

## Majestic God of a Seasoned Saint Michael J. Wilkins

Wasn't that great? I love that. I wish I could do some like that. Beautiful, beautiful choruses too. Thank you for doing that. What a majesty! That's wonderful. That's what I'd like to look at this morning.

Well, we have a diverse group here, don't we? If you look where I'm looking, we have a lot of unique people here. One of the wonderful features of the life that the Lord has given to my wife and myself is a fact that we get to be around a lot of different types of people. We have a wonderful ministry here. We have a wonderful ministry and a church in San Clemente. We've had two wonderful pastorates. We've had a chance to meet wonderful people. And the thing that never ceases to amaze me is the fact that everybody is so different on the surface. And this is especially so, I think right now.

We have a very intense ministry with a bunch of young junior high, high schoolers. My older daughter is now in junior high school, eighth grade. And you not only... This year, we not only had a teenager entering our home, but also all of our teenager's friends. And it's just fabulous the kinds of people that we get to be around now.

Now, on the surface, especially these young people and everybody all around, they look the same. But what we all discover is that the closer we look, the more unique, the more individual each person is. And that's what the Bible actually does teach us, that if you are a truly born again

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Christian in particular, you are a walking miracle. You are unique, yet it is still quite possible for people all around to completely overlook how unique you are.

Now, there's a story that illustrates as you prior heard of. It's a great story anyway. It's a story about a man and his dog, who were walking on a beach, and they came upon another visitor to the beach. The owner of the dog is so proud of his dog's newly mastered feat, so he says to the visitor, "Watch this." So he takes a piece of driftwood. He throws it far out onto the surf, and the dog immediately runs on top of the water and fetches the wood and runs back. The visitor just shakes his head in disbelief. So he asks the visitor, "Did you notice anything unusual?" The visitor responds, "Your dog can't swim, can he?"

Scripture teaches us that the most profound miracle that we can show the world is a truly changed life. And the world today is looking for real Christians, Christians who live a life that's different, which is powerful, a life that shows people how to get control, how to live victoriously over the problems that confront them every day.

And just this past week, I had a wonderful opportunity of seeing this in action. I was speaking at Forest Home last week, and had the wonderful privilege of ministering to a group of seniors. It's not seniors in high school, but senior citizens. And what a wonderful group of people they are! This is the second time that, before it was my wife and myself and my younger daughter, we got to spend a week with these people. And we found that they were, on the surface, seemingly the same, getting old, wrinkled, kind of shuffled around kinda the way that I'm shuffling around now. I hurt my leg. I, I feel for, I mean, you kinda hi-, shuffle around. On the surface, they, they

don't look that unique. But the more we spend time with those people, the more unique we find that each one of them are. And what we find is that people don't give them the attention you would give to somebody who is young and unique.

You know we were looking forward to being those people. One of the reasons we were looking forward to them was that in our second pastorate, it was a pastor that was in a church of mostly retired people. The community was in a retirement area. The average age was 55 and above. And I went in there at 30 years of age. And those people loved this. The wonderful thing was that the average age was 55 and above, yet the average age in the Lord was around five years. And these were people who had been through all of life, but who had now met Christ in a real way. And what a dramatic change He had brought in each one of their lives! So we were looking forward to going up to foster home and spending time.

The first time that we were there, there was a lady who in the evening talent show did a rendition, personal portrayal of Peter's mother-in-law. She dedicated it to me because I was speaking of Peter that week. And she said, "I'd like to dedicate this to Michael, because when he first walked in that, that first night, I thought to myself 'what could this young surfer possibly have to say to me?!' Says, 'I've been there. What could he possibly have to say to me?'" But she said this time has been a true blessing. "Because," she said, "you like us."

You know at that first conference, I gain an understanding of ministry that God has used to shape me into the kind of man that I know He wants me to be. I was the morning Bible teacher, and Stanley Collins was the evening Bible teacher. And I was struck by the dynamic of this powerful

man of God. That was the last conference that he was going to do at Forest Home. He was going to retire, go back to England where he is right now, where he had grown up.

