

# Parenting for the Next Trillion Years

## Genesis 22:1-14

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Today's message is on Christian parenting. I heard someone once say that parenting is the hardest job you'll ever love. I couldn't agree more. What do Christian parents want more than anything else? For our children to know Christ as Savior and experience his grace in eternal life. It's the deepest longing of my heart for my daughters. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees with children and faith and what they will believe. However, parents play an enormous role in the placing of the gospel before their child and making it attractive to them.

The Christian home is the most fruitful and effective mission field in all the world. To prove that, *if you are a Christian here today and became a Christian in the environment of a Christian home, would you stand up?* There is no mission field in the world with this rate of evangelism. Since that is the case, I want to talk to you today about the no question, no argument, number one greatest spiritual influence that parents can have on their children.

Here's the goal. Preparing your child for the next trillion years. There are around 6,000 days before age 18 in which a parent exerts direct influence. Parents, what will you do with those 6,000 days? I'm urging you to do all you can to prepare them for the next trillion years.

We are going to learn this from an experience in the life of Abraham. Who was Abraham? Abraham was the man through whom God promised would come a great nation. Direct promise. Here is the problem. Abraham became old and still had no direct descendant. It's hard to father a nation if you don't at least father one child through your wife (Abraham's wife was Sarah).

Abraham waits until he is 100 before God fulfills his promise. They named their precious new son Isaac. We pick up the story 13 years later.

### Abraham's Test (Genesis 22:1-2)

*"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'* (Genesis 22:1-2 ESV)

Imagine the look on Abraham's face? *You want me to do what?* This is completely shocking on every level. First, since when did God require child sacrifice? And not just any child, the child of promise? The writer makes it clear that this was a test, not a child sacrifice which God was very much against. Of course, Abraham didn't know it was a test. Have you noticed how when God tests us, he doesn't test priority 7 or 9? Instead, he goes right to the top of our list. For Abraham, that was Isaac.

He's told to go to Mt. Moriah. Mt. Moriah is around 45 miles away. This is like us walking to Southwest Michigan. It's a 3-day walk.

## **The Journey of Dread (Genesis 22:4-5)**

*"On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." (Genesis 22:4-5)*

We see Abraham's resolve to obey by the fact that he got up early in the morning. There is no arguing with God, and he doesn't drag his feet to obey.

Imagine Abraham's dread on this trip! What was Abraham thinking this whole way? He was remembering God's promise in 21:12, *Through Isaac you will have descendants. Through Isaac you will have descendants.* Each step. Over and over. Hebrews gives a glimpse.

*"[Abraham] considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." (Hebrews 11:19)*

Abraham thought, *If I kill him, God's promise will stand, which means that God will raise him from the dead.* That's faith. Believing the promises of God, no matter what the circumstance.

## **The Ascent and Altar (Genesis 22:6-9)**

*"And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.' So they went both of them together." (Genesis 22:6-8)*

Isaac knew what was involved in worshiping God. How? They were used to worshiping God together. Do you have spiritual routines with your kids?

I recall eating dinner at some peoples' house and the dad asked everyone to bow their heads for prayer at the table. And their son said, "But Daddy, we don't normally pray before we eat!"

*"When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood." (Genesis 22:9)*

While Isaac is called a boy, he is likely in his mid-teens. Abraham is well over 100 years old. We get a glimpse into their relationship as Abraham had to explain to Isaac why he was doing this. Imagine that conversation. *Isaac, you know I love you. You know how special you are to your mom and me. But God has told me that I must sacrifice you on this altar. As much as I love you, I love God more.*

At Isaac's youth and Abraham's age, Isaac could have outrun him or outfought him. But Isaac didn't. Abraham obeyed God and Isaac obeyed Abraham. That says something.

*"Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son." (Genesis 22:10)* No doubt this was with tears streaming down his face. This was the devastating moment in his priority 1 trial. Would he obey? Who held first place in his heart?

"But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.'" (Genesis 22:11-12)

Abraham had passed the test. God wasn't watching his knife, God was watching his heart. God saw that the necessary surrender had taken place. In obedience, Abraham intended to do it. At the last moment, God stopped him. The story goes on to tell how God supplied a ram in the thicket which was then sacrificed instead of Isaac.

There are many faith lessons in this story and many pictures of the life of Christ as well. But I want to ask one very important question. *What did Isaac learn that day on Mt. Moriah?* Getting up early. The three-day journey. The explanation by the altar. The tears on his face. What did Isaac learn as he looked up at the blade of that knife?

**Isaac learned that the number one priority in his dad's life was God.** All his life Isaac heard the stories of how special he was. How God had promised, and his parents had waited. If any child ever was the spoiled only child, it was Isaac.

But on that mountain, as he looked up at that blade, Isaac realized that he was not the center of his dad's universe nor the object of his deepest love. God Almighty was number 1 in his dad's life. No question about it. And it formed a deep and lasting impression in Isaac's life. Isaac became a hero of the faith also, listed in Hebrews 11 as a model of faith. How was Isaac influenced toward this?

**Parents, of all the tools and influences at your disposal, the most powerful and lasting influence for the gospel that you can have in your child's life is for them to see that God is your greatest treasure.**

Why? Because what is important to you is naturally passed on to them. It's easy to see this in other areas. If you grew up in a Cubs cheering home, you probably are a Cubs fan. If your dad was a lawn care kind of guy, you probably keep your lawn just so. That's the way it works. If it is clear that your life revolves around the Lord and his will for your life, your children will see it and it will make the gospel attractive to them.

