

FATHERHOOD – Part One
ADAM AND HIS SONS
Sermon 6/16/19

Today is Father's Day, the day when we think first of our own fathers and the kind of influence they had on us – how strict or how lenient they were; whether they were a good provider, a good listener, a good teacher; or whether they fell short in several of these areas. We think of the tools they handed down to us and whether or they have been sufficient enough for us to improve upon the model we were shown.

Some children call their fathers their best friends, the ones who taught them everything they know. Others have very little to say and struggle to find something positive about their fathers. Some sons and daughters have been treated as precious and were trained to treat others the same. Others have been neglected or even abused. Some, because of their father's addictions, learned how to abuse their bodies and abandon their own families; others learned from their father's example how to stay away from anything that mistreated themselves or others. They also learned how to tough it out and remain faithful when life took a turn for the worse.

In the late Fifties and early Sixties, we saw strong men with a moral compass on TV. Fathers like Jim Anderson from "Father Knows Best", Ward Cleaver from "Leave it To Beaver" and Lucas McCain, the single father who was not afraid to show his love for His son while garnering a reputation as "The Rifleman". Today, with very few exceptions, television portrays men and fathers as weak and inferior to the women in their lives and they are treated as slightly below stupid by their children. We have come a long way since Sherriff Andy raised his son Opie in Mayberry, USA.

Like all men, fathers come in different shapes and sizes with varied personalities and dispositions. Some are quiet, some gregarious, some are serious, some jokesters. But the one thing they all have in common is they have sired children. How they parent is mostly determined on how they were parented; for both good and bad parentage starts from a foundation of learning from previous generations. For instance, my father was born right before the Great Depression. He came from a family of farmers, miners, and cooks; poor, with not much money, but hard workers. Like most people who went through the Great Depression my father made a vow to himself that when he grew up he would not be poor. He would work hard, get an education and climb the ladder of success till he reached his middle-class goals. My father and his brother were both employed by US Steel; but his brother worked in the mill while my father worked in the accounting office.

As a result, my family was well provided for. My father bought a new car every four years (for which he paid cash). As kids we got new school clothes at the start of every school year and through the years we moved up to nicer homes and better neighborhoods. My father did not believe in credit cards and though it seemed we had a lot; my father was a saver and not a spender. He saved enough money through the years so that all three of his children could go to college without having to go into debt or work while attending school.

So, my father succeeded well in accomplishing his goals. Unfortunately, along the way he lost the relational aspect of fatherhood. And as a result, his children lost their center of security. The older we grew the more distant my dad became. The more we needed his guidance the less he

interacted with us. My sister had it easier, being the girl and several years younger than my brother and me. She remained my dad's favorite throughout his life and the one he continued to speak to as both she and he grew older. I, however, was spoken to less and less until there was no contact at all unless I initiated it. I remember years, perhaps even a decade going by when I never even received a birthday card from my father. This just goes to show that if you were to ask any of his children how great a man our father was you would get a different answer from each of them.

If I was to sum up the influence my dad had on me it would be in these few words: He taught me how to provide for my family but he did not teach me how to love them beyond material means; that I had to learn on my own. Dad was a great provider, but he was a deficient father. The emotional aspect of our relationship was greatly lacking. That is why as I grew up, I vowed not to be like him. I felt success for me was to be the most unlike my father that I could be. While it was true that I needed to follow his example of providing for my family, I also needed to improve on the model I was shown. I needed to do better, I needed to overcome all the deficiencies I had experienced and, in their place, create life where there was none. I had to appreciate the life I did have while at the same time mourn the life I did not have, mourn the loss of the love I was not shown, and then move on to make a better life for my future wife and children.

Thankfully I met a Father along the way that was able to love me deeply, who nursed my broken heart back to health and set me upon solid ground so that I could stand with feet firmly planted in grace and mercy; A Father who taught me how to love and how to be loved; A Father who forgave my shortcomings and did not hold them against me; A Father who treated me with respect and taught me how to be the man my father wasn't but the man I had vowed to be. Of course, I am talking about my Heavenly Father. Once I established a relationship with Him, I began to understand what a true father was and how he is to relate to his children.

