

St. Andrew's UMC  
June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Matthew 9:3-10:16  
"Freely You have Received; Freely give"

Our family moved to the U.S. in 1975, when Mobil High Test was still under 40 cents. Back then, you could stay in your own car, and the gas station attendant would gas up your tank, and wipe the windshield while you wait. And this was after the oil shock of '73.

We did not have a car for a while. We saved up for a few months, and one day, we found a beat up '69 Chevy Impala for \$500 in the classified section of a local newspaper. It did not come with the factory undercoating, so the areas behind the wheels were rotted out, and you could see the pavement, if you opened the lid of the cavernous trunk. But the passenger compartment was still okay: it has only one hole under the floor mat. The engine was excellent, as the owner said, and you could not hear it when it idled. My father thought it did not start, so he would often turn the ignition, and engage the starter motor: "Krrrrk!"

We drove this clunker to the nearest "mountain" in New York, the Bear Mountain, for our first BBQ, and that was where we first saw the wildlife, such as whitetail deer. It was wonderful to see all the greens and animals just a couple hours away from the city. We even drove to Niagara, Thousand Islands, and Canada in the bicentennial summer of '76.

The Chevy did not break down. It ran wonderfully, until a member of the Korean church we attended, who just opened up a garage, begged us to have a tune up at his garage. My father told him that the car ran just fine. He politely declined three or four times, but the man eventually prevailed. Once we got the car back, the car shook and spewed out black smoke. My father thanked him later for helping him digest his meals, while he drove.

My father drove this clunker proudly to his work as a night security guard at a Con Edison power plant. He was so happy to get his first check. We all gathered together in the living room for his "the first-check-in America" opening ceremony. When the check was pulled out, he was devastated. The pay was less than \$100, after taxes and fees were taken out.

So he got a job as an orderly at the nursing home my mother worked as a nurse's aid. Not long after, he hurt his back, lifting a heavy object all by himself. He realized that he could not continue working in that place, so he looked for other ways to support the family. The banks did not want to risk their loans to a guy with no assets. So he turned to the church members.

After securing loans from a few church members who charged exorbitant interest rates, he bought a small oriental grocery store. My parents struggled beyond their limits for many years to pay for the debt.

The grocery store was a hard work. I worked there for about 10 months, while I was waiting to enter the college, after I was discharged from the United States Air Force. After a few years of rising early and getting to bed very late, my father sold it and bought a drycleaner in New Jersey . All this time, I was in the military, college, and seminary. While my family sweated out in the heat and humidity of New Jersey , I pursued the noble cause of academics, along with the fair amount of pizzas and beers—all under the banner of carrying the hope and future of the Park family, as their first born.

One day, after having actually managed to graduate from the college and the seminary, their first born was ordained a minister of the United Methodist Church . I suspect that that filled his parents with the sense of pride. I think my father was filled double portion, when he saw his grandchild a few years later.

After serving three churches in Connecticut , I moved to California in 1994. In the same summer I received the news that my father was diagnosed with a cancer, and he would be operated next week. So I flew back east and saw him enter the operating room and return home to recover. I stayed for a week, and returned to CA. Next time I saw him again was April, next year, and he was asleep in a coffin. It was so unreal. And we did not know, then, that there was such a thing as colonoscopy.

Although my father enjoyed golfing and fishing, he never had enough time to do those. He barely managed to play golf maybe once a month. He was always working. Last time I went fishing with him was the summer of `76. I joined the USAF in `77. From `77 to `95, for almost 18 years, my father and I did not have much time together. I was always away from home, and my father was always working. Whenever I managed to come home to visit, we barely had time to sit down and talk or do anything together. And one day, I found my father lying cold in a coffin alone in a quiet corner of a funeral home.

I wondered aloud, not long after his death: What was the meaning of his life? I had great difficulty accepting the fact that he lived his life working hard 6 days a week, struggling to make ends meet while trying to pay off his debt, sending his first born to college and seminary, and providing weddings to his three sons.

I had great trouble reconciling that that was the meaning of his life. Where was his enjoyment? Where was his relaxation? Where was his life? I have been vaguely hoping that, one day, he would retire, enjoy his golfing and fishing, enjoy his grandkids grow up, and perhaps I could spend some time at a lakeside with him, watching the sun do down, with the idle fishing rods on the still water. It did not happen.

