

Father's Day

Expositional Study Selected Texts

What My Father Did Right

Written By

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I am who I am today because of the influence of my godly father, Gettys Albert Baker. From my childhood, to his death in August of 2008, he poured his life into mine, teaching me everything from how to read people and situations to how to tell stories. And, boy, did he love to tell stories. Raised in South Carolina in a story-telling family, he knew how to keep you spellbound whenever he started reminiscing about his past life and experiences.

I'll never forget the one he told me about a mother who came into his office in the Federal office building in San Diego. Her son had been caught smuggling an illegal exotic bird into the U.S. and she took issue with the arrest fine by my father's officers. Sitting down in his office overlooking the beautiful Coronado Bay Bridge, she started in ...

"My son, Jose, is not guilty, and I will not pay this fine" she argued.

"So you say your son is innocent?" my father replied.

"Yes. He is a victim."

"How so? Please, why don't you tell me what he told you happened to him that day as he sat in his car waiting his turn to go through our port of entry" he stated.

"Well, Jose said as he sat there with the engine idling and the windows down, this exotic bird just happened to fly in the passenger's open window. Immediately, he tried to grab the bird, but it managed to quickly crawl under the seat, and just when that happened is when he pulled up to the Custom's officer."

“Oh, is that what your son told you?” my father countered.

“Yes,” replied the convinced and angry mother.

With that my father said, “Now, in light of what Jose told you I have a couple of practical questions for you. If the bird did just happen to fly through his window, and if it did, in fact, manage to squeeze its large body under the seat, how did it happen to tape its bill closed and also manage to crawl into a bag, which, oddly enough was taped closed?”

The lady paid the bill.

Because my father told such great stories, we lived in a state of laughter in our home. Yeah, my father's stories were something else, and he was something else. For years he held the record of drug seizures by a single agent in his area. He became the youngest supervisor, at the time, of a port of entry, and rightly so because he was an excellent, smart, and wise leader who loved his agents. Even though he never had a college education, people with college degrees and Ph.D.s populated his office and reported to him. They also enjoyed his insights into issues and problems they all faced. Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes interviewed him during my high school year, but he never liked the interview because they edited his words to make him say things which ran contrary to what he believed or said in the totality of the interview setting. He met many movie stars over the years who came through his port of entry to enjoy fishing and hunting in Mexico. And after he retired from Customs at 56 years of age, he worked for the next twenty years for E & G Dynatrends as the supervisor in charge of anything seized in five western states by the IRS and U.S. Customs. He also took possession of things, at times for the FBI. I'll never forget the time I walked into one of his 100,000 square foot facilities and noticed an old wooden shack off in the corner.

“What's that?” I asked pointing in the direction of the “house.”

“That is the Uni-bomber's shack, you know, Ted Kaczynski. I took possession of it for the FBI and they will eventually be moving it to D.C.” he replied.

“Can I snap a picture of it with my iPhone?” I asked.

“No, son, that would be against the law” my dad asserted. Moses had spoken so we moved on to look at other confiscated items.

All of this has always amazed me. He, the humble country boy, the young man they called Sonny Boy when he grew up, accomplished much in his 76 years, but his biggest impact rested on my life. I am forever in debt to you dad because you did it right.

And that right there is the question I'd like to entertain this morning.

What My Father Did Right

I usually give you a detailed and pragmatic exposition of a given Bible text, but for this special day I think we need to pause and learn from a life well-lived, a life of a godly man whose life as a father still speaks to us today even though he's in God's presence. I've spent my entire life studying my father's great and exemplary life so I could live as he lived and be the kind of father and man of God he represented all the way to the end. From my study I can easily isolate those key life principles which have changed me and I know they can and will change you as fathers too.

He Stayed True To My Mother

My father's vocabulary didn't leave any room for the word divorce. He chose, rather, to be committed to Ephesians 5:25-29:

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, ...

He realized the present tense command of the word "love" in the Greek, calling for perpetual observance on his part. And he also knew this was agape love, a specialized word calling for unconditional, sacrificial, selfless love. Even though I didn't hear him audibly say all the time he loved my mother around the house, his actions proved he loved her without question.

