

BRIAN FIELDS

Warrior, Worshiper, Friend

INTRO

(Quote Isa 40:28-31...)

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

When my son Joshua heard of Brian’s passing, he said he could hear him quoting this passage. As I share about Brian and his life for a few minutes this morning, there will be plenty of Scripture mingled in. As we all know, Brian loved the Scriptures of God, and the God of the Scriptures.

Were I to title my remarks this morning, it might be “*Brian Fields, Warrior, Worshiper, Friend.*” But I want to concentrate of the “Friend” part. First, Brian and His Friends. Secondly, Brian, My Best Friend. And thirdly, Brian, the Lord’s Friend.

Brian & His Friends

I want to start with Kathy, his beautiful bride of 30 years, best friend, confidant, and in the end the best and most attentive nurse and caregiver a person could ask for. You brought an amazing amount of joy to Brian’s life.

Friday, the day of Brian’s home going, we were at the hospital and Johnny Johnson, who’s funnier than me, and should be telling these stories, started talking about when Brian first met Kathy. Brian went from Mr. Serious to...? well, almost giddy. His squadron mates were all buzzing with, “What’s happened to Brian?” He had found out Kathy, who he met at a health club, worked at a certain bank as an auto teller. So he took J.J. out to check her out, Brian sending her a rose up through the canister! :) “What do you think Johnny?” “Wow, she’s pretty!” He took me out there too, from the base, in our flight suits, in his sports car, to cash a check for one dollar. :) Today was to be the big day. He wrote a note with the check asking for her phone number. She sent back one dollar and her phone number at the urging of her coworkers. So it

was a fun beginning to a beautiful relationship. Kathy, I know you got a lot out of the relationship too, but thank you from Brian, and from me and all his friends and family for being an excellent wife and an excellent friend to Brian. He loved you beyond words.

Time doesn't permit to address the whole family, but you know better than any of us Brian's loyalty, leadership, commitment, and joy in his family. I will say to Marc, Angi, & Heath that he was so proud of you and thankful for you, as he would tell me countless times. Sometimes I would say to him, "You should tell them!" He assured me he did, but I know fighter pilots aren't the world's best communicators, so I wonder? Please know it's true! You were and are a major source of joy and pride in his life.

You could probably ask Ralph Obana, Dan Udouj, and the other friends from his high school days that he walked with in Creekmore park weekly, enjoying life long relationships and solving the world's problems. They could tell you the pride he had in his kids. And they could tell of the joy they had in Brian and their life-long friendships with each other.

Then there's his fighter squadron! A band of brothers. I don't have the time to tell you of the many close knit friendships that come from serving one's country, risking your lives together, training in peacetime, or flying in combat. Close friendships with fellow flyers, and with the men and women who maintain the jets and support the mission. The number of 188th friends here today attest to these close and valued friendships.

I'll just tell you two stories from Brian's flying career that J.J. helped me remember Friday. One of them Brian would probably just as soon I didn't tell, and the other would be OK. :) They point to Brian's warrior spirit, his skill, and also to his human side.

Wrong Target at Gunsmoke 1983 practice. :)

Amazing performance Fangsmoke 1985, Gulfport Mississippi. 33 jets and 11 units. Six shacks! Brian & JJ basically win the competition, sending the 188th to the Gunsmoke world wide gunnery meet representing the US Air National Guard F-4 community. :)

Brian, My Best Friend

I can be brief about this. It's pretty simple really.

We both had an intense desire to follow God. To know Him, His Word, and His ways. So we've shared verses, insights, and revelations for years as we discovered them. And we joined each other in a giant life experiment, trying to live by His Word with His leading.

Secondly, we love and accept each other, just as God accepts us in Christ Jesus, no matter what. But having said that, and this is important, he would always tell me the truth. Always. And I would do the same. Psalm 51:6 says, "*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being ...*"

Honesty! He was committed to it. Once he faced a tough decision on an important "secret clearance" application to mark a box truthfully opening himself up to a lot of scrutiny and possibly losing his job, or telling a seemingly innocent small lie and playing it safe. He sought my counsel. I told him that if I ever could tell someone to tell a small lie, this would be the time and place. But I just couldn't do it, and prayed he would have wisdom. He told the truth, and God amazingly took care of the whole situation. My admiration for him grew immensely.