How well we earthly fathers do in parenting our children is not easily known at first. Most fathers don't know how well they have done until their children are grown and out of the house, observing how they make their way in the world and the kinds of decisions they make. It seems that when children begin to get a glimpse of what it is like to be an adult and become responsible for their own mistakes, the perceptions of their father from childhood take on a different hue. Suddenly fathers don't seem as ignorant and backward as they were when they were growing up, and the child realizes he is not as astute an observer of human character as he once was.

For most children there comes a day when they better appreciate what their father did for them and begin to express their thanks. Some parents may experience only a few years of the empty nest before they hear praises from their children. Others may wait decades. But if and when it comes, it is comforting to know that not everything we as fathers did was so bad that God could not use it for good. We did some things right, and, as sinful people, that in itself is something to be proud of.

The Bible is full of fathers. All had their strong points, and all had their faults. But we're going to look at just one of them. Today we're going to look at Adam as a father and see what he was like from the perspective of his children, his wife, and his Heavenly Father.

We don't know much about Adam but what we do know paints a portrait of a man who

started with everything God had to offer and ended by losing most of it. Adam was given a garden to tend, animals to name, a world to rule over and a wife to help him. He started out well but as soon as temptation came onto the scene the good man that God created from the dust of the earth seemed to fade into the background and Adam's lack of character and moral weakness came to the forefront, causing the world and all who followed after him to suffer the consequences of his lack of a backbone.

While Satan was busy tempting Eve, Adam was right there with her saying and doing nothing. He did not challenge Satan nor tell him to leave his wife alone. Instead he allowed his wife to disobey the word of the Lord and did nothing to prevent his own disobedience. At least, when confronted by the Lord, Adam confessed correctly, *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."* He confessed that he was a willing participant and did nothing to stop his wife from eating the fruit. At least in his confession Adam stood tall and, as we might say, owned up to his mistakes "like a man".

After being driven out of Eden because of his sin Adam had to confront the fact that he no longer lived in Paradise and that work was much harder. There was no mist to water the garden, and the ground was now cursed and growing weeds. No longer a cultivator and keeper of grounds which were thriving, he now, by the sweat of his brow, had to plow and tend the cursed earth until the day he died. We don't know what Eve thought about this but at least we know that she knew she acknowledged equal responsibility for their fate. So perhaps she never became a drippy faucet of blame in their household, though she might have had some justification for it.

What we do know is that after expulsion from the Garden Eve conceived her first child and named him Cain and then conceived a second time with her son Abel. The Scriptures say that Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground like his father. We know nothing of their early years; we only see them as adults when Cain gets angry because God accepted his brother Abel's offering but had no regard for his own. Why God accepted one and not the other is not relevant here. What is relevant is that Cain was given an opportunity by God to do right and Cain ignored God's warning. He followed in his earthly father's footsteps and chose to sin instead. Letting his anger get the best of him he killed his brother in a jealous rage.

Once again, we see the consistency of God regarding disobedience. As He did with Adam, God curses the labor of Cain so that he will no longer be able to cultivate the ground and enjoy the fruit of his labors. And, like his father, God drives Cain out of the land he has known and tells him he will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth as long as he lives.

Shakespeare once said, "O what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." Adam and Eve got caught in the web of deception Satan had woven in the garden. Satan captured Cain in that same web, and it resulted in him murdering his younger brother Abel. Sin entered the human race through Adam and was now being handed down to every generation which followed, beginning with Cain.

The loss of Abel must have been devastating for we know of no other death occurring in Scripture until the death of Abel. Death was spoken of by God as part of His warning to Adam when He said, *"From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of*

good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Both Adam and Eve had gradually understood that spiritual death had occurred when they were forced out of Eden. But now they understood the true deception of Satan who told them, “*You surely will not die!*” for physical death had now become very real to them – the fulfillment of God’s consequence for their disobedience. It’s hard enough to lose a child but to know that you are ultimately responsible for the death of that child is unthinkable. Yet the death of Abel was just the start. The chain reaction from their sin was just getting started.

