

“Like Father Like Son?”  
Genesis 26  
February 6, 2000  
Dr. Jerry Nelson

We are all familiar with “true-false” statements on a school exam. Based on the reading and lectures we are expected to know whether the statement made is true or false.

I have a “true-false” statement for you:

True or false: “God has no grandchildren.”

For many years the statement “God has no grandchildren” has been a somewhat clever way of saying that no one becomes a Christian simply by being born into a Christian home.

Each person must personally respond to Christ’s offer of life. The Bible makes that very clear.

While it is true that no one becomes a Christian simply by being born of Christian parents, **is it equally true** that being born of Christian parents is of no advantage?

Or is it possible that the relationship your parents had or have with God has a direct affect on your relationship with God?

Likewise, does your relationship with God have a direct affect on your child’s relationship with God?

How significant is it that you or your children were born into a Christian home?

Let me sharpen the question:

“Did you become a Christian because your parents were Christians?” Or “Will your children become Christians because you are a Christian?”

What does the writer of Proverbs mean when he says, “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it”?

Does it mean you can train or shape your children to become Christians?

Be certain of this: Each person’s conversion is a unique experience, wherein God’s grace touches him or her personally.

But in the plan of God, there is something about family that plays a significant role in the application of that grace of God.

This morning I plan to emphasize this generational aspect of Christianity **but before I do that**, I want to point out that God is not restricted by it.

Time and time again in the Bible and in subsequent history God has reached into unbelieving families and families of other religions and snatched out those on whom he mercifully showered his grace.

He interrupts an unbelieving family line to begin a new believing family line.

In fact, all non-Jewish believers are examples of that “interrupting grace”.

The promises of God originally fell only to the Jews but in God’s timing those promises were opened to Gentiles as well.

So while I plan to speak to the generational aspect of Christianity, I don’t mean for a minute that if you weren’t born of Christian parents you can’t be a Christian.

Some of you here this morning are living testimonies to the interrupting grace of God – you come from a long line of non-believers but God reached in and saved you by his grace.

**With that said, I want to go back to the main issue –**

How significant is it that you and/or your children were born into a Christian home?

Is there a sense in which God DOES have grandchildren?

In my preparation for this next sermon in our study of Genesis, I almost skipped Genesis 26.

First of all it seemed to interrupt the flow of the story about Jacob and Esau – a story begun in chapter 25 and picked up again in chapter 27.

But secondly, as I read chapter 26 it seemed rather mundane, even repetitious of early stories.

In the chapter we are told that because there was a famine in the land, Isaac moved to Gerar, neighboring country.

The same thing happened in chapter 20 with Isaac's father, Abraham. We are also told in chapter 26 that while in Gerar, Isaac tried to "palm off" his wife as his sister. His father Abraham had done that twice.

He got out of that jam and eventually became a very wealthy man.

So had Abraham.

He got in a dispute with others about land and wells but eventually made a treaty – so had Abraham.

What's the point in all that, that we haven't looked at already?

Then it dawned on me, is it possible that Moses, the author, is trying to make a point by noting the similarities between Isaac and Abraham?

So I looked more carefully at this chapter and chapter 25 about Isaac in comparison with chapters 12 and 13 about Abraham.

Now bear with me for a minute and see if the similarities impress you the same way they did me.

25:19 – 26:11

"This the account of..." 25:19

Abraham fathered Isaac :19

Isaac married Rebekah :20

Rebekah was barren :21

The Lord said... :23

Predictions :23

Age of