

God As Father

God's Example of Fatherhood

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Given 16-Jun-07; Sermon #834

As all of you in the United States know, tomorrow is Father's Day. And, its origin is somewhat typical of American thinking on fatherhood, which is not much.

We speak of things as being, "As American as mom, and apple pie." When athletes have a camera pushed in their faces, they do not say, "Hi Dad!" They say, "Hi Mom," and give a big toothy grin.

We tend to honor mom more than dad. Dad is the breadwinner and we respect that but less and less. And as time goes by, it seems, mom makes more bread than dad. Mom tends to be the beating heart and soul of the American family—so the myth goes.

Americans first celebrated Mother's Day in 1908, in West Virginia, and it was quickly made into a national holiday by 1914, and [redone in 1919] to honor mothers who lost sons in the First World War [U.S. involvement from 1917-1918]. That was pretty quick work, six years or so.

Father's Day, though, like Mother's Day, was first celebrated in 1908, in West Virginia (they seem to like their parents up there). But, it was not until 1966 that it was set as the third Sunday in June, by President Lyndon B. Johnson; and official recognition as a federal holiday had to wait until 1972, by President Richard M. Nixon.

I guess that is okay. We did not put up much of a fuss. Even on Father's Day, most do not want much of a fuss made over them. Just let them play—softball or perhaps golf. But, it usually ends up being a day of dad cooking out over the grill, getting hot, smoky, and charred, because of the barbeque.

It is almost a given in American culture that fathers maybe solid as a rock, but they are dumb as rocks too. Ask Americans to name a famous American dad, and I would guess that 75 percent of the people would name, "Homer Simpson." I mean, he is been on TV for 12 to 14 years now—some ungodly number of years for a show like that. Think about it; this is a guy whose favorite word is, "Doh!" and "Mmmm! Beer!"

That is kind of what Americans think of dad. He is someone who likes to sit in front of the television and drink beer. And, television both in sitcoms and commercials has mocked dads as harmless dolts for decades now, making them the butt of jokes, and

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making us think that they are hopelessly clueless and unable to function without their smart wives and children to tell them what to do and where to go.

Think of Herman Munster, the old TV character, whose wife, Lily, had to tell him everything to do each week. More recently, we have had, "Tim 'The Tool Man' Taylor," who was such a klutz that he had his own coffee cup at the emergency room. We laugh, but it is really very insulting to men.

And, we honor them with the day like Father's Day.

It kind of follows because this country treats fathers merely as irresponsible impregnators and that is about as far as it goes. I am exaggerating a bit, but fathers are essentially taken for granted in this country.

Our public policy, though improving as time goes on, grants parental custody in divorce cases overwhelmingly to mothers. This is about 80 percent of the time.

Public parenting instruction, and welfare—governmental mostly, or non-profit—is almost all directed toward mothers, single mothers, and unwed mothers. That is not a bad thing, but fathers tend to be ignored.

It is unfortunate that, on the other hand, too many men tend to neglect their parental duties. It is not intentional all the time, but sometimes it is. Sometimes they are just no good and do their own thing. But most often, it is simply carelessness or one thing or another distracts them.

We will see, as we go through the Scriptures that the Bible confirms this trait of men—that men are often not very good at fatherhood; it is a weakness in our human nature. Men, in general, tend to undervalue, shirk, or fail their duties as fathers. Good dads are rare gems to be cherished by their children who have them.

But even so, even though the biblical record is spotty, God has not left us without an excellent role model of a father.

This next section of the sermon is going to be history, the history of various fathers. We will start at the beginning in Genesis 4. I want to show you some of the biblical record of human fatherhood.

What kind of father was Adam? He was the first man and the first father.

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Genesis 4:1-2, 8 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LOORD." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground...Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

How did Adam do? His firstborn, Cain, became the first murderer. That is not a very good way to start out, if you ask me. To be fair, Abel was righteous.

So Adam's "batting" average at this point is .500. He later had Seth, who helped the average go up, but he also had probably dozens of other children. And we know what the world became before the Flood. So, probably, at best, Adam was inconsistent. First, he struck out, producing a murderer, and then he hit a home run, producing one of the most faithful men in history.

So, he had pretty extreme results. Adam is typical of men all through history. Sometimes they do well, sometimes they do great, sometimes they do not have a clue how "that" happened.

