

HOW TO WRITE A TRIBUTE FOR YOUR PARENTS

Of the Ten Commandments, this one may be the most mysterious and, perhaps, the most ignored: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). There are many practical ways to honor your parents—by talking to them regularly, by sending them notes and gifts, by spending significant time with them. But there is one especially powerful way to honor your parents—by *writing a tribute*, a formal document honoring them for their role in your life.

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 the family life you shared.

The best way to begin writing a tribute is to set aside a large portion of time—perhaps an afternoon—to be alone with God and start capturing your thoughts and memories in writing. 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 thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

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 too 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 worry about being selective in this step, just record anything that comes to mind.

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 use your smartphone to capture 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 help you get started:

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? _____

What nicknames did people in your family have, and how did they earn them? _____

What was your favorite birthday? _____

What did other people think of your parents? How did other people react to your parents? _____

What did you admire about your parents? _____

In what ways are you like them in your personality, skills, habits, etc.? _____

How did your parents display affection for you? _____

What character qualities did they model that have stayed with you? _____

What values, learned from your parents, are you passing on to your children? _____

Additional memories: _____



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 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 well, 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 a final draft. 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.



STEP SIX: PRESENTING THE TRIBUTE

Now that you have finished writing your tribute, it's time to give it to your parents. Before you do, there are still two things to consider. First, how will you design the tribute?

HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS:

- If you have an eye for design and the appropriate software, consider creating the final version of the tribute yourself using creative fonts, colors, and graphics.
- If your tribute is shorter, you could hire a calligrapher to print the tribute on parchment. Keep in mind that this may not be the best option for longer tributes, as calligraphy can be difficult to read when it is small.
- Decide if you want to add any photographs, artwork, or other mementos to the document and plan accordingly.
- Once you have your final document, have it framed to set it apart as a special keepsake.

Finally, give some thought to how you will present the tribute to your parents. You could give it as a gift for Mother's Day or Father's Day, a birthday, or Christmas. You could present it at a special gathering like an anniversary party or a family reunion. Whatever setting you decide on, consider reading it out loud to your parents in person to make it especially meaningful.