

A HEART-HELD FAITH

JEREMIAH 31:29-33

In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

There is a man who stands in the shadows of your life.

He may've been your rock and best friend. The skills and traits you lean on every day were taught to you by him... On the other hand, you may have never met this man or known him. Or you might've moved a thousand miles away from him to avoid his harmful influences.

But your biological father is there, behind the scenes.

My wife was 10 years old when she lost her dad to a drowning accident. Lyle Weldon was a godly, Christian man. I wish I had known him. Kathy wishes he had been there to walk her down the aisle and play with his grandson who bears his name, [Quincy Lyle...](#) He died on February 1st, and every February 1st for the 42 years we've been married it's a hard day for Lyle's little girl.

Lyle has been gone for over 50 years, but trust me his memory and legacy remains in the shadow of our lives.

That was especially true this past February 1st. As most of you know my son, Zach, was in a Covid comma for the month of January, and on February 1st his doctor called us to prepare us for the worst. Why February 1st of all days? Why get the bad news on that exact date?

But God's timing is always perfect. Kathy had prayed and asked God to save her grandson from growing up without a dad as she had done. As it turns out God was refining our faith! February 1st was the turning point. The next day, Zach woke up. Today, he's back home.

Our experience obviously causes me to praise God, but it also reminds me that there is a man who stands in the shadows of our lives. We usually call him "dad."

I believe this is true for everyone - even those who wish it weren't so. I know some of you have memories of your father you're trying to forget. You were battered or abused by the man who should've shown you love. And you've resented the sway he's had over you - even the influence he has on you today, from the shadows.

"It's not fair," you say, "why should I care about who he is or what he did?" In a strictly biological sense a father's role in child-bearing doesn't equal the weight of his overwhelming influence. We think just because a man donated his seed, it shouldn't entitle him to a permanent place in the spotlight, or even in the shadows of another life. But it does. And I believe it's God's will that it does.

Because God wants to have a father-child relationship with us all, He made the father-child relationship of us all so very powerful. Our dad haunts us or helps us - or something in between - but he impacts us all. God granted this power, in hopes that our earthly fathers will be good fathers, and point us to our heavenly Father.

Which brings us to Jeremiah 31:29, where we're told, "In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'" Naturally speaking a father does have a disproportionate influence on his child. He's the one who eats rotten grapes, yet the child gets stuck with the sour taste. But the passage predicts a day when that will no longer be the case. Such statements won't be made.

For God will establish a New Covenant where He'll put his law in our minds and write it on our hearts. He gives us a new life - we experience a new birth where we no longer experience our father's sinful aftertaste - but God Himself becomes our Father, and we inherit His nature.

This is the relationship God made possible on the cross when He sacrificed His Son Jesus to forgive us.

Now, for the Christian there is another Man in the shadows. You have a stronger influence named Jesus! And He won't let your natural father ruin your life - not when you have a Father in heaven who wants to save it.

If you weren't blessed with a good and godly dad take hope. Jesus is now with you to give you all you need.

Especially, if you're a man trying to be the dad to your kids, that you didn't have. Some of us fathers worry that we're not enough. We won't be up to the task. But Dad, if you know Jesus He's put on your mind and written into your heart the love you need to be a good father.

Every dad needs Jesus in the shadows. We want Him to be our influencer, especially if we've suffered at the hands of a hurtful dad. Men, pain that's not transformed by Jesus ends up getting transferred to our children.

This is why every father needs to be born again. Dads need mouthwash! Rather than the sour taste of grapes we didn't eat, we need to receive the new life that comes in

Christ. Dads need Jesus - and we need examples of fathers who love Jesus and are good dads to their kids.

And today, I have an example of just such a man. He wasn't book smart, or a fancy talker, or sophisticated. He was born at home, had a 10th grade education, and worked mostly blue-collar jobs. But he loved Jesus with all his heart. He was my wise and wonderful dad.

Every day for a long time now this man has stood in the shadows of my life, along with Jesus. And though he's gone now, not a day goes by I don't somehow feel his influence. Today, I'd like to talk to you about my Dad.

