



PAPA: I JUST LOVE THAT GUY

By Marilyn Sharpe

It was bedtime at Jon and Tammie's house two years ago. Then two-and-a-half year old Hayden was being tucked in by his mom. After toothbrushing and pjs and prayers and kisses, Tammie asked him, "Who is your best friend, Hayden?" Without skipping a beat, Hayden responded, "Papa Sharpe! I just love that guy!" Papa is his grandfather, Jon's dad, and my husband of almost 38 years, Les. Tammie called our house after tucking Hayden in and left us a voicemail message about this tender interchange. Les was deeply touched. And, Les had earned this loving appreciation.

Once a week since Hayden was just a little over a year old, Les has spent his day off with Hayden (and now alternates those special one-on-one times with Hayden's little sister Erica). Les now picks each one up from daycare and they head off on a Papa-grandchild adventure. Les lets them pick what they do. They've taken light rail downtown to the new library and read books. They've gone fishing and swimming in the summer. They've gone to Como Zoo and the Conservatory. They've gone to the park to play. They have visited the Minnesota Zoo, the Children's Museum, the Arboretum, the Science Museum, and the Model Train Museum. They have taken rides at formerly-known-as-Camp-Snoopy, been to Underwater World, and played with Legos. They have watched movies and set up wooden trains and read books and run errands together. He has taken them to meet his colleagues at work, who have heard endless stories about Hayden and Erica and seen their pictures.

Whatever they do, Les is attentive to what they want to do. He listens when they talk. He loves them and affirms them and encourages them and answers endless questions and explains how things work. They eat together, play together, and make a million memories.

Early in their excursions, Les decided that he would not buy gifts or toys or candy on their outings. This was not initially well received. But whining, wheedling, demanding, and crying didn't change his mind. Now, that is a non-issue and the gift is their time together. Hayden did notice that something was missing in Les' truck and he asked about it. "Papa, do you have a time out chair in the truck?" "No, I don't," Les replied. "Do you think I might need one?" "Yes, Papa," Hayden responded in his most earnest voice, "and a timer so that I know when to get up." "Well, Hayden, I don't think there is room for that and it would be really expensive. Do you think that you could just cooperate when I ask you to do something?" Les responded. "Okay, Papa." And he has done just that.

Les also shares his passions with them. On the day Pavarotti died, Les told Hayden that one of the world's finest singers died and they listened to opera together. When Tammie picked Hayden up from daycare that day, Hayden wanted to share with her what had happened. "Mom, today one of the best singers died and Papa and I are very sad." "Who was that?" inquired Tammie. "I don't remember," said Hayden, "but he sang karate."

There is no better gift you can give a child that you love than time together, focused on one another, making memories. How else will they learn God's love for them? Remember, today you are the face and hands and voice of Jesus in their lives. What a gift!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. If your grandchildren live nearby, spend time together, lots and lots of time, doing what they love to do.
2. If they live far away, stay in touch. Make phone calls. Send emails, letters, cards, photos, and little gifts that express your values. Read a story aloud and send your grandchild a cassette or video of you reading it, or do it online as a video chat, if you have a computer with that capacity.
3. Say, "I love you" in a million different ways.
4. Let your grandchild know that you pray for them regularly. Send them a prayer. Ask them to pray for you. Pray together.
5. Post their artwork on your fridge or bulletin board. If they don't live nearby, take a picture and send it to them.
6. Look around for a child in your congregation or neighborhood or circle of friends who doesn't have a grandparent around and "adopt" them.