

Bible Devotions: Lock Stock & Barrel
Devotional Reading for Outdoorsmen
(Old Testament)

Genesis 49:1, 9, 21-24, 27

What Would Dad Say?

And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:

Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?

Naphtali is a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words. Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)...

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."

As I write these words, I have entered a new phase in my parenting responsibilities. My children are now grown, or nearly so. I'm transforming from a disciplinarian-type father who was overly concerned with making sure my adolescent children walked the straight way (and not necessarily comfort-free, I might add) into a kind, compassionate, meek, gentle, soft-spoken, hand-wringing father still overly concerned with making sure my young adult children walk the straight way. Well, I think I'm kind, the rest might be a stretch. Really, I see myself more of an encourager and life-sage for my children as they seek my counsel in the things of life.

As for me personally, I credit my father and mother with my own Christian upbringing. Three things stand out to me about the way they prioritized life.

First, God was always to be honored and worshiped. In success and struggle, doing the right things and making the right choices were the orders for the day. Anything less required asking for forgiveness, which was characteristically implored before each meal.

Second, my parents made family their number one responsibility. Church was simply one of the nuts and bolts of family life that could not be singled out as a lesser priority without weakening the integrity of the home. Deep commitments and sacrifices that exhorted the family were only feats of faith which defined their Christian living. For example, I remember the day in the mid 1960's when dad and mom bought a piano. Neither of them had any formal music training but because they saw the need for musicians in our own small church, they privately dedicated my sister, brother, and me to God for that purpose. In the course of time, the three of us became musicians.

Third, my dad (and mom) loves the outdoors, a passion he has passed down to his children and grandchildren, always with the understanding that it is a gift from God. With this outdoorsy-ness in mind, Jacob's final words to his sons take on a fresh meaning for me, especially as I think about what my dad would want me to remember about life:

Judah... In Genesis 49:8-12, Jacob gave us a prophetic glimpse of Jesus, the coming Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). I can hear my dad telling me to conduct myself with the strength of the Lion. Be a Godly man. Worship and honor and obey Jesus. Guard my realm like a lion guards his. Be glad that I'm one of the Lion's whelps.

Naphtali... When I think of a deer let loose, a sense of freedom comes to mind. This kind of freedom cannot be exclusive of God, for *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (II Corinthians 3:17). My dad has always encouraged me to be unyielding in the embrace of liberty in America and unapologetic in taking a stand for God in America (or anywhere else). There's a purpose in this: to be vigilant in our longing for God – for our selves, our family, our friends, and future generations. The psalmist proclaimed in Psalm 42:1, *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God."* I want to pass along to my children that depth of desire for the Savior.

Joseph... A broken bow would obviously fail in battle but Joseph's 'bow' remained strong. The imagery is of a weak bow being like an "unreliable people in whom God cannot place His trust" (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, 1998). My dad would tell me to be a reliable bow fit for the Lord's army, with my very being made strong by the hand of the Mighty God. Trust in those things that never fail: the unbegotten God, the only begotten Son of God, His inerrant and infallible Word, His good pleasure and great promises, the trustworthiness of His Spirit.

Benjamin... Jacob's words to Benjamin carried a reference to greed. I can hear my dad warning me to not let greed be a troubling characteristic of my Christian walk. Money and material goods should be used to sustain an honest living. There's no room for greed, cheating, and selfishness in that type of good lifestyle. Be honest in all things and *render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's* (Luke 20:25). It's a matter of integrity and you either have it or you don't.

I must remember that in any given day, my last words to my children could be my final words. I hope that every occasion of departure – like going to work, seeing my children off to bed, or school, or college – has words of love hanging in the air. I must speak the kind of words that burn in their hearts and embed in their minds. Words that exalt Jesus. Words that encourage them to remain faithful to their Savior after I'm long gone.

In my final words, I want them to hear a call to holiness. The rest of life's lessons, like love for the outdoors or anything else, will fall into place because that's the way my dad raised me and that's the way I raised my children...

... As I make sure they walk the straight way.

Bible Devotions: Hook Line & Sinker (study guide)

Genesis 49:1, 9, 21-24, 27

What Would Dad Say?

HOOK

1. What is the last sentence you want to say before you die, and to whom would you say it?

2. How do you inform others that the outdoors is God's gift to us? How will you be better at it?

3. List three animals and their characteristics which remind you of strong Christian living. Why?

LINE

Judah... Conduct yourself with the strength of the Lion. Be a Godly man. Worship and honor and obey Jesus. Guard your realm like a lion guards his. Be glad that you are one of the Lion's whelps.

Naphthali... Freedom cannot be exclusive of God. Be unyielding in the embrace of liberty in America and unapologetic in taking a stand for God. Be vigilant in your longing for God.

Joseph... A weak bow is like an unreliable person in whom God can't place His trust. Your bow should be fit for the Lord's army, with your very being made strong by the hand of the Mighty God. Trust in those things that never fail: the unbegotten God, the only begotten Son of God, His inerrant and infallible Word, His good pleasure and great promises, the trustworthiness of His Spirit.

Benjamin... Don't let greed be a troubling characteristic of your Christian walk. Money and material goods should be used to sustain an honest living. There's no room for greed, cheating, and selfishness in that type of good lifestyle. Be honest in all things.

What are your family's strengths? Weaknesses? What will you do to make your family more trustworthy before God?

What concerns you most about raising a family in America? List a few characteristics that dependably describe your family's integrity. Will this be true 10 years from now? 20 years?

SINKER

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts on this devotional. Reflect on your own experiences.

Key words: parenting Christian family encouraging words

