

## **A Tribute to Joe Griswold: A Great Fisherman... A Greater Man...**

A tribute to Joe Griswold, ... a great fisherman, and a greater man. "Fish on, fish on!" Joe yelled, using one of his favorite fishing expressions, I reached down to get the rod and Joe said, "Wait! Not yet!" That big smile ran across his face, "Wait til we get doubles!" Earlier that morning I had been fishing and as usual I caught nothing, not even a bite. Swallowing my pride I got on the noon radio and said, "Are there any Striper King Members fishing today?" Little did I know that Joe Griswold, the 1982 world champion would answer me with, "this is Joe, Are you on any fish?" I didn't want to tell him I had never been on any fish in my entire life. I'd caught a few, but never "on fish" as he described it. I replied sheepishly, no and added not yet, to boost my credentials. Come to the dam, Joe said. When I arrived he told me to pull my boat on the shore and get in his boat. I had first met Joe at the Striper King meeting several weeks earlier. I had heard many wonderful stories all good of course about his fishing expertise. So, I hesitated to take him up on his offer.

As I climbed into his boat for the first time, I had no idea that my fishing luck and my life was about to change. I was anxiously waiting to pull in this fish and now he wanted me to wait. I thought, "this could take hours!" As soon as these thoughts passed through my mind, the other rod bent back with a fish. Joe sprang from his seat, grabbed the other rod, turned and said, "now you can wind her in!" During the next 45 minutes, Joe gave me the best fishing lesson I've ever had. We caught so many fish my arms ached for relief. That was the first lesson Joe would give me about fishing, but over the next few years of our friendship, he would teach me more about life.

Joe Griswold was a great fisherman, but he was a greater man! He has given me and many others a wonderful example to follow. He has helped many people with his kindness and generosity. He was so unselfish, always thinking of others. Sometimes I would kid Joe and say "Joe you need to change your name to Mr. Acts of Kindness". He was always doing things for others.

One hot summer day we were sitting on his porch talking and suddenly he got up and ran into the house and got 3 cold drinks and gave them to the 3 sanitation workers cleaning the streets in his neighborhood. I'm sorry to say I didn't even notice them, but Joe did! Joe also noticed the family that needed groceries, the man who needed a warm coat, a diligent worker struggling to make ends meet, the guy on the lake whose motor broke and needed to be towed miles away from a landing.

Joe's efforts may have gone unnoticed by man, but not by God. Jesus Christ said in Matt. 11:42 "And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will be rewarded." Randy Alcorn in his book, in his book The Treasure Principle, states "the treasures we collect on earth will be left behind when we leave, the treasures we collect in heaven will be waiting for us when we arrive. You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. When Joe entered the gates of heaven on Sunday he had

many treasures and rewards waiting on him for all the many wonderful and gracious deeds he did for others. Joe, being the humble man he was, use to tell me, “when I get to heaven, I’ll be glad to just sweep the streets and leave the other higher positions to the Billy Graham’s of the world.” Joe you will be the best street sweeper in heaven.

Joe was a wise counselor and had 35 years experience working with others at Homelite and John Deere. People who have worked with Joe always said he was the best supervisor they ever had because he treated them with dignity and respect. He would never ask them to do a job he wouldn’t do himself. As deadlines approached, Joe would be found working alongside his employees helping them get the job done in a timely manner. He was always willing and eager to help one of his fellow employees with everything from financial and family problems to fixing a flat tire in a parking lot. Joe was always there for them. He was loved and respected by the people with whom he worked. Joe is loved and respected by all of us here today. Will Rogers said “I never met a man I didn’t like.” Joe Griswold could have said the same thing. Joe loved people and people loved Joe. Several of us were sitting around in Joe’s trailer at the lake after a day of fishing and I asked Joe, if he had any advice for life. He thought for a second and said “Enjoy life and love others.” Jesus also tells us the same thing in John 15:12, “I command you to love each other in the same way I love you!”

