



## Dr. James Lee Sells

August 21, 1928 - November 25, 2007

James Lee Sells

(8/21/1929-11/25/2007)

A Vision of Something Better, Lets Build it Together

James Lee Sells, age 79, of Bolivar, Missouri passed away on Sunday, November 25, 2007 at Citizen's Memorial Hospital in Bolivar, Missouri

James Lee Sells was born in Sesser IL on 8/21/1928, the son of Ben and Erma Sells. To the common eye, he was another mouth to feed for a poor young family just getting started. But God saw a vision of something better and decided Jim and he would build it together. Soon, Mary Lou, his younger sister, and then Sam his younger brother were added to the family. Jim graduated from East St. Louis High School in 1946. In East St. Louis, Jim would also find his life long love in Joyce Wayne, whom he married on June 2, 1950. Gods plan for Jim included his undergraduate education where he played collegiate basketball and developed a love for coaching. Not height, but head and heart combined with a deadly accurate two-handed chest jump shot allowed Jim to successfully contribute to his collegiate basketball team. He received a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degree from

Southern Illinois University.

Jim and Joyce looked at their family and had a vision of something better, so together they began to build it, first with the birth of Jan, then Scott, Ben and finally Jane. While his family was expanding, so was his career. Jim completed a Doctorate of Education degree at Columbia University in New York City. While there, he and Joyce looked at the city's church situation and visualized something better. Together with several other families, they established the first Southern Baptist church in New York City. In 1958, the family moved to Davis, California where Jim was head basketball coach and associate supervisor of health, physical education and recreation at University of California, Davis. Joyce and Jim were charter members of the first Southern Baptist Church formed in Davis. In 1963 Jim became chairman of the Department of Physical Education and Recreation at State University College, Buffalo, New York. The family moved to Bolivar Missouri in 1965, where he joined Southwest Baptist College and found his final home.

Jim found in Bolivar a small two year Christian junior college that was structurally old and functionally limited. He visualized something better and began calling on partners to help him build it. He became the president of Southwest Baptist College in 1968 and later Chancellor of Southwest Baptist University. During his 27 years of service to SBU, Jim's vision, with the help of many, began to become reality. The small two year college with poor facilities became a four year university with a modern 152 acre campus. The few NAIA sports teams evolved into a NCAA Division II athletics program with 16 sports. In place of a junior college associate degree, SBU grew to offer graduate and post graduate degrees in multiple disciplines.

For 42 years Jim called Bolivar home. Under his able guidance SBU grew and became a proud partner with the community. Over the years, others also had visions of something better that Jim embraced. His talent for fund raising

made him a valuable proponent of many community projects over the years. One cannot imagine a Bolivar without the evidence of the often invisible, yet assuredly present fingerprints of Jims involvement: the Cancer Center at Citizens Memorial Hospital, the YMCA, the Rayle Library, and many other community projects were aided by his leadership and willingness to dig in and get things done.

On the morning of November 25th, 2007, God considered Jims eternity, and he visualized something better, so he called him home. Together, they are no doubt building it.

Preceded in death by his wife Joyce Sells and parents James V. and Erma Sells, Jim is survived by his four children, Janice Glover of Warrensburg, MO; Scott Sells of Colorado Springs, CO; Ben Sells, of Upland, IN; and Jane Siebert of Springfield, MO; his brother Sam Sells of Campbell, CA and his sister Mary Lou Curran of Georgetown, TX. He leaves behind 14 loving grandchildren, Justin Glover, Cook Glover, Drew Glover, Spencer Glover, Emily Sells, Sam Sells, Patrick Sells, Abby Sells, Jake Sells, Seth Siebert, Jenny Sells, Silas Siebert, Tyler Sells, and Sarah Siebert.

Funeral services will be held at 10:00am, Wednesday, November 28, 2007 at the First Baptist Church in Bolivar, Missouri. Congregational songs will be "His Eye Is On The Sparrow", "In The Garden" and "The Lord's Prayer". Burial will follow at Crestview Memorial Gardens just East of Bolivar, Missouri under the direction of the Butler Funeral Home. Pallbearers will be Justin Glover, Cook Glover, Drew Glover, Spencer Glover, Sam Sells, and Patrick Sells.