After the, the last morning, where I gave a message in preparation for communion, he took me aside. And all these little ladies were just kind of clamoring around him. "Oh, Stanley..." You know, he's just knida shoo them away, and he says, "Michael, I wanna speak to you." And he took me aside and he said, "What are you doing with your life?" I said, "Well, I'm teaching at Talbot Biola." He says, "What are you teaching?" Said, "Biblical studies. The ne-, the New Testament in particular." Said, "Well. OK. Good. But what I wanna tell you is I wanna tell you, not to stop preaching the Word of God." He said, "Today is a day of gimmicks, when not many are truly preaching the Word of God. And I wanna tell you that you have been called of God to preach His word."

And then he took me aside, and we spent about a half an hour sharing various areas of ministry. And he gave me five golden words of advice for ministry. He said, "Michael, these words were originally shared to me when I was a young pastor back in England. They were shared with me by Sidlow Baxter. And I'd like to share those with you now."

Here's what they were. I wrote them down immediately. When I left him, I went, wrote them down on a, a napkin actually. Here's what they were. He said, "First of all, be saturated in the Word." Be saturated in the Word. Allow the Word of God to saturate every part of your being.

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"Secondly," he said, "delight yourself in the Lord, walk with Him in the joy of your salvation."

Delight yourself in Walking with Jesus.

"Thirdly, in your younger years you will spend much time developing messages. Work hard at this. Work hard to develop a message based upon the Word of God.

"Fourthly, in your later years, God will give you a message for your generation." In your later years, God will give you a message for your generation.

"And fifthly," he said, "later in your ministry, God will spend much time working on the messenger." Later in your ministry, God will spend much time working on the messenger.

You know, I was tremendously honored that this man of God would take the time with me. And I thought about those words much since that time. And they have been most important for me as I look at what I am doing with my life. I was most surprised by the last one. "Later in your ministry, God will spend much time working on the messenger." I wouldn't have guessed that he would place that last. It seemed to me that God's work on a messenger would have been more of a priority in the earlier years of ministry. But the more I thought about it, the more I understand. Messages are vitally important for the outworking of God's program. But what may be the most important message that we can give to those around us is that the gospel message works, that my life and your life has been changed by a lengthy contact with the living God. And it makes a difference. And that we can have a consistency in our walk with God, because He has affected us so radically.

We become the message that people see walking around every single day. And that's what I'd like to focus our attention upon this morning, the fact that you and I have much to learn from seasoned saints of our great majestic God.

Today is a day of youth, we glory and strength and vitality and agility, beauty. Some maybe not quite so beautiful as, as others, but of beauty. Youth exhibits promise, potential, hope. Even in our walk with God, it is often in the young that we see those who are so radically turned on, who have that overwhelming zeal and fire for God. But my dear young friends, and I can preach to you now, the biblical cutoff seems to be about the age forty. I have a year and a half until I become an older man. I just saw a bumper sticker as I was driving up to Forest Home that said "Forty is not old if you're a tree." (laughter) Think about that one for a while.

So I can preach because I'm including myself here, and it's a message that we need to hear today. The message is simply this. Listen to the God of seasoned saints.

You know you are learning much about God in all of your classes. Many of you are walking with God in a radical way, which may shake the foundations of our world. But never overlook the perspective of God that can be found only for many through veteran service.

I greatly appreciate the advice that Stanley Collins gave me. There is another older man who is about to go off the scene of ministry, who left words of advice not only to guide the next generation of pastors, but also us as well.

Turn if you would, the 1 Timothy chapter 6. In 1 Timothy chapter 6, we catch the heart of the apostle Paul. There is a sense of urgency in Paul's voice as he prepares this younger man, young pastor Timothy to minister to the churches that Paul had spent his life establishing. That catch the true heartbeat of this aged apostle in verses 11 through 16, where Paul says, "But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time." Notice, "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."

There is so much to be learned from the beloved apostle. But I hear in Paul the same emphasis that Stanley Collins shared with me that true godliness will result from a true knowledge of God.

Paul's God is a majestic God, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords." He is the one who holds true immortality for Paul as Paul approaches his own mortality. He is the only holy Jehovah, who struck fear in the hearts of men and nations. Why? Because of His most glorious splendor.

