

Spiritual Fathers

Hebrews 11:8-10: “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

Then in I John 2:13: “I am writing to you, fathers, ...”

Let us pray:

Father, we worship You this morning. You are our Father and our God and our Savior. Lord, we are so grateful that You have made Yourself known to us. And this morning we come to You and we ask that You would speak to us so that we would hear Your voice in the Scriptures and through the things that are shared. Lord, this is what we are seeking. We are not seeking a teaching. We know that You do not want that. We want You to speak to us as if we are sitting here with You, because we are, we are here in Your presence. You have made it possible. You have cleared the way that we can have fellowship with You. And Lord, we pray you would fellowship with us through the Word by the Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.

These things that I am sharing this morning have been on my heart for a long time. Who knows why God puts things on your heart? But they have been on my heart for a long time, and maybe it is because I am getting old. When you get old, you start to pay attention better. You are not thinking about, “I need to have a good message.” You are thinking more about, “Lord, what are you saying to me at this time? Because I want to finish well.” And this is not about finishing well, but it is about hearing what the Lord is saying, and what I know He is saying to me. So I want to start off with Hebrews. I am not sharing this verse in Hebrews to talk about faith and things like this, but there is something about fathers that must be in context with the whole body. There are

no fathers without the body; fathers are given to the body. Fathers are placed in the body for His purposes, for His desires. They are manifestations of who God is, and they are manifestations of who God is to the brethren.

Fathers Living in the Whole Generation

In Hebrews 11, you have, “Abraham was in tents with Isaac and Jacob.” That is the whole generation. I know I have said before that a generation is not just, “It is my generation now, it is moving out, and the generation of young adults is moving in, and the little generation that are downstairs are going to come in.” No, we are all one generation; we are all living in the same generation. God is speaking to this generation, this time that we are living in. So, it is important that we take things in the context of when God is speaking, for He is speaking to the whole body.

He is not just singling out, like the verse in John says. I know we always read it like this: “I am speaking to YOU; I have written to YOU fathers, and so on. I have written to YOU.” No, he is saying, “I have written to you, fathers, I have written to you, young men,” and the emphasis is on the “YOU. But this is the way you should read it, “I have written to you. I am speaking to you, because I am speaking to the whole generation, so let us not separate generations.

Our brother, Kumar, gave an exhortation about a generation gap. There is no generation gap, so to speak. We are all living in the same time. Now we may see things differently because of where we are in our age and in our maturity with the Lord, but the speaking is the same; it is to all of us.

I am not saying this is what you need to do to be fathers, because you grow into being a father. That is what happens; you grow into it. The Lord leads you into being a father. And there are some in the congregation who might be seen as fathers.

Function As Fathers

When I talk about fathers, I am not talking about a gift; I am talking about a function. We function as fathers to those that are younger. So, I am not talking about giving instructions, but fathers supply something. Ephesians says that we are all joints of supply to one another. So fathers supply something just like young men supply something, and just like little children supply something to the whole body. So, as we are looking at these things and talking about them that are specific today, it is not saying, "Oh, he is talking about fathers. So as a young person, I am going to text, because I do not need to hear this." No, for you younger brothers and sisters, I think the Lord's message to you is: "I want to show you; I want you to seek out the fathers that I have put here, because they have a function for you." And he is saying to the fathers, "Fathers, you have a function." And as I said, not everybody is a father, but we all will in one way or another are going to function as a father here and there. And we need to realize that because it is a serious thing. It is not like being a father is some kind of a position. It is not; it is a function, and the whole body is supposed to be functioning.

So, when we think about this, you know, it is a manifestation of the Scriptures that said, "Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things." That is how fathers function. It is a manifestation of that. Because fathers know you have need. That is the thing about fathers. Fathers are providers. They provide the family with the things they need. They do not just say, "I am head of the family, so it is my word or the highway." That is not it. It is being a provider and aware of needs. You become aware; you know.

