

Eulogy for Penny Poppinga

Hello. I'm Brian Hopkins, the firstborn of Bob and Marcia Hopkins, Jr. I'm also the firstborn grandchild of Bob and Betty Hopkins, Sr., which makes me Penny's first nephew. A little over a year ago, my wife Tracey and I entertained Penny and Dave in our home during their trip to Arizona. It was an afternoon of heartfelt fellowship and laughter. It's still hard for me to believe that such a short time later we're now here on this occasion. I've worked on this eulogy for a few weeks now and compiled over 20 pages of material, which I've condensed to six pages for this short time slot. For me to accurately extol the many virtues of my aunt Penny, I couldn't help but include Scriptural references that intertwine with who she was, represent the life she led, and were responsible for shaping her into the special woman whom we all knew and loved—a woman after God's own heart who also wanted others to know Him and His Son Jesus. Please bear with me as I paint a portrait of Penny with words.

Truly, with Penny's passing this world just lost one of those bright lights that made it a better place. Today, I proudly—and humbly—honor the fond memory and wonderful life of my beloved Aunt Penny Renée (Hopkins) Poppinga. After valiantly battling breast cancer for 2½ years, Penny finally passed away peacefully in her bed at home, having breathed her last, dying at a young age but satisfied with life; and she was then gathered to her kin.¹ She slipped from this world and went to her resting place in Paradise, just as Jesus said to the repentant man next to him on the cross, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise,"² where Penny now stands awestruck in the presence of boundless light while peacefully awaiting the resurrection of the righteous, at which time he will say to her, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you."³ Meanwhile, she is experiencing "the fullness of joys in God's presence, the delights that are in His right hand for everlasting."⁴ Penny will rise again in the resurrection with those whom the LORD raises up on the Last Day,⁵ and she will recline at the banquet of the righteous with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of heaven.⁶

Although Penny slowed down over the last few weeks, despite the challenges of her physical ailments, she proved to the world yet again that she was still upbeat, optimistic, and "especially joyful"⁷ whenever we were with her, and she continued to astound and amuse us all. Considering all that she had been through in that time, she did amazingly—even miraculously—very well, and to the very end she still did what she liked best: spending time with her family and friends, laughing, and having a good time.

¹ Cf. Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 49:33.

² Luke 23:43.

³ Ephesians 5:14.

⁴ Psalms 16:11.

⁵ Cf. Job 42:17 (Greek Septuagint); John 11:24.

⁶ Cf. Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28–29.

⁷ Deuteronomy 16:15.

It brought great joy to her heart to have all her family and friends visit her—and thank you to all of you who did that.

Penny lived a good and full life, and we're all so grateful that she passed peacefully without suffering further agony. As a lifelong good and faithful servant of Jesus, in her rich but short 66 years of life, Penny left an indelible mark in this world by making it a better place. She shone her light before all people so they would see her good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.⁸ Penny excelled in her lavish love, kindness, generosity, and hospitality, among many other admirable qualities too numerous to list. She always assumed the best of others, gave them the benefit of the doubt, encouraged them, and was willing to help them in any way she could, even if she didn't know them. In everything, she strove to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and attaining the resurrection from the dead.⁹ I have every confidence that He Who began a good work in Penny will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus¹⁰ and that she will be told, "You have done well, good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful with just a little, I will entrust you with much. Enter your master's joy."¹¹

Penny was a very meek, humble, and Godly woman—a rare gem of a woman, the woman of virtue described in Proverbs 31—and a warm, caring, loving, and fun-loving soul. She empathized with others who were less fortunate and had compassion for them. As King Solomon describes her: "She spreads out her palm to the poor and extends her hands to the destitute.... She opens her mouth with wisdom, and a lesson of kindness is on her tongue."¹² With her kind heart, beaming countenance, approachable personality, and zest for life, she touched everyone who knew her through her ministry as a missionary and a floral designer.

