

Five Fathers

#0208

Study Given by W. D. Frazee

When I was asked to bring a father's day message this morning at St. Elmo, I go to thinking and praying about what the Bible has to say to us on this subject. Of course, we all have fathers. Everybody isn't a father. I'd like to spend part of the time this morning talking to fathers, and the rest of you can listen in. Part of it is for all of us. So like the good dinner we're going to have by and by, there'll be something for everybody.

One of the first fathers noteworthy in the Bible is Enoch. I remember when I was a boy hearing this little riddle: Who was the oldest man that ever lived, but died before his father did? Who was that? Methuselah. We all remember Methuselah as the oldest man who ever lived. Genesis 5:27 tells us that. He was 969 years old when he died. Nearly 1,000 years old. But the old riddle says that even though he was the oldest man that ever lived, he died before his father did. Is that correct? How come? His father isn't dead yet. Who was Methuselah's father? Enoch was his father. The Bible says that:

“...Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters”
Genesis 5:22.

Then God took Enoch, and as Paul tells us in Hebrews 11:5, he was translated. Think of it. He went on walking with God. He's walking with Him this morning, and will through all eternity.

The interesting thing to me this morning is the expression, “Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah.” He was 65 years old. Men, of course, lived much longer in those days. He was 65 years old when his first son was born. He'd been a follower of God before the birth of Methuselah. But as that little fellow was placed in his arms, and then as he got a little older and was a toddler, and began walking with his father, those little fingers hanging on to Enoch's big hand, Enoch developed an understanding of fellowship with God as *his* Father.

Fathers, this is what God designs every father shall experience. Of course, the only way that can be very meaningful to us is to seek to be to our children what God seeks to be to us. Only as we represent the character of God to our children can this relationship be meaningful to us in showing us what God is like. I suppose those of us who are fathers would be the first to confess that we haven't reached that ideal.

If there's any father who has, will you stand up? We'd like to congratulate you. No, I suppose we all realize that we have come short. I'm glad God is in the business of making up our deficiencies. Constantly God is laboring to make up

man's deficiencies. And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It's a wonderful thing when father and children can fellowship together in a way that helps the children to know and the *father* to know what the fatherhood of God is like.

Let's turn over to Genesis 18. This is about Abraham, and what a wonderful father Abraham was. Abraham had to wait a long, long time before he became a father, didn't he? Abraham made some mistakes; they're written down in the Bible. But thank God, he triumphed over his failures, and he was given the name by inspiration, "The friend of God."

Notice what God Himself says of Abraham as a father:

"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" Genesis 18:19.

The thing that God appreciated about Abraham as a father was this: as he stood in the place of God to his family, his large household, he commanded them in the ways of righteousness. This included not only Abraham's immediate household. His family comprised of more than a thousand souls. He was the patriarch of a large encampment—his children, grandchildren, other relatives, his servants, and those who had joined with him in the worship of God. Over a thousand people came to worship as Abraham placed the morning and evening sacrifice on the altar of God.

You know, it must have been something to keep order in that camp. Don't you think so? I'm sure it was. But Abraham, perhaps as few men have done, succeeded in combining justice and mercy, love and firmness. All through that camp, those who lived there under Abraham's leadership felt that he was interested in them. They also knew, if you'll allow me to use the expression, that there wasn't going to be any monkey business, no fooling around, no disobedience. I would that all fathers today, including the man that's speaking, could fully learn this blend.

You know, as I said, I want to say some things this morning for the people that aren't fathers as well as those who are. Right in the heart of His law, God put that Fifth Commandment so that fathers could function. He made a requirement for every son and daughter.

Let's repeat together the Fifth Commandment:

"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee"
Exodus 20:12.

So Abraham was carrying out what God had written in His law.

Dear fathers, if our children are to respect us and our commands and our directions, we must respect the Father in Heaven. It must be clear to our children whether they're six years old or 16 or 36; it must be clear to our children that we also

are under authority, that our commands are not the arbitrary dictates of a human mind. We are stewards, not owners. Our children, and those who may come under our direction, are not our property. Every soul belongs to God.

But God, who is the Creator of all, has arranged delegated authority. God does not speak to each person day by day and say, “You hoe corn today, you wash dishes today, you go to town today, and you go to school today.” God has arranged society in such a way that delegated authority is in action. The policeman stands at the corner and directs traffic. The teacher stands in the schoolroom and directs the students. And the parents in the home, with the father particularly responsible, must see to it that order is maintained. God requires this of parents.

