

Colossians 3:20-21; Deuteronomy 6:4-7
 June 20, 2010 (Fathers Day)

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“A Father’s Love Letter”

The Apostle Paul wrote many letters which are included in our New Testament; some were written to churches who needed help solving problems; some churches needed a “how to” manual. Other letters were written to individuals. On some significant occasions, I choose to use letters for my sermon; today is one of those days.

Dear Daddy,

This may be the first Fathers Day when we have been together since 1993, the year before we moved to Virginia. My Sunday employment and the asphalt between us have prevented me from being with you on this special day each year. The occasion of Ally’s high school graduation has allowed us all to be together and celebrate. Happy Fathers Day!

I’d like to use this letter to communicate my gratitude to you. Thank you for the example that you have set before us. Your three children and four grandchildren have learned by your example. The words from our Old Testament Reading spoke of the importance of placing God first. The Children of Israel were invited not only to remember that the Lord is our God, the LORD alone, but they were also commanded to love the LORD their God with all their heart, soul, and might. They were to take these words to *heart*, to commit them to memory. Placing God first and loving God with a person’s entire self was important enough to share with their children. It was more than the passing down of *tradition*, or a way of life. These words were so important that the parents were to *recite* them to their children. They were to speak of their God every day. Parents were commanded to talk about God at home and when they were *not* at home, at night *and* in the morning. Talking to their children about God was to be as natural as talking about the weather. They were to talk about God *anytime*.

Part of this teaching also prompted the parents to remember the importance of placing God *first*. If they talked about God *often*, they would be reminded *themselves* of how important God was to be.

The conversation about God was supported by their everyday actions. Children were to hear about God *from* their parents, but were also to learn about God by *watching* their parents.

Daddy, much of what we learned about God came from you. Perhaps because of family circumstances, you and Mama decided to make sure that we were in church. “Being there every time the doors were open” left a distinct impression on us.

You were always consistent. As children we knew what the limits were; there was never any doubt; we always knew what to expect. Likewise, by your actions, you taught us to be dependable. If you said you were going to do something, we knew that you would do what you said you would do. You taught us the importance of integrity, of how important it is to keep a good name. You created a reputation of doing the right thing, even when it was difficult. Duty

and responsibility are more than mere descriptors; they entail who you have taught us to *be*. When we were growing up, you attended all our games, other school functions, and events.

You taught us to work hard; working at Ford Motor Company on the Assembly Line had to have been a struggle at times, especially during the Energy Crisis, or when the plant would close for brief periods of time. But you kept working, at one time, working three jobs to insure that we had *what* we needed and some of what we *wanted*.

While at times, we thought you were too hard on us, we never doubted your love for us. We are grateful for how you have evolved over the years. I want you to know that you have left an imprint on us; Liz, Britt, and I are all products of you and Mama. I'm not only referring to the Smith ears which Britt and I have inherited. Your influences run deep in our veins; we are proud to be called your children.

Thank you for training us up in the way we should go and for teaching us the importance of knowing that the Lord is our God. I love you very much.

Love,

Charles

Dear Ally and Samuel,

This is my 19th Fathers Day, since I celebrated my first Fathers Day before Ally had her first birthday, and I have so much for which to be thankful. I simply don't know what happened; my time as a Dad has moved so very quickly. Nothing gives me greater joy than spending time with my family.

Both of you graduated this week: Samuel from Eaton Middle School and Ally from Kecoughtan High School. As you walked across the stage, I simply could not imagine that both of you have developed into the people you have become. You were too young for too short of time, and now Samuel, you are going to high school this fall and Ally, you are going to the great University of Georgia, which makes me doubly proud. Thank you for being easy to raise. I love spending time with you. Some parents tell me how hard it is to *be* parents, but you have made it a privilege and a pleasure. So many times, you have been the light at the end of a dark day.

