

## Hermann Austel

What is it that makes a man a giant? Perhaps there is no one thing that might set a man apart from and ahead of the peloton. It may not be that he has 8 children, 34 grandkids and 32 great-grandkids. It may not be that he was married for nearly 60 years. It may not be that he knows some 16 middle and near eastern languages, nor that he helped to translate a portion of the New American Standard Bible from Hebrew into English, nor that he has written numerous scholarly works, nor that he began teaching Greek at the graduate level while still a student, nor that he continued to teach for 58 years, nor any one of his other many, many achievements.

Perhaps what makes this elderly gentleman, topped with thin, snow white, wispy hair stand 'head and shoulders' among men even as he takes a simple stroll through the grocery store, is not so much what he has done, but who he is. To personally know Dr. Hermann Austel—his genuinely gracious way, devoid of pretense or guile despite his many achievements—is to truly understand his stature.

The spiritual legacy that Hermann leaves behind actually began with his grandmother while she was pregnant with his father back in Germany when she placed her trust in Christ. Her uncommon faith and faithfulness carried forward and became a part of the heritage that we enjoy today. Hermann was born on October 28, 1927, to recent German immigrants, Hans and Fenna Austel. The first of three boys, he grew up through the Great Depression in the home Hans built for them in Los Angeles on the hill above what is now California State University at Los Angeles.

As a young boy, when Hermann was convicted of his own need for a Savior, he knelt by his bedside and asked Jesus to save him from his sin. Several times, as a boy, he would repeat his plea to be forgiven for his sin until one day, as a teen, he read John 10:28 and realized that one's salvation could never be taken away, not even by his own sin.

One day, when still a boy, Hermann's faithfulness—a lifelong characteristic—was beautifully demonstrated and thus enshrined as family legend when he was assigned to watch the family's goats on the hillside behind their house. His father told him specifically to hold onto and not let go of a particularly ornery goat. Handing over the rope, Hans left him to the task. Before long, the goat was determined to wander despite Hermann's desire to the contrary. Shortly, the goat won the battle and in time began to drag him along the hillside when Hermann lost his footing. Determined to do as he was told, he held fast to the rope regardless of the goat's speed or direction.

Eventually, Fenna saw what was happening and ran out, shouting for him to release the rope, only to find that he had been cut, bloodied and bruised from being dragged over the bushes and rocks. When his father had returned to the scene, he asked Hermann why it was that he did not let go of the rope. His simple, yet telling response was, "Because you told me not to." As the story goes, it was one of the few times that Hans could be seen crying.

He was an early teen when, in confirmation class at the German Methodist church, he met the young girl who would later become the love of his life, Rosemarie. In her later years she would remark that he had caught her attention because he was not misbehaving like the other boys and because he seemed to know all of the answers.

Though they attended separate high schools, they became lifelong friends, to say the least. He graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School (where he lettered as a gymnast on the pommel horse)

two years ahead of his classmates and continued his career in education at UCLA in 1944, studying chemistry.

Eventually, on January 6, 1946, he would propose marriage to Rose at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Marriage would have to wait, however, as he was drafted into the army less than three months later. He served most of his term in Japan on occupation duty as a chemist's assistant, with several others working under him, earning the rank of corporal by the time he was discharged only 14 months later. While in Japan, he would regularly round up soldiers and drive them to Bible studies, often leading the Bible studies himself.

Once Hermann returned home to Rose, he quickly resumed his studies at UCLA. Before he graduated in June of 1949, with a BS in chemistry, the two were finally married on April 24. It was then that he began to demonstrate and hone his characteristic tough tenderness. In his nearly 60 years of marriage to Rose, he would live out Ephesians 5:25-33, loving her like Christ loved the church.

Only a few months later, they would move north to Vallejo, California, where he worked at Lawrence Livermore Labs as a chemist. While in Vallejo, he became active in church under the leadership of Pastor Graves, an evangelist, who helped Hermann "get out of [his] shell." Pastor Graves encouraged him to give his personal testimony at a street meeting and a spark was fanned into a small flame.

As a young adult preparing to teach Sunday School, he noticed how commentaries would make reference to the original languages. He wanted to see for himself what they said, rather than relying on the understanding of others. It was then that a hunger to study Hebrew and Greek began and the flame began to grow.

In 1951, the now four-member family moved back to LA, where Hermann began to work for National Lead (a part of Dutch Boy paint) working to perfect latex paint. While living there, the next four children were also born.

While Hermann's career as a husband and father was well underway, it was in downtown Los Angeles that his career in ministry and passion for the same continued to flourish. While attending a German speaking Methodist church, he fell under the conviction that some of the doctrine taught there was not biblical. He then left that church and helped to start Emanuel Kapella, another German speaking church, in Pasadena.

