A Sense of Self

The Family's Spiritual Leader

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Course III – Unit 9, Lesson 3

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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In this lesson, we will look at the father as the spiritual leader of his family. Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing what you think being a spiritual leader is. **Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and then put it our of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scriptures. **Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.**

I. Introduction

One of the father's roles is to be his family's spiritual leader. In Deuteronomy 11:19, Proverbs 22:6, and Ephesians 6:4, fathers are instructed to teach/train their children in the ways of the Lord. This means that they are to teach them to know what God's law is and to model it. When children are taught both by studying a subject and by a parent's modeling the subject, they tend to live that style of life.

II. Joseph, Man of God and Spiritual Leader

A. Joseph, the man of God (Matthew 1:18 ff)

Joseph, husband of Mary and father of Jesus, was chosen by God to be the earthly adopted father of His Son, Jesus the Messiah. What kind of person was Joseph? What caused God to choose him, over the hundreds of thousands of Jewish men of the time, for this most important job? How important was this job? Of all the men who have ever lived, Jewish or non-Jewish, only Joseph, son of Jacob, has ever been the earthly adopted father of a member of the Godhead.

First, Joseph was of the right family. He was not just a descendant of Abraham, but a descendant of David, the greatest King of Israel (Matthew 1:1-16). According to Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah would be a descendant of David. Joseph filled this Biblical requirement.

Joseph was also a businessman, a carpenter. Although, it might not seem like an important job to us, in the First Century it was. The carpenter not only built parts of houses, he made furniture, tableware, farming tools (especially plows), and many other household, farming and business implements. A village or town without a carpenter would have had an extremely hard time surviving. A carpenter was not rich, but today he would be called middle class. God has always demanded that people provide for themselves and their families. Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12)

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Not only was Joseph an important member of his community, but he was a righteous man. Joseph not only kept the letter of the Law of Moses, he did good to his fellow men. One example of his righteousness was his relationship with Mary, his betrothed. It is more than just an engagement, but less than marriage. Once a couple was betrothed, the only way they could break it was either through death or divorce.

When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he decided to divorce her. Instead of embarrassing her, he planned to do it secretly. Most men would have created a major scandal. They would have dragged their betrothed wife before the city elders and exposed her as an adulterer, not Joseph; he was a kind, gentle man. He felt that although Mary had betrayed him, he did not want to hurt her.

Another example of Joseph's righteousness was that he obeyed and trusted God. This is shown by his doing what angels told him to do. This included going ahead with his marriage to Mary (Matthew 1:24), naming the baby Jesus (Matthew 1:25), taking his family to Egypt to escape from King Herod's murderous rage (Matthew 2:13), returning to Judah (Matthew 2:20-21), and later taking his family to Nazareth (Matthew 2:22-23).

We might say, “Of course Joseph would do what an angel told him to do.” Not really! In reality, the Bible is filled with stories of men and women disobeying God's message, whether given by angel, dream, prophet, or some other method. Man has the free will to either obey or disobey God, even when God personally reveals a message to them. Examples of people who disobeyed God's message are Lot's wife (Genesis 19:15-26), Balaam the prophet (Numbers 22:4-24:25), the numerous rebellions among the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings, and the sin of Achan (Joshua 7:10-26).

Another example of Joseph's righteousness was his obedience to the Law of Moses. When Jesus was eight days old, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to the Temple to make the required sacrifice for the birth of a son (Luke 2:21-24).

B. <u>Joseph, the Father</u>

Jesus was not Mary's only child. Joseph and Mary had at least four sons (James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas) and two daughters (names not recorded) (Matthew 13:55-56).

They raised at least seven children. What kind of parents were they?

Not much is known about either Mary or Joseph or how they raised their children. The only verses that talk about Jesus’ childhood are in Luke 2:40-51. There Luke says that Jesus “...continued to grow, become strong in wisdom, and the grace of God was

upon Him." In verse 52, Luke restates it, "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men." To illustrate this he gave one example, Jesus' remaining behind in the Temple when His parents returned home.

What Luke is saying is that Jesus grew physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. This would seem to indicate that Mary and Joseph provided the home environment for their children to develop in a God-directed manner.