We can't save anyone. We can't force faith on anyone. But we can make it attractive. The obvious and terrifying problem here is that you can't fake faith with your kids. You can fake it to other people. Smile on Sunday. Greet the pastor. What do we know? But your kids, they are in your home and watching 24/7. They know what we really care about. They know the true God of our lives by simply watching us.

We certainly are not talking about spiritual perfection in the home. We are talking about spiritual reality in the home. *You can be spiritually real in the midst of spiritual failure.* Let them see that as you confess your sinful attitude to them and ask them to forgive you. Tell them that you want to grow. **Not perfection, just reality.**

I have told the story of a firm memory in my mind when as a boy my mom gathered all four children and confessed a sinful attitude and asked us to forgive her. *Yes!* That reality in your life will work powerfully in their hearts as they grapple with the claims of Christ and the demands of discipleship. The same principle dangerously applies to any other counterfeit god they see in us. Paul Tripp has an excellent book on parenting called, *Age of Opportunity*. He lists other gods.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, pp. 31-36.

<i>Idol of comfort</i>	<i>My needs come first!</i>
<i>Idol of Respect</i>	<i>You will respect me!</i>
<i>Idol of Appreciation</i>	<i>I serve, you appreciate!</i>
<i>Idol of Success</i>	<i>You will make us look good!</i>
<i>Idol of Control</i>	<i>You will do what I say!</i>

These idols all reveal that our primary goal is not making them God-lovers, but parent pleasers or pawns used to make us look good. Our children tend to reflect the weaknesses in our own lives. That's why children drive parents crazy. The control freak parent drives his children away. The respect freak parent never earns her children's respect. The appreciation freak parent never gets enough kudos. On and on.

Here is the good news, while you can't save your child, every Christian parent is in a place of powerful influence for the gospel in their lives.

Growing up, I do not recall one night in all these years that if I looked into my parents' bedroom when they went to bed that I did not see my dad kneeling by his bed in prayer. Why do I remember that? Because dads don't do that unless they take their faith seriously. What did it do? It made a very strong impression.

Don't hear this as a challenge to live out your faith for your kids' sake. I am merely pointing out that the stakes in your child's next trillion years are huge and you are God's missionary to your child. So what sort of things make gospel impressions in a child's heart?

Pastor Bob Russell gave three key priorities in a message I heard 25 years ago that is the seed of this whole message...

## **Key Priorities in Parenting Your Children Toward Christ**

### **Attitude toward church**

For better or worse, the church represents God. A parent's attitude toward the local church will be interpreted by the child as to where their heart is toward God.

I grew up in a home in which we always went to church. It wasn't even an issue or a question. If the doors were open, we were there. What did that say? Church is important, and God is important. You know, I hear about parents sometimes asking their 12-year-old, *do you want to go to church or do you not want to go to church?* Really? Do you do that with school? *Would you rather watch Disney movies all day or go to school?* We laugh at that because we say we would never do that because education is so important. Don't make it an option. In general, you want to look for opportunities to show them that spiritual things are more important than other things.

I remember when basketball became an issue. My dad loves basketball. He himself played and we played. We played for hours and hours in our driveway. I attended every league and camp available. My sophomore year I was attending a large public high school where basketball practice was on Wednesday nights, sometimes late enough to interfere with the youth ministry that night. This was a dilemma for my dad; a little Mt. Moriah moment because he desperately wanted me to succeed in sports. But he went to the coach and said, *"My son will not be available after 6:30 on Wednesday nights."* Coach said, *"fine,"* but didn't like it. Wednesday nights I went to youth group. It hurt my playing time that year. But I learned a lesson about my dad's heart. Today, which is more valuable? My sophomore year basketball statistics or the impression my dad's stand made on my heart?

Your attitude toward church and leaders and the place of it in your schedule will speak volumes. If you're negative toward the church on the Sunday drive home, don't be surprised when your child turns 18 with a negative perspective on Christianity. You formed it in them, bit by bit for 6,000 days.

### **Atmosphere in the home**

Deuteronomy 11:18–19 tells us God told Israel to create an atmosphere of spiritual instruction in the home. Talk about the Lord in the day-to-day of life. I strongly encourage you to have regular family devotions, either in the morning or at night. There are books available of Bible stories when children are younger that keep them interested. Pray together. Memorize verses together. Put up spiritual quotes and truths around the house. Those have a way of sticking with you.

Some people will say, *you don't want to take that too far!* Yet you go to their house and they have shrines to IU basketball or the Bears. Memorabilia everywhere. *Why all this? These are important to us.* Will these be important in a trillion years? How important is where your child is a trillion years from now?

### **Adherence to God's command**

This is the daily ethic of our lives. Hear me. NOT spiritually perfect, just spiritually real. Lots of confession and forgiveness. Lots of Romans 7 stuff. This is directional. Is the general direction of my life toward the things of God? It's the single most influencing human factor in the spiritual lives of our children. Who are we before them on the Mt. Moriahs of our lives?

Today, we are giving you the opportunity to pray together. Parents, together, families, however you want to pray. Confess to God and maybe to your children, *Mommy & Daddy want to do this better.* They don't need perfection, they need reality. Maybe today can be a fresh start.

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