

Faithful Father

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Have you ever watched a show like ER or observed what takes place within an emergency room especially when a critical situation emerges? Everyone is moving at a high pace, the adrenaline is flowing, and time is critical. That's exactly how I felt the moment I was told by my father he had cancer and that it was one of the worst kinds of cancer.

At that moment my entire frame of mind moved from a state of shock to one similar to that of an emergency situation. I felt a radical call to action. Although both of our eyes immediately filled with tears and despite the personal fears I had of losing my father, I knew I had to support him with everything I could possible give him. Nothing else mattered to me at that point, not my career, my financial situation, my future plans, or any of my own personal needs and concerns. I just knew that if I was in my dad's situation, my parents would do everything in their means to fight my disease. They would have searched for the best doctors, the best hospitals, and the best treatments available. That's just how my parents are. And I knew it was my responsibility to do what I could now, especially as the eldest son.

Although it was natural to feel a Herculean responsibility, I had to be reasonable and calm, at least that was my thinking then. Now, whether I was levelheaded at the time is left unknown. I merely committed myself to being at my father's side as much as possible and help bear whatever burden I could possibly carry, even though my father was the one who was fighting the largest battle of his life. My assistance was minimal at best, but I wanted to do whatever I could. I simply loved my father. I couldn't stand to see him disappear from our lives and from my life.

From the very onset, I made it a point to stay with him at two-day intervals and then go home for a brief rest. But even when I was home, as I laid my head on my pillow, my thoughts were continually with my father. Even in my dreams, I found myself remembering all the special memories I had with him, the many unique ways he loved my mother, the way he showed up for my soccer games, his attendance to all my graduations, the way he kept his promises to me, his encouragement, and the list goes on. Each memory only reminded me that I didn't deserve this man's love, his kindness, and his grace upon my life. I felt so humbled by his kindness and generosity. As a result, my love for my father only deepened while my resolve to do something about his illness only strengthened. Tears naturally flowed down both sides of my face and I didn't care to wipe them away.

As I laid in complete darkness, I literally cried out to the Lord, asking him to intervene on behalf of my father's health. Knowing that I wasn't worthy to have my request honored, I decided to appeal for God's mercy not based upon anything I had ever done (which wasn't much), but on the way my father lived his life – a life marked by selfless giving and endless serving.

Throughout the six-week struggle my father endured, time was never on our side and it seemed to disappear with each passing update from the medical staff. At one point we made a family decision to transfer my father to North Shore University Hospital. The chief oncologist took a personal interest in my father's case and was willing to have him transferred. But getting him from one hospital to another was not an easy task. Thankfully after many long days of negotiations, we were able to get the proper authorization to have him released and then transferred.

I remember the day the transfer took place. All of the nurses came by my father's bedside and, with tears in their eyes, they expressed their best wishes. Prior to him receiving the tracheotomy, after each medical procedure, he would verbally tell each

doctor or nurse how thankful he was for their kind service. But then when he lost his ability to communicate verbally, he would express his appreciation in other ways. Often he would express his thankfulness by grabbing the nurse's hand and gently rub it back and forth, while simultaneously he would move his lips saying, "thank you." I closely watched how each nurse responded with a smile and sometimes with watered eyes. I was astounded at how he touched the hearts of those wonderful servants. He had an extraordinary gift for sharing love that was real and so inviting. It was a perfect testimony of how my father affected lives.

As we were exiting the hospital, my father requested that I be with him in the ambulance. I sensed that he was concerned and that he would feel safer if I was with him since I was his voice. When he couldn't express precisely what he wanted to share especially when it was critical, I spoke on his behalf, a role that made me feel as if I was doing something for someone I dearly loved.

Once we got him over to North Shore University, I could see how much he was struggling physically, but I knew he felt safer and in better hands now that he was there. But as soon as he got settled in, the pace picked up once again. My adrenaline went up several notches. From meeting with doctors, nurses, and going from one department to another, outwardly I was on high alert, while inwardly I was physically and emotionally exhausted. But in the back of my mind, my greatest concern was my father, his condition, his pending future, and my family.

A few days into his rigorous schedule, there was a special moment with my father which caught me completely off guard. My father's breathing was quite bad and on this particular occasion, I remember my heart racing as I began to set all the equipment up to clear his trachea. During such times my internal anxiety was elevated and my fears heightened, wondering if this was the moment when he would pass on into eternity (I always had that fear throughout this entire ordeal).

