Tributes to Gladys Purkett
Day 1 of 1

Guest:  Gladys Purkett, Others
Air Date:  May 29, 2006

Bob:  Gladys Purkett was part of a memorial service not long ago. What made it unusual is that it was held in her honor.

Gladys:  I have never heard of a memorial service before the person is gone, and I just think this is the greatest thing that could happen.

Dennis:  Life is short, it's a vapor, but we, as followers of Christ, we need to use these days strategically and make sure we're being obedient.

Gladys:  And I just thank all of you so much because you really filled my life with what I needed for two years, and it's just made a big, big difference.

Dennis:  It's just good to push back and listen to the life of someone who finished well and ask ourselves the question -- am I finishing well?

Bob:  This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, May 29th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll hear a special tribute to a special friend on today's edition of our program.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. We don't usually get the opportunity to meet folks who listen to FamilyLife Today, but a few years back we met one of our listeners, and what emerged out of that meeting was a great friendship.

Dennis:  We sure did, Bob. We had a chance to meet a widow. Her name is Gladys Purkett. She, at the time, was living in Southern California, and basically what had happened was she was listening to our broadcast, just really liked to hang out with us on FamilyLife Today, and she sent us a couple of donations, and something kind of got my attention about it, and we invited her to come back here, and she came by my office, and I sat in my office -- I'll never forget this -- and I just was expressing appreciation that she was a
stakeholder in FamilyLife Today and that she not only listened and was applying in her life what we were teaching from the Scriptures, but that she wanted to participate with us as a donor.

And I said to her, I said, "Gladys, what do you do with your life?"
And she's spunky. She looked at me, and she said, "You know, I'm not doing a whole lot of anything except playing Liverpool Rummy – and I've asked Bob, and he doesn't know what Liverpool Rummy is, either – and I looked at her, and I said, "Well, Gladys, why don't you consider coming back here, volunteering, and make a difference in families both here in America and around the world?"

Well, you know what? She did. She quit playing Liverpool Rummy, said goodbye to her buddies in Southern California, and they, along with her children, really thought that she was losing her mind.

Bob: They thought she'd gone off the deep end, that's right.

Dennis: They really did, but Gladys came back here to FamilyLife, and she rolled up her sleeves. Now, I want to tell you something, she had a work ethic that was stout. In fact, she had a conversation with me on occasion or two about a person or two in our ministry that she didn't think that they were working up to her standards, and, in fact, invited Barbara and me over to her house for dinner, and I was just very impressed with how Gladys lived, and she made a ton of friends here at FamilyLife.

Bob: She worked here for a couple of years, right?

Dennis: Right, and then her family said, "You know, Gladys, we want you to be closer to us and spoil the grandkids and be a little tighter with your family." And, of course, she'd worked at FamilyLife and some of our teaching had rubbed off on her, and she thought, "You know, I hate to leave this family here, but I really am part of another family that I need to go care for," so she moved to Eastern Tennessee and moved in and began to care for her family and was doing just fine in that, and was getting ready to move to Alaska.

Bob: And that's about the time that she got the news that her heart was failing.

Dennis: That's right. She was given one to six months to live and was not doing well at all, in fact, had some terrible days when they wondered if she was going to live throughout the day, and it wasn't long after that that I called Gladys, and this kind of gets me because her three children contacted us and said, "We'd like her
memorial service to be at FamilyLife." And they said, "You know, we were so impressed at the number of friends that she made there in your ministry, and the heart of people for her that when she moves on and gets her graduation papers, we want to have her memorial service here at the ministry."

When I heard that, it really got me, because – well, it just meant a great deal. So I walked out of the office moments after I'd heard this, and I ran into you, Bob, and you said, at that point …

Bob: Well, I reflected back on what you've written about in your book, "The Best Gift You Can Give Your Parents," the whole concept of speaking words of honor, and you've always said, "Why do we wait for the eulogy to offer up those words of honor? We ought to do it while people are still here." I said, "We ought to have Gladys' memorial service before she passes. We'll get her on the phone and let her participate and hear what people would say at her memorial service.

