

GREAT GIFTS FROM GRATITUDE
by Tom Grabel

CALL TO WORSHIP

*Be rooted in Him, be built in Him, grow strong in the faith
as you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness.
(Colossians 2:7)*

INVOCATION

Lord, you have created us in your image and we pray we can even come close to measuring up to your design. We thank you for being our Father in Heaven, we thank you for the Fathers we have on this earth and, for those of us who are Fathers, we thank you for the honor of being a Father. We pray for your wisdom in everything we do, but specifically today we pray to be wise enough to be a good Son to you and wise enough to be a good Father to our children. We hope we have learned lessons from you that we can impart to our children so they grow in the image you have created for us. We pray that we can influence them so they will know the grace and the glory of the greatness of your LOVE and they can overflow with gratitude as we do.

SCRIPTURE

*While he was still speaking, a bright cloud suddenly cast its shadow over them, and a voice called from the cloud:
"This is my beloved Son, in whom I take delight; listen to him."
(Matthew 17:5)*

If you, bad as you are, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give to the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13)

GREAT GIFTS FROM GRATITUDE

We designate this day to honor our Fathers and to be honored as a Father. I think of my Father and know I was lucky, and I am grateful to have had him as my Father. Happy Father's Day, Pops – I miss you. I am also grateful to have had a great Father-in-Law – Happy Father's Day, Big Don.

When I think of myself as a Father, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to be a Father. When I think of all the trials and tribulations of becoming a Father, it is no small miracle unto itself. A boy from Georgia and a girl from California growing up thousands of miles apart: I do remember, when still living in Atlanta, getting a piece of mail intended for my next-door neighbor and somehow it just lit up my fingers when I touched it; it was from her family in Huntington Beach, California. I somehow somehow knew I would end up in California. Then to get out here and being single for many years, then to be set up on a blind date with Carolyn, and then there being one year between our *first* first date and our second first date. But once we got to that second first date, it was green light all the way. We dated for a year; we were married for a year; then our first baby, a perfect little girl; twenty months later, our second baby, a perfect little boy. What a perfect family. To experience the pregnancy and then childbirth is an incredible miracle, and I am so blessed and grateful to have experienced them.

And then there are the everyday things of being a Father that bring me great pleasure and gratitude. Just waking in the morning and knowing our little family is together and safe brings me great joy; saying good morning as the house comes alive; making the kids lunch (on occasion) and sending them on to school; taking Nicole driving (yes driving; remember, she was in Carolyn's tummy when we stood in line and joined this Church); surfing with the kids or just hanging out watching a movie; then saying good night at the end of the day. All of these things bring me great pleasure and honor being a Father, and these are the human pleasures I am grateful for.

But what is our job of being a Father? When my Father died and I did his eulogy, I spent a lot of time reflecting back on our life together. He was a hard man and very tough on me; I earned pretty much everything I ever got. He was in construction, so I always had

a summer job, and he gave me the dirtiest, nastiest job he could think of – and he built sewage treatment plants, so it could get really dirty. He loved golf, but I did not get the Country Club membership privilege; I had to caddie for him until I learned the game, knew the etiquette, knew the rules – only then did I get to play the game. They did not have the money to send all four kids to college, so I paid my own way. When I turned eighteen, he charged me rent to live at home, so I moved out pretty early and only went back for a very short while. Later in life, our relationship changed and I really enjoyed being around him; he turned into a real joker and we had a lot of laughs. As I reflected back over these times, I realized that he loved me and I loved him, but I realized he was preparing me for life, and that is one of the many jobs we do for our children: preparing them for life.

So what is a Father's job with his children?

First and foremost I think our job is to LOVE our children, and I gotta tell you, this is one of my great pleasures because I LOVE MY CHILDREN. But we also have to prepare them for life; teach them right from wrong; teach them there are consequences for their actions; teach them not to judge others, and to accept all as they come; teach them to do their best; teach them to be their own person even when everybody else is doing something else. These are the human lessons we must teach our children.

So then I think about the things beyond this realm we must teach. We must teach them to accept and LOVE that they have another Father – a Father who art in Heaven. A Father far greater than I, and one who can give them lessons and gifts far beyond our ability to comprehend. I know it seems odd, at least to me, to assign a gender to a Spiritual being, but for the purposes of today, I will call him Father, as that is how he is referenced throughout the Bible. As a matter of fact, the entire New Testament talks about the relationship of a Father and a Son – the Father being God the creator, and Jesus Christ being the Son.

And when I compare the human lessons we wish to impart on our children and these lessons as they were applied to Jesus by his Fathers, both Joseph and God, I see some surprising similarities.

God loves his Son:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.
(John 15:9 NIV)

God prepares him for life – both this life on earth and the life to come:

- Jesus was a carpenter and thirty years old before he appeared on the scene. Do you believe his paternal parents and God in Heaven were preparing him for life during that time? When we begin his story, he is as well-versed in Old Testament scripture and knowledge as anyone could possibly be. He regularly takes on the teachers and confounds them with his wisdom. He is prepared!
- But Jesus must also prepare for and accept the role he must play in this world – a terrifying journey to change the world and the way it believes in and celebrates God. He must accept death by crucifixion. He does these things because he is prepared!

God teaches his Son right from wrong:

- The three greatest temptations of history were presented to Jesus by Satan:
 - *The ability to feed the world.* To cure those desires at that time, he would have been the greatest ever.
 - *The ability to perform miracles.* Who would not believe in a man who could do those things? But that was not the message and would have been distracting.
 - *To be given authority over all of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship Satan.*
- God had prepared his son to rebuke all of these great temptations. One by one, Jesus knew that the short-term benefit did not outweigh what he had been prepared for.

How many stories can we think of where Jesus taught his disciples not to judge, because he had been taught: Do not judge, or you will be judged. Do not condemn, or you will be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

- The Samaritan woman by the well who had had five husbands.
- The adulteress who was turned to be stoned. *“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”*

There is no greater story of a man being true to his heart than Jesus Christ. He challenged every accepted religious belief at the time that had been in place for two thousand years. He was rebuked by virtually every leader and never wavered.

But again, these are the human traits that we wish to teach our children and that God and Joseph taught Jesus.

Now, what are the Spiritual gifts which God has given to his Son that his Son has also given to us and that we can teach our children?

Can we believe that there is a creator – a God who knows each and every one of us and all that we are about – and that he loves us and wants a relationship with us? That if we try, we can have that relationship with God? How about the gift of eternal life? Can we comprehend this? Can we even begin to understand that we have a Spirit that transcends the human body? That God can direct our lives into a Kingdom here and now that surpasses anything this broken world can throw at us? Well, I can believe these things, and *because* I believe them is why my heart overflows with gratitude. Gratitude for the gifts that have been given, if we only accept.

Can we impart this knowledge to our children? I will never give up trying, because I know the richness of these things and I am grateful for the opportunity to try.

I am full of gratitude from the great gifts that have been given. Most of all I am grateful for the awakening to a richness of life – aware of God, believing in Jesus, believing that I have a Holy Spirit that walks this life with me, and knowing that I have Spiritual Father. Happy Father’s Day.