

LAYMEN MINISTRIES

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Lessons From My Dad

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by Jeff Reich

My dad was a special guy. As a kid, I learned many lessons from him - most of which I still remember and practice today. It seemed he always could make friends, anywhere and with anyone.

He

was always laughing and teasing people, which is something I picked up - sometimes to my own detriment! Like most kids, I did not always appreciate my father's counsel, but now that I am older and have raised kids of my own, I can fully relate to why he said and did some things!

My father worked at a law school for over twenty-five years. He wrote a feature column in the law-school paper entitled "Floyd Sez" — wit and witticism for law-school students. He was a favorite among these students. In the city where we lived, the newspaper published a full-page article about my father and his influence among the students and staff, along with photos. When he retired, the law school created a scholarship fund in honor of his name, the Floyd Reich Scholarship Fund, which remained there for some 35 years. This scholarship fund was used as a way to help poorer students with educational costs.





And then one terrible day not long after his retirement, my dad was hit by a drunk driver while walking an elderly blind lady. In his remembrance, a memorial display was placed in the law school that remained for over ten years. Dad was often called the “night dean,” loved by the professors, teachers, and students alike. Now - are you ready for this? My father was not teacher, professor, or administrator, but merely the janitor!

At his funeral, the church was full of lawyers, judges, and other important people in local government. My mother received a personal letter from one of the state senators. Why? Because my father touched the lives of many of these people during those twenty-plus years of employment as a janitor. Late at night, as law students studied for exams, he would place his hand on their shoulder and encourage them. He bought clothes and shoes for many of these students who were poor and trying to work their way through school. He fixed their cars (one of the poor law students didn't even know the battery for his VW Bug was under the back seat!). He invited them over for dinner; he teased them, laughed with them, and often shared encouraging words. One evening a stu-

dent came to ask for some advice. “You want advice from a poor, dumb, old janitor?” my dad asked. “Yeah. Dumb like a fox!” the student replied.

MY DAD A PASTOR?

We sometimes get the idea that we are insignificant and that God can't use us to touch the lives of other people. This simply is not true. My dad, with hardly any education and only the simple job of a lowly janitor, touched the lives of hundreds. Why? Because of his love for Christ and people.

If you would have asked my father if he had any spiritual gifts or any special endowments from God, he would have emphatically stated, “No!” Yet *he was a very gifted person*. He had a definite ministry, even though he probably never thought of it as such. It sometimes seems that those who spend all their time looking to see what their spiritual gift is don't find it, when those who don't think they have any have the most!

My father had the gift of pastoral ministry. If you had asked him, he would have laughed. “Not me! You would never get me up front of a church to preach a sermon.”

Yet he preached a sermon every day to the students and faculty with whom he worked. He took time to minister to the needs of those he came in contact with. He was a pastor to his own little flock consisting of those whom he associated with - and so are you.

We each possess portions of many spiritual gifts. We just do not recognize them as such. Many of us have the gifts of pastoral ministry, evangelism, and teaching, in *a spiritual sense*. We encourage those around us; we share our personal experiences with a living, loving God; and we teach by example what a change Christ can make in one's heart, character, and life. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

One of my favorite books states it this way:

"Wherever we may be, Christ bids us take up the duty that presents itself... If it is your work to till the soil or to engage in any other trade or occupation, make a success of present duty. Put your mind on what you are doing. In all your work represent Christ. Do as He would do in your place. However small your talent, God has a place for it. That one talent wisely used, will accomplish its appointed work. By faithfulness in little duties, we are to work on the plan of addition, and God will work on the plan of multiplication. These littles will become the most precious influences in His work." *Christ Object Lessons*, pp. 359, 360.

When the subject of spiritual gifts is brought up, most people think of some miracle-working super-gift that has a big impact on many. This is a very distorted view. Yes, God does give special gifts of His Spirit that are used in a large and public way. But let's not think that these are the only type of gifts His Spirit gives. Many more gifts are given than most realize.

Whatever you are good at, use that gift as a tool to win the friendship of someone. Build relationships. Be helpful, kind, and thoughtful. Let Jesus shine through you.

My favorite book goes on to say: "Because they are not connected with some directly religious work, many feel that their lives are useless; that they are doing nothing for the advancement of God's kingdom. But this is a mistake." *Christ Object Lessons*, pp. 359.

A WORKING MINISTRY

My dad's work shift ended at 1:00am, but he usually finished his duties by about 12:30am. So, he would read his Bible in the janitor's closet. One morning at about 12:30, his supervisor drove by the law building. Noticing

all the lights turned off, he took note. Another night he found the same thing. And again, a third night. Parking his car, he walked to the building, quietly unlocked and opened the double glass doors, and started walking quietly down the long main hallway. Only one light reflected out into the hallway - that of the janitor's closet.

