

**Lessons My Father Taught Me**  
**2 Timothy 4: 1-5**  
**Don Lincoln**

My father died 2 weeks ago today. Exactly one year to the day after my mother. I appreciate the multitude of kind expressions of sympathy I received.

I often tell people, the only person who shows up in my sermons more than my father.....is Jesus. That's pretty good company. So, while I'm sure this won't be the last time my dad shows up in a sermon, I'm going to give him this chance to witness to the gospel as he would like.

My father was 16 when he entered the University of Rochester and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering, then an MBA from Wharton, and worked for Procter and Gamble – better known in Cincinnati where their international headquarters is as “Procter and God” – worked there his entire career.

The writer to Ecclesiastes says, “I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out the reason and meaning of things.” My father believed his mind was God's gift – and should never be squandered. He also believed firmly that since, in the beginning, God created order out of chaos, one of the chief ends of humankind was to ALSO give order to chaos, as a way of giving glory to God. My dad said that's why God created engineers. I'm pretty sure the writer of Ecclesiastes was an engineer. To everything there is a season. And a time; and a purpose, and a place. Everything. My dad even outlined his entire funeral – the only challenge with that was he had 20 Scripture lessons!

Engineering was the way my father approached life. Whether it was a problem in the packing line at the Crisco plant at Ivorydale in Cincinnati, or a difficult issue in the church personnel committee on which he served more years than I can remember, creating order out of chaos was always his goal. He had a calm demeanor, and, as Paul writes, to Timothy, “utmost patience in teaching.” How many of us tend to ADD to the chaos rather than diminish it? How many of us, instead of recognizing that someone who differs from us might simply be a worthy adversary; we instead, treat them as an enemy. Instead of negotiating, compromising and learning from one another, we do battle. You and I know we do battle pretty well personally, but nationally and politically we're aces at it! And what does that accomplish? More chaos. Less common good.

Back in the day, if an engineer had a plastic pocket protector, a mini-slide rule, a mechanical pencil, with the right tools you were ready for anything. I've told you of my dad's affinity for repairing things as opposed to replacing them. We had a washing

machine for 40 years – in the end, the only thing original was the white exterior shell. Belt, drum, switches, agitator – all replaced.

I'm sure that had something to do with the frugal, fiscal conservative, depression-era man my father was. While in high school my friend Mark's father bought a yellow Pontiac Firebird convertible with a 350 and a Hurst 4-speed. **MY** father, however, owned the least expensive 4-door-sedan Plymouth made – in robin's egg blue; am radio; and the little moon caps, not even full hubcaps, the smallest engine they made – a 225 slant six – and a three speed on the column – “three on the tree” as we used to call it. I bet the dealer paid my DAD to take it off the lot.

He was frugal. But the one place dad didn't scrimp was the tithe. **God loves a cheerful giver. Bring your first-fruits of the harvest to the Lord.** From the start, 10% to the church – and THEN to the university, to the veterans, to the food cupboard. Those were above and beyond the 10% tithe. He and my mother agreed on the tithe. Well – mostly. The only serious argument I ever recall hearing between them when I was young was when my mom suggested they do their tithe AFTER taxes instead of before. Dad wouldn't budge. First fruits. Always a tithe. There will even be a tithe from his estate. In life and in death, we belong to God.

How many of us consider the tithe first – first fruits – a commitment to the mission of the church; service to neighbor; outreach to others – and only **after that** determine what model vehicle to buy, how often to eat out, what new phone to get with what's left over as opposed to doing it before? I'm guessing for many of us it's the other way around – we get what we want and whatever's leftover is God's. Putting God and neighbor first was actually one of the most liberating and freeing things I learned from my father. Amazing what that does to your life. And what a lesson to teach our children.

The apostle Paul writes to the Romans, “weep with those who weep.” I've told you before about being age 12 and seeing my father weep at the dinner table when we got word our young pastor had died from a heart attack at 42. I learned years later that pastor counseled to my father during a difficult season in his life. My father wept. And I realized that day it was OK for a grown man to cry. God equipped us with tear ducts for a reason. My favorite memory verse; the shortest one, “Jesus wept.” Again, good company.

“Weep with those who weep,” Paul writes. In the same breath Paul also says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.” My father sang the Star Spangled Banner at every sports event – out loud; full voice standing up – everyone always turned around and looked at him. Just the way he sang hymns. Never ashamed to give vocal praise to his God, or to celebrate the nation he had served in the Navy. He loved to laugh. But never at dirty jokes; racist jokes; Pollack jokes; blonde jokes. He never laughed at them, never told them. For him, anything that demeaned one of God's children had no place on his tongue, and laughing at such jokes when spoken by others only perpetuated bigotry and prejudice and sexism and racism by making light of them, and he would have no part of that.

I remember hearing my father cuss. ONCE. Once in my 64 years. My mom was spelling dad at the wheel on an icy drive home from Buffalo. He was dozing, and woke to her cries as a truck had swerved into our lane and was running us off the road. He cussed. Only once... that I EVER heard!

