

Father's Day Sermon

A father is neither an anchor to hold us back, nor a sail to take us there, but a guiding light whose love shows us the way.

Today, I am going to talk to you about a father in the Bible. A father who sacrificed such a lot but is very often overlooked. A father who had true faith in God yet he only gets mentioned around Christmas time.

Can you guess who this is? Joseph – the husband of Mary and stepfather of Jesus. Not many people think of Joseph that way. But, as a stepfather he loved and raised Jesus as if he was his own.

Now, you may have had or have a loving father, or you may not have known your father, or you may have a stepfather or your father may have mistreated you.

This morning I am going to share with you some of the things, not only fathers, but all parents and non-parents can learn from the faith and actions of Joseph.

Who was Joseph – Joseph was descended both from Abraham, the original recipient of God's promise to bless the world and from King David the heir of Royal promises? Now you would think because Joseph was part of this ancestral line, he would be all set up.

But, in fact he wasn't. Joseph lived in humble circumstances, living in the remote and tiny town of Nazareth and he worked as a carpenter. For him to consider taking a wife, he first had to be established enough to support her and provide food, clothing and shelter.

In those days, young men were considered eligible to marry at the age of 18 as this would have given them time to be set up. Girls could be betrothed from the age of 12. So for this betrothed couple, Mary would

live with Joseph at his parent's house, along with any siblings he may have had. They would all contribute to the costs until Joseph and Mary's own family grew and then they would have to find their own house.

Many of you will know the story – Joseph was betrothed to Mary; he found out she was pregnant; in those times Mary could have been stoned to death. It must have been humiliating to learn that his betrothed was pregnant and not by him. Joseph could have reacted with angry retaliation, after all he had every right to do that.

But Joseph showed compassion in thinking how he could protect Mary from disgrace and the stoning that a supposed adulteress might receive in those days. He chose to treat her with respect and his attitude was rewarded when an angel of the Lord came to him in a vision and told Joseph the rest of the story. This changed everything for him.

It seems to me that we often overlook the fact that although God, in His sovereignty, chose Mary to be the one who would give birth to the Son of God, that He also chose Joseph to be a father to Jesus and to raise Him into manhood.

Just as God had chosen a godly young woman to bring forth the child, He chose a godly man to be the father. And what an inspiring model of fatherhood Joseph was. Joseph was not a rabbi or a priest, he was poor and unknown except by God who chose Joseph as the perfect family head for the promised humble king.

The angel commanded Joseph to personally name the child – Jesus. This is deeply significant as it meant that Joseph, in naming the child, acknowledged Him as his own son, thus becoming the legal father of the child, according to Semitic law.

As a result of this legal adoption, Joseph's ancestry as a descendant of David, transfers also to his legal son. Biologically, Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit and thus, the Son of God. But legally He is the son of Joseph and heir to the promises of David, Joseph's ancestor.

After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had at least another six children. The boys were Simon, James, Joses and Jude and the name of one of the girls was Salome. (Matthew 13:54-47, Mark 6:3 – 15:40)

Two of Joseph's biological sons, James and Jude, became Christians and pillars in the 1st century church, They wrote the books of James and Jude in the New Testament.

Joseph was a loving parent who was concerned about the wellbeing of those in his care. He was a just man who obeyed the Bible's laws and commandments. He faithfully followed God's direction when told on several occasions, what to do.

We don't know how long Joseph lived but the last known reference to him occurs after the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem in 9AD. It is suggested he died well before the time that Christ began His public ministry – somewhere between the middle of 9AD and the fall of 26AD and was likely dead for many years before Jesus was crucified in 30AD.

What can Joseph teach us today? 6 things.

1. Honour and Respect.

Joseph had every right to leave Mary, however, he was going to do it privately, so that no one would shame Mary. Even though he felt she had betrayed him, he still loved and cared for her.

If someone betrayed you, would you still turn the other cheek? Would you continue to give to them? Or would you want everyone to know what

he or she did to you? Most people would want revenge out of hurt and embarrassment. Joseph didn't – He followed God' way.

We don't always know why things happen, why people hurt us, but we need to trust God. God is the only one that can heal and restore.

2. Trust, faith and obedience.

Joseph had to really trust God. An angel of the Lord came to him in a vision. Now you may consider was it real or was he hallucinating? But it was very real.

What kind of faith do you think Joseph had to have to accept a message in a dream? And not just any message – but one that would affect his entire life.

A person needs to have a deep relationship with God to be willing to do what God asked him to do without question. Joseph had a deep faith, conviction and relationship with God.

In order for us to have peace about the things that God wants us to do, we have to deepen our faith with Him – this helps us to understand God and understanding produces trust and trust produces action.