It is so funny, I should not say funny, but it is so true. When I was a teenager, I never even thought of being married. All you do is think of yourself: "What am I going to do? What is going to please me?" Then you get married, and suddenly you are aware that it is not just me. "Oh my God! I have to think about somebody else." Then when you have

kids, oh man! I have asked people, "Do you want to know what a bond slave is? Have children, and you are a bond slave." It is not that the kid owns you, but you become a slave out of love, and you are aware of what is needed. Not only that, you are also moved to provide what fathers provide, and that is stability, grace, direction, and guidance. That is what fathers do because it is providing.

I did not get along well with my dad, but my older brother, Mike (bless him) was a lost soul for a while, until he became a carpenter. And when he became a carpenter (my dad was a cabinet maker), suddenly there was this relationship that bloomed. I was jealous of that because I never had it, but my brother did, and to see it blossom was a blessing to me. It was something I was envious of, but to see it, and to see how my brother flourished because of it was a wonderful thing.

And brothers and sisters, that is what the Lord has done in making a body. He has created a body that has fathers, young men and little children, all for His own glory; all so He can show who He is. And that is it. It is not so that I function this way, and this is what I am and things like that. It is to show forth who the Lord is and to manifest God.

I want to look at four things before I do a conclusion in looking at fathers. Fathers are examples and are sources in their functioning. They function as examples in certain things, and they function as sources in other things. You cannot pin it down into a box because there is no functioning as a father, apart from a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. There is none.

You cannot do it. You cannot say, "Okay, these are the things you need to do." You cannot do it because you do the things the father does because you see the father doing things. Isn't that the life of the Lord Jesus? "I see My Father doing things, and that is what I do. I hear My Father saying things and that is what I say." So apart from a relationship, a living relationship, a current relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, there is no functioning as a father in life. You can do

the things that a father does, but life is not there. So, I said there are four kinds of things. Two are functions of examples and two are sources. So, I am looking at these things, and they are all New Testament verses today.

Fathers Are Examples of Real Faith

The first one I want to turn to is II Timothy which is to Timothy and his last letter. It was not long after this letter that he was martyred, and this is wonderful encouragement.

II Timothy 1:5: "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well."

I have the New American Standard and it says, "sincere faith," but it is also translated in others as "genuine faith," and it is also translated as "unfeigned faith." If you put those altogether, what they all have in common is that they are real. There is nothing fake about it.

"Jim, you are talking about fathers, but here you have Eunice and Lois, and those are not masculine names." You know, the Lord manifests Himself through women, through sisters also. It does not mean that sisters cannot be fathers. In Christ there are no women and men. There is no difference, and I will bring an example later today.

The whole thing about Timothy here is that he had an example of real faith. And we have these ideas of faith that sometimes we think that faith is for special moments. "I am in trouble! I need faith!" Or it is a one-time experience when we come to the Lord, but after that, we do not exercise faith anymore. So, we follow the law. But he said, "It is an example of real faith." Now what does that mean? Or what does that look like? As I thought about it, I looked at it this way. In the Lord's Prayer, after the praising of the Lord, the first request is, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is a day-to-day faith. This is faith. Lord, I am

looking to you to give me the things that I need for this day. And to me, it was so weird.

I remember when we went with Floyd to Concord when they were starting the fellowship. We stayed with the brothers and sisters in Concord because Floyd wanted us to experience the ministry of beginning things. I remember there was a brother there that we know. Almost everything, any problem that came up for the day, the first thing he did was pray. He just stopped right there and prayed, and asked for the very things that were needed for that situation for the day: "Now "Lord, this is happening. Will You do this?" That is everyday faith.

When I am talking about everyday faith, this is the thing that really has been the most meaningful to me in looking at this and thinking about it. It is a faith that is secured in this very thing, that I am in God's hands. *I am in God's hands*. No matter what happens around me, I am in God's hands, and I can trust that whatever is happening around me has not gone apart from Him.

A sister suggested that I read Biddy Chambers' Biography, and I did. Her daughter was saying this about her: "All my life, my mother never for half a second questioned what God allowed to happen. She might be puzzled but unperturbed and never desperate. She believed God was in the middle of the situation." That is a faith that stabilizes. From that one hymn that I read from this morning, she says, "When you falleth, He stays thee." He keeps you from falling, from teetering off; He keeps you. He stays you. He stays you not for your own self, but he stays you so that you are not wavering away from Him. "I have you. I have you in My hands. I know you do not feel like I do, but I have you."

