June 19

Grace and peace to you this day.

Having just celebrated Father’s Day, with your indulgence, I’d like to spend the next few days reflecting on my own dad and the things I learned from him as well as on what Scripture teaches us about fathers. My dad died almost nine years ago, and I would be lying if I said I didn’t miss him every day.

My dad was born and raised on the south side of Chicago (21st and California) and as a young man was a professional musician. He had his own polka and dance band and played weddings, dances, and so on all over the city. His instruments were accordion, piano, and drums. One of his trumpet players was a friend of his, Vincent Cichowicz. They were classmates at Harrison High School. Mr. Cichowicz went on to play with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and was also a professor of music at Northwestern University’s School of Music.

Here’s a picture of my dad and one of his bands in probably the early 1950’s. Dad is on accordion:

![Image of dad and band](image-url)

My dad had many “sayings,” some of which he said in Polish, some in English, and some with a combination of languages. Some of his sayings were, shall we say, colorful, as you might expect from someone who raised three teenage boys on his own. As a music teacher, Dad believed in the importance of kids learning about music and thought that it was something they could carry with them their whole lives. That included me. He taught me how to read music and play trumpet when I was in 1st grade.
In any case, in the 6th grade I had been asked to play a solo for a PTA meeting. The song was “Carnival of Venice” and one of the notes was a high “G.” Not all that high, unless you’re a nervous 6th grader standing in front of a bunch of listening parents back in about 1967 or so. My dad was to accompany me on piano.

As I was practicing that day, I took the easy way out and played the high note down an octave. On the way to the meeting where I would perform, my dad gently said, “I noticed you took the high G down an octave. How come?” I told him I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to play it because it was too high. His response: “Think you can or think you can’t, either way you’re right.”

I played the high G that night, and with some gusto I might add. But the lesson that day wasn’t about air control or any of those things. It was about confidence. It was about encouragement. It was about how sometimes the best thing a father can do is let his child make his own choices and support them, no questions asked. It is a lesson I carry with me to this day, 55 years later.

My dad wasn’t a student of the Bible, though he was a man of faith. Nonetheless, as I think about that day so many years ago, I am reminded of this Proverb:

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (22:6).

So, thanks, Dad. And, you were right.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
June 20

Grace and peace to you this day.

When I was growing up, whenever my dad was working on something around the house, he would often have me “help” him. Sometimes that “help” involved holding the flashlight. Sometimes it involved getting a tool and handing it to him. Sometimes it involved holding a piece of wood as he was cutting it, or maybe holding the ladder, or simply just keeping him company.

Aside from the simple pleasure of being with him and helping him with grown up “dad stuff,” there was often some form of instruction. Not in an overt, authoritative way, but in a gentle, fatherly way. Things I remember are things like this:

“Keep your tools sharp.”

“Don’t force it. Let the tool do the work.”

“There’s no hurry. Take your time.”

And of course, the classic, “Measure twice cut once.”

I remember once a few of my friends were over at our house and we were building a platform for the drum major to stand on for our high school marching band practices. Of course, as teenagers, we paid attention to none of the things my dad had said and, well, the platform looked like it. Honestly, the thing looked like a building code violation. It was embarrassing.

My dad came home from work and, after having stood on his feet in a factory for 12 hours, helped us to take it apart and do it the “right” way. It turned out great. As we were all thanking him and kind of apologizing for him having to help us, he could have admonished us or given us a lecture. But that wasn’t in his nature. All he said was, “Just remember, boys. Do things right. That way you can’t go wrong.”

At the time, I thought he was just talking about building stuff. Later on, I realized that what he was really talking about was life.

As I said, my dad wasn’t a student of the Bible, but he was a man of faith. As I think about this time in my life, I am reminded of this Proverb:

“'I will guide you in the way of wisdom and I will lead you in upright paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered, and when you run, you will not stumble” (4:11-12).

Once again, thanks, Dad.

IHS,
June 21

Grace and peace to you this day.

When I was growing up, we went on a car trip every year. Sometimes it was just to the Chain O’ Lakes in northern Illinois where we rented a cottage with other family members. Once we went to Springfield, IL, and once we took a two-week trip all the way to Las Vegas and back. There were no interstates then, and along the way were all those cheesy tourist attractions. Somewhere there’s a picture of me as a young boy riding a giant tortoise at a roadside attraction in Arizona. I also remember staying in a roadside motel where the individual units were shaped like teepees.

One of our favorite destination was the Ozarks. It wasn’t nearly as built up then as it is now, and I remember the “boardwalk” which is now pretty run down. But back then in its “heyday,” for a young boy, there was no place better on earth.

The souvenir shops with moccasins and Indian arrowheads. The place where you could pan for “gold.” The BB gun target range. And let’s not forget the Ripley’s Believe It Or Not Museum, with “strange wonders from around the world.” And my personal favorite: skeeball.

One night, after having spent the better part of a very hot day on the boardwalk, we went to some kind of air and water show. Nighttime came, and the show was at one end of the boardwalk and our car was at the other end. The end our car was on was at the top of a steep incline. After much complaining and whining on the part of yours truly, my Dad said, “Come on, Sport. Climb up on my shoulders.”

Maybe he did it simply to shut me up. Maybe he did it so we could get back to the motel room faster without me lollygagging behind. Or maybe he did it because, well, that’s what fathers do. The Book of Deuteronomy says it like this:

“There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place” (1:31).

Once again, thanks, Dad.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
June 22

Grace and peace to you this day.

As we close out the week, today I would like to spend a few minutes talking about a man I never met: My dad’s dad. My Grampa Joseph. In many ways, it’s a classic immigrant story.

Grampa came here from Poland (which was actually Austria at the time) in 1907, fleeing the winds of war that were blowing across Europe at the time. He was 17 years old and completely alone in America. I researched his entry records from an Ellis Island database and actually found him. This is a facsimile of his ship’s passenger record:

![Ship's Passenger Record](image)

He made his way to Wyoming where he met my grandmother, who was quite a bit younger than him, and at the age of 17 was already a widow. They married, and eventually my grandfather was injured in a coal mining accident. They made their way to Chicago where they bought the six flat at 21st and California where my dad was born, and where I was born.

During the Depression, my grandfather was the only one on his block to have a job. He made six dollars per week working in a factory that made wooden handles for brooms and the like. Because he were employed, and most were not, my grandmother and he
often didn’t charge their tenants rent and many times would give their “extra” food to those around them.

And, my grandmother, a devout Catholic, made sure to say her Novenas at St. Roman’s church every Wednesday evening.

Eventually, my grandfather contracted leukemia, perhaps from his work in the mines, and died in 1955, two years before I was born. He was 65 years old. The same age I am now.

My dad didn’t talk about him much, but once when I asked him “What was your dad like?” My dad got a little choked up, despite many years having passed, and managed to say, “He was a great man.” Really, that says it all.

And you know, if someone now were to ask me now about my dad, I would say, despite the lump in my throat that I have even now as I write this, the same thing, “He was a great man.”

I never knew my grandfather. Never got to hear his story from him. Yet, the Lord has blessed me through him by setting the example for my dad, and hopefully for me. And if you were to ask me what makes a man “great,” I would answer with one word: heart. This is what it says in the Book of Malachi:

"He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (4:6).

Even though I never knew you, thanks, Grampa.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

June 23

Happy Friday, everyone!

Here’s your musical devotional for the week. Turn up the volume and enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlsQrycKKsY

IHS,

Pastor Lou