

1960

DISCIPLINE: MY DADDY'S GIFT TO ME



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It takes three things to be successful: Vision, focus, and discipline.

Vision shows you what's possible. Focus permits the commitment to be realized. Discipline gives you the fortitude to carry out the task without straying from the path to success.

My discipline was a gift from my Daddy.

My Daddy trained me that we are all responsible for that which we do. There are two kinds of people: Those who are victims and those who are responsible. Victims blame others. Those who are responsible accept the credit for all their actions. Good, bad, or indifferent, we — all — have made all the decisions that have gotten where we are at this moment.

Discipline, to my Daddy, meant knowing what you wanted and going for it — within the bounds of legally acceptable and morally responsible limits. And he would accept no less from us. From the time I was 10, I remember that he would not accept excuses for failure. If we were to gain credit for success; we had to accept blame for falling short of our goal as well.

My Daddy was a “man of God.” He not only preached; he lived the life of the holy. Material things didn't impress my Daddy — only the worth of a person's beliefs and their actions. My Daddy talked directly to God. And my Daddy always listened to what God had to say.

So there was no fooling my Daddy with falsehoods or lies. He always seemed to know better.

When we made mistakes, he only asked three questions: What did you do? What should you have done? What do you think I (meaning him) should do? And if we made too big a mistake, Daddy had a razor strap to remind us there were always options.

One of my clearest memories of that required discipline was the day I chose to misbehave. I knew it was wrong but I did it. I fretted all the way home about what I would say to my Daddy *if* he found out, because I sure wasn't

going to tell him. The long walk home down a dirt road in Fort Gay, West Virginia, didn't dissuade me: I couldn't; I wouldn't tell my Daddy what I had done.

The minute my foot hit the front porch of our home, I knew I was in trouble.

Daddy was sitting on the porch, in his rocking chair, reading the Bible. He looked up at me and said, "Son, what did you do?"

There was no, "Hello, son, how are you doing?" There was just those burning words, "Son, what *did* you do?"

And I told him. I *had* to. By my reckoning, God had already "ratted me out." Someone had told Dad and it sure hadn't been me.

Then he asked the expected question, "What should you have done?"

And, again, I told him because I had known there was another, better option. And, besides God had already "ratted me out" and told him anyway.

Then came the hardest question, "Son, what do you think I should do?"

Sighing deeply, I replied, "I guess you should whip me."

He looked deep within my eyes — as only he had the knack of doing — and replied, "Son, I love you. Go get the razor strap."

And my Daddy whipped me with that razor strap.

I don't remember how many times he hit me. As the belt approached, I could hear the singing of the demons. Within the fire of each connection between that razor strap and my butt was a message, "Don't do *that* again!"

That night, the family gathered for our every-night ritual. Daddy sat in his rocker reading the Bible. Mom and my sister sat on the steps. My brother sat on the railing. I stood silently, nursing my wounds.

Neighbors came by and chatted about the neighborhood. We never talked about the "outside world." We talked about the only world that mattered: Fort Gay and the surrounding towns.

As it happened, my Daddy and I were the last on the porch that night. As I started to go in, I said, "Daddy, I'm really sorry about what I did."

My Daddy replied, "I know."

That night he hugged me — as he always did. He kissed me lightly on the cheek — as he always did. And he reminded me, “I love you, son.”

I slept soundly that night although I had to do so on my tummy. My backside had not forgotten the “special delivery” administered earlier. I slept well because I had erred, I had paid the price, and my Daddy still loved me.

We never talked about that incident again. It was a closed subject. I had strayed and I had paid.

Life was my God's gift to me.

Discipline was a gift from my Daddy.