Dennis: Well, and there was something about what you said that resonated because the next day, as I recall, we were going to have staff meeting, and so I scrambled some people, and I said, "Let's see if we could get Gladys on the phone, and let's have a living memorial service. Why say it about her when she's gone and can't hear it?"

And so I surprised the staff, as we were all gathered together, as we usually do. More than 400 of us were gathered together for our staff meeting, and I reminded them of Gladys' story a bit, and then we got Gladys on the phone, and, well, we thought it was so special and so powerful we wanted you, as a listener, to hear it.

[Previously taped]

Dennis: So, Gladys, are you on the phone?

Gladys: Yes, I am, I most certainly am.

[applause]

Dennis: I'm going to start us out, and we're just going to have an open mike here, that as I was thinking about you, Gladys, your heart for families – just that you, as a radio listener, would care about somebody's family other than your own and would make a gift to FamilyLife. That's pretty humbling, and I want to thank you for that.
Gladys: That was my joy in giving, and it's been – I had a rough week last week trying to let go of things and let others do for me. It is one of the hardest things I've had to overcome.

I need to tell you about the new name I got, because I have been a real cantankerous, uncooperative person this last week. I just cannot – it is so hard after 80 years of doing for others to, all of a sudden, have to stop, cut it off, and have somebody do everything for me. And it's just been the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. And my daughter gave me a new name. There was a lady came over to see me, and she kept telling me how precious I was – it just kind of made me smile. And then my daughters started calling me "Precious," and then one day when I was complaining about something that I didn't want them to have to do, we read a devotional that a pastor who had a donkey that was a cantankerous critter, and so they named him "Prune." So she said, "Okay, Precious Prune, that's you." So that's my new name.

[laughter]

Dennis: Well, you know what? You're headed to a place where you're going to get a new name, too, and you won't be fighting the one who gives you the new name.

Gladys: No, I know. That's going to be wonderful. I'm looking forward to it. Anytime – I'm ready. I told the Lord, I said, "The sooner the better."

Dennis: Gladys, here is someone – I'm going to ask each person as they come forward to identify themselves, because there's somebody here that wants to say something to you.

Gladys: Okay.

Heather: Gladys, it's Heather.

Gladys: Oh, hi, Heather.

Heather: I just wanted to tell you how much I love you – I know you know that – and you're leaving a wonderful legacy for your family, and it was fun to meet your granddaughter and to see you two interact and to put the little cloth curlers in her hair, and all of our fun shopping days together. Those are priceless memories to me. So I'm praying for you and love you a lot.

Gladys: Oh, you've been a special blessing to me, thank you, Heather.
Mary: Hey, Gladys, this is Mary. I just really appreciate what you've done for the ministry and others through the blood drive. You know I didn't want to give [laughter]. Every time I give blood now I think of you and just the determined person you are, and I really think God may allow me to be giving the gift of life, and I think He's used you to give the gift of life spiritually to people, and we love you, and you've got a special place here.

Gladys: Well, thank you so much.

Abe: Hey, Gladys, this is Abe.

Gladys: Hi, Abe.

Abe: Thank you for having us over so many times and for just being like a mother, a grandmother and coming over and letting our dogs get all over you and for teaching me Liverpool Rummy.

Gladys: Yeah, tell Dennis I never played bridge in my life.

[laughter]

Abe: Yeah, that's not your game.

Gladys: No, that's not my game.

Abe: No, but don't ever try to play Gladys in Liverpool Rummy. She can still beat me. So, anyway …

Gladys: Thank you so much for coming to see me, making a special trip here. That meant an awful lot to me.

Abe: Well, you know, we may come that way again, okay?

Gladys: Good.

Abe: Love ya.

