

“WHAT MAKES A GOOD FATHER?”

Genesis 48:8-21

(06-21-20) Father's Day

By Rev. Victor Kim

Today is Father's Day, in case you didn't know. And there are more people than you might think who don't know. Father's Day isn't like Mother's Day, which no one forgets. You don't want to compare Father's Day and Mother's Day, Mother's Day wins hands down. In terms of effort made and economic impact, Mother's Day clearly outshines Father's Day. I'm not really sure why that is but over the years Mother's Day has certainly become far more commercially attractive than Father's Day, so retailers play it up. Flowers for Mother's Day, jewelry, just an overall sense of tenderness and appreciation. Dads? Well, often it's a bit more casual, isn't it? Another tacky tie, or for those truly lucky dads, a box of golf balls, always a welcomed gift! Even church attendance favours Mother's Day. Mother's Day is often one of the highest attended worship services, but Father's Day is often one of the worst. It probably has something to do with the time of the year, typically school's out by Father's Day, but still.

In my family we try to not forget Mother's Day. Back when we lived in Calgary, my entire family would always make an effort for Mother's Day. But Father's Day, well, if my brother and I got to take our dad out for a round of golf, that was a pretty good Father's Day, but if we didn't, well, it wasn't a big deal. And my dad didn't make a big deal out of it, just like I don't. Not a big deal. But fathers are a big deal and the need for good fathers is no joke.

It's not always easy to find role models for good fathers in our culture. In an ironic twist, some years ago the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright Jr. who used to be the Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, which used to be the church that former President Obama attended, quoted Bill Cosby on the issue of the difficulty of finding positive male role models for young African American boys. We keep looking in the wrong place, said Cosby. I'm sure Wright couldn't have imagined that years later the same Bill Cosby who came to be known as

America's Dad on the Cosby Show, would be found guilty of drugging women and sexually assaulting them. We keep looking in the wrong place, indeed!

Maybe we should be looking closer to home. While our culture may not have an abundance of positive male father figures, many of us grew up in homes which did, I certainly did. My father was the oldest of 8 children, one of whom didn't survive during childhood. At the end of the Second World War, his family was left penniless as Korea regained its independence from Japan and not too long after that, his father, my grandfather, died, leaving my father as the main breadwinner in the family. My father had to stop his education and went to work, which allowed his three younger brothers, my uncles, to keep attending school, the oldest attended law school in Korea before getting into drafting here in Canada, the next became an accountant with Shell Oil and the youngest is a professor of business at St. Mary's University in Halifax. But all my uncles would tell you that my dad was the smartest of the bunch, but he never got the education or the opportunities they did. Later, he moved his family to Canada, with no English and no job, and he, along with my mother, put his two sons through school, and my father became the first elder ordained at the Calgary Korean Presbyterian Church. He never read any books on parenting, but he knew instinctively not to let me go to bed angry or to punish me without an explanation. Culturally, as a Korean man of a certain time, saying the words, I love you, wasn't something that he would say to his son, but I never doubted that he did. My dad turns 85 this week and I want to say, Happy Father's Day to him.

There's another father I want to speak about this morning and that's Joseph from our text this morning which Mike read from Genesis 48. By the time we get to this part of the book of Genesis, a lot's happened in Joseph's life. The Joseph who brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to be blessed by his father Jacob, is nothing like the young naïve boy who told his older brothers about his dreams of their bowing down to him and who walked around oblivious in his coat of many colours that his father Jacob had given him. I mean how stupid

do you have to be to get your brothers to hate you so much that they would consider murdering you, but in the end settling for selling you into slavery and telling their own father that you'd been eaten by wild animals? But as I said, there's a lot that's happened between that Joseph and the one represented in our text this morning. Jeremiah Wright breaks down what makes a good father and why Joseph is a model of a good father.¹

A good father puts God first.

Think what you will of the young Joseph, but he always put God first. He told his dreams to his brothers because they were dreams from God. When as a slave in Egypt his master's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph resisted her and told her that he could never do such a great evil against God. Whether as a slave in Potiphar's house, or as second in command to Pharaoh over all of Egypt, Joseph never forgot who he was and whose he was. Later in life Joseph named his own two sons Manasseh and Ephraim, meaning, God made me forget my sufferings and God has given me children in the land of my trouble. **In all things God was first for Joseph.**

A good father also seeks God's guidance.

Throughout his life, Joseph sought God's guidance. Whether as a slave in Potiphar's house or in jail after being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, whether before Pharaoh or before his brothers when Joseph was in a position of power over them, he sought the guidance of God. Jeremiah Wright says about his own father, who came from the tobacco fields of Virginia to hold a municipal board seat for the city of Philadelphia, who earned 4 degrees, 3 in theology, **that he never got so educated that he stopped seeking God's guidance.** A good father seeks God's guidance.

¹ The categories that Jeremiah Wright uses are found in his book, *Good News! Sermons of Hope for Today's Families*. 1995.

