

Day 38

A Warrior's Heart for Stewardship

Removing Soot Build Up from Your Heart

My grandparents moved to 5th Street when my Dad and Uncle were young boys. Their house wasn't perfect, but after living in a shanty with no real windows or even walls, it must have seemed like a palace. I am sure the house needed much work when they moved in. My Dad and Uncle continued to do a lot of renovations to their family home even as I was growing up. My grandparents lived in that house from 1939 to 1997. It wasn't big and it certainly wasn't fancy, but it was cozy and comfortable, and smelled like love. My grandmother finally moved from the house after my grandfather passed away in 1996.

She had resided in that house for 58 years. During her move she gave me many things that perhaps seemed meaningless to most including a few boxes of old paper items. As I finally took the time to review the boxes of paper I could see their lives during the early years. The boxes contained old tax papers, my grandfather's payroll receipts dating back to the 1930's, anniversary, and birthday cards, electric bills, war ration stamps for coffee and sugar, postal savings bonds, even the hospital statement from when my Dad was born...he cost a whopping \$10.86 to enter the world! So many things. It was like piecing together a puzzle of someone's life from years before. My grandmother even lovingly handed me the small suitcase that belonged to her mother with a few items still in it along with her mother's purse and billfold with her initials carved in the worn leather. SIM, Sarah Isabelle McKeever. I consider those treasures that I will never be able to receive again. I hope to pass them on someday to my legacy and pray that they will see the value in those pieces of paper that put together a puzzle of a life well lived.

The puzzle left behind was simply pieces of paper from daily living, that over time, like fine wine...each became a beautiful bouquet of a fragrance of the past. They told a story of simplicity and depth of faith. It was in those puzzle pieces of paper that I learned the true lesson of stewardship from my grandparents...after they were gone.

My grandparents, George and Mildred (Milly) Stout, were among the original group of tenants that moved into the neighborhood on 5th Street about the same time. They didn't know it then, but years later the house four houses away on the corner would belong to their son's family...which included me. George and Milly's house was perched along the top of the big hill. Once people moved into the neighborhood on 5th Street they didn't leave often until death. They spent their lives there apparently with no desire for bigger and better houses...their secret my grandma always said...they were 'content'. As the years passed most of them could have easily afforded to move, but they were content to be exactly where God had them...tucked away in a little neighborhood on 5th Street.

My grandfather worked full-time at an office supply store in downtown Des Moines. He was compensated such small wages in 1934 that his employer forbid employees to marry. They didn't feel their employees could sustain a household and family on the salaries they paid. Even though his employer forbid marriage...my grandparents were completely in love with each other so one day they secretly drove to Omaha, Nebraska and got married. I have their marriage certificate as proof! In the times we currently live in...imagine if an employer forbid (a word hardly used in our present society) an employee to marry! But, it does make for a heartwarming story of true love between my grandparents and their escape to marry each other.

They had two sons shortly after marrying. My Dad arrived first exactly ten months after they said “I do” with his brother arriving 12 months after him. They were a busy family, but my grandmother loved being a wife and mother. After God, her family was everything to her. As her son’s got a little older she began cleaning houses a few afternoons a week to earn a little extra money. She would take her sons with her to help.

If you look at old magazines from the late 1920’s through the 1930’s you’ll quickly notice that wallpaper was the shiplap of today. Due to the cost, only those with financial means could cover their walls with the fashionable paper. In that era houses were heated with coal. This caused a soot buildup on the wallpaper that had to be cleaned. My grandmother and her two young sons spent many afternoons cleaning houses and removing soot from wallpaper. While I loved spending time with my three daughters as they grew up, taking them to clean houses and wallpaper would have been a messy, disastrous job! But for my grandma and her sons, it was just what they did, but let’s face it...my dad and uncle were no saints...it would have required angelic patience by my grandmother!

My grandmother always taught her grandchildren the importance of saving money and the difference between a ‘need’ and a ‘want’. At the same time, she was good about supply our ‘wants’ in moderation. The lessons she shared on financial stewardship had been passed down from her parents to her, going back several generations.

After my grandmother went home to be with Jesus, I was going through more of the boxes containing the paper puzzle pieces. I found my grandparents taxes from 1944. On the front of the old form were their earnings. My grandmother had made \$150.00 cleaning houses that year. I remember thinking what a lot of work for only \$150.00 for an entire year’s wages. I realize money is at a different economic standard now then it was then, but even then \$150 was not a lot for a part-time job over twelve months. On the back of the tax form was a place to mark any charitable deductions. There...in the column...written in my grandfather’s handwriting...was the amount of tithing my grandparents gave to the church...\$150.00. My grandmother had given all of her earnings for the year in tithing to the church. I held the old tax paper in my hands as tears rolled down my cheeks.

In all of our conversations she had never mentioned she gave her entire wages from 1944 to God. While the lessons she had taught on stewardship growing up were valuable...this was truly amazing. She lived what she taught. It was more than just words. My grandmother was a Warrior of stewardship. She knew that God would provide and that everything she had came from Him and belonged to Him. It was probably one of the many reasons she could live in the same house on 5th Street for 58 years...her happiness was not associated with money...she was content in all seasons. There were times they were in poverty and times they had abundance (Philippians 4:11-13). My grandmother had learned to be content and worship God in all seasons of life regardless of her bank balance.

Putting this into action –

Have you experienced times in your life of extreme financial struggles? Are there times in your life you have enjoyed abundance? Do you feel joy and peace no matter what season you’re in financially? Are you content in your soul regardless of your bank balance? Do you go into debt over a want and later regret it?

My grandmother most likely used Kutol as a soot remover when she cleaned wallpaper. Kutol was a soap company based in Cincinnati. The company was about to go under when they developed Play-Doh in the 1920’s as a wallpaper soot remover. The Play-Doh was formed into a ball and then rolled on the

wallpaper removing the soot. Life in this world often teaches us to be greedy with our possessions and money...we can develop a kind of soot build up on our hearts. Scripture teaches us the truth about Godly stewardship. Everything we have comes from the Lord. Applying scripture to the heart can be the soot remover of the soul. And unlike the Kutol Company, God will never go under from poor financial management. Your investment with God is completely safe and the return on investment (ROI)...is truly of everlasting value.