

A GODLY HERITAGE

God has placed it in my heart to speak about family. We come from different parts of New Zealand and the world, but if we gathered all our wider family together, including aunts, uncles and cousins, there would be thousands of people. So although our immediate family may be small, we represent a large number of people. And God loves our family!

It has been popular to trace your family tree or your heritage and find out who your ancestors were. There are websites like ancestry.com that you can go to.

Some years ago I decided to do that too. I knew my great-great-grandparents on my father's side came into Nelson aboard the sailing ship the 'Mary-Ann' in 1842. So we researched archives and cemeteries. Then we discovered a memorial on the waterfront in Nelson that listed all the early ships that had arrived there, along with passenger lists. On the second ship that is listed is a record of 40 of my ancestors.

Today you can do a DNA test that will take you back 1000 years. And of course the Chinese have amazing records that go back more than 2000 years.

But when we look at the Bible we see something more remarkable. The family tree of Abraham goes all the way back to Adam and forward to Jesus Christ, a period of about 4000 years. There are many lists of genealogies in the Bible. I suspect many of us skip over them when we are reading, but God has placed them there for a purpose. Here are some of those reasons:

- Proves the Bible is a true historical book
- Shows that God's promises to Abraham, David and his people were fulfilled.
- Also gives us the biological lineage of Jesus Christ

Matthew – gives lineage from Abraham to David and through Solomon to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.

Luke – gives lineage from Adam to Abraham, to David, through son Nathan to Joseph the father of Mary.

Although these lists of names are biological, they are also a line of faith that has been passed on from generation to generation. Not all walked in God's ways, but many in those lists were men and women of God, who fulfilled God's purposes in their generation.

I believe these lists of genealogies show how God values family and what he can do through a godly family line.

1. BUILDING A GODLY HERITAGE

Today we are going to focus on Abraham. God called him to leave the wicked idolatrous place where he grew up and go to a land he would show him – a place where he would begin a new family line.

You may not have come from a Christian family, but now in Christ you can build or be part of a new family life – one that is Godly. What a privilege.

Abraham and Sarah had no children and waited many years for God's promise to them, to come to pass. One day 3 men came to visit them. We are told they were angels, and one is referred to as the Lord. They reassured Abraham and Sarah they would have a son by that time the following year. As these visitors were leaving, the Lord said 'I need to tell Abraham what I am about to do'.

Genesis 18:18-19

"Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is just and right, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

The Lord was about to visit Sodom and Gomorrah to see if the cities were as wicked as he had been told – and to do what was just and right. However he wanted to tell Abraham what he was about to do, so that Abraham could be part of the process – Abraham would learn more about God's justice and righteousness. In turn Abraham would do what was just and right and teach his children to do the same.

God's Purpose for Abraham

Let's look back at what the Lord said to Abraham:

"I have chosen him, so that he will do what is just and right."

In our society today most people focus on achieving: developing a successful career and attaining material wealth. Sadly children are just tagged on! However God wants us to understand the value he places on the family and how a family can fulfil his purposes on earth.

We certainly see that God saw that this is important. Look again at what he said to Abraham: **"I have chosen him so that he will direct his children ..."**

Years ago I joined a mission organization called Overseas Missionary Fellowship. It was originally begun by a man called Hudson Taylor. But if you go back some generations you discover a wonderful story. It begins with James Taylor, the great grandfather of Hudson Taylor, who dedicated his life to Christ on his wedding day. In fact he was late for wedding as he was on his knees, surrendering his life to Christ. He raised his children in the ways of the Lord, and they raised theirs in the way of the Lord too. One of these was also called James.

James was a chemist and also a lay preacher in the Methodist church. He married a godly woman and they had a son they named Hudson. He heard his father praying for God to send people to China – and at the age of 4 declared that he would go. Hudson Taylor spent 51 years in China – as a result 1000s of others followed into missions and multitudes have come to Christ.

Let's go back to Abraham – even before he had children God said: **"direct your children in the ways of the Lord."** The word 'direct' is command, not a popular word today, but it means to establish rules, guidelines and boundaries. We see the same instruction in the New Testament. We are to bring up our children in the ways of the Lord.

Notice what God says to Abraham: **"direct your children by doing what is just and right."**

Abraham was to set an example and model the life of faith. He demonstrated that he loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul and strength.

Imagine the impact it had on Isaac when his father took him on a journey to Mt Moriah and tied him to an altar! What thoughts went through Isaac's mind? He obediently submitted to what God had told Abraham to do, but he saw his father's love and commitment to God and his faith, clearly demonstrated.

