

The love of a father

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It is not easy being a father. Someone once noted that children go through four stages. First they call you DaDa. Then they call you Daddy. As they mature they call you Dad. Finally they call you collect.

Dads, we love you. The role of a father is more important in today's world than ever before. Today's father needs to be nurturing of his children, supportive of his wife, and yet at the same time provide the spiritual leadership of the home that the Bible accords to fathers. It is a rare and special kind of man who can combine all three of these qualities and have an impact.

God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another. We should ever underestimate the power of our actions. With one small gesture, we can change a person's life.

In honor of fathers everywhere, of mothers who have to be fathers and fathers who have to be mothers, and of all of those special people who reach out and change lives for the better, I present the following story as it was shared with me. May God bless you all!

The pickle jar as far back as I can remember sat on the floor beside the dresser in my parents' bedroom. When he got ready for bed, Dad would empty his pockets and toss his coins into the jar. When the jar was filled, Dad would sit at the kitchen table and roll the coins before taking them to the bank.

Taking the coins to the bank was always a big production. Every time he slid the box of rolled coins across the bank counter toward the cashier, he would grin proudly, "These are for my son's college fund. He'll never work at the mill all his life like me."

We would always celebrate each deposit by stopping for ice cream. I always got chocolate. Dad always got vanilla. When the clerk at the ice cream parlor handed Dad his change, he would show me the few coins nestled in his palm. "When we get home, we'll start filling the jar again." He always let me drop the first coins into the empty jar. As they rattled around, we grinned at each other. "You'll get to college on pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters," he said. "But you'll get there; I'll see to that."

No matter how rough things got at home, Dad continued to doggedly drop his coins into the jar. Even the summer when Dad got laid off from the mill and Mama had to serve dried beans several times a week, not a single dime was taken from the jar.

The years passed and I finished college and took a job in another town. Once, while visiting my parents, I used the phone in their bedroom, and noticed that the pickle jar was gone. A lump rose in my throat as I stared at the spot beside the dresser where the jar had always stood. It had served its purpose, and had been removed.

My dad was a man of few words, and never lectured me on the values of perseverance and faith. The pickle jar had taught me these virtues far more eloquently than any amount of words could have done. When I married, I told my wife about the significant part the pickle jar had played in my life as a boy. In my mind, it defined, more than anything else, how much my dad had loved me.

After our daughter was born, we spent the holidays with my parents. After dinner, Mom and Dad sat next to each other on the sofa, taking turns cuddling their first grandchild. Jessica needed changing, so my wife took her from Dad's arms and carried Jessica into my parents' bedroom to diaper her. When my wife came back into the living room, there was a strange mist in her eyes.

She handed Jessica back to Dad before taking my hand and leading me into the room. "Look," she said softly, her eyes directing me to a spot on the floor beside the dresser. To my amazement, there, as if it had never been removed, stood the old pickle jar, the bottom already covered with coins. I walked over to the pickle jar, dug down into my pocket, and pulled out a fistful of coins. With a gamut of emotions choking me, I dropped the coins into the jar. I looked up and saw that Dad, carrying Jessica, had slipped quietly into the room. Our eyes locked, and we smiled.

I don't know what heaven will be like, but I know what God is like. He is like a loving Father who invests in us daily to give us a future and a hope.