I think sometimes children and especially young people get the idea that this is something that fathers and mothers have a choice about as to whether they will or will not enforce discipline. The only choice that a parent has, dear friends, is whether to obey God or disobey Him. That’s the only choice.

Sad to say, we have some examples in the Bible of fathers who seem to be content to lie down on the job. Aaron is one, and his two boys were executed by the fire of God because of his sinful lenience. Eli is another, and his two boys lost their lives ignominiously in the defeat of the armies of Israel because of their rebellion against God.

No. Fathers do not have the choice of whether they will or will not have the authority. God has given them that authority. They can fail to exercise it as some officer in the government may fail to discharge his obligations that he has taken an oath of office to carry out. So a father or mother may fail in their job.

But remember children and young people, when a father or mother *allows* you to disobey, when with their permissive attitude they let you have your own way, *they* in turn are disobeying God, and they must answer for that before the judgment bar. Don’t forget that.

And so God says concerning Abraham:

“...I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him”
Genesis 18:19.

I’m glad I had a father that sought to be like Abraham and carry out discipline. With this fellow that’s speaking, my father had quite a hard job. He had to literally carry out the instruction of the Scripture, as written by Solomon, to use the rod many, many times. I don’t think all children are as hard to get along with as I was. I think some of them are, as I have observed them. I’m thankful that God in the Bible has given instruction to fathers to use the rod when it’s necessary—of course, in love.

Some fathers don’t know how to blend those two things. The only time they can use the rod is when they get angry. That’s the very time *not* to use it, fathers.

No child should ever be disciplined when the parent is mad. That makes two evils instead of one. And two wrongs never make one right. Do they? No. But thank God, there can be discipline joined with love.

In fact, fathers, if you're tempted to correct a child either with your voice or in some way that awakens pain. I say if you're tempted to correct a child, and you feel stirring in you anger, wait. Go alone with God. Ah, but somebody says it has to be dealt with right now—you have to be dealt with right now; very much so. Go alone with God and get from Him that combination, that blend of love and firmness, justice and mercy that will enable you to be a true father.

Now we're going to turn over to the New Testament and find another father. This is in Luke, the first chapter. Like Abraham, Zacharias had to wait a long, long time to be a father. Zacharias was given a special privilege. He had an angel from Heaven come and told him that he was to have a son and gave him instruction on how to bring him up. That angel's name was Gabriel (Luke 1:19). The visit of the angel is given us in verses 11 and onward.

What a wonderful thing it must have been for that father, Zacharias, the aged priest, to have the angel tell him all about what to do to take proper care of this boy. Interestingly, his name was John. The angel *told* Zacharias what to call him. That name 'John' is an interesting word. It means God's gracious gift. That's what John was; he was the gift of God.

So this angel said to Zacharias, "There are certain things I want you to think about in taking care of this boy, for he is no ordinary child. He's to be great in the sight of the Lord, and he's to go before the Messiah to prepare His way."

When Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were conscious of this sacred trust that God had given them, they moved from where they were. They weren't in Sodom, but they weren't as retired as they recognized God wanted them to be. They moved way out in the country, away from all the influences. In fact, the 80th verse indicates that John was in retirement until he began his work at the age of 30 years.

It's a wonderful thing, dear fathers, to have such a regard for the messages that the angel Gabriel brings, and such a sense of responsibility for your children, that you're willing to make any move in order to give those children the very best environment possible. This is what Zacharias did. And thank God he had the joy of seeing his son grow up to be the one who presented the Messiah to Israel.

Now in doing that, Zacharias had to break with custom. He had to disappoint society. He had to be different. He had to be peculiar. What do I mean? I mean this: Zacharias was a priest. His father was a priest. His grandfather had been a priest; his great-grandfather, and so on way, way back to Aaron. For over a thousand years, every boy born in that line had been educated and trained and developed to be a priest.

Now here comes this boy, and I can fancy the relatives saying to Zacharias, “When are you going to get busy and get John ready to be a priest?” Was John ever serving as a priest? No. Why not? God had something else for him to do.