This is the very faith that David talked about or expressed in Psalm 23, when he said, "Though, I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear everything that is coming against me?" "No! I will fear no evil for Thou art with me." This is the type of faith that Timothy's mother and grandmother had.

This was the faith of the widow of Zarephath. In I Kings 17, when Elijah went to the land that was experiencing a famine, God said to him, "I have set it up for you, so you do not have to worry about it. I have a widow that is going to take care of you." When he goes there, he finds that it is a poor widow, of all things. She has just a little bit of flour and oil left, and she said, "I am just going to make this and die." Then he said, "Well, can you give me a piece first?" The widow said, "Okay." And he said, "From now on, the flour and the oil will not disappear." It is not like that suddenly trucks came in with all this flour. "We got you and the widow for the next seven years, Elijah." No, it was a day-by-day thing. You see, this is the goodness of the Lord, day by day. "I do it day by day. I do not just go out and smooth everything out for you all at once, but you can trust Me. *You can trust Me.*" That is day by day faith.

I could give you many examples of ones living by faith, such as George Muller of Bristol. That is a good biography to read if you want to read about faith. Or Amy Carmichael's, "A Chance to Die" or "Gold Cord." Or you could read about Anthony Groves, a man of faith, and to us these are great saints.

So, I want to tell you about a person you have never heard of, and I know you have not heard of him. His name was Caramel Hermans. I know you have not heard of him, have you? He was a Belgian guy, and I met him in Sydney, Australia. I know that I told you before that I had a really great experience while I was on tour, and the Lord really captured me at that time. I had a roommate that was really weird, and I could tell you stories, but I won't. When we got to Sydney on the last part of the tour, this roommate dragged me into Teen Challenge, and there was Caramel Hermans, a little Belgian guy. I was 23, and he was 28 or 33, something like that. He was very slight, not too tall.

He washed my feet. Not literally, but I tell you, he washed my feet, and he was such an encouragement to me. He was the head of this house of Teen Challenge, and he was telling me about how things

function and what they do: "You know, we are needy, we are in need all the time." He had a George Mueller experience, and it was not just once, not quite often, but it happened periodically. He said, "We would get to the table, and we would say, 'Lord, we do not have any food, but we just thank You. We are just grateful that you are God.'" Then there was a bakery truck coming up and saying, "Hey, we have extra bread here, do you guys want it? We will give it to Teen Challenge." The whole thing was this type of faith. This was the faith that was in him that was being shown to all the younger workers in Teen Challenge. So, they got to see a faith that now encouraged them in trusting God and believing God. It spoke to them that God is not only able to do these things, but He is also willing to do these things, and He does do these things. This is an example of faith, and it comes from those that have learned to trust.

Lois and Eunice had learned to trust God in a daily way, and that was witnessed by Timothy. That is why Paul said, "I see it in you too, Timothy." It was a real faith. It was fathered toward them, and he was fathered into it. He was fathered into the experience, not the knowledge of it. There is a big difference. He was fathered into the experience of it, just like those people at Teen Challenge who were fathered into the experience of it. It is a wonderful thing to have that simple faith, the reality that God is a Father and a caring Father at that.

Fathers Are a Source of Encouragement

Secondly, fathers are a source of encouragement. Acts 11:19-26: "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off

to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

This is Barnabas, and we know a lot about him. We know that Barnabas was not really his name; his name was Joseph. Why did they call him Barnabas? Barnabas means “son of encouragement” or “consolation.” So why did they call him Barnabas? Because that was how he functioned. That was exactly how he functioned.

I want to say something about encouragement. Encouragement is not coming alongside and saying, “Oh, dear, dear, dear, you can do it. Attaboy; come on, you can do it. Come on, I urge you on.” That is not the encouragement we are talking about. This is the thing about Barnabas as an encourager, and I think this is really, really important. When he went up to Antioch or he went up to that area and stopped at Antioch, the apostles did not send him out to bring everybody under their rule. But he went up as a brother to see.

