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He Did It God's Way

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Keith Wiginton today



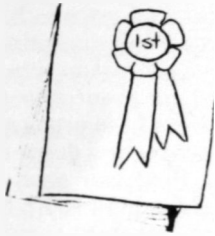
Linda Fickling
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He Did It God's Way

ESSAY GRAND PRIZE WINNER



He Did It God's Way

— by Patsy Evans

"As Lukie and Sara were driving down the highway with what seemed like acres between them in the front seat of their car, a late-modeled sports job zoomed past them bearing two passengers sitting so close together that it looked as if there was only one person in the car.

"As the sportscar faded into the distance, Sara turned to Lukie and said, 'Lukie, we used to be like that.'

"And Lukie, both hands planted firmly on the steering wheel, slowly replied, 'Sara, I ain't moved.' "

Keith Wiginton's humorous anecdote was not told to entertain his congregation, but to illustrate a principle that he believes to be crucial to the lives of all Christians: "If you aren't as close to God as you used to be, make sure you know who has moved." is the mind piercing tag line.

Keith, the 46-year-old pastor of the First Baptist Church of Altus, Oklahoma, is the newly elected president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. The job, which is coupled with the chairmanship of the convention's Executive Board, is a non-salaried position of strategic importance to the Southern Baptist churches of Oklahoma. In our success-oriented society, this prestigious office might be considered a boon to his ministry and a gateway to greater "professional" opportunities. But Keith has some definite ideas on the subject of success and what constitutes a successful life. Succinctly stated, discovering and doing the will of God for one's life is the epitome of success.

In applying this unique success principle to his own life, Keith has found that keeping his life open to God's leadership is the imperative out of which success has grown. As he has allowed God to "call the plays" in his life, he has simply walked through the doors of opportunity that God has provided. Keith's ministry was no less successful when he pastored the tiny Mt. Tepee Baptist Church near Hobart over twenty years ago than it is today because success is dependent not on the greatness of the task, but the faithfulness of the servant. All of this seemingly unconventional line of thinking can best be understood by looking back a few years in the life of this man whose influence is felt in secular as well as religious circles around the state of Oklahoma.

Friendship School and Friendship Baptist Church near Altus, along with his home and family, created the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual atmosphere out of which Keith Edwin Wiginton's skills, attitudes, and beliefs were nurtured. His three brothers, who preceded him through the ranks of athletic achievement, bore strong influence in his life. His family was and is a close-knit one, and during his high-school years, he was always identified as one of the Wiginton boys — always as **somebody's** brother; but by the time he graduated from high school, Keith Wiginton was known for himself — for his athletic ability and achievement.

In 1954, with teaching and coaching as his professional

goal, Keith entered what was known at that time as Southwestern State College. He rapidly gained the respect and acclaim of coaches, teammates, and fans, not only because of his outstanding athletic talents but also because of his team spirit and leadership ability. He was a four-year starter on both the basketball and baseball teams and was captain of the baseball team his junior year and of the basketball and baseball teams his senior year. Keith not only excelled in athletics but was an honor student as well. He was president of his class during his sophomore, junior, and senior years, and received the Best Male Citizen award his senior year.

Although his goals were already established, Keith began during his senior year to feel an unusual kind of awakening to his responsibilities as a Christian. His involvement in the Baptist Student Union had aroused in him a new spiritual awareness and insight into himself and the world around him. With the prayerful support of Jim Morrison, B.S.U. president, and Doug Manning, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Weatherford, Oklahoma, Keith began to sense that God had a special plan for his life. His understanding of all that this plan involved did not come immediately. He tried to convince himself that he could be a powerful Christian influence in the lives of the young people whom he taught and coached. He reasoned that God would surely not allow him to come this far in his college program only to change his career plans when he was almost ready to graduate. He pondered the invitation that had been extended to him to remain at Southwestern as a part of the coaching staff while working on a master's degree. But the more he tried to impose his own plans upon God's plans, the more frustrated he became; it was like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Finally, on a Sunday evening in March of 1958, Doug Manning brought a message from Joshua 3:5, "... Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." Keith felt that God was speaking to him in unmistakable terms, and he went forward during the invitation acknowledging that God had called him to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and that he was committing himself to obey that calling.