Sacrifice. I've seen him lay down his time and resources for his family and friends. Also for causes and people he didn't even know. I admire that very much in a man. I think we all do. I respected him and loved him for it.

Lastly he had a strong gifting where I didn't, and perhaps visa versa? But he helped me and disciplined me much in focusing, that is, keeping the main thing the main thing. It seemed so easy for him, but he gave me an indian name, "Many Irons," because he said I always had many irons in the fire. :) He knew with my personality I was sometime afflicted with "the paralysis of analysis," so he would gently remind me of that, and point me in the obvious right direction, or to the right decision.

A trait Brian had that many of you might not guess was mercy. In our long friendship, he encouraged me to extend forgiveness, to not take into account a wrong suffered,

or to show kindness in a hurtful situation more often than I encouraged him to do the same.

Brian and I both have several best friends perhaps. But most of them call us “best friends” and seem to marvel at the love, respect, loyalty, and joy we have in each other’s friendship and company. I think it might be a little bit like Paul’s speech in Athens on Mar’s Hill recorded in Acts 17, “God chooses where people should live and their times.” Perhaps he establishes friendships too? My good friend Charles Angel who just spoke, used to tell me, “The Holy Spirit establishes relationships.” I’m thankful to the Holy Spirit, and to Brian for such a rich and rewarding friendship, and the joy of his counsel. I’ll miss him sorely. He was a rock. Always faithful. Always caring. Always there for me.

Brian, The Lord’s Friend

Those of you who knew Brian knew that if you talked to him very long, or even very short, he would talk to you about the Lord. The Lord was so very real and close to him. He spent more time with the Lord, reading the Bible, and in prayer than anyone I know or have known personally.

He seemed to have two main focuses when he talked to people he knew or met about the Lord. One was “prepare for coming hard times.” In this sense I think he was a prophet, and a particular kind of prophet known as a watchman. He never said this about himself, and probably wouldn’t be comfortable with me saying it. But in simple terms a prophet is one who listens spiritually for what God is saying, and repeats what he hears. He was concerned for the sheep of the Shepherd, His Lord and King.

His second focus was eternity, heaven, and hell. He wanted people to consider the reality of it and choose wisely. He would point out that Jesus talked twice as many times about hell as heaven; that it was a reality in the Old Testament and the New.

Not long ago a UAFS college student called me saying, “ I am an atheist or agnostic. And most of my friends are. But if I’m wrong, the ramifications are significant. I have a few Christian friends but I don’t want to talk to them about it, because I don’t

want to hurt their faith. I don't think I can hurt your faith, so will you meet and talk to me about it?" Shortly thereafter I told Brian about this young man and conversation as we drove to the Cracker Barrel in Russellville, which we did every 3 months to meet with Charles, catch up with each other, and pray.

We often discussed, "Why can't people see the Lord, embrace Jesus, and come to faith, when it seems so clear to us?" I would proffer (1) They are angry with God about something in their past, instead of thanking Him for their very existence and the opportunity to live. Or (2) They just want to be their own king--rule their own life -- go their own way.

He at once said, "Yes, but they can't make peace with it because God has placed eternity in their hearts. They sense they are eternal and they sense there is a Supreme Being with whom they will have to deal."

Insightful! Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*"

Brian's focus on eternity, heaven, and hell was not different than the Apostle Paul's who died much younger than Brian at the edge of a Roman sword.

"I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen." (1 Corinthians 16:21-24)

That was Brian's message. He saw it just like Paul, and so ordered his life and conversation. To him it was the truth, and life's most important truth. So it was his focus. He could keep the main thing, the main thing.

In his personal life he valued and practiced obedience, self-discipline, prayer, and worship.