In 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul says "flee." In 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 22, Paul says, "flee." Most of you young men have memorized that verse where it says, "Flee youthful lusts." What do we think about? I have heard so many sermons preached or Bible studies given that that passage concerns sexual lusts. It may have allusion to that, but more importantly, I believe that what Paul is emphasizing in these two statements of "flee" is, he is emphasizing the two twin tools that the devil wants to use, to ruin a true ministry of God: ungodly desires and ungodly authority.

Paul only uses the word flee four times in all of his writings, and in each it has to do with running away from something that would drag us down to ungodliness. In 1 Timothy 6:16, it's the love of money and the love of dispute. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 22, he says "flee from the youthful lusts" of controversy, which ultimately has in its root having to be right. Any of you like to be right? You had better like to be right in a class, right? Huh? We are trained to think right, to think according to truth, which is wonderful. What a wonderful privilege we have!

But unfortunately, our sinful tendency is that of pride and self-centeredness, which places "me" at the center of all truth. You've ever done this? Will you look around you and you'll look at people and say "yeah, they're OK. That church is OK. That, that person thinks well, except... If only they change that... If only that church would just change right there... If only that theologian would change right here..." Who becomes the center of our world? Me. And Paul says "flee" that which would drag us down, the lusts of having to be right, the lusts of ungodly desires.

My friends, this is the God whom we study and with whom we have begun a relationship, this majestic God that Paul points to in his latter days of ministry. But there is a wealth of

relationship waiting to be shared with us by those who have walked with God through all of the paves of life, even as had the apostle Paul.

What Lynne and I found when we were with these seniors at Forest Home is that we were more blessed than they were. As we thought about the reasons why we were blessed, it comes down to three things.

One, those people love to . They knew who they were and they loved to have fun. It was an uninhibited fun. They could laugh at themselves; they could laugh at life because of the security they have in Christ.

Secondly, they were teachable. I find an interesting phenomenon. Children up until about the age of three or four are teachable. We don't begin to be teachable again until, I'm guessing now, somewhere around sixty seven. I think it's somewhere in there. And these old people finally got to the point where they can relax. And they knew that they didn't know at all, and they probably weren't gonna learn a whole lot more. And so they wanted to hear from somebody else, even a young whippersnapper like myself.

And thirdly, all those wonderful people, they were godly. They knew what was important in life, and for them was all or nothing.

You know, you're learning so much here. And for many of you, the leadership role of churches will soon be in your hands at a very early age. But never be so arrogant in your knowledge of

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God that you cannot learn from those who have weathered many storms of life. You're going to find people in your ministries even maybe right now and in the future, who may be nearing the end of their most externally productive years, who basically go unnoticed and unappreciated because they cannot contribute to the organized programs of your church. But I would like to suggest to you that if you take the time, you will learn much of our God from these wonderful senior saints. People, who have walked with God through many storms, through many periods of blessings, many triumphs and many tears, and the intimacy and understanding they have gained, will teach us much about who our God truly is.

You look at 2 Timothy Chapter 4. Listen to Paul. In his last words, 2 Timothy 4:16, "At my defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, in order that through the procla-, that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

The majestic God of a seasoned saint. Don't overlook those wonderful people.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, it's so easy for all of us to buy into this youth cult in which we live. So easy for us because we are full of vision, we're full of hope, we're full of energy. We seem to sense that we have all of the potential in the world to accomplish such great things for you. And we're not meaning to say this pridefully. But Farther, in our desire sometimes, we think the world basically revolves around us and that we have a knowledge of you and an intimacy

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with you that nobody else has ever experienced. How easy it might have been for a young pastor Timothy to be threatened by aged apostle Paul.

Father, I pray that we would humble ourselves. I pray that we would hu-, would humble ourselves in such a way that we would walk with you in such sincerity and truth that we can see you as our majestic God through the eyes of some seasoned saints, who have weathered the storms and the victories of life. What a wonderful privilege to be in the family of God! Thank you for this. In Jesus' name, Amen.