

## **4.6 James W. Rapalje** **“My BIG Brother Jim”**



**Bo Joy**  
**Haywood Community College**  
**Clyde, North Carolina**

**John 14: 6**  
**Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

# My BIG Brother Jim



James W. Rapalje  
August 3, 1949 – November 23, 2008

**Hi ! I'm Bob! I'm Jim's older brother. Marla asked me to speak to you for a few minutes today about her dad, my BIG brother Jim. I may have been Jim's older brother, but for the past 50 years or so, he always called me his "little brother." I think he must have enjoyed being "bigger" than I was. I'd like to tell you some things about him from my perspective. Even though I am older, in so many ways, he really is my BIG brother!!**

**After starting out as roommates for about 20 years in our childhood, we, along with our sisters Nancy and Janet, all four of us got married in one summer. That was back in 1971. Jim married his late wife Ann who also passed away with cancer a year and a half ago. I married my wife Martha of 37 years. Because of our different skills, Jim and I had very different paths for our lives. I was called to my life as a teacher. Since Jim was gifted at working with his hands, most of his life was spent in the lawn business. Eventually he owned his own lawn business, Jim's Lawn Care. The important thing is that we both really loved the Lord, and the Lord honored us both with successful, although very different, careers.**

**I retired in the summer of 2007 at just about the time Jim was diagnosed with cancer. So I told Jim that I would be glad to help him with his lawn work if he needed help. That was when I really got to see what a hard worker Jim was! I began helping Jim with his yards about one day a week. In my own naïve way, I**

thought yard care was mostly “mowing” yards. Now I could certainly “mow” a yard! But I soon learned that “lawn care” is much more than “mowing” lawns! On our first day working together, he handed me an edger and told me to get to it! Now I will have to say, I owned an edger and a weed whacker of my own! But I never used them!! I couldn’t even get them started!! So I said to Jim, “What?? I can’t edge a yard! I can’t even start this thing!!” Jim explained to me that he had taught Danny to run an edger and a weed whacker, so he thought I could probably handle the job too!! Well, I guess if Danny could do it, then with MY education . . . !!! As I look back on the whole experience, Danny probably did a better job than I did, but Danny wasn’t there!! For this job, Jim just had me, and I would just have to do my best! Anyway, there I was a retired pencil pusher, out there pushing (and lifting!) lawn mowers for Jim’s Lawn Care!

Speaking of lifting mowers, those big old mowers didn’t just jump on and off of Jim’s truck! I can’t for the life of me see how Jim could lift those lawn mowers up on the truck!! With great effort, I could get a mower off the truck, but I never could seem to lift that mower high enough to get it back on the truck! I kept telling Jim to wait until I got there in the morning so we could load the mowers together! But no!! Every morning when I would get to Jim’s house to go off to work with him, he already had the mowers loaded!! How did he do that??? And towards the end, even with his soma, he could still load a mower by himself better than I could!

We had some good days together, and I was blessed to spend some quality time with Jim, my BIG brother. I think we were a pretty good team with me edging and weed whacking, and him mowing with his big riding mower and blowing off the driveways!! In fact, just before his retirement this past spring, working together we did a record 15 lawns in one day!!

Life is not all work and no play, even for Jim! We also had time for recreation. Jim and all the family really had a nice time at Sanibel Island the past two years. This was all thanks to our Aunt Elsie and Uncle Bill who suggested that we all go down there and spend a week as a family! They not only suggested that we go down there, they paid for the rooms!! What a deal!! Aunt Elsie called us up one day and said, “How would you like a FREE week at Sanibel??” Like, WOW!! Did you say, “FREE”?? So we all went to Sanibel—twice! It turned out to be a great family time. And it was the first time in over 37 years that Mom got all her kids to spend a few days together under one roof! What a special opportunity to be able to spend some time with Jim! The entire Rapalje family would like to

**express our thanks to Aunt Elsie and Uncle Bill for this wonderful gift that you gave the family.**

**Now, when Rapalje kids get to Sanibel, there is usually one activity that comes to mind! What is it? SHELLING!! But not Jim!! In a lot of ways, Jim is like our Dad! He never did things exactly like everyone else did! What did Jim want to do at Sanibel? FISH!! Jim loved to fish!! Now, I'm afraid I'm not much of a fisherman! I must have been behind the door when the Lord handed out fishing skills! On these trips, Jim was the fisherman, but when he caught the fish at Sanibel that first year, I was there to help him clean them!! I'm thankful that Jim had a friend like Don Rigga, his real fishing buddy, someone who could really help him enjoy fishing!!**

**On our second Sanibel trip this past October, Jim didn't feel like doing very much fishing, but we all did watch a lot of baseball. The week we were at Sanibel was a week for baseball championships, and of course Jim showed his colors for his favorite baseball team. If anyone doesn't know it, this favorite color is RED, from the Philadelphia Phillies. Earlier this year, thanks to a couple of trips to New Jersey with Janet, Jim even got to attend a Phillies game in person. He said that he had never been to a professional baseball game before. We didn't know that this would be his last baseball season, but imagine how happy Jim must have been to see HIS Phillies win the World Series in 2008.**

**Well, that was Jim's favorite baseball team! Dare I mention his favorite football team? He and I both shared a love for FSU football! As long as I can remember, Jim has absolutely loved and lived the garnet and gold of FSU. Even in seasons that were not so good, Jim unapologetically wore his FSU shirts and sweat shirts. He even had a Seminole spear painted on his garnet and gold truck. In fact, you may have noticed some garnet and gold colors in the floral arrangements today, and even garnet and gold Christmas lights around this place. The Christmas lights were thanks to our sister Janet, an avid gator fan. And today, I see someone out there wearing a garnet shirt and a gold tie that I never thought I would ever see in garnet and gold—that would be Jim's niece Marie!! I can only imagine how very hard it must have been for Janet and Marie to do this!! It really proves how much they love Jim!!**

**OH!! Did I just mention Christmas lights? I'll tell you, last year at Christmas, Jim put up about 77,000 Christmas lights in his yard! Our sister Janet put up about**

55,000 at her house, so between the two of them they put up over 130,000 lights. Jim had his own version of “Light up Mt. Dora”!! Of course, if you do the math (and you knew I would find a way to do some math in this presentation!) and add in my 500 Christmas lights, that would be about 130,500 total lights!

