

June 21, 2015
Father's Day 2015
Genesis 37:1-4
Ward Cleaver's Curse

Opening words: Last month I told you Mother's Day was big business. According to the Chicago Tribune, the average American spent \$172.63 on their mother this year. That is up \$10 from last year. That means Americans spent a total of \$21.2 billion on Mother's Day. Father's Day is big business too, but not quite as big. According to the National Retail Federation, the average American will spend \$115.57 on their fathers. As a country, we will spend \$12.5 billion on Father's Day. This is the breakdown:

- 64.1% of children will get their father a card
- 41.5% of children will get their father a new apparel item, like a tie (\$1.8 billion)
- 42.6% of children will get take their father on an outing, like lunch (\$2.5 billion)
- \$1.6 billion will be spent on electronic gifts
- \$336 million on tools

How are you going to honor your father?

On this Father's Day, we find ourselves in the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis. The story is a familiar one, the day Joseph received his colorful coat from his father, Jacob. It must have been a great day for him, but it wasn't so great for his eleven brothers. Good fathers love their children equally, but Jacob loved his sons unequally. Verse three says it clearly, "Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons because he was born in his old age." Who was your father's favorite in your family? Our scripture lesson for today is Genesis 37:1-4. Let me call this message *Ward Cleaver's Curse*.

Genesis 37:1-4 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

² This is the account of Jacob's family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Neil Kennedy once said, "*There is no greater influence in the lives of your children than the words you speak over them. The blessing of the father is incredibly potent and powerful. Your words give your children potential. As their father, you are prophesying their future!*" Speaking as a father, I couldn't agree more. If you can agree with those words, say, "**Amen!**"

The Unrealistic

How many of you remember Ward Cleaver? You have to be my age or older to remember him. He was the television father of the show, *Leave It to Beaver*. The show ran from 1957-1963. I just remember it as a rerun. Ward was an exceptional father, husband and community leader. He seemed to have a simple answer to all the family's problems. There is no other way to say it. Ward was a good man, but he was also a lucky man. Because, he was married to June. She was a sweetheart. She did all the housework in her dress and high heels. She was always baking cookies for their two sons, Walter and Theodore. Ward and June called them Wally and the Beaver. If I remember correctly, Wally had two close friends, Lumpy and Eddie Haskell. (Eddie was just simply a jerk.) Beaver had two friends, Larry Mondello and Whitey. I will never forget the episode where Beaver fell in love with his teacher, Miss Landers. I always liked *Leave It to Beaver* because all their problems were solved in 30 minutes. Do you wish you could solve all your problems in 30 minutes? You know it is true. No one questioned Ward's love for his family. No one questioned his future employment. He had no skeletons hiding in his closet. He had no addictions. No one questioned the fact that Ward Cleaver was the foundation of his family. Ward Cleaver was the perfect husband and father. Can I be honest with you? I wish my children could have been raised in the Cleaver home. My home (and yours) had too many imperfections.

They tell us that good fathers possess twelve characteristics. Ward Cleaver seemed to have them all. I am short a few. These are the twelve:

1. He's a good disciplinarian
2. He allows to let his children make their own mistakes
3. He is open-minded
4. He teaches his children to appreciate things
5. He accepts the fact his children aren't exactly like him
6. He spends quality time with his children
7. He leads of example
8. He is supportive and loyal
9. He challenges his children
10. He teaches his children lessons
11. He protects his family
12. He shows unconditional love

Of the twelve characteristics listed, how many do you possess? I may have half, but Ward Cleaver had them all. I might as well admit it. I don't really care for Ward Cleaver. In comparison to him, I am a really bad dad. Sociologists tell us Ward Cleaver and other television parents of the early 1960's cast a curse on our society. They were just too perfect and they set the standard too high. There was no way I could live up to Ward Cleaver's standards. Have you ever felt guilty because you were not the perfect parent? Your house wasn't always clean. Your meals came out of a bag. Your money was limited and your patience grew short. Have you ever wondered if you have scarred your children in some way? After all, you weren't exactly Ward Cleaver. This is the truth:

There is one great difference between Ward Cleaver and you. The Cleaver family lived in a world created by the entertainment industry, and we live in the real world. If you ever felt guilty about your parenting skills, say, "**Amen!**"

The Biblical

One of the reasons the Bible speaks to us is that it wasn't created in Hollywood. The Bible is about real people, who lived in the real world. As I researched this message I discovered there are very few perfect fathers in the Bible. Most had some imperfection. Just think about it for a moment. Adam had no role model to follow, but he handled the murder of Cain killing Abel. The problem was, he got an eviction notice and had to leave the garden because he had sinned. Noah saved his family from the flood, but later was found in his birthday suit in the tent. He ends up cursing his son and sends his descendants into slavery. Abraham was the father of an entire nation. The problem was, Isaac wasn't born until his old age. Abram couldn't wait and tried to take matters into his own hands, having a child with a woman who wasn't his wife.

In the scripture lesson for today, we are told that Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was not a perfect father. Look at the text with me. According to the scriptures, Jacob had twelve sons by four different women. To say the least, he had a very complex life. The second-to-last of his sons was Joseph, the one who led God's people into Egypt to escape the famine. It is not easy having an older brother. It is harder having ten older brothers. It must be really, really difficult being dad's favorite with ten older brothers. Wanting to promote his favorite son, Jacob gives Joseph a new coat, one filled with many colors. That coat did nothing but cause problems. It made Joseph the target of his older brothers' hatred. Do you remember the story? Seizing their first opportunity, they grabbed their younger brother and sold him into slavery, telling Dad he had been killed. The rest is history. There is no shortage of blame in the story. Joseph was arrogant. The ten brothers were hateful. Jacob failed to love his children equally. Jacob should have been more like Ward Cleaver. Ward Cleaver loved Wally and Beaver equally. Do you love your children equally? If you are looking for the perfect father, stop. Except for the fictitious Ward Cleaver, there are no perfect fathers. If you will admit your father had some imperfections, say, "**Amen!**" If you will admit you have some imperfections as a father, say, "**Amen!**"

The Realistic

My father, Ronald Adams, was born in Ashtabula, Ohio in 1920. His father, my grandfather, Roger Adams, had a variety of jobs during the Great Depression. The family lived on next to nothing. My father was just a child during the depression, but the poverty of those years never left him. He was always saving for a rainy day and never spent money on the extras of life. He didn't even like spending money on the basics.

