

“Empowered to Father”

Acts 16:1-5

While preparing for today's message, I turned to the Bible to look for some good examples of fatherhood. Unfortunately, this proved to be quite a challenge. I started with the first book in the Old Testament, Genesis.

1. **Noah** - He was the most righteous man on earth. So righteous that God saved him and his family from the great flood. But, he was a terrible father. The first thing Noah did after God restored creation was to get drunk! He got drunk and passed out naked. Ham, his youngest son, discovered him in that condition and told his older brothers. And when Noah woke up from his nap and heard about the incident, he became angry. For some reason, instead of taking it out on Ham, Noah cursed Canaan, Ham's son, his grandson with slavery! (Genesis 9:20-25)
2. **Lot** - He welcomed two guests at his home, whom he considered God's angels. When a crowd of gangsters came to his house, seeking to harm the guests, Lot stood in their way by offering them his own daughters, so the guests would be left unharmed! (Genesis 19:1-11)
3. **Abraham** - He is considered the Father of our faith. But, he was another terrible father. He abandoned his first son, Ishmael whom he fathered through his wife Sarah's maid servant, Hagar. Later, He tried to kill his second son, Isaac to please God. (Genesis 21:8-21 and 22:1-10)
4. **Isaac** - He had twin sons. For some reason, he favored Esau, his first son over Jacob, the younger one. As a result, the two sons lived apart from each other for many years. (Genesis 27)
5. **Jacob** - Just like his Father, Isaac, Jacob also had a favored son. He loved Joseph, his youngest son, more than his other children, and he made it clear to everyone. The consequence of his favoritism? The other siblings hated Joseph, so much so that they sold him to merchants from a foreign country. (Genesis 37:1-28)

Not finding any good example of fatherhood among the patriarchs, I moved on to the kings.

1. **Saul, the first king:** He used his daughters by deceptively offering them to David in marriage. Meanwhile, he was scheming to have David killed by the hands of their enemies, the Philistines. He did this by sending David out to battle again and again, even though he knew that his daughter, Michal, truly loved David. (1 Samuel 18: 17-28)
2. **David, the second king:** In public, he was the greatest among all the kings of Israel. However, in private, David was one of the worst fathers in history. He was absent from his children's lives and failed to discipline them. (2 Samuel 13:23-29) And, with his adultery and subsequent murder and cover-up, he failed to set a good example to his children. The result of his failed fatherhood set into

motion a negative legacy for his children and many generations to come. Their family story is filled with rape, murder, betrayal, and rebellion.

As I searched the other biblical characters in the Old Testament, I could not seem to find any person who stood out as an exemplary father. So, I checked the fathers mentioned in the New Testament.

Can you think of any fathers from the Gospels? The common one we think of is Joseph, the father of Jesus. Actually, there is another father who appears before Joseph in the Gospel of Luke. He is Zechariah, the father of John the baptist. Both Zechariah and Joseph play a crucial role during the pregnancy of their wives. Zechariah gives a name to his son when is born. Joseph protects Mary from public disgrace by marrying her.

But, there is no further record of how they raised their sons. The name of Mary, the mother of Jesus, appears a few times throughout the four Gospels, a couple of times along with names of his siblings. (Matthew 13:55-56, Mark 6:3) But, Joseph is never mentioned again after his family visits the Jerusalem Temple. So, we do not know what kind of father he was for Jesus and his other children.

For a while, I continued my search to find cases of exemplary fatherhood in the Bible. And I stopped without having found a single example. So, please let me know if you find one. My initial reaction was great disappointment. But, then, I realized that I cannot expect the biblical characters to behave in the way modern people behave. They lived in a world that was totally different from ours, with very different social and cultural norms. And, after all, all the fathers, much like the mothers in the Bible, were not perfect. They were imperfect human beings, just like us.

Yesterday, we celebrated the life of Mr. Fen Holmes, who entered eternity last April. Listening to the stories his two sons shared about their father, I couldn't help but think about my own father who passed away several years ago. And, on the eve of Father's Day, I found myself thinking about him with deep gratitude.

My father was a great pastor who served his churches with dedication and personal sacrifice. He was a spiritual giant and had many followers. But, he was not a good father. He was not really around his children because he was always busy being there for other people. When he was at home, he was doing preparations for his sermons or Bible studies, and we, the children had to be quiet not to bother his studies.

Being a typical Korean father of his generation, he never said "I love you" to any of us while we were growing up. As you can imagine, my five siblings and I don't have great childhood memories of our father. It was only when our father's health began to deteriorate with Parkinson's disease that he began to soften. He even began to say "I love you, my beloved son or daughter." It was something that none of us expected to hear from our father, ever. So, when he said it to us for the first time, we were so shocked that we didn't even know what to say in response!

