

Pray

Photo of JFK with his son

Continue series on Church as family

Start by thinking about heroes

[What kind of people do we have as our heroes in life?](#)

Maybe you have

**Heroes of literature** written famous poems or stories

**Heroes of exploration** gone to new places or done new things

**Heroes of care for the poor** have reached out to people in situations that no one else will reach out to

**Heroes of church history** God has used to glorify His name

**Heroes of our nation** have led strongly through difficult times

This morning - Hero of the family – specifically a Father

Rick was born in 1962 to Dick and Judy Hoyt. As a result of oxygen deprivation to Rick's brain at the time of his birth, Rick was diagnosed as a spastic quadriplegic with cerebral palsy.

Dick and Judy soon realized that though Rick couldn't walk or speak; he was quite astute and his eyes would follow them around the room. Dick and Judy would take Rick sledging and swimming, and even taught him the alphabet and basic words. After providing concrete evidence of Rick's intellect and ability to learn, Dick and Judy needed to find a way to help Rick communicate for himself.

In 1972 and a skilled group of engineers at Tufts University, an interactive computer was built for Rick. This computer consisted of a cursor being used to highlight every letter of the alphabet. Once the letter Rick wanted was highlighted, he was able to select it by just a simple tap with his head against a head piece attached to his wheelchair. When the computer was originally first brought home, Rick surprised everyone with his first words. Instead of saying, "Hi, Mom," or "Hi, Dad," Rick's first "spoken" words were: "Go, Bruins!" - The local ice hockey team. It was clear from that moment on, that Rick loved sports and followed the game just like anyone else.

In the spring of 1977, Rick told his father that he wanted to participate in a 5-mile benefit run for a Lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Far from being a long-distance runner, Dick agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair and they finished all 5 miles,

coming in next to last. That night, Rick told his father, "Dad, when I'm running, it feels like I'm not handicapped."

This realization was just the beginning of what would become over 1,000 races completed, including marathons, duathlons and triathlons

Their best time for the Marathon is 2hrs 40 minutes 47 seconds – faster than the winner of the men's Olympic marathon in London 1908

6 of them being Ironman competitions - 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a marathon (26.2 miles) run, raced in that order and without a break. Most Ironman events have a strict time limit of 17 hours to complete the race). Also adding to their list of achievements, Dick and Rick biked and ran across the U.S. in 1992, completing a full 3,735 miles in 45 days.

In a triathlon, Dick will pull Rick in a boat with a bungee cord attached to a vest around his waist and to the front of the boat for the swimming stage. For the biking stage, Rick will ride a special two-seater bicycle, and then Dick will push Rick in his custom made running chair (for the running stage).

Rick was once asked, if he could give his father one thing, what would it be? Rick responded, "The thing I'd most like is for my dad to sit in the chair and I would push him for once."

So today – looking at Father's and Son's aspect of family life

Thinking through what God has to say on this

First – look again at how God is our perfect Father, perfect Dad

Martin – last week – we are all Sons of our Father, Dad in heaven

Paul in the bible talks about God as being the Father from whom all families in heaven and earth get their name

In other words – the idea of Fathers and Sons isn't an idea that came from clever people in universities – social workers – politicians.

Lots of people see that lots of mess in the world comes from a lack of good fathers

But we all need to see that when we're desperate to see an increase in good fathers we need to start by looking to the person who came up with the idea of fathers and who is the perfect father rather than looking at ourselves.

When we want to learn about family life we need to learn from God

Dick Hoyt, the hero of fathers who I've just talked about is a great hero but he will have his weaknesses. He's not the perfect father and he's not God.

In fact Jesus describes earthly fathers as being evil compared to God our perfect father, our perfect Dad in heaven.

However good our own fathers are or were they have weaknesses – there will have been times when they have not been there when they have let us down some time or other. I want to be the best Dad I can to my 2 boys but there have been times when I have let them down

However much our own fathers might have let us down we can still get to know our father in heaven

We can't rely on our experience of our earthly fathers to know what our perfect heavenly father is like

We can only find that out from

- listening to what God has to say about himself in the bible
- being brought close to God by being adopted as God's sons through Jesus
- The Holy Spirit helping us understand what the bible says and telling us in our spirits that we are God's children.

