FATHER’S DAY

FATHERHOOD – NO GUARENTEES

Here we are at Father’s Day again, I am sure some of you father’s are like some of us mothers on our special day, afraid that the message will point out how miserably we have failed as parents, sending us away wondering why we ever became parents in the first place. Dashed of any hope of ever having “normal” adults of our children when our full time parenting days are done – you needn’t be afraid this is not that kind of sermon! We are going to look at some fathers in the Bible, look at their lives and then see how their children turned out.

Our first father is Adam, God’s first man, created in His image. Adam sinned and was kicked out of the garden. From a perfect man to a fallen sinner, not a very good start to parenting. Adam and Eve had Cain, Abel and Seth, plus several other sons and daughters. Cain committed the first murder because he was jealous of Able and angry with God because God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected his. Cain and Able were raised basically the same, Cain and Able knew what was acceptable to God, but Cain chose to bring an offering that was not acceptable. The sacrifice of Cain was not acceptable because of Cain’s attitude and lack of faith in God. Cain was a very good example of sinful man – he was fueled by jealousy. Cain killed Able but in

Genesis 4:9 when God asked Cain where Able was he lied to God saying he didn’t know. Had he picked up these bad habits and attitudes because of the sinfulness of his father? How could Cain and Able be so different, when raised basically the same? Have you ever asked yourself that question about your own children?

Next we are going to look at Aaron, Aaron was the brother of Moses, the spokesperson for Moses and instrumental in getting the Israelites set free from bondage in Egypt. Aaron does not appear to be a very strong man, when Moses was on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments; Aaron not only let, but even helped the Israelites make a golden calf to worship. Aaron and Elishaba had four sons, the first two sons, Nadab and Abihu were high priest like Aaron but in Leviticus 10:1&2 – *Aaron’s sons Nadah and Abihu took their censors, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. -* Here we have two men that were fully aware of how they were to offer incense to the Lord but they brought unauthorized, possibly even pagan ritual into the tabernacle and the Lord sent out fire and killed them. Showing His authority and not allowing sinful acts to be committed. Eleazar and Ithamar were Aaron’s other two sons; they were also priests but seemed to follow the rules and obeyed the commands just fine. So what made Nadab and Abihu act in such a way to anger God and cause him to kill them? They were taught the same rules and laws but chose not to follow them. They must have thought they were the above the Law and God’s commands and we can see where that kind of thinking got them. Going back to Aaron although a man of God, he was easily swayed by the people and here we also see was not in control of his sons. Four sons, two good and two bad how can that be so?

Eli is also an interesting father, he was flawless in his service to God but lax as a father, he had no control over his sons, Phineas and Hophni. These guys were the worst, not only did they take sacrificial meat before it was dedicated but also laid with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle. Eli rebuked his sons in

I Samuel 2:22-25 but it was too little too late. Now the interesting person in all of this is little Samuel, the son of Hannah, the son that Hannah had prayed so hard for in I Samuel 1 and then dedicates to the Lord and leaves in the Temple for Eli to raise. That would not seem like a very good idea, in the light of how Eli’s sons were acting but as I Samuel 2:26 reports that Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men. Samuel turned out just fine. Perhaps Eli saw the error of his ways with his own sons and endeavored to do better with Samuel. In the end Eli’s sons were literally the death of him. Eli’s sons had brought the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines, and then a messenger returned in I Samuel 4:16-18 – *He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.” Eli asked, “What happened, my son?” The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phineas are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.” 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.”* Here we see Eli, the dedicated servant of the Lord overtaken not by the death of his sons but the loss of the Ark of God. We cannot fault Eli for his dedication to the Lord on one hand but was Eli like many parents today, so taken up in their work that they have no time to properly bring up their children? We all have to have jobs in this modern age, both parent more than likely work outside the home, the trick is to balance work and time with the children and that is not always easy. There was a survey done several years ago that came up with the conclusion that especially fathers spend only 2 minutes a day with their children TWO MINUTES! We brush our teeth longer than that!

Samuel grew up and became the earliest of the great prophets after Moses, but he too was not a successful parent in I Samuel 8:1-3 *“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah (a BUY jah), and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted brides and perverted justice.”*

Where have we heard of this kind of misguided youth? – Eli’s sons and Samuel’s sons were almost mirror images of each other in their evil ways. The wickedness of Samuel’s sons prompted the elders to ask for a king, like other nations. The sinfulness of children may not turn out to be all bad, as we move on to our next father, Jacob; we can see how God used the sinfulness of Jacob’s sons in selling Joseph to Egypt to save and entire nation.

We slide back in time a ways with Jacob, but in this scenario of Jacob should be near King David, who is the next father after Jacob because they both had sons they favored. Jacob’s favored son was Joseph, who was spoiled and had all the dreams about the other brothers bowing down to him. We don’t have to try very hard to imagine how that made the other brothers feel, this spoiled, pampered brat thought that he was going to be someone that they would bow down to? Jacob did not hide the fact that Joseph was his favorite, with the gift of the coat of many colors, the brothers hated Joseph, and in human terms probably had a right to do so, and they hated him enough to kill him. As the story in Genesis 37:12-36 tells us but it is Rueben who saves his life, they stage Joseph’s death and sell him to the Midianites and relate a story to their father of how a wild animal killed him. We know the rest of the story, although Jacob did not exhibit the best of parental skills here the sinfulness of his sons to sell their brother, then lie to their father is definitely in 21st century terms a dysfunctional family. God had great and wonderful plans for Joseph and all the tribes of Israel. We see a completely different Joseph from the one sold into slavery, to the one who welcomed his brothers into his court with love and gentleness in Genesis 45:1-14. Holding no grudges this Joseph saw the whole picture, the why and the wherefore of his life. To gain insight into each of Jacob’s sons, Genesis 49:1-28 is interesting reading, along with the blessing for each son, Jacob or Israel as he is now called gave insight into the future of each son.

