

A Father's Legacy

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We'd been robbed! Returning home from a three-week vacation, we found cupboards opened, appliances moved, the basement door ajar. The usual sense of welcome and rest in our house was swept away by the uneasy, sinking feeling of loss as we cataloged the missing belongings.

A call to the insurance agent revealed our coverage would replace the clock radio, telephone, and jewelry the burglars carried away in a pillowcase. Unfortunately, no kind of coverage could replace the personal items that were gone.

My high school and college rings-I hadn't worn them for more than a decade, but had saved them faithfully for my children, Ben and Betsy. A collection of bicentennial silver dollars, halves, and quarters. A medicine bottle filled with Ben's baby teeth-every one except the one he swallowed-we'd systematically collected them to present as a gift when his own children began teething.

As I reflected on those priceless losses, my thoughts turned to my children's remaining time at home. In eight years Ben will pack his things for college; a year later Betsy will follow. Soon after that they may marry or move to another part of the country. I asked myself, What legacy do I really want to leave my children?

More than rings or coins or baby teeth, my honest desire is to leave them a greater part of myself. I want their legacy to include some examples, characteristics, and experiences that will last them a lifetime. I want them to have:

A Dad of Prayer

I remember as a child seeing my mother sitting on the edge of her bed, reading her Bible. Similarly etched on my mind is the image of my father kneeling beside his bed in prayer before retiring each evening. Prayer has been a rich part of my heritage.

As Ben and Betsy get older, they will also benefit from a dad whose prayer life is visible. I'm not advocating a pharisaical practice to impress some spectator, but I am becoming more intent upon providing opportunities for my children to see me, other adults, and even older teens in prayer.

Our family gives thanks together before meals, and we pray faithfully each night before the children retire. But recently I have also drawn them close at appropriate moments to pray for Auntie Bonnie in the hospital, Mom at her meeting or a crisis on the news.

A Dad of Purpose

Last week I changed brake pads, fixed a toilet, sealed the driveway, and hung wallpaper. There's nothing wrong with getting the most out of each day. In fact, the Bible tells us that there is a time for everything under the sun. Housework is important and recreation is beneficial. But in the midst of all my worthwhile activities, I must remember the words: "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life."

My children need the legacy of a dad whose life is directed by a clear purpose. They must see more than just an effective executive managing daily demands. While a treat at the Dairy Queen is a good investment, they also need to see my check written for hunger relief overseas. While playing catch in the backyard is enjoyable, they must also sense the joy I feel when praising God in a spontaneous song.

I want Ben and Betsy to recognize the overarching purpose in my life, the primary goal that gives meaning to daily particulars. Whether we're playing trumpets, painting a widow's house, or helping at the church work day, I hope they discover my main purpose in life is to honor God through praise and service.

A Dad of Patience

We have all heard the terms introvert and extrovert. I have another way of categorizing people: the dictators and the wimps. I tend to err toward the dictator side.

Every one of my tools has a proper place on the workbench, and I'm ready to court-martial any kid who misplaces them. I expect good manners, courteous speech, clean bedrooms, and acts of kindness showered between my nine-year-old and eleven-year-old. In other words, I expect perfect kids.

But that's obviously unrealistic. No child will ever be perfect. A parent cannot ignore problems, nor should we avoid corrective discipline. However, we can guard our reactions.

My children need to experience peace with God, peace with each other, peace with their friends, and peace with me. There have been times when I've been upset with the kids because they've "disturbed the peace." Yet honest reflection leads me to admit that too frequently my reaction was more disturbing than their initial infraction.

Recently, Ben and Betsy were an hour-and-a-half late returning home from school. Barb and I were worried and drove around the neighborhood looking for them. We eventually found them playing in the schoolyard.

My normal reaction would have included reading them the riot act, with a voice elevated in pitch and decibels. But on this occasion I quietly asked them to go home and then discussed with them the consequences of disobedience.

For Betsy it meant missing her basketball game that evening, for she still had homework, piano lessons, and errands to run. For Ben it meant we would not work on his model airplane, for he too had responsibilities. Surprisingly, their attitude during the two-day grounding that followed was peaceful. I believe they reflected the patience I had shown.

The legacy I desire for my children includes a father who accepts them, empathizes, and responds with patience.

A Dad of Play

All too soon our children will begin to drive, date, attend college, and eventually set up their own homes. For now, as children, they enjoy a time of life that can never be recaptured. While each of our kids has school and household responsibilities, we want to guard time in their childhood years for creative, healthy play.

Ben will never receive the bottle with his baby teeth, but he will remember launching rockets, and playing Frisbee in the cul-de-sac. Betsy won't receive our rings, but she may recall the bike rides around Lake Johanna, the games of "Pig" on the driveway basketball court, and the times in the front yard when she'd say: "Dad, warm me up for soccer." I want to leave my children the memories of a dad who was fun.

A Dad of Praise

I'm amazed at how often people complain. I'm amazed at how often Christians complain. I'm amazed at how often I complain! I cannot think of a greater insult to God than to gripe with the mouth He has created for praise. The punishment of Israel's wilderness wanderings reminds us of God's displeasure with complaining.

As a parent, I frequently complain about things in my children's lives. My motivation is sincere. I want them to grow up with good attitudes and habits. I am embarrassed, however, by how often I use negative, corrective speech, compared to the amount of praise I give them.

Some days it's hard to find something worth commending. Nevertheless, if I want my children to praise rather than complain, they need a dad who leaves them a legacy of praise.

Ben and Betsy will live up to my view of them. Therefore I must notice and commend their actions that are wholesome, good, and praiseworthy.

Since our burglary, I've started to build a legacy for my children that can never be taken away. My purpose isn't to raise perfect kids-that can't happen with an imperfect father. But I do want to leave them with a legacy of a dad who really enjoys them and who loves them deeply.

There times when I tarnish this desired legacy. But I have determined by God's enabling to leave my children more than jewelry or coins. My prayer is to leave them the legacy of a godly father, one who, above all else, reflects their Father above.