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## A GODLY HERITAGE

Genesis 48:1-22

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Genesis Lesson 79

## A GODLY HERITAGE Genesis 48:1-22

Back in the late sixties, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young came out with a popular song called, "Teach Your Children Well." It was addressed to the freewheeling hippie generation, which had tried to cast off all the restraints and rules of their parents' generation. While the song reflected noble intentions, I always thought that there was a great deal of irony reflected in it, that this rebellious generation would somehow succeed in teaching their children where their parents had failed.

I'm afraid that my generation succeeded in teaching our kids all too well. We taught them that lifelong commitment in marriage is outdated. We taught them to cast off the roles of husband as provider and wife as mother and homemaker. We taught them to do whatever feels good, whether sex, drugs, drinking, or any other impulse. And, we taught them to feel good about themselves while they walked out on their marriages and coped with all their various addictions!

But while my generation largely failed because we cast off God's standards, the theme of that song is still true, that we must teach our children well. The family is at the center of God's purpose. It is primarily in the family that a godly heritage is handed down from generation to generation. God chose Abraham and promised to give him a family and from that family to make a nation to bless other nations. Abraham's family was the foundation of the nation Israel, from which the Savior came.

In Genesis 48, we see Abraham's grandson, Jacob, handing his heritage in God to his son, Joseph, and to his grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim. He adopts Joseph's two sons as his own, blessing Joseph through them. One reason this chapter is here is to explain why Joseph isn't listed as one of the tribes in Israel. He got a double inheritance through his two sons who were adopted by Jacob.

Out of all the events recorded in Jacob's long life, the author of Hebrews selects this episode as his example of Jacob's faith:

“By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff” (Heb. 11:21). Jacob had not yet received the fulfillment of God’s promises. But he blessed these two young men, believing that God would keep His word through them. In that act of faith we see Jacob imparting to his son and grandsons the most important thing he could have given them, namely, faith in the promises of God. From this chapter we learn that the most important thing we can give to our children and grandchildren is not a college education or a large inheritance.

The most important thing we can give our children and grandchildren is a godly heritage.

I doubt if I need to convince you of the truth of that proposition. I cannot explore all the ways we can do it. But from this chapter I’d like to share three ways that we can impart a godly heritage to our children and grandchildren.

1. We give a godly heritage by taking spiritual concern not only for our children, but also for our grandchildren.

Jacob adopts these two grandsons as his own sons and imparts his blessing to them. With Jacob, as well as with his father, Isaac, before him, the blessing was reserved for a special occasion. It was more than just a father’s prayer for the well-being of his son. It was the actual imparting of well-being, based on special divine prophetic insight about the spiritual future of that son. Once given, it was irrevocable. That’s why Esau was so upset when Jacob deceived their father into giving him the blessing.

In 48:15 it says that Jacob blessed Joseph. But as you go on to read the blessing, you discover that Jacob blessed Joseph by blessing Joseph’s sons. Parents are truly blessed when their parents take a concern for the spiritual well-being of the grandchildren. Since God’s purpose spans the generations, our goal should be to raise up godly generations, not only through our children, but also through their children. Grandparents who love the Lord are a great gift to a child. They can sometimes impart spiritual truth to our kids in a way we can’t. And they reinforce the spiritual values which we’re trying to impart.

I love this perceptive essay by a third grade girl, called, "What's A Grandmother?" (James Dobson, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* [Tyndale], pp. 47-48):

A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own. She likes other people's little girls and boys. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys, and they talk about fishing and stuff like that.

Grandmothers don't have to do anything except to be there. They're so old they shouldn't play hard or run. It is enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is, and have a lot of dimes ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars. They should never say "hurry up."

Usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth and gums off.

Grandmothers don't have to be smart, only answer questions like, "Why isn't God married?" and "How come dogs chase cats?"

Grandmothers don't talk baby talk like visitors do, because it is hard to understand. When they read to us, they don't skip or mind if it is the same story over again.

Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don't have television, because they are the only grown-ups who have time.

All Christians are concerned for the spiritual well-being of their children and grandchildren, but they don't always communicate their concern properly. I've observed two opposite extremes. Some Christian parents err on the side of laying down rigid rules and correcting the slightest violation with severity. They lack grace, kindness, and patience. Others go to the other extreme and let their kids run wild, afraid that if they correct them they may damage their fragile self-esteem. They fail to impart any notion of God's standards for behavior or of consequences for disobedience. We must teach God's standards, but we must do it with tenderness and affection. People of any age,

but especially children, learn best when they feel loved and when they hear kind and encouraging words.

Here Jacob speaks encouraging words to these two grandsons. He draws them near to himself, kisses and embraces them. Though there is no mention of the look on his face, you don't have to read between the lines of verse 11 to see the radiance on his face as his dim eyes look with joy on these young men (who were about 20 by now). Then he lays his hands on them as he blesses them. Through his words, his expression, and his affectionate touch, Jacob made these grandsons feel loved. They later gave up their Egyptian culture and royal upbringing and identified themselves with this despised band of shepherds who were waiting for the promises of God. So take a deep spiritual concern, not only for your children, but also for your grandchildren, and wrap it in a love that they feel.

2. We give a godly heritage by recounting to our children and grandchildren our own experiences with God.

This assumes, of course, that we are walking with God. Jacob went through his ups and downs, but through it all, he had walked with God. When Joseph came to see him on his death bed, Jacob recalled how God had appeared to him at Luz (Bethel) and the promises God had made to him there. When he saw Joseph's two sons, Jacob expressed his gratitude that God had allowed him to see not only Joseph, but also his children. Then, in blessing his grandsons, Jacob recounted God's faithfulness and goodness again. Even in his unexpected crossing of his hands, so that the blessing of the firstborn went to Ephraim instead of Manasseh, Jacob was recounting his own experience of God's grace. Let me pick out of this chapter just three things about your experience with God that you need to impart to your children and grandchildren:

- A. Tell them of God's covenant faithfulness toward you.

That theme permeates Jacob's testimony in this chapter. Seventeen years before he had complained to Pharaoh, "Few and unpleasant have been the years of my life" (47:9). But now, Jacob has mellowed. As he takes a final look backward, he remembers how God appeared to him at Bethel as he fled from his brother. Jacob had deceived his father and wronged his brother. God

would have been just in finding someone else to use in accomplishing His purpose. But He appeared to Jacob and affirmed the covenant promises to him.

Twenty years later, Jacob wasn't much farther along. He had out-swindled his uncle Laban and headed back to Canaan. He had settled outside of the land without seeking God's direction. Then his sons deceived and murdered a whole town because one young man there had raped their sister. But God appeared a second time to Jacob at Bethel and assured him that the promises were still good.

Even in Jacob's great time of sorrow, when Rachel died, God's comfort had been real. The pain of that loss was still with the old man as he reminisced here (48:7). But God had been with him. Then the hammer blow of Joseph's loss had hit the grieving man. He had thought that he would never see his son again. He went through years of confusion, wondering how the loss of his one son who seemed to follow the Lord could fit in with the promises of God. But now, at the end of his journey, God had proved Himself faithful, as Jacob held in his arms not only Joseph, but Joseph's two sons. And so as he blesses his grandsons, Jacob tells them how God has been his shepherd all his life to that day and how God will be with them (48:15, 21).

When your family looks at your life, are they inclined to say, "God is sure faithful, isn't He"? Or, would they say, "God must not be very good, because dad's always complaining about the treatment he's getting"? Complainers tell others something untrue about God, namely that He isn't faithful. Kids are skilled in reading between the lines of our lives. If we profess to know the Lord, but our lives are a constant complaint, they put it together and make a mental note that they don't want anything to do with our God. We've got to tell them, by our words and our attitudes, that God is faithful, even through the hard times.

