**My Father**

I received many blessings and benefits by being my father’s son, but it did not come without some damages to my life…and especially to my elder brother and my younger sister. Dad was a successful pastor for 36 years in the Church of the Nazarene. There were many people who loved him—and several who still do. Each of his children have come to love him in their own way, but the tremendous effort he gave to his ministry was marred by the total control he tried to maintain in his church, and especially in his family.

Nearly every Sunday morning we children were threatened within an inch of our lives not to reveal **the secret:** that things at home didn’t reflect what was preached on Sunday morning. Rather than trusting the Holy Spirit to create in his life, in his home and in his ministry what God might want, he worked hard to create in all the areas of his life what he thought was correct. It fell short of what made him happy and way short of what made his family and church happy too.

I was in my second year as a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene when my dad asked me to come have lunch with him in his car during the lunch break of a training session that the district was giving at the Upland church. It was there that he told me of his plans to divorce my mom and marry a leader in the church that he was pastoring at that time. Fortunately, the leader was a woman. **Things can always be worse!**

Dad and I argued for more than three hours in the car about why this is not what God has told us we should do. After about everything that could be said was said, my dad said to me words I will never forget: “Well, Forrest, I have served God for 36 years and now I deserve a little happiness.”

Perhaps nothing I could say would better reveal the story of a life that had tried to be faithful to God…carrying several crosses as a matter of fact…but not finding the joy of the Lord, which is our strength, to help him with life.

My next words to my dad, “Well, dad, you will always be my father, and I will always be your son,” saved our relationship. I knew that there would be people in my life in the church that would not want to be my friend anymore—and there were several. But there were a few who came to comfort me.

I will never forget about a year later when a member of a nearby church came up to me in his car as I was leaving my church that I was then serving, and said to me, “I hear your dad ran off with a woman in his church…how soon will you be doing the same thing? There have been crosses that I have born because I was dad’s son. But there were also benefits and blessings that I had enjoyed, and still enjoy.

It was a happy day five years later than that conversation in the car in Upland when dad said he wanted to go to dinner together. There he told me that he had come to realize that he had made a mistake in divorcing my mom, that he had asked God to forgive him, and wanted to know if I would forgive him too. I gladly did.

Dad became a wonderful follower of Jesus in the next few years before he died. I saw a joy in the Lord in His life that I wish I had seen during my years of living in the parsonage with him. It was my joy to be at his bedside singing hymns of the church and praying as he passed into the arms of Jesus.

Bearing our crosses for Jesus, and not for ourselves, and not for the expectations of others, pays big dividends not only for God’s kingdom, but for ourselves as well.