



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

A Passionate Heart: Problem Children

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Dr. Matthew J. Hook

2 Samuel 14:25, 28, & 1 Kings 1:5—6

Based on a sermon by Rev. Adam Hamilton

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Fatherhood—what are fathers supposed to do? And how do you get that information out?

We had, Leigh had Hunter, our first child 14 ½ years ago. I had a chance to stand by and watch. Coming home from the hospital in Memphis, TN, was wild...and wonderful. We prayed for him. And it hit me driving home. "I don't know what I'm doing!" No course on fatherhood, and I never received a job description. So I did what most of the fathers in this room did. I winged it. I made it up as I went along, pretty much. But truth be told, I *did* have a class on fathering. That class lasted over 42 years. That class's primary instructor was my dad. My dad taught me how to be a father.

He didn't teach me by lecturing very often. He taught me by showing me: what he did to me and for me. So watching my father I learned, I kind of caught it. "This is what dads are supposed to do." And where did my dad receive his education? From his dad. And where did he learn? From his dad. Most of our dads were pretty young and inexperienced when they started out. Where did your dad learn to be a father? Probably the same place.

So let's lay out a job description. I'd like for you to write them down, because in the end, we're going to come back and see how they relate to you personally, whether you're a woman or a man, father or not. Ready?

To be a Spiritual Guide. This is job #1. Before a child is ever born, God is molding them in their mother's womb. We believe that every child is a gift from God. Ultimately, the children belong to God before they ever belong to us. We are caretakers of those children, we are stewards, but God is the One who ultimately considers them His children. Scriptures say we are to "*Train up a child in the way they should go, so when they are old, they will not turn from it.*" Proverbs 22:6. We are to teach them first by our example. You who are fathers in particular are called to reflect in a small way, the love of their heavenly Father. When they look at you, they are seeing something of what God might be like and what God's love actually is like for them. That's a tall order to try to live up to. So when you say "Let's go to church this morning" instead of always leaving it up to your wife, that's saying something. Dad says "Being a Christ-follower is important. The walk is important." Every once in awhile it's a very healthy thing to have your kids accidentally catch you on your knees praying or reading your Bible on your own, or doing something specifically because you felt God wanted you to. They need small stuff that says "this is how important God is in my life" day in and day out. Moses meant this when he said "*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.*" 7

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Deuteronomy 6:6-7. This is job one for a father: to be a spiritual guide.

The second duty of a father is to **love & treasure your children**. That seems to go without saying. Most of us say “Yes, I want to love my children.” But a biblical kind of love is not syrupy, but sacrificial. Jesus demonstrated this love, in that “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” Romans 5:8. This is how God shows or proves his love for us. Sacrificial love puts the needs of the other before your own needs. It’s sacrificial. The “love chapter” was not written for weddings, but for day in, day out living. Let’s self-evaluate here: Instead of love, try inserting your name, and see how you line up. Put your name in where love fits. “*4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.*” It’s huge. How many people have struggled their entire adult lives because they never felt treasured by their father. They never felt that they were somebody. They never felt that their lives mattered. People in their 50s and 60s who say “Even though my dad is gone, I am still feeling that vacuum left from the time I was growing up, and I never really knew if he treasured me or not.” This is a powerful thing. Let ‘em know now.

The third responsibility is **to shape the character** of one’s children. How is that different from the first 2? This: We’re talking about your children’s sense of right and wrong, their moral compass, their sense of what a man or a woman is to be. There is a book entitled “Children are Like Wet Cement”. I like that title. While they are small they are still being formed and shaped, they’re not set in stone. You are the primary influencers. And consistently ask yourself “What does God have in mind for my child?” The answers are there.

The fourth of our list of characteristics is **to equip and prepare our children for life**. And that’s something that many of our dads did fairly well. The basic stuff of how to live. How to shave, how to load the razor blade, how to take care of yourself. Basic hygiene. How to deal with business ventures, how to have an interview, how to change a tire, how to fill up the gas tank. That’s part of the job: how to prepare you for life.

