

“FATHERS OF FAITH”

(Genesis 17:1-8)

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–I–

1. Read Text: Genesis 17:1-8 and Pray.
2. As I was preparing for today’s message, someone called my attention to the fact that while most Mother’s Day sermons tend to extol the virtues of mothers and motherhood,...

A–...Too often it seems that there’s an inadvertent tendency for Father’s Day sermons to focus on what *wrong* with fathers today.

B–And I must confess that there’s a lot of truth to this – many Father’s Day sermons *do* tend to focus on the negatives (I’ve even caught myself doing it on occasion!).¹

3. So, recognizing this dilemma, as we celebrate Father’s Day today, I thought it would be important for us to intentionally steer clear of not only *avoiding negative* examples of fatherhood, but instead to lift up *positive* ones as role-models for us all.

A–And I want to do this by highlighting at least four positive qualities/characteristics of good fathers, and then illustrate these using character examples from the Bible.

B–In effect, today’s message will be a high-level overview of how God used **“Fathers of Faith”** in the scriptures, and what they can teach us about Godly fatherhood today.

–II–

4. The first quality I want us to explore is that of *radical **OBEDIENCE*** to God’s call.

A–If we look at the most influential and famous examples of Godly fathers in the Bible, we find that they were men who walked close enough to God to listen to & obediently follow God’s direction and path for their lives, no matter what the challenge or cost.

B–Take for example, the story of Abram in today’s scripture (father of Isaac & Ishmael), who at age 75 heard God tell him to pack up his family and possessions, and move to an unknown place that God would guide them to along their journey.

1–So in obedience, Abram and his family do just that. And in today’s scripture from Genesis 17 we hear how – 24 years later, at age 99 – God appears to him again, changes his name to “Abraham,” and makes a covenant with him to be the father of many nations, and to inherit the land now know as Palestine.

2–I don’t know about you, but when I’m 75 or 99 years old, I would assume that my life’s purpose has *already* been fulfilled in my younger years.

3–So what an incredible amount of faith it must have taken on Abraham’s part to trust in and be obedient to God’s call on his life at that age – and yet he *was*.²

C–Now, fast forward to the New Testament and we find another “father story” of radical obedience – the story of **Joseph**, father of Jesus.

1– In Matthew 1:18-25, we read that when his fiancé Mary was found pregnant, Joseph was appalled – he knew it wasn’t his, so he planned to dismiss her quietly.

2–But the story tells us that instead, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because she was bearing a child from God who would “*save his people from their sins*” (Matt. 1:21).

3–And so, in spite of the taunts and ridicule of others, Matthew 1:22 says that “*When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel... commanded him....*” – I.E., he (like Abraham) was obedient, even though it cost him his reputation!

5. A second quality of Godly fathers in the Bible is that they possessed a *faith-filled WISDOM* – the experiences of life and their close walk with God taught them what was right and good, and how to put those qualities into practice in daily living.

A–Take, for example, **Jethro** (No, not the son of Jed Clampett from “The Beverly Hillbillies”), but the father-IN-LAW of Moses

1–In Exodus 18:5-27, we find him berating Moses for being a work-a-holic, but then suggesting to him a system of assistants (called “Judges”) who would help Moses arbitrate disputes among the people, so he wouldn’t have to do it all by himself.

2–So here we have someone who’s not even a *biological* father helping a great leader of Israel become even *more* effective by teaching him how to delegate.

B–As another example, the entire **book of Proverbs** in fact represents the lifetime wisdom of *several fathers* (including King Solomon) that they wanted to pass on to their children.³

6. A 3rd quality that “Fathers of Faith” reveal in the scriptures is that they’re able to manifest *genuine HUMILITY & REPENTANCE* in the face of *personal* mistakes/sin – I.E., a willingness to ask for and receive God’s forgiveness for and restoration from their sin.

A–Think about the “father” of all humanity, named “**Adam.**” In Genesis 3-4 we hear the story of his and Eve’s sin by their eating of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden.

1–And yet, even though we know this disobedience had serious consequences,⁴ it’s interesting to note that God himself didn’t end his relationship with them.

2–No. They were still allowed to live a life of love and joy together, and become mother and father of the human race – as if to say that Adam (and Eve) had enough humility and spiritual maturity to own up to their sin and turn back to God in a renewed relationship (which is what the word “repentance” means).

B–The same thing happened many years later to **King David**, father of Solomon. In 2 Samuel 11-12 we read the story of his adultery with Bathsheba, and the subsequent political cover-up that led to the murder of Uriah.

1–And even though serious consequences remained for his actions, we also read there the story of David’s repentance and eventual restoration to God through his confrontation with the prophet Nathan.