This is the thing about fathers. I said, “Fathers are aware.” He was aware of the grace of God in that place. He was aware that God was doing something in that congregation among those people. For us, we can bring it down to the individual. The Lord will make us aware of a younger brother or a younger sister, and we can see the grace of God working in them. Maybe they are struggling with something, maybe a sin or a problem, something like that. But the grace of God is there, and it is ready to be delivered. Suddenly, the Lord shows you that, and you are aware of it, and you come alongside. This is a “Son of Encouragement,” the Greek word is *parakaleo*, and we get Paraclete

which is what the Holy Spirit is known as—Paraclete, the one who comes alongside.

The whole thing about this encouragement is that first, you are aware. You are aware of life. You are aware of life being challenged, life being grown, life being held down. You are aware of that, and you come alongside with a calling to one's aid. The calling is not that this person or this group of people are calling for your aid. It is the Lord who lives in you and with whom you are in a relationship who says, "Go alongside." Sometimes you are sent out like Barnabas was sent out, "Go and check out what is happening." But a lot of times, brothers, and sisters, it is out of our relationship with the Lord, and we become aware of others around us. That is the whole key to everything, isn't it?

We get so turned in on our own walk with God. I have got to be like this. I have got to be the overcomer. I have got to be whatever. We are so turned in that we are trying to fix ourselves or make sure that we have a good presentation for everybody that we are not aware of anyone else.

The Lord is saying, "I am aware. If you could get out of yourself for a minute, I want to show you. I have work for you. I am not worried about who you are. I know who you are through and through, but My Son is in you, and they need Him. Your coming alongside is not going in with your great wisdom, your great compassion. It is the life of the Lord Jesus that you are bringing with you."

I think of Ed Miller; he is so precious. And he goes, "I had to go to the emergency room. I guess the Lord Jesus needed to be there, because I am taking Jesus with me." That is the whole idea, brothers and sisters, we are taking Jesus with us. We are coming out of that relationship with Him.

So, Barnabas goes and it says that he strengthened them and urged them on in the way they were going. I remember for me, it was Floyd Police who urged us on, and he might say, "Hey, here is a book, why

don't you read this?" Or he might say, "Why don't you come with me to Concord?" Whatever it was, it was to encourage us to go on, so that our eyes would be opened more to the Lord Jesus. It was never about himself, but, "I want you to see what the Lord is doing. I want you to see more of the Lord."

In another case, Barnabas took Mark under his wing, and I want to say that he disciplined him. Oh, brothers and sisters, some of our young men need that discipling. Now we who are older know the discipleship movement and all the bad stuff that came out of it back in the 70's. Discipling does not mean lording it over, and that is what it became back in the 70s. Even Derek Prince apologized and said that way was wrong.

Nevertheless, discipling is a guiding; it is coming alongside, walking alongside, and guiding. Mark messed up the first time when he went with Paul and Barnabas. But Barnabas still wanted to take him on the second one. Isn't that interesting? Now Paul said, "No way," and it caused the split between them, but the whole thing is that Barnabas took him alongside. And through that, there was a model for serving God. There was a model; not a teaching about serving God. It was not a conference about serving God. It was a "taking alongside with me. Come with me while I serve the Lord and be my helper." It is almost like an apprenticeship: "Come along with me." You think of all the things that could have happened. It was not just, "Oh, he is going to teach me how to preach." No! He taught him how to serve.

I do not know if Mark ever preached anything. We do know that Paul said, "He is of service to me," whatever that means. We do know that he wrote the Gospel of Mark, but we never hear about him preaching; because you see, serving is not always preaching. There are a lot of things that the Lord has for us to do that have nothing to do with preaching. Most people say, "I want to serve the Lord." But their thought is to stand up in front and preach the word. So, he recognized

in Mark that the Lord had a calling on this man. He recognized that, and he took him under his wing with him and he brought about what the Lord wanted. The Lord wanted a servant, and He got a servant. Isn't that wonderful?! But it took an older brother to take him under his wing.

Fathers Are Examples of Living As You Serve

Third, they are examples of living. I said living service here, but I want to say living as you serve.

