



Portrait of a Godly Father

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More than 3000 days have passed since I received the phone call telling me that my father had had a heart attack and had gone to be with the Lord.

We had been together only hours earlier, celebrating my 21st birthday. He was my best friend. Our hearts beat alike in so many ways. I could not imagine life without him.

They say that time heals. I do know that the Holy Spirit has supernaturally, tenderly, graciously bound up the wounds of this broken heart.

But there are some things that time can never make you forget. The countless, joyous memories that I treasure of my father's life, grow more precious with each passing year. I doubt that a single day has passed since September 1, 1979, that my life has not been touched by the life of this man who knew and walked with God.

Over the years, I have been asked many questions about my father. Whenever I talk about him, I fear that others may think he was some spiritual "super hero" who lived a life to which others cannot attain.

But let me explain that Dad was not from a Christian home; he was not saved until his mid-twenties; he never went to Bible college or seminary. His life was really a testimony to what could be true of any dad whose heart was wholly God's.

From a daughter's heart, I'd like to share with you some personal glimpses from his life—some of the things that most stand out in my mind about his ministry as a father.

Generous Love and Encouragement

"Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

There was no doubt in any of the minds of the seven children in my family that we were loved. Unconditional love was expressed through frequent verbal and

physical reminders. In fact, after our father's death, we discovered that each of us had felt that we were "Daddy's favorite"! Not only did he tell us how much we were loved, but he also told others how very special we were to him and how grateful he was for the ways God was maturing and using us.

His love was also expressed in constant prayer on our behalf. He recognized his utter dependence on God to work in our lives, and prayed daily and specifically for our various needs.

His love was revealed by his constant availability, demonstrating the priority he placed on us as a family. Though his business and personal ministry required many long, hard hours, and frequent trips away from home, we knew that he would be there any time we needed him. His arms were always open when I was hurting. Now that he is no longer here, when I am hurting, I run confidently into the loving arms of my heavenly Father.

I will always think of my father as an encourager and an affirmer. While never tolerating laziness or half-hearted efforts, he encouraged every step in the right direction, thus creating a climate in which we were motivated to do our best. Even in times of failure, insecurity, or inadequacy, he encouraged us to exercise faith in what God could do through the situation. He always sought to encourage us with a vision of what God could do with our lives if they were wholly yielded to Him.

On my 16th birthday, as a freshman in college, I received a letter from my dad that I will always treasure. It is full of encouragement and love, as he rehearsed some of the "growing up" stages through which God had taken me to that point. He closed by saying:

I want you to know, Honey, that any time you may want to talk in the future, or if there is ever anything I can do to help you I any way, I promise I'll be available. Just let me know.

I've become increasingly convinced that God has something very special and very wonderful for you - which I know will become a reality, because you want only to know and to do God's will for your life.

And, believe me, I'd infinitely rather see you in the Lord's will than to be rich or famous or anything else! After all, it's really true, that there's "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last!"

I love you very much! Dad

Genuine Life and Example

"You are my witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers" (1 Thess. 2:10).

In countless areas, Dad gave us a Christ-like example to follow. Perhaps the model of humility was foundational. He never felt worthy or deserving of the goodness and grace of God. He never got over the fact that God would save him, often shedding tears at the thought. He was quick to admit his failures and weaknesses as a father, and, when necessary, to humble himself and seek forgiveness. Today, I love and respect him, not because he was perfect, but because he was willing to humble himself.

In his relationship with our mother, he was an example of unconditional love and permanent commitment. He knew that to be a good parent, he first had to be a good partner. He viewed our mother not only as his physical partner, but also as his spiritual partner. They shared common commitments, goals, friends, burdens, values, priorities, and ministry.

His faithfulness in the Word and in prayer has been a continual motivation in my own life. During the twenty-eight years that he knew Christ, he never missed a single day of giving the first hour of the day to the Lord, in the Word and in prayer. No matter what the demands on his schedule, time spent seeking the face of God was always first priority.

His life modeled for us what it meant to be pure and guileless, both externally and internally. Neither in his life nor in ours would he countenance the objection, "But everybody else does it!" He frequently reminded us of our high and holy calling as children of God, and made every effort to cultivate in us a longing for and commitment to absolute purity in every area of our lives.

That commitment meant, in part, sheltering us from influences that he felt did not encourage holy living. For our family, that meant, for example, no attendance at movies and no television. We did not even carry a newspaper! To many parents today, such standards are inconceivable, and might even be considered "legalistic." Let me hasten to say that the emphasis on holiness in our home was a wonderfully positive one. We did not view those standards as making us in any sense spiritually superior to those who made different choices. Holiness was seen, not as restrictive, but as a truly liberating privilege.

While many would criticize such an upbringing as too sheltered, I will always be grateful for the privilege of being protected from unholy, worldly influences

during those very formative years, while my values and appetites were being developed.

