

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Sunday, June 20, 2010 based on Genesis 18:1-15.

Men's Issues

Well, Happy Father's Day everyone! It's Father's Day in America, and on a day like today, I like to address some men's issues. Most Sundays I try to address subjects that are for everyone, and I do think there is something for everyone today. But on a day like today, I like to be more specific about things that pertain to men and their issues.

Of course, "issues" is probably the right word to use this morning. I know many, many wonderful and decent men. But men seem to have some issues. - A group of women got together and began talking about the men in their life with comments like these - "What do you call a man that has lost 75% of his intelligence? – Divorced" "Why do men love BMW cars so much? – They can spell it." "How many men does it take to change a toilet-paper roll? Who knows, it's never happened." – Yes, a few issues.

I think part of the issue for men is that it seems to take different skill sets in life to succeed – one set for the business world, one set for a family life, one set for a personal life, and it is difficult for men to transition between the different skill sets. Men do seem to have "issues", but since we don't talk much either (at least about the deep stuff), we float around with all these things going on inside without resolution. Perhaps we are just misunderstood - more about this in a moment.

First of all, I do have some words of praise for men today. I would like to say to the men who are actively raising children that I compliment you on your parenting. Up to about 40 years ago, men seemed to take a secondary role in parenting behind the other person in the home. But the

men I observe today are more directly involved in child raising. They are changing diapers and getting children to activities. They work equally with their partner to parent, discipline, and encourage. I observe that men today are taking parenting seriously and are trying to balance work, family, and personal time, and I am impressed. Study after study indicates that children have a better childhood and are more prepared for adulthood when both parents are actively involved in their life. So congratulations Dads and keep giving your time, energy, and presence to your children!

One of the best examples of fatherhood I read one time was an article where a man reported that for his birthday as a youth one year his father gave him a card with 365 markers in it. The card explained that each marker represented one hour of his Dad's time. The card said that life gets crazy everyday, but he wanted his son to know that spending time with him was very important to his Dad. So his son had a one hour marker he could use everyday to guarantee that they had time together. The marker could be used to play catch, or to watch TV together, or to work on homework, or to just to talk. The now grown son said that one of the best gifts from his father was that year of time. Men, let's not forget the importance of time and presence when it comes to our children!

And let's not forget the impact we have on our children. I have had many conversations with grown men and women who speak about both the joys and wounds their father's behavior or lack of presence played in their life. Men have many roles in life, but taking responsibility for bringing up a child and acquiring the skills to parent is part of being a man. No

body automatically knows how to be a parent. So classes and reading are just as important as classes and reading for life.

Parenting is only one of the many issues for men. For a man, it is about wanting to be successful. It is about providing. It is about protecting. It is about achieving. It is about being fulfilled. It is about being connected. All these things are important to men, but how best to do all these things in a healthy way?

Earlier I said, I think men believe that it takes different skill sets to do all these things. But I would like to submit to you that it take one basic skill set to do all of these things. The skill set goes like this – we are invited to honor ourselves, honor others, and honor God. This one skill set helps us with success, fulfillment, and achievement.

Honoring ourselves is both about knowing we want something but balancing it with honoring others and God. In my opinion, I think men are the most powerful creatures on earth. Now when I say that, I expect to get some jeers from women in the crowd. But hear me out on this one. Women are very powerful creatures, and they are becoming more powerful. But it is a different kind of power than men's.

But right now men in general have the kind of power that changes worlds. Men build things that change the landscape of the earth. They create things that can make the world a better place or a worst place. They have the physical power to make home life a living hell or to protect their loved ones. Men are capable of great cruelty and great love.

Men are very powerful. Men have the power to push a button and destroy life as we know it. Men are very creative and yet potentially very

dangerous creatures. This is why men need something to guide them to use their power wisely.

This is why honoring yourself, honoring others, and honoring God is a good principle to live by. To be able to honor yourself helps a man understand that they have the right to be happy and fulfilled. But if they are going to honor others at the same time, then fulfillment comes not at the expense of others but in working with others for mutual fulfillment.

