

FATHERS OF THE WORD

In "FATHERS OF THE WORD," we're going to look at four photos of dads in God's Word — Job, Noah, Abraham, and Eli. And, as you can tell, if you know your Bible, we'll be studying three good guys and one bad guy. We're going to learn what a father of the Word looks like from a positive and a negative perspective. We're going to look at the positive attributes that God honored in the lives of Job, Noah, and Abraham. Then we'll look at what God rebuked in the life of Eli. We can really draw lessons from both their failures and successes.

FATHERS HAVE A BIG CHALLENGE. One of the questions I often ask men who have raised children is, "Would you do it any differently?" I listen carefully and try to learn from those ahead of me in their earthly pilgrimages. Do you know what? The changes they often share are so easy to implement even today. No matter where you are in the parenting process. One father summed it up this way. He said:

"My family's all grown, and the kids are all gone. But, if I had to do it all over again, this is what I'd do:

I would love my wife more in front of my children.

I would laugh with my children more — at our mistakes and our joys.

I would listen more, even to the littlest child.

I would be more honest about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection.

I would pray differently for my family — instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me.

I would do more things together with my children.

I would encourage them more and bestow more praise.

I would pay more attention to little things, like deeds and words of thoughtfulness.

And then, finally, if I had to do it all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day I would use to direct them to God."¹

¹ From the Dobson Father's tract.

This explains why Charlie Shedd made one of his original promises to his tiny son, Peter:

I hope that I will be able to make knowing God natural to you. It is natural. In fact, I think this relationship with God is the only thing that is one hundred percent natural. We will pray together until it is easy for you to put your arms on the windowsill of heaven and look into the face of God. Before I put you back in your crib, I want to tell you something Philip said.

We had been out in the country for a ride. It was evening and we ran out of gas. We were walking along after we had been to the farmhouse, and I was carrying a can of gas. Philip was only four. He was playing along, throwing rocks at the telephone poles, picking flowers, and then, all of a sudden it got dark. Sometimes night comes all at once in the country. Philip came over, put his little hand in mine and said, "Take my hand, Daddy. I might get lost."

Peter, there is a hand reaching to you from the heart of the universe. If you will lay your hand in the hand of God and walk with Him, you will never ever get lost.²

SO WHAT ARE WE MISSING IN THE 90'S?

In a study conducted several years ago, sociologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, of Harvard University, identified several crucial factors in the development of juvenile delinquents. They created a test that can, with about 90 percent accuracy, predict future delinquency of children five to six-years-old. They listed four necessary factors in preventing juvenile delinquency:

- _ The father's discipline must be firm, fair, and consistent.
- _ The mother must know where her children are and what they are doing at all times, and be with them as much as possible.
- _ The children need to see affection demonstrated between their parents, and from their parents to them.
- _ The family must spend time together as a unit.

In a similar report, but from a Christian perspective, Dr. Paul D. Meier, a Christian psychiatrist, wrote that the key to right parent-child relationships could be summed up in five things:

1. Parents' love for each other and for the children;
2. Discipline;
3. Consistency;

² Letters to Phillip.

4. A good parental example; and
5. A man at the head of the home.

KNOWING GOD AS THE PERFECT FATHER

The perfect father would be the one who knows everything about you and still loves you; who is always on your side; who is big enough for anything; and who never lets you down. Of course, that is the description God's Word gives of the ONLY perfect Father in God's Word. We all have met Him. Jesus introduced us to God as Our Perfect Father:

- NOTICE YOUR SEEING FATHER. Jesus calls Him our Father who sees all of our secrets. That means He is watching; He "knows everything and still loves us." What a comfort to have God as our Perfect Father. He is "on your side."

". . . so that your giving may be in secret. **Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**" (Matthew 6:4).

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. **Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**" (Matthew 6:6).

". . . so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; **and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**" (Matthew 6:18).

- DRAW UPON YOUR SUPPLYING FATHER. Our Perfect Father is our constant resource. Have you met and entered into communion with our Father of Mercy? Oh, how much He loves you and is supremely "on your side"!

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort**, . . ." (2 Corinthians 1:3).

- TRUST IN YOUR STRONG FATHER. This Perfect Father Jesus introduced us to is powerful. The name of the Lord as "Father of our spirits" means He is strong. To put that down to earth for us, He is "big enough for anything."

"Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. **How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!**" (Hebrews 12:9).

- HOPE IN YOUR SECURE FATHER. Jesus has introduced us to our Perfect Father who won't ever let us down, leave us, or change into something less than perfection. We are to constantly go back and rest on Him. The name of the Lord as our Father of lights communicates the incredible truth that God is changeless. Our Lord is unfailing. To say it in daily talk, He is the Father who will "never let you down."

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from **the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows**" (James 1:17).

As you can see, the perfect father would be the one who knows everything about you and still loves you; who is always on your side; who is big enough for anything; and who never lets you down. So, how do we who are so imperfect perform one of the most difficult tasks in life?

We start by seeing our Perfect Father as He is, and then we start in the power of His Spirit to emulate Him. God is the model. God alone is perfect. We are imperfect and sometimes failing students of the Perfect Father. But, even if we fail at times, we can always point our families to their Perfect Father, right?

OUR PATTERN IS GOD'S WORD

So, what should we look for? Good habits that show up in the great dads of God's Word! The first great dad we will see is Job. From his life we need to grab and copy his habit of prayer. And, by the power of God's Spirit, start making it characteristic of your life!

The Book of Job is perhaps the oldest book in the world. It is also perhaps the clearest view into the spirit world, the spiritual side of parenting, and the cosmic proportion of conflicts we face as we parent and lead as dads.

HABIT NUMBER ONE: PRAYER JOB PRAYED

What is the key truth about the good dad Job? JOB PRAYED.

"So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings [according to] the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did regularly" (Job 1:5, NKJV).

Can we learn something about how to parent our families from Job's life? Yes, some powerful habits he had. There are five distinct elements of Job's parenting habits. You may want to even note these in your Bibles.

1. **JOB PRAYERFULLY FOLLOWED THE LIFE OF HIS CHILDREN.** Note the words: "when the days of feasting."

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He knew what was going on in his children's lives. He knew their cycle of house visits, parties, get togethers, and so on. He was in touch on a daily basis with where they were, and where they were headed. He followed his children around in his heart because he had a godly concern and love for them. ARE YOU FOLLOWING YOUR CHILDREN'S LIVES? You and I will never pray effectively for those who are not regularly on our hearts.

2. **JOB PRAYERFULLY SOUGHT THE PERSONAL CONSECRATION OF EACH MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY.**

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Note the words, "Job would send and sanctify them." This speaks of his high priestly role at the head of his family. He went to God seeking their purity before the Lord. In a practical way, Dads, it is you who needs to know your boys and girls and seek their sanctification. It is you who needs

66 *GROWING DADS GOD'S WAY*

to tell them when they are out of line, immodest, heading toward sin, and so on! And as dads we are also husbands. We are, as Paul said in Ephesians 5, to seek our wife's sanctification through God's Word! A godly dad will know his children and wife's spiritual status and be prayerfully caring about their growth toward Christlikeness. DO YOU CARE FOR YOUR DAUGHTERS AND SONS AND YOUR WIFE'S CONSECRATION?

3. **JOB PRAYERFULLY OFFERED HIMSELF TO GOD.** In the middle of v. 5, we see another truth. Job faithfully acted as an intercessor for his family.

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It wasn't talk, it was work! HAVE YOU OFFERED YOURSELF TO GOD AS AN INTERCESSOR? Prayer is much like holding something for someone you love. You just make sure that you guard it.

4. **JOB PRAYERFULLY VIEWED HIS FAMILY FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE.**

Note the words "in their hearts." He was so vitally concerned about their inner spiritual life that he cried out to God for them. HAVE YOU started doing this, DADS?

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Job was so aware of the constant pressure of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He wanted pure children, holy families, and strong worshipers of God Almighty. So he was looking over the lives of his family members trying to see them from the inside out. What a challenge, what an opportunity, what an encouragement this can be, Dads. Sometimes we just need to look at them as they *will* be instead of only as they *are*. Remember: God says we are seated with Christ. That is our future glorified condition. And He relates to us on that basis. Never overlooking sin, but always seeing us as we shall be by His grace.

5. **JOB PRAYERFULLY PERSISTED.** He was a great dad because he kept on. It wasn't just when they were little. He prayed through their growing years and never stopped. You know the key to success in any endeavor is to get started and not quit.

