

June 19, 2016

Father's Day 2016

What Fathers Really Want

Genesis 22:1-12

Opening words: Do you remember the story? The history of Father's Day can be traced back to ancient Babylon 4,000 years ago. However, the story of the American Father's Day is not quite so old. It can be traced back to 1909. For it was on Mother's Day of that year, 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. That was 106 years ago today. 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, our man in Washington, 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.

Today we are in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. Do you remember Abraham's story? When we are first introduced to him, his name is Abram. That name means "the father of many." Of all the people on the face of the earth, Abram caught God's eye. Not because of his sinless nature. Instead, he caught God's eye because of his character. In other words, he was a man who simply wanted to please God. In one of the great scenes in the Bible, God promised Abram that he would someday be a father of a great nation. In time, his name is changed from Abram, the father of many, to Abraham, the father of the multitude. Everything sounds great except for one glaring fact. The father of the multitude, Abraham, has no children. Does any of this sound familiar? It is as true today as it was then; God does things in God's time. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, welcome their first-born into the world at the age of ninety-nine and ninety-eight. That birth not only ruined their retirement years ☺ but it demonstrated the power of God. They named their long-awaited son Isaac. All of this is necessary to understand this morning's scripture lesson.

When Isaac was twelve years old, God decided to test Abraham. God must be number one in your life. The father-son team head off to make a sacrifice. Isaac does not know until the last second that he is the sacrifice. In the end, the life of a goat was taken and the boy is spared. It is a cruel story in many ways, but it does tell us what fathers really

want for Father's Day. Our scripture reading for today is Genesis 22:1-12. Let me call this message *What Fathers Really Want*.

Genesis 22:1-12 Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

According to the NRF, the National Retail Federation, the average American will spend \$113.80 to honor their father this Father's Day. Let me say that again. The average American will spend \$113.80 to honor their father this Father's Day. That figure is actually down from last year. Last year, the average American spent \$119.84. Our country will spend a total of \$12.5 billion on Father's Day this year. That figure sounds big until you compare it to the \$21.4 billion Americans spent on Mother's Day. What are you planning on giving or receiving this year?

This is the breakdown:

- \$592 million on automotive accessories
- \$707 million on personal care items
- \$710 million on sporting goods
- \$755 million on tools
- \$1.8 billion on gift certificates or gift cards
- \$1.8 billion on clothing
- \$1.7 billion on electronics
- \$2.5 billion on a special outing

That list contains the items fathers want for Father's Day, but that list doesn't contain the items fathers *really* want for Father's Day. There is a great difference between what we want and what we really want. Today, I want to talk about what fathers really want for Father's Day. They are found in this morning's scripture reading. This is my plan. I am going to tell you quickly the things fathers really want for Father's Day and end by telling you about my father. I believe you will find those three wants in his story. If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Fathers want to be respected

First, fathers want to be respected. In the Genesis story, Isaac both respected and trusted his father. He even let him tie him up and lay him on the altar. Let me say this clearly. Respect should never be given blindly. Respect must be earned. Fatherhood is not simply a biological act. Fatherhood is a relationship. How much time do you spend with your children? I believe, if you don't know five of your children's friends, then you don't know your children. What are you doing with your life to earn your children's respect? Tickets to a ball game are nice for Father's Day, but respect is better. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**"

Fathers want to be needed

Second, fathers want to be needed. Isaac asked Abraham about the sacrifice. In other words, he looked to his father for help. There is only one thing worse than being overly needed. That is not being needed at all. I have a friend who has two daughters. One lives on the west coast and the other on the east. I asked him how often he hears from them. He answered, "Not enough. I raised them to be independent women and they became independent woman. I hate it. It would be nice if they needed me every once in a while." A new electronic gadget would be nice for Father's Day, but to be needed would be better. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**"

Fathers want to experience grace

Third, fathers want to experience grace. Isaac must have needed some serious counseling after that day. He must have had a million questions and he must have had some sleepless nights. Yet, the relationship between Abraham and Isaac moved on. He forgave his father. I have never known a perfect father. However, I have known countless fathers who made mistakes and who needed to be given. I have known fathers who have experienced grace. Maybe it is time you forgave your father? A new shirt and tie would be nice for Father's Day, but grace would be better. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**" This is my father's story:

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 never handled money easily. He was always saving for a rainy day. He was miserable. He ate macaroni and cheese in the

dark, not because he liked it. He ate macaroni and cheese in the dark to save money. Saving money was one his great preoccupations.

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. My uncle joined the Navy. 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. He died with those tales. When the war ended 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 itself ended, my father arranged to stay in Europe as long as possible. He wanted to do some sightseeing. 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. He 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 Italian. That meant 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.

In time, 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 over thirty years. On the day he retired, no one noticed.

On this Father's Day, can I be honest with you? I never felt close to my father. 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 have very little music tolerance. I just don't enjoy it. It is not because I am ignorant or shallow. It is not because I don't hear it, so please don't turn it up. When it comes to music, I just don't appreciate it. I have asked the question a million times: why do we always have to have music? Why can't it just be quiet?

My father showed very little tolerance with me because I was non-musical. 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 be dismissed. I can't remember a single time standing next to my father not feeling nervous. He never hit me, but I was always ready for his backhand. I yearned to have a relationship with my father, but it never came. I wish my father would have turned the music off and just talked to me. Every televised football game illustrated the problem. At halftime, my dad ran into the room to watch the band; I left to get a sandwich. He cursed because they never showed enough of the band. I silently celebrated at his frustration. Living in the same house, we were a million miles apart. I felt like he was closer to the unknown person in the trumpet section than he was to me. I never asked him for any kind of help because I didn't want to be rejected, again. When my father died, I grieved. However, I didn't grieve for the relationship I had 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.

Over a year ago, 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 closing words were given in the mausoleum. It was not my first trip to that mausoleum. It is the same mausoleum that holds the remains of my parents. Ironically, Mr. and Mrs. Naylor are across from my parents.

As I stood by my parents' names on the wall, three things struck me. First, time goes fast. My father died twenty years ago. How could it be twenty years? How fast will the next twenty years go? I wonder where I will be twenty years from now. I wonder if I will still be alive? 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. 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. Time has taught me, the best you can do is to do your best. I like to think my father 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 hope they look at me with grace. 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!**" Happy Father's Day!