Recommend anything by Mark Stibbe on this subject – have read one of his books on this

Going to move on to a moment to look at what the bible says about being fathers and sons in the church family

Just going to pause and pray first – it's important that we're not living our lives for God, whatever we are doing in life, out of a desire to win our heavenly father's approval or to try to win anyone else's approval but that we live our lives for God because we know that our heavenly father already approves of us in Jesus.

Just pray now for Holy Spirit to come – remind us that God is our father who has sent his son to die for us so that we can find intimacy with our father in heaven

Now going to look at fathers and sons in church family life

Going to look at Paul and Timothy

Paul – man who served God soon after Jesus died and rose to life, starting new churches in different areas, teaching them about God and about God's work and about how they fit into God's work, related to them as a father.

Timothy was a man who helped Paul in the work he was doing, and Paul described Timothy as his child.

As you read Acts and some of Paul's letters you get a picture of what their relationship was like

- Spent time together
  - travelled together,
  - worked together,
  - Experienced life together.
  - Wasn't about titles.
  - Would have seen each other's strengths and weaknesses close up,
  - Would have learned to bear with each other's weakness, to encourage one another and to forgive one another.
  
- Paul's genuine concern for Timothy – letters he writes to Timothy
  - Paul 'prays constantly' for Timothy – wants Timothy to be blessed
  - encourages and guides and instructs Timothy in his work as church leader
  - encourages and guides and instructs him in his own relationship with God
  - concerned about his physical health
  - is aware of Timothy's weaknesses and looks to help Timothy with his weaknesses
  - Warns him about possible dangers from false teachers and the need to bring correction where necessary, encourages him to persevere
  
- Friendship
  - Paul says 'he longs to be' with Timothy – genuine friendship not formal.
  - Asks for Timothy to come and visit him in prison
  - He remembers Timothy's tears - he was affected by the emotions that Timothy felt

Paul – wasn't just a fantastic communicator of truth and a great church planter

Also was a great example of being a Spiritual Father to Timothy

This morning I'd like to lift up Paul's example as a spiritual Father to the crown

I'd like to stir faith within the whole church that the crown will be somewhere that will increasingly be filled with men who will live their lives as those who would be spiritual fathers.

I want to encourage men here to have their lives affected by Paul's example. I know for me just looking again at Paul and Timothy I'm provoked by Paul's example. At the moment I'm getting to know some people in Tajikistan who know Jesus or who are getting to know Jesus and I want the way I relate to them to be shaped by Paul's example.

John, one of the 12 of Jesus disciples wrote about Spiritual Fathers in the church. He described Spiritual Fathers as those 'who know him who is from the beginning'

- Not about physical age
- Not about titles
- Not about fame
- Not about material wealth
- About knowing God – come back to earlier point – to learn to be a Father through knowing our Father in heaven
  - Let's press into knowing God our Father,
  - Let's listen to him as we read the bible,
  - Let's spend time talking with him
  - let's spend time in his presence,
  - Let's enjoy being his sons

Going to finish by looking at what God says in the bible about being physical fathers and sons.

Again – start by reminding that before looking at this that we do it from a place of being God's sons.

Martin referred last week to story that Jesus told of man who had 2 sons, younger son took his inheritance and it blew it all on reckless living and ended up working looking after pigs, to him unclean animals. Came back to his father and was wonderfully extravagantly welcomed back by his father.

When this happened the older son refused to go in and celebrate with his family and friends and neighbours. Jesus said this son got angry even though his father pleaded with him to come in and celebrate. The older son complained that he had been slaving for his father for years and that he'd never disobeyed him.

His father said to him 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours'. The older son clearly knew that but somehow he had forgotten how important this was. He'd got caught up in obedience and duty and forgot the enormous value of the fact that he **already** had his father's love.

I know that this is something I need to keep reminding myself of. I know I became an adopted son of God over 20 years ago. I know that nothing can change that.

But sometimes I can get so caught up in trying to do things right I can start to give in to the lie that my sonship is just based on what I do and sonship is just about a list of things to get better at and that maybe if I do well at these things then I can really relate to God as my heavenly father

The truth is I'm already ready to relate to God as my father because of Jesus.

However good a father I am on some days or however bad a father I am on other days I will always I will always be able to relate to God as MY father in heaven because of Jesus.

So let's look at what God says to us about fathering in the bible

Paul writes in his letter to the early church in Ephesus a section on family life so this passage is a part of this section

'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> "Honour your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), <sup>3</sup>"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." <sup>4</sup>Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.'

So he starts off by talking about parenting in general and tells us that God's expectation is that children will obey their parents.