- He sacrificed for her even though he worked hard shift hours for most of my life.
- He came alongside her after a hard day with the children.
- He supported her when we needed discipline.
- He made sure she was part of the various decisions they faced as a couple. Yes, he coveted her insights into the challenges and opportunities they faced.
- He provided for her needs.
- He spoke to her in a loving fashion. Sure, they, like any married folks, argued now and then, but I never heard him call her a name or use vulgar words toward her. That was just how you spoke with the woman you loved.

You couldn't be around my father long before you realized you stood with a godly man with a godly love toward his wife, a love nothing or nobody would shake. Theodore Hesburgh said years ago, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." I don't know if my father ever read this quote, but he sure lived it, and now it is my turn and it's your turn too.

Father's. Will you love your wife through every step of life?

- Through tough arguments, as petty as some of them might be. Will you be friends on the other side of the debate?
- Through the terrible twos of your children?
- Through the emotion of watching your first child graduate and go away to college?
- Through the day you place your daughter's hand into that of young man she loves?
- Through sickness which may strike your wife's body?

Some men get to some life steps and then pull away or pull out. Godly men don't head down those paths, ever. No, they love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and that love, in turn, filters down to the children who are always watching, studying, and learning from their lives.

He Learned From His Mistakes

He made plenty, and if you ever wanted to know what they were, you just had to ask mom. She had a steel trap of a memory for recalling where and when he had blown it. She could probably tell you what he was wearing on the day in question, too. Aren't women amazing?

Yes, my father made his share of mistakes, but he became wise because he learned from them. Solomon illustrates this spiritual principle well. Looking back over his long, no-holds-barred life, watch how the king speaks in his old age:

³ I explored with my ¹mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my ¹mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men ²to do under heaven the few years of their lives. ⁴ I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; ⁶ I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. ⁸ Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men— many concubines. ⁹ Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. ¹⁰ All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had ¹exerted, and behold all was ^{2a}vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. ¹² So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? ¹³ And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness (Ecclesiastes 2).

Ah, there the message is in the last line: wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. Solomon learned that you could pour your life into all kind of life pursuits, but at the end of the day it was, and is, divine spiritual wisdom is what matters most. The king had been consumed with all the wrong things in life for years, but he eventually learned that the spiritual things far outweighed the earthly things. That, my friend, is wisdom and it is gained when one learns from their mistakes.

My dad must have studied Solomon's life closely.

When I was around five years old, my father was a Border Patrol agent. He worked long hours at a temporary prison facility for illegal aliens in Imperial, California. Because he loved ping pong, and they happened to have a nice competition grade table in the main building, he'd get off work and start playing other agents for hours after work. And he'd be so excited about and so engaged in the game he'd forget time and time again to call mom, who typically had dinner ready for his arrival.

Believe me; I remember when he'd pull up in the driveway in his blue 1965 Chevy Impala with a white hard top. My sweet, loving mother usually shifted into the General Patton mode. He ducked and ran for cover on a few occasions, but eventually he wised up and figured out how a husband is supposed to function in this one key area. Trust me, fathers. A phone call, a text message, or a tweet can and will breathe wonderful life into your marriage.

Got any fathers here right now who've made some mistakes this last week? Anyone bit the dust because you were thoughtless during the last month?

- Anyone forget your wedding anniversary?
- Anyone get the anniversary date wrong?
- Anyone answer the question from your wife, "Honey, how do I look in this new outfit?"
- Anyone blow a petty concern all out of proportion?
- Anyone forget to follow-through on something you said you'd do her or for your children?
- Anyone, well, I challenge you to fill in the proverbial blank.

Small fathers make mistakes and never learn from them. Great fathers make mistakes and seek to learn from Christ how they can improve from the situation. My father taught me all about this truth, and I'm glad he did because I've made my share of mistakes too, and I've grown from them, spiritually speaking.

And, as a sidelight, I must challenge the ladies. When, not if, he makes mistakes, will you be ready and willing to forgive and restore him? Will you be ready and willing to give him the room and the time to move into deeper spiritual maturity? He is going to need you.