Abraham wasn't perfect, and nor are we – but our children can see if our faith and love for God is real. As we look at the Bible we see that not all children chose to follow their parents' footsteps. Sadly the same is true today. The family is under attack – in fact the devil has sought to divide and break down the family from the beginning. Today we see that intensifying, not only in the society, but the very laws that are being passed.

When children walk away from God it breaks the hearts of Christian parents. And the enemy is quick to accuse the parents: 'You see you failed, you are not good parents', or, 'This is because the church has problems'. Even your children may accuse you, saying, 'you were too strict, you forced us to go to church.'

No parent is perfect – often we see within one family some who follow the Lord and others who walk away. So we need to realise that each of us has our own choice. Of course there are things that influence and affect children growing up, but ultimately we are responsible for our own choice.

Ezekiel 18:4-5

“Every living soul belongs to me (I have given life to all men and women) – the father and the son. Each person is responsible for his own life. If a righteous man does what is right but his son doesn't follow, he is accountable for his own sin.”

Then it goes on and says: **“the father will not share the guilt of the son.”**

So we can see clearly that God doesn't place the blame on parents when their children choose to follow their own way. Of course we all long that our children will follow God's ways. The enemy has brought accusations against many Christian parents, so they are discouraged and feel a failure.

However we are God's children and because of that, there is a grace upon our family. Don't give up praying – as we do the Spirit of God works in the hearts of our children – they may reject his prompting, but as we continue to pray, he continues his work. No-one has gone too far away that God's Spirit can't reach them.

I shared the story of Hudson Taylor earlier. As a young teen he turned away from God, but his mother prayed earnestly, and Hudson turned back to God and went on to become one of the first missionaries to China.

Ezekiel 18:27

“But if a wicked man turns back from the wickedness he has committed and does what is right and just, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offences he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live.”

No-one has gone too far away. In fact our Heavenly Father longs for each one to return. We see that beautifully portrayed in the story of the Prodigal Son.

So what can we do?

1. Don't give up praying for them – it is a spiritual battle.
2. Speak and declare God's Word over their lives. Here are some I have used:

Isaiah 43:6

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth”

Isaiah 54:13

“All your sons will be taught by the Lord and great will be your children’s peace.”

2. BLESSING OF A GODLY HERITAGE

Let’s look back at the word the Lord gave to Abraham:

“so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he had promised.”

God had given Abraham amazing promises, and God knew these would come to pass – after all he sees the end from the beginning. However there was an important key: Abraham had to direct his children and grandchildren in the ways of the Lord, and in this way his faith would be passed on from generation to generation, and a godly heritage raised up.

This would enable God’s promises to come to pass.

Exodus 20:6

“But showing love to a 1000 generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

What a promise! God didn’t only promise that to Abraham but to all of us. A promise that his love would be upon our generations going forward if we follow and obey him.

Many parents pass onto their children an inheritance when they die. And this is a good thing, a blessing – something the Word of God urges us to do. Abraham passed on his wealth to Isaac, along with his skills – but he passed on something that had far greater eternal value than his worldly wealth. He passed on a spiritual legacy that bore fruit that is eternal.

That’s what I want. I was blessed to have Godly parents, but I want to continue that Godly line. Whether you came from a Christian background or not, or even whether you have children or not, we can share in building Godly heritages for our descendants.

Can I share with you the story of Jonathan Edwards. This man lived in eastern USA in the 1700’s. His father was a pastor and his mother a pastor’s daughter. Jonathan was their only son. He studied theology, and became a professor, pastor, and a revivalist. Jonathan married Sarah, who was a strong believer and they had 11 children together. The State of New York did a study on 1394 descendants of Jonathan and Sarah, and this is what they discovered: from among those descendants there was: 1 American Vice President, 3 Senators, 3 Governors, 3 Mayors, 30 Judges, 13 College Presidents, 30 College Professors, 100 Lawyers, 60 Physicians, 75 Military Officers, 100 Preachers and Missionaries, 60 prominent authors and 80 other public officials.

The person who did that study also did a study on a man called Max, who lived around the same time. Sadly many of his descendants were paupers, drunkards, prostitutes and ended up in prison.

We may not have come from an illustrious line like Jonathan Edwards, or even a Christian family, but now we are in Christ we are new creations – the curse is broken and we can be part of a new godly line.

So as we close this message I believe God wants us to truly understand that a Godly lineage is of great value to God. This brings him glory and we all have a part to play.

Do not to allow the enemy to whisper condemnation when your children or grandchildren choose to walk away from God, but recognise this is a battle and press in to God in prayer.

One of the greatest blessings for each of us is to be part of seeing God's purposes come to pass on earth through our sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. Amen!