Then there was a godly example set in the area of giving. I don't believe I've ever met a believer who finds any more joy in giving, than my father did! He saw himself, not as a recipient of God's blessings, but as a channel through which God could flow His blessings to others. His desire to be successful in business was motivated by an internal desire to give as much to the Lord's work as he possibly could in his lifetime.

He was a man of faith, even in the midst of incredible loss and external pressure. Within one year, we lost our home in a fire, my mother faced life-threatening brain surgery, and Dad suffered severe financial reverses in his once-thriving business. I watched him respond to adversity with as much calm confidence in the sovereignty of God and as much gratitude for the goodness of God, as in times of prosperity and abundance.

In fact, my first conscious thought when I received word of Daddy's death was a paraphrase of a verse I had read earlier that week: "God is good, and everything He does is good." That reality undergirded my heart in the subsequent days of tears and sorrow. Where had I learned to trust? At the feet of a father who knew how to trust!

Finally, Dad's whole life was lived in the light of eternity. The reality that time is short, eternity is long, and Jesus is coming, literally gripped him. Every choice, every decision, every activity, every purchase was evaluated in terms of its eternal value. That is why he had such a passion for winning people to Christ and discipling them in their faith. Our home was always a beehive of ministry. One of the greatest evidences to us of the reality of the Christian life, was the privilege we had of constantly seeing people saved and spiritually nurtured in our home. Business, recreation, entertainment, education, social life— all was secondary to the joy and responsibility of reaching others for Christ. Most of our family vacations were "ministry vacations," structured around various types of outreach opportunities.

Another letter I received from Dad, while away at college, highlighted five evangelistic situations he had been involved in during the past week. He summarized:

"So, as you can see, the Christian life is anything but dull. My only problem is getting enough time for work or for anything else! All of these stories help remind me that there really is nothing in life that is comparable to the privilege of witnessing for Christ, and serving Him."

That enthusiasm was infectious!

Shortly after his death, my mother found in Dad's desk drawer a slip of paper on which he had written the words of Psalm 90:12, *"Teach us to number our days, and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should"* (paraphrased).

When Daddy went to heaven, those of us who knew him best, sensed that he was where he really belonged. His heart had been there all along.

Godly Leadership and Exhortation

"For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:11, 12).

Instruction in the ways of God was a vital, integral part of the fabric of our family life. Everyday occurrences were responded to and evaluated from a spiritual, biblical perspective. "Family devotions" was not reserved for just one time and place. It was an around-the-clock way of living.

Whenever necessary, that instruction included reproof and correction—not just about unacceptable behavior, but about attitudes, responses, and values.

An invaluable part of the "curriculum" was carefully-thought-through exposure to godly men and books. We developed heroes—godly heroes. My early Christian life was greatly shaped and influenced by the lives of men such as Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone, George Mueller, and David Brainerd. Further, I was blessed and challenged by being allowed to hear the conversations and prayers of many great living men of God.

Dad's leadership involved helping us develop a godly vision for our lives and futures. I will never forget the night our family sat together in a black church service in Haiti, where we were spending our Christmas vacation. I was 18 years old. In the middle of the service, Daddy leaned over to me and whispered, "Honey, what are your fifty-year goals?" To be honest, I'd never given it a great deal of thought! But I proceeded to think through and put on paper the things that I wanted to be true of my life in fifty years, if the Lord tarried. That exercise was invaluable in helping to shape and guide my life and ministry.

Before we were even born, we were consecrated to God—set apart for His service. Over and over again, Daddy impressed on our hearts that God wanted to use us, that our lives could be extraordinary, for His glory.

During my college years, we spent many hours brainstorming together about what could be done to reach the world with the gospel of Christ. In fact, that

was the last subject we discussed together on our back porch the afternoon before he was taken to heaven. His vision, counsel, and spiritual desire have continued to provide direction and motivation for my life and ministry.

Just after his death, I received in the mail a piece of paper on which was written in my dad's handwriting, 3 John 4: "I have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in the truth." Daddy's desire was that we would go further spiritually than he himself had, that we would stand on his spiritual "shoulders." That is my goal and commitment, by God's grace.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews paints for us a picture of a "great cloud of witnesses"—men and women of faith who, like Jesus, have already run the race and made it to the finish line. In many moments of uncertainty, fear, indecision, or temptation, I have envisioned that celestial grandstand. One face stands out in my mind. I can hear him cheering me on, as I run the race that he has already completed. I can hear him saying, "Don't give up! Don't quit! Keep on running! Keep your eyes on Jesus! He'll be there to meet you at the finish line!"

You see, I've already had a glimpse of Jesus. For twenty-one years, I saw Him in the face of a father who was filled with His Spirit. As a result, I can hardly wait to see Him face to face.