

The Father Figure of Freedom by Jeff Strite

Deuteronomy 18:15-18:20

James Dobson once told of the time his 2 year old son Ryan said grace. He said: "He had watched his mother and me pray before we ate each meal, but he had never been asked to say grace. One day, when I was out of town on a business trip, Shirley spontaneously turned to our toddler and asked if he would like to pray. The invitation startled him, but he folded his little hands, bowed his head and said reverently, "I love you Daddy, Amen."

(James Dobson, Focus On The Family Magazine April 07 p. 18)

Now, what was little 2 year old Ryan saying?

Yes, he was saying he loved his daddy.

And yes, he was saying he loved God.

But he was also saying something else.

To his little 2 year old mind - his daddy was God.

Now, that's not good theology.

But it's not far off.

You see, earthly fathers were intended by God to be examples of who He is!

That's why the Bible often refers to God as our FATHER.

Speaking of God, Isaiah declared

"...you, LORD, are OUR FATHER, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Isaiah 63:16

Jesus taught us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify YOUR FATHER which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

The Lord's Prayer starts out

"Our FATHER which art in heaven..." Matthew 6:9

And Paul wrote "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, FATHER." Romans 8:15

God Is Our Heavenly Father, and thus it's obvious that He meant for earthly fathers to be physical representations of who He is.

In the days of Moses, God was the FATHER of Israel.

But Moses was God's representative.

And because of that, Moses became God's physical "Father Figure" for the nation of Israel.

Thus, when Moses spoke, he spoke the words of God.

When Moses led he led where God directed.

Every aspect of Moses' life reflected the life God wanted Israel to imitate.

You see, that's what a FATHER FIGURE is all about.

Father figures are to help us grow up to be something special.

And earthly fathers were meant by God to be FATHER FIGURES to us of who HE IS, and to model for us the kind of people WE ought to become so we can glorify our Heavenly Father.

Now, at this point, someone might say: "Well, Jeff you're being sexist in saying that."

I'm not being sexist... I'm being realistic.

Not only is this concept Biblically true (to say that earthly fathers were meant to be models of our heavenly Father) it is SCIENTIFICALLY true.

ILLUS: According to a study done in Britain a few years back, (Urmee Khan Telegraph.co.uk 10/1/08) children whose fathers spent more time with them had a higher IQ and were more socially mobile than those who had received little attention.

AND, the differences were still detectable by the age of 42.

According to another study, ("Being a Good Dad When You Didn't Have One", p. 19)

Children from FATHERLESS homes are:

- 5 times more likely to commit suicide;
- 32 times more likely to run away;
- 20 times more likely to have behavioral disorders;
- 14 times more likely to commit rape;
- 9 times more likely to drop out of high school;
- 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances;
- and 9 times more likely to end up in state-operated institutions.

The point?

God designed fathers to have a significant impact on their children.

And when earthly fathers don't live up to their responsibilities... it has a disastrous effect.

But when they DO live up to being God's "father figure" THEN they greatly benefit kids.

ILLUS: George Foreman grew up never knowing who his father was. When he got married he ended up having several children, 5 of which were boys. Do you know what he did for his 5 sons?

He named them all GEORGE!!! (ALL 5 of them)

He never wanted his boys to wonder who their daddy was.

He understood the value of a "Father Figure"

And God understands the value of a "father figure" too, and so God has made specific promises to fathers that He will bless them if they do it right.

In the 10 commandments, God warns the fathers:

"You shall not bow down to (idols) or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..."

BUT THEN HE makes this promise

"... but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my

commandments."Exodus 20:5-6

God warns fathers that there are serious outcomes for those who hate Him and do things contrary to His will. Not only will they pay a serious price for their sins... but so will their sons and grandsons and their great grandsons.

HOWEVER, if these disobedient fathers decide that that was not the smartest thing they'd ever done - if they repent of their sins and turn their lives around and serve Him - then God will fix what they'd done and bring blessings upon thousands of their future generations of children.

Isn't that a great promise!

In other words, BAD fathers can bring bad things on their kids,
but, if they're GOOD fathers... they can bring BLESSINGS on their children.

And an excellent example of this is related in the 11th chapter of I Kings.
There, we're told that Solomon angered God by worshiping the gods of his many wives, and that God had warned him twice not to do that. But Solomon didn't listen... and so God said:

"Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.

Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." I Kings 11:11-13

Did you see what God was saying to Solomon there?
Solomon sinned against God and was going to lose his kingdom.
But not during his lifetime.
WHY? (Because of his father David)

Then God tells Solomon that the kingdom would be torn from his son...
but even then his son would still keep ONE TRIBE.
WHY? (because his father David)

In other words, because of DAVID's obedience to God, Solomon's father had created something of an umbrella effect over his children and grandchildren. That's what God had promised when He said he would show "love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

And that's the primary reason why God sets high standards for Elders.
A man cannot be an Elder if he is not a good father to his children.
Why? Because Elders are to be the examples to the men of the congregation this part of their lives must be something other men can look up to and imitate.

But what if you haven't had a good father?
Or what if you haven't had ANY father in your life?
Well, God has an answer for that as well.

In Psalm 68:5 God is described as "A father to the fatherless..."
Thus, if you haven't a good father/ or any father at all...
God wants to fix that.
He wants to be the father figure in your life and fix what has been broken by being your
Father when you have no Godly earthly father in your life.

