



A Tribute To My Dad By John J. Smid

Luke 1:17

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

"Dad, I'm gay and I'm going to divorce my wife." All I remember from that evening's discussion were tears, love, and a father that was trying to share wisdom from his own life experience. "John, don't do this. Leaving your family will not help anything. I don't want to see you do this to yourself or to your family." My dad didn't scold me or get angry. But I was too stubborn. I was stuck and rebellious. At that point in my life, I wasn't listening to anyone.

My dad had a life of many sorrows and disappointments. There were times when I wasn't sure he was going to make it through. But one thing was consistent: his active faith never wavered. As long as I knew him, he never left God's side . . . no matter how tough things got. One of his many sorrows came as he was faced with my homosexual struggles.

I had been married for six years and had two beautiful daughters that I loved very much, but my heart was so confused. When I got married in 1973, I swore that I would never get a divorce. I had been hurt so much by the divorce of my own parents that I didn't want to ever see my children go through that experience. Yet through pornography, feeding on my deep curiosity about men, I developed a homosexual fantasy life. The final step came through a homosexual friend who led me into acts of adultery.

Ignoring my father's counsel, I left my wife and family and embraced a life of promiscuity, frequenting bars and overall irresponsibility. But through this period of my life, no matter what, there was always a connection with my dad. We didn't separate from each other. Yet the nature of my sin and the difference in our lifestyles created an invisible barrier between us.

I thought by simply introducing my dad to my partners and friends that he would grow to understand and embrace my lifestyle. My dad's responses continually revealed his relationship with the Lord to me as he exhibited the spirit of Christ. One night I stopped by my dad's house, testing the waters of acceptance. "Dad, I would like you to meet Jim. He is a good friend of mine." My dad responded with grace, extending his hand to Jim. He would engage in conversation with my friends, and never pulled away from them.

I invited my dad to my house to celebrate my daughter's birthday. I still have pictures of my homosexual partner cutting the cake amidst a roomful of friends. My dad was right there, supporting my daughter and relating to the others with grace. He never faltered in his convictions or in his relationship with Christ. He was uncomfortable with my lifestyle and disagreed with my choices, yet he was willing to be uncomfortable in order to love me.

My friends were aware of my dad's respect for them. They respected him and trusted him because he treated them as human beings loved by God.

Through the witness of a friend, I eventually accepted Christ as my Savior. As I found the courage to leave my destructive life, my dad was still there rooting for me. But my new life in Christ was not yet clear to him. As a result, when I decided to move to full time ministry work he was very uncomfortable with the idea. “John, I ’m not sure about this. You’ve always had a hard time sticking with something. You might change your mind, and be worse off than you are now.”

I stood on my convictions. “Dad,” I said, “that is how I used to be. But Christ is changing me. He’s giving me the strength to be committed to His will.” About a month later my dad came to me. “John, I believe this is a good decision and I want you to know I am with you all the way.” With my father’s blessing on my work and calling, nothing could stop me!

When I was scheduled to be on Larry King Live, my dad once more showed me the spirit of Christ. The day before the program was to air he called. “John, I told all my friends this morning at breakfast to watch the show. I told them my son was going to be on TV.” My dad was not ashamed or embarrassed about my life, past or present. He carried no guilt or shame from my choices. He was proud of me and supportive of me sharing my life story. He continued over the years to tell others about me and the new life I had found.

In one newspaper interview regarding my recovery, I stated that during part of my childhood my dad had been emotionally absent. I later asked if it had hurt him to read what I had said. “Sure it hurt,” he responded, “but it was true. During that time in my life, I was under so much stress that I was unavailable for anyone.” His response put healing salve on my wounds. I saw more clearly into my dad and the way our father–son relationship had developed.

Over the last couple years of his life, my dad’s health began to fail due to a lung disease. He hated being attached to an oxygen hose, and became frustrated when he couldn’t go places like he used to. But each time I would call, or he would call me, he would repeat the same message. “Everything with me is just great, I love you, keep up the good work.” During the last two months of his life he was in the hospital hooked to breathing machines and IVs. When we went to see him, he would usually smile and wink. It wasn’t until his last week alive that he became more frustrated with the medical input. He knew he was going to die and was ready to go.

March 21, 1997, my father passed away. He was seventy-five years old. We had spent thirteen years building a deep, rich relationship. His godly faith and humility played an important part in my recovery.

Norman John Smid has left this world for a better place. I still miss him greatly, and would love to hear him say once more that he loves me and I am doing a good job. But I have no regrets about our relationship. During his last bout of illness, he had no dying words or last minute rushed message to tell me or anyone else. He had already shown us and told us many times. Likewise, I don’t feel I left out anything. I had shown him my love and respect, and he’d let me know that I had also blessed him in his life and faith.

I received a model from my dad that I share with others as they suffer through the difficulty of having a challenging loved one.

- Tell your kids you love them and actively love them.
- Be willing to be with them even when it may be uncomfortable for you.
- Respect all people no matter how you feel about their behavior.

- When they take steps of growth and healing, bless their steps and show them that you see the changes they are making, even when they don't have a proven track record.
- Model humility and trust in the ever faithful Jesus Christ.

I am not sure I will ever be able to measure up to my dad's reputation or his love, but I know he supported me and believed in me. I'll never measure up to God's standards either, but I know I am His and He loves me and believes in me.

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