In one word, Jim was agreeable. He got along with everyone, and everyone liked Jim. As you know very well, he always had a joke to tell, good news to give, and a happy attitude towards life, no matter what was happening around him. But we all got some very bad news on Friday of last week. In a weekend in which Marla just happened to be in town, Jim began to hemorrhage. The doctor said for him to come to the emergency room for tests. So, he got in his truck, and he drove himself to the emergency room, where he was admitted to the hospital. Either by chance or by design of the Lord (whichever you happen to believe in!), my wife Martha was admitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the same hospital through the same emergency room on the same day! (By the way, both Jim and Martha were both released on the same day, Monday!) Jim was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, and of course, I was on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor with Martha for the weekend. The bad news for Jim was that the doctors were going to have to tell him that there was nothing more they could do for him. How do you respond when you have Level 4 cancer for a year and a half, and then the doctors tell you something like this, that they can’t help you?

On Saturday night, I prayed for the Lord to give me a word of encouragement for Jim. The next day, on Sunday, the Lord answered my prayer. I got to have a talk with Jim like I have NEVER had with anyone in my life. I told Jim that he had lived a hard life, but through it all, he had always tried to have good news, a positive attitude, and a joke to tell. I told him that I thought he was probably feeling bad because he didn’t have any good news to give everyone, and he really didn’t feel like telling jokes any more. I told him that we, his friends and family, understood this and we loved him. I told Jim that he didn’t have to give us good news! He didn’t have to tell any more jokes!! We loved him for who he is, and we didn’t expect him to always have good news.

I told Jim, “Look at the success you have had in your life. Look at Marla and Danny! Look at how they have grown up! Marla is your medical-student daughter, soon to be “Doctor Marla Carter”! See how tall and mature Danny has become. You got Danny to manhood!” What a great tribute [speaking to

**Danny and Marla] you both are to your dad and mom—to Jim and Ann. Your mother and father must be so proud of you now, as we all are!**

**In that hospital room we talked about the Lord and how He loves us so much. I reminded Jim that the Lord promised to be with us in good times and in hard times, but especially in the hard times. I told him that we don't have to be afraid like those who do not know the Lord. I told Jim that I was very proud of him for his own faithfulness, and I was proud of what he had accomplished as a son, as a father to Danny and Marla, and as a member of the Body of Christ. I told Jim that I was really proud to have him for my brother! Jim needed to hear what I really thought of him, and I'm so glad the Lord arranged this special time for me to talk with him.**

**Oh, we talked a LOT about the Lord. If you know Jim, you know that he loves the Lord with all of his heart! In fact, he had two goals for his life:**

**Goal #1: Make Heaven his home!**

**Goal #2 : Take as many people with him as he could!!**

**Jim told me that sometimes he gets emotional, even to the point of tears, when he talks about things like this. So I reminded him that, according to the Bible, it's okay for men to cry! By the way, did YOU all know that?? It really IS okay for men to cry! Jim had to take a tissue from the box, but that was okay!! About then, Jim noticed that I needed a tissue also!! We both cried!! But it was okay—we really needed to cry!! These were hard times! These were really hard times for Jim and his family!!**

**I reminded Jim that at the end of our lives, we may see a great light, and from that light, we might hear our name called. I ask you [speaking to the audience], if you saw a great light in the middle of a great darkness, and you heard a righteous and holy God call your name, what would you do??? Would you run towards the light? Or would you run away and hide yourself in the darkness? What if you recognized the voice of the One who called your name? Remember that Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd! My sheep know my voice! My sheep know my voice!"**

**I believe on Sunday afternoon, November 23, Jim heard his name called! No one calls your name like Jesus! I KNOW Jim, and there is no doubt in my mind**

that Jim “ran to the light!” At the moment that Jim left his body, two of the people who loved him so much were on each side of him. His daughter Marla was holding one hand, and his own mother was holding the other! When Jim had “left the building,” Marla took Mom’s hand, and they were NOT alone in this moment of deep sorrow.

Two thousand years ago, when Jesus looked down from the cross, He saw his disciple John and His own mother Mary standing at the foot of the cross. When Jesus died on the cross to redeem us from our sin, He had already provided that John and Mary should NOT be alone in this moment of deep sorrow.

Isn’t this a great story from the Bible, given and applied to us today, to comfort us in this difficult time of loss?

And now in conclusion, there is one very simple question [and a follow-up question] that I know my BIG brother Jim would want me ask each and every person in this room. Here it is: “Do YOU know Jesus?” Do you know Him?? [Follow-up question: If/when He calls your name, will you recognize His voice and run to the light?]

Thank you all so much for coming to show your love for Jim! Thank you, especially Pastor Don and all the pastors, staff and members of the Grand Island Baptist Church, for all your support for Jim and his family in this time of need! May the Lord continue to bless your church and your ministries here.

**Prepared by Bob and Martha Rapalje  
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