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"Continually" he started following their lives. He started to offer prayers for his family as their intercessor, and wouldn't stop. He was ready for the unexpected death of his children. He prepared them for it every day! HAVE YOU STARTED? KEEP ON! QUIT? GET STARTED!

Fathers of the Word will be like Job who interceded prayerfully for his family in Job 1:5. WOW! Do you see how serious this dad was? Job had five objectives:

- He Followed: Job knew what was going on in his kids' lives ("cycle") — he knew daughters at home were invited out to his sons'.
- He Cared: Job sought their personal lives to be consecrated ("sent and consecrate"), examined, and cleansed.
- He Offered: Job personally stood as priest of his family, offering atoning sacrifices for sin in general.
- He Looked: Job was not only concerned about externals but also vitally concerned about the heart ("in hearts")!
- He Persisted: Job continually did so with spiritual persistence ("continually").

A godly father in tune with the Scriptures will:

- _ know his children deeply, personally and directly;
- _ get involved in making sure they keep pure;
- _ stand ready to seek their repentance and restoration;
- _ look at heart attitudes — and won't stop!

So, fathers of the Word will be like Job who was involved *prayerfully* with his family.

HABIT NUMBER TWO: OBEDIENCE NOAH OBEYED

Job was a great dad because he PRAYED! Next, we need to look at one element of another great dad's life. The dad was Noah; the element is the one word that sums up his life: OBEDIENCE.

Fathers of the Word will be like Noah who warned his family. Turn to Heb. 11:7. The inspired writer condenses Genesis 6-9 into one verse. Noah:

- Believed God ("by faith").
- Stayed in touch with God ("being warned of things"); he had spiritual perception.
- Obeyed God ("prepared [a what?] an ark").
- Had the respect of family ("saved house").
- Called sin what it was, and sinners who they were ("condemned the world")!
- Was saved by faith ("according to faith")!

Listen to the inspired biography of Noah's life in Hebrews 11.

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV).

There are several ways Noah expressed this godly attitude of obedience. Join me in v. 7 as we take apart the keys to a life of obedience.

1. NOAH BELIEVED GOD "BY FAITH."

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV).

2. **NOAH STAYED IN TOUCH WITH GOD, "BEING WARNED OF THINGS TO COME."**

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV)

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This means he was in spiritual contact with God (through God's Word and prayer as he listened to God). All this led to spiritual perception of God's will for Noah's family. I hope every one of you hearing my voice will want to know for certainty God's will for your family so that you can obey it!

3. **NOAH OBEYED GOD; HE "PREPARED AN ARK."**

The ark was 450 x 75 x 45 or 1,518,750 sq. feet. This equals 569 R.R. Stock cars, of which 208 could hold the 21,000 land animals of the 1,072,300 total species. The average land animal is the size of a sheep.

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4. **NOAH LED HIS FAMILY: HE "SAVED HIS HOUSE."**

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV).

This is the genealogy of Noah:

"Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9, NKJV).

They went along with his project, alone in the whole world! Why? Because he was living a life of integrity in the world and at home.

5. **NOAH WAS UNAFRAID TO POINT OUT SIN; HE "CONDEMNED THE WORLD."**

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, **by which he condemned the world** and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV).

He confronted the whole world of sin and stood against it — the longest sermon in 100 years.

6. **NOAH LIVED "ACCORDING TO FAITH."**

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world **and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith**" (Hebrews 11:7, NKJV).

Fathers of the Word will be like Noah who saved his family by warning with word and example! This means you will:

- Believe God.
- Continually be in communion and contact with God.
- Always obey God.
- Live a life of integrity in the world and at home.
- Confront sin, and stand against it.
- End as an heir of faith.

So, Job prayed. Noah obediently warned.

HABIT NUMBER THREE: LEADERSHIP ABRAHAM DIRECTED

ABRAHAM COMMANDED the direction of his family!

"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" (Genesis 18:19, NKJV).

What was it God admired about this man of faith? Abraham commanded his family to look beyond the passing fancies of this world system, beyond the materialism of the day (in Ur of the Chaldees). That meant for him to forsake gods of this world system (e.g., sun god, moon god). And it meant to obey the true and living and only God!