This is my first Father's Day without him. Both Mom and Dad passed away this past year, and as I talked about my Mom on Mother's Day; today, I'd like to draw some lessons for all dads from the example of my own.

His name was Olin Adams, but in High School I started calling him "Big O." The name stuck. I came up with the nickname because I thought it fit my dad's enormous personality and opinions - not always a good thing. It was surprising to me when I heard his friends start calling him "Big O" - even Mom called him "Big O." The name resonated. Today, with the approval of his family, even his tombstone bears the inscription, "Big O."

Dad had a favorite psalm, Psalm 117, the shortest chapter in the Bible. He caused me to memorize it, "O praise the Lord, all ye nations. Praise Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord."

My Mom was the Bible student and she wanted to instill God's Word in the heart of her sons. So while growing up, every night Mom came into our room and read my brother and I a different chapter of Scripture. Except on Wednesdays... Mom was at choir practice, so that night it was Dad's job to read us our Bible chapter.

But every Wednesday night he read the same chapter. Duty-bound Dad would come into our room with his Bible, open it to Psalm 117, remind us it was the Bible's shortest chapter; then quickly read, "O praise the Lord, all ye nations. Praise Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord. Goodnight boys."

Then he would order us to sleep, shut the door, and go back to what he was doing. I think I was 30 years old before I realized, "Goodnight boys" wasn't in the text.

Yet fast forward many decades. A few years ago Dad and I were driving in my car, when I asked him, "Dad, every Wednesday night you came into our room, and read, "O praise the Lord, all ye nations. Praise Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord. Goodnight boys." Mom read us different chapters in the Bible, but you just wanted to get it over with - you read us the shortest chapter every Wednesday night."

Of course Dad replied, "How many of those chapters your mother read you, have you memorized?" Touche'!

Yet that story sums up the spiritual training I received from my Dad. Mom was the Bible student and scholar in the family. It was her priority to saturate our minds with the knowledge of God's Word. She was the theologian. Mom taught us chapters, and verses, and map locations, and prophecy timelines, and Bible background...

But in looking back on it now, Dad's role was just as important. He brought the theoretical down to real life. He gave us a shoe leather faith. Dad kept his Christianity real. He always brought the spiritual into the practical.

On Sunday nights Mom played the organ for the church choir, while Dad ushered and watched the parking lot for the thieves who'd been breaking into cars.

I'll never forget the night he tore the knee out of his suit pants. Someone said he ripped them when he fell down trying to catch a couple of guys burglarizing a car.

He had chased them across the parking lot into the nearby woods. I'm sure Dad had given very little thought as to what he was going to do with them if he caught them. It was a blessing he fell and they got away.

But even as a child it struck me; that Dad's devotion to God was willing to get down and dirty, and risk danger if necessary. Even though he'd fallen down, in my mind he was standing up for the Lord, and for what was right.

Up until a few years ago, when my eyes starting going bad and I needed a taller podium, I preached behind this pine pulpit built for me by my dad. (I brought it out just for today.) Dad also constructed the stage in the old building on which I preached. Dad didn't do a lot of chapter and verse explaining, but my ministry went out from the pulpit and platform Dad constructed with his own two hands.

To me, this wooden pulpit represents my Dad. As a pastor I speak for the Lord, but Dad's ministry was more practical, more hands on. He served through his actions.

My Dad wasn't a scholar. Scholastic robes would've looked odd on him. In fact, his theology was whacky at times, especially as he got older. For a pastor like me who places great importance on rightly dividing God's Word, Dad drove me nuts with crazy interpretations and ideas. His flawed theology certainly had some holes in it.

I always told him his first 30 minutes in heaven would be spent with Jesus telling him he should've listened more to his son. But then I think of the thief on the cross, or the Samaritan woman at the well, or the Romans at Cornelius' house who the Lord saved and filled with His Spirit - how much theology did these people have right?

