

July 26, 2009
Imitating our Father Sermon Series – Part 6 of 6

Great Faith Leaves a Legacy

Genesis 24

¹ Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. ² He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. ³ I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, ⁴ but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

As I brought out in the children's devotion, someone is always watching and learning from you.

It starts in preschool. Little Sammy comes home from school one day. He says a word he learned at school. But not from his teacher!

If you are a fifth grade boy, a kindergarten boy looks up to you.

A high school girl is the role model for the junior high girl down the street.

And of course, parents know that. Children often begin to walk and talk like their parents.

1. All of Us Leave a Legacy.

Now sometimes we can laugh about the "legacy" we leave others. But our legacy can have horrible consequences too.

In a recent *Time* magazine article, the authors spoke of the devastating effects of divorce on children:

On every single significant outcome related to short-term well-being and long-term success, children from intact, two-parent families outperform those from single-parent households. Longevity, drug abuse, school performance and dropout rates, teen pregnancy, criminal behavior and incarceration — if you can measure it, a sociologist has; and in all cases, the kids living with both parents drastically outperform the others.

Divorce leaves a horrible legacy for our children.

Or Google *Children of Alcoholics* and you learn that children of non-recovering alcoholics are more likely to become alcoholics themselves.

Or look up *Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them* and you find: "Children who witness resentment, anger, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, or physical violence walk on eggshells. The usual symptoms are: depression anxiety, School problems" and a whole list of others.

These legacies are terrifying to any parent, uncle, aunt, or grandparent.

In contrast, we know families that leave a great legacy. The two brothers John and Joel Rechlitz, the Milwaukee firefighters who rescued little David Harper from the burning SUV... their dad was a fireman too. What a legacy he left his boys, a legacy of self-sacrifice and courage.

Or in the Spiritual Life Survey that we took last spring, to the question, “Which of the following describe what was going on in your life when your faith began to become important to you” 66% of those most active in their faith said, “I was raised in a Christian home, faith was always important.” (page 9 of Appendix). Many of us can thank God for the great spiritual legacy that our parents left us.

One of the ways God at Mt. Sinai impressed upon his people the seriousness of sin was this statement about leaving a legacy:

“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, ¹⁰ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Deuteronomy 5:9,10).

We can pass on trouble to the following generations. I encourage you to read King David’s story with that in mind (2 Samuel 11-18). His adultery with Bathsheba had disastrous effects on his family – incest, murder, rebellion. The sins of the father were passed on to his children.

Or we can be like Abraham. A thousand generations later we are blessed by our association with this man that our God called “friend.”

We are all leaving a legacy. Take just moment to jot down a few people who are watching you – people to whom you are leaving a legacy. Who is watching you? Children, co-workers, friends, family?

In our text for today, Abraham wants to leave a legacy for his son. He wants to make sure that he marries a godly wife.

2. All of Us Received a Legacy.

Now why would Abraham want to leave this legacy of faith for Isaac? The answer is found in the first verse of the chapter: “Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.”

The LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. Just think of the blessings Abraham received. Abraham enjoyed great wealth and great honor among his peers. He had received the promise that the whole nation would someday belong to his children. Most importantly, he had received the promise that through his offspring all families of the earth would be blessed. Through him the Savior would come. What greater blessing can you imagine!

And all the spiritual blessings Abraham enjoyed, we enjoy as well. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul wrote, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” In Christ Jesus, we have every spiritual blessing. If you look at Ephesians 1, some of those blessings jump off the page. You were chosen by God the Father before the beginning of the world. You have forgiveness of your sins through Jesus blood. You have the promise that everything is working out according to God’s plan for you.

You have the promise of eternal salvation. You have the promised Holy Spirit working powerfully in you to change you.

So I would encourage you, spend a few moments in thankful contemplation – write out a few of all the blessings that the LORD has given you. This is the spiritual legacy we want to pass on to all those around us.

3. Leave a Legacy

So in this lesson, how does Abraham leave a legacy? He leaves a legacy by his example. First of all, notice his focus on **the Promise**.