Ronny: Hey, Gladys, it's Ronny Gerard.

Gladys: Oh, Ronny, hi. I've thought about you so much and wondered if you were still around and what was going on.

Ronny: Yeah, they let me stay. I'm excited.

[laughter]
Gladys, you are an amazing woman. One of the things I love most about you is your love for your own family and just your consistent prayers for your children and your grandchildren and the legacy that you're leaving and the love that you have shared with us and just to be able to see your heart for your family – it's been a real treasure – just your graciousness and your generosity there, and the ability to speak the truth in love. I'll always remember, I was at the food cube, and you said, "Are you over here again?" Well, I think it's about time for me to stop visiting that food cube again, Gladys, so in honor of you this week, I'll try to do that, all right?

Gladys: I wish I was there to bring the food.

Ronny: I love you, Gladys.

Gladys: Thank you so much, God bless you.

Rob: Gladys, hello, this is Rob Smith.

Gladys: Oh, Rob, hi.

Rob: I wanted to just tell you just what a woman of courage you have been for me. You just have so much courage, and I know that courage is grounded in your walk with the Lord. So I thank you for that picture, and I also wanted to just talk to you about that persistence and stubbornness. Theresa used to say going to the grocery store with you was always a treat because you didn't just go to one grocery store. If lettuce was 2 cents cheaper across town, she had to take you down there.

Gladys: Yeah, I got a lot of flak on that.

Rob: So we miss you, and we love you, Gladys.

Gladys: Well, thank you so much, Rob, I appreciate you guys. You're all just so special. I just thank you. You've been a special blessing to me, for sure.

Kevin: Hi, Gladys, it's Kevin Kelly.

Gladys: Hi, Kevin.

Kevin: How are you?

Gladys: Hey, buddy.
Kevin: Happy Valentine's Day, we love you.

Gladys: Well, thank you. This is really a different Valentine's Day than I ever had.

Kevin: You wouldn't believe the line it took me for me to get up here today. Hey, I just wanted to thank you for being a giver and not a taker all the way to the end of your life, and you're still giving, and it's a testimony as so many people come up here and talk about what you mean to them. You mean so much to us and our family, and I think back a couple of years ago, and you know how hard it is for me when all the ladies go off and have a retreat, and I've got the six kids at home, and you made that wonderful meal for us that time, and our kids still talk about it—"Can't Miss Gladys make us another meal?" So I just appreciate you so much and from all the Kellys and from everybody here, we just love you so much.

Gladys: Love you, too.

Mark: Hello, Gladys, this is Mark Trover [sp]. And I was listening to Dennis give a message before this memorial service, and he was talking about love, and I remembered a particular incident. Remember, you were having a real difficult time loving somebody…

Gladys: Yes.

Mark: And we talked about that quite a bit. The thing that struck me most was that by the end of that evening, you had a strong vision not just for how can I manage and control this person who is driving me nuts, you had moved from that to "How can I love this person?" And it was incredible and wonderful to hear in the days and weeks that followed how God was using that in your life and in that other person's. And I just wanted to tell you that the doctors might think your heart's unhealthy, but one of the healthiest signs of a heart is teachability, and you're not old in heart, and you've got a healthy heart, and we really love you for your heart. Gladys, God bless you.

Gladys: Thank you so much.

Dennis: Gladys, this is Dennis, and before I get the last word here, I wondered if there would be something you'd like to say to our team.

Gladys: Well, there's no way I can express— I am so full—I think this is just the most wonderful thing that anybody has ever done. I have never
heard of a memorial service before the person is gone, and I just think this is the greatest thing that could happen, and I just thank all of you so much because you really filled my life with what I needed for two years, and it's just been – it's made a big, big difference.

Dennis: As everybody was talking about you, I just was thinking of Proverbs 31, the last part of the chapter, where it says, "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also he praises her. Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates."