3. Sacrifice and letting go.

When Joseph married Mary, he sacrificed what He wanted for the sake of Christ, the firstborn. He would have to keep the secret of who Jesus was, even when it was time for His consecration, a presentation to God which was a custom of the time. Ultimately he would have to be willing to let Jesus go when it was time. God entrusts our children, our parents, our siblings, our work, the earth and our possessions to us. Sometimes God wants us to be willing to let go of the things we are so desperately clinging to. We have to be willing to choose God over these.

4. Patience

Joseph had to wait to be with his wife Mary intimately after she gave birth to Jesus. As a single adult, waiting for God's best is often hard to do. Whatever you are waiting for – marriage, healing, friendship, career, home or waiting for someone you care about to accept Christ – it is all hard to do. Joseph knew from experience that waiting is a form of obedience and obedience brings blessings.

5. Direction

Joseph was obedient to God and married Mary. He obeyed God and went where God led him. Sometimes he didn't know where they were going exactly, where they would stay or what their future would hold. He just trusted God.

God wants us to trust Him for the direction in our lives. It is when we don't always know where we are going that God can use us the most. Sometimes we need to just go and let God worry about the rest. This means in all areas of our lives, our relationships, our work and our finances.

6. Unconditional love

Joseph loved Mary as well as Jesus. He loved Mary despite what he thought she might have done. He loved Jesus even though he was another man's child – in fact God's child. All of us desire to be loved unconditionally. Loved no matter what we have done in the past or in the present. Joseph shows us unconditional love. He shows us this because his example was God, who sent His Son to die for us, the ultimate act of unconditional love. Christ died for us, while we are sinners.

Joseph had a small but important function in the truth, life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As Jesus' earthly father, he was the Lord's early guardian and guide. Thus when Jesus instructed His disciples to open their prayers with the words – Our Father – He knew well how a righteous, earthly father could prepare a person for understanding the Heavenly Father.

God knew who Joseph was deep in his heart. A man of faith, honour, respect and, best of all, a man who had a relationship with God. It is through this relationship that Joseph was able to do what he did.

He is our example – to all parents, stepparents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends. He is our example of what we must do to live our lives as we all seek after Christ.

Closing Prayer - Heavenly Father, today we ask You to bless our earthly fathers for the many times they reflected the love, strength, generosity, wisdom and mercy that You exemplify in Your relationship with us, Your children.

We honour our fathers for putting our needs above their own convenience and comfort; for teaching us to show courage and determination in the face of adversity; for challenging us to move beyond self-limited boundaries; for modelling the qualities that would turn us into responsible, principled, caring adults.

Not all our fathers lived up to these ideals. Give them the grace to acknowledge and learn from their mistakes. Give us the grace to extend to them the same forgiveness that you offer us all. Help us to resist the urge to stay stuck in past bitterness. Instead, moving forward with humility and peace of heart.

We ask your blessing on those men who served as father figures in our lives, when our biological fathers were not able to do so. May the love and selflessness they showed us be returned to them in all their relationships and help them to know that their influence has changed us for the better.

Give new and future fathers the guidance they need to raise happy and holy children, grounded in a love for God and other people and remind these fathers that treating their wives with dignity, compassion and respect is one of the greatest gifts they can give their children.

We pray that our fathers who have passed into the next life have been welcomed into Your loving embrace, and that our family will one day be reunited in Your heavenly kingdom.

We pray in unison with Joseph, whom you entrusted with Your Son, we ask Your generous blessings today and every day.

Amen.

To finish I would like to read a description of what God, as a model father represents.

GOD – THE MODEL FATHER.

F = forgiveness - Forgiveness is a huge part of your relationship with God. He is willing and able to forgive you of any sin you commit. All you need to do is ask Him. Nothing you do is ever so bad that God won't forgive you. (Romans 8:38-39; 1 John 1:9). **That is unconditional acceptance.**

A = Active - God is active in your life all the time. God is always at work around you. Ask God to show you what He is doing. You will be amazed at all that is going on. More important, the invitation is always open for you to be active with God. (John 5:17)

T = Time - We often get too busy to do things, but God always has time for you. Whenever you feel lonely, struggle with a problem, want to share a thought, or need to deal with a concern. He is there for you. There is no time in your day when God is too busy to talk or listen to you. (Jeremiah 33:3)

H = Heart - God knows your heart and He loves you anyway. Proverbs tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things., Many people don't like to be around you if you aren't in a good mood or if you make mistakes. God wants to hang out with you anytime, and He alone is able to change your heart to be all you were created to be. (1 John 4:9-10 and 19)

E = Everywhere - Everywhere sums up God's place in your life. It can be encouraging to realize that when you are in a tough place in your life, He is right there with you. Whether other people are there or not. God is by your side (Romans 8:35-39)

R = Rest and Read - There are two areas where most people could use a little work. Rest is important too – this enables time for the Lord. He wants you to set aside daily time to rest in Him and to read His word. The best way to get to know your Heavenly Father is to spend quality time resting and reading all about Him in the word. (John 14:21; Psalm 46:10)