Dear children:

As we've seen recently in our own circle of friends, none of us has any guarantees on the length of our lives. In trying to foster an environment of openness in our family, I want to ask each of you some questions that some time ago my covenant group encouraged me to ask you.

I welcome your candid answers. No, there's no deadline for giving them to me. That's up to you. I feel compelled -- and I want -- to at least ask them, giving you the opportunity to answer. In no particular order here goes.

1. How do you feel when you have to say "no" to me?

2. What do you wish you could've gotten from me in earlier years but didn't?

3. Are there any promises I've made to you that I haven't kept?

4. Do you always sense love from me?

5. Do I still expect you to live up to my personal standards of perfection?

6. (To my children) Please recreate for me the scene -- and how you felt -- when you presented me with your report cards.

7. (To my sons-in-law) Do you feel that I've totally accepted you in our family? Is there anything at all that you need to say to me about this? Is there anything at all that you'd like to hear me say to you about this?

Well, there they are. Not exactly fare for an evening of fun'n'games, but it's that core stuff that can so easily slide in life.

A few years back this line came to me: "I'm beginning to say good-bye." I've made it a mantra of mine because I want all the books balanced with each of you -- and, as far as possible, with everyone -- at all times.

Thanks for playing this little parlor game with your closing-in-on-60 Dad.

With my love and openness to your responses,

Dad