

Eulogy for Dad

Smithtown Gospel Tabernacle

July 20, 2003, 7:30 p.m.

Prepared by Justin J. Agoglia

On behalf of my family, I want to express my sincere thanks to family, friends, and visitors who traveled both near or far to be a part of this service. I would like to also extend a special thank you to my Aunt Rosemary, my dad's sister, for taking several weeks off to help carry us through this most difficult time. We love you and are so grateful to all that you've given to us.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Vicki Miller who stood by us throughout this time and generously offered her medical expertise each step of the way.

Before I begin the eulogy, I must let you know that I've decided to take a different approach. Traditionally, eulogies take shape in the form of someone sharing the life of a person who has passed on. Great compliments and praises are shared, but I felt to simply talk about my dad in the standard format would not come close to the uniqueness of this man.

Instead, with your permission, I've decided to step off the road a little and take a different path, one that is even more personal and quite intimate. It's a letter that I began writing to my dad while in the hospital, late one evening, but couldn't complete until now. My hope is that it will paint a picture of someone quite special to me and to so many others. I do realize, however, that my canvas and paint brush are too small to accurately portray how special my dad was. In light of this, I will do my best with all integrity to share the life of my father through the eyes of his son. Fortunately, my dad has heard most of this because of the relationship we had together.

July 4, 2003, 10:42 p.m.

Dear Dad,

As I sit in front of your bed, watching you try to sleep and struggle to survive, I've been thinking a lot on your very life and how it's impacted mine. When I look back on the photo album of my life, you're practically on every page. The memories are many because you made the time for me. You took the time out of your busy schedule and made sure you kept your promises. With the time I have left, I want to specifically share some of the many things I've learned from you and how you've blessed my life.

I have to admit that trying to encompass your life in its entirety is a very difficult task, but I've chosen to place them in three categories: God, family, and others.

I. God:

Perhaps the greatest image that comes to mind when I think of your relationship with God is of you sitting on the living room floor every morning, blanket covering your legs, bible held high with pen in hand, or hands interwoven while praying.

As a child you were already demonstrating to me a burning passion, a genuine zeal for God. You were definitely the spiritual head in the home, but you knew quite well that to truly lead, you had to be led yourself. In other words, you had to first seek after the One who could offer wisdom, insight, and discernment on how to be a loving husband and raise three boys.

And then after Kole (our dog) joined our family, he would faithfully join you at the edge of your feet each morning. I just wonder what he was thinking as you sat there and sought the Lord. Perhaps he saw things during the early hours that some of us missed on. Whatever it was, he knew well enough the value of sitting at his master's feet. Maybe it was the same security we felt just being in your presence. Who says dogs aren't that smart?

As I sit here, reflecting on the life you led each morning, my mind only wonders what spiritual battles were won when you cried out on our behalf. Perhaps a more sobering thought is what my life would look like if you hadn't sought the Lord each morning or prayed for me.

I can remember going away to boarding school in Connecticut to receive help for a diagnosed learning disability. I was only twelve years old. How I missed being home. I vividly remember being ridiculed and laughed at because I was a Christian. That very first week of school you offered to come and take me home if it got so bad. However, you suggested something that I will never forget: you encouraged me to open the Word and diligently seek the Lord.

Prior to boarding school I learned the Word through you, mom, and Sunday school, but now it was time for me to learn a valuable lesson, a painful one I might add. Like David had to confront Goliath, now I had to pick up my own sling, select my own stones, and begin fighting my own battles. Yet, my choice of weapon was the Word. Thus, every evening - with tears streaming down my face - I began to slowly consume the scriptures, the very heart of God. It was here that I began to first hear from Him.

That entire school year, I did very well academically and even made honor roll (if you remember that); but, now that I think of it, perhaps that wasn't the main reason why I went to boarding school.

With all that said, I thank you, Papa, for establishing a godly heritage in our home with Mom. God was first in your life, no matter what the circumstances were and it spilled over into our family and into many other lives. Now I know what a godly man looks like. I lived with him and learned under him. You're that godly man. And thankfully, you introduced me to the quintessential godly man – Jesus Christ. Now, I try my best to meet with him each day as you once did.

II. Family:

In a world where family is no longer a priority, Dad, you still set the bar and gave me a high standard to follow. For 35 years, you have faithfully walked with mom in marriage. As a son you've spoken volumes to me by your actions and what it means to be a truly caring and loving husband. You would be the first to say that you weren't perfect, but it was through your limitations that I saw the endearing love you had for mom. It was through your "cracks" that I saw rays of light, rays of pure love which penetrated the heart of mom. She was a real treasure to you and you loved her.

When we almost lost mom in the first car accident, with my two brothers and I, anxiously sitting in the emergency waiting room, I saw tears of compassion and pain stream down your face as you came out to see us.

Never had I seen you cry like that before. But it was your brokenness for mom that showed me the depth of love and loyalty you had for her.

Although I haven't had the privilege of being married yet, when I do get married, I'm committed to loving her, honoring her, and serving her as you have with mom. I know I won't be perfect, but I promise to do my best to be the husband you've modeled to me.

If I could choose one phrase to describe you as a father, it would be – **life mentor**. The day I was born, you were the carpenter and I was the wood; you were the master teacher; I was the apprentice with God overseeing the process.

For the past four years, I've personally sought out key mentors in my life. Some are well known; others aren't. But as much as I've learned under these gifted individuals, none will ever compare to you.

Just like a great building must have a solid foundation, the very cornerstone of your life was predicated on *being* a man of character. Integrity was interwoven in the very threads of your being and there was continuity between what you said and what you did; I've seen it both publicly and privately.