I do not know how much God instructed Adam in fatherhood. We do not know. There is nothing in Scripture that would say that God took them aside and said, "This is what you should do when you have children." There must have been some instruction, but we do not know what it was.

But, perhaps, his and Eve's approach to parenting can be deduced from the names they gave their sons. We have got to use what we have here. The first son is named, Cain. "I have gotten a man from the LOORD." They named him, "gotten," "acquired," or "possession," implying that he was God-given and special. He was someone that they had been waiting for, and expected. He was, in a way, the Promised Son to them.

Abel, on the other hand, means, "breath," "vapor," or "vanity." This implies briefness, transitoriness, or even nothing.

So, you have the "Paragon" of boys on the one hand, and on the other you have "Nothing." Paragon became a murderer, and Nothing became righteous.

What does that tell you? One grew up thinking that the sun shined for him alone, and the other thought he was not even worthy of sunshine. So, one became proud, willful,

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violent, and a murderer, while the other became obedient and humble to the point of death. This gives you a bit of understanding of the childrearing practices of Adam and Eve.

Righteous Noah did a bit better than Adam, and he did it under less-than-ideal conditions. Remember, Noah had his children right near the end of the Pre-Flood world. It was very corrupt, and he had to raise his three boys in this milieu of sin and wickedness—some of the worst times that have ever been on Planet Earth.

But Noah seemed to do pretty well. He had three sons, and he raised at least two of them to be respectful and honorable men. This is after the Flood, when it is just Noah, his boys, and their children:

Genesis 9:18-23 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated. And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

This was a terribly embarrassing and awful situation for Noah. Being drunk, he was not aware of what was going on and what had happened to him, necessarily. But Ham stuck his head in Noah's tent and found him in this condition., and he went off to tell his brothers.

Now, we do not know how Ham told his brothers. We do not know whether it was, "Hey, guys! You should see what has happened in dad's tent!" Or, "Heh, heh, heh! Guys, you would not believe what happened in dad's tent!" We do not know whether it was, "I am just telling you this because we have got to do something," or, whether he was really mocking his father. We do not know. It does not say.

But, what Scripture does say is that Shem and Japheth did something about it, and they did it in a way that was respectful, where they themselves did not have to see Noah's shame. What they did was to take a blanket, one over here and one over there, and they held it backwards and slowly went back until they saw his feet, then laid the blanket on him, never turning their heads toward him to see him.

So, at least two of his three sons turned out to be pretty good. He batted .667—if we were to compare it to a baseball batting average. He did pretty well.

In I Peter 4:8, Peter quotes a proverb, "Love covers a multitude of sins." And that is exactly what these men did. They literally covered over the effects of this sin that occurred as the result of Canaan's perversion. But Ham did not participate in covering this sin—he did not participate in this act of love that Shem and Japheth did.

So, regarding his boys, Noah gets a pretty good score. He did fairly well.

Going on to the time of Abraham, we see this, speaking of Isaac:

Genesis 21:8-9 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.

The first son of Abraham was Ishmael, and he grew up to be a scoffer and mocker. Back in Genesis 16, he was prophesied to become a wild man, hostile toward every one. Every man's hand would be against him, and his hand would be against every man. It is interesting.

Then, regarding the sacrifice of Isaac:

Genesis 22:9-10 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

This does not say a great deal about Isaac, but speaks mostly about what Abraham did. However, there is no sign of a struggle. If we would have read a bit earlier, we would have found out that Isaac asked him where they were going and where was the animal. Abraham's answer was basically, "God told me to do this. Trust me. We have only a little farther to go." And, Isaac was quite obedient and faithful to his father.

So we have two very different sons here. We have Ishmael, who is a mocker, a wild man, and hostile toward everyone. And then we have Isaac, who was very obedient to his father. He seemed like the perfect son.

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Now, we do not know how involved Abraham was in Ishmael's childrearing. He may have been almost totally reared by his mother, Hagar the Egyptian. We do not know. But, if that is the case, that might explain the stark difference between them. Maybe Ishmael grew up knowing Abraham was his father but without a great deal of Abraham's guidance. I do not know. But you certainly have to wonder. It could not be just genetics. There had to be some training and guiding (or lack thereof) to produce these two different characters.

We know for sure that he took a great deal more interest in Isaac, because Isaac was the promised seed. We know that he took a great deal of personal time and energy in training his son, Isaac. He took so much time and so much effort that Isaac grew up to be almost exactly like Abraham. He was so much like Abraham, so much in his image, that he even sinned the same sin as his father—lying to a king to protect his wife from being taken from him. That is the only sin that we have mentioned in the Bible about Isaac, and it is the same sin as Abraham's. They are almost like two peas in a pod they are so much alike.