Why did he want not want his son Isaac to return to the land of his birth? Because he focused on the promise of God. Look at 24:6-9

⁶ "Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. ⁷ "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land'-he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. ⁸ If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

God had promised Abraham would receive this land. His actions showed that he trusted in this promise.

Model that kind of love for God's word and promises. Let your kids see your love for God's Word in your own reading of the Bible. I can well remember how my dad one winter spent hours reading through the entire Bible. If you haven't started a Bible reading program yet, grab a *Meditations* today and start. This is one thing that you can do to begin to set an example for those around you. Focus on the promises of God.

Abraham also modeled prayer. We heard his beautiful prayer a few weeks ago when he prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah. He was insistent before the Lord. The servants in his household must have heard him pray and learned from him. Listen to Abraham's servant's prayer and testimony: 24:12-15.

¹² Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'-let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master." ¹⁵ Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder.

Model that kind of prayer for your children. When trouble comes, cling to promises of God and pray out loud. This is one of the things I wish that I had changed in my parenting. We prayed at meals. I prayed after devotions, but often my children didn't see me praying because one of them was sick or when we faced a difficult decision in our lives. In your prayer life, let someone listen in and learn from you – that's what Jesus did when he taught the Lord's Prayer.

On the back of the worship folder is one outline for your personal prayers. You can use that one or one of your own choosing.

Praise – let the Word of God you have just read or thought about lead you to give thanks to God.

Repentance – Confess your sins and apply to yourself God’s forgiveness in Christ.

Ask – ask for spiritual blessings and our daily needs

Yield – ask God to help you turn your heart and your fears over to him – that his will be done and not yours.

The last “p” to model is priority. Abraham’s priority was the spiritual welfare of his son and his descendants. What is not so evident in this story was that there were lots of things to distract Abraham right now. He had just lost his own wife – a time of sorrow. He was living in a foreign land – and one of the ways to make allies in those days was through marriage. He could have gotten “tight with the Hittites” by having Isaac marry one of their princesses.

But Abraham chose the spiritual future of his son and grandsons and great grandsons before his own comfort or protection.

There is a passage that applies to Abraham’s search for a wife for his son. That passage is 1 Corinthians 7:39. Most modern translations say something like the NIV: “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” It sounds like you are sinning if you don’t marry a Christian.

The King James is a more literal translation of this verse: “She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

“Only in the Lord.” The text doesn’t say that he has to be a believer. But it says that the whole choice of a spouse should be done “in the sphere of the Lord.” In other words – if my relationship with the Lord is the most important relationship, then every decision I make I’ll want to make thinking – how might this improve or hinder my relationship with the Lord.

For a couple contemplating marriage, this is a huge issue. What is my priority? Is my heart pulling me to do something that I’m pretty sure will be detrimental to my spiritual well-being and the spiritual life of any children we might have?

But this same principle is true no matter what the decision. Is it “in the Lord”? That is my only priority!

My professor this past week was talking about his grandson who is very good in sports. High school coaches have already told his parents that he should be playing in a select league if he wants to compete at the high school level. But select leagues play on Sunday mornings all over the state. What is the priority? Their children are watching. I don’t have the answer – but is it “in the Lord”?

I have to be honest: this concept of leaving a spiritual legacy is a heavy burden on my conscience. Who of us doesn’t look back at his or her life and wish you could have been a better role model? I am troubled by the fact that so often the Apostle Paul says: “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). I haven’t always left the best example for my children and for my brothers and sisters here at St. Paul’s.

That's why I'd like to close this sermon with a time for personal confession and absolution. Let's just pause for a moment and think of some those ways that we have failed those around us, and more importantly, failed our God. We admit to you, Lord, that we are far from perfect.

In just a few moments we are going to here to receive Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. He is giving it to us to assure each of us who are burdened by the knowledge of our sins that we are personally forgiven. Lord, we do believe this forgiveness. Help us overcome our doubts. Protect us from Satan's efforts to keep us focusing on our failures rather than your forgiveness. Help us to believe that forgiveness and rejoice in that forgiveness – not just for our own benefit but as an example to others.

Then, Lord, allow us to leave this table with new strength and new conviction to live for you. Work powerfully in us so that when others follow our example, they will be following the example of Christ Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

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