasts all come to the Savior. Yes, God takes them, too. Isn't it wonderful that anyone who wants to can come to Christ? (Grace for the Guilty, p. 111)*

Perhaps you never had a father like this, but right now you hear your heavenly Father calling. How many times did I hear the Father's voice in my father's voice and see His pleading face in my father's pleading face. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling...

*Come home! Come home!  
Ye who are weary, come home!  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
Calling, O sinner, come home!*

I thank you heavenly Father for my earthly father. What a legacy he has left to me and my sister and our children and grandchildren—and to the church of Jesus Christ. And to the nations of the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. ❄





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