Penny was a very strong woman of faith, the kind that could move mountains.¹³ She was always diligent to conduct her life in a way worthy of the Good News of Christ¹⁴ and to lead a life worthy of God, Who calls us into His Kingdom and glory.¹⁵ She was a good steward of her time and resources. Penny also learned to trust that the LORD was her shepherd; she did not lack,¹⁶ and she learned to be content in whatever situation.¹⁷ With her strong faith from her tightly knit family and humble upbringing, she wholeheartedly believed that she could do all things through Him Who gave her strength.¹⁸

⁸ Cf. Matthew 5:16.

⁹ Cf. Philippians 3:10–11.

¹⁰ Cf. Philippians 1:6.

¹¹ Matthew 25:21,23.

¹² Proverbs 31:20,26.

¹³ Cf. Matthew 17:20, 21:21; Mark 11:23.

¹⁴ Cf. Philippians 1:27.

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

¹⁶ Cf. Psalms 23:1.

¹⁷ Cf. Philippians 4:11.

¹⁸ Cf. Philippians 4:13.

Penny's treasured Grandma Julia (Taylor) Lisle served as an excellent spiritual role model and was a huge influence in her walk with the LORD. Penny wrote about her extensively in the Lisle family genealogy book *Everyone Is Relative*. Penny was also very close to her mother Betty, my beloved grandma. It seemed as if they were joined together at the hip. Penny and my grandma's birthdays are one day apart: Penny was born November 4, and Grandma was born November 6. Also, it was nearly three years to the day of their passing.

In her early teens, Penny first heeded Jesus' gospel call to "repent, stop sinning, and believe the good news, for the kingdom of Heaven is near."¹⁹ Penny had ears to hear the word of the kingdom, receive it "with a good and pure heart,"²⁰ and understand its importance and preciousness. She then accepted Jesus as her lord and savior and committed to his invitation to discipleship. Penny had counted the cost of becoming Jesus' disciple,²¹ and she agreed to his terms that anyone who desires to follow him must disown his own life and carry his cross daily and follow him.²²

In Jesus' Parable of the Sower who sowed seed, Penny was the disciple exemplified by the seed sown on good soil that bore fruit with hope, sprouting up and growing, producing one hundred times as much²³—and what an abundance—a cornucopia—of beautiful fruits of the spirit she bore in her lifetime, those of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."²⁴ Following Penny's splendid example, may we all endeavor to "bear fruit consistent with repentance."²⁵

As a disciple of Jesus, Penny was a clean slate, a new wineskin into which the new wine of his unique teaching about the kingdom of God was poured.²⁶ She was always endeavoring to learn, grow, and deepen her walk with God by dedicating a lot of time to Bible study, prayer, repentance, self-improvement, and women's retreats.

Penny sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness;²⁷ she chose to serve God, not the fleeting materialism of this world.²⁸ By the world's standards, Penny was never very materialistically wealthy, but she was incredibly rich with God and amassed great merit with Him.²⁹ She understood that "a person's life does not depend on the abundance of his possessions"³⁰ and that "when a wealthy person dies, he will take

¹⁹ Anthologized from Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2; 4:17.

²⁰ Luke 8:15.

²¹ Cf. Luke 14:28–31.

²² Cf. Luke 9:23.

²³ Cf. Matthew 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, Luke 8:4–15.

²⁴ Galatians 5:22–23.

²⁵ Matthew 3:8.

²⁶ Cf. Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37–39.

²⁷ Cf. Matthew 6:33.

²⁸ Cf. Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13.

²⁹ Cf. Luke 12:21.

³⁰ Luke 12:15.

nothing with him.”³¹ Penny’s heart was a true servant’s heart that was dedicated solely to serving God and other people.

Penny had an extraordinary personal relationship with Jesus. The Apostle Paul says: “The one who joins himself to the Lord [Jesus] is one spirit with him.”³²—She always seemed to live by this Scripture: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”³³

Penny’s method of evangelism was best achieved by first building relationships with people. She accepted people for who they are, as they are, and where they are in life and loved them regardless. She emulated Jesus’ gentle nature, always with a low profile and humble disposition. She was never pushy or forceful about sharing her faith, but she stood firmly in her convictions and was always very proud to say with a great big smile, “Jesus is my lord and savior.”