Attendants will be Emily Sells, Abby Sells, Jake Sells, Seth Siebert, Jenny Sells, Silas Siebert, Tyler Sells and Sarah Siebert. A visitation will be from 5-7pm, Tuesday evening, November 27, 2007 at the Butler Funeral Home in Bolivar, Missouri.

The family suggests contributions in memory of James Sells to the Southwest Baptist University or the Citizen's Memorial Hospital both in Bolivar, Missouri.

Friends may sign the guest book or send private condolences at [www.butlerfuneralhome.com](http://www.butlerfuneralhome.com)

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# Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. James Lee Sells*

October 05, 2023 at 05:18 AM



“ *Dr. James Lee Sells*

January 26, 2023 at 04:15 PM



“ *Dear Sell's Family,*

*My love and prayers go out to you during the loss of your father. Dr. Sell's was a great man of God. I worked back in 1973-1977 for your dad at Southwest Baptist College. One year ago he came to the MO Baptist Convention and his office was behind my work area. He always took the time to say good morning. He had a sweet spirit about him, he shared, you can call me Jim. I told him no, You will always be Dr. Sells with high respect! He loved Joyce and loved his children and his grandchildren. He always spoke highly of each one. God Bless each one of you!  
Becki (Shirley) Kelley class of 1977.*

Rebecca Kelley - December 04, 2007 at 12:00 AM

KS

“ To the entire Sells' family, we wanted to let you know that you have all been in our thoughts & prayers since we heard of the loss of your father. Our prayers are that our heavenly father will provide you with the grace & comfort that you will need to cope with this difficult loss of your father.

To Ben, Lisa & family and to Jane, Tim and your families whom we grew up with and see from time to time, we especially wanted you to know we've been thinking of you. I thought so much of your dad and very much enjoyed the times he would stop by my office in Springfield to visit with me. You may take comfort in knowing that your dad's work and willingness to help people on this side of eternity will leave a long and lasting legacy and testament of his faith which you can take much comfort in.

I wanted you to know that I thought very highly of your father and always appreciated his kindness and interest in my family.

Ken A. Stephens & Family.

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**Ken A. Stephens** - November 29, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JC

“ We were privileged to meet Dr. Sells during his visits to Upland and Taylor University. We are very sorry for your loss but rejoice also regarding his homegoing and reuniting with Mrs. Sells. Especially to Ben and Lisa and family, we want to give you strong support. You are loved by many. Ben, thank you for carrying on the work of your father. He left a great legacy. Blessings!

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**Jerry and Connie Cramer** - November 29, 2007 at 12:00 AM

SM

“ *Ben, Lisa and Kids,  
We are so very sorry for your sudden loss. We praise our Father  
that your parents/grandparents are in their new home. Praying for  
you as you process this new loss. Lovingly, The Mortland Family*

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**Steve, Erika, Stephen, Allie, and Nicki Mortland** - November 29, 2007 at 12:00 AM

LK

“ *Sells family: Thank you for sharing the giftedness of your father in  
my life. He was a Christian gentleman and was always very  
gracious to me in my years at Southwest Baptist University and then  
at the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame.*

*I am indebted to men like your father who are visionaries and still  
have a heart for people. Witnessing his involvement in church, in  
your lives and the pictures of all of you in his office was a  
demonstration of the place you had in his heart, right behind his  
strong love and faith in God.*

*I will personally miss his presence, but will live out his influence on  
me.*

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**Lee Kanakis** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

MG

“ Dear Jan and David,

*Sheree, Lauren, Alex and I wish to extend to you and your family our deepest sympathy on the loss of your father. We were lucky enough to spend some time with him and your mother over the years and all of us came away impressed by his humility, kindness and gentle spirit. He was great parent to you and a wonderful grandparent to your children.*

*Know that you are in our thoughts and prayers.*

*Sheree, Mike, Alex and Lauren*

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**Mike and Sheree Grelle** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

MM

“ Your family is in our prayers here at Taylor University Fort Wayne (TUFW). Thank you for your partnership in ministry. We are sorry for your loss. May you be flooded with many happy memories during this time of grief and loss.

*Praying for you,*

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**Michael D Mortensen** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

UF

“ Our thoughts and prayers go with you at this difficult time. May your memories and the comfort of knowing Dr. Sells is with our Father carry you through. Our school family has been blessed by the Sells' family and we will keep all in our thoughts.