Thankfully sin can never trump God’s mercy or compassion. After a while the Scriptures say, “Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth.” I don’t think it was any easier for Adam and Eve to think about having another child after losing both of their sons to sin, than it is for modern day parents to think of having another child. Each child is irreplaceable and the heartbreak of perhaps loving and losing another child can be unbearable. I think that is why the Scriptures say, “*Adam had relations with his wife again*”, perhaps implying that there was some time that passed between the death of Abel and the loss of Cain before they were ready to try again. And when they did, Seth was born.

We don’t know much about Seth, but it is interesting that after Seth himself had a son the Scriptures say, “*Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord.*” Who these men were we do not know. What we do know is that Adam and Seth and Seth’s son Enosh are mentioned so it seems reasonable that these are at least three of the men who began to call upon the name of the Lord. But this implies that these men were not calling on the name of the Lord prior to this. Why this was so we are not told. But it is good to know that at least in the line of descent from Adam and after the loss of both Cain and Abel, men began to recognize their need for the Lord. As the old saying goes, “Better late than never”.

So, what kind of father was Adam? We don’t have much to glean from what the Scriptures tell us; but we can say with certainty that he was a man with a past that haunted him. His sin was not contained in the garden. It went with him throughout his life and influenced his kids as well. Did he pass down any godly traits? Yes. Abel presented an offering that was pleasing to the Lord. Abel would not have known what an acceptable offering was if his father Adam had not taught him.

But we also see that the contemplation of doing evil did not skip a generation. Though Adam was more of a passive person in his sin, his son Cain was more of an aggressor. Cain felt that if you’re going to sin go big, and so he did. Just as his father Adam chose to ignore the warning of the Lord Cain did as well. And just as Adam did not take time to contemplate his actions but went passively into disobedience, Cain also did not take the time to consider his actions but immediately after hearing the voice of the Lord moved aggressively into disobedience.

Like father, like son? Did Cain learn this behavior from his father? Did Adam retain at least a hint of disobedience as he was raising Cain? We don’t know. What we do know is that the actions of Cain are the by-product of sin being passed down through the bloodline of Adam. Sin is now an inherited trait. But what of Abel and Seth? We have no record of wrong being done by either of them; yet we can be assured that neither was perfect. Once sin entered the world it permeated all who were born of the line of Adam.

Cain embraced his sin, but Abel and Seth did not. Abel knew what sacrifice was acceptable

to God and Seth was among those who “*called upon the name of the Lord*”. So, it appears that, despite his major flaws, Adam retained his reverence for the Holy One and attempted to pass his knowledge of the goodness and majesty of God down to his sons. It made an impression on two of his sons but not, unfortunately, on his firstborn Cain.

Our first two kids are 8 and 6 years older than our youngest. I have told our youngest that we were not the same parents with her as we were when her siblings were born. They were our first and we were just learning how to parent and how to be responsible adults. We were learning how to discipline a child and how to do it the right way. We were maturing as adults but weren’t as mature as we would be years later when our youngest was born. As a result, we believe we were better parents with our youngest that we were with the older two.

This is probably true of all parents who have multiple sets of kids and was probably true of Adam and Eve as well. You learn something about yourself when you raise a child and when you lose a child you learn even more. A lot of husbands and wives divorce after the death of a child because they cannot see their way through together. They grieve separately and do not talk about the tragedy that has befallen them. So they grow apart and eventually make it permanent. This is what happened to my brother and his first wife.

But Adam and Eve stayed together and weathered the storms that sin brought into their lives. They had another son which Eve believed the Lord had given to them to take the place of Abel whom Cain had killed. They did not distance themselves from the Lord but rather gave Him credit for their ability to have another son to take the place of the one they had lost. This is another indication that God was still an integral part of the family of Adam and Eve.