So, we can give Abraham full marks for rearing his son of promise in a godly way, in contrast to the false son of promise, Cain.

Back in the portion of the story where God is about to tell Abraham about Sodom is the reason why Abraham was able to do this—to produce a good son. God says:

Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

What this says is that, literally, God made a relationship with Abraham so that His way would be passed down to other generations. It was Abraham's relationship with God that taught him how to command and train his children in a way that perpetuated God's ways to subsequent generations. It was God's relationship with Abraham that gave him the ability to teach his son properly and to make it stick. And, not only would this make it stick for his son, but also so that his son would teach his grandson, and his grandson his great-grandson. This is an amazing gift.

If we were to turn back to the second commandment, it says that God shows mercy unto thousands of generations of those who love Him.

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So, what we see here is how important Abraham's relationship with God was in being a good father. Hold that in your mind for later.

Now on to Isaac, and we will take a look at his childrearing practices. This is one of Isaac's failings. Isaac did not do everything right. He was human with a problem.

Genesis 25:27 So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.

What God is establishing here at this point is that these two boys are vastly different personalities. Esau loved the outdoors, hunting, and cooking; he was a guy's guy. But, Jacob, on the other hand, was no wimp; however, he preferred other pursuits. He liked the things that he could do in his tent. He was more well-rounded. He could do the books. He could raise sheep. He could do this, that, and the other thing. He was a man of many talents.

Genesis 25:28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

So, we find here that there is a problem in the family. There is a rivalry developing between Esau and Jacob. And the reason for their rivalry is their parents' favoritism—one for the one and the other for the other.

What did this cause? The problem is still going on! This is the origin—the genesis—of the bitter Israelite/Edomite conflict and feud that still rages today. And it will continue to rage until Jesus Christ comes and stops it. When Isaac made a mistake, he made a BIG mistake.

Now, both Esau and Jacob were rascals in their own ways. We know this because Esau did not know or care about the value of anything. He did not value either the Birthright or the Blessing. If he had, he would have done more to keep them. Of course, Jacob—he would steal your underpants, if he could find a way to do it. He was a "heel-catcher." That is what his name means. He was the type of person who would do anything underhanded to get his way—until he was converted. Then, he turned out to be a pretty good fellow.

But, this is the difference between them. Esau would not change. Jacob did.

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Of course, we should add to this that from the very beginning, while they were still in the womb, God chose Jacob, deciding to work with him. He did not choose Esau. As it is written in Malachi, God hated Esau—meaning, He did not do the things for him that He did for Jacob. God loved Esau less, for his own purposes. And those purposes are helping us now in many primarily spiritual ways.

So, Isaac does not get very good marks for his childrearing. That is unfortunate. Then there is Jacob.

Genesis 37:2-4 This *is* the history of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

It seems as if the family trait of favoritism went down into the next generation. Jacob preferred Joseph to his ten older brothers and one younger brother. Joseph was the firstborn of his favorite wife, Rachel. I am sure that played a part in all this.

Joseph had wonderful qualities that made people admire him. However, he had some that made others hate him too. One was that he was a tattle-tale. Another one was that he had a big head. He was a spoiled brat. He probably flaunted that coat of many colors.

And so, his brothers hated him and would not say a nice word to him, even if you had a knife to their throat. What did this cause? What was the result of this poor parenting on Jacob's part? Resentment. Hatred. It led to Joseph's eventual kidnapping, near murder, and enslavement, and to Jacob being deceived and grieved, all perpetrated by the unloved sons who all got together and said, "This has got to stop."

Now, we should not forget, when talking about Jacob's childrearing abilities:

Genesis 35:22 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it....

That is the last that you hear of this until Genesis 49. That is interesting.

But then, there is also Levi and Simeon and their trick on the men of Shechem, regarding Dinah, their sister:

Genesis 34:27-29 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses.

They pretty much went in and took everything. Killed the men, and took everything else—women, children, goods, and whatever was in the field—everything.

Listen to Jacob's response:

Genesis 34:30-31 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I. But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

And that is the end of it.

