

Hello Brethren,

This weekend is Father's Day weekend in the US, and I was pondering what to write about. It occurred to me that three years ago I wrote a blog article for Father's Day that I don't believe was ever sent out locally. Since I don't imagine many would have read it, I want to reprint it below with a couple of updated edits. It is a little longer than my typical Sabbath Note, but I hope you don't mind.

The Measure of a Father

Thirty-three years ago next month our oldest child was born. While this precious little miracle was such a beautiful thing to come into our lives, I was frankly scared half to death. I knew next to nothing about babies, because I'd not been around many, and the prospect of caring for a new little life was rather overwhelming, no matter how much we had talked about it, prayed about it and hoped for the opportunity to raise children of our own!

Not only was I initially quite nervous about holding our baby, and way out of my depth when it came to changing her diaper, I was even more unprepared than I understood for the lifelong task of being a father – being a dad! But life doesn't seem to wait until we feel we are ready to take on challenges, and over the next ten years two more beautiful little boys would join our family. This felt like on-the-job training at its most intense!

Even though he had died several years before I met my wife, the strength and example of a most wonderful man taught me a lot about being a dad. As a boy growing up, the strongest, most stable, most patient and beyond a doubt the most beloved man in my life was my maternal grandfather. My sister and I spent a lot of time on their farm. I was thrilled when my mother, sister and I were finally able to move down with them. I relished life on that farm until just short of my 20th birthday when I moved away to go to college.

Some of my most cherished memories are of time with my grandfather. And some of the deepest and most powerful lessons that would help me navigate the uncharted waters of fatherhood came from him as well. I would like to share some of those characteristics with you, because, as fathers, it is important for us to strive for them. But more importantly, these are also characteristic that all of us as Christians should be developing.

Strength: *Grandpa was physically strong. As a young teen working with him in the granary shoveling corn, I decided I could certainly outwork him at his age! So I started shoveling faster and harder, just to prove my point. But it wasn't long until I was sweating, dirty, worn-out and steadily falling farther behind! It was amazing how strong that "old" man really was!*

But it wasn't just his physical strength, it was also his strength of character. By the end of his life, it was his spiritual strength that inspired me. He was physically tough – had his back severely broken as a pre-teen in an accident, but he never quit and never let it slow him down. He was mentally and emotionally tough – enduring hard times, the death of a baby and more. And he was spiritually tough – once God called him, he remained faithful until his last breath.

Patient and Calm: My grandpa was known for his untiring patience, no matter the circumstances. That trait was something he taught me when working with livestock. There are times to yell and holler and wave your arms to stop the animals or herd them in a direction you want them to go, but grandpa taught me how being patient, using slower movements and a calm and soothing voice will often accomplish so much more. And when you are in a pen with cattle, you can get hurt badly if a 1,200 pound animal gets upset or scared!

While working on equipment (and on the farm something always has to be either repaired or maintained) I'd sometimes get frustrated, and growl at a "stupid wrench" or "stupid bolt". Grandpa would always remind me the wrench and bolt were neither stupid nor smart, it was me who had the option to be one or the other. And then He'd calmly examine the predicament I was in, and let me know what I should do instead.

His approach to people was the same, always calm and patient. He had a deep, easy laugh that put everyone at ease. He always took the time to listen, and help if he could. While grandma could get quite worked up, I never, ever remember my grandpa getting mad and raising his voice, certainly never throwing things or launching into the verbal harangues others would. He always set a wonderful example.

Always there for others: It was never a question in my mind whether grandpa would be there if I needed him or called. An example I'll never forget was with my first car, a rather homely 11-year-old 1967 Plymouth.

One day on my way home from work I had a back tire blow on the driver's side. Grandpa had taught me how to change a tire, so I jacked up the car and pried off the hubcap, and went to work. But the lug nut didn't want to come off. Perhaps I just needed to put my back into it, so I did. To my dismay the entire lug bolt twisted off, nut and all! I can still drive on four bolts, so I tried one on the other side of the wheel, and in short order got the same results. With only three left, I knew I was now in trouble! So I walked to the nearest farmhouse to use their phone and called grandpa.

He pulled up a short while later, to my great relief. He stood and looked at the car for what seemed like a solid minute, then with one finger he wiped some of the caked gravel road dust from the end of one of my remaining lug bolts, revealing the letter "L" stamped on the end. It seems Plymouth decided to put left-hand threads on the left side of some cars! When I turned the remaining nuts the opposite direction, they came off just fine, and I was able to gingerly drive home on the remaining three bolts, where grandpa helped me replace the broken ones. He was always there for me, and I knew it!

And it wasn't just me. I've seen grandpa stop whatever he was doing when a neighbor came by to ask for help. If a church member needed help, grandpa would drive two or three hours round-trip to help them. It's just who he was.

A man of integrity: My grandpa was a man of his word, and unerringly honest. He was always careful about the promises he made, but once he promised, it was as good as done. If he promised to help a neighbor, rototill the huge garden for grandma or take me fishing, he would.

At 10 years old I hadn't learned much about patience yet. One fine summer's day grandpa had promised to take me fishing, as soon as he was done working on the truck. Itching to go I remember standing there watching with my pole in my hand. Finally, with a sigh, he got up, wiped the grease from his strong hands, and we went fishing! As much as he needed to finish the truck, he made good on his promise.

I have no memory of my grandpa ever lying, cheating anyone or being dishonest in any way. He just didn't live that way, and he had little tolerance for those who did. I remember one man who was dishonest in dealing with us. Grandpa made his feelings exceedingly clear in his low, steady voice, and he refused to ever use that man's services again. He had integrity, and he expected it from others too, including me. That was a powerful lesson.

Deeply converted: Somewhere around the time my first car rolled off the assembly line in Detroit, God called my grandparents and uncle to the Truth. Until cancer ended his life 13 or 14 years later, grandpa lived his calling with the same patience and integrity that defined everything else about his life. It was in large part through his example that I first became acquainted with the Truth of God, and within a few years began to read and study for myself. I would have to give my grandpa a great deal of credit for not only exposing me to the Truth, but for setting a wonderful example of what a Christian man can and should be.

Among other things, strength, patience and calm, reliability, integrity and deep conversion are all elements so very important for a father to have, and to model for his children and later his grandchildren. I only hope that over time I can live up to the measure of the man to whom I owe so much.

Meanwhile, I want to wish you all a very good Sabbath. My family and I will be in Van Buren for morning services and then travel up to Bentonville for afternoon services. We look forward to seeing many of you!

Best regards,

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