One of the important things for men to remember when honoring yourself is that you are not a commodity. What you do to provide for yourself and your family is a commodity, but you are not a commodity. And when others want to treat you like a commodity, then perhaps, it is time to work somewhere else. You are not a commodity. You are a child of God, and you are worthy as a child of God to be honored and to be honorable. Honor is for you and for others.

We are going through hard times right now. These times feel very similar to economic times of the 1980s. That was a frustrating time for men and women, but it was a time when many men doubted their worth or value because they couldn't get a job or lost a business because of economic times and decisions made. Times like these make people and especially men angry. Anger leads to all kinds of bad and violent behavior.

Psalm 37:8 says, *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil*, and we know that anger has led to much wrath in the world.

This is why honoring God forces us to let go of our anger and ask God and others to help us. 100 years ago, Henry Ford began to mass

produce the Model T automobile and put thousands of blacksmiths out of business. But Henry Ford also created thousands of new jobs that changed the face of America. Times are changing. We have the creative power to think, pray, and create our way out of this. It just takes our imagination of how to do it. To honor yourself, honor others, and honor God gives us a perspective to do it in a way that benefits everyone. So in everything we do and in every decision we make to ask, "How is what I am doing honoring myself, honoring others, and honoring God" goes a long way in helping us make all the decisions we have to make day in and day out

Today in scripture we have God's birth announcement to Abraham that he was going to be a father. Now this was quite the revelation because it had been 24 years since God first made the promise to give him many descendents. And both Abraham and Sarah laughed about the possibilities in their old age. But you also heard God say today, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" During these times we hold on to that perspective, "Is there anything too wonderful for God?"

We live in a time when men and women need to become wise about their hopes and dreams and how their hopes and dreams impact the earth and other people. Honoring ourselves, honoring others, and honoring God helps us do that.

Almost 20 years ago now, a woman in her early 30s asked if she could address the congregation I was serving. This is what she said in part – *"If God had asked my spiritual being which parents I would like to have, I can't imagine requesting better parents. They have brought into the*

world four capable, creative and confident children. I hope my own children will live on in this tradition.

In looking for guidance for my own parenting skills, I have asked myself what I admired in their parenting skills. Both Mom and Dad gave me the feeling that there was nothing I could not do if I tried. Academic excellence fell into that category. If I came home with a 92 on a test, my Dad would be there to say why didn't you get 100? Some people might think that this would encourage children to think they weren't good enough but in our family I think it gave the message "I know you are smart. I know you could have gotten a 100 on that test. A 92 is OK there is nothing wrong with a 92 but keep trying.

They taught me to follow my interest with confidence. In junior high school, my brother and I were interested in 4-H. There was not an established 4-H club in our town. Dad went with us to the organizational meetings and volunteered to be the adult leader for the chapter. This meant a lot to me, maybe more so today than then, because Dad is not the kind of man to put up with the Mickey Mouse stuff that often goes with being in charge of a group, but he was willing to give his time because of the interest that my brother and I had.

The thing that I remember about their parenting ability is not what they bought us, or the material things in our environment, but the time and fun they shared with us. Things like, going to the farm together, watching Disney together on Sunday nights while dining on hamburgers, canoe trips, camping, family vacations, visiting relatives, and going to church on a regular basis whether we wanted to or not.

I appreciate the fact that they taught us right from wrong, respect of others, and responsibility. I'm glad they gave us a sense of humor. They showed us that the family unit is very important, but still treated each of us as individuals. What I also appreciate is the things I would not think of right away, how as a parent I now realize doesn't just happen. Things like the clean house we had to live in, clean clothes to wear, good food on the table, a mom who made my lunch to take to school, and usually willing chauffeurs.

So my prayer today would be that my children will have as wonderful a childhood as I did. May all the grandchildren live on in the tradition of confidence, creativity, capability and loving parents.

This is my prayer as well! How are you honoring your children, the world, yourself, and God? Amen.