The fifth responsibility may come as a surprise. But it’s come out in psychology that one of a father’s primary roles is to **be a playmate** for his children. Wives, studies show it’s not just men being irresponsible. Sorry! ☺

The sixth part of the job description is **just being present** in a child’s life. Theologically, this is called “The ministry of presence.” It means that you show up. If possible, you live in the same home. If that’s not possible because of divorce or travel, then you find other ways to have the ministry of presence. It may mean email, regular phone calls, and visits. But presence is very important. And let me note: There are dozens of people here in this room whose mothers were wonderful single moms with a great family life. But when possible, when there’s a father, a father, the father in the house, it does make a difference.

And finally, the role of **provider and protector**. The role most of *our* fathers felt was their primary responsibility, we’ve actually listed last. I think it comes far below what many of us thought, but it is vital and important.

There’s an eighth point of any good job description: “**And all other duties and responsibilities** which may arise, as necessary, to fulfill the job requirements.” That means all the things you just thought of that I forgot to include are covered in point 8 of the job description. Lots and lots of things. I’d love to hear your response to that job description. Hold on to this list, because we’re going to evaluate that in a moment.

Let’s turn to King David himself. We’ve studied how he did so many things very, very well; but not everything. **He did not know how to father**. And like many of us, he learned from his father, who learned from the father before him.

Now we read in the Scriptures that David had at least 19 sons, listed in the books of Samuel as well as

Chronicles. We find he had at least one daughter named Tamar and perhaps more. You would think he had lots of experience in being a father. But unfortunately that was not a part of his culture or his experience. In his culture it was someone else who always took care of the children. It wasn't really the king's responsibility to interact with them. So while he loved his children and loved them deeply the Scriptures seem to indicate, he did not know how to interact with them.

Out of David's 19 children named in Scripture, there are 4 boys and 1 girl whose stories are told in some detail in the Scripture. All of the other children we don't know, other than their names. We talked about Solomon a little bit last week. There was Tamar, and Amnon, and Absalom, and Adonijah.

Amnon was the oldest of David's sons, the crown prince of Israel. And tragically, because of David and Bathsheba, Amnon learned from his father one terrible, tragic lesson: women were objects to be possessed and had. Not people to be treasured. And so while he watched his father have a terrible affair with Bathsheba, Amnon learned that it was okay to break the law of Israel, if you were a part of the king's royal house. If you followed the study guide you read that Amnon thought he was in love with his half-sister Tamar. But it was lust. In the end, even though she rejected him and begged him "Please don't do this thing," he raped her. Now, Scripture says David was furious with his son Amnon, but he did nothing, which was a tragic mistake. Because Absalom, who was Tamar's full brother, who was the next in line to the throne after Amnon decided to take matters into his own hands. Absalom. He was the most handsome of all the king's sons. He had long hair. He was "romance novel guy", handsome in every way. King material. Absalom decided to take matters into his own hands, since his father seemed unwilling or inept to take into his hands the discipline that was needed for Amnon, and so 2 years after this all happened, he decided to bring about vengeance upon his brother. And while his brother Amnon was at a party, Absalom came behind him and slit his throat. He killed his older brother. Now, when David got word, he grieved and he mourned and Scripture says he wept bitterly for his son. But David did nothing. Absalom fled to the kingdom of Geshur, which was a neighboring kingdom. Absalom's grandfather was the king of Geshur, his father was the king of Israel. He fled there. He married, he began having children, and for 3 years lived in Geshur. And not once did David try to make contact with his son. Not once. Moms & Dads, don't just "do nothing!"

David was mourning and grieving for Absalom his son. He was wishing his son would come home. He was wishing he could be restored with a right relationship with Absalom, but he did nothing to make that happen. He did not reach out to him at all. *Some of you* know what that feels like, because some of you had fathers like that. And there was a wall built up, and your dad did nothing to try to break through that wall. And some of you like Absalom are on the other side. You're afraid to say anything, you don't know if you should say anything, you don't even know what he's thinking. And Absalom is thinking all this time "My dad must hate me. My dad despises me, or else he'd at least write or try to make contact with me. I mean, I have children now, and my dad doesn't even care about my children."