I know that from the day I was born, my father has never stopped seeking God's guidance around how to be a good father and I know that to this day he prays for me to be a good father to my own children. **We cannot forget that we too have a Good Father who loves us and it is God's guidance that must inform and equip us in all the decisions we face in life.**

A good father asks for God's blessings.

Joseph brings his children to his own father, to Jacob, now called Israel, so that his father can bless Manasseh and Ephraim. In those days it was the father who bestowed a blessing to his children. Remember when Jacob himself stole the blessing of his father Isaac from his brother Esau, leaving Esau in tears, unable to receive the blessing that Isaac had unknowingly given to Jacob. I remember an elder from my previous congregation who told me that every morning when his children left for school, he would ask God to bless them and bring them home safe. When my children were younger each night as they got ready for bed, I would pronounce the Aaronic Blessing on them. ***The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*** Fathers, and mothers, need to pray for God's blessing on their children. **We believe in a God, who desires to bless us, we shouldn't take that for granted.**

A good father puts the past behind him.

As I said earlier, Joseph the man at the end of the book of Genesis is not the same Joseph the boy who was his father's favourite. He has made mistakes. Joseph is a different brother than he was when he was young. As the second in command of Egypt, when his brothers come to him to beg for grain, Joseph, unrecognized by his brothers, could have exacted revenge, but in the end, he shows mercy, compassion and is overcome by love. How do you love those who sold you into slavery, who basically left you for dead? Joseph, who put God first, who sought God's guidance, who asked for God's blessings also knows that while his brothers may have meant evil for him, God had turned that evil into good. **How many fathers have modeled**

instead an unwillingness to forgive and move on from the past and thus equipped another generation to hold onto old grudges, ancient grievances and unsettled scores? But a good father, who puts God first, who seeks God's guidance, who asks for God's blessings will also know to put the past behind him, to forgive and to embrace the new possibilities of the future God provides. It could not have been easy for my father to leave all he knew behind to immigrate to Canada. Yes, it was an opportunity at a new life, but it would cost him all that he had known to that point in his life. **I've never heard my father speak a word of regret about making that decision.** I hope I've learned the same lesson.

Ultimately good fathers put their trust in the Lord.

How tempting it must have been for Joseph to turn away from God. When he was in the pit while his brothers were debating whether to kill him, when he was sold into slavery, when he was jailed on false pretenses, when the chief cupbearer whom he helped out forgot all about him after being released from prison, he could have lost his faith and wondered where God was in all his suffering, still Joseph never gave up and he trusted in the Lord, he remained faithful. Studies have shown that in households where the father goes to church the likelihood of a child remaining a churchgoer later in life is dramatically higher than in homes where the father doesn't attend, even if the mother does. Good fathers trust in God, even when times are difficult or unpredictable. **The way a good father models that trust, in faithful participation in the body of Christ, with the people of God, makes a huge impact on their children, on their families.**

Joseph brings his children to his father Jacob for a blessing. Joseph knows the power of trusting in God. He knows that his children will see his trust in God, and they will be impacted and nourished by what they see in their father. Our text this morning presents a tender but powerful scene. Three generations, participating in a ritual of blessing that seeks to trust in the Lord, to ask for God's guidance and blessings, to put God first. Jacob, named Israel, his son

Joseph, the child of Jacob's first love Rachel, and Joseph's own sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who will become part of the twelve tribes of Israel, all bearing witness to walking faithfully with God. **For fathers today, this faithful walking with God is critical, not only for us as fathers, but for those who will follow in our footsteps.**

Rev. Wright tells the story of the Chicago blizzard of 1979, when a man's car spun out of control and got stuck on the side of the road. The snow drifts were too high for his 8 year old son to walk in, so the father told the boy to stay in the car until he came back with help. The father cracked the windows open a bit and left the motor running so the boy would have plenty of heat but not be overcome by carbon monoxide poisoning. He walked for three miles before he came to the Great Lakes Naval Station, but by that time the storm had grown so fierce that there was no way for him to get back to his son. The roads had become not only impassable, but impossible. No one could tell where the fields stopped and the roads started. It would take days to get back to his car and the snow drifts grew to be twenty feet high. When it dawned on the father that it would be impossible for him to return to his son, he had to be physically restrained from going back out into the blizzard, which would have surely taken his own life. But in his struggle to get free, the father heard his son's voice in the next room in the warming center. In disbelief he ran over to the next room and there was his son, laughing and playing with the sailors and other children. Son, how did you get here? the father asked. I thought you were still in the car. It was easy daddy, replied the son. I was afraid to stay where you left me, so I waited until you were out of sight, **then I followed, walking in your footsteps. To my fellow fathers, someone is watching where we're walking, how we're walking and whether our talk matches our walk.** The good news for fathers is that we have good models to follow ourselves. Many of us have or have had good fathers for whom we ought to be always grateful. We have the model of faithful witnesses in scripture like Joseph and of course we have our Good, Good Father, who is perfect in all his ways and who loves us completely. **May we as fathers and as mothers and as daughters and sons, old**

and young, put our God first and trust in God always and may we know the blessing of God upon all our lives.

Thanks be to God, Amen.