

# DON POLING

Member since 2014

## Background

### Birth Date:

January 15, 1937

### Place of Birth:

South Fork, PA

### Military Service:

Cold War (4th Armored Division)

## Did You Know?

Don was baptized by his great-uncle, Charlie, who was an pastor of a church in Oregon.

Don's great, great grandfather helped to build cottages at the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. When the dam maintained by this organization broke on May 31, 1889, the pent up water rushed down the valley into the town of Johnstown, PA. The flood resulted in the death of 2,208 people and \$17 million worth of property damage. Don's great, great grandfather was actually at the fishing and hunting club the morning of the dam's collapse.

## Favorite Hymns:

Amazing Grace  
It Is Well



Don has quite a life story, one that I have no hope of capturing on a front and back piece of paper. But if I were to boil down all that he shared into a summary statement it would be this: Having experienced God's love and grace in his own life, Don has spent a lifetime passing this blessing on to those around him.

Don has had a relationship with God from a very young age. His mother was the organist for the South Forks Methodist Church, which was located only a block from the duplex that Don's family shared with his grandmother. Throughout his childhood, the family moved closer to the church, first to an apartment half a block away and then into the home right next door. As a teenager, Don remembers being very involved in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and even teaching a Sunday School class for younger kids.

But Don says that despite these early experiences of faith, he didn't really understand grace until he was in his forties. His wife, Susan, was staying at home with their four children, and Don was trying to juggle the financial responsibilities of his family. He remembers being overwhelmed, reaching a point where he knew he couldn't handle things on his own anymore, and calling out to God in desperation. The day he spoke the words, "Lord, I can't handle all of this by myself. I need your help. You have to come to my side," he felt God's presence right beside him. He says he had finally reached the point where he let go, and let God. Soon Don got involved with a supportive group of men at his church. He says, "They helped me to see I can't do it all by myself. Jesus

sent everyone out in two's. That way we can bolster each other up when we're down." Together, these men became an amazing team. The group included two carpenters, two plumbers, a code inspector, and a large number of reasonably handy men. Don refers to himself as the group's professional painter, since he didn't have any other specific skills, and he jokes about the lone lawyer in the group, whose main purpose was to encourage the rest of them. They were all in the same Sunday School class and spent time after each week's lesson planning how to care for the handyman needs of the congregation.

The group also coordinated a weeklong workcamp each summer. Each year from 1985 to 2007, they took around 60 teens and adults to do home repairs in Charleston, WV. Their team would usually be able to complete about five different projects. In later years, they participated in local Habitat for Humanity builds and trips to the Gulf Coast to help with hurricane clean-up. Don has done everything from painting to roof repair to unblocking people's backed-up plumbing. He says, "These guys were game for almost anything," and in a week's time, the group could raise a Habitat home from the bare foundation to a framed, roofed, and sometimes shingled structure. "It just seemed like things worked together. The Holy Spirit was leaning on us and pushing us and working with us."

Don views his teaching career as one of the many blessings he has experienced. He enjoyed helping kids to go the right direction, always trying to be extremely fair and inspiring them to be their best. He also felt blessed to have time free in the summer to help others. Beyond the yearly work camps, he chaperoned an outdoor education experience for 9th grade students, a four-day-long trek that began with camping at Pine Grove Furnace, followed by a canoe trip down the Potomac River to Hancock, MD. After helping with this program for several years, Don became the travel guide for the local Boy Scout troop, leading them on a similar trip each summer.

Don speaks of the many other blessings he has experienced in his life: his marriage to Susan, the birth of his four children, and the many people who have encouraged him in his life. Don says he was "twitter-pated" from the first day he met Susan, "She was a catch, I tell you, a keeper." When they were first dating, he remembers Susan's mother encouraging him to take the college entrance exam, even when he didn't think he was capable of passing it. His first semester of college was overwhelming because he tried to continue working his industrial job while also taking a full load of courses. But when the boss noticed him floundering, he told Don to quit working so that he could concentrate on school, saying, "If you need money, I'll loan you some." And as a flat-broke college student, he remembers his mom occasionally slipping him the \$5 he needed for gas, so that he could go to visit Susan in a nearby town.

Don has also felt the Lord's protection over his life, having walked away from three near-death experiences. Once his brakes went out at the top of a steep hill, and he had to downshift his way to a stop. Another time, he fell asleep driving and hit the guardrail. If the guardrail had not held, he would have plummeted down a 300 foot drop to the river below. Another time, he got into an accident with a much larger car. If it had hit him a split-second later, he knows he would not have walked away from it.

Recently, Don suffered a severe bout of arrhythmia. His condition deteriorated to the point that he remembers praying, "I know this could go up or down. But if you let me live, I'll try to help somebody. Maybe there is somebody out there who needs things that I have to give."

Don has been faithful to his word. He has helped with Hungry Hearts food pickup and distribution and provided companionship to men from our congregation, so that their wives can have a short break from caregiving responsibilities. And he intentionally reaches out to the people he knows who seem sad or lonely; offering them encouragement.

Don's story reminds me of the greatest commandment, according to Jesus, in Mark 12:30-31:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself."