

Things My Dad **Never** Taught Me

It's not just what our fathers teach us that matters; often it's what they *don't* teach us that can make the difference.

By Robison Wells

When I think of my dad, the words that the Lord said about Hyrum Smith come to mind: "I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart, and because he loveth that which is right before me" (Doctrine and Covenants 124:15).

Loving that which is right, my dad taught me many life lessons as I was growing up. But I'm especially grateful for the things he never taught me.

He never taught me to curse. I have a brother just a year older than I am, and the three of us would go camping or hiking as "just us men," and Dad never used that as a time to be profane or tell dirty jokes. He was as respectful when he was around us boys as when he was around my mom or my sister or his mother. I remember one time he was having a particularly bad day, working long hours on a Saturday when he probably would have rather been relaxing. With my brother and me in the backseat of our station wagon, he backed up into a curb, and in the heat of the moment he yelled an expletive. Then, getting his calm back, he turned to us and, with the most brokenhearted look I'd ever seen, apologized for what he had said. In the 30 years since, I've never heard him repeat it.





He never taught me to be

selfish. When my mom was pregnant with me, and my dad was in college, hoping to become a doctor, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She went downhill quickly, having to quit her job and having trouble taking care of my older brother. My dad, knowing where his priorities lay, went to his school counselor to figure out the quickest way to graduate: they found that instead of pre-med, he could graduate soon with a degree in psychology. It wouldn't get him to his goal, but he'd have a degree and maybe he could get a better job. He did it in a heartbeat. He gave up his career dream because he loved his wife more than that dream.



He never taught me that there was “men’s work” and “women’s work.”

My dad would go to work every morning, work all day, eat a lunch he prepared himself, come home tired, and then make dinner for the family. I remember as a boy, when my mom went into the hospital and the Relief Society started bringing meals to us, I was confused and said to Mom, “You mean they think *you* cook?” My dad did laundry, he vacuumed, and he helped us with our homework. And he never complained that my sick mom wasn’t “pulling her weight.”



He never taught me to quit learning.

In the evenings, after all his work was done, my dad would occasionally curl up with a novel, but more often he was hunched over an atlas or looking up something in a reference book. He was, and still is, a military history buff—his father having served in the infantry in World War II—and my dad would read histories and watch documentaries and study and take notes. And when he wasn’t reading to himself, he was reading to us: *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and King Arthur stories and a dozen other things. He taught us that reading was cool, that stories were exciting, and that you never get too old for it.



He never taught me to shirk a calling. From my earliest memories, Dad was always engaged with the Church. He was in the bishopric. He was in the Young Men presidency. He was a high counselor. He was a bishop. And he took every calling seriously and magnified it. I remember when I first became an elder, before my mission, I went with him to give a blessing to a woman. The house was filthy. The couch was not just unwashed; it had bugs on it. I didn't want to touch anything. But Dad sat right down and made himself comfortable, as though he were visiting a relative. When the time came to give the woman a blessing, I admit that I hesitated placing my hands on her head, but my dad treated her as he would treat anyone else. He blessed her. And he helped her family.



My dad never taught me to be less than my best. I'm grown now, with kids of my own. And I'm striving to be the kind of man who loves that which is right and who knows not only what to teach his children but what *not* to teach them. ■

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