No, I was not the ideal son. I was a somewhat rebellious son, and my father was a hardhead. We had difficulty communicating, and our political and social views were quite the opposite. But I always expected that there would be such a day at the lakeside.

I came to realize that did not understand how much my father loved and cared for me, despite the fact that we did not express much emotions of endearment. Once I was

changing the tire of our family AMC wagon that my father bought used, which was of course, a piece of junk, and because the road was slightly in slope, it was very difficult to keep the wagon on the jack. I had to place something under the car, but a metal milk crate was all that we could scrounge.

While I was changing the tire, the crate could not withstand the weight, and suddenly collapsed. I was like, “Oh, darn!” But my father, who was standing next to me, just freaked out. He thought I was going to be pinched under. I was quick enough to get out of the way, but it horrified my father. I guess it is hard for children to feel their parents.

Did you know my father quit drinking and smoking cold turkey in one day? He went to a weekend retreat, and after he returned, he never touched the booze or cigarettes again. When we were cleaning out his stuff, there were the dusty, old bottles, untouched from the day he quit.

My father was not a perfect man, but I think he was a better person than I ever will be. I ached for the life he did not have, for the things he liked doing but could not afford to. And those were not really terribly expensive or privileged things.

A few years after his passing, I was finally able to let go most of the sentiments that claimed my emotions. All my regrets, anger, disappointments, vengefulness, etc., finally gave way to the acceptance of one thing: in all his imperfection, my father gave his life for the benefit of his children. And I believe that is meaningful enough a life for me.

Jesus is sending out his disciples and charging them what to do and what not to do, while on their mission journey. The degree of austere manner of traveling may surprise us and even challenge us, for we are used to preparing for everything, even for a short backpacking trip. And one thing out of many things that Jesus said caught my attention: You received without payment; give without payment.”

Fatherhood, or parenthood, is like a mission journey, in a sense. You don't go to school to be trained or given all the materials to support you to be a father or a parent. You start with the bare minimum, and you gain wisdom and knowledge as you go. Sometimes, you need to ask others, or need to depend on others, in order to do things right. And oftentimes, the knowledge you have about being a father is from remembering how you have been loved by your own father.

One thing that I have learned from my father would be exactly that: he gave me everything without asking anything in return. I have received from him without payment.

Now that I am a father, here is one question that I still ask myself: “Am I a good father?”

I want to be able to say that I have given all I could to my son. Honestly, however, I cannot say that. For, sometimes, I wish I could start over again. If I could, I want to start over from year 2000.

There are things that you cannot touch or see. And those things are what make life meaningful. And if you can give those things that cannot be touched or seen to your children, you do well. I have made so many mistakes as a father: I did not give or love all I should have. I was not the loving father, patient father, mature father, or understanding father I should have been. And I have yet to learn to love unconditionally.

Some things just have to flow out of one's heart, and sometimes it is easier to look to what others have said. I've found this prayer, and this Father's Day, I want to pray with you as a parent the prayer that speaks for me. I hope it would for you, too. Perhaps, this would be a covenant that we parents could make with God.

Let us pray.

"Parent's Prayer"  
by Abigale Van Buren.

*"Oh, heavenly Father, make me a better parent.  
Teach me to understand my children,  
to listen patiently to what they have to say,  
and to answer all their questions kindly.  
Keep me from interrupting them  
or contradicting them.  
Make me as courteous to them  
as I would have them be to me.  
Forbid that I should ever laugh at their mistakes,  
or resort to shame or ridicule when they displease me.  
May I never punish them  
for my own selfish satisfaction  
or to show my power.  
Let me not tempt my child to lie or steal.  
And guide me hour by hour  
that I may demonstrate by all I say and do  
that honesty produces happiness.  
Reduce, I pray, the meanness in me.  
And when I am out of sorts,  
help me, O Lord, to hold my tongue.  
May I ever be mindful that my children are children  
and I should not expect of them  
the judgment of adults.  
Let me not rob them of the opportunity  
to wait on themselves and to make decisions.  
Bless me with the bigness  
to grant them all their reasonable requests,  
and the courage to deny them  
privileges I know will do them harm.  
Make me fair and just and kind.*

*And fit me, O Lord,  
to be loved and respected and imitated  
by my children. Amen."*