B. Tell them of God's great salvation.

Jacob calls God, "The angel who has redeemed me from all evil" (48:16). He was probably thinking primarily of his experience at Mahanaim, when the angels camped around him to protect him from Laban, and then when the angel wrestled with him at Peniel just prior to his feared reunion with Esau. He here

equates this angel with God. I believe the angel of God is the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "redeemed" is a special Hebrew word that was used of a near relative who had the means of helping a poor relative out of bondage. If the poor relative had to sell part of his property or even sell himself into servitude in order to survive, the redeemer could buy back that relative's property or the relative himself, thus restoring his freedom (Lev. 25:25 ff., 47 ff.).

That's a beautiful picture of what God did for us in Christ. We were enslaved to sin with no way to free ourselves. The price was more than we could ever afford. But God sent our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and paid the price with His own blood. It's a story that you need to tell your children and grandchildren over and over. They need to know that you once were lost in sin, but that Christ has saved you. They need to know that they need Christ as their Redeemer.

C. Tell them of God's amazing grace.

In blessing his grandsons, Jacob deliberately crossed his hands, so that his right hand rested upon Ephraim, the youngest, instead of upon Manasseh, the oldest, as Joseph had planned. When Joseph tried to correct his father, the old man said, "I know, my son, I know."

Why did Jacob do that? Because God had revealed to Jacob that Ephraim would take prominence over Manasseh among the tribes of Israel. In fact, this didn't happen for hundreds of years. Even in Moses's day, Manasseh outnumbered Ephraim by more than 20,000 (Num. 26:34, 37). Moses shows his faith in recording this prophecy which wasn't yet fulfilled in his day. But finally Ephraim did grow larger and more prominent than Manasseh, fulfilling Jacob's prophecy.

There was no human reason that Jacob blessed Ephraim above his older brother. But in so doing, Jacob was illustrating a divine principle which he had learned: that God blesses us apart from any merit on our part. The world would have picked the skillful archer, Ishmael; God picked quiet Isaac. The world would have picked the rugged outdoorsman, Esau; God picked conniving Jacob. The world would have picked the older, Manasseh; God picked the younger, Ephraim.

Why doesn't God operate on the merit system? Why doesn't He choose the most gifted, intelligent, upright, promising people for His church? Paul tells us that He does it to shame the wisdom of this world, so that no one can boast before God (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Manasseh could have grumbled, "It's not fair that my younger brother gets first place ahead of me." But if he had said that, he would have missed God's grace. Grace doesn't operate on the basis of human merit, but on the basis of God's sovereign choice. The clay has no right to question the potter, "Why have you made me like this?" (Rom. 9:20). If God gave us what we deserve, we would all go straight to hell. We must learn to humble ourselves before the Sovereign God and gratefully receive His grace, rather than grumble about why someone else seems to get better treatment than we do.

So we impart a godly heritage to our children and grandchildren by taking spiritual concern for them and by recounting to them our own experiences with God. Finally,

3. We give a godly heritage by picturing to our children and grandchildren our hopes for their future in the Lord.

If you were a refugee shepherd and had two grandsons who had been raised in the palace in the most advanced nation on earth, what kind of future would you hope for those boys? It would have been so natural for Jacob to wish for them all the privileges that the court of Egypt offered. They had all the comforts of wealth and opportunities for power and prestige. I wonder if their mother, from a well-known family in Egypt, would have been horrified to think of her sons being identified with the despised shepherds of Israel rather than with the high political circles of Egypt. "You're throwing away your career in Egypt for what?!!" But by faith Jacob pictured for these grandsons a future in which they were identified with the covenant people of God. Jacob believed God for the fulfillment of things not yet seen.