The Temple incident tells us they allowed Jesus an increasing amount of independence as He grew. If they had not, they would have never allowed Him to be off with friends and relatives. They would have kept Him with them all the time.

Also, it tells us that they had trained Jesus both socially and religiously. As a child, He was able to discuss God's law with the leading religious leaders of His day on a level of equality.

From Matthew's story of Jesus' early life we see that Joseph was the kind of father who looked out for the safety and best interests of his children. For the first few years of Jesus' life, they were constantly on the run. They traveled to Egypt and several places within Palestine to escape the jealousy and hatred of evil kings.

Another indication of Joseph's love of his children was that he adopted and raised Jesus as his firstborn. In the ancient world, this was extremely important. A man's firstborn was responsible for carrying the family's name and fortune into the future. When Joseph chose to acknowledge Jesus as his firstborn, he was turning his family fortune and future over to an outsider.

Joseph was ready to be considered a "fool for Christ's sake" (1 Corinthians 4:10). He readily staked his reputation on his faith and trust in God. When looking at Joseph's actions from strictly a human point of view, we see a person acting in an illogical and foolish manner. What he did was totally different from what was normally done in his day. Even today, it would be difficult to find anybody to do what he did. People then as now would have called his actions foolish.

III. The Family's Spiritual Leader

A. <u>God's Design for the Father</u>

Paul in his discussion of problems in the Corinthian church states, "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace." (1 Corinthians 14:33) This tells us much about God. It says that when He creates something, it is like Him, harmonious and orderly. From

the beginning of time, God created order. Chaos came about when angels and men rejected God and attempted to replace God's order with their order.

The family, as part of God's divine creation, mirrors the order He has built into the universe. The husband/father is head/leader of his family. The wife/mother voluntarily accepts her husband's leadership when they marry. Together, they guide, train, and discipline their children until they become adults.

The father's headship/leadership is based on God's love and love for his children. He is not a dictator accountable to nobody. He is accountable to God for how he fulfills his duties. This should be a scary thought to fathers. Unfortunately, it is not. Most fathers today ignore God and do as they please. They have little or no place in their lives for God.

A husband is to love his wife. When we look at the story of Adam and Eve, we see that God created Eve to be Adam's companion. Their relationship was to help one another in living and serving God. One aspect of that companionship was the husband and wife relationship. Within the institution of marriage, she is to be his sexual partner and the mother of his children (Deuteronomy 24:5; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).

A father is not the dictator telling his wife and children how to live their lives and then doing anything he wants to do. The father leads his family in living a Christian life. He models Christian living for them. Joseph was a respected community leader and a servant of God. From what we know of his children from the Bible and early church history, they followed in his footsteps.

A leader needs to have some philosophy by which to lead. The same applies to the father as a spiritual leader. All fathers are spiritual leaders of their families. Some fathers seem not to realize they are spiritual leaders. They live as if there is no God or as if God is not important. As a result, their children are reared without little or no spiritual guidance.

Others recognize their role as spiritual leader and act as the spiritual leader. Unfortunately, the basis for their spirituality is not God. Some are atheists and teach their children atheistic principles and philosophy. Some, while claiming to be Christians, base their spiritual leadership on something other than Christ. Children in these families are either taught to reject God or are given mixed signals about spirituality. A few not only recognize and accept their role as spiritual leader, they base their leadership on God. As a result, their children learn the ways of the Lord.

Also, their sons learn how to be spiritual leaders of their families. Their daughters learn that accepting the spiritual leadership of their husbands does not mean they are second class.

Families are like individual people. If a person is to become mature and complete as God intended, he or she must live a Christ centered life. The same applies to the family. For a family to become the family God intended, its spiritual life has to be based on Christ.

Spiritual leadership not based on God and Biblical principles destroys a family. Regardless of how strong or ideal a family might appear outwardly, when God is not at its center, it is rotten. It is only a matter of time before the decay becomes so powerful that it is visible to everyone.

One way a father can exercise his spiritual leadership is to designate a time each day to study God's word with his family. A father should lead his family in its daily devotions, not just schedule them.

After children become adults, the father no longer has the authority to exercise spiritual leadership over them. This does not mean that the father can no longer exercise spiritual influence over his children. It all depends on their relationship.