Penny was a faithful, longtime member and servant to her church community here at Deer Flat Church, and she was a powerful prayer warrior and intercessor. She understood the spiritual value of prayer and fasting, and she often prayerfully interceded for her family, friends, and others to know God and His Son Jesus like she did. In her home, she had a prayer closet in which she spent a lot of time with the LORD. Numerous Post-it notes with Scriptural verses, spiritual insights, and praises are pasted all over the closet walls as well as the pages of her Bible. As a prayer warrior, Penny spiritually armed herself with prayer, fasting, and supplication to do spiritual warfare. Like Jesus during his life on earth, she “offered up prayers and petitions, crying aloud and shedding tears, to the One Who had the power to deliver from death; and [she] was heard because of her godliness.”³⁴

With God’s help and perseverance, Penny certainly endured many disappointments, hardships, and tragedies in her lifetime. She understood that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God,”³⁵ but she also understood “how blessed is the person who perseveres through trial.”³⁶ Despite them all, she still chose to consider it all as joy when she encountered various trials,³⁷ to “always be joyful,”³⁸ to “serve the LORD with gladness,”³⁹ and to “rejoice in union with the Lord always.”⁴⁰

Penny was a role model for how to love God and her fellow human being as herself. My Grandma Betty once wrote me, saying, “To love and to be loved is the greatest gift.” This was certainly true of Penny. Her heart was entirely full of love. Jesus said: “By this

³¹ Psalms 49:17–18.

³² 1 Corinthians 6:17.

³³ Galatians 2:20.

³⁴ Hebrews 5:7.

³⁵ Acts 14:22.

³⁶ James 1:12.

³⁷ Cf. James 1:2.

³⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

³⁹ Psalms 100:2.

⁴⁰ Philippians 4:4.

everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another."⁴¹ Penny exemplified that love because she didn't just "love with words and talk, but with actions and in reality."⁴² Penny came to know and love God because God first loved her.⁴³ The Apostle John says: "Love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God...because God is love."⁴⁴

On that note, I will always remember Penny for the many ways in which she consistently demonstrated her love for me and the other Hopkins grandchildren and made us all feel so special. Undoubtedly, her nephews and nieces were a special joy to her. She once told me that although she couldn't have children of her own, she considered us all to be her children. In that regard, we were her greatest legacy.

I have always loved and cherished my aunt Penny—I thought the world of her—and I'm especially grateful to have known her all my life of nearly 51 years. Like my beloved grandparents, she has been an influential part of my life, for she also contributed immensely to the happy childhood that I had and my own spiritual journey. I know that I am who I am today partly because of her positive influence. I've never known kinder souls than Penny, my uncle Dave, and my grandparents Bob and Betty Hopkins. Many times I've seen them give whatever they had at the time to help someone in need—and without hesitation or expectation to be recompensed.

I've learned many good lessons about character integrity and life in general from Penny's splendid example, especially the virtues of helping someone in need, being a good neighbor, and the precious value of family and friends. As a result, I've come to cherish my family and relationships with people because Penny taught me that these are the things in life that matter most and truly last forever. I have so many fond memories of great times spent with her through the years and funny anecdotes that will remain with me always. I will forever cherish our precious time spent together. In Psalms 55, King David says: "Sweet was our fellowship; we walked together in God's house."⁴⁵ Penny has been the best aunt you could ever imagine, and she will always be dear to my heart.

Recently, I saw a bumper sticker that said, "Live a great story." Penny lived a great story indeed. The day when she was about to pass, I imagined her spirit saying:

"The time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and...also to all who have longed for his appearing."⁴⁶

⁴¹ John 13:35.

⁴² 1 John 3:18.

⁴³ Cf. 1 John 4:19.

⁴⁴ 1 John 4:7–8.

⁴⁵ Psalms 55:15.

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

In her obituary, Penny said:

"I have prayed for years that all my family and friends may come to have a personal relationship with Jesus, my Lord, and know Him the way I do. If my life hasn't brought you to that saving knowledge, then I pray my death and your memories of me will do that. I can't wait to greet you all and party in Heaven."

Until we meet again in the kingdom, I'll miss you, Penny, and love you always. May her memory always be a blessing.