II Timothy 3:10: "Now you followed my teaching, manner of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance." Now the New American Standard says, "conduct," but I changed it because I am such a scholar. But "manner of life" is not that I want to see just your conduct.

You know, the Muslims have done that. They have a book called the Sunnah, and all the Sunni Muslims are called after that book, the Sunnah. The Sunnah was a compilation of how Muhammad lived. That is where we get the five pillars of faith. Pray five times a day, because Muhammad prayed five times a day. Give alms because Muhammad gave alms. Do not drink wine, because Muhammad did not do those things. All this was about copying Muhammad. Well, you can copy Muhammad but not have the life of Muhammad. See what I am talking about? You can have, "What would Jesus do?" And you do not have the life of Jesus doing it. So, there is this manner of life. The actual word is "agoge," and it means, "What led him?" What was the thing that led him to live as he did? Another word is, what guided him in living and serving as he did, or what carried him into that way of life? So really it is more like, you know my spirit.

Boaz

Let me give an example from the Old Testament, whose name is Boaz, and he came from Ruth. And in chapters 2-3, it gives you a picture of Boaz's life. Boaz was a good Jew. He followed Torah because if you

look at it, he made sure that he did not let his servants go back and glean his area; he left it for other people. He did all those things. But the whole idea was that this was not a thing done grudgingly: "Oh, do we have to do this? Just leave it." His whole demeanor, if you read chapter two, is one of life. Because in doing all these things, the way he lived toward his servants, he went with his servants, he ate with his servants. And then he even instructed—you know, leave a little more. You do not have to do it all, just leave some more, leave some big stuff. Boaz was not just a doer of the law. Because the law was really given just to obey, but it was a picture of God. This is what God is like. So, when you think about, "Why does he want you to leave stuff for the poor people to gather? Because God loves them. Boaz was not into the letter of the law, but he was into the Giver of the law. He could see that this is what God is like. How wonderful it is! I want to be like God. I want to be generous because God is generous. So, you see this in Boaz which was a great witness to his workers because they saw somebody who knew the Lord and was joyful about it. It was not just that they were doing this commandment because it was what they were supposed to do. They were serving the Lord, and it was the Spirit that was behind it.

Paul's Spirit and Heart of Service

When looking at Paul and Timothy, we find another thing about fathers. Sometimes you can choose to be a father. Think about that. Paul brought Timothy. Timothy did not say, "Oh, can I follow you?" No, Paul said, "Come with me." Isn't that like Jesus? "Come follow Me." Paul brought Timothy with him, and then Timothy's experience with Paul was that when Paul was writing a letter, Timothy would see him pray. He would see the emotion, the love, the hurt that came out of serving God's people. Yet, he was not saying, "Lord, do away with them." It was like Moses saying, "I have had enough." But God said that, right? "I am moving them all out and I am making a new group out of you." But He was getting Moses to say, "That is not Your heart, God. You know that is not Your heart."

And here is the whole thing about Timothy. Paul could write about Timothy in Philippians 2:20, "For I have no one else of kindred spirit ..." It was because of his discipleship; again there is that word discipleship, which did not show him that, "I am a minister and I do that." But all of a sudden, his whole spirit of service, his whole heart of service was revealed to him. It comes only from a father's heart. This is the heart of our Father God, portrayed in Paul and manifested in Paul to the churches and to Timothy. It was to be reproduced and to bring about His will. He heard Paul's prayers, he saw his care for the brethren, he saw how he labored as a tentmaker and as a teacher.

One of my finest memories about Floyd Police was that he opened his door to us. Floyd was a high school teacher. I remember one time in summer, because Jerry and I were his gardeners and we did his lawn, he would always say, "Oh, come on in for coffee." That was always great because it was such good fellowship. We got to know Floyd, not the preacher Floyd. We got to know Floyd. I remember one day he came in in his undershirt, one of those Godfather undershirts because it was hot, and he did not have air conditioning in his house. So, he had his Godfather undershirt on, and he was making lesson plans for summer school. I could see if that was for regular school, but for summer school? He was going about it, and he said, "Guys, if you wait about 15 minutes, I need to finish these plans." Then he finished it up, and that night he was teaching a Bible study. What do you see? You see a man who is diligent in taking care of business for his students. You see a man who is diligent in preparing for the Bible study. You see a man who has opened his home so that young brothers could be encouraged and edified—Fathers. So, it was not just the message that he brought nor the teaching that he brought; it was the man.

