

Endnotes: Laughing with Cathy

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Article:

My father Harry died recently at age 89. When he filled out the hospice forms and answered the question “How do you want to be remembered?” he wrote, “That I was a Christian and had a good sense of humor.”

When I was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, my family was very active in our local church near Denver, Colorado. My father was a constant volunteer—except on the stewardship committee. That was not because he didn’t believe in giving—he always tithed. The problem was that he made it clear he expected everyone to tithe, and so he made other people uncomfortable when he approached them about their yearly pledge.

Dad felt the same way about premarital sex. He didn’t have sex until he married my mother when he was 38, and he expected everyone else to do the same. So I was shocked when Mom and Dad invited Cathy and her family to come stay at our cabin in the Colorado mountains. Cathy was one of the popular girls at school—and a cheerleader. That’s why I didn’t know her very well; I was never in the popular crowd. But at age 17, Cathy was pregnant ... and unmarried. My parents must have figured Cathy and her family needed to get away.

One spring Saturday morning, Cathy and her mother came to our house to get the key to the cabin. Cathy’s mother came inside to talk to Mom, but Cathy stayed outside in the car. Dad and I were sitting in the living room. Dad got up and went outside. I looked out, and my father was standing by the car, and he and Cathy were laughing. You see, my father was always one for telling corny jokes, and he could get just about everyone to laugh. This went on for awhile. After some time, Cathy’s mother went back out to the car, and they drove off.

Dad came back inside. I was still sitting in the living room. He turned to me before he walked through the living room. With just three sentences, he taught me a wonderful lesson. I don’t remember his exact words, but the message was clear: “I saw you sitting here. You didn’t come out and talk to Cathy. Not a very Christian thing to do now was it?” And then he walked away. My father and I never talked about this incident again, but the message stuck with me forever.

In the years before my father’s death he developed dementia and lived the last few months in an Alzheimer’s unit in Arizona. I had told my colleagues the story about Cathy, and one day one of them asked, “Have you told your Dad how much what he did meant to you?” So when I went to see him again, I started telling him the story. He remembered Cathy. When I got to the part where he went out and talked to her, he said, “Don, you were always such a good dad.” He thought I was telling him a story about me, so I stopped. I had several chances later to tell him that I loved him and what a great dad he was. Thanks Dad, for teaching me the right way to act and how important it is to laugh.