Now Joab, David's general, becomes an intermediary between them, and he brings Absalom and his family back to Jerusalem in Israel. And there in Jerusalem, Absalom sets up a home. And now he's living only blocks away from King David. Literally around the corner. David could have stopped by any time. Could have invited him to eat a meal in the royal palace. David knows his son is back, and for 2 more years there is silence. That's our scripture. For 2 years, Absalom doesn't hear a word from David, his father. 5 years of silence takes its toll on a person.

During that period of time, not only did he become convinced his father hated him, but he began to hate his father. Finally, Absalom decides his father is not an apt king for Israel, and decides he is going to overthrow his father. His father is king over Israel. And the only way he could do that is if his father is dead. So Absalom decides to lead a revolt, a revolution against his father, and have his father killed. Can you imagine what it would take for a son to think his father needed to die? For Absalom to do these things? The kind of pain and hurt that was there?

Absalom leads the revolt. And David's armies go on the attack against Absalom's armies, and in the end Absalom is killed, even though David gave the command for everyone in the army to spare his son. And then the Scripture tells us in a passage you will read this week, it says "*The king was shaken to the core. He went*

up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you-- O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Kings 18:33.

What a tragedy. All of this would have been avoided if David would have just told his son "I love you." How many encounters would it have taken to prevent all of this? One? Two? Three? Five? Of course it would have been awkward that first time...but what a difference it could have made.

Let's talk about our fathers, and our heavenly Father for a moment. When we look at David, we see there are a number of forces that shaped him. You remember how his father Jesse prejudged him, excluding him from the prophet Samuel's visit. "Surely you can't mean David?" Do you see where some of these things start? David was shaped by his father, who was shaped by his father. The Scripture says "*punishing the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation...*" Exodus 20:5. It's the power of idolatry. It's the power of sin. And you can look around and see people where it's the truth. You see that not only was the father, but the grandfather and great-grandfather alcoholic, or abusers, or distant, or strict disciplinarians, or lax disciplinarians, or a whole bunch of other characteristics that our children pay for, and then pass on to their children...and their children's children.

Sin is powerful. But hear now the more powerful thing about being a Christ follower: It doesn't have to be that way. The powerful thing is when you give your life to Jesus Christ, and you say "Lord, I want to follow you. I invite you into my life, to be Lord." God sends his Holy Spirit into your heart. His Spirit is there to mold you and shape you and make you into the person God wants you to be. The holy Spirit doesn't make you better than anyone else; just better than you used to be. He is a powerful shaping force that transcends the power of sin, the power of your parents, the power of your culture, the power of anything else, when you actually surrender your life and invite the Holy Spirit in. He begins to shape those things in you. He begins to break the chains that have been binding your family for generation after generation after generation, and your past does not have to equal your future. You still will struggle, but in Christ, the power is broken!

That's why Scripture says "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" 2 Corinthians 5:17. That's why Jesus talked about being born anew, or born again. Because you don't have to continue to be the person you once were, or the person your father or your mother was. Here's something amazing that God does: he takes those things that were hard in your life, and put in His hands, he's able to make something beautiful come of them.

2 more words: One is for you who are fathers and grandfathers & uncles & neighbors: **it's never too late to start on the right path.** Had David just turned to Absalom, after he learned his lesson from Amnon, everything would have been different. You look at that list of job descriptions, and you say "I didn't do so well. Now I have grandchildren." What a great time to start! And you can say things...and they'll listen to you, no matter how many times their parents say the same thing. You can make an impact.