King David is our next father, he like Eli and Samuel were exemplary in their anointed tasks but were not the best parents in both word and example. David is known as a righteous king but he was prone to sin as all humans are, his most popular sin is that of the adultery committed with Bathsheba. David confessed that sin and God forgave him but the child conceived, died. As Nathan the prophet tells David in

II Samuel 12:14.

We have another incident in the family of David where his oldest son Amnon (AM nun), raped and humiliated his half-sister Tamar and this brought the wrath of her full brother Absalom down on Amnon. Absalom killed Amnon and in fear of David’s wrath Absalom fled. He was later allowed to return but then plotted to overthrow his father’s throne. But a spy of David’s was in the camp and advised Absalom in such a way that allowed David to assemble his veteran army and Absalom’s new army was no match. Absalom was talented with many abilities but was spoiled, impatient, and overly ambitious, magnified by vanity and pride led to his tragic death. Even at all of this David lamented in 2 Samuel 18:33 “O my son, Absalom-my son, my son Absalom – if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” even when our children disappoint us, we still love them and grieve over the loss of them whether in death or in separation because of rebellion.

We see two fathers, David and Jacob, both with favored sons, but the outcome of the favoritism is different. Absalom turned against his father and tried to overthrow him that led to his death, Joseph on the other hand although hated by his brothers, in slavery was exulted by God into a position of authority and thus able to save the tribes of Israel from the famine. God’s will is done once again.

Solomon was also David’s son; Solomon was only 20 years old in I Kings 3:4-15 when he became king of Israel When Solomon sacrificed at Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon and asked him, “What shall I give thee?” Wow what a list of possibilities that could have opened up but even at this point Solomon was wise, he asked for an understanding heart to judge the children of Israel and the ability to tell good from evil, that is wisdom in a nutshell. God granted Solomon his request and along with that riches and honor if he would be the kind of king his father David had been. Solomon prospered as a wise man, others came from afar to ask advice of Solomon, and he had a beautiful temple built among other buildings. Solomon set up commercial trade with Egypt and Syria. Even with a strong army he wisely kept peace with treaties. But as with all humans Solomon had his faults, with all the trade agreements came the influx of foreign women in the court making many demands on the king. He allowed them to practice their pagan religions and he even practiced these idolatrous acts, the beginning of the end for Solomon’s reign. We see that even Solomon in all his wisdom did not keep himself from sin and fell into the practices of what was going on around him. We too can find it difficult at times to keep from being swayed by the things around us that can lure us into sinful practices, billboards, TV commercials; bars on every corner can become overwhelming especially to the young. It is hard to keep our children from these temptations since everyone is doing it. That is where our example is important but it still is impossible to protect them completely. They grow up and have to make their own decisions and mistakes.

We have looked at many fathers and there are many more fathers in the Bible that we could look at and would probably find that they too were human and sinned and let their children down or the children let their parents down. Adam sinned letting God down and the we see in Genesis 4 where Cain killed Able. The question we need to answer for parenting – When children go wrong, the first finger is pointed at the parents, is it the parent’s fault? God didn’t blame Adam, he could have said to Cain since your father sinned and you followed in his footsteps and sinned now you are cursed etc. But God made Cain responsible for his own actions; no fingers were pointed at anyone for the blame of Cain’s failures. We are responsible for our own mistakes when we reach the age of accountability. Cain made his own choices and now had to live with those choices. That is why we need to choose carefully the path we take in life and are willing to submit to God and ask forgiveness so we are not alienated from God as Cain was.

Then Aaron, Eli, Samuel and David, all good at their, appointed and anointed jobs but were not the best fathers, as we mentioned before did they fall into the trap of being so busy that they had no time for their children? We see so much of that today with working parents, then to offset the time the children are with babysitters, parents get the children involved in every kind of activity. One of my sisters-in-law with their two youngest children had four places to be with two children on the same night! And that was a school night to boot. We need to be careful that activities and sports are kept in moderation so there is still time to be together as a family without outside distractions.

Jacob and David both favored children that always make things difficult. Parents should have all their children as favorites that are hard to do but different characteristics of each child can make each child a favorite in their own way.

There is an interesting thought here, these are all Old Testament fathers, there are only a few NT fathers, mentioned in the Bible, after the Genealogy of Jesus, in Matthew and Luke, and there are no other lists of Genealogy listed in the Bible. The New Testament is more orientated toward the family of God, not tracing human blood lines but creating a family through the Blood of Christ.

We all know that child rearing has no guarantees, not even Dr. Spock or Dr Dobson have all the answers, if they did there would be no children gone wrong. So how can we raise our children with any degree of hope of success, after all look at all these great Biblical men had little or no success as fathers? So why look at these fathers? God’s special people, all human, all sinners, but still they were loved and forgiven by God when they sought forgiveness. We are all special to God and will be treated the same by Him no matter what our sins are or how we faired at raising our children. There is still the fact that everyone has a choice, even raised to believe they still have the choice to accept or reject God.

What can we as Christians, not just fathers, but all Christians do to help children? Not just our own children but all children.

1. Love them, children need to know they are loved.
2. Care for and about them. Be genuinely interested in them.
3. Love one another. Parents love each other.
4. Christians love one another, and show that love.
5. Help young people believe in Jesus, by teaching them about Jesus and being good examples.
6. PRAY for our children and all children. Prayer sometimes is the only thing that we can do and we shouldn’t make it the last resort but the thing we do all the time.

If we work at combining all of these things for all children we encounter the world would be a better place to live. AMEN.