

WHAT WOULD BE IN YOUR LAST LECTURE?

Last Friday, 47-year-old Randy Pausch died of complications from pancreatic cancer. Many of you will recognize Pausch as the husband, father of three, and innovative computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University whose “Last Lecture,” delivered last September, has been watched by millions on the Internet and more recently was released in book form. Well aware of his incurable disease, Pausch said, “[I’m] trying to put myself in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children.”

Here are several of the key insights he wanted to leave behind for his children:

- Never underestimate the importance of having fun. I’m dying and I’m having fun. And I’m going to keep having fun every day because there’s no other way to play it.
- Experience is what you get when you didn’t get what you wanted.
- No one is pure evil. Find the best in everybody. Wait long enough and people will surprise and impress you.
- Brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something.
- We can’t change the cards we’re dealt, just how we play the hand. If I’m not as depressed as you think I should be, I’m sorry to disappoint you.

To Think About...

While Randy Pausch’s death is a tragedy, all fathers would be wise to learn something from his story—that was the purpose of his lecture. We should imagine ourselves in his situation and make positive changes that will make a difference in the years, months, or days we have left with our children. We shouldn’t wait until we’re confronted with our own mortality to make a conscious decision to invest ourselves more in areas where we’re truly indispensable: relationships with those we love. We should make it a habit—every day—to examine our priorities and make choices about how we can best use every moment of life.

Additionally, we can follow Pausch’s lead and start thinking about what “message in a bottle” we want to leave behind for our children. What are the most important principles and life lessons you have learned to embrace? How do you want your children to remember you?

As I write this column, I am a man who was not a good father and a good husband. I was emotionally, psychologically and spiritually absent from my family. It was not something I wanted to do or intended to be when I walked down the aisle of my wedding day or watched my two sons born. I was responsible for a dysfunctional home and family and in the midst of that I couldn’t figure out all that was wrong or how to fix it. My wife did everything she could imagine and in time I stripped her self worth and love for me away day by day. My kids were afraid of me and it seemed I was out of control

while trying to portray I was really OK. Regrets, you bet. I wished I had ten years of my marriage back. I wish for a lot of soccer games back when I should have been the encourager not the screaming crazy dad on the side-line. I wish that one of the few vacations we had as a family that I taught my sons how to fish, hunt and appreciate life in nature. I regret a lot. I look at the documentary on Randy Pausch's and read his book and I am challenged to change for the right reasons and not just for change itself. I know that real change is in the deepest part of my soul that I rarely allow my self to visit. There lies my real problem. I need to exchange regrets for life.

How do we do it as Fathers?

As difficult as it is to imagine, part of our role as fathers is to prepare our children for eternity—even if we're the ones who experience it first. Death is often regarded as tragic and unexplainable, but for those of us who trust in Jesus, death is a victory, a coming home. Often, children want to know what we believe about life and death, but beyond getting information, they need to see some confidence and hope from us about those questions. We have the awesome responsibility of passing on that hope—and that destiny—to our children.

ACTION POINTS for Committed Dads

- Create a “message in a bottle” for each of your children. Start a regular habit of writing or recording video or audio to capture important principles you want to pass on to them.
- Ask your wife or a good friend, “What would you do if you had only six months to live?” Answer the question yourself, and ask your older children as well.
- Try using some type of a regular reminder that you have a limited amount of time left to invest in your children every day.
- Revisit your goals regarding your career and your finances. Ask yourself, “What values are behind these goals?” “Will my pursuit of these goals pull me away from higher family priorities?”
- Reach out to your father or father figure and thank him for something he has taught you.
- Pray this prayer: “Heavenly Father, I trust You to provide for me and for my family, now and in the future. Please help me rest in that trust and let go of a striving lifestyle.”

Fathers, at the end of the day, we must go where our soul yearns and that is to be one with the Father.