And so may I stress, fathers and mothers, remember God may have plans for your boy or your girl different from anybody else. We’re told that the relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth (*Steps to Christ*, page 100).

Therefore fathers and mothers, be much in prayer that God will help you to fit into the plans of God for your children. The greatest thing you can teach them is to so cooperate with you in the formative years and to so respond with love and obedience to your directions, that their ears shall be attentive to the voice of God as they come into the years when lifework is chosen.

Oh, it’s a wonderful thing to follow the leadings of God. This is what John did. What a father Zacharias was to train him, along with Elizabeth, during those years so that he did the work that Heaven had called him to.

I have another father from the New Testament to present to you. His name is Paul. Somebody says, “I didn’t know Paul had any children; I didn’t know he was a father.” Well, I’ll read it to you from the Bible. 1 Corinthians 4:14–15. Paul is writing to the entire church at Corinth:

“I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”
1 Corinthians 4:14–15.

Here Paul is writing to his converts, the men and women, and the boys and girls and youth that had heard his message in Corinth. When Paul went into Corinth, there wasn’t a Christian in that great city. It was one of the most wicked places in the ancient world—a port city filled with vice and heathenism. And Paul went in there with fear and trembling and tears and pleading, he preached the Gospel of Christ publicly and from house to house, and raised up the church.

Writing to these Corinthians, he said, “I’m your father. I’m writing to you as my children.” Ah, this is something that I trust many a person here will enter into—the joy and the sorrow of having sons and daughters in Christ. God desires you, men and women, to be able to present many to the Lord when the Savior comes. This privilege is open to everybody, but it’s entered into by few. There’s plenty of room for you to take hold of. If you win a soul to Christ, you’ll become, in a sense, the father or the mother of that individual.

I remember over 35 years ago when I was in Oklahoma City, the district manager of the Singer Sewing Machine Company came to my meetings. His wife was a follower of the Lord, but Brother Martin had never made his surrender. He was a great big fellow, a fine, successful businessman. His wife had been praying for him for 20 years. Thank God, he came to our meetings. One night as we sat in

his home, he made his surrender to Jesus. I had the joy of baptizing him into Christ and into the church.

I knew him through the years. He later became a colporteur and sowed the seed of truth in many homes. He and his wife were with me at the beginning of the work right here in St. Elmo. They did house-to-house work up and down these streets.

Later, Brother Martin became the manager of the Azusa Valley Sanitarium out in California. He's sleeping now, but a few years before he died, he visited Wildwood. Up there on the hill by Haskell Hall, I met him. He threw his arms around me (he's a great big fellow) and gave me a bear hug. I said, "I'm so glad to see you. You're my boy. You're older than I am, but you're my boy." Was he? Oh yes. He acknowledged it.

There was another way in which Paul was a wonderful father. Turn to Philippians 2. Paul not only had children who were converts, he had children in the sense that he trained others in the work of soul-winning. Outstanding in this was Timothy—Timotheous he's called here in the 19th verse.

I want you to notice in the 22nd verse what Paul said about this young man, Timothy:

"But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel"
Philippians 2:22.

When you read the epistles to Timothy, in each one of them Paul says, "Timothy, my son." When Paul writes to Titus he writes, "My own son."

It's a wonderful thing to have children not only through ties of flesh and blood, but through *winning* people to Christ and through *training* people in soul-winning.

There's another father I want to notice briefly because if the only thing the Bible told about was success, some of us would get very discouraged. For a few minutes, I want us to think about a man who made a mess of life. Jacob's very name means supplanter. He was a bit tricky. He lied to his father, he cheated his brother, and had to flee for his life lest his brother kill him.

When he got over to Laban, he in turn got cheated. He got into all kinds of problems and messes. Finally, he found himself with a family of 12 boys and one girl. And oh, the tangles that most of them got into. And finally, it seemed that sorrow could be no more as the ten brothers brought word back that they had found this coat of Joseph splattered with blood. They brought it home, intending that their father should think that some beast had devoured Joseph. What had happened? Those very brothers, the ten of them, had united in a plot first to murder Joseph. Then they thought better of it and decided to sell him as a slave. And there he was in Egypt. It really didn't look like Jacob had been much of a father, did it? He didn't have much to show for it.