Standing in the doorway, the supervisor asked, "Floyd, what are you doing?"

My father looked up from his Bible and smiled. "Reading my Bible."

"You don't get off work for another half hour. Shouldn't you be working?" he asked with a note of censure in his voice.

"Let me show you something," my dad replied. He got up from his chair, set his Bible on a shelf next to the big industrial sink, and went into the hallway, flipping on the long row of light switches. Crossing the hall, he pushed open the door to the men's bathroom and kicked a small wooden wedge under the door to keep it open. Down the hall he unlocked and opened the door to the office of one of the law professors. "Can you find something for me to do?" he asked.

The supervisor walked briskly to the main entrance of the building and carefully examined the corner of the floor by the door. No dirt. He hurried over to the men's restroom and looked behind a toilet. The stainless-steel nuts that held the toilet to the floor shone back at him. The stainless-steel pipes under the sinks glistened.

Back in the hallway, he looked up. The florescent lights were dust free. Making his way into the professor's office, he pulled back the heavy curtains at the window with a surety that this would be the place (many janitors who work at night forget to dust behind the closed curtains). He wiped his hand on the window sill. No dust. Turning to my father he said, "Keep up the good work, Floyd."

Now what impressed the supervisor more: catching my father reading the Bible or the fact that his work was well done? And if his work had not been well done, what would that have said about my father's religion? Could we say that cleaning a building is a ministry? Yes. And he exercised at least one of his spiritual gifts in doing his job well. A spiritual gift, you ask? Yes, because he did his work well as a way of witnessing for Christ! Whatever gift God has given, if used for His glory, it is a spiritual gift just as much as any other found in the 1 Corinthians chapter 12 list. Remember, these "littles" sometimes are "the most precious influences in His work."

I asked my dad one day how he was motivated to keep his building so clean. He told me, "I just think of dirt as sin, and God has given me the job to get rid of it!" One could truly say he believed the Scripture when it says: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do it with thy might.*" Ecclesiastes 9:10.

I am reminded again of what my favorite book says: "However lowly, any work done for God with a full surrender of self is as acceptable to Him as the highest service. No offering is small that is given with true-heartedness and gladness of soul. . . . The humblest of duties are not to be ignored. Any honest work is a blessing, and faithfulness in it may prove a training for higher trusts." *Ibid. p. 359.*

RETHINK MINISTRY

So here is a classic example of a wrong concept of ministry. A lady called our office one day. She seemed quite excited. "Is this Jeff Reich? I am so glad to talk with you! My husband and I have been reading the *Laymen Ministries* magazine, and *we want to start a ministry.* We want to really do something for Christ. We want to know how we can get a ministry. . ."

All of a sudden, she was interrupted by the sound of children fighting in the background. "Would you be quiet," she yelled, "I'm on the phone!" She went on to explain how they wanted to start a ministry, but again the children interrupted the conversation by making noise.

"So - you have children? How many?" I asked, taking a personal interest in her.

"Five," she answered.

"Have you ever considered that maybe God has already given you a ministry in raising your children?" I asked.

"I guess I never thought of that before," she sounded rather surprised.

People have this idea that ministry can only be performed in some type of institutional setting or that they have to go out and do something to be involved in ministry, missing the idea that LIFE IS MINISTRY.

"Wherever we may be, Christ bids us take up the duty that presents itself. If this is in the home, take hold willingly and earnestly to make home a pleasant place. If you are a mother, train your children for Christ. This is verily a work for God as is that of the minister in the pulpit." *Ibid. p. 359.*

Spiritual gifts - we all have them. Opportunities for

ministry are all around us. They present themselves day after day, but we often fail to see them. The mother working with her children uses her gifts all day long. The smile shared as you open the door for someone at the store; opening your home to someone in need; inviting someone to dinner - all can be used to share God's love.

If you work as a carpenter, plumber, roofer, or builder of any sort, do those things for Christ. If you are in the medical profession, use your skills for Christ. Use your talents to win friends in the workplace. Earn a reputation as someone whose religion helps you be the best and most honest in your field. Build trust. Share Christ. Spiritual gifts are the tools He gives to bring us close to people.

**I would rather see a sermon
Than hear one any day.**

**I would rather have you walk with me
than merely point the way.**

**Advice is often confusing,
But example is always clear.
The eyes are better, people,
And more willing than the ear.**

**The best of all the preachers
Are those who live their creed.
To see it put into action
Is what everybody needs.**