I admit, at first I hated Paul when I was a Christian. I thought he was so arrogant in his letters. But I will tell you, as I have gotten older, I marvel at him. I marvel that he could be who he was. I mean, he could be this, he could give place to Apollos in Corinth. He could say, "Hey, I

planted, but Apollos is watering.” He was not jealous of Apollos’ ministry. Apollos was watering, and God was giving growth. There was no envy or jealousy that a lot of times ministers have over their flocks. But it was Christ, it was the church, the whole. Wonderful!

Fathers Are Sources of Correction

The fourth thing is that fathers are a source of correction. I know many of us that are men know what some of those sources of correction are or were. But not all corrections are negative. That is really important for fathers to know. Fathers give corrections, and corrections can also be training or guidance. Isn’t that what it is when you are disciplined? That is Hebrews 12.

Here is one example in Acts 18:24-28: “Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

There is a correcting in the way you look at the Scriptures. Isn’t it great to have teaching brothers? That was Chuck Smith. Chuck Smith took the Bible and explained it to us, and suddenly, our ideas about God were, “Oh!” He tweaked us. He just tweaked us a little bit. “Oh, this really does apply to me.” So, there is that type of correction.

Now there is another type of correction. I want to use this where Paul says in I Corinthians 12 before he gets into the love chapter. He is

talking about all the gifts in chapter 12, and then he says, "And I show you a still more excellent way."

That is Margaret Barber and Watchman Nee. Margaret Barber had a tremendous ministry, and it was so hidden from the world. You know something? She showed Watchman Nee a more excellent way. If you read his biography or any of his books, he mentions Margaret Barber, either by name or he says, "a sister." But I remember, and I think it was in Normal Christian Life that he said, "She had so much to give, and I disciplined her and said, 'Why aren't you taking this to the city where you have a bigger audience? The more people who will see, the more people will get the benefit.'" And she just said, "I was called to this place. I was just called here." In other words, you are not out to be somebody but called to this place. Just called to this place. "And because I am called to this place, God can do his work. Otherwise, if I go to some place that I am not called to be, it is all me. There is no fruit in the lives of the people."

The important thing about fathers is the fruit that comes out in the lives of these young men. Remember, young men can also be young women. There is something that goes out and something is germinated. Look at the life of Watchman Nee from the influence of Margaret Barber. He was so influenced by her in good ways, especially, that is the flesh. That is just the flesh. You need to overcome that; it needs to go to the cross. But he had someone to guide him that way.

The Character of the Father

The last thing I want to say in conclusion is the character of a father. Do you ever wonder why God chose Mary to bear His Son? Do you ever wonder why? Why Mary? Was there something special about her? We could say, "Yeah," and we can speculate and things like that. He knew how she would respond because He has that foreknowledge. But part of it was that He knew who she was betrothed to. When God was thinking about this, He was looking for a good father for His Son. You

think about that. We spiritualize so much, but God is practical. Who was going to be bringing up His Son? That was very, very important to Him. So, He is not out of the equation.

I was thinking of doing a PowerPoint here, but I just thought, I am not doing it. So I looked at some painted pictures of the nativity. And everywhere you have either the magi, who are the ones in the forefront, and there is Mary and the Baby all lit up, and then you always find Joseph over in the shade. It is like, "Oh, who is that guy? He is the father."

Fathers are in the background of the lives of the young men. That is a very, very important thing. It is said, and I know Floyd said this: "In the fellowship the disciples take on the characteristics of their fathers." That is important. But the whole thing is, the father does not have to be in the foreground. There are great pictures of fathers whose sons are in the foreground as champions, and the fathers are in the background. But you know that there has been an influence there. But the thing is, he does not want to come to the forefront and say, "Yeah, it is all my influence. Yeah, he is a chip off the old block. He is everything that I am." No, because we give glory to God. God has done a great work in this person. Oh, how wonderful it is to God. That is Barnabas.