There is no biblical record regarding these two instances that Jacob called any of them into account for their sins. In fact, the only response that he made to Levi and Simeon was that, "This does not look good." That is pretty weak, if you ask me. He did not have a real good sense of justice or righteous indignation. This was a terrible crime. You could, in a way, forgive him for his love of his sons; he would not want the law to come down on them as it should have. But, on the other hand, he did not do anything—pretty weak.

Of course, they were grown men by this time, but he was still the patriarch. He had the power of life and death in his hands. He could have done something.

Eventually, he did do something in a way. He took away Reuben's firstborn status, and he told Simeon and Levi that they would be scattered in Israel. They would not get an inheritance of land. But, even so, it was too little too late. Jacob did not leave a very good record.

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Now, the point is clear. We have gone through five of these men in Genesis, which is typical of the rest of the Bible's examples. The Bible shows that there is a spotty record of fatherhood, even among the best of them—the great men of Scripture failed more often than not in raising their children. Most of them were merely average fathers. Some of them were terrible fathers. There are a few good ones.

Now, if we would go on, and we could even here in Genesis, we would find that this remains true.

Lot's two daughters got him drunk and committed incest with him. He obviously did not shield them very well from the perversions and sins of Sodom.

Moses seems to have been at best an indifferent father. He did not circumcise his sons until God forced Zipporah to do it. Otherwise, Moses would have died before he went back to Egypt. One of Moses' grandsons became an idolatrous priest for part of the tribe of Dan.

Aaron had two sons that God had to strike down for offering profane fire and behavior before Him. But yet, one son received God's commendation and a personal covenant in which God said that he would never lack a man to act as priest before Him—Phinehas.

Gideon had many wives and 70 sons. But one of them, Abimelech, killed all of his brothers but one. Maybe Gideon was a good father, but this one slipped by somehow—among 70, you can understand why.

Eli the priest, had wicked, corrupt sons, who stole from the people's offerings to God.

Samuel's sons took dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice in Israel.

David, as my dad's Bible study on Absalom shows, had a horrible record as a father. He produced Amnon, who raped his sister Tamar; Absalom and Adonijah both rebelled against him. He also fathered Solomon, who had his own problems, especially toward the end of his life.

And Solomon produced Rehoboam, who foolishly threw away most of his kingdom by stubbornly refusing to relax the oppressive taxation and forced labor that Solomon had done.

Hezekiah, who was one of Judah's best kings, probably in the top three kings, produced Manasseh, who was Judah's worst king. But, on the other hand, Manasseh repented at

the end of his life.

Josiah, who ranks right up there with David among Judah's best kings, produced a couple of losers. Jehoahaz, who reigned three months, was such a bad ruler that the Pharaoh had to come in and depose him, taking him to Egypt in chains. The other son, Jehoiakim, reigned eleven years, but he practiced abominations and was considered evil by God. He was deposed and led away by Nebuchadnezzar in chains.

This is not a really good record, is it?

But in the New Testament we have two good examples. Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, must have done a pretty good job producing John as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. And we have Joseph, husband of Mary, chosen by God to raise His Son, Jesus Christ. Evidently, these two were pretty good fathers.

But, as I said, these examples leave us with a pretty spotty, average-to-bad record of fatherhood in the Bible—even among some of the greatest men of Israel. Good fathers are hard to come by.

Obviously, since we have gone through all this and found so few good examples, we are left with only one Perfect Example—God the Father Himself. He is the One who we must always turn to for the right and proper model of fatherhood.

The next setting is the re-gathering of Israel to the Promised Land, which is called the Second Exodus. God makes a statement here as the people begin to stream back into the land:

Jeremiah 31:9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.

What God is telling us is His care as a father in bringing them back, and He will make sure that they walk by rivers of waters (you can think of what this means both physically and spiritually), and in a straight way (both physically and spiritually) again, in a way that they will not stumble. He is going to start working with them. He is not only going to bring them back into the land, but He is going to work with them by giving them His Spirit and leading them in the way that they should go. This is how He works as a Father to them.

Certainly, Israel is God's own nation, if you want to look at it from that standpoint. He called Abraham out of idolatry and his father's house. He gave Isaac to Abraham and Sarah by a miracle. He chose Jacob before he was born.

Of course, He called the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery and did all those miracles to make sure that happened, and He redeemed them with the firstborn of Egypt. He made them a nation under His laws at Sinai. Then, after forty years, He brought them into the Promised Land and conquered the people before them. And He would have done even more! He blessed them. He gave them kings. He did all those things that he should do as their God and Father.