God chose him to "command his family." Does he:

- _ obey God's rules? (Genesis 21:1-8)
- _ have genuine loving personal concern for each? (Genesis 21:9-21)
- _ sacrifice all for God, even best, closest and most precious? (Genesis 22:1-12)

So, then, does Abraham command them by example? Yes.

- _ Obey God's rules.
- _ Be transparent and genuine in love.
- _ Lay it all (literally, as in Isaac) on the altar.

How did he do that? Look at Hebrews 11:8-10.

- IF GOD SAID "GO" — HE WENT!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

- IF GOD SAID "LEAVE IT ALL" (Materialism) — HE DROPPED IT!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed **and went, even though he did not know where he was going.** By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

- IF GOD SAID "WORSHIP ONLY ME" — HE DID!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God"** (Hebrews 11:8-10).

But let's look at the condensed version again, Heb. 11:8-10:

- _ God said "Go" — he went.
- _ God said "Leave materialism" — he did.
- _ God said "Give up those gods" — he did.
- _ God said "Obey me" — he did.

So, fathers of God's design will be like Abraham who commanded his family to:

- _ Get out of this world system headed away from God and toward judgment;
- _ Leave the quest for "things" and start seeking the only things that last — God's kingdom; and
- _ Forsake those gods and bow to the living and true God!

Let's get more specific. There is still a world system to renounce, Dads. Are you doing so?

- Egalitarianism (all equal). God says equal worth, not equal responsibility; relativism (no absolutes). God says "Yes"!
- Exploitationism ("Get all you can"; "Go for the gusto"; "Go for it!").
- Hedonism ("Please me *now!*").
- Materialism (life consists in multitude, quality, and possession of things and privileges).

There is still not only a world and its system to renounce but also a kingdom to seek! Dad, do live for things eternal:

- _ Read the Word of God.
- _ Lead your family.
- _ Serve in church.
- _ Reach out to the lost.

Remember: there are still many gods to give up. Many of Satan's ways permeate this world. Just a few are:

- Substance abuse for gratification.
- Sexual license for gratification.
- Sounds of sin — the language and music of rebellion, wickedness, and occultism

Finally, there is the fourth portrait — that of a *bad* dad. His habits led to God's curse upon his family. We could say that fathers of the Word won't be like Eli.

HABIT NUMBER FOUR: DANGER SIGNS OF A BAD DAD

ELI VALUED HIS CHILDREN MORE THAN GOD

Eli held his children in higher esteem than the Lord!

"Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?" (1 Samuel 2:29).

ELI LACKED DISCRETION. **Discretion is vital to God.** It appears Eli had a lack of discretion (e.g., staring at a woman):

"As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth" (1 Samuel 1:12).

ELI LACKED DISCERNMENT. **Discernment is vital to God.** It appears Eli had a lack of spiritual discernment (e.g., thought the woman praying was drunk):

"Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, 'How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.' 'Not so, my lord,' Hannah replied, 'I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.' Eli answered, 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.' She said, 'May your servant find favor in your eyes.' Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast" (1 Samuel 1:13-18).

ELI LACKED DISCIPLINE OF HIS CHILDREN. **Disciplining our children is vital to God.** God said that Eli participated in his sons' sins because he did not rebuke them.

"Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?" (1 Samuel 2:29).

ELI RESISTED CONFRONTING SIN IN HIS HOME. **Confronting sin in our home is vital to God.** God rebukes Eli because he continued to resist confronting sin in his home.

"For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13).

ELI LACKED SELF-RESTRAINT AND GOD JUDGED HIM. **Personal discipline is vital to God.** Eli lacked self-restraint and God judges him.

"When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years" (1 Samuel 4:18).

How can we summarize the danger signs of a bad dad? Like Eli, this involves:

- _ Preoccupation with an occupation to the exclusion of family needs.
- _ Refusal to face the severity of his children's actions.

- _ Failure to respond quickly and thoroughly to the warnings of others.

- _ Rationalizing the wrong, thereby becoming part of the problem.

So, what does it take to be a genuine "Father of the Word"? By God's grace, we will emulate the positive habits of Job, Noah, and Abraham. Job prayed; Noah obeyed; Abraham led. And, by God's grace, we will avoid the pitfalls of Eli, who held his children in higher esteem than the Lord!