In our New Testament Lesson, Paul was instructing the Colossians on how important family relationships *are*, but also reminding them how good life can be, and he was right. Like Mom's spare-tire cover reads, "Life *is* good." Children were reminded to obey their parents; this commandment dated back centuries to the giving of the Ten Commandments. Actually this commandment is the *only* commandment with a promise; it read "Honor your father and mother so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." Following the directives of godly parents increases a person's *longevity*, for these parents are trying to raise the child to travel the right path. Paul's words to the children came as no surprise to his readers.

But Paul's directive to the fathers came as quite a shock. That society functioned with people at the *top* and people at the *bottom*; in a family system, the father *ruled*, and the children

had little to no status. Paul's words to fathers, that they should not provoke their children, were revolutionary. The reason offered was so that they not lose heart or get discouraged, which we now know is true because of the modern study of psychology. Our actions have an effect on the people we love.

Ally and Samuel, there are times when I have allowed outside stressors to invade our time, and I want to apologize. What happens to me in other relationships, circumstances, or situations outside our home should not negatively impact how I parent you. The responsibility lies with the parent to differentiate from those stressors and not provoke our children. You are gifts from God to me and your mother, gifts which we treasure with all our hearts.

I have attempted to be a good father. Before either of you were born, I taught a class called "Parenting by Grace." I've read books and articles to help me where I needed help. But my primary understanding of being a father was remembering how my Dad parented me. There were some things I wanted to do differently and some I wanted to do the same. I mentioned those good qualities in the earlier letter to Paw, and would like to pass them along to you.

I want you to know that God should always be number one in your life; I still believe that the church has a place in our world. Churches are flawed only because they are filled with humans. I hope you always go to church; I hope you always keep deepening your relationship with God.

Continue to be consistent and dependable. If you say you are going to do something, do what you say you are going to do. I want to underline the importance of integrity, of how important it is to keep a good name, for that is something that no one can ever take away from you. If you don't have a good reputation, it is only because you give it away. Do the right thing, *even* when it is difficult. Let me reword that last phrase, "Do the right thing, *especially* when it is difficult," for if you can do the right thing when it is difficult, then it will be easier to do the right thing the next time. Duty and responsibility are more than mere descriptors; they communicate to others what *you* consider to be important. Work hard; nothing worthwhile gets accomplished by being inactive or lazy.

While at times, you may think that I am too hard on you, I hope you have never doubted my love for you. You are products of Mom and me; I'm not only referring to your eye color which you inherited from me. Our fingerprints are all over you, more than you realize as teenagers. I am so very proud to be called your Dad.

Samuel, you are the nicest and most thoughtful person in our house. I hope you never outgrow your tenderness and simplicity. Ally, you are the most gregarious and confident in our house. Your future is as bright as the noonday sun. To both of you, never forget who you are; never forget from where you've come; always remember you are loved. Again, I am so very proud to be called your Dad. I love you very much.

Love,

Dad

Dear God,

I could not write these letters to my father and to my children if you weren't in my life. The way you parent me inspires me to be a better father: how you encourage me when I'm down; grant hope when futures look bleak; extend grace when I stumble; and love me no matter what. You have created me in your image and have given me worth.

Thank you God for allowing me to experience the joy of being raised in a Christian home; of having a wonderful marriage to a committed Christian who is my partner in ministry; and of having the privilege of being called Dad by two incredible teenagers. Thank you for providing for all my needs and many of my wants. Thank you for always being consistent and present. Your promises are true, and you are dependable. If you said you were going to do something, we know that you will do what you said you would do.

You have believed in us when *we* didn't, knowing that we can do *all* things through Christ who strengthens us.

I have never doubted your love for me. My actions have not always proved my love for you and when there has been distance in our relationship, it has only resulted because of *me*. While I know my Daddy loves me, and I know my children love me, I also know that your love far surpasses any love that we experience here on earth.

I am proud to be called your son; I love you very much.

Love,

Charles

Write letters. Tell the people who are most important to you that you love them. Life is too short. AMEN.