He watched over them. He disciplined them. He scattered them. He lavished blessings upon them. And He says here that He will bring them back to Himself in the Millennium. Israel will be the nucleus around which Jesus Christ's Kingdom will be built.

So, we could say, then, that His Fatherhood over Israel is undeniable. What else could you call Him?

Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

Clearly, the Israelites understood God to be their Father—not just God, but He stood in place of a Father to them, if only by creation! It said here, "Has not One God created us?"

So, He was the father of Adam. Of course, all his genealogies bring this clearly down to the Israelites, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, there is this underlying thought in verse 10 that they understood Him as Father by covenant as well. He was not just the Father by creation but also Father by covenant. And that is what they mention here.

"Why do we deal treacherously with one another [we are brothers!] by profaning the covenant of the fathers?" Brothers have a parent in common. So, Malachi, here, is saying, "Why are we being so awful to one another? Why are we betraying one another?"

It is very clear, here, from Malachi, that the Israelites knew intellectually their position in the relationship with God. They knew themselves to be children; in fact, they were called the children of Israel, knowing that there was a Greater beyond Israel—God their

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Father. This was a well-known fact. And Jesus confirms this in Matthew 23, when he is castigating the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your [spiritual] father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

So, obviously, the Pharisees and Jews of the time understood God as a Father to them. He was castigating them for taking this title upon themselves. In no way did they deserve to be called "father," especially in the way that it was meant here in such reverence and respect.

Going on to I John, we will see that this applies in spades to us.

I John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

We can look at this in both senses of physical Israel understanding God as their father, as well as spiritual Israel—the church of God—understanding God as its Father. It applies both ways.

Turn back to Isaiah to look at something. Again, the Fatherhood of God is mentioned.

Isaiah 1:2-4 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider." Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.

Now, if we were just to read only this, we might think that God Himself is not a very good Father. If this were the end of the story, we could say that God was actually a bad Father. His nation is sinful, and it produces children who are corrupters. But this is only a part of the story. In a way, here, we are jumping in the middle.

They started out all right, but as Ezekiel 16 shows, they became corrupt very quickly.

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But God is not finished with them yet. Like I said, this is the middle of the story. He is going to eventually produce willing and obedient children.

Turn to Revelation to pick up "the rest of the story," as Paul Harvey might say—well, at least the end of the story.

Revelation 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations [not just Israel], tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Then there is the question about where do these people come from.

Revelation 7:14-15 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them..."

Just as a Father among His children. So the end of the story is that in His own time, God will turn wholesale rebellion into wholesale salvation! That is how good a Father He is! But even though His children go astray, He finds a way to bring them back.

Paul says in Romans 11:26 that all Israel shall be saved. This is probably not absolute. There are probably some among them who will not make it, but the vast majority of Israel will eventually be saved. I think that we can trust the apostle Paul.

It says in II Peter 3:9 that He desires all to come to repentance. He does not want to lose a one of them. He wants billions and billions of children. He is going to do His very best to make sure that the vast majority of them will actually be there in His Kingdom. He has the right stuff to pull it off. He knows how to do it.

How? That is what we come to. How will He pull this off? What makes Him such a good Father?

We will be spending most of the remainder of our time in Psalm 103. Psalm 103 is a

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song of worship and thanksgiving to God for all the wonderful things that He does for us. What I am going to do in the remainder of this sermon is to use what it says about God here to be an encapsulation of the principles of Godly fatherhood, all in just one simple Psalm—one that is not so long that you could not memorize it.

You could say that what is written here about God is a checklist of character traits that human dads need to emulate so that they can successfully rear their children.

If they do not have children, it is a wonderful checklist of character traits to have nonetheless, because they are all godly character traits that we all need to use in our relationships with one another. They are all things that men can use in their relationships with their sons and daughters.

There is one caveat here, and that is that some of them are divine traits that are probably beyond us. They are not totally beyond us, because God is teaching these things to us. But there are some things here that only God can do. We just have to learn the human side of them. What I mean is that some of these are miraculous things that we could never do as physical people, but the physical counterparts of those traits are the things that we can put into practice. As we go through them, I will try to explain these things.

Each one of these traits or character points could be a sermon in itself. But I just want to take the time to give you an overall idea what these traits encompass.

Psalm 103:1-2 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:

Now, God as Father deserves a great deal of praise, worship, and exaltation for all the things that He gives us. These are the things that He does for us.

