

A Man's Man

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by David Jesse



Dad was a "man's man:" A passionate fisherman; skilled woodworker; avid gun collector; grease monkey. In the summers, he and his buddies would drive to Canada and spend days fishing for bass and trout. He could build and repair cabinetry like a professional. His collection of World War II-era guns was something he prized. He rebuilt a Corvair engine in our basement. When I think of what a prototypical American dad is supposed to be, I think of my Dad.

And he never taught me how to do any of it.

I was what you might call an "accident." By the time I came around, Dad was in his forties, and doing everything he could to simply keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. He no longer had time for any of those passions. He worked 70 to 80 hours a week. When he wasn't working, he was a volunteer minister of music at church. So for most of my childhood, Dad was the guy trying to catch 4 or 5 hours of sleep, or the guy leading the singing on Sunday. Other than that, I didn't see Dad except for a few hours on Saturday when I would tag along with him on errands he had to run.

I went fishing with Dad only twice. He never trusted me with a saw or a hammer and nails. I only fired a gun with Dad one time. And when the car needed work, the last thing he wanted to do was slow things down trying to teach me how to change the oil or spark plugs. Today you won't find a fishing pole, table saw, gun, or wrench set anywhere in my garage.

I guess I'm supposed to be disappointed by this. A dad is supposed to teach his sons how to do these things. Most men's fondest memories of their fathers are those times building

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something together; hunting or fishing on a camping trip; or working together to get the engine to crank. Not me.

But rather than looking back on my relationship with Dad as less than ideal, I see a more important legacy: one of faith, family, and finishing strong.

I never had to wonder if Dad loved Jesus. He expressed that in every moment of every day. He talked about Jesus to co-workers and customers constantly. He demanded excellence in the way the church worshipped on Sunday. His Bible was always on his night stand. He didn't have lots of time for friends, but when one needed him, he was always there. As best as he could, he lived the life he was given the way Jesus would have.

I never had to wonder if Dad loved his family. He was a hard man. He demanded perfection from his wife and children, and we seldom lived up to his expectations. But on Saturday, he always took me to get a malted milkshake from the drugstore. He showed up at every piano recital I ever had. And when any of us kids walked away from God, he firmly but lovingly disciplined us, and when that didn't work, prayed us back into our Father's arms.

Finally, I'll never have to wonder if Dad finished strong. A few short months after retiring, he was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. He was told he had six months to live. So he began making sure his ledger was clear. He called those with whom he had broken relationships and righted them. He made preparations for my mom to be taken care of. And most importantly, he found a way to share Jesus with those he loved, even after his death. So as I sat at his bedside throughout the dark night before he was birthed into eternity, I never had to doubt what awaited him on the other side. He closed his eyes in this world, and opened them in the next to see his Savior's face.

Faith. Family. Finishing strong.

I don't know how to fish, build, shoot, or repair. But I've got an even better legacy worth passing on to my sons.

Husband | Father | Disciple | Christian Conference Speaker | Men's Ministry Speaker | Author |
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