

Celebrating Papa's Life

Henri DeVries Pote

October 15, 1924 – November 2, 2013

We are here, today, to celebrate the life of Henri Pote...Papa to those of us who were born or adopted into his family...Papa Henri or Grandpa Pote to his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Papa is a good man who lived life well. Anyone who knows him will attest to his pursuit of godliness and his love of God and people.

Papa's family knows him as a good father and loving husband. We could spend hours telling the many ways he demonstrated his love. The many evenings falling asleep listening to Papa read, first from the Bible, then from a favorite literary work. His excitement at planning a family trip, or pointing out a beautiful sunset or rainbow. His tireless hours tilling the soil, planting, and harvesting a large garden. His enjoyment in building a tree house for his children. His quirky sense of humor that was so easy for children to enjoy.

And all of us can attest, to one degree or another, how his example has impacted our own lives and character...the parts of our own personalities that remind us of our Papa...

Papa's greatest legacy, though, is in the deep love of God that he instilled in each of us. When Papa spoke of Jesus, his whole face lit up! Those of you who have listened to Papa teach the Bible remember his excitement at exploring the truths of God's word.

There are so many stories we could tell of Papa's life on this earth. But, today, we're not here just to celebrate Papa's life in the past tense. We're here to celebrate Papa's present and eternal life! November 2, 2013 was not just Papa's last day in this life...it is the day he looked forward to and planned for his entire life! It is the day Papa finally met Jesus, face-to-face!

At times like this, people say things like, "Well, at least you know he's in Heaven." And I smile and thank them, while I want to yell, "No! You don't understand!" While watching your child graduate from high school, you wouldn't say, "Well, at least you know he earned his diploma." There's no "at least" to it! There is nothing "least" about Papa entering Heaven! On the contrary, this is a moment of triumph! A moment to be celebrated with great joy!

Papa is a Bible teacher, but he could never speak of Heaven without getting choked up. Tears would stream down his cheeks as he spoke of someday seeing Jesus and all our loved ones. Papa looked forward to this day, with all his heart! The hope of Heaven was Papa's greatest joy and deepest longing! And now, for Papa, it is no longer a future Hope, but his present reality!

To understand what a great joy this day is, we must understand how Papa lived with a constant awareness of the hope of Heaven.

If you leave here, today, thinking Papa was a perfect man, perfect father, and perfect husband, you'll have missed the focus of his life. Papa was not perfect. He was not sinless. Papa lived life with a constant awareness of his own imperfections and weaknesses and of his own inability to ever conquer sin apart from God's grace.

More than anyone I've known, Papa lived life with an understanding – a vision – of what life must have been like in the Garden of Eden, before the curse of sin. In his poetry and songs Papa spoke of that lost innocence...and of the awful consequences of sin's curse.

One of Papa's favorite songs, that he loved to sing with Mama, speaks of sin's temptation:

*The barbed hook will pierce your stricken heart.
Too late, you'll find the serpent's bait, when taken,
Will lose the sweet, but keep the bitter part.
Heartache and hatred, deception and shame,
These got their start, and the serpent's to blame!*

Papa lived with an acute awareness of the awful cost of sin...of the far-reaching painful consequences of sin's curse. Papa's life was characterized by pursuing godliness while fleeing sin...a life of seeking to know the right thing to do in each situation and praying for strength to do it...a life of wanting to speak healing and never cursing into the lives of others...

Papa didn't see Heaven as an option to be embraced only to avoid Hell.

Papa didn't see Heaven as just a beautiful place with pearl gates and gold streets.

Papa looked forward to Heaven with unspeakable joy...because Papa understood that on the day we meet Jesus face-to-face, sin's curse is finally completely broken! On that great day, we are finally free to fully be who God created each of us to be! On that great day, we can stand before God and each other, naked and unashamed...with hearts bared and no sense of shame, guilt or self-consciousness...affirming one another and enjoying each other's company with no need to worry about saying the wrong thing or giving poor advice...

Today, Papa is in Heaven, in every sense of the word. He is with Jesus and all our loved ones who have gone before. Papa is singing, dancing, worshipping and celebrating...all his joy has been made complete!

And today, we are here to join Papa's celebration!