On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese Empire. My father was twenty-one years old. He and his brother, my Uncle Carlisle, were two of the first

to volunteer for military service from Ashtabula. My father joined the Army and went to Europe. My uncle joined the Navy and went to the Pacific. Like many, my father rarely talked about World War II. He was in the medical corps and started off in North Africa. In time, he moved up the boot of Italy, as the war progressed. He must have experienced some horrible things. When victory came in Europe, he prepared to move to Manila. The day before they were to leave, the orders were canceled because the first of the atomic bombs was dropped. When the war ended, my father arranged to stay in Europe as long as possible. It seemed to be a wise choice. He was in his mid-twenties, single, uneducated and unemployed. He saw many things most only see in pictures. Those may have been the happiest days of his life.

When he returned home, he used his G.I. Bill to get an education. My father was an interior decorator by trade. He first went to the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, then he went to the New York School of Interior Design. It was while he was in New York that he met my mother. They met at a gathering for young people who wanted to meet other young people at the Marble Collegiate Church. At first, my mother wasn't interested in him because she thought he was Catholic. When she found out he was Protestant, he "had some potential". They were married at a Dutch Reformed Church in Brooklyn and had their wedding reception at my grandparent's home around the corner. They spent their wedding night at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. He always referred to her as "the big city woman." Looking back, I don't know why they decided to leave the Big Apple.

They would move to a magical place called Warren, Ohio. They bought their first home when my twin sisters, Susan and Janet, were born. I was born seven years later. My mother was a dietitian who worked at Trumbull Memorial Hospital. My father was a buyer for Carlisle-Allen Department Store. As a child, I thought our home was boring. It wasn't until I became an adult, that I discovered it was exceptional. Our home was always stable and my parents rarely fought. My parents went to church every Sunday and to work every day. In those days loyalty was a big deal. My father stayed with the store for nearly forty years. The end of his career was sad. On the day he retired, no one seemed to notice. The generation that hired him had passed.

On this Father's Day, can I be honest with you? I never felt close to my father, because I never felt accepted by him. Except for our genes, we had very little in common. He loved music, so the old turntable stereo was turning away at a high volume. I inherited my mother's musical gene, very little music appreciation. I was often the brunt of his jokes for his stand-up routine. I think it is better to be yelled at and taken seriously, then laughed at and dismissed. I can't remember standing next to my father and not feeling nervous. I wish my father would have turned the music off and talked to me. I yearned to have a father like Ward Cleaver. Someone to take me fishing, someone to take me to a ball game. Someone who liked me. When my father died, I grieved. However, I didn't grieve for the relationship I lost. I grieved for the relationship I would never have. I promised myself, I would be a better father than he was. I pray that I am.

You may remember. Back in May, I attended a funeral. My sister's mother-in-law died. Mrs. Naylor was 92 years old and she was part of my life for decades. When the service was over, I drove to the cemetery. The parting words were given in a mausoleum. It was not my first trip to that mausoleum. It is the same mausoleum that holds the remains of my parents. Ironically, Mrs. Naylor was placed near my parents. I said this last month too. As I stood by my parent's names on the wall, three things struck me. First, time goes fast. My father died nineteen years ago. How could it be nineteen years? How fast will the next nineteen years go? I wonder where I will be nineteen years from now. Second, I have a good life. I can trace all the best things in my life back to my parents. My mother made sure our home was filled with love and security. My parents gave me what every child really wants and needs - stability. Third, the time has come for me to stop being critical of my father and start remembering him with grace. In my opinion, as his only son, he was not the perfect father. He was never comfortable with younger generations because he wasn't comfortable with aging. He was not Ward Cleaver. When you are young, you look for perfect parents. Time teaches us, the best you can do is do your best. I like to think he did his best. Perfection is impossible. I'm doing the best I can with my children. I hope they don't look for perfection. I have heard it said, *"It is much easier to become a father than to be one."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

The history of Father's Day can be traced back to ancient Babylon 4,000 years ago. However, the story of the America's Father's Day is not quite so old. It can be traced back to 1909. For it on Mother's Day of that year that Sonora Louise Smart Dodd sat in church with her father. It must have been a difficult sermon to hear because her mother died years earlier during childbirth. She and her five siblings were raised with love and care by their father, William Jackson Smart, a Civil War veteran. The 27 year old Dodd wondered why there wasn't a Father's Day and began a crusade to establish one. She began by enlisting the support of the Spokane Ministerial Association and the YMCA. They declared the first Father's Day to be June 19, 1910. It was a big success. Soon other communities and states began to recognize Father's Day. President Woodrow Wilson supported the idea of a national Father's Day in 1916 and President Calvin Coolidge did the same in 1924. Some things don't change. Nothing happened in Washington DC for decades. It took Lyndon Johnson in 1966 to sign a presidential proclamation making the third Sunday in June Father's Day. Six years later, 1972, 58 years after the establishment of Mother's Day, Richard Nixon signed a law making Father's Day a national holiday.