

WRITING A TRIBUTE FOR YOUR PARENTS

Creating a written Tribute to your parents—a formal document honoring them for what they’ve done right—may not be as difficult as you think. By reading through the examples given in the book, *The Tribute*, you can gain a greater understanding of the concept of honoring your parents.

Parents do not care whether you are a writer, a grammarian, or spelling bee champion. They feel honored by the fact that you are speaking from the heart. You can accomplish this as you include special memories—those times of happiness, joy, celebration, and even pain and sadness that recapture how you felt as a child.

The best way to begin writing a Tribute is to set aside a large chunk of time—perhaps an afternoon—to be alone with God and start putting thoughts and memories on paper. Here are a few suggested steps:

STEP ONE: PREPARE YOUR HEART

Spend some time in prayer and fellowship with God. Talk with Him, read His Word, and allow Him to search your heart. As Psalm 139:23-24 says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

HERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU:

- ⌄ Are you willing to look at your parents through the eyes of Christ?
- ⌄ Are you looking to God, rather than your parents, for approval?
- ⌄ Are your motives pure? Are you seeking to manipulate your parents through this gesture in any way?
- ⌄ Are you prepared to honor them regardless of their response?
- ⌄ Do you need to ask for their forgiveness for anything?
- ⌄ Are you willing to forgive them for how they have hurt you?

Don’t become introspective over these questions. The goal is to honor your parents, not to manufacture additional, unnecessary guilt in your life.

STEP TWO: CREATE A LIST OF MEMORIES

Your goal here is to collect as many memories as you can. Write down the good memories you have about your childhood—events, happy occasions, interesting experiences with your family, things your parents taught you, and more. Don’t be selective—you want to pull memories out of your mind and put them on paper.

You should be able to recall at least 10-15 specific good things about your parents. It may take a weekend (or a year) to bring them out, but usually those memories are stuffed in your brain.

You might want to start with an hour alone, just writing what you can remember. Then, over the next few weeks, carry around a notepad or some small cards and jot down anything that comes to mind. You will be surprised how, once you start, little things will spark memories—smells, sights, things people say, things your kids do.

The following questions should loosen a few rusty drawers in your brain:

 What was your favorite gift from your dad or mom? _____

 What memorable conversations do you recall having with your parents? _____

 Where did you go on vacations? What did you do? _____

 What was your happiest moment as a child? _____

 What did you enjoy doing with your dad and mom? _____

 What holiday traditions did you observe? _____

 What problems did your parents help you with as a child? As a teenager? _____

 What pets did they get for you? _____

 What activities did they encourage you to be involved in? _____

 What activities did they participate in with you (as a coach, teacher, etc.)? _____

 What was the funniest moment you experienced with your family? _____

 What special phrases did your family invent? _____

STEP THREE: ORGANIZE YOUR MATERIAL

If you are writing to both parents, one basic decision you will need to make is whether you want to write two individual Tributes or one combined Tribute. There's no right or wrong here—it all depends on the occasion and what you feel comfortable with.

There are many formats you can use to present your material, including a scrapbook, a book, a notebook, or a framed picture. The format you choose will help determine the length and look of your written material.

You may end up with dozens of items on your “memory list.” You will need to reduce the number of items to fit whatever word length you have chosen for your final version, so now it is time to prioritize.

Go through the list and select the memories you feel are most important to include in the Tribute. Remember, you do not need to include every memory that pops into your head, as in, “I remember going to the grocery store one time when I was a small boy and you bought green beans.” Some memories have no meaning! Just like picking only the freshest blooming flowers for a bouquet, choose the memories that are the most meaningful and vividly emotional to you.

STEP FOUR: WRITE THE ROUGH DRAFT

Don't worry about being fancy here—just tell the story as if you are talking to a friend.

To help guide you, here is a step-by-step outline:

1. INTRODUCTION

Explain why you are writing this Tribute.

EXAMPLE: *“Too often we let our lives go by and we fail to let the ones who are most important to us know just how special they are. You are special. There are so many reasons I am thankful that you are my daddy.”*

2. WHAT THEY DID RIGHT

Use the charts on the following two pages to turn each memory or character quality you have selected into a sentence or paragraph. The following examples show how you can turn a single phrase into a sentence or paragraph by telling the story.

EXAMPLE:

MEMORY/CHARACTER QUALITY	STATEMENT
“Good provider ... hard worker ... went to work even when he was sick or when it was icy outside ... paid my way through college ... ”	“I never, ever worried that I wouldn't have the things I needed or wanted, because you are such a hard worker. I can remember days you went to work even when you didn't feel good, and a few times you had to walk to work because of icy roads. And, unlike many parents, you paid my way through college.”

MEMORY/CHARACTER QUALITY

STATEMENT

MEMORY/CHARACTER QUALITY

STATEMENT

3. CONCLUSION

Summarize your appreciation to your parents for the good they've done and how they have influenced you. This is also an ideal time to point to the future—to the relationship you want to continue to build with your parents, and to the legacy you are passing on to your own children.

STEP FIVE: PUT TOGETHER YOUR FINAL DRAFT

Take all the material you've put together on your worksheet and transfer it to some fresh paper. Look for ways to make improvements. Does everything make sense? Is the writing clear enough to understand what you are describing?

It might help to ask other people—your spouse or some friends—to look at your Tribute because they may spot some problems you haven't thought of. They also can point out any grammatical or spelling errors you didn't catch.

FRAMING THE TRIBUTE

Now that you have finished writing your Tribute, it's time to design the gift for your parents. Take the document to a framing store and ask for advice on how to present it. Then create a clean version of the document, suitable for framing.

HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS:

- If you have access to a computer with good word processing or desktop publishing software, set your document in the font style and size you desire. Then print on a laser printer.
- Have your document typeset by a local typesetter.
- Hire a calligrapher to give the document a classy look on parchment. Make sure the words are large and clean. In fact, this approach doesn't work well with longer documents unless you use a very large size piece of paper. Otherwise, calligraphy can be difficult to read.
- Decide if you want to add any photographs, artwork, or other mementos to the document and plan accordingly.

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