They'd all been raised on paganism and Greek mythology. I'm sure they all had outlandish and unbiblical ideas, yet Jesus forgave them anyway and made them His people. They were under a New Covenant where God had promised, **"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."**

I'm just saying in some ways proper theology is a bit over-rated. Hey, there'll be people in hell who had expert theology, but it never worked its way downward the eighteen

inches from the person's brain to their heart. Academic knowledge is important, but it's not essential.

When the Ethiopian asked Philip how he could be saved, Philip told him, "If you believe in Jesus with all your heart..." That's where my Dad excelled. His was a heart-held faith. Dad was sincere and stubbornly so.

I'm sure when I get to heaven, Jesus will spend His first 30 minutes with me explaining that I didn't know as much as I thought I did. And that all my sufficiency was not in what I knew, but in Christ, and in Him alone.

Olin Adams believed with his heart. If you ever talked to my Dad for long you realized he was passionate about his faith. Dad was bold and fearless. He loved Jesus and he didn't mind telling anybody about Him.

And he loved to serve the Lord, anyway he could. Mom was the talented musician and the gifted Bible teacher. She was in demand. Mom taught a ladies' Sunday School class, sang solos, and played the organ.

Though Dad was less talented, he was just as eager to serve. He willingly took the unglamorous assignments.

For one, Dad also taught Sunday school, but he took the class nobody wanted - the death row for Sunday School teachers. Dad dared to teach fifth grade boys.

And I love how he did it. He'd stand and say to the class, "Alright boys, does anybody have something they want to say. You can talk about anything you'd like, for as long as you want. I'm just going to sit here quietly."

Of course, when given the opportunity nobody took advantage. So Dad would stand up again, and say, "Alright boys, you've had your chance. Now it's my turn and I expect you to shut-up and listen to me like I quietly listened to you." And it worked. We sat and listened.

Unlike Mom, Dad was never invited to sing in the choir or play an instrument at church, yet he still had musical gifts and a music ministry he used for the glory of God.

On weeknights he and his buddy loaded up their car and headed to the nursing home. Dad played the guitar and Jerry played a string attached to stick and a wash tub. Jerry would flip the handle on the wash tub and say he was changing keys... Dad and Jerry's Gospel songs sounded beautiful only to the hard-of-hearing, and to God! Making a joyful noise was the duo's specialty.

And while Mom served on Sunday mornings, in the spotlight at church, I saw Dad serve the Lord in the most sacrificial way imaginable. His invalid sister, Ann, lived in a nursing home downtown, and every Sunday afternoon Dad would pry himself off the couch, turn off the NFL game, and make that long drive to visit a forgotten sister.

After coaching and carting us to ball games all day Saturday, and faithfully attending church both Sunday morning and evening, Sunday afternoon was his only time off, but most weeks he gave it up to visit his sister.

My Dad's example taught me more about mercy, and compassion, and sacrifice than a thousand sermons on the subject. Dad always quoted James 1:27, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Big O lived that verse.

Dad never claimed to be, but he was also a biblical counselor. Of course, Dad had an opinion on everything, and often what he said was just that, an opinion. But on occasion God used my Dad's words to speak wisdom into my life that has shaped me and my ministry forever.

For example, shortly after Kathy and I got married, we had our first spat. I was angry and needed advice, so I came to Dad's house. He was in his garden, sweating profusely. He was getting a workout behind his rototiller, plowing up his garden. I'm sure I looked distressed.

But when he saw me, he didn't even turn off his rototiller, he just dropped it into idle. I said, "Dad, you'll never believe what Kathy..." That's as far as I got before he cut me off. He didn't let me complete my sentence.

Dad shouted over the motor, "Sandy, I've lived with you 20 years, and I know how hard you are to get along with. Now shut up and go home. Apologize to Kathy and do what she wants you to do." Then he popped the rototiller back into gear and went back to plowing his garden. I never went back to Dad for marriage counseling, but I also never forgot what he told me!

On another occasion we were facing opposition at church. I believed God was calling us to build a new facility, but a small pocket of people opposed our plans.