B. Positive Examples of Spiritual Leaders

1. *Abraham* - The Old Testament does not tell us how or what Abraham taught Isaac about God. It does provide us with several indicators of his spiritual leadership as a father. One was when he circumcised Isaac on the eighth day according to God's covenant (Genesis 21:4). Another was when Abraham offered Isaac as a burnt offering at God's command (Genesis 22). A third example was when Abraham refused to allow Isaac to marry an idolatrous Canaanite. Instead, he sent back to his homeland to find a wife among his relatives (Genesis 24). Abraham's actions model obedience to God to Isaac.

2. *Joseph* - The story of Joseph is almost like a fairy tale. As a young man, his father's favorite, he is sold into slavery by his jealous half brothers. He spent years as a slave in jail. It would have been easy for him to rationalize that God had abandoned him. He could have turned his back on God, but instead his faith grew stronger. Eventually, God brought him to the attention of Pharaoh, who freed him from slavery and made him Prime Minister of Egypt, the greatest country in the world. When Joseph had a chance to get revenge against his brothers, he did not. Instead, he saved their lives. The example of his righteousness and kindness was

not lost on his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. They, in turn, taught their children and their descendants became leaders among the Israelite nation. Joseph's spiritual leadership affected not only his two sons but his descendants for centuries.

3. *Job* - Job is described as "...blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1:1) He had ten children, seven sons and three daughters. On certain days (probably their birthdays), his sons would have a big party. When it was over, Job would gather his children together and offer a sacrifice for them in case they had sinned during the party. He taught them that it is possible to commit sin unwittingly. From their father, they learned to live pure and holy lives and to repent of their sins.

4. *Zechariah* - Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist. Luke describes both him and his wife, Elizabeth, as righteous and blameless (Luke 1:6). They were old and childless. God not only blessed them with a son, John, but also with divine revelations. They modeled their spirituality to John. He became the greatest of God's prophets, the one who introduced Jesus to Israel as God's Messiah (Christ).

C. Negative Examples of Spiritual Leaders

1. *Lot* - Lot was a man who had it all. He was the nephew of Abraham. He learned God's will from his uncle. He was an extremely wealthy man. Unfortunately, he let his wealth control him. Eventually, he ended up in the most evil city of his day, Sodom. Lot raised his children there and allowed them to marry the Sodomites. God judged the city and condemned it to destruction. He ordered Lot to leave the city. Lot tried to get his children to leave with him, but they called him crazy. Eventually, Lot, his wife, and two youngest daughters fled the city as God rained fire upon it. This was not the end of Lot's story. His wife could not bear to give up their home and wealth and looked back in longing for it. God struck her dead for her greed and disobedience. His two surviving daughters, did not want the family name to end. They got their father drunk, had sexual relations with him, and each had a son. As a spiritual leader, Lot led himself and his family to death, incest, financial and social ruin, and spiritual rejection of God.

2. *David* - David was called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). David was also a husband (eight wives and an unlisted number of concubines) and a father (at least 18 sons and an unknown number of daughters). As a military leader, a king, and the spiritual leader of the nation David was one of the greatest men who ever lived. As a father, he was a failure. His oldest son, Amnon, raped one of his half sisters, Tamar. Amnon, in turn, was killed by his half brother Absalom, Tamar's full brother, for raping Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Absalom led a

rebellion against his father and for a short time held Jerusalem. Eventually, he was killed in battle (2 Samuel 15-18). And in David's old age, Adonijah attempted to seize the throne in a palace coup (1 Kings 1). Eventually, Solomon killed Adonijah (1 Kings 2:13-25).

3. *Samuel* - Samuel was the greatest of the Judges of Israel. He served as priest, prophet, and civil ruler. He walked in the ways of the Lord and was loved by the people. Unfortunately, he also followed the example of his old teacher, Eli. He failed to teach his children and to correct their ungodly ways.

IV. Conclusion

The father's most important job is to be the spiritual leader of his family. It is more than just telling children about God. It is setting the right example and leading them to a knowledge of God.

What kind of people do you want your children to be? How will you feel when they say to you, “Someday, Dad, I'll be just like you!“ Will you be proud, or will you be ashamed? It is up to you.

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**