The book of James says, "If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues, their religion is worthless." My father's witness was strengthened and validated by a bridled tongue. His word was his word. People knew they could trust him because what came out of his mouth was usually edifying; truthful; considerate. How many of us guard our tongues in such a way that people know whatever comes out of our mouths is likely to be beneficial and trustworthy?

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her." I've told the story of when I was four and my mother lost the diamond out of her ring down the kitchen drain. She sat on the floor and cried and sat down and cried with her – I wasn't sure what we were crying about but I cried with her. She called Procter and Gamble crying – and my father thought one of his kids had been hit by a truck. His perspective on what was important, and his reassurance that it was only a diamond and could be replaced calmed the day.

But that night, my dad showed up with six of the biggest pipe wrenches that Procter and Gamble owned and spent the evening taking apart the plumbing from the kitchen sink all the way down to the very tail end of the cast iron drain pipe in the basement on the off chance that he might find it. **He loved her.** My mom spent the last year of her life bedridden in the skilled nursing wing of the retirement community where they lived. Dad trekked from his apartment through four buildings and three elevators to get to her room every day by 10:00am and stayed until 8:00pm. Every day for a year. He loved her with **that kind of devotion** until her last breath. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for.....dad modeled selfless, lay-down your life love.

A year ago, during our Ephesians series, I lifted up the text where the Apostle Paul writes, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. I told you about overhearing my father praying at night – prayers that lasted 20, 30, sometimes 40 minutes – and included prayers for you – the congregation of Westminster. EVERY night. The ministries, the music, the outreach.

What I didn't tell you then was that every evening that prayer closed with words that were something like this:

"Lord, there may be members of our family who do not claim you as Lord and Savior, so Lord, we pray that by the power of Your spirit You would melt their hearts, that they would come to know Your love and Your grace as Carolyn and I have been so blessed to know, and turn to You as their Savior."

Listen again to what Paul writes to Timothy:

“As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”

My father was an engineer, but he was clearly an evangelist. Every Sunday he would sit in the choir loft of the Northminster Presbyterian Church where he was a member for 67 years, and look out over the congregation. He would take note of anyone he didn't know, and as soon as the benediction was spoken, he made a beeline for them, would greet them, and say, “I'm Don Lincoln, I don't believe I've met you.” I don't know how many people have told me they were “Don Lincoln-ed” into the life of that congregation in Cincinnati. My dad always said the difference between a warm congregation and a cold one is ONE person – showing hospitality to a stranger. Of course it also meant we were like the last to leave church on Sunday!

When that church in Cincinnati was first pondering contemporary worship, and dad – a lover of classical music – was wrestling with the idea of a band, we chatted. I said, “Dad, it's just a new medium for the same old Good News. Let me put it another way. Suppose by your wearing an aquamarine leisure suit to church on Sunday, you could bring 100 people to Jesus in a year?” He thought a minute and said, “Do you know where I can buy one?”

My father loved his wife, loved his kids, loved birds and mountains and travel, loved music and friends and grandchildren – but it was nothing like his love for his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And nothing like his desire for everyone he knew to know the joy he had found in his faith in the Lord. And he wanted everyone to know why he lived the way he did – not to earn God's favor, as if anyone could – but in response to the great gift he had been given in the grace of Jesus Christ. His life, his way, his word, his living – a response to what God had shown him in Jesus Christ.

Which is why he wanted the following read at his funeral. He handed me a piece of paper a few weeks ago and said, “Don, read this at my service.” His last request. In response to a question from his pastor, “What Is Heaven Like” he wrote this:

## **WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE??**

*My first answer to this impossible question will be, “Anywhere I can be with Carolyn.” But that isn't what the Pastor wanted, so –*

*I think trying to answer this is another one of those heavenly mysteries. We try to answer it with our earthly minds and perspectives; we try to understand the workings of God – and we can't.*

*I'm confident heaven will be better than we can think or imagine. I think we finally will be able to answer that first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “what is the chief end of man?” (that's a generic man and includes ALL of us).*

*For those of us who remember this, the answer is, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Doesn't that sound like heaven?? Nothing else will matter – not even whether or not Carolyn and I recognize each other!!!*

*One more thing, I know that wherever heaven is, whatever it's like, I will be there. Not because of what I've done but because of what God has done. God in His abundant mercy has promised that. All I have to do is know that Jesus is God's Son and my Lord and Savior.*

*If YOU don't have that same confidence, this is a good time and place to ask the Holy Spirit for help in making that decision about who you believe Jesus to be. Then we can be in heaven together.*

Paul writes, "As for you, do the work of an evangelist."

The best advertisement for Christianity is a living, breathing Christian, whose response to God's love is a life of discipleship. Someone whose tongue is bridled and whose word can be trusted, who sacrifices for the sake of others; who is a generous steward of resources instead of selfish and self-centered; someone who works to diminish the chaos instead of increase it, who works to build up instead of tear down; someone who prays without ceasing; but most of all, someone who loves nothing more than seeing others come to know the love of Jesus Christ.

Your kids, my kids, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, a neighbor – could have exactly that kind of advertisement in each and every one of us. Every day. It's the best way the Gospel gets shared. In person. One at a time.

May it be so. AMEN.