



The Father Never Leaves Us

Steve Brown

A friend asked me to contribute a story about my father for a chapter of his book, *What Fathers Say*. My friend asked me to tell a story about my father and then draw on something important I learned from him. I thought about the time I almost blew up an old lady sitting on her porch. I honestly didn't see the lady when I threw that cherry bomb. But when I went back (with my friends) to check on her, someone got my license plate, and by the time I got home an hour later, the police had already been there. When I looked at my father and heard him say, "And where have you been?" in a way that suggested he didn't need an answer, I knew I was in trouble... big trouble.

To make a long story short, I went to the police (twice) and then to the house where I had thrown the cherry bomb. I sat with the elderly lady I had almost injured and listened to her son (a very big and angry guy) threaten to kill me. And then I had to face my mother, who made that man look like a kitten. It was not a pleasant experience, and just so you know, I haven't touched a cherry bomb since.

Was my father happy with me? Are you crazy? I lost my driving privileges until I was 45 years old! But you know something? Throughout that

whole time my father never left my side... not once. Not only that, he made it clear I was his son (I thought I would be disowned) and he loved me deeply.

My wife Anna (when I told her I planned to contribute this story to the book) reminded me of the time when our daughter Robin was a little girl struggling with a serious case of pneumonia. My father walked into the room where Anna was standing there crying. I was out of town and Anna felt quite alone and afraid. She said my father stood by her and put his arm around her, squeezing her shoulder.

"He didn't say a thing," Anna said, "He just stood there with his arm around me and quietly waited."

His presence made all the difference and she felt everything would be all right. I understood, because under very different circumstances, my father did the same for me.

When I think of my father, I think of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:11, "*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*"

The first time I read those words, I thought, *Wow... if that's true and God loves me half as much as my father did, I've got it made.*

My dad wasn't big on church because he didn't think he was good enough. He wasn't. Neither

am I. Neither are you. But that's the message of Jesus—that he came for people who weren't good enough. My father never understood that but he does now. Just before he died, his doctor (a Christian) told my father that he had only three months at most to live. He said, "Mr. Brown, we're going to pray and then I'm going to tell you something more important than what I just told you." They prayed and then that beloved doctor told my father about Jesus and his love for those who don't fit, who were sinners and who always felt on the outside. That day my father ran to Jesus.

Maybe when we all get Home, you'll get a chance to watch my father play pool, but probably not. I can't find any mention of pool halls in the Bible. Besides, my mother—who was sure the devil resided in pool halls—would go ballistic. I do know my father felt more comfortable in pool halls than he did in church, and that's kind of sad.

That's one of the reasons I'm so passionate about the truth of God's radical grace. There was, of course, my father's unconditional love that I would later recognize in my heavenly father. But when I think of my father missing the central message of the Christian faith because he didn't think he was good enough, didn't fit, and thought he would be rejected, I wince. I wonder how many others are just like my father. □

Steve Brown is the president of Key Life Network.