He Made Sure We Were At Church

I can't remember not being at church. From my earliest memories, until I headed for college in 1976, my father made sure our local church remained the center of our lives.

- Every Sunday we were in Sunday School learning about Jesus and His Word.
- After Sunday school we attended worship and listened to Dr. Harold Ling teach the Scripture and bring them to life in creative ways.
- Every Sunday evening we had youth group at 6 p.m.
- After youth group we attended worship where we typically heard a special series from the Scriptures.
- After worship we usually went to other people's homes for Sip N Sings, or food and fellowship. I always enjoyed those times and can't begin to say how many theological discussions we had over cake and punch.
- Thursday nights were adult choir practice and we sat in the pews while my parents rehearsed for worship on Sunday.
- When there was a men's function or men's breakfast, I joyfully went with him.
- When the church had a work day, I had the opportunity to help him and the other men when I could.

- Every Sunday he taught a Sunday School class full of sixth graders, while my mother ran the children's department.

Yes, missing church was not an option in our home, and I must say it was one of the greatest gifts my father gave me as the spiritual leader of his home.

- At church, I learned of my sinful status and the Savior's work to redeem me and give me true spiritual life.
- At church, I learned how to worship the living God.
- At church, I learned the difference between a worship service and a performance.
- At church, I learned the value of loving admonishment.
- At church, I learned how to love and care for other saints.
- At church, I learned how to give to God by watching my father financially gave and by seeing other saints, like Mrs. Jackson, live simple lives with a special needs child, but who made sure she gave God his due.
- At church, I learned the difference between moral and immoral living and the importance of choosing holiness above all things.
- At church, I learned the importance of having a multitude of counselors as I faced various, thorny issues as I grew up. Solomon is so right along these lines: "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22).
- At church, I learned how to think through and use the Word of God for spiritual maturation.
- At church, I was exposed to great saints and pastors like Richard Wurmbrand who suffered greatly for his faith in Romania under the communists.
- At church, I gained a reverential respect for the holiness of God.
- At church, I gained a deep love for the theological field called prophecy.
- At church, I learned the value of prayer by watching godly women like Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Miller. Their stories of how God honored and answered their prayers always excited and humbled me.
- At church, I learned how to share my faith and defend the Word.
- At church, I learned how to teach and preach the Word. For two years I served as the leader and teacher of our high school group, and before I went to college, I was asked to preach my first public sermon.
- At church, I developed a love for missionaries. Remember how I told you some time ago how I struggled academically when I was younger? Well, when I was in second grade, it was a white-haired, retired missionary from Ecuador, Mrs. Kristofferson, who stayed with me after Sunday School to help me learn how to read.
- At church, I developed a love for missions. During my Junior and Senior years I lead many missions trips with Y.U.G.O. (that's an acronym for Youth

- Unlimited Gospel Outreach) where I learned to preach and teach through interpreters.
- At church, I learned how to serve the body of Christ with my spiritual gifts.
 - At church, I was baptized and publically declared my allegiance to Jesus Christ.
 - At church, I started to understand God's calling on my life.

My father did many things right, and making sure we all understood the ultimate value of being an active part of a vibrant, caring, biblically-based local church was one of his greater gifts to me. He didn't just read the words from Hebrews 10 about worship. No, he applied them to his life and to ours because he knew how important they were. And what are those words? Here they are:

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Some fathers would rather be jogging or working out at the gym on a Sunday morning, while the wife makes sure the kids get to church. They, unfortunately, work on the outer man which is decaying, while giving little or no attention to the development of the inner man which shall live forever. I thank God I had a father who knew the difference. Sure, he gave me a love for sports and working out, but I always knew that love could never replace or be out of balance with the importance of being in a house of worship before the unseen throne of the living, Almighty God.

He Loved The Less Fortunate

My father never let his power, position, and prominence get in the way of caring for people. I'll never forget my first class on this concept. It occurred when I was about eight years old.