And finally this word to all of us who *have* fathers: There comes a time in your life when your **roles begin to shift.** The time will come when they need your help. And suddenly all those things we laid out in the job description become things *your parents* need from *you*, as a son or daughter. You have the opportunity to be a spiritual guide for them, to pray for them daily, to invite them to church, to help them see Christ through you. You have the responsibility to love and treasure your parents, even if they weren't lovable when you were small. To let them see that now it means to live with right and wrong. To show your mother or father what a husband and wife could be, even if they didn't know it before now. That you can equip & prepare them for new stages of life. In Christ, their chains can be broken. In Christ you can find the capacity to tear down the walls that had been erected over time. In Christ, you can find the ability to be everything good that your parents were, and to love them with the love of God. To minister to them in their time of need, and to reflect the love of Jesus to your mother and your father.

This week, may you not do nothing. May you build bridges, and tear down walls, and break the cycle. May you find the power of Christ within you so that your past does not have to equal your future. And may you share that with as many people as possible. Amen.

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2 Samuel 14:25 In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him... 28 Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face.

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The Job Description of a Father

- Where do you get this information?
 - A Job Description Evaluation
- | | David | Your Dad | You |
|----------|-------|----------|-----|
| 1. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 2. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 3. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 4. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 5. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 6. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 7. _____ | ___ | ___ | ___ |

A Tragic Tale—David's Three Sons

- Amnon –
- Absalom –
- Adonijah –

Our Fathers and Our Father

- David's father Jesse and the forces that shaped your father.
- The enduring power of our fathers.
- The awesome power of The Father
- A word to Fathers and Grandfathers
- A word to Those with Fathers

Study Guide

As you read, maximize the spiritual benefit you receive by asking yourself these questions:

1. What do I learn about people from these stories?
2. What do I learn about David from this account?
3. What do I learn about God from this story?
4. How does this relate to me today?

Monday—2 Samuel 16—David Flees from Absalom. If you didn't read last Friday's study guide, read 2 Samuel 15 before reading 2 Samuel 16. In that passage, Absalom, King David's son, is trying to overthrow his father's throne. In verses 1—4, we find a servant of the first King, Saul, who helps David. The servant's master is Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson. David has welcomed him to his table as a way of honoring Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan. Read verses 5—14. What character trait of David do you see in this passage? What might this look like if lived out in your life? Read verses 15—23. Remember that to claim the harem and concubines was to claim to be king. Absalom now does what was evil in the eyes of God by having those women. Absalom follows bad advice and does this on David's rooftop, on display. What might be your own life lesson here?

Tuesday—2 Samuel 17—Absalom Gets Bad Advice. Read 2 Samuel 17. Remember that Hushai is loyal to David, He gives poor advice to give David a chance to flee? Why did Ahithopel kill himself? What would have happened if David came into town in power?

Wednesday—2 Samuel 18—Absalom Put to Death. In this chapter is an all-out civil war between forces of David and the forces of Absalom. Remember in 14:25-26 we learn about Absalom's hair? It gets him in trouble. Look over the sermon notes and consider how Absalom's life might have been different if David had been a different kind of father. Notice the love David had for Absalom, despite all his wrongdoing. If only David had talked with him, it wouldn't have

come to this.

Thursday—2 Samuel 19—David’s Return and Resumption of the Throne. What character traits of David are the dominant ones in these stories? He shows this to each of his enemies. How does this relate to your life? In the end of the chapter notice the conflict between the “men of Israel” and the “men of Judah.” The tribe of Judah was where David had come from. It is the largest tribe. The northern 60% of Israel in David’s time was known as the region of Israel, while the south was known as Judah.

Friday—2 Samuel 20—Sheba Rebels Against David—Joab’s Character. Take time to reflect on Joab, David’s general. At times he took matters into his own hand. Why did David keep him around? How does Joab do this again in this chapter? It represents the violence and brutality that was in everything, even justice in David’s day. Is there a message for you? Pray to your heavenly Father. If you are a father, invite God to make you a better father. Consider the mistakes of David and how much they cost him. Next week, we’ll actually jump back for the story of David and Bathsheba. See you Sunday!