

LEGACY OF FAITH

LATE CC PASTOR DAVE ELKINS SHOWED & WALKED IN GOD'S GRACE

Story by Margot Bass
Photos courtesy of Calvary Chapel Dayton, Ohio

Maria Elkins listened attentively to her husband's sermon from the previous Sunday—the last he would ever preach. The words took on new meaning and depth: “My God is faithful not just because He's going to put food on the table but because He died on the cross for me already. He's already done all that He needs to show me His faithfulness. Whether I die here on the street or He ... puts me in a better place in this life, either way I will praise Him.”

Dave Elkins, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Dayton, OH, passed away five days later on October 2, 2015. He and a church friend, Frenchie L'Heureux, had just finished mowing a church member's lawn that afternoon when Dave had a heart attack at the side of the road. He died soon after. Maria reflected, “It was heartbreaking to hear his words, but Dave was right. I don't have to like it, but God is God, and He's allowed to make those decisions.”

An Unlikely Pastor

In 1991, Dave and Maria moved from California to start CC Dayton. The flock has remained an intimate size, at most 125, which allowed Dave to know each member.

Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things ... to put to shame the things which are mighty. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26b-27



Left to right: Dave Elkins at the Empty Tomb; baptizing his daughter Bethany in the Jordan; Dave at home.



Dave was an unlikely choice to pastor a church for 24 years. The third of seven children, he was raised in California and Texas in an unstable home by alcoholic parents who divorced, remarried, and divorced again. At 13, he ran away from home to live with his father, who had abandoned the family; his father turned him away. From then on, Dave fended for himself—living on the street, in his car, with friends. However, a high school friend kept telling him that he needed Jesus Christ. Angry, 15-year-old Dave challenged God: “If You're tough enough, I'll submit to You,” Maria recounted. Shortly after that, Dave surrendered his life to Jesus, boldly shared his faith through street evangelism, and felt called to be a pastor.

Dave spent a year as a missionary on a Navajo reservation. At 21, he met Maria in Riverside, CA; they were engaged four days later and married in 1981. They worked for two years with Youth With A Mission (YWAM), including several months on a Mercy Ship in Hawaii before returning to California. He knew then that he wanted to start a church in Ohio, where his mother lived.

Growing Biblical Insights

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. PHILIPPIANS 4:13

Dave had dyslexia and could not read beyond a third-grade level when he graduated from high school. “He learned by reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the Bible aloud to me,” Maria explained. “Over time, he was able to read his Bible with great understanding and expression.”



Left to right: Dave with his wife, Maria; teaching God's Word; Dave with his daughters Lydia and Bethany.

According to Dave's son-in-law Brock Paine, “The amount of detail he could draw out of even the smallest verse was incredible. He could look at any chapter and pick up on connections to other places no one else would think of.” When men in a study group wanted to skip a long list of difficult Bible names, Dave insisted they read each one, admonishing them, “Imagine how you would feel if you were reading all of the names in the Book of Life, and your name was skipped over.”

Dave mentored many men at CC Dayton, including current pastor Riley Driver. Although Dave was nine years younger, Riley considered him the older brother he never had. “No one could integrate the Word, Genesis to Revelation, like Dave could. I'm beginning to learn to do that after three years,” Pastor Riley admitted. He has continued Dave's tradition of mentoring men to become servant leaders in the church and in their homes.

Fearless Faith and Love

Dave's daughter Bethany Conkel recalled, “He had this bold, fearless faith and love. It didn't matter who the people were, what they did, what they looked like, or how they smelled. He loved and connected with them. God brought us people who were a bit wounded and needed to be fixed up and loved.”

He hugged everyone who came into the church, another tradition that hasn't changed. “I'm trying to get a few people trained in hugging, because I had to be trained,” Riley said. CC Dayton members still meet for lunch in the church basement every Sunday after service, a practice Dave started. He often said that you get to know people when you share a meal with them.

Dave was transparent about his faults. Maria shared, “He was not ashamed of saying, ‘I blew it. I had to repent.’” She added that God delivered him as a young man from a struggle with pornography. In their first year of marriage, Dave confessed that he had been unfaithful to her one time. “His honesty helped other people to be honest, too. He had a testimony and could tell guys with similar

struggles, ‘You've got to get it right, stop, and repent because God can change this,’” Maria stated.

Dave spoke truth in love, asked tough questions, and unabashedly declared God's Word, according to Frenchie. “We've seen some people who didn't think they deserved God's love,” Frenchie said. “Pastor Dave would tell them: ‘If God can love me, He can love you.’”

Restoring Lost Years

Through the years, Dave continued to share Christ and pursue relationships with his fractured family. Late in life, his dad Bud Elkins, a prison guard, visited CC Dayton monthly. After Bud died, Dave learned from a fellow guard that his father had been loved there and had become a Christian who shared his faith with all. Dave's mother Ellie also became a believer, attending CC Dayton before her death.

Family Ministry

“Ministry in the church was a way of life for our entire family,” said daughter Lydia Paine. “Dad's perspective was that anything could be ministry. Anything could be a gift to someone else and to God.” That included counseling people at their home, providing housing to many in need, and serving in any church work detail.

“He taught us ministry by involving us. Now ministry comes very easily to us,” added Bethany. Dave's daughters always knew he loved them. “He was always going to be real with me, tell me what I needed to hear, and point me back to the Lord and to biblical truths I needed at the time,” Bethany recalled. “He was bull-headed and determined, not intimidated by anything when it came to sharing his faith or loving people the way Christ would want. By the world's standards, he shouldn't have been successful in life. He definitely embodied how God uses the least [of us] to confound the wise.” ✨

“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 SAMUEL 16:7b