So, when you look at the character that He was looking for in a father, in Matthew 1:18-20 it says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being an upright man..." (or a righteous man as it says in the New American Standard which I like upright better.) "Being an upright man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" And then going back down

to verse 24, “And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife.” Then in chapter 2, there are some other things that he did.

The point here is: what does it mean that Joseph was upright? How do you become upright? You become upright by walking with God. He had some walk with God, just like Boaz. They did not have the New Testament; they did not have Christ within them, but they had the light that they did have, and he lived according to that light. That is what he did. He lived according to light, and he passed that light on to his infant Son. And as His Son was growing up, there was light going out to Him from God through Joseph to his Son. Do not think that did not happen.

We have this idea that Jesus comes in, and He is so in tune with God that He does not need anything. It was not that way. God is so other than us. How could He entrust somebody with His Son? He did because He knew. He took this man, and he was upright. He walked in the light that God had for him. Also, he was not self-absorbed. He was worried about Mary: “I do not want to see her put in the forefront and ridiculed or anything like that. I want to do this secretly, so she is not hurt by it.” Oh, that is something. Here is a man who is not out for himself. He was a man who responded in obedience to what God showed him. So when it says that Joseph arose from his sleep, he did as the angels instructed.

Then it says in Matthew 2:13a: “Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. And it says he arose, took the Child and His mother.

Verses 19-20a: “But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ‘Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel.’”

“But Lord, I have a condo, and it is all paid for.” No! He arose and went back. Then when he found out that Archelaus was there, the Lord said, “No, take him up to Galilee.”

Here, you have a man who, when he heard the Lord, he did it. This is the father that God chose for His Son. And this is the father that God chooses for His assembly. This is the very thing that God is doing when He says, "I write to you, fathers. I write to you, fathers. I am calling you to this type of life." I am not calling you to, "Well, you have got to do these things. I am calling you to come into contact with Me because God makes fathers." He said to Abraham, "I will make you a father of nations. I will make you a father."

God is Concerned for the Body of Christ

Now brothers and sisters in closing here, let me just say that the Lord is so concerned for His body. We talk about the Lord preparing the body, and He is preparing it. Part of His preparation is making sure there are fathers. There must be fathers because there must be young men, and there must be little children; you cannot do without any of them. This is the whole body of Christ.

God is concerned for His body, and He is concerned for us in the sense that we are walking with Him. Everything comes out of our lives, whether we are young men or young children or fathers; it does not matter. What matters is that we are walking with Him. This is God calling to us in these days as they turn more and more chaotic. Our salvation is not that God is going to intervene and bring in a new president and suddenly everything is going to go back to normal. It is not going to happen!

As things get more and more chaotic, He is doing that, because it drives us more and more to Him. It drives us to Him, not in the sense of, "Oh, protect me, protect me!" But it drives us to Him to say, "Lord, help us to endure. Give us that which we need to endure in this time. Give us fathers who can prepare the way for these young men, who can succor little children."

Abraham was with Isaac and Jacob dwelling in tents. You know what that means, dwelling in tents? They were not of this world. All of them,

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—fathers, young men, little children, all in tents. He wants us to realize that, and He wants us to walk in the way He is meant for us to walk. May He get what He wants.

Lord, we do pray as we think about Your great love for Your body. How the last thing You said to Peter was, "Feed My sheep. Tend My sheep." Oh, Lord, here we are saying, Lord, how do we tend? We may have fallen short, but we want to come back and just give ourselves afresh to You because we want to be upright. We want to be upright before You. We want to live in the light You have given us. Lord, we want to live by that light. We want to have that light in us as life. Lord, we want to be those who hear You and do Your will. Lord, this is our cry to You. Thank You that this is the very thing You want. Isn't it wonderful, Lord, that we want the things that You want? Oh, Lord, we bless You. Thank you. Thank You for caring for us and loving us the way You do. Please, may Your will be done, in Jesus' name. Amen.