

A Father's Legacy
Proverbs 20:7
Father's Day—June 21, 2009
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Introduction

Most father's when asked what they most want to leave their children skip over things such as money and social standing to things such as: respect, honesty, self-discipline, faith. Tim Russert, the television newsman and author who died just before Father's Day last year at age 58, wrote in his book *Wisdom Of Our Fathers*

Not long ago, when I took Luke [his son] to Boston to begin his freshman year of college, I knew as the door to his dorm room closed that a major chapter in his life—and mine too—had just come to an end. He would never again be totally dependent on me. (Actually, that had been true for years, but as long as he lived at home while in high school, I could still pretend otherwise.) Before I drove off, I gave him some simple advice: “Study hard. Laugh often. Keep your honor.” I hope I've taught him to make good decisions and that I've given him a strong moral foundation to do the right thing. When my life is over, I know that the most important thing I'll be judged on is what kind of father I was.¹

Whether or not you agree with his closing statement, he makes an important point: every father makes a significant impact on his children; he leaves a very important legacy.

Think with me, on this Father's Day, about “A Father's Legacy.” Let's think beyond our own ideas of a good legacy to what God says is *the best legacy* we can leave our children. Our thoughts will be centered on one verse of Scripture. Turn to Proverbs 20:7. “A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.”

The Father Who Leaves The Best Legacy Is Righteous.

This verse tells us that *the father who leaves the best legacy* is righteous. The verse is about “a righteous man.” What does it mean to be a righteous person? The word used here refers to lining up with an ethical or moral standard. In the Bible it refers to the standard of God's character and actions. It was used to refer to actions of justice and accuracy in what one does. For example, Job said he “put on righteousness and it clothed [him]” (Job 29:14). He listed some examples:

- delivering the poor and orphans (29:12, 16);
- bringing help and joy to widows (29:13);
- giving guidance (29:15);
- rescuing the oppressed from the wicked and punishing the wicked (29:17).

- The word was also used to describe a man's character.

Noah, Genesis 6:9 tells us, "was a righteous man." Proverbs and the Psalms frequently speak of "the righteous man," of "the righteous," that is, people of righteous character (e.g., Proverbs 24:16; 29:2; Psalm 5:12; 92:12 etc.). The term is used here of a person who is righteous or right before God. It describes his spiritual state or condition.

But, as we read other statements in the Bible, that gives us a problem. First, God's Word tells us that none of us always do what is right before God. Ecclesiastes 7:20 states, "... there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." Then Romans 3 makes the obvious point, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

God's standard is perfection—complete, continual righteousness. We cannot become righteous people if we are better than most, or even if we are better than everyone else. In Psalm 143 King David asked God to hear his prayers and not judge him because, he said, "in Your sight no man living is righteous" (2b). Paul echoed this point in Galatians 3, "... no one is justified by the Law before God..." (11). It is an either/or state: either you are righteous or you are not. There is no comparative scale. Nothing short of God seeing and knowing you as totally right with Him makes you righteous. Since we are not perfect and cannot make ourselves perfect, if there is a solution for this problem it must come from outside, from beyond ourselves.

There is a solution, there is a way to become one who lines up with God's righteous character. God has provided the way for us to be made righteous. And, yes, those of us who are believers know about it and have experienced it. Let's be clear on it. The prophecy of Isaiah 53 looked ahead 700 years to Christ, the Messiah, the Savior,

... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (5-6)

Then about 25 years after Christ's death and resurrection, Paul wrote in Romans 3 that we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (24). It is only in and through Jesus Christ that anyone can become righteous. As Paul summarized it later in chapter 5, "For as through the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One [Christ] the many will be made righteous" (19).

If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, all your sins have been forgiven, you have life with Him forever *and* you are righteous before God in Him. Christ's righteousness was transferred to you as God's free gift because Christ paid for all your sins. It is Christ's righteousness which God the Father now sees in you.

This means that if you are a believer, Proverbs 20:7 is about you. You are the righteous man who can leave the best legacy for your children.

The Father Who Leaves The Best Legacy Walks In His Integrity.

How do we do that? *The father who leaves the best legacy walks in his integrity.* To understand this we need to start with clarifying what true integrity is. Let's take a closer look at the word *integrity* used here. The basic underlying meaning is to be complete. It was used in a variety of ways in the Old Testament, e.g.,

- a day that is *complete*, or an entire day (Joshua 10:13);
- a body that is *complete*, or sound, healthy (Psalm 38:3);
- a sacrifice that is *complete*, without any defect (Leviticus 22:21-22);
- speech that is *complete*, that lines up with the truth (Amos 5:10).

And so it also came to be used to describe what is morally and ethically sound and correct. King David pledged in Psalm 101 to “walk within my house with the *integrity* of my heart” (2). Again, in Psalm 19, he told God “keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be *blameless* [*complete*, a man of integrity]” (13). Let's go back to the description of Noah again in Genesis 6:9. He was, we already noted, “a righteous man” and, the verse continues “*blameless* [*complete*; a man of integrity]...”

So the overall picture is of our thoughts, speech and actions lining up with the righteousness of God we have in Christ. This is the *practical* side, or experiential righteousness. The same truth is expressed in different terms by the apostle Peter,

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Peter 1:14-15).

And it is by living with this *integrity* that we can leave the best legacy to our children.