Now let's return to our text.

For the better part of 40 years, Moses has led the people of Israel.
For the better part of 40 years, Moses has been God's FATHER FIGURE for Israel.
And NOW God makes Moses & Israel a specific promise:
"I will raise up for (Israel) a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will
put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to
account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name."
Deuteronomy 18:18-19

God's going to raise up a prophet LIKE MOSES.
It will be an Israelite who will LEAD ISRAEL.
It will be a man who will be the FATHER FIGURE for Israel.

Oh?... Well, who could this prophet be?
That's right – it was Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.

And that's exactly how the Israelites read that promise.

When John the Baptist was baptizing people down at the Jordan River the priests and
Levites asked him who he was, he replied "well, I'm not the Christ"
They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"
He said, "I am not."
"Are you the PROPHET?..." John 1:21

Why ask if John was "the prophet"?
Because they were remembering the promise God had made to Moses back in Deuteronomy
18
"I will raise up for (Israel) a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites"
They were looking for the coming Messiah...
and they just knew that Messiah would be the promised prophet.
AND THEY WERE RIGHT!!!

In Acts 3, we're told about Peter and John going to the Temple to pray when they encounter
and heal a man who was lame from birth. That naturally drew a huge crowd... and Peter
preached to them. And in his sermon he said this:

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

Did you catch what he was saying there?

Peter was plainly saying: Jesus was the PROPHET promised by Moses.

This prophet would be like Moses in leading God's people.

This prophet would be like Moses in teaching God's people.

And this prophet would be like Moses in being "the FATHER FIGURE" for God's people.

Jesus was THE father figure.

Jesus told Philip: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father..." John 14:9

Now Jesus is many things to many people.

In Ephesians, we're told that Jesus is an example of what good husband should be like.

But Jesus is also our example of what a real Godly father should look like.

So allow me to explore that idea for a moment:

Did Jesus love children?

Of course He did. At one point He said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me..."

Did Jesus protect the weak and struggling people of Israel.

You bet He did.

In fact, about the only folks He was rough on were the bullies who beat up on God's children. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law.

And that's exactly how a Godly earthly father live.

He should love his children... and protect them from bullies and dangers in this world.

But Jesus also modeled another aspect of being a good father.

He refused to say things that our Heavenly Father wouldn't say.

Jesus said: "... I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." John 8:28

What Jesus is saying is this:

If the Heavenly Father says it... that's what I'm going to say.

And in the same way, a Godly earthly father would say:

If God's Word says it... that's the way it's going to be, because that's what the Heavenly

Father has said.

- God says stealing is wrong. So son, we're going to go back to that store and return the object you took... and you're going to apologize for that.
- God says honor your father and mother. So daughter, you mocked your mother and cursed at her. And I will not allow that. You will admit to her that you were wrong and ask forgiveness.

ILLUS: Now this next is a story of how a Godly father should conduct himself, but it's a story of a preacher, who's a friend of mine, whose cousin was living with her boyfriend. He really loved his cousin, but what she was doing was wrong... and so he told her so. He explained that God hated that kind of behavior, and he told her this in love.

Isn't that what a Godly father would have done?

Of course it is.

But as soon as the rest of the family heard of what he'd done, they became angry with HIM because he'd "judged her."

Had he?

Well, he'd made a judgment based on Scripture, just like a Godly father should have done.

You see, a Godly father does judge.

He makes judgments all the time about what is right and what is wrong based upon what God has already set forth in His Word. And a Godly father tells his children when they've done right, and when they're done wrong. A Godly father expects his children to obey and honor the HEAVENLY FATHER, because if they don't... they could very well end up going to hell, and he loves them too much to let that happen.

Can I hear an "AMEN"???

A Godly father speaks only what His Heavenly Father has spoken.

Now, there's one last thing about Jesus that models what a Godly father should do.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus "... always lives to intercede for (us)."

Did you know that?

Did you know that right now, Jesus is in the very presence of the Heavenly Father, talking about you.

He's mentioning you by name.

And He is interceding for you.

And that's what an Godly earthly father should do for his children.

He intercedes for them.

He prays for them.

He talks to God about them.

He thanks God for them.

And he asks God to guide them.

And sometimes, he even prays that God will make their lives uncomfortable... because they've stopped listening to him and they've gone off to live sinful lives.
But a Godly father always prays for his children.

CLOSE: Back in 1976, John Ashcroft was elected as a US Senator from the state of Missouri. Just before he was to be sworn in as a US senator, he met with his family and friends for prayer.

As they gathered around him, he saw his dad trying to get up from the coach. Since his father was now an old and frail man, Ashcroft told him,
"That's okay, Dad. You don't have to stand up to pray for me."
His father replied "I'm not struggling to stand up. I'm struggling (pause) to kneel."

His father was struggling to kneel.

And that's what a Godly father does... he struggles.

A Godly father struggles to be the kind of father God wants him to be.

A Godly father struggles to love and protect his children the way he should.

A Godly father struggles to stand for righteousness for his kids.

And a Godly father struggles to always kneel before his HEAVENLY Father to intercede for his children.

A Godly father realizes that being the kind of man he should be, requires that he constantly struggles to do better and be more for his children.

But you can't be the Godly kind of father you want to be if you don't first belong to Jesus.
That's why we offer an invitation at the end of every service...