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Title: 'Order My Steps'; Second-Generation Pastors Share How Their Fathers Helped To Lead Them To Their Calling In The Ministry

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For Ellington and Tecoy Porter, every Sunday was "Take Your Son To Work Day," and they watched their father, the late Rev. Robert Porter, preach the gospel, lift the souls of the faithful and tend to the spiritually ailing.

They watched and learned. They listened to how his voice resonated throughout the sanctuary. They witnessed him listen to parishioners and respond with patience instead of judgement. They saw him study the Bible, returning to it when he, himself, needed direction.

So when they too were called to the ministry, they were ready.

"The main thing that I took from my father's pastoring and leadership style was the principle of really loving the people you serve," Tecoy Porter said. "I believe that this principle has been one of the primary reasons for our success today."

Today, the "Porter Brothers" lead Genesis Missionary Baptist Church in South Sacramento. Their father and mother, Hazel Porter, founded the church in 1990. Rev. Porter died in 1999 at the age of 54, Mother Hazel Porter succumbed to a battle with breast cancer in March; she was 58.

Both brothers were ordained by their father.

"I believe that my father met both of our decisions to follow him in ministry with excitement and some relief knowing that ministry would continue in our family," Rev. Tecoy Porter said.

When the elder Porter took ill, he named his sons co-pastors of Genesis.

"To be able to continue the legacy of my father and mother at Genesis definitely means a whole lot to me," Rev. Porter said. "It is especially a humbling experience to be able to take up this mantle at the very church that my father founded. It is truly a joy in being able to serve God and the city in this capacity," he shared.

While Porter always knew he wanted to be a minister, Asbury P. Jones, Jr. was the first one to tell people it was the last thing he planned on doing.

Jones is the son of the late A. Paul Jones, Sr., former pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church in Oak Park. The younger Jones planned on studying law and set his sights on legal briefs, not Bible scriptures.

It wasn't until five years after his father's 1984 death that he received "the call."

"He never would have guessed that this is what I chose. I didn't express an interest in it. I was the first one to proclaim 'Oh I'd never do that.'"

Jones is executive director of Nehemiah Urban Ministry Initiatives, an arm of the Nehemiah Corporation of America, which trains and sends missionaries on assignments across the country.

"My calling is to be a full-time pastor. God has me in a holding pattern," he shared.

While Jones isn't the pastor of a church, he does get the chance to preach as a member of the Faith Fellowship Community Church.

"My heart yearns and burns to preach the word of the Lord," he said.

Jones enjoys being the namesake of a local pastor who people still remember and hold in esteem.

"It's a treat to live in the city where he was respected and honored," he shared.

Jones doesn't consider being a member of the clergy so much as following in his father's footsteps, but finding his own relationship with God.

"I don't want people to think 'Oh, the Jones family, this is what they do.'"

Jones admits that being a PK, or preacher's kid, did give him a bit of insight into the role.

"You probably know church life a bit more than a person in the pew," he said.

With a behind the scenes view of the pulpit, the younger Jones says he learned to be less judgmental and how to relate to different people.

"He never preached over the heads of people. He wasn't deep unnecessarily. He talked right to them, he tried to make them think."

Having two sons follow him into the ministry has brought joy to Bishop Yardley Griffin, Sr. His son Isaac Griffin is attending a seminary in Southern California and often comes home to Greater Faith Church, where his father is senior pastor. Another son, Yardley Griffin, Jr. preaches and leads the choir, Voices of Faith. Griffin, Jr. is also expected to be named the church's Leader of Praise and Worship.

"He's becoming one of the most dynamic pulpiteers of his age," he said of his namesake.

Because of his busy schedule, Bishop Griffin sometimes sends his son Yardley, Jr. to serve in his stead for out-of-town preaching assignments.

"After that, they want him, not me."

His ego isn't bruised, he says.

"It was the same way after I preached for my father."

Bishop Griffin's father, Rev. James D. Griffin, founded Greater Faith in 1963. Bishop Griffin has led the church since 1977.

The preaching gene runs strong in their family, as a great grandfather Hezekiah Griffin, Sr. was known as Sin Killin' Griffin and traveled throughout the South, preaching the Gospel at revivals.

"I really believe in generational anointings. I think it's remarkable what the Porter brothers have done at Genesis," he shared. While he's happy to have sons that wanted to be ministers, it wasn't something the Bishop forced on them, or had an opinion about one way or the other.

"I wanted them to get a good education and go to a four-year college," he said of his dreams for them and his eight other children.

Being their father, he naturally wanted to see his sons succeed and "represent" the family name. He says, however, that he's had to learn to allow them on their own, to find who they are as men, and who they are as men of God.

"I told them, number one, that a call to preach is a call to prepare and the call to lead is a call to follow," he shared.

Sylvester "Ronnie" Howard says his father, Rev. Sylvester Howard, pastor of Trinity Missionary Baptist Church saw the change that the decision to become a pastor had on him even before he told him of it.

"He woke me up," said the younger Howard.

At 46, Ronnie Howard has been preaching for nearly 19 years.

His father still keeps a watchful eye on him, as he expects him to take over the church when the "Lord says enough."

"He critiques me, but after (I've preached) he's the one standing there with the most excitement," Ronnie said.

As assistant pastor, he preaches on the third and fifth Sundays.

"He's fiery," says the elder Howard of his son. "He's doing a great job.

"He's harder on me than the rest," Ronnie Howard says, "but I think he's proud to say 'that's my son.'"

He'd be grateful, he adds, to be "part of the man his father is."

"He's committed to what he does. I've taken that from watching him. But the main lesson he taught me is to do the right thing. He's always said 'in order to lead folks, you've got to lead them right.'"

Porter said his father gave him similar advice.

"Out of the many, many lessons that my dad taught me about being a man of God, the one that has most influenced me is the lesson of keeping my integrity. This has been the most valuable lesson because of the critical need for God's representation to be trustworthy. As long as I am true to God and myself, then I know that I am doing the will of God," he shared.

Both Porter brothers have been active in the church practically since birth.

"Unlike most PKs that I knew, I enjoyed growing up as a preacher's kid," Rev. Porter said.

"Of course there were hard times having to adjust to always being in the spotlight during the course of growing up. Couldn't get away with too much, because somebody always knew that I was Porter's kid. But I enjoyed it because by being a PK I was exposed to so much at a young age, which ultimately prepared me for what I am today. I just pray that I will be able to affect my children in the same manner as my father did me," he continued.

Ronnie Howard has three daughters of his own. The jury's still out on whether or not he'd encourage his girls to follow him into the ministry.

"I'll have to pray on that," he said smilingly.

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