To parents who have had children who are the exact opposite of each other take heart from Adam and Eve. Yes, sin will be part of their nature from birth; but you can raise two children under the same roof with the same level of instruction for both and one can turn out to be as opposite of the other as night is from day. No child is alike, and every child responds differently to discipline. One may please the Lord and one may not. But one thing is certain: the condition of a child’s heart will be revealed by how they respond to discipline. An obedient child will submit. A rebellious child will not.

Could Adam and Eve have done better in raising their kids? That is the same question all parents ask of themselves and the answer is, “of course we could”. But most parents do the best they can with the knowledge and level of maturity they have attained at the time, and in spite of the sin which they daily confess. Though their home is the classroom and their children the experiment, parents do learn from their mistakes. Ultimately all who live will stand before the throne of God and give an account of what they have done in this life. And that includes everyone who has ever parented a child.

What we learn from Adam is that he did nothing to prevent his wife’s temptation and he willingly partook of sin himself. When God confronted Adam God did not blame Eve for Adam’s sin. Adam was held responsible for his own sin just as Eve was held responsible for hers. The same held true for Cain. God did not excuse Cain’s behavior because of how he was raised by his sinful father Adam, but rather held him personally accountable for the decisions he himself made and the actions he alone took as a result of the use of his own free will.

Adam was a sinful man and in his sinful condition attempted to parent his children. Broken himself, he tried to raise children who would make better decisions than he. Adam made one very wrong decision early in life that impacted not only his family but the entire family line of man. Did his children suffer as a result? Yes. But were they doomed to failure as a result of his sin? No. They were inheritors of their father's sin and the curse which came about because of it but they were not the victims of it. They each had the ability to overcome what their father did and to be responsible for their own actions. Abel was able to do this as was Seth. Cain made the choice not to and suffered his own consequences as the result of his own sin.

If you are a father and you have wayward children know that you may not have done everything right; even so your children are responsible for their own choices. They will stand before God not on the shoulders of your sin or your inadequacies but rather on their own sin and their own inadequacies. Your confession covers your own sin. They must confess their sins to have them covered by the blood of Christ. There is only one Perfect individual and that is Jesus Christ. All others fall far short of that perfection. But God forgives all who ask and seek after His righteousness.

We men here today may have been good fathers who raised obedient children who followed the path of the Lord. We may have become best friends to our children, someone whom they wish to imitate; someone whom they want their kids to know and love as well. Or we may not have done a very good job; we may have struggled to find our own way as we were trying to raise our kids. We may be estranged from our children because of something we did or did not do, a father who no longer has any influence on his children or their household.

But whatever type of father we were God is not just the God of yesterday, He is the God of today and tomorrow as well. He will continue to bless our good efforts and is more than willing to forgive our worst efforts. We were given care of our children for a short amount of time; only about one quarter of our children's lives are under our direct influence. The other 75 percent of their lives they live under the choices they alone make.

To fathers let me say this: If you need to repent of your failures God is willing to hear. And, if you have a strained relationship with your children, God is also willing for you to confess your failures to your children so that you might be reconciled to them. Take it from someone who knows. You don't want to continue to live with ill feelings or hatred or unforgiveness or bitterness or the heaviness that sadness brings because you have been disappointed with your father or with your children or if they have been disappointed with you. As Paul says, "*If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*" (Romans 12:8). Jesus tells us that even if someone has something against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled to that person before we offer our gift to God (Matthew 5:23-24).

So, whether the fault lies with you, your father, or with your children you are instructed to make peace. And the point of entry for peace is the door of forgiveness. Even if your father has passed away, as is the case for most of us here today, forgiveness is still possible. "As far as it depends on you" forgive. Do what you still have the ability to do. Give your anger and your disappointment to the Lord and release to your heavenly Father the pain your earthly father caused you. In exchange God will grant you release from the past and replace it with His peace. This may not happen instantly; it may be a process as it was with me. But be assured, God will honor your willingness to forgive by removing from you the burden of your disappointments.

