

A Good Word for Walter Smith
August 5, 2005

Walter's last words to me were about a week before he died. I visited him at his bedside, Lou, in her place, on the other side. Before I left I asked Walter if he'd like for me to have a prayer with him. He held my hand – firmly, even in his weakness – looked me in the eye and said simply, “Keep it short.” I did. And he drifted back to dozing. Those have been Lou's words this week as we have planned this service – Keep it short. So I'll try. I think it will be somewhat easy – not because there's not plenty to say about Walter, but let's be honest - most of it you can't repeat in church. You know what I mean. It makes me smile just to think about him.

As I went through my notes from talking with Lou and Gary and Jacki and Cal, three words emerged that I think describe Walter Smith the best: Planner, Provider, and Prankster.

Walter the Planner

He had a file about his own death, if that tells you anything – prepared years ago. His obituary written. Funeral home selected and paid for. All of his files organized and typed. He believed in planning ahead, organization, and hard work. He wanted Gary and Cal to have their acts together to always be ready for a rainy day. He planned ahead for the future – always forward thinking in his approach to life. He believed in hard work and being prepared – whether that be in his 43 years with Esso (now Exxon) Company or in his decorated service in the United States Navy. He received citations for outstanding service and action in the Mediterranean Sea, the North Atlantic, and the Pacific areas of World War II. He was a company man – faithful and loyal employee who did his job and did it well – making many friends in the process. He loved public speaking and his

charismatic personality fit the role well making him always well received by anyone who would listen. Yes, Walter was a Planner – always prepared, always organized. There's a lot more I could say about that, but he would want me to keep it short.

Walter the Provider

Walter was determined to provide an education for Gary and Cal – whatever it took. He always made sure that he saved money and that Gary and Cal were following in his footsteps – even asking Cal in one of their last conversations what percentage of his salary was going into savings. He didn't believe in spending all of what you made – Lou says that's precisely why she never did get a dishwasher. But Walter was determined to take care of Lou – his “Princess” – building a house for the family in 1956 – the same house he died in last Sunday night – with his family right there by his side – exactly the way he had trained them.

He was not only a provider for his family, but also for his church. A charter member here, he taught the young children in Sunday School. That truly brings a smile to my face as I think about Walter and O'Neal Starnes teaching children's Sunday School. Even today I have been recruiting Sunday School teachers to teach our children this coming year. And I thought about Walter providing a place in this community of faith for our youngest to grow up knowing that they were loved by a God who created people like Walter Smith. We need some of the fathers today to follow in Walter's footsteps. He set a good example in those early years of the forming of Park Road Baptist Church in the way he loved the children. I never visited him that he didn't ask me about my boys. And his own love of the lake and teaching kids to waterski always gave us something to talk

about. Yes, Walter was a Provider – always wanting a bright future for those he loved the most. There's a lot more I could say about that, but he would want me to keep it short.

Walter the Prankster

Lou was worried that this day would be just too sad. And it is a sad day. And there will be many sad days ahead. But it is also a day of celebration – celebration of the life of Walter Smith. And he would be disappointed in us if we couldn't find some way to laugh today. Spending time with Walter not only brought a smile to your face, but often brought a belly laugh as well. I believe that every time I visited Walter over the last 5 years – often in the hospital with some breathing complication or pneumonia-type situation – he said the same thing to me. He always wanted me to bring a picture of myself – so he could enter me a “purty” contest. Now I don't tell you that with any sense of vanity or conceit. I tell you that because it shows you who Walter was – and continues to be – a source of smiles and laughter and pure craziness in the very best sense of that word.

He always told Lou in their constant back and forths, “I'm going to send you back to your Mama in Wadesboro.” He'd never done it – he couldn't have lived one day without Lou by his side. The perfect woman for him – one that could match his wit and dance his dance. I hear tell they cut a mean rug together. He was always saying, “I'm going to get me a new car and new woman.” He may have traded a few cars over the years, but one woman named Lou was good enough for 53 years without a trading in. Lou, well done, good and faithful servant. You were his dance partner – the one he laughed with and cried with. You made it through richer and poorer, better and worse,

sickness and health – and though now you have been parted by death – memories will sustain you – that and the love of God that will be your comfort in the days to come.

Walter was the life of any party. He kept things stirred up and all together at the same time. He had a way of telling the same joke, and it always being funny every time. Yes, Walter was a Prankster – always bringing joy and laughter to any gathering of people. There's a lot more I could say about that, but he would want me to keep it short.

Walter – Plumb Damn “Purty”

On this day of worship and celebration, we cling to the Blessed Hope that even today Walter enjoys breathing deep the fresh air of the very presence of God – and surely Walter has added a perspective of joy to the heavenly kingdom. The last thing Walter said to me was “keep it short.” But it was the next to last thing that Walter said to me that I will always remember for it was Walter at his finest. Even though weak, he held my hand and looked me square in the eye and said, “Can I tell you something? You're plumb damn “purty.”

Can I tell all of you something today – Walter was plumb damn “purty” too.
Thanks be to God.