

Let me start by saying that I don't always do "Fathers' Day" sermons. I don't always do "special day" sermons. But sometimes I do. Well today is one of those "sometimes." This is actually one of my favorite subjects. Because being a father was, and still is, one of the greatest things that ever happened to me! Also, I might add being a pops is pretty awesome as well!

You maybe never really got to see me as a father. Chase was here for a year and Kirstin was here for a couple of years before heading off to college. Hopefully, you know what good kids they are, and they have done really well since they left the nest. I'd like to think the reason for that is I worked very hard at being a father! And it was a great joy to do so! I am so very proud of both of them and continue to work hard at being their father to this day. I will always be their father and they can't escape that argument no matter how much I may embarrass them.

So, this is my "Fathers' Day sermon." And I thought about different passages I could use, and I had a long list especially after looking in my Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. But I finally gravitated toward these two. And these are some of the most famous passages in all the Bible, and maybe the most influential words in history. They are, "The Ten Commandments," which was our Old Testament lesson and "The Lord's Prayer." And both speak of fatherhood! In the Ten Commandments, we read, "Honor your Father and Mother, that your days be long in the land," and the opening words of The Lord's Prayer are, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." Those two scriptures will be the basis of my thoughts for today.

Read Matthew 6:5-15

So first, the commandment. Now notice, as it's pointed out in scripture, this is the first commandment "with a promise." The others simply say "do" and "don't do." Or "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" if you are a King James person. But this one has more. It says, "Honor your Father and Mother, that your days may be long in the land." This is also the first commandment that deals with humans' relationships with other humans. The first four are in relation to our relationship with God and the last six deal with how we are to relate to others.

Now, please notice that doesn't simply say, "...that your days be long..." In other words, this is not "honor your father... so that you'll live a long life." Maybe you remember the words Bill Cosby once said to his son. The boy was misbehaving, and Bill said, "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out! And I can make another one just like you!"

This is not that! What this is about is the business of learning respect and honor. And that respect and honor is given first to our parents. Then, after that, it becomes a matter of our becoming respectful people and respecting others no matter who they are! And when people learn honor and respect, their days are long in the land.

I am always excited and sometimes a little taken back when kids and youth say to me “yes sir or “no sir.” Excited because I know they have learned honor and respect from their parents! Taken back because for some reason it makes me feel older (which by the way I have finally accepted). In other words, when we follow this command to respect and honor, we will make out better in this world and we are able to honor and respect others. Do you agree?

I believe that. But let me tell you, respect is something that is learned, isn't it? It is something that we must choose! And it must be separate from our feelings if it's ever going to work. Because sometimes we don't feel like someone deserves our respect. We need to learn to choose respect anyway. But that's a lesson lost on our modern world.

In the current worldly climate, people have abandoned completely the notion of having respect for someone with whom they disagree. And that is why we are so polarized!! If you want to solve the worldly problems, that's the place to start. Teach people to respect those with whom they disagree! Respect who they are and where they come from. I think one aspect of respect is learning about the person and what “makes” them up and yet still respecting them even if we agree to disagree.

But respect is not natural. And we need to learn it first as children. Thank God I had parents who taught me to respect others. That was the first attitude I was to have when encountering people, I didn't know. I was taught that. And so were you! So, it's learning respect and honor first for parents that makes us respectful and honorable people. And our parents are the primary relationship for much of our lives, aren't they? At least for the most formative years! And they have a unique place in our minds and our hearts.

There is a saying a wise father who once told his son (and I might have said that at some point), “I may not always be right, but I will always be your father.” Those are great words, aren't they? They're not always easy, especially as children begin to become adults themselves. But children need to learn the important concept of “who is the parent here?” So, this idea of honoring and respecting father and mother is right there where it should be, in the very heart of the Ten Commandments!

Now let me tell you – and I know this is the hard part – honoring your father doesn't mean doing so only if he happens to earn your respect, or if he is an honorable person. Those things are great, of course. But I know there are people who would say "But my father was a scoundrel." or even "My father abused me." Those things are tough! Fathers are not always right. And the fact is, all of them "blow it" some of the time, and I know that I blew it some of the time, and unfortunately, some of them "blow it" all of the time!

Let me offer some help with that. And this comes from the second of these two famous passages. Jesus' disciples asked him how to pray. I'll bet they felt the way we all feel sometimes. There are times we feel our prayers are empty. There are times we feel no connection, and we wonder if anybody's listening. "How should we pray?" they asked. And the first thing Jesus said is, "Pray like this. 'Our Father...'" The very first instruction he gave them about prayer was about the nature of our relationship with God! God is our Heavenly Father.

God wants to have that close, familial role in our lives. In fact, all throughout the Bible, our relationship with God is described in those same kinds of intimate family terms. So that's the very first thing Jesus told them about prayer. Remember the Father/Child relationship. That's what God wants!

Let me suggest to you that God can fill that role for those of us who have had bad or non-existent relationships with less than honorable fathers. God can heal the concept of father for those for whom it has been damaged.

There are those in the "inclusive language" world who would have us not use male references for God. And I'm not saying there aren't valid reasons for that. It may well be limiting God to confine him to just one gender. People have argued against it was when someone would say, "we shouldn't use such terms because some people had bad father experiences." I would say "Wait a minute! God as 'Heavenly Father' can heal those experiences for us!" I believe that and I believe God has that power! In fact, I would say that God is our first father! He is the perfect father! The best we earthly fathers can hope for is to be like our Heavenly Father. He is the ultimate role model! If we can emulate him, we will do well! And I will add here not just us earthly fathers but all of God's children.

And let me say again that it was Jesus' idea to call God father. He taught his disciples in his first lesson about prayer that we are talking with a God who wants for us a close familial relationship. He even talked about praying to God "Abba Father." That was a close, personal term, much like our word "Dad" or even "Daddy." Think about that in terms of our prayer or our concept of God. Too often our concept of God is one of him being aloof, far away, uncaring, and far above anything as trivial as having a relationship with the likes of us!

So, in closing, let me suggest that we use this day – Fathers' Day – to honor our fathers. Let me suggest that we use this day to remind ourselves that learning to choose that respect and honor is what makes us respectful and honoring people. Let's use this day and ideas to go beyond honoring just our fathers (and mothers) but we honor and respect all people. That's what helps us to "live long in the land." And let us use this day also to remind ourselves of our relationship with God, and the nature of that relationship. Let us be thankful for not only our earthly fathers, but also for our Heavenly Father!