As a physical father, we have the responsibility to emulate Him in these things. We are the one in the place of God in the family. We are the ones who have to give and provide these various things for our wives, and our children. So, there is something to be learned in all of this.

Psalm 103:3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases,

Obviously, spiritual forgiveness and miraculous healing are not in our bag of tricks. This

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is one of those things that are divine characteristics that we cannot do. But there are physical counterparts that we can do that can copy these divine ones. Of course, there are character traits that we can have and put into practice that are part and parcel of these things.

The point is that God possesses forgiveness that produces healing. I am putting the two of them together. God forgives and that produces healing.

Now, children often break rules. They do it automatically, they do it purposefully, they do it deceitfully, they do it one way or the other—they are going to break the rules. There has never been a perfect child. So when they break the rules, it is our job as fathers to discipline them. They should be disciplined for breaking the rules.

But children have to know that they can seek and receive forgiveness for their infractions upon contrition and repentance. If they believe that their dad will not forgive them for what they have done, *it will crush them*. They will think, "What is the use? Why be good? He is never going to forgive me."

We know in our relationship with the Father, that when we do something wrong, and we know it is wrong, and we confess that we have done it, and we ask for forgiveness, and we begin to repent and turn from the sin, we know that He will forgive us. It gives us the ability to move on and try to do better—reaching for the goal.

God does not hold our sins against us forever. It would take quite a hard-hearted God, a hard-hearted dad, to think that there was something that He would not forgive, if his child came to him and asked him for forgiveness and mercy. So we should not fail to forgive our children their trespasses as well. They need to have that confidence that they could come to us and seek and receive forgiveness for what they have done. You do not want to crush your children. It will take the spirit right out of them.

In fact, it is this particular trait that the whole Psalm is constructed around.

Psalm 103:9-18 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is

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gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LOORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

The first thing and the main thing I want to give you today is this ability and desire in us to forgive—to be that dad whose children are not afraid to come and confess that they have done wrong. Because, once that happens, things can begin to improve. Dad is supposed to be there to give the instruction to help that child not to make that same mistake again. He can then give his strength to the child through instruction and example. But there has to be that recognition by the child that his father will forgive him even when he has done wrong.

The next one begins in verse 4, the first half.

Psalm 103:4 Who redeems your life from destruction,...

The second trait we need as fathers is the trait of redemption. You may think that this is another one of those exclusively divine traits—well, it is. Only God can truly redeem us, but we can take the principle out of God's redemption and apply it to our physical lives.

How did God redeem us? Through self-sacrifice.

Hebrews 2:13-15 ...Here am I and the children whom God has given Me. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The principle here is that we have to be willing to give of ourselves to our children. Sacrifice is the essence of godly love. If we are not willing to sacrifice for our children, we do not love them. If our children are headed over the edge of the cliff, we have to do whatever it takes to save them from their self-destructive ways. If it takes the sacrifice of time, money, personal effort, whatever it might be, we must be willing to pay it.

Remember that it says in Malachi that rearing godly seed is a top priority. God has given those children to us as a heritage, as it says in chapter 1:27. He wants us to produce

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the very best children for Him as possible. That is why He made the family. It is the primary purpose for the existence for the family. So, because of this, we have to do whatever it takes to produce the result that God wants—which will take sacrifice to accomplish.

We have to do what we can to redeem them from this world, from the error of their ways, to redeem them from the pressure and attitudes of Satan the Devil. We are in that place for them as their father. That is the second of these great characteristics of God's fatherhood.

Psalm 103:4 Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies,

Loving kindness and tender mercies are another characteristic of God we should emulate. Notice that it says, "Who crowns you...."

What does this make you think of? Maybe a king, queen, prince, or princess—someone who wears a crown. Or it might make you think of winners because victors of the games were given crowns or wreaths of laurel to wear. This image of being crowned is an image of plenty and of glory and of beauty and of nobility. The idea is that He showers us or surrounds us with steadfast love and compassion. And they make noble this relationship. It makes it beautiful to see the love of a father for his children. It makes his children lovable when they are terrors, when they are not so lovable.

What David is saying here is that these virtues of lovingkindness and tender mercies infuse a father's every act. He does everything for the good of his children. He is not a tyrant in any way. He does not look as if he hates his children. Another way to put this is that the father's love just oozes out of him profusely. That might not be quite a nice way to put it, however it should emanate from him like a glorious beam of light. ("Emanate" is better than "ooze," I am sure.) This is the way that God is with Israel and with us.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

This applies to us just as it applied to ancient Israel.

