

# Dad, His Children, and You

*Author's Note: I like it when writers include a note about themselves along with their writing. It helps me understand the perspective that a writer is coming from. This gives me more tools for parsing the writer's work. I understand why he might emphasize a particular point or miss another important thought. I also tend to read sympathetically when I know his background.*

*This article is more like one long biography, not because my dad and I are better than anyone else, but because I want you to know where I'm coming from in future articles for this column. And I hope we can learn some lessons from my dad.*

God gave my dad and mom a girl and ten boys. God gave my wife and I four girls and three boys.

I'm slowly realizing what Dad must have gone through to raise all of us boys. I wonder if my children will turn out like I did, or, in other words, I wonder how similar I am to Dad. I wonder if I am making all the same mistakes he made. I may never know. Maybe I should ask him sometime.

But I'm pretty sure he will shake his head, smile, and say something like "God gives grace to those that need it." In the end, that about sums it up.

In the meantime, you and I must think and pray and read and write and pursue the best course of action for our children. God gives children to all different kinds of people, but mostly young and ignorant parents. That's a good thing, as any 45-year-old man will tell you. But I certainly was (and am) no exception. However, I have benefitted tremendously from my dad's wise influence.

Let me try to distill a few of the main things that stand out to me.

Dad was a man of patience. We boys bickered and argued and fought and whined and complained and cried. One boy doing all those things is bad enough. Ten of them stretched out over thirty-five years takes a lot of patience. Patience is an invaluable virtue to learn. It takes discipline and an eye on the future. It maintains a firm grip on the emotions at all times. A patient man learns to prioritize his child's well-being over his own. Patient people learn to enjoy the challenges that life brings and lean heavily on the Lord for wisdom through each moment.

One thing Dad taught me that I am still struggling to learn is to be slow with my words. Frustration only compounds the problem and the best way to curtail frustration is to hold the tongue and wait for reason and the Holy Spirit to provide a suitable reply. The first thing that comes to your mind is probably not the best response. A wise response remedies the problem. A frustrated response only makes it worse. Maybe this is taking patience a step too far, but sometimes no response may even be the best response.

This leads me to the second important concept that Dad lived out for me. He gave us boys enough room to make mistakes. Maybe I should state it this way—he wasn't a helicopter parent. We roamed the neighborhood while Dad read the newspaper. We had a healthy idea of what Dad expected from us, but

we never looked over our shoulder to see if Dad was watching us. We knew he wasn't sneaking up on us to see if we followed his instructions. He trusted us and this gave us the space to develop our own convictions. As a parent, I find this a very delicate balance to strike, and I doubt Dad knows how he accomplished this. I suspect he would chalk this up to the grace of God.

But I'm also sure that Dad thought about this topic and prayed for us. Dad believed that his children had the potential to go far beyond him in service to God. He didn't try to map our life out for us. He trusted us to God and dreamed of all the places that God would use us in His Kingdom. He held on to us but loosely. His aim in raising us was not selfish ambition or pride but unwavering commitment to God.

Dad modeled a disciplined life for us. He didn't waste his money on home upgrades and fancy vehicles.

He provided us with space to learn gardening and farming. We mowed the yard with push mowers and weeded the flower beds and gardens with our hands. When we were older, he taught us to frame houses. Ten energetic boys can frame up a house in no time! Dad wasn't harsh. But he taught us to work. Even when the Florida summers peaked over 100 degrees, he would doggedly raise the walls and frame the roof. Dad was tenacious. At the end of the day, even after us boys would be edging towards the truck, hoping to go home, Dad would be striding the job site, straightening boards, sweeping the floor, or picking up trash, whistling all the while.

Dad demonstrated a life of commitment to God. I'm sure he would argue this point strenuously with me because he is a humble man and recognizes his flaws, but all of us children would testify to this fact. It started with his teaching about God constantly. Dad set aside about half an hour daily for leading us in singing, Bible reading, and prayer. This family worship time was obviously meaningful to Dad. He didn't call us together out of duty. He believed in it passionately. Cumulatively, we spent hours each week, learning new songs, discussing the meaning of Bible passages, and interceding for others in prayer.

But Dad's commitment to God went much beyond teaching. He lived it out by honesty in his business. He helped the poor. He dedicated time to the church. He denied himself pleasures and riches for the sake of the gospel.

Did Dad make mistakes? Of course. But I love Dad because I see a man that loves God and lives sincerely. This love gave me the stable foundation I needed to strike out in faith on the path that my father walked. And you know, Dad wasn't the first man to walk that path. Come to think of it, Grandpa did for Dad what Dad did for me. And I suspect that chain goes far back in time. I pray that you and I can become one more link in this long chain. And that when our children are parents and have a moment to breathe and reflect, I pray that they will smile and say, "Thank God for Dad."

~Caleb Martin