During that time, he had begun to pursue a Master of Divinity degree at Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary. His prowess in linguistics was quickly recognized as he began to teach beginning Greek during his second year as a student, and there was no looking back!

While studying in the book of Haggai, Hermann fell under the conviction that the Lord was calling him into full-time ministry. While he thought he might be headed toward foreign missions, in 1954, the people of the little church plant called him to be their first pastor. In those years, in addition to being a loving husband and father of six, he attended seminary and pastored the new church...all successfully. One of those summers, since the seminary was unable to pay the faculty their salaries, Hermann sold Fuller Brush in an effort to make ends meet. One year, when his brother Otto was home from the mission field and helping minister in the church, Hermann selflessly—another defining characteristic—gave all of his church salary to Otto.

In 1955, Hermann graduated from seminary with highest honors, never receiving a grade lower than an A. They moved to Newhall in 1961, where they lived for ten years during which time the last two children were born. It was in those years that he discovered his true calling and passion. In 1964, he resigned as pastor of the church to teach full-time, answering the call to become the dean of the seminary.

In 1967, it was his privilege to spend the summer in Israel on an archeological dig at Tel Gezer after he had begun his pursuit of his PhD in middle and near eastern languages, which he finally completed in 1969, copyrighting his dissertation in 1970 ("Prepositional and Non-Prepositional Complements with Biblical Hebrew").

He would go on to write multiple works, including several articles in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, part of the commentary on 2 Kings in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, commentaries on the books of Nahum, Haggai and Zechariah in *Commentary on the Bible* and an article in *Giving the Sense* to name only a few.

In 1974, the seminary moved to Tacoma, Washington, where it became Northwest Baptist Seminary. Over the years, as countless people have said, Hermann **was** Northwest Baptist Seminary, not merely due to his well-known academic prowess, but because, once again, of who he was. He was as near to the epitome of God's grace turned horizontal as ever there was one and he was loathe to draw attention to himself for virtually any reason.

His public ministry aside, Hermann is Pop to his eight adoring children and their spouses. Over the years, and right up to the end, he demonstrated hard work and diligence. He unwittingly taught his sons to attempt virtually any project working with their hands, if for no other reason than that he seldom possessed the wherewithal to hire the job out. He would come home from his office, change from his suit and tie to jeans and a t-shirt and teach them how to sweat and how to bloody a finger in the process. More than one good memory was made.

He loved to swim, be it in a pool or lake. He spent many days taking his boys on back packing trips in the mountains of California and Washington. He taught them to sit quietly and watch a wild animal one moment, then have them walk up a long hill to pose for a picture next to a huge granite rock the next. He taught them to sleep out in the open air, skillfully playing his harmonica as they lay there, exhausted from the long day's hike.

He was firm and unwavering in his discipline, yet reasonable and ultimately tender in his dealings with his children, fostering the utmost love and respect for him. By consistent example, he taught servant-leadership to all around him, especially as he tenderly, lovingly cared for his adoring Rose, even in her last days that were troubled with dementia. His affection for her never, ever wavered. Up until their last days together they shared an uncommon warmth and tenderness one would expect among newly-weds.

He loved the Word of God, not for its literary quality or importance but because it is indeed God's living and active Word. He was up early every morning spending time in it, learning it, digesting it, mastering it, living it. He endeavored to end each day and start the next reading his Bible, even during his last days in the hospital.

He prayed diligently for others, especially his family. Hardly a day went by without his praying specifically and purposefully for each one of them. That intercession will be greatly, greatly missed.

Perusing the pages of his Bible, one would soon and easily find a theme in the highlighted verses and passages, that the Lord is *“compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.”* Though he would **never** say it, his life cries out, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.”

Just as he has impacted countless men and women for the gospel across the globe over his many years of ministry and private life, he was a treasure, given to all of us by our Heavenly Father to demonstrate the grace of God that we might know our Savior more.

Dr. Austel, Hermann, Pop, we love you. You have left a void that will never be filled. We already miss you more than words can express and we cannot wait to see you again and tell you so. All who knew you, know that your greatest desire was that God be glorified above all else. Even up to your last days, your heart’s cry was, “To God be the Glory.”

When a man lives his life in such a way that he reflects the glory of God for others to see in such a way that what they see are attributes of God and not that man himself, he is a giant. Pop, you were such a man.

Together, we praise God for reflecting for us the glory of an awesome, living, almighty God, a compassionate and merciful Savior and an ever-present Comforter and Friend.