Over the years I've learned that we *teach what we know, but reproduce what we are*. As a result, because you lived a life of uprightness, your sons and many others seek to walk in that same pattern. And even with your passing, I will continue to seek out men and women who will pour into my life; in turn, I am committed to locating, developing, and releasing the next set of leaders. That was Christ's model.

Another wonderful gift you gave me was the **gift of humor**. I've watched you use humor to break through some of the most difficult situations between people. Humor has a powerful way of penetrating one's heart for there are no language barriers or cultural limitations and, in some instances, it can be a healing ointment to a hurting heart. I now share this love of life and laughter with my brothers and share it with so many others.

Let me share one simple illustration which demonstrates your love for humor. Right behind me is the baptistery pool. (Notice that off to your right, you'll find the diving board and slide for the pastoral staff...no that's not true).

Seriously, the day we decided to get baptized as a family, you said something that made everyone laugh. Pastor Forseth asked us to

introduce ourselves to the congregation and so we began to do so. When it was your turn to speak, you openly said, "Hi, my name is Joe Agoglia and, by the way pastor, this water is freezing." (So much for being reverent during a baptismal service.) That's you, so real and always willing to keep us off balance.

You've also taught me the importance of seeking **excellence in all things**. "Always do your best," you consistently said. As a teenager, I remember one particular incident where I failed to clean the stove properly after you asked me to. You quickly called me back and had me look at the stove again. I certainly missed several areas. So you said to me, "Do the job right. If you do it right the first time, you won't need to do it again." Everything you did had excellence stamped on it. Now, I never settle for mediocrity.

III. Others:

Your last sphere of influence has been the many lives you've touched throughout your lifetime. You are simply a lover of people and it's recognized from anyone I've talked with. Your countenance brightens anyone's day and your compassion for others has no limitations.

You've met with actual kings and queens, with high Washington dignitaries, presidents from well known colleges, and associated with many well-recognized individuals. But you've told me several times how unimportant meeting such personalities meant to you. You're heart was to help people who were in need and you did so as a servant.

For the six weeks I've been with you in the hospital, I'm amazed at the diversity of people who came to see you, people you personally touched in some unique way. They were from all walks of life from all parts of the country: those formerly in prison, widowers, other cancer patients, wealthy men, the poor, addicts, those still mourning the loss of loved ones, and the list goes on and on. Each one had a consistent message, a consistent story – "I'm here today because you reached out to me like no other."

If someone asked me where they could find Jesus, I would have sent him to you, dad, for you knew him so well and walked with him daily. In Matthew 25:37,40, when asked, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?" Jesus responded, "In so far as you did this to one of the least...of mine, you did it to me."

Perhaps I've been trying far too hard to find Jesus...in church, in bible studies, in seminary, or the places we commonly expect him to show up.

Yet, it was in this mystery that I truly found Jesus. You showed me that Jesus comes to us in the poor, the sick, the dying, the prisoners, the lonely, the disabled, the rejected.

If I could sum up your life as a father and my greatest mentor, it would be these things which I believe every young child needs:

1. From the moment I was born to the day you passed on, you provided tangible “handles” for me, things for me to grab on to. You helped take what was complex and made them simple for me to understand. Now, these great truths are transferable life principles that I can share with others.
2. You were also my navigator, having gone before me in life and then providing me with a road map for me to walk through, all while continually seeing the big picture. And with the many roads I came across, you've help me choose the best one, even if it was the road less taken.
3. You gave me a safe environment to learn and practice these life lessons, a milieu where I could make mistakes and, yet, still learn from them. You were the container that held my fears and worries when I needed someone to absorb them, and you were the mirror when I needed someone to reflect back what I couldn't see clearly.
4. As we have most recently seen, life has many curves and surprises, and without the proper training, sometimes, these instances can make or break us. Fortunately, you've provided rich soil for me to develop deep roots, roots that go both vertically (via a life of character) and horizontally (via a network of strategic relationships). Your passing is a great loss for the entire family and friends, and your lack of physical presence is already felt. But, in spite of this, the roots you gave us as a family equipped us unknowingly to carry on. Thankfully, you taught me to live not just for the moment, but to live in a *state of preparedness*.
5. Lastly, and perhaps more significantly, you gave me the wings to fly. You taught me how to be a dreamer and to dream big. Learning to ask great questions has been essential to your success. You've always said, “Gather all the facts first. Then, once you have all the information, your decision is made clear.”

Today I consider myself a blessed son, not because I'm particularly extra special or possess any unique gifts; far from it. I'm just a simple man who was undeservedly placed in a family line with some very special people.

I'm not sure why God permitted me to have such a man in my life. I've been spoiled to know a man with such honor, a man that has earned the title as David once was given directly from God himself - a man after God's own heart.

Dad, although you're in the presence of God now, you left a very large legacy, one that will continue both on earth and in the heavens. We understand the mantle has now been passed on to us and we have a responsibility to be both caretakers and investors in what has been deposited into our lives. As sons, we promise to take care of mom, surround her with love, obey her, and most of all, honor her as you have.

And last of all, as you know quite well, our fervor for the Lord has not been dampened; instead, our resolve to follow and seek after Christ is even stronger. We will carry on as a family of five because you live within us.

I love you dad and miss you very dearly. We will meet up one day. For now, we must get back in the trenches and press on.

Closing: The Lamplighter

There is a great Scottish story about an old lamplighter. Each evening as dusk came, the old man would make his rounds against the lamppost, climb up and light the lamp, step back down, pick up the ladder, and proceed to the next lamp.

After a while he would be down the street and out of sight. But you could always tell which way he had gone from the lamps he had lighted and the glow he left behind."

I could always tell which way my dad went by the lights he left behind. With that said, I ask you: what lights do you leave behind?