

Following Red: Keys to a child's heart

by [Gordon Atkinson](#) in the [December 14, 2004](#) issue

I got the news that Red Davis had died in his hometown of Marshall, Texas. I cried when I heard it, though I only met him a couple of times.

“Who is Red Davis?” I can hear you saying.

Well, I’ll tell you.

Red Davis was nobody special in this world, or he was a great saint. I guess it all depends on how you look at things, but I’ll tell you something true and wonderful: “nobody special” and “great saint” go together a lot more often than some people think.

Twenty-five years ago Red Davis was the CEO of a big company in East Texas between Longview and Marshall. This company provides so many jobs for local people that it is somewhat famous in those parts.

Some would say the crowning achievement of Red’s life was attaining a high position in such an important company. I wouldn’t know. I don’t know much about the company, and I don’t know anything about how Red managed to become CEO.

I only know what Red did after he retired. And I know about that because my dad was the pastor of his church.

Red retired in the late ’70s, before my dad became the pastor of First Baptist Church of Marshall, Texas. After Red got his gold watch and had his retirement party, he went to the man who was the pastor at that time and told him he would like to find a way to serve the Lord. The pastor assumed that Red would chair a critical financial committee for the church, or be involved in some other important and public way. He was surprised when Red said that the Sunday school class for three- and four-year-olds needed a teacher and that he would like the job.

And so it came to pass that the CEO of the most important company in the county showed up the next Sunday morning to sit on the floor and tell Bible stories to little

children. Red didn't know much about teaching children in the beginning, but he was warm, kind and willing. And he knew that patience and hugs are the keys to a child's heart.

My dad tells me that Red used to call all the kids in his class every Saturday night just to ask how their week had gone. He always ended the conversation by telling them he looked forward to seeing them on Sunday morning. Having a kid in Red's class became something of a rite of passage for young families at First Baptist. If you had a child in his class, you knew you had to be there every Sunday, because none of Red's kids ever wanted to miss church.

It wasn't long before groups of little children were seen following Red around the church wherever he went. He never minded the attention or the trouble. Some of them were in his class. Others were in classes from years back. People started referring to them as "Red's army."

Five years became ten, and ten became 25. Red slowed down a bit, but he was there every Sunday for a quarter of a century. Almost everyone in the church had a child or a grandchild who had been in Red's class.

I hear that if Red ever stood up to speak in a church business meeting, a respectful and reverent hush would fall over the congregation. People respected Red not because he was a successful businessman, but because he was Red Davis the gentle Sunday school teacher and passionate lover of children.

In August, Red Davis died quietly in the Marshall hospital. I don't suppose the ripples of grief will travel much farther than Longview and Marshall. But that wouldn't matter to Red. He was a man who was pleased to wait upon the table of his own humble calling until the day when the Lord called him to take his place at the Big Banquet in the sky.

My father did the funeral. At some point in the service he asked everyone who was ever in Red's Sunday school class or ever had a child or relative in his class to stand. Very few people remained in their seats.

Dad told the story about the woman who was in the local grocery store with her small child. The little boy said, "Mama, I just saw God." The woman looked up and the child was pointing at Red Davis. He was a boy in Red's class. When he tried to wrap his little mind around the very big idea of God, the best he could do was think

of Red.

What else do you need to know about Red Davis? What other eulogy do you need to hear?