

# Relationship Tip of the Day



## Choose Love

My father whom I loved so deeply was a very unkind man. I didn't know this until I was an adult because my mother chose not to speak poorly of him after their divorce. This was because she knew that it would hurt me to know the truth.

When as an adult, I experienced the real man for myself, a deep hatred and resentment grew as I realized he was not the man I'd fantasized. My little daughter's heart loved him and was blind to the fact he had deserted us and barely kept in contact with me. It is fair to say, I grew to despise him for what he'd done. I treated him harshly. I avoided communicating with him. I loved everyone else in the world, but not my own father.

When I returned to Jesus, God began to work on my attitudes. On the day I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, God spoke to me concerning my hateful actions toward my father and very specifically told me to write him a letter of apology.

"Apologize to *Him*?" I argued, "After all the pain he has caused me? No! He should be apologizing to *me*!" But I could not deny it was God who was speaking.

For the next week, I wrote several drafts. The first few told him I was sorry I'd been so mean to him, but it was his fault in the first place. The Holy Spirit kept encouraging me to only apologize for what I'd done. Eventually, we came up with a clean draft in which I sincerely apologized for how I had treated him. There was no expectation that he would reply when I put that letter in the mail.

To my surprise, my father responded. Even more surprising to me was that he thanked me for my letter and said, "I probably provoked you." He took responsibility without me demanding he do so.

After this, our communication began to improve, but our relationship almost fell apart again after he lied to his mother concerning me. He told her that I was going to have my stepfather walk me down the aisle and lamented to her how much it hurt him. She called and said "the family" wasn't coming to my wedding.

My grandmother was a sincere Christian but totally blind to her son's manipulations. I said to her, "Grandma, you know that I am also a Christian and I would not lie to you. But your son is lying to you." Then I explained to her how I had told my stepfather that I wanted my father to walk me down the aisle even though he didn't deserve it. He graciously accepted this decision, understanding how difficult it was to make.

Before you judge me about that, believe me there is more to the story which need not be shared. Suffice it to say, my stepfather didn't serve it either.

My father's response was, "I think your stepdad should walk you down the aisle. He has been more of a father to you than I have."

I said, "I have already spoken to him about this, and he understands that I want you to do it."

My father kept refusing, and after several attempts to convince him and honestly feeling a bit bruised that he wouldn't want to walk his own daughter down the aisle," I relented. I called my stepfather and told him the story, and he graciously consented to do it.

My father then called his mother to boo-hoo about how I didn't want him to walk her down the aisle, and that's why she called me to express her displeasure.

I never knew what happened next, but my father and his mother and sister all attended my wedding.

Perhaps that would have been a great place for him to change his ways, but over the years, he still found ways to humiliate me every time we saw him or when we talked on the phone.

This somehow built up in me, and I made the decision not to call him anymore. He always knew just how to humiliate me, and he seemed to enjoy doing so. After every phone call, I would cry and lament what he'd said. Enough was enough.

For two years, I didn't communicate with him at all, and he didn't contact me either. It had always been me initiating our relationship anyway, so maybe he didn't notice.

But God didn't approve, and I called my father again. Within five minutes, he'd done it again—insulted me in my most obviously painful spot while enjoying it.

Then the Lord spoke to my heart. "Choose love."

This is when it finally dawned on me that my dad was not going to change, and if I was going to love him, it would be a choice I would make again and again. I could either not call him and avoid the humiliation or choose to forgive him knowing he would probably do it again. I decided to choose love and forgiveness.

After this decision, I asked God to help me know what to say when he would inevitably ask questions that were accusatory in nature, and an idea "came to me."

The next phone call I was ready. He asked His jabbing question, and I said, "Why do you ask, Dad?" He hemmed and hawed as if he didn't know how to respond and then made up some lame excuse which was obviously not true. He realized that I was on to him.

Amazingly, he never asked that question again. He never brought up the topic ever again. Our communications improved.

Our relationship was always difficult, but I chose to love my father. We went to visit him now and then and I kept up the communication—still

always initiated by me. I will never regret my decision to choose to love my father.

One day I was speaking to him over the phone about how God had shown me that being a Christian was about loving Jesus not following a long list of religious rules, and he replied that he agreed with that. That was truly a first. At the end of the call I said, "I love you, Dad."

He responded, "Me, too," which is as close as he'd come to telling me he loved me. Right before he passed away (he was dying with cancer), he asked if he could play some songs for me on his organ. He chose Christian hymns.

My father mocked Christianity, had divorced my mother because she was a Christian, and belittled our calling to be ministers, but at the end of his life, he bought an organ and played songs about Jesus. It was his way of letting me know he believed. That same day, we said our goodbyes and I hugged him and told him I loved him. He hugged me back as sincerely as he ever had knowing that he'd never see me again. I felt his love for me even though he still couldn't tell me.

That would never have happened if I hadn't chosen to love my father.

### ***Ephesians 4:29-32***

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. <sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

Excluding physical and sexual abuse, do your best to make peace with everyone. Remember that if you cut off everyone who offends you, you will soon be left with no one. Choose love.