

Memories of Tom

Charles Fry

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brother **Tom Dennis** was an evangelist among the churches of Christ for many decades. In addition to his many good works, Tom served as the editor and publisher of *The Gospel Message* for a few years. Paul said of his fellow worker Epaphroditus, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem" (**Philippians 2:29**). It is with that spirit that your editor asked Charles Fry to write a brief tribute to Tom.

If you have ever heard Tom Dennis deliver a sermon, you will probably remember his distinctive speaking style. Tom dramatically stressed the points in his messages with highs and lows of tone and volume. He taught the scriptures for decades with vigor and conviction. When Tom left this world on July 14, 2024, he was ready and willing to go to be with the Lord, trusting the message of redemption he had faithfully taught. Tom stayed on course among us for 95 years of life and 75 years of preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ and his church. In his final years of service, Tom was a respected elder of the **church in Nixa**.

Tom was admired for knowing his Bible well enough to speak lessons and cite scriptures from memory, even when he lost his sight for a time due to diabetes. He had been determined to keep on doing the Lord's work when his legs stopped working, and he could no longer drive himself from place to place, as he always persisted despite various challenges through the years from his personal "thorn in the flesh." Tom wrestled with diabetes all the years I knew him and generally prevailed over the difficulties it presented. His long life with diabetes was emblematic of how he lived as a servant of Christ, disciplined and determined, never quitting, and always working through the challenges.

Tom labored for decades as a traveling evangelist. He considered the work he did visiting congregations scattered across the USA not only an opportunity to teach and encourage those churches he visited, but also a broader benefit in keeping churches connected with one another and aware of one another. He was always willing to visit congregations that were struggling or isolated, as well as those that were thriving, near or far.

In the course of his work as an evangelist, Tom welcomed several young men over a span of years to spend time, often weeks or months at a time, sometimes longer, to travel with him and work alongside him. I myself was a beneficiary of Tom's willingness to open his home and his schedule to young men aspiring to work as evangelists, and I am grateful for his help and endless encouragement. When Tom visited our home congregation early in 1976, the elders conferred with Tom and then proposed to me that my wife and I should travel with Tom that summer, which we did, not really being sure what we were getting into. Tom and his precious wife Anne were very gracious, always hospitable, and accessible. Our time with Tom in those summer months, sometimes along with other young men with similar goals, was a great blessing for us.

Over the years of his labors, Tom led half a dozen tour groups to Israel and Egypt. Many brothers and sisters benefitted from the opportunity to travel together in the lands of the Bible and get some taste of the reality of those ancient places. As was his habit, he did his best to make it easy for the travelers, taking care of details to make the trip as pleasant and burden-free as possible. He shouldered the responsibilities as a shepherd caring for his flock when he led those groups, as he did also while serving as an evangelist and then as an elder when he settled into the church in Nixa, MO.

Shortly after Anne died, my wife and I were in the vicinity of Nixa, and we called Tom to see if we could stop by when we passed through. He was, as always, gracious and hospitable, eager to see us and determined to provide a meal. True to form, not only did he welcome us into his home that afternoon, but

when he learned our travel plans, he made sure we could find the church in Pueblo that we intended to visit on Sunday and called ahead to make connections so they would be ready to receive us. That business of helping brethren and congregations make connections and stay in touch was a work that Tom excelled at, a good use of the gifts of grace God gave him for the glory of the Kingdom.