As I said before each of us are held responsible for our own actions. When I stand before my Maker, I know I cannot say what I did and who I became was because of who my father was, how I was treated by him or what he did or did not do to and for me. I will stand before Him responsible for my own actions and not on those of my father. I will be held responsible for what I have done, what I have confessed, and what I have made of the life I have been given, in spite of the deficits I encountered.

Things happened many years ago between my father and I of which we both played a part. But in obedience to the Lord I sought to be reconciled to my father by asking for his forgiveness for the part I played in our estrangement. If you need to do the same I encourage you to do so as quickly as possible. Whether you are the father or the child, if there is a need for forgiveness, find the path and take the action before the Lord calls you or your children home and neither one of you ever hear the words you long to hear from each other.

I don't know what words were ever spoken between Adam and his sons because there is no record of it in Scripture. But when Cain killed his brother Abel that was certainly something for which he needed to ask forgiveness. Yet it appears that when the Lord punished Cain for his sin and made him a wanderer on the earth, he left without reconciling with his parents; and we never see any further interaction between Cain and his parents. Adam and Eve lost one son through murder; but they lost another through pride, rebellion, and a stubborn resistance to repentance.

When you look at the children of Adam you might say that Abel was a good boy who pleased his mother and father. You might also say that Cain was a bad boy who deeply disappointed his parents. But does that make Adam a good or bad father? If you look to the child, you could go either way. Perhaps you could even say that with the birth of Seth it was two out of three on the side of Adam being a good parent. And that's not bad odds. But besides the fact that a child's behavior shines a bright light on their parent's child rearing skills, does a child really determine the quality of a parent? Good children have come from bad homes and bad children have come from good homes. What determines the quality of a parent, the quality of a father, is his devotion to the Lord and his willingness to submit to God's authority.

We are all sinful people who do sinful things. That is why we have need of a Savior. It is the sinful father who confesses and submits to the Lord's correction who is the better father. It is not the child who determines the quality of his father. A child tests the quality of a father, but he does not determine it. That determination is made by God Himself. For each man, father or not, stands on his own before His Lord. And every child of every father who ever lived stands on his own before the Lord. As fathers we may disappoint our children. As children we may be disappointed in our fathers or be a disappointment to our fathers. But they and we rise or fall on our own. We make our own decisions and only our own confessions will determine whether or not we are considered a good father by the Father of us all. But one thing is sure. The love of a father is precious, and we should do everything we can to retain or recapture it. For that is what God desires for us all.

(THERE'S NOTHING LIKE) "THE LOVE OF A FATHER"

A hand to hold as we grow old, someone to look up to,
A smiling face with words of grace to teach us what to do,
A patient man, a loving man, who shows us how to follow
And points the way every day to paths that lead from sorrow to the road of life.

Days of teaching, days unending, times of joy and laughter,
Growing strong, learning right from wrong, days of happy ever after.
Special days meant to say how much we are loved.
These are things a Father does, a mirror of the One above,
That's a Father's love.

*There's nothing like the love of a father,
Someone who will wrap his arms around you
And surround you with his love and care
There's nothing like his love.
There's nothing like a strong force to guide you
Nothing like a steady hand to point you
In the way that you should go
Oh, there's nothing like the love of a Father.*

For our lives they sacrifice with years of toil unending
While cheerfully and gratefully counting all their blessings.
Grateful to the only One who understands the meaning
Of how a man by God's command can make a child into a man -
That's the Father's plan.

*There's nothing like the love of a father,
Someone who will wrap his arms around you
And surround you with his love and care
There's nothing like his love.
There's nothing like a strong force to guide you
Nothing like a steady hand to point you
In the way that you should go
Oh, there's nothing like the love of a Father.*

*There's nothing like the love of the Father,
Someone who has wrapped His arms around us
And surrounds us with His love and care
There's nothing like His love.
There's nothing like the Son of God to guide us
Nothing like the Spirit's hand to point us
In the way that we should go
Oh, there's nothing like the love of the Father.
Oh, there's nothing like the love of the Father.*

(There's Nothing like) "The Love of A Father" Words and Music by Dan Burris
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