As I went to clean his trachea, he had me pause for a moment since my attention was solely on helping him breathe a little better. In his own caring way, he looked directly into my eyes and said something I didn't understand the first time he mentioned it. So I asked him to say it again: in his weakened and exhausted state, he said, "**Faithful son.**" Not knowing if I heard him correctly, I repeated back to him what I thought he said. He immediately responded with a grin and a nod as if to say, "correct."

Tears quickly filled my eyes as I absorbed what he shared. I quickly retorted with a nodding head as if to convey that I saw it quite differently. I told my father, "Dad, if there is any reason to believe that I'm a faithful son, it's only because I had a faithful father for over 32 years." I really meant it. I didn't feel like I was a faithful son. My thoughts and feelings had always resonated with the prodigal son, not the prized or gifted child. My father was a man who lived an entire life of being faithful to his Lord, to my mom, and to his sons. There was nothing I ever did that deserved the title, faithful.

If you can believe it, with all the time I had with my father, we barely had many moments where we talked about our love for one another. I wanted to tell him how much I loved him and how special he meant to me, but that didn't get to happen. Most of our conversations were on the Lord, the next procedure or treatment, or how mom and my brothers were doing. Even now I wish I could look my father in the eyes and tell him how much he means to me, how I desire to be like him, and how I want to follow his godly ways as he once did when he was with us. Although no man or woman is perfect, my father's character was one of consistency and faithfulness. Faithfulness is not something you earn or obtain as one would with a degree. It's found deep within the threads of a person's character and identified by a lifetime of consistent behaviors.

Dad, you were the one who was faithful. As you grew closer to the Lord, over the years I noticed that your tenacity to be faithful increased and that spilled over into our lives. You were a living model from which we could learn from and live by. Even

throughout those six weeks, I can testify to your commitment to your Lord. And with each negative report, you continually sought after him. You expressed to us that God's hand was in this entire process, whether it made sense to us or not. I can't say that I deserve or ever will earn the title of faithful son. I can only pray that I may learn how to be faithful as you once were.

With all of this said, there is one thing I do believe happened when you departed from us. At the moment I watched you pass from this life on to eternity, I believe you met in person the One you always met every morning - Jesus Christ. I can only wonder the love you felt and experienced as he gently wrapped his arms around you and embraced you. And then as you stepped back from your warm embrace, you looked directly into his eyes and heard these words: "**Welcome home, Faithful Son!**"

Thought:

As I finish writing this reflection, I'm holding back tears as I think about the man I once intimately knew and grew to love and admire as he modeled a steady faithfulness to me. Not feeling worthy to be the son of two godly parents, I'm slowly beginning to recognize God's extended mercy to me by allowing me to be included in this special family.

As I examine my own life, I can see many areas where I've failed to be faithful. To be quite honest I simply fail each day and, unfortunately, many failures go unnoticed. Why? It's because they reside within my heart. As much as I would like to have a heart that is holy, one that is tender and compassionate, unconditional and consistent, and bent toward the things of God, I simply don't have the same heart that David once had. I would love to believe that my goodness was enough to make me accepted by the Lord. It's not. Whatever goodness may be found in me is only because of the Christ who gave up his own righteousness so that I could wear his holy garment. Thankfully, I can be forgiven based on this truth. And because of that, I can forgive myself, move forward, and walk in righteousness.

If you're feeling a sense of guilt in anyway, be assured that you have an Advocate who is always willing to forgive you, no matter what areas you have failed to be faithful. Be honest with yourself and ask the Lord to forgive you and he will. But I believe the harder choice will be forgiving yourself.

I can recall times when I failed or sinned in some way. I would share my wrongdoing with my dad, and often he would ask me if I confessed it to the Lord. I would always express that I had. Then, he would say, "Well...then move on. He's already forgiven you." It was his perspective that helped me to move forward and walk in obedience again.

I encourage you to do the same. Remove the "axe" you so easily hold over your head. Take hold of every area of your life and choose to be faithful. Don't focus on the past but on today and the wonderful future God has awaiting you.

Like you, I too must choose to be faithful everyday. I pray God will forgive me for the areas where I've compromised my walk with Christ and replace it with a desperate hunger to be a faithful and godly man.

As I can attest to my father's faithfulness, I feel a sense of unworthiness to even be called his son. However, when I'm called home, I pray that when I meet my Savior I may hear those same words - **"Welcome home, Faithful Son."**