He DOESN'T tell us that if children are ever disobedient then their parents will lose their salvation.

Neither does it say that it's not important for children to obey their parents – he doesn't say 'children obey your parents in the Lord, but if they don't, the parents should just forget about it because it's not really that important'

How this looks day to day in families will vary from culture to culture and family to family within church families

We all need to hear what God is saying here and work it out what it will look like in our own situations.

Next we are told to honour our parents.

Looking again at the older son in the story Jesus says that he had always obeyed his father through his actions but you could argue that hadn't particularly honoured him as he'd allowed himself to get angry and bitter towards his father.

This can be another big challenge – I've not always honoured my parents well in the past and they were great parents so for those who have been parented badly or had parents who were not around this can be a huge challenge.

Again – we need to start from the place of knowing God as our perfect father in heaven who made it possible for us to be forgiven by him by sending Jesus, the man who is also God, to die for us – we need to know his forgiveness so we can forgive others

Finally this morning I want to look at the final instruction Paul writes and it is focused now on fathers.

God has something very specific to say to fathers, he says something for Fathers to avoid doing and something for them to do.

‘Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.’

So first he tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger. He says something very similar when he writes to the church in Colossae so although it’s very specific I think it’s something to sit up and take note of as fathers.

He’s not saying – if the children get angry the Dad must have messed up.

Sometimes my children get angry about things

That doesn’t always mean they’ve done it because I’ve provoked them. It may be I’ve just asked them to do something they don’t want to do.

But it may also be because I’ve provoked them to get angry because I haven’t handled my own anger very well

John Piper writes very helpfully about this

He says

‘Fathers cause their children’s souls to shrivel into small, hard, angry shells mainly by being like that themselves. Anger is the cannibal emotion: It eats all the others till none is left. It does this first in fathers, and then this constricted soul is passed on to the children. Anger is absorbed as the dominant emotion and all the tender feelings die. Paul says don’t let that happen. “Fathers, don’t provoke your children to anger.” The remedy is the gospel—“as God in Christ forgave you.”

I know in my life this has been a battle, learning to look for obedience from my children, without allowing myself to use anger rather than standing my ground patiently in my desire to find obedience.

A few verses later Paul talks about learning to fight spiritual battles against the devils schemes. It can be easy to read about fighting these spiritual battles and think in terms of intercession or evangelism or praying for the sick which certainly are battles but I believe this area of learning not to give way to anger is just as important a battle as the others I just mentioned.

Then having talked about what fathers are to avoid doing, Paul writes about the positive aspect, if they are to avoid anger how are they to father their children?

He says they are to ‘bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.’

I haven’t got time to look at this much – but I want to make the point that when Paul uses the phrase ‘bring them up’ this could also be translated as ‘nourished’.

When fathers look to bring discipline and instruction to their children we are to be doing it out of a desire to nourish then, out of a desire to see them grow to maturity – that rather than bringing discipline and instruction out of anger we are bringing it out of love, out of a desire to bring nourishment.

I believe we can do things as fathers to help our children understand that when we do bring discipline and instruction it comes from our love. We can communicate our love for them through our words and our actions. We can engage in their worlds. Both my boys love Lego so I want to try to spend time with them playing with Lego and finding out about what they have made. We can give them specific time when we are just spending time with them.

One time I managed to take my older son camping for a night in Wales. It was a beautiful campsite but from the time we arrived to the time we left it just drizzled. So we put the tent up and then went to look round the indoor sections of the campsite. Then we both went to bed at about 6 o'clock and Sam had the chance to tell me lots of his jokes.

From my point of view, because of the rain it wasn't a particularly successful weekend but Sam came away telling everyone what a great weekend he'd had and it helped me see how important it was for him to have time with me even it was in a field trying to camp in permanent drizzle.

Finish with a story about an encounter the son of DL Moody, an American evangelist had with his father when he had not done what his Dad had told him.

'A little later he came into the room again and saw that I had not obeyed him. Speaking with that directness of which he was capable, he ordered me at once to bed. His tone of voice was new to me, and I retreated, frightened and in tears. But before I had time to fall asleep, he was at my bedside. He explained that he had reprimanded me because I had disobeyed him, but this in no way indicated that he didn't love me. As he knelt to pray with me, I noticed that tears were falling down over his rugged, bearded face... I'll never forget the scene. My father had unknowingly awakened within me the consciousness of the love of God