As Joe approached the final few weeks of his life he never gave up. He kept battling to the end. Several months ago I told him, I had read a verse of scripture that reminded me so much of him and I wanted to share it with him. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed but we don’t give up and quit. We are hunted down but God never abandons us. We get knocked down but we get up again and keep going (2 COR 4:8-9). Joe not only knew scripture, he lived it. He never gave up. Joe taught us; not only, *how to live* but *how to die*.

Joe was a great story teller, and no better place to tell a fishing story than Waldrop’s Restaurant located on the shores of Lake Hartwell. A place where time stands still, a place that takes you back to the 1960’s when Lake Hartwell was built, a place where everybody is treated as family. All the local fisherman would gather together eat and tell fishing lies – I mean stories. More fish were caught around that table than in all the lakes of S.C. combined. Joe could recall every detail of a fish story. The time, place, temperature, depth, color, contours, etc. He would tell each one as if he would be drawn back into time, in the very same day it happened. His voice would quiver with excitement and enthusiasm as he told each story. Every story left you with two impressions. The first “I gotta go fishing right now” and the second “this man loves to fish”. Everyday he spent outdoors was a worship experience to Joe. He was so thankful for every sunrise and sunset. The sight of diving seagulls on a school of fish, Canadian geese flying in their perfect V formation, and the sound of loons echoing their calls across the water.

Joe has taught me by his example to be courageous and strong in facing life’s trials and difficulties. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer he lived life to the fullest, cherishing each day the good Lord had given him and encouraging others to do the same.

One of Joe's favorite fishing expressions was "you've got to have a ticket, without a ticket; you can't ride the bus." A few months ago after losing his oldest son Joey and continuing to battle cancer himself, I asked Joe, "Joe how can you be so strong?" Joe smiled and said, because I got a ticket and I know where I'm going. Joe had the ticket all right, a one-way ticket to heaven. Joe's faith in Jesus Christ never wavered. As a young man from Rutherfordton, NC, he attended a church his family helped build. He and Pat had their first date in this church. Joe told me he was the song leader. I said, Joe I didn't know you could sing. He said, I couldn't but I was the song leader. It was in this church that Joe asked Jesus into his heart. He had a personal relationship with the savior and his life exhibited all the fruits of the spirit that we are promised in GAL 5:22, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Joe taught me and others how God can be glorified in all situations. He was quick to give the good Lord all the credit, thanking him for everything he had given him and for being with him during difficult times. He reminded me that this life is short but there is a better life awaiting in heaven and we get to fish with the greatest fisherman who ever walked the face of this earth, Jesus Christ.

Joe served his country as a marine stationed in Lebanon for two years. He was proud to be a marine. Joe Griswold was a yes sir, no sir, salute the flag, believe in God; kind of man. If Joe ever boasted about anything it was his family. He loved his family so much. He was proud of all of you and your accomplishments in life. He talked about how much you meant to him and how blessed he was to have your support. You have been there when he needed you. You were there to help him, encourage him and love him.

Joe felt loved by his family. His cup runneth over with love from his family. Someone said, "Behind every great man is a great woman." Pat, he would talk about you and how fortunate he was to have a wife like you. You have been faithful loving wife to him for 35 years. Joe was indeed a blessed man to have you and his entire family.

On behalf of everyone here today we want to say thank you for sharing Joe with us and our prayers will be with you. A few weeks ago, I shared this quote with Joe from an unknown author, "Some people come into our lives and go too quickly. Some stay and make footprints on our hearts and we are never, never the same. I told Joe he had made footprints on my heart and the hearts of many others here today and we will never, never be the same. I'm so glad God allowed our paths to cross. I was blessed to have a friend like Joe. He would be quick to tell us not to fret or be sad, he's at home, his heavenly home. He would tell us to go and do the things we enjoy doing, to also love others along the way. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, one day when we draw our last breath on this earth we will wake up in the presence of God Almighty. We will bow down in worship before a Holy God surrounded by his radiance and glory. In the background we will hear laughter and joy. If we listen very carefully, we just might hear a faint voice saying "fish on, fish on."