*Sincerely,*

*Mickey Lazard Principal Upland Elementary*

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**Upland Elementary School family** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DS

“ Ben & family, I am so sorry to hear of your father's death. My thoughts and prayers are with you today as you celebrate his life together and put his earthly body to rest.

Sincerely,

Dennis Smith

Jones-Smith Funeral Home

Upland, IN

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**Dennis R. Smith** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JM

“ Ben, Lisa and family,  
We were sad to learn of the passing of your father. Please know our prayers and thoughts are with you and your family today.

Judy & David Mouton

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**Judy & David Mouton** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

CB

“ Sorry about your loss, our prayers are with you and family at this time.

I pray for peace and comfort for all of you.

Donovan and Christie Badillo

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**Christie Badillo** - November 28, 2007 at 12:00 AM

BE

“ Dr. Sells will be greatly missed by all of us at Southwestern Christian University. His efforts and consultation not only assisted us in our first Capital Campaign, but led to the establishment of our Institutional Development Department as well. His personal friendship and wise counsel were valuable treasures to me personally. His love for Christ and His Word was seen in all He said and did. I treasure our many wonderful moments of sharing the truths of God's Word together.

*May God fulfill His promise in II Corinthians 1:3-4 and be the "God of all Comfort" (the One whom comes to your side and bears the weight of your loss) to your family is my prayer.*

*On behalf of Southwestern Christian University, its Regents, faculty, staff and students, be assured of our prayers.*

*Bob R. Ely  
President*

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**Bob R. Ely** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DB

“ We simply wanted to express our condolences to the entire family.

*Dr. Sells was a fine man whose work was a benefit to the Christian faith. I've always said you can determine the quality of a man's life from looking at the quality of his children. That is certainly the case for Dr. Sells. He leaves behind wonderful children.*

*Again, our sympathies go out to the family, especially Tim and Jane Siebert. Your family is on our prayers.*

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**David & Stacey Burton** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

LG

“ Always enjoyed the visits Dr. Sells made to Caldwell Oil Co. I was employed by Gary C. Brown for 26 years and Dr. Sells made lots of visits during that time.  
My deepest sympathies to the family...

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**Linda Goforth** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DS

“ We are holding you in our thoughts and prayers. It is too far to give you a hug. Deedee, Truett and Emmet

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**Deedee Smith** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JH

“ I was privileged to serve at Southwest Baptist for eleven years, most of them under the leadership of Jim Sells. I remember very well how the faculty anticipated his arrival as the chief academic officer and how pleased we were that he was selected to succeed Dr. Craig as president. Jim was one of the most competitive individuals I have ever known, and I mean that in a positive sense, because he was driven to push ahead, never content to rest when there was so much more to accomplish. He kept his sleeves rolled up, both figuratively and literally, and he was the hardest working and most actively involved president under whom I served. He maintained that work ethic after he left SBU, and Bolivar has lost an outstanding citizen. I pray the Lord's comfort upon his children and grandchildren.

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**Jerry Horner** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

MW

“ *This worlds' loss is Heavens gain!*

*Jim and I had numerous theological "mini-moments" during the short time that I've known him. His guidance has helped me be a better Sunday School teacher, and a better person too. He quietly taught, and guided, just as his Savior did.*

*I know how proud he was of his children and especially his grandchildren, from the fond stories he told.*

*God Bless You*

*He Will Be Missed*

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**Melanie Welsh** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JT

“ *Ben, Jane and family,*

*I was saddened to hear of your father's passing. He and your mom were wonderful friends to our family from the first day we arrived in Bolivar. I got to know him more personally when he served as the 9th grade boys Sunday School teacher. We exchanged a lot of Amherst Baptist Church stories even though we were there at different times.*

*More recently I remember how my Dad enjoyed visiting with him on their bike rides. My memories are happy ones and I hope that is comforting to you.*

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**John Tummons** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

BD

“ As I sit below my diploma, hanging on the wall above my desk, signed by Dr. James L. Sells and my father, I am so thankful of the relationship between the Sells family and ours. Although we have been separated by miles and time over the past 20+ years, I often take time to reflect on the wonderful family that is Sells! I know that I am a better person for having known Dr. Jim, Joyce and all of the Sells family, especially Ben and Jane. I know that this loss is so difficult for all of you. I know that although I will not be able to attend the memorial service, several of my family will be there including my mom and dad. I know that my folks will surround you with love, and support you like family. Please know that I am there with you in spirit as well and our love and prayers are with you, and will continue to lift you up in the coming days.