I had a coin collection I prized. Right after the government started putting copper into our coinage, you could still find old silver coins in circulation. I collected them when I found them, and eventually started using some of my limited monies to also buy old coins. At one point, I had a few Liberty Head Silver Dollars. They were my pride and joy because they were so clean, new, and shiny.

Then one night someone knocked at the door. In a few seconds two sailors dressed in black uniforms with the white stripes around the collars shook my dad's hand, walked into the living room, and sat on the couch. Within a few minutes it was apparent they were old Navy buddies passing through the area, but they were in need, and that's why they dropped by our home.

At the time, my parents didn't have much money to spare, but my dad knew I had a small coin collection. Somewhere along the line, someone told me copper would be added to coins and that silver coins, which were still in circulation at the time, would be worth something one day, so I started keeping all the old coins I could find. Eventually, family members, like my mother's parents, would give me coins to add to my growing collection.

Anyway, my dad knew about my coins. I'll never forget how things went that evening as his two Navy buddies sat on our couch explaining their financial situation. My dad got up and retrieved my two prized Liberty Head Silver Dollars and said, "Marty, these men need this

money more than you so I'm going to give these coins to them, OK?" I happily agreed and within a few minutes those sailors were out the door with some of their needs met. I've thought about that moment many times over the years. Who knows, I could have retired now for those coins, right? All kidding aside, my father taught me the importance of sacrificially giving to meet the needs of others. Usually, he was at the front of that line, but on this evening back in the mid-1960s he put me at the front. Yet I had many opportunities to watch him over the years be a giver and not a getter.

No sooner did I leave for college than over the next several years various young men with various hard-luck stories moved into my parent's home. I'd come home from college to find someone else in my bedroom. It's just the way my father lived. If you had a need and he had the ability to meet that need, he acted sacrificially and selflessly.

And I will never forget the day I met his best childhood friend, Johnny Williams.

Driving through the woods of South Carolina a few years before he died, my father said he wanted me to actually meet the man he had spoken about so much over the years, the guy he played ball with in the school yard, the guy he had played in the woods with almost every day and all day during those long, hot, humid summers. The farther we drove, the deeper the woods became. I started wondering where we were going, and then an old, battered shack alongside the country road caught his attention. "There is it. There is Johnny's house," he said.

"That is where Johnny lives. Somebody actually lives in that shack," I replied.

"Yes, and, oh look, there is Johnny on the roof with a hammer," he said excitedly.

As we parked, Johnny started to walk toward the rickety ladder. I couldn't help but notice his pronounced limp and the odd way he swung one of his deformed arms. He didn't know who we were at first, but once he reached ground level and saw my father, he went ballistic, hugging him and mumbling words I couldn't make out through his toothless smile.

That moment became one of those moments I almost burst into tears. My father had never told me Johnny had severe physical issues. He couldn't hear real well, he couldn't speak in an intelligible fashion, and his body was misshapen, making walking and even standing a real effort. Wow. This was my father's best childhood friend. He had many other friends, but this was his close friend. Standing there I learned much about my father that day. His buddy was the guy everyone else would make fun of. His buddy was the guy nobody would ever pick for a team. His buddy was the guys nobody would want to hang out with, ever. But this was my father's buddy because my father didn't see the disabilities. He just saw Johnny with the eyes of Christ.

Isaiah told us eight hundred years before His birth how the Messiah would act toward the less fortunate:

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice (Isaiah 42).

Key here is verse three. The Messiah would care for those with life issues, to those bruised by life, to those whose life circumstances threatened the light of their lives. To read through the gospel accounts is to see how this verse represented the daily ebb and flow of Christ's life. He

loved the unlovely, and He willingly and purposefully stepped out and befriended the Johnny Williams' of life.

Father's, listen. One of the greatest things you can give y our family, your children is the flesh and blood model of a man who loves the Johnny Williams of life. My father gave it to me and I will never forget its value.

Being a father comes with a tremendous responsibility. You can either do it right or you can do it wrong. My father did it right because he chose to be a father who followed and sought to emulate Jesus Christ. I'm trying to walk in those big shoes. Whose shoes are you attempting to walk in?