During my high school years, my father faced many challenges in his church, and I became very critical of him and his ministry. I saw him no longer as a great pastor but a hypocrite who was sacrificing his family for his ministry's sake. After much contemplation, I decided to pursue theological studies for my

undergraduate degree. Why, you ask? Well, I thought then that I would be able to prove that my father was wrong. How silly my intention was! But, looking back, I can see it was the beginning of my journey toward ordination. Though my father failed to be a loving and caring father to his children, God called me into ministry through his failures.

Going back to my search for an exemplary father in the Bible, though I could not find such a role model among actual fathers, I found an example of excellent fatherhood in the apostle, Paul, the man who was actually never married. As we see in today's scripture reading, Paul and Timothy were partners in ministry. Paul took Timothy with him on his missionary journeys. But, their relationship was more than just partners in ministry. Paul was Timothy's mentor. The apostle even referred to Timothy as his son.

Timothy was quite young when he first met Paul. His father was Greek, and his mother, Eunice, was Jewish. His mother and grandmother, Lois were women of sincere faith, and Timothy inherited their faith and received spiritual instruction from them. (2 Timothy 1:5).

But despite their great influence, it looks like Timothy still tended to be timid and unsure of himself. (2 Timothy 1:7) That's when Paul stepped in and became Timothy's spiritual mentor and father.

As his spiritual mentor and father figure, Paul genuinely loved and cared for Timothy. The two letters he wrote to Timothy is filled with his tender affection for the young man. He called Timothy "My dear son" and "My true son in the faith." When he was apart from him, Paul constantly prayed for Timothy. He helped Timothy to be better equipped for ministry through counsel and guidance. He had Timothy circumcised, so he could minister to both Jewish and Gentile Christian believers. He took Timothy with him on his missionary journeys, so he could learn from him. And he left Timothy alone in the ministry field, so he could practice what he learned. Under Paul's leadership, with his loving care, help, teaching and guidance, Timothy grew in his competence and capacity for leadership in ministry. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul became a spiritual father to Timothy and other young leaders in the early church.

If you're here today as a youth, college student, or young adult, I hope and pray that you can relate to Timothy. The young man felt timid and fearful at times, unsure in his faith.... I remember how scared I was ministering in my first church. I had about 120 people on the membership role, but only one third of them were attending weekly worship service. It was a small, tiny congregation. But, I was aware of my limitations, speaking English as my second language, and felt anxious about my performance as their pastor.

Have you ever experienced such things? Have you ever felt self-conscious, unsure whether or not you are doing things right? If you have, remember that like Timothy, you do not walk the journey of faith alone. Timothy had Paul as his spiritual mentor and father figure. In Paul, he had someone to love him, to encourage him, and also to challenge him.

For me, these "father" figures on my path to ministry were Rev. Gahyung Kim, a senior colleague in ministry, whom I could turn to with any question I had; Rev. Barbara Donica, my counseling elder, who guided me through my first year of ministry; and Sue Burman, a church member, who supported my

ministry by constantly telling me, "I love you. I trust you. I believe in you" both with her words and actions. Here is a poem she wrote for me when she found out that I was moving to another church.

She's God's beauty here on duty,
Bless this child so meek and mild.
A golden flower of Korean bower.
Give her room to grow and bloom.

She is preaching here without fear
Teaching there she is everywhere.

Are you sickly, she'll come quickly,
Bring a prayer and sooth your care.
Treasured daughter shares the Water,
Bread and Wine, God's gift divine.

Too soon she is gone prolific one
Mystic ion a dandelion.

If you are here today as an older adult, look around you. Is there someone you could invest your time and energy in as Paul did for Timothy? Are you willing to teach or help with the children and youth Sunday School? Are you willing to help with the programs for our children, youth and young adults? Are you willing to be someone's spiritual mentor and father figure?

If you are here today as a parent, a father or mother, a grandfather or grandmother, are you guiding your children or grandchildren in spiritual matters? Are you showing them how to live as a devoted follower of Jesus by your own examples?

Because as God is our eternal Father, the One who guides us, who leads us, who molds us, we too, are called to be Father figures to the next generation -- imperfect as we are.

Today's scripture says, as Paul and Timothy continued their ministry, traveling from town to town, churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers. May their example give us hope and inspiration. May the relationships we enter into at church, at work, at school, at home, be of love, encouragement, but also of challenging and prodding. For if we can join together like Paul and Timothy, the older and younger generations partnering together, we too will discover the great fruit that such relationships can bear. Thanks be to God!