*When I think of Dr. Sells, I always remember how he was able to garner such respect and attention through his soft, confident, reassuring and comforting voice. I have likened Dr. Sells delivery in speech to that of Jesus--warm and inviting. Dr. Sells was a tremendous example of one who lived for and exemplified Jesus!*

*Thank you Lord for giving us Dr. Jim and Joyce, and may their legacy live on in through their wonderful family.*

*We love you all,*

*Brent*

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**Brent Davison** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

MB

“ Jan and Family,  
You are in my prayers with sympathy.  
Marge Ballew

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**Marge Ballew** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

TP

“ I was so sorry to read Dr. Sells obituary in today's News-Leader. How fondly I remember the Sells Family living next door to us when I was a child, although Scott's memories of my trashing his bike may not be so fond... Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. -- Trudy (Smith) Pischer

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**Trudy (Smith) Pischer** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JC

“ Out prayers are with you

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**Joann Condren** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DB

“ Dave, Jan, and kids; We hope the good memories will sustain you during this sad time. Know that you are in our prayers.--Diane

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**Diane Boling** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

GS

“ Jane and family we are so sorry for your loss. You are in our thoughts and prayers.

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matt 5:4*

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**Glyn & Alissa Strong** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

NR

“ Just know you are in our prayers and thoughts this is a very sad time but on the other hand eternally this is a joyous time. The Lord be with you and your family.

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**nelson rediger** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

GF

“ *Ben, Lisa and Family~*

*Our hearts ache with you as you grieve the passing of your father/grandfather. Please know that we are praying for you and care for all of you!*

*Gary and Janet Friesen*

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**Gary and Janet Friesen** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JW

“ *I was sorry to hear of Jim's passing. I am grateful that I had the privilege of chatting with this remarkable man on Thursday.  
From Jean and Garrett Williams*

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**Jean Williams** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

BW

“ *I'm from the Class of 1974 and remember the personable and amiable character of Dr. Sells. While working on the yearbook staff and the College Relations staff as photographer, there were several occasions to just visit and get acquainted. I will always remember his "I Sat Where You Sit" speeches in Convocation and his sense of humor. Jim will surely be missed by all.*

*Brownlee Williams*

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**Brownlee Williams** - November 27, 2007 at 12:00 AM

BF

“ *Ben: I so sorry to hear about the passing of your father. Please know that you are in my thoughts and prayers and also pass my thoughts on to the rest of your family.*

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**Beth Fitzjarald** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

JC

“ We are praying for you and are so very sorry for your loss. May the One who watches over all of us give you His comfort and peace.

*With prayer,  
JD & Jenny Collins*

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**JD & Jenny Collins** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

AR

“ *Ben, Lisa, and family,*

*We were shocked and saddened to hear the news about your father's passing. Our prayers are with you for strength and peace during this stressful time. We will continue to pray for comfort and help as you adjust to the loss of another parent. May God be extra close to you and carry you through these difficult circumstances.*

*Al and Jo Rupp*

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**Al and Jo Rupp** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DI

“ *So very sorry to here of your fathers passing. But I am sure your loss is Heaven's gain. It is never easy to lose a loved one but when it is without warning it is much harder. Please know that we are praying for the peace that passes all understanding. God bless you and your family during this sad time.*

*Elda Ivey (retired from Campus Safety on the Upland Campus)*

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**David and Elda Ivey** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

DT

“ *The world is less of a good place without the presence of Jim Sells. He was, no, he IS one of the greatest human examples of intelligence, decency, and wisdom to ever walk on this planet. The world will ALWAYS be a colder, darker place without him in it. He lives on in each of us who have been impacted by his presence and wisdom. He is and always will be a great man.*

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**Dr. Richard and Rita Tate** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

FC

“ *Dear Ben and Lisa,*

*You are in my thoughts and prayers as you grieve in the midst of this loss.*

*As you tell your history, Ben, it always seems clear that your father is counted as a big influence on your life and the directions you have chosen.*

*Faye*

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**Faye Chechowich** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM

TN

“ *Ben and family,*

*I'm sorry for the sudden loss of your father and grandfather. Our prayers are with you.*

*Toni and family*

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**Toni Newlin** - November 26, 2007 at 12:00 AM