I want to tell you something, friends. If you know the Bible record, you will agree with me that I haven't told half of the mistakes of Jacob and his sons. But listen: When you and I go to the city of God, on that wonderful trip we're going to see a jasper city with golden streets and 12 gates of pearl. Over each gate is going to be written a name. The first gate we see, the name on that gate will be one of Jacob's sons. The second gate we see will be another of Jacob's sons, and on the third gate will be the name of yet another of Jacob's sons. And we go on around that city until we have seen 12 gates—that's all there are. Every one of them has on it above the entrance the name of one of Jacob's sons.

Oh, I think that's wonderful, friend. I think that's wonderful that that man that had made such a mess of his life in so many ways, and his children—many of them had made such a mess; I'm thankful that through prayer and earnest effort, through trust in God and heroic endeavor, Jacob came at last to the place where his name was changed from Jacob, supplanter, to Israel, a prince of God. And he had the joy at last of seeing those boys, now grown men, one by one find a relationship with God and with their father and with their brothers that Heaven could bless. And they're going to be there in Heaven forever and forever.

Oh, if there's any father here this morning that feels that you've made a fool of yourself and a failure in life, take heart. Think of Jacob. The God of Jacob is your God. The God of Jacob is your refuge.

A word to children who may feel that their fathers have been a failure: I was talking to someone a few years ago, and this individual said, "I don't know anything about honoring my father. I wouldn't know what to honor. There is nothing about him I know to honor."

Are there children these days, this sad time, that are in that fix? There are two things I want to tell you. First, my dear friend: if your father's life is such that you can't respect his life, you *can* do what God says and respect his office, his position.

The policeman down here on the corner may be somebody whose life and record I know, and it could be a sorry one. I hope it isn't, but we'll just use that for an illustration. But as long as he wears the uniform and has the badge, I'll respect his office. Are you with me? Yes.

And if your father, God pity him, has been a drunkard, a dissolute man, if he's been cruel, if he knows nothing of God and has never manifested the character of God to you, pray for him. And remember, if he as your father, couldn't lead you to Christ, maybe you as his son or daughter can lead *him* to Christ. Don't forget it.

Now, I've saved the best on that point till the last. This is a wonderful secret. If you've never known it before, there'll be someone here this morning that this is meant for. It's in the book *Ministry of Healing*, page 199—one of the greatest inspired statements I've ever read.

Here it is, and remember I'm giving it for anybody here this morning to whom the word 'father' does not bring a memory of joy or respect. Listen:

“For all that the world neglects to bestow, God Himself will make up to them in the best of favors” *Ministry of Healing*, page 199.

Let’s analyze that a bit; let’s pick it apart and look at it. Where do fathers that do succeed get the love, the firmness? They get it from God. No man is a creator. The best father in this world is only a channel. That’s all. He’s an agency through whom God works. So back of every father and every mother stands God. And anything good, whether in mercy or justice, that your parents ever did for you came from God. Anything they failed to do was the work of the enemy.

If God is the one who has inspired every good thing that every parent ever did, will you tell me that God has so limited Himself that if your earthly father fails, your heavenly Father fails too? Oh, no. Thank God, “our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing” (*Ministry of Healing*, page 481). Isn’t that wonderful? God has more than one way of reaching us with the revelation of His love.

Timothy’s father was a heathen. But thank God, Paul came along, and God revealed to Timothy through Paul what perhaps his own father had never revealed to him.

God has other ways. God can deal direct, can’t He? Think of the beloved John out there on the Isle of Patmos, banished from the society of those he loved and those that loved him. But there, Jesus Himself came and revealed to him wonderful things. What a fellowship.

Listen, my friend: If your home background has not been pleasant, if an earthly father or mother has failed you, God Himself will make that up to you with the best of favors if you’ll let Him. Of course, no matter how brilliantly the sun shines outside, if you insist on going down into the cellar and closing the trap door, the sun may shine ever so brilliantly, but you’re in where? In darkness. And if you choose to go sour on life just because your father or your mother has failed you, you’re not only cheating yourself, you’re grieving your heavenly Father, for He loves you as if you were the only child He ever had.

Father’s Day. While we think of earthly fathers, let us think in this quiet moment especially of our heavenly Father. Shall we? When ye pray say, “Our Father.”

Do you have a father? Yes. Even if you never knew an earthly father, you can know your heavenly Father. He is *your* Father as if you were the only child He ever had. He loves you with an everlasting love.

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