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Gleanings

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What I Learned from Dad



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The principle of reproduction is one of the great realities of God's universe. In Creation, God set in place the reality that all species, including humans, reproduce after their own kind (see Genesis 1). As a result, when humans reproduce they produce children who reflect the character and nature of their parents. Furthermore, parents have the privilege of training their children. If we want to realize our full potential, as children we need to be very circumspect about learning the lessons of life from our parents.

Another reality of our current existence is that we all have life limits, that is, we all die. Parents will die and children will die. On April 12, my Dad passed from this life. In addition to considerable emotional pain, the event has caused me to reflect more deeply on what I learned from him. My Dad has taught me much in life; hence, I would like to dedicate this newsletter to him and, at the end, to share some of the lessons that he taught me.

But first, here is my eulogy to my Dad.

What happens when you are born into a poor family, particularly a family that continues to grow in the number of mouths to feed? The Lewis Chester family grew to a total of eight children during a time of economic depression and then a world war. My Dad, Bill Chester, faced these circumstances as the oldest son of Lewis and Bessie Chester.

As a boy, Dad worked hard on the family farm. He remembered the arduous work of picking cotton in the hot Texas sun. Summer nights in Texas were miserable in the homes of the day—there was no air-conditioning. Many nights he would sleep outside to escape the heat. There were times when he didn't have any shoes, as well as times when he had little to eat. Though these were hard years, they were used by God to build character and to shape his vision for his life.

When World War II began, Dad worked for a tire company. Since tires were a necessary war material, his employer obtained an occupational deferment for him. Dad felt the call of duty, however, and voluntarily joined the United States Navy.

Through the war years, he was in numerous battles in the Pacific Theatre. He experienced life-changing pain as he witnessed the death of many of his friends during the course of combat. Japanese suicide pilots known as "kamikazes" damaged his ship several times. He endured long hours at his battle station in the war zone and many times he feared for his life.

As with his childhood experiences, the war years were times of growth and maturity for Dad. One of his life-shaping experiences in the navy was exposure to pipe fitting. He discovered that he enjoyed this type of work.

After the war he applied himself to getting an education with the goal of starting his own business. Remembering how much he enjoyed pipe fitting, he sought business opportunities that utilized this trade. This led him to the plumbing business.

Shortly after returning home from the war, he went to work for Watson Brothers, a Dallas area plumbing company. He started at the bottom and worked his way up. He became a journeyman plumber, then a superintendent, and finally an estimator and salesman.

In 1949, he formed his own company, United Plumbing Company. During the next thirty years, he built the company into a leading mechanical contracting firm. Eventually the

company was renamed United Mechanical. Today United Mechanical is nearly sixty years old and enjoys an outstanding reputation mostly because of the legacy of its founder, my Dad.

The company was very important to Dad as he was determined to provide something for his family that he had never experienced while growing up—financial security. After the initial years in business, he experienced substantial success. Through hard work, dedication to excellence, and a commitment to building relationships, he provided financial security to his family. This enabled his wife and four children to enjoy not only a comfortable life, but also enabled his children to enjoy something else that he hadn't personally experienced—a college education.

But perhaps Dad's greatest legacy was that he led a generation out of the poverty he had grown up in. Because of his business success, he was able to help his immediate family with vision and resources to achieve their dreams. But this blessing was not limited to his immediate family. Brothers, nephews, and brothers-in-law all were blessed through his business and generosity.

Dad was always concerned about others and kindly gave to help his family and friends. "Selfless servant" is a good descriptor of his relationship with others. On more than one occasion, he gave money to those in need with no expectation of repayment. His heart was always to help and bless.

His legacy looms large. He was a man of great character, vision, and determination—a true servant-leader who loved much. He was a mighty man, who will be greatly missed. I salute him with the words spoken of King David:

"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep." Acts 13:36 (NIV)

Dad served God's purpose in his own generation. Now he has fallen asleep. So to Dad I say: "Thank you, I love you, I miss you, and good-bye for now. I will see you on the other side. And I know you are walking with the giants in heaven."