But here is the rub. How do we do this? How do we *walk in our integrity*? Most of us know all too well that we can't do this on our own. We can live with integrity only through God's presence, guidance and power. As Paul wrote in Romans 7, “I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not” (18). Then he asks, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (24). His answer, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (25). As he wrote in his letter to the church at Philippi, “I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me” (4:33). To walk in our integrity means that righteous people must rely on God in every circumstance and moment.

What does integrity look like? First, when it says “walks in *his* integrity,” it points to living out the righteousness you have in Christ. That is, consistently thinking, speaking and acting as Christ does. Since we are in the Old Testament, let's look at two Old Testament

passages that give us both the overall picture and some specifics of integrity in action. If you are following in your Bible, mark the specific acts of integrity. Turn to Psalm 15.

“O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who *walks with integrity*, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; he swears to his own hurt and does not change; he does not put out his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.” (1-5)

Now turn ahead to Psalm 26.

“Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have *walked in my integrity*, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth. I do not sit with deceitful men, nor will I go with pretenders. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.” (1-5)

There are many, many more specific statements and examples in Scripture. Live out, walk in your integrity.

If you are thinking, “How can I ever do that?” remember again, it is Christ in you that makes it possible. At the same time, avoid two poles of error on this. The first is the idea of *perfectionism*—the idea that you have to be perfect to be one who walks in his or her integrity. Consider the example of King Asa, the fourth king over Judah after David. Turn back to 1 Kings 15, beginning at verse 9,

“So in the twentieth year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Asa began to reign as king of Judah. He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. He also put away the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made. He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned it at the brook Kidron.”

Now note this last sentence.

But the high places were not taken away; nevertheless the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days” (9-14).

He was not perfect, but his heart was devoted to God and his consistent walking in his integrity.

The second pole to avoid is the thinking that since I can't be perfect then, as we noted a few weeks ago, I can in effect say "God has saved me. He knows I am weak, that I'm far from perfect. So, when I sin, when I hang on to a few sinful things, He understands." Romans 2:4 tells us

"do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

Then in Romans 6 we read

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (1-2)

As A Result, He Leaves A Blessing For His Children.

As you live in your integrity the result is that you will leave a blessing for your children. When a child of God, a righteous person, walks in his integrity, God blesses him and he builds a legacy of blessing. God blesses your reliance on Him and your faithfulness to Him.

Part of that is a legacy of blessing that is first for you. Let's note several parts of this blessing found here in Proverbs.

- Turn back to chapter 2, verse 7. "He [God] stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity."
- Turn ahead to chapter 10, verse 7. "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot."
- Drop down to verse 9. "He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out."
- One more, look ahead to chapter 11 verse 3. "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them."

We can turn to the Psalms for a few more.

- 92:12-13, "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God."
- 112:1-3, "Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever."
- One more, 119:1-2, "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart."

These are just a few of the many blessings that God gives as He builds a legacy of blessing for those who walk in their integrity!

There is a warning to go with this—you must keep walking in your integrity, keep on building the legacy of blessing. You can quickly change the quality of your legacy. God told the prophet Ezekiel to warn the people,

“The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression... a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin. When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die.”
(33:12-13)

Keep walking in your integrity!

Let’s move on to the main thrust of our text. As a result of a righteous man walking in his integrity he brings from God, he leaves a blessing to his children. Our text, again, tells us “A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.”

What’s involved in this legacy of blessing? It includes tangible, material things. Proverbs 13:22 “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, and the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.” But that is not the main and most important part of this legacy. It is a personal, quality of life legacy. Proverbs 14:26 tells us “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge.” And, most importantly, it is a legacy of spiritual blessing. As God gave the ten commandments recorded in Exodus 20 He said, beginning at verse 4,

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (4-6)

Before I comment, look at the opening verses of Psalm 112 again. “Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed” (1-2).

Now a few comments. First, everyone bears full responsibility for their own choices. I can no more force God to do things for my children that I can force Him to do things for me. Neither can I blame my parents for my poor, wrong, sinful choices and their consequences.

We see this in Ezekiel 18:20.

“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”

Now, the point, the principle is that your children and grandchildren will be blessed by God through your legacy of faith and righteous living.

Last Monday we celebrated my father’s 90th birthday in Seattle. It was a good time. After returning home, I ordered flowers for him for Father’s Day. I chose the words to be written on the card with great care, and yet very easily. “A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.” My father is a righteous man who walks in his integrity. I have been greatly blessed. He has been and still is my model for all of life, including ministry. I am so fortunate to be walking in the blessing of my father’s legacy, *the best legacy*. My grandfathers and great grandfathers also were righteous men who walked in their integrity. I am so fortunate to be walking in the blessing of their legacy, *the best legacy*.

Conclusion.

“A Father’s Legacy.” As we enter the next few quiet, holy moments of time with God, reflecting on this truth and responding to Him, let each of us— not only the fathers— ask ourselves a few questions:

- First, “Do I know with certainty that I truly am a righteous person, that Jesus Christ is my Savior, that His righteousness has been given to me?” If so, as you have no doubt done many, many times, thank God for saving you. Thank Him as well that as His child you can build and leave the best legacy for your children and every person you impact. If not, come to God today.
- Secondly, ask yourself, “Have I been, am I really walking in my integrity?” Sort through and settle any outstanding issues with God.
- Finally, building on the first two questions, ask yourself “What kind of legacy am I leaving for my children, for all my family, for all I impact? Is it really *the best legacy*?”

¹ Russert, Tim. *Wisdom Of Our Fathers*. 2006. Random House. 11 June 2007
<<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19174679/page/2/>>

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