I went to my Dad for advice. We were sitting at the kitchen table when I complained, "I've served the Lord faithfully for 15 years. If they don't trust me by now they never will. I'm tired of having to prove myself to people."

And that's when Dad said sternly, "Sandy, in this world you have to prove yourself to people every single day."

As usual, Dad was right. God loves us unconditionally, but people, especially church-folk, have expectations of a pastor, and rather than grumble and complain about it, I needed to buck up and live to a higher standard.

And my Dad said something else to me once that will guide my life to the end of my days. And it wasn't in church, or in a Bible study. It was on the golf course.

We were on the ninth tee box at Mystery Valley. The play had slowed and several groups had bunched up.

I was waiting in the golf cart while Dad and this stranger got into a conversation. They chit-chatted a while until this man asked Dad, "Well, what do your sons do for a living?" Dad told him, "Both of them are pastors."

Oh, this guy just lights up. He's so excited, "Pastors! Wow, two sons and both are pastors. I'll bet you're proud of your boys!" And that's when Dad paused, and loud enough for me to hear, he answered him... "So far..."

I'll never forget Dad's two words that day. Whenever I'm on the verge of getting puffed up, I recall that my Dad has already popped that balloon. He let me know that stringing together a few years of faithfulness isn't enough. Even after 41 years I'm still only so far...

I'm very capable of messing up. Our race isn't over until we break the tape. As Clemson Tigers' coach, Dabo Swinney, once said, "Nothing is more irrelevant than the halftime score." What matters most is how we finish.

Like I told the nurse who was with me in Dad's final minutes on earth, "Life is a test. It's only a test. And my Dad passed his test." As Psalm 116 tells us, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

One Sunday after church Dad took me to Longdale Park to hit baseballs. I figured Dad was a so-so athlete. He'd bragged that he was the marbles champion of East Atlanta, but that was the extent of his athletic resume'.

Yet after throwing me countless baseballs, he said it was his turn to bat. That's when he pointed to the scoreboard in left-field and called his shot. He vowed to hit the scoreboard, and with the very next pitch he did. My dad bragged about that feat for the next fifty years.

Yet that kind of stuff was commonplace for Dad. He always find a way to do what he said he would do, even when people didn't think he could. Dad wasn't rich, or talented, or educated, but he was devoted and determined. He made up for what he lacked with his consistency. If Dad said it, you could take it to the bank. I grew up believing there was nothing my dad couldn't do.

And Dad was never more consistent than with his family. He was always there for Mom, Ken, and I. Dad would often joke, "I use to be called "Olin," but I got married, and became "Carol's husband." Then my son came along, and I was "Sandy's dad." After a while I was "Nick's granddad." Now I'm "Colt's great-grandpa!"

But don't let Big O fool you - his family was his greatest joy! He had learned that the secret of happiness is not holding onto your life, but in living it for others.

Dad protected his wife, Carol, for 70 years. Mom was literally the girl next-door. They got to know each other when Mom visited Dad's sister. The rest is history.

A few days ago I was going through a box at their house. It was full of love letters. It was like stumbling across buried treasure. One letter was dated 1953 a few months before they married. Dad had written to her while she was vacationing with her family. One card had a lock of mom's hair she had sent to dad in response. It was the beginnings of a love that lasted seven decades.

I've heard it said, "The best thing a man can do for his children is to love their mother." That's so true. Ken and I were blessed to grow up in a stable and loving home.

But Dad not only provided us stability, he knew that life is hard, troubles come, and so along with stability and love his goal was to also give us some grit and stamina.

I was about 10 years old, when Dad bought me a new bike. It was a Christmas present. This bike was a purple Schwinn, with a banana seat, and sissy handlebars.

We lived on a steep hill, and I was so cool flying down that hill on that bike. I was so cool I decided to stand up on its seat. And it was even more cool when I took my hands off the handlebars, and surfed down the street.

That it is, until my front tire hit a rock and spun sideways. I flew off that bike and slide about 30 yards across the pavement. At that point I was no longer cool. I was a mess. Street burns over my legs, back, and torso. Mom wiped me up off the pavement, found some ointment, bandaged me up, and prayed for my healing.