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I John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

As I said, God's love infuses everything that He does.

Psalm 103:5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

This is God's providence, another trait that we need. One of the main jobs of a man is to provide for his wife and children—food, clothing, and shelter—the basic needs—but also things like education and opportunities to build skills and expand horizons.

Just think about what it would be like if our Father, God, just gave us only food, clothing, shelter, and nothing more. What if he did not provide for our education? What if He never gave us an opportunity to grow? What if He never laid something before us to see if it would be something we might like to do—a duty, or new skill with which to serve one another? Life would be awfully boring if it was only food, clothing, and shelter. It is a father's job to give his children these other things as well—things to expand the mind or increase their skills.

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

God is so provident that when we ask Him for something, He is already a mile ahead of us. Usually when we ask Him for something, and He decides that it is good for us, He gives it to us with more than we can handle almost. That is how God provides. This is the attitude from which human fathers should desire to provide for their children. Not just the basic needs but beyond that to education, skills, and opportunities.

I have another caveat here. This desire to provide for our children has to be balanced against becoming a workaholic. We can be so desirous to provide for our children that we basically abandon them while doing it. This should not be. There has to be a balance here. We are physical and human. We have to find that point where things work best.

Now the next one.

Psalm 103:6 The LORD executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.

Now, this is a two pronged one—righteousness and justice. This is inward and this is outward—righteousness and justice. A godly father is personally righteous, and he deals out justice. So God, obviously, is perfectly righteous, and His ways and decisions are just. We have to really work at these things, though. We really have to work on ourselves, overcoming and growing in understanding and our practice of God's way of life. This does not come naturally to us with our human nature.

This means that we have to, as men and fathers, stick our noses in the Bible, we have to be overcoming our faults, we have to be showing a good example to our children in everything. And when we do this, when work on ourselves, the outward application of these things is justice in our dealings with our children. If we are righteous on the inside, our dealings with them in our relationship should be just. That is the way that it works.

Romans 2:5-11 shows that God is just. The two major points are that God "will render to each according to his deeds." He is just. The other one is "there is no partiality with God." And so He rewards for good behavior and punishes for bad behavior.

The next one is found in Psalm 103 is in verse 7.

Psalm 103:7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

Now God did not make His children guess at His rules and way of life. He expressly taught them to Israel and later to the church of God. This verse shows that His instruction was transmitted in two ways. It says that He made known His ways to Mose, and His acts to the children of Israel. These two ways are that He communicated to them verbally, and His actions—what He did for them—showed them the right way. So, He *told* them and He *showed* them.

For human fathers, the lesson is clear: You should lay down the house rules, and you are to also abide by them yourself. You are the leader, and your children should be able to look at you and see your rules in action. You have to be the perfect example of how

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you want your children to be. This goes hand in hand with the one just before about righteousness.

These next verses show exactly what I mean.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

God not only spoke through the prophets and the apostles, He spoke through His Son, and then He sent His Son among us to show us how to do it. So God not only told us, but He showed us. We human fathers must also tell our children and do them ourselves.

Now, the last one is in verse 8.

Psalms 103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

This has a lot to do with the first one: forgiveness. So we have come full circle. The underlying idea communicated here is "slow to anger." In other words, God does not fly off the handle at the first instance of disobedience. He tempers his justice with mercy. He grants grace where it is appropriate. He has a long range view of His children's rearing, and He considers when punishment is needed. He considers how severe it needs to be. He considers whether matters should be left to run their own course in order to teach the lesson.

This means that as our Father, He applies wisdom in dealing with His children, and He deals with them individually and for their ultimate maturity and well-being. This means that He comes at His job as Father with a great deal of thoughtful consideration, and He comes at it in love. He knows, as we read earlier, His children's frame. He knows what they can take; He knows how much punishment to give. He knows when enough is enough. He knows when they have gotten the point.

And so, He tempers his justice with mercy and grants grace when it is appropriate.

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I Timothy 1:14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

God would rather give grace than smash us. That is how we have to approach our childrearing. He tempers His acts with great mercy, and He gives grace.

Galatians 4:3-6 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

In God the Father we have the pattern for righteous fatherhood among us. If we should ever need to know what to do in rearing our children, dads, all we need to do is remember how our heavenly Father deals with us.

RTR/rwu/cah