Then Jacob by faith paints a picture of Joseph's future in the Lord. He says, "I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow" (48:21-22). It would

have been so easy to say, "Son, I'm proud of your success in Egypt. You're a chip off the old block," and leave it at that. But Jacob helped Joseph to see what God wanted for his future, namely, to return to the Promised Land.

Verse 22 is difficult to interpret. We can't be dogmatic, but several Hebrew scholars interpret the verb as a prophetic perfect, describing that which is yet future as already accomplished. Thus Jacob is prophetically speaking of his posterity as taking by force that which he had purchased. He had bought a piece of land near Shechem. The Hebrew word "portion" is a play on the word Shechem. The word "Amorite" recalls God's prophecy to Abraham, that his descendants would be slaves in another land for 400 years, but that they would return to Canaan when the iniquity of the Amorite was complete (15:13-16). So here Jacob may be telling Joseph that the portion he had bought in Shechem was a pledge of God's promise and that his descendants would conquer the Amorites by force in fulfillment of God's judgment.

The point is, Jacob pictured a great future in the Lord for his children and grandchildren, a future that involved the fulfillment of God's promises. As God's people in our day, we need to picture for our children the great purpose of completing the task of world evangelization before the Lord's coming. We do not truly bless our children if we encourage them to worldly success instead of success with God. By our example, through stories we read to them, through the values we live and teach, we need to give our children a vision for the coming kingdom that God has promised for those who love Him.

Let me balance that by saying that we need to be careful not to determine that our children must follow in a certain career path to please us. Joseph had an agenda for his sons in which Manasseh received the blessing of the firstborn. God's plan was different, and Joseph had to bow before that plan. We need to encourage our kids to follow the Lord with all their heart, but at the same time realize that the Lord may not want them to be what we want them to be.

I know that my parents are delighted that I'm in full time ministry. But when I dropped out of seminary and spent four years painting houses while I waited for God's direction, they

never pushed me or said, "We're so disappointed that you dropped out of seminary." They loved me and told me that they wanted me to do what God wanted for me. The Lord led me back to seminary and into the pastorate, but I never felt pushed by my parents' expectations. In the flyleaf of the first Bible which they gave me for my eighth birthday my parents wrote, "Our greatest hope for you is that you will always live close to Jesus Christ." Through those kind of encouraging words, written and spoken over and over, we paint for our children and grandchildren our hope for their future in the Lord.

### Conclusion

As parents, we should feel greatly blessed of God if our children are blessed of him. I remember years ago when this really hit me. I had been reading the autobiography of the great British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I was jogging in the forest one day, asking God to bless my ministry like Spurgeon's. Suddenly the question popped into my mind, "What about John Spurgeon?" Millions have heard of Charles Spurgeon, but hardly anyone could tell you who John Spurgeon was. He was the father of Charles, also a preacher, and the son of a preacher. If his son had not achieved such fame as a preacher, John Spurgeon would have served the Lord faithfully, gone to his grave, and his memory would have perished. There have been thousands of pastors like him who have walked with God, shepherded His flock for a lifetime, and gone to their reward without any notice in the sight of the world.

As I jogged, I thought, "Would I be willing to serve God faithfully and raise up my children to serve him, even if I never achieved any recognition?" The more I thought about it, the more I realized, Yes! That's what I want! I would be gratified if my children and their children after them go on to love the Lord, even if I never achieve what the world views as "success." The most important heritage we can hand down to our children and grandchildren is faith in the promises of God. I encourage you to put aside everything that would hinder you and to work at giving your children that kind of godly heritage.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the biggest enemy in our culture as we seek to raise up godly children? Time pressure? Peer pressure? Drugs? Sex? TV? Success syndrome? (Other)?
2. How can we teach our children grace (unmerited favor) and yet teach them that behavior has consequences?
3. Agree/disagree: If kids don't turn out right the parents must have blown it.
4. Most of us aren't starting with a clean slate. How would you counsel a parent who may be divorced or in a messy family situation to begin in this process of developing a godly heritage for his/her children?

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