

A Tough, Gentle Father

Gentleness is a wonderful quality, and when you find someone who truly possesses it, people are drawn to that individual. Perhaps it is because the trait seems to be in such short supply in this world.

Bill Hybels is the founding and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill., one of the most attended churches in North America with an average attendance of nearly 24,000. He is also an author of a number of Christian books.

In *Honest to God*, he writes about a luncheon with his brother in which they spent an hour discussing the mark their father left on them.

“Dan and I reminisced about the times we had sailed with him on Lake Michigan. We remembered violent storms with 50-mile-an-hour winds. All the other sailors would dash for the harbor, but Dad would smile from ear to ear and say, ‘Let’s head out farther!’”

The brothers talked about the tough business decisions they had seen him make. “We winced when we remembered his firm hand of discipline that blocked our rebellious streaks. We never doubted it. Dad was strong, tough, and thoroughly masculine.”



Yet for 25 years, the father spent nearly every Sunday afternoon standing in front of 100 mentally retarded women at the state mental hospital. “Gently and patiently, he led them in a song service. Few of them could even sing, but he didn’t care,” Hybels said. “He knew it made them feel loved. Afterward, he stood by the door while each of those disheveled, broken women planted kisses on his cheek.

“As little guys, Dan and I had the unspeakable privilege of watching our 6-foot-3, 220-pound, thoroughly masculine Dad treat these forgotten women with a gentleness that marked us.”

Hybels’ recollections bring to mind my own father – and perhaps they stir some memories of your own – a man who was a farmer at first, then a sawmill worker before becoming a barber for most of his life providing for his family. He was tough as nails, unshakable by the adversities he faced, but owning a heart filled with compassion for people he met with obvious needs, and each summer growing a garden to sell the produce for mission causes.

Gentleness. It is a value and quality in one’s character, one that we should all strive to employ. And it is one of the fruits of the Spirit defining a Christian, according to Galatians 5:22-23: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*