Heavenly Father, we join together of one accord, thanking you for our sister in Christ, Gladys. Thank You for her infectious smile, and her tenacious spirit her infectious love for people and for You. Thank you, Father, for just the brief times we have known her and been with her here in the days past and for the privilege of allowing our paths, Father, to cross. Indeed, she has shown many here, many of us how to finish well, and how to live out her days before You. And now, Father, we commend her to You to attend to her health. Allow her joy in these days that You have given her and on her coronation day, we pray that You, indeed, will be honored by her life. We love her, and we love You. In Christ's name, amen.

Gladys: Amen. Thank you, Dennis.

Dennis: Thank you, Gladys, we love you.

Gladys: God bless you and your work and thank you so much for this. I'm going to miss you, but I'll see you in glory.

[applause]

[musical transition]

Bob: We've been listening to a living memorial service for our friend, Gladys Purkett, and I remember how many of the staff came up in the days following that staff meeting, and it was enriching for us, as a staff, to have the chance to speak words of honor like that.
Dennis: It really was. You know, it's good to go to a funeral. That sounds a little strange, maybe, to make that comment, but Ecclesiastes 7 talks about the mind of the wise is in the house of mourning. It talks about the living taking it to heart, and when you go to the end of the matter, death, and you start thinking about how life on this planet ends but how, if you Jesus Christ personally, if you've placed your faith in Him as your Lord and Master, death is but a doorway to a face-to-face greeting with Him, and it's a great reminder, Bob, just to have something occur like that memorial service.

But, you know, a second thing I want to just apply out of this that I got, because people were coming up to me in the days that followed, as you said, and they were going, "You know, it was so good. It was just so good to honor somebody while they're alive – to say it to them while they're still kickin'."

And, you know, I wonder if there's a listener right now who has something they need to say, whether it's to your spouse, to your parents, to a child, just honor them today. It was fun to honor Gladys.

You know, life is short, it's a vapor, but we, as followers of Christ, we need to use these days strategically and make sure we're being obedient. It's just good to push back and listen to the life of someone who finished well and ask ourselves the question – am I finishing well? Am I going to end up at the same finish line?

Bob: You have encouraged all of us for years to speak words of honor to our parents, particularly, but to others while we still have that opportunity rather than waiting for their memorial service to do it now. You wrote a book a number of years ago called "The Best Gift You Can Ever Give Your Parents," and it's a book that encourages us to honor our parents by writing a tribute of honor, something that we can read to them, we can present to them, have it framed, and have it where they can keep it in their home. And I can imagine that some of our listeners today who heard how Gladys responded to those words of encouragement she received from our staff – they may be moved to step out and write something for their parents.

We'd love to send you a copy of the book, "The Best Gift You Could Ever Give Your Parents." Go to our website, FamilyLife.com. In the middle of the screen you'll see a button that says "Go," and if you click on that button, it will take you right to a page where you can get more information on the book, "The Best Gift You Can Ever Give Your Parents," and particularly if someone is about to
celebrate a significant anniversary or birthday, or if you just want to be ready with something very special this year at Christmas, contact us and get a copy of this book, "The Best Gift You Can Ever Give Your Parents." Again, the website is FamilyLife.com. You can order online, if you'd like, or you can call 1-800-FLTODAY. That's 1-800-358-6329, and someone on our team can let you know how you can get a copy of this book sent to you.

Well, of course, today is Memorial Day here in the United States. It's a holiday for us, and that means that our offices are closed, and I don't have any fresh information about the matching gift opportunity that we've been talking about this month, but we just wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you to those of you who have contributed. Thanks for your support of FamilyLife Today and for helping us begin the summer strong. We appreciate your partnership with us, and we appreciate you listening to FamilyLife Today. Keep us in your prayers, if you will.

Well, tomorrow Dr. Ron Jenson is going to be joining us, and we're going to talk about husbands and dads and men, in general, stepping up and taking the lead. He has some great thoughts for us on men and leadership, and I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

[musical transition]

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