

Michael W. Smith: 6 Principles I Caught From My Dad's Life

My dad was an incredible baseball pitcher, taking his career all the way up to the minor leagues. Growing up, we spent many late afternoons out in the yard throwing a ball back and forth.

Catching my dad's pitches from his left-handed throws became second nature for me. But as the years went by, there's a different kind of catch I began to field from my dad.

There's an old saying that goes, "More is caught than taught." I had a front-row seat to see how to live a life of integrity and honor by *watching* my dad's life. Sure, he gave me plenty of sound advice and wisdom over the years, but we all know that seeing someone live out their beliefs carries far more weight than their words talking about it. Lessons are best learned from someone who leads by example more than lectures from an expert.

I learned so many great principles from my dad by observing and "catching" his tireless work ethic, constant desire for excellence and service to people in every area of his life. I want to share six of those truths with you that I utilize every day in being a husband of 40-plus years, a dad with six adult children and 16 (and counting?) grandkids. Oh, and just so you know, my grandkids call me G-daddy. As a musician, I'm grateful the name they gave me turned out to be more hip-hop than IHOP.

Principle No. 1 – Balancing quality and quantity time is crucial to grow in love and influence.

For quite a while, born out of a crazy-busy culture, we've

been hearing that quality time is so important. But that can't become an excuse for avoiding quantity. As my kids were growing up, my dad gave them both by rarely ever saying no. If they asked him to do anything, Dad was all in. No such thing as too hot or too cold to play outside. You could tell he never thought, *Is this something I want to do?* If the kids wanted to do it and involve him, his choice was to be with them. That decision created a principle in his life that offered his grandkids both quality and quantity time.

Principle No. 2 – Creating personalized and unique moments can form a continually deepening bond.

Another element of our busy lifestyles today is trying to figure out how our kids and grandkids can fit into *our* schedule. A vital principle I learned from Dad was to work hard to show interest in any and everything our kids and grandkids do so they will invite us into their worlds. Kids are so smart. They can tell if we are sincere or just patronizing them. Looking for and creating specific moments by asking questions, expressing interest and taking time with them is a literal investment in their lives as well as ours.

Principle No. 3 – Giving presents is great, but giving presence is the best gift you can ever give.

Sure, Dad and Mom, known as Granddaddy and Mimi to my kids, gave them gifts, but the best gifts were their presence. When talking over stories for my book, each one of my kids mentioned the constant presence of my dad in their lives. When they would walk into their home, their eyes would go straight to Dad's chair. His presence always offered us all such a warm sense of safety and security. All he had to do was smile and start calling out their nicknames, and all seemed right with the world. Being present, *all* there and focused, is the best gift a parent, grandparent and great-grandparent can give. Not entertainment, but engagement.

Principle No. 4 – Making your marriage your first priority in love and life is the best example for your kids.

In conversations for my book, all my kids commented on how they saw their grandparents stay in love by expressing affection. My parents always held hands when they walked. And when one would leave, they would kiss goodbye. One of my daughters said, “You know what? You *can* stay in love with each other. They were so obviously each other’s best friend.” We all know that a family where the marriage is a priority offers a child a better chance of happiness and contentment as well.

Principle No. 5 – Expressing love to others from the heart of Christ is your best witness to the world.

Whether in my parents’ hometown of Kenova, West Virginia, or after their retirement near us in Franklin, Tennessee, my kids always saw them be great neighbors. Mimi and Granddaddy knew *everyone* on their street. And everybody loved them. My kids easily recall the times that they stopped by their house to find neighbors or new friends having tea with them. All my life and throughout my kids’ lives, my parents’ faith drove their commitment to love and serve people. One of my kids said, “We feel like their No. 1 goal was to just be as ‘Jesus’ as they could possibly be on this earth. And to all of us, they achieved that.”

Principle No. 6 – Praying is the most proactive expression of love and care you can take for anyone.

We live in a day where people view a social media post that says, “Our prayers are with ...” or “Our prayers go out to ...” as somehow minimizing or skirting responsibility. But as a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent in a family of faith, prayer is an investment in the lives and legacy of the next generation. I credit my parents’ prayers for my transformation out of a prodigal season to the surrendered life and calling I have lived out for the past 40-plus years.

My children have seen the fruit of their grandparents and parents' prayers in their own lives. Sincerely and authentically interceding for our children and grandchildren, being specific in asking God to touch, bless and give favor will cover them with the greatest love the world has ever known.

Nothing I have shared today has to cost you a dime, but it will require your time. No matter who your parents were, or how good or bad your childhood may have been, you can apply these principles to make sure you leave a lasting legacy in your own family. Whether you are carrying on an incredible family line or are trying to turn the tables on a difficult past, part of the good news of the gospel is God's help and hope are available to you right now. {eoal}

Michael W. Smith *is a multiple Grammy Award-winning recording artist with sales of over 15 million albums. He is also the author of The Way of the Father: Lessons from My Dad, Truths about God.*

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