I was very blessed by my Dad in so many ways. He was my biggest fan, always there for me. He loved my wife, my children, and me. He was always interested in whatever we were doing and did whatever he could to support us. But perhaps the greatest blessing from Dad was the value system that he taught me. So please allow my Dad to bless you as I share a few of the values that he imparted to me.

Truth: Dad was a stickler for truth—good, bad, or ugly—he had to know the truth and was very intolerant of lies. I remember one time as a teenager when I lied to him about something and he punched me out. He was deadly serious about truth and knew that only truth sets us free (John 8:32).

Integrity: Living consistently with righteous values was high on Dad's list. Integrity is about living righteously, that is, in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. Dad hated hypocrisy and gave no quarter to it. The closest that Jesus came to cursing was criticizing the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:13). Dad shared Jesus's perspective.

Work ethic: Growing up in poverty, Dad learned the value of hard work. All his life he applied himself diligently to his work and trained his children accordingly. I remember working in the family business starting at the age of twelve. Every holiday and summer vacation, Dad would put me to work. As a result, when I went college I was already a licensed plumber, to the amazement of my professors. My Dad practiced Proverbs 14:23: all hard work is profitable.

Excellence: If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well. This was my Dad's operating philosophy. This philosophy permeated everything that he did. On the day of his memorial service, I made sure my bed was made, my car was clean, I was neatly and appropriately dressed, and my shoes were polished. For me, this was simply a reflex, because my Dad taught me to live this way. This habit of life reflected the teaching of the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:17, which commands us to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Passion: Dad taught his children to pursue their passion. He taught us to enjoy getting up every morning. He said that life is too short to not do what you love to do—money should not be the driver for work, passion should be. Passion is a wonderful gift from God and is a key tool for guiding us into our life work. Psalms 111:2 extols the value of delighting in God's creation. Find what you love about God's creation and do it. Then you will enjoy each day.

Stewardship: Dad placed great importance on stewarding resources. He was not a pack rat, because clutter caused confusion and neglect. If he owned something, he felt the responsibility to care for it. He understood the truth found in Luke 16:11: the skilled management of worldly assets qualifies us to manage true assets.

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Generosity: A corollary of stewardship is generosity. Dad was generous—giving freely to anyone in genuine need. Unlike most people today, he did not view himself as a consumer and he put personal needs at the bottom of his list of the uses of money. He truly practiced Ephesians 4:28, which encourages us to work so that we may have something to share with others.

Relationship (love): One of the keys to business is relationship. Dad believed that you must do business with friends; you do not want to do business with your enemies. He built many lasting relationships practicing the Golden Rule (Galatians 5:14). Not only have I sought to build relationships as Dad did, but I have also tried to honor Dad's relationships in the spirit of Proverbs 27:10, which encourages us to value the friends of our fathers.

Planning: Planning is essential for every business. Dad was a master planner. He even planned his passing. When he discovered that he was terminally ill, he began giving away anything he did not need. He worked with professionals to structure the assets in his estate to maximize the financial blessing to his family. In addition, he provided detailed instructions for his funeral and prepaid the costs. His work greatly reduced the funeral burden on the family since we knew his wishes. In all aspects of life, Dad practiced planning in accordance with Proverbs 16:9.

Service: Dad understood that another key to business is service. The value proposition of an organization is efficacious only to the degree that the organization services its customers well. His business always enjoyed an outstanding reputation because, for Dad, business was not about money, it was about serving others. He willingly sacrificed profit to insure that the expectations of his customers were exceeded. He went the extra mile (Matthew 5:41) and was the servant of all (Mark 9:35), which is why he is among the giants in heaven.

Given the biblical values that Dad practiced, it is not surprising that his life blessed so many. His legacy will live on through everyone he touched.

If you embrace the biblical values that my Dad practiced, you will honor the Lord and you will bless those you love and bless yourself. Plus, there is no doubt that my Dad would be pleased to know that he blessed you.

If you want to live a life that counts, first embrace Christ as your Savior, then express your gratitude to God for the saving work of Christ by living biblical values as my Dad did so beautifully. Then you will do well in life, just as my Dad did. And one day you too will walk with the giants in heaven.



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