But when Dad got home from work and saw me lying in bed, he sized up the situation and took action. He got me up from the critical care ward that was my bedroom, took me outside, and put me right back on that bike. Dad made me ride it up and down the driveway.

He was wise enough to know my wounds would heal, but he didn't want fear to take hold in my heart. He immediately got me back on that bike. I didn't think so at that time, but that was cool. More than anything else, my dad taught me courage. He helped me grow into a man.

And the way Dad handled that situation was a way that was impossible for Mom. It just isn't in a mom to do what he did. A mom's heart is to shelter her son... kiss his boo-boos, nurse his wounds, help with his healing.

It took a dad to see beyond the immediate injuries and take stock of the long term consequences. Dad saw the need to teach his son how to be brave, to address and overcome his fears - to not give up when life gets hard.

And my mom would be the first to tell you it takes a Dad to make a beat-up boy get back on his bike. A dad does the hard stuff that needs to be done. It's a dad's job to make sure his kids face their fears, rather than succumb to them. Dads hold their kids accountable. They make them keep their promises and be true to their word - and not back down from the challenges of life.

Let me just say, I was blessed to be raised by a man and a woman. If you've accepted the notion that both sexes are not necessary for raising children you need to think again! Both genders bring to the table a different style of parenting. The unique ways men and women play and interact with children are both necessary.

Fathers roughhouse and play dangerously with kids. This inspires competition, and engenders independence, and promotes risk-taking... Whereas mothers interact in more nurturing and compassionate ways with their kids, which creates in children a sense of security. Masculinity and femininity are both essential to good parenting.

I've heard it said, "Dads tend to see their child in relation to the rest of the world. Moms tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their child." Another way to say that would be dads care about sending their children out, and preparing them to impact their world.

Whereas, moms emphasize a loving, and healing, and nurturing environment for their child - a safe place from the world.

That's why it's no surprise that it was my Dad who taught me to fight. And I'm not talking boxing lessons; no, he taught me how to face an enemy and not back down. Olin Adams had a spine. He had a backbone and he passed it on to his boys. He stood up for his family.

Once there was a crazy man at the ballpark. This guy was known in town for his violent temper. He'd been charged with the assault of his son's football coach.

He was there during our baseball game with his son's team. His boy had been in a collision at home plate, and the father, the crazy guy, thought I was the catcher, so he pushed me. I was 13, and a grown man pushed me.

Dad was on the other field watching Ken, when I told him what had happened. And immediately, Dad decided he needed to do something to defend his firstborn.

Dad assured me he'd take care of it, and he started walking to where the altercation occurred. Thankfully, the fellow was gone, but Dad had made up his mind he was going to mix it up with the guy. He would defend his son.

It's funny, years later, Dad confessed the whole time he was walking to where we thought the man would be, he was praying earnestly, "Please, Lord don't let him be there." As they say, "Faith is fear that's said it's prayers."

There was also an occasion where Dad physically came to the defense of my Mom. Dad worked 35 years for the telephone company. And once early in his career, Mom got an obscene phone call while Dad was at work.

Needless to say, it shook her up. Well, the next time it happened Dad traced the call. He got the number and looked up the caller. It was a teenage boy. So one day after work Dad parked in front of the kid's house.

He watched and took notes... the type and color of the boy's car. His tag #. He saw what the boy looked like.

Later that night, Dad called the kid. After describing his house, and car, and appearance, Dad said, "Now I know you, but you don't know me. And if you ever call my wife again, I'll get you when you least expect it." A loving husband protected his wife, and the calls stopped cold.

And Dad approached death the way he tackled the other bullies in his life. He was never intimidated. Fear never gained a foothold in his heart. I was by his bedside when he died. I wouldn't say he died peacefully. He died the way he lived, fighting to the very end. But he wasn't afraid. He knew that death is but a passage - a transition from this life to the next. Death is a foyer not a sanctuary.