Once the decision was made, Keith never questioned the rightness of it, but there were things he didn't understand at the time about God's dealings with him. It seemed that he had wasted his senior year of college. He had to go back to Southwestern for a fifth year in order to meet the liberal arts requirements for acceptance to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and he was impatient with this delay in beginning his seminary training. He had majored in Math and minored in Physical Education, and he wondered why the omniscient God had permitted him to spend four years studying things that he would probably never use to any great extent in the special ministry to which he was called.

Despite his lack of understanding, he trusted the wisdom of God. As the months and years went by, he realized more and more how vital that fifth year at Southwestern State was to his life and ministry. Most important, it was during that year that he met Linda Graybill from Leedey, who later became his wife. If he didn't know then, he knows now that she was God's special choice for his lifelong companion. This fifth year was also a period of spiritual growth and insight that came about largely because of his close association with his pastor and friend, Doug Manning. He learned things about preaching, pastoring, and ministering that could not be learned in a classroom. Doug not only tutored him in the study of the Bible but also channeled speaking oppor-

tunities his way. By the time he entered seminary, he had gained valuable experience in preparing and delivering sermons. To his surprise, the study of math also proved to be a distinct asset to his Bible study and sermon preparation because it had taught him to think analytically, and his involvement in athletics had shown him the importance of team work and had brought a discipline to his life that has been invaluable in helping him establish good work habits. The things he had once considered to be obstacles to progress toward his ministry were recognized as instruments that God had used to hone, shape, and give direction to the work of His young servant.

In 1965, after several months of chronic weakness and fatigue, Keith was diagnosed as being diabetic. Living with a condition that most people consider to be inconvenient, to say the least, he has discovered yet another **blessing** from God — a new kind of self-discipline. Staying on a restrictive diet is not an easy matter when dinner meetings and out-of-town travel are a routine part of the schedule, but diet is only one facet of the problem. Sufficient rest, moderate physical activity, and doses of insulin are also daily requirements. How can such a limiting lifestyle possibly be a blessing? Couldn't Keith be a happier, more productive, person if the constant awareness of physical restriction were not present? Maybe. But Keith has learned something very significant — that tragedy can often be turned into triumph, and disaster may result in the dynamic that urges one on to greater accomplishments than would have otherwise been undertaken. Keith likes to apply to himself a concept that he once heard expressed by someone else — that success has not come **in spite of** his handicap but **because of** his handicap.

Most of Keith's minstry has been in Oklahoma, with only one pastorate outside the state in Carlsbad, New Mexico. For the past eleven years, he has had the unique privilege of pastoring in his home town among relatives and friends who have known him since his childhood. His mother, two brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews are members of his congregation. Jesus said that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country, but Keith seems to have overcome that obstacle; his ministry in Altus has been perhaps the most satisfying and the most fruitful of all of his places of services.

In his Baccalaureate address to the 1982 graduating class of Altus High School, Keith set forth something of his philosophy of life. With Romans 12:1-2 as his Bible text, he pointed out that God wants his followers to use their lives to do things that they are equipped to do, things that they enjoy doing, and things that have eternal value. He stressed that God does not call upon people to "sacrifice" themselves to do tasks for which they are not equipped and that they cannot enjoy. Adapting the title of a popular song, "I Did It My Way," Keith entitled his message, "I Did It God's Way."

Keith finds the scriptural passages in which the Christian life is likened to an athletic event especially meaningful. In one such passage, II Timothy 2:5, Paul states that "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (RSV). Just as a coach has a game plan for every team member, God has a game plan for the life of every person; but many players in the game of life are trying to make up their own rules, and God cannot crown or reward those who do not play according to the rules. Playing by the rules means doing it God's way. Success is discovering and doing the will of God for one's life. That is doing it God's way.