Last Tuesday, after our Methodist men's meeting in Van Buren, Steve Hobbs went with me to see Brian who was now confined to bed in his home for the first time. Steve told Brian, "You'll never know how much it meant for you to come pray for me. Your visits and your emails were so encouraging to me." Brian prayed for Steve, who was healed of an incurable disease last year and is sitting out there among you now.

This is funny, knowing his diligence and faith, one time I told Brian, “If I was sick and could pick only one person in the world to pray for me, it would be you.” He pondered that a second and replied, “If I was sick and could only pick one person in the world to pray for me, it would be me.” :) I’m still not sure if he was serious or not? I laughed, and at the time didn’t think that was very humble. But I did think it was true, at least for me.

During this last week men, friends from his past, warriors he knew in the military and spiritual warriors he’d prayed or ministered with, filed in to see him. Although very weak, and warring against the pain or the effects of pain medicine, he would rise, under his own power, and greet them, sharing mutual respect, love, and honor. Kathy and the kids were amazed at this, as were we all.

Angi and I discussed that quite unlike him, being a leader and take charge kind of a guy, he hadn’t made many plans or preparations for this day, the day of his funeral, if it happened. But like I’ve said, he was always able to keep the main thing the main thing. He was fighting for his life, and the ability to continue to care for those he loved. I think of 2 Tim 2:4, *“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”*

And it’s been repeated over and over these past hours and days, “He was a warrior.”

My mind flashes to Easter Sunday, just 15 days ago. After an early church service, my wife Elizabeth and I went to visit Brian and Kathy. He was sitting in a chair in his bedroom and pretty weak. We all visited and shared a little humor, before the girls went into the kitchen to visit. Brian and I chatted for awhile, then he looked at me and said, “I think I’ve given up. I wonder if it’s too early?” I replied, “I think only you will know. But you are a warrior, and you won’t give up before it’s time. You will know.”

At that he started to get up. I asked if I could help him, and he declined, standing up rather quickly under his own power. I asked him where he was going? He said, “To tell Elizabeth goodbye.” :) He walked to the kitchen and leaning on his staff (in this case kitchen granite), he began to worship, with soft strong phrases, “Blessed be the Name of the Lord, Mighty is the Lord, Awesome is the Lord our God, Holy is the Lord...” We all responded with hushed “Amens,” and worship in our hearts. It was powerful, instructive, and touching.

Warring to the end. Worshiping to the end.

Yesterday at church a young man named Josh Lindsey, a friend of mine and a friend of Brian's came and gave me a big hug saying, "Brian fought the good fight. He finished his race well. You can't ask for more than that."

I said, "Amen."

I want to say again, and I know Kathy would concur, I'm so proud of Brian's children, now adults. Angi, you've been amazing, loving and supporting your dad through this, taking him to the doctor many times, helping Kathy with these arrangements, and many other acts of kindness and service. Heath you've been much support, strength, and service to your mother and to Brian in this season of need. Marc had the honor of spending the last night with his dad, when none of us dreamed he could depart so quickly. As the nursing staff administered more and more pain medicine due to more and more pain, they seemed to be asking Marc for some guidance. He told them he didn't want them to do him harm, but didn't want him to suffer either... to use their best judgment. Then Marc began to read to Brian from the Psalms. Psalms 100-106 to be exact. It seemed that Brian would be fitful, but lie back relaxed at the reading of the Word. They were some of his favorites. It seems fitting to conclude with the reading of a few of those verses, giving glory and honor to the God of Creation, Brian's Friend, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations." (Psalm 100:4-5)

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. ... For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer. But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from

*everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,
To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.” (Psalm 103:11-18)*

*“Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor
and majesty, Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak, Stretching out heaven like a tent
curtain. ... He makes the clouds His chariot; He walks upon the wings of the wind;” (Psalm
104:1-4)*

*“Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; Let the
heart of those who seek the Lord be glad. Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face
continually.” (Psalm 105:2-4)*

*“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the
people say, “Amen.” Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 106:48)*