2–These stories tell us that there is always hope, grace & forgiveness from God (for fathers and *all people*), no matter how deep our sin, or how serious our mistakes.

7. A final quality of biblical fathers that I want to lift up today is the *tenacious LOVE* they have for their children – a love that never gives up, no matter what their children do or experience.

A–Consider, for example, the story of the synagogue leader **Jairus** in Mark 5 and Luke 8, who continued to beg Jesus for the life of his sick daughter, even after his servants had said she was dead – and as if to affirm the tenacious love of that father, Jesus goes to this home and raises the little girl back to life.⁵

B–Also remember Jesus’ own parable of the “**the father with 2 sons**” (Luke 15:11-32).

1–One is a “Prodigal Son” who leaves home with his inheritance and wastes it all on what the Bible calls “*dissolute living*”, but after coming to his senses, is later welcomed home with love and open arms by his father.

2–And though the older son never leaves home & is angry & bitter at his brother’s return, he’s nevertheless also treated with the same love & honor by his father.

C–In fact, Jesus told this parable in Luke 15 to be a metaphor of the greatest example of tenacious love of all – the love of **God Himself** for each and every one of us.

1–Just as the father in his parable never gives up on *either* of his sons, so God *our heavenly Father* never gives up on us, either.⁶

2–No matter what we do or how far we stray from the right path(s), God our Father’s *tenacious love* is always there for us.⁷

8. Now, there are undoubtedly more qualities of Godly fathers that we could talk about, but these four are a good place to start today as we celebrate “Fathers of Faith”:

A–They demonstrate *radical OBEDIENCE* to God’s call on their lives;

B–They possess a *faith-filled WISDOM* about life that they put into practice;

C–They’re able to manifest *genuine HUMILITY* and repentance even in the midst of personal shortcomings and sin;

D–And they exhibit *tenacious LOVE* for their children, no matter how far their children stray from right paths.

9. So today, whether we’re a father, a “father-to-be,” or merely someone “like a father” to others,....

A–...And whether these “fathers” are from the pages of the Bible, or are here with us now, or have gone on to be with God and are only a memory,...

B–...Today we give thanks for all “*Fathers of Faith*” – and *all* fathers everywhere – who’ve influenced our lives for good and for God.

10. [PRAY]

11. [CLOSING SONG]

ENDNOTES:

1. In fact, the negative examples of fatherhood today are part of what fuels some people’s advocacy for the use of gender inclusive language when referring to God – their rationale being that today’s culture often has a difficult time accepting God as “Father” because *their* concept of “father” is a negative one.

2. That faith and obedience resulted today in at least three of the world’s major religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Another “obedience” story that Abraham is famous for is found in Genesis 22, where he is first obedient to God’s “call” for him to sacrifice his son Isaac, and then later obedient to God’s call to sacrifice a ram instead. Much is sometimes made today of how “cruel” God seems to be by asking Abraham to do such a horrible thing as sacrifice his own child. However, if we remember that the pagan cultures and religions all around Abraham all required human sacrifice, we can more easily understand that this story is not so much about the “cruelness” of the God of Abram in “requiring” human sacrifice, but about His mercy and grace in *not* requiring it in the end. The God of Abraham is thereby set apart as *different* from, *more just than*, and NOT bloodthirsty like the other pagan gods who still *did* require human sacrifice. In other words, it’s a story about how the God of Abraham has put an END to the need for human sacrifices once and for all!

3. Read, for example, Proverbs 1:1-8, 4:10, 8:33, 23:19. Many of these teachings are attributed to Israel’s King Solomon (son of King David), but there are other fathers whose wisdom and teachings are alluded to, as well, such as Agur (Chapter 30), and King Lemuel (Chapter 31).

4. Such as them being “kicked out” of the garden of Eden, having to bear pain in childbirth, and toil hard and sweat at work all life long.

5. Find this story at Mark 5:22-24,35-43, and Luke 8:40-42, 49-56.
6. A good example of this “tenacious love” quality in the Old Testament is that of King David in dealing with one of his other sons, **Absalom** (described in 2 Samuel 13-18). Even when Absalom strayed away as a “prodigal son” and in his case *never* “returned home” (he instead raised an army to try and usurp the throne of his father), David nevertheless still demonstrated love and compassion for him. This is most clearly evident from his words in 2 Samuel 18:33 upon hearing of his son Absalom’s death.
7. Romans 5:8 explains it this way, “*God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*” As someone once explains this, in coming to God, “*we don’t have to clean up to take a bath*” – God accepts us as we are. In Wesleyan Christianity we call this “Prevenient Grace” – God’s grace which comes before any conscious, personal awareness on our part.