Just this week, the thought of my own death struck me. I've seen so many friends and family die recently or almost die. You can't help but to think about the fragility and brevity

of this life. But I was reminded of my dad, and other believers with the same unconquerable faith.

Dad believed in Jesus, Who holds the keys to life and death. Jesus' resurrection assures us that death is not the end. He overcame. There is life beyond the grave.

And death can't take from the believer in Jesus anything of permanent value. In Christ, wives will rejoin husbands, and dads will be reunited with sons. In Jesus, even love, joy, peace, hope are undiminished by death.

Before I close, let me return to our original text, Jeremiah 31:29, "In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'" In other words, the day will come when children will no longer be able to blame their faults on their fathers. Just because your parents ate rotten grapes doesn't excuse the sour taste in your mouth. No one any longer can blame their sin on their upbringing.

For a New Covenant, a new birth, a new relationship with God the Father, the receiving of God's very nature can break the generational chains of sin and bondage.

Sons are no longer destined to repeat the mistakes of the fathers, and grandsons the mistakes of the sons.

In this sense my dad was the victim of sour grapes. He grew up in a bigoted South, in the days of Jim Crow and racial prejudice. Both Dad's church and family affirmed racist beliefs. A systemic racism indoctrinated a whole generation of white Southerners like my Dad. And this was the cultural heritage passed down to me.

Yet just because our fathers sucked sour grapes it doesn't mean we're destined to savor the same taste! There is a Father in heaven who changes human hearts.

Remember, what's not transformed by Jesus often ends up transferred to our kids. But through God's New Covenant hearts can be soften and minds can be changed. The Spirit of God doesn't give up on hard hearts and closed minds. God doesn't write off the racist any more than He gives up on any other sinner. Rather, His Spirit is able to write God's law of love onto our hearts, and into our minds. This is what God did in my life. He set me free from the bias of my bigoted culture.

And I'd get mad at my dad for not listening to me and at times persisting in his stubborn ideas. We had some real knock down, drag outs. Yet God was far more patient than I was. Three times God arranged divine appointments to get Dad's attention and shake him up.

Once it happened at the Waffle House. He and mom were eating dinner when an African-American lady, a complete stranger to mom and dad, walked up to their table and took dad's ticket to pay their bill. Of course, Dad resisted. My proud Dad always paid his own way!

But this lady insisted. She told Dad, Jesus had commanded her to buy his dinner, and if he didn't let her he would be keeping her from obeying Jesus! Well, Dad relented. He couldn't do that, so he handed over his bill.

Another time it happened at Hardees. A black man standing in line in front of him, got up to the register and told the clerk he was paying for his meal, and the white guy's behind him. Dad knew this was no accident. It was happening again... God was renewing my dad's mind.

Friends, God is faithful to do that. He's serious about changing our carnal ways. He'll do whatever it takes.

Let me be honest, was there still work for God to do in my father's heart? Yes, I'm sure there was... Just as the work of sanctification continues in all our hearts. But God was faithful to my dad. [Jesus was in the shadows of my Dad's life, just as my Dad was in the shadows of mine.](#)

It's ironic, while on earth my Dad was clinically colorblind. He couldn't see greens or certain shades of blue. Whenever we drove through an old town where the stoplights were turned on their side it got dangerous. If Dad was driving, he couldn't tell the "go" from the "stop."

But now that Dad is in heaven he sees color perfectly. And not just optically, but socially and racially. For it's in heaven that God's love is finally perfected in our hearts.

Until then, there is a man who stands in the shadows of your life. Your dad has a powerful sway over you.

And if you are a dad you stand, and will always stand, in the shadows of someone else's life. You have an influence, and it's more powerful than you've assumed.

Dads, use that influence wisely. Teach your sons to be men. Teach your daughters how a real man treats girls. Bring a godly masculinity to the parenting in your home.

Most of all, love Jesus and the people He created - all people - not just in word, but in deed and truth. Teach the Bible by how you live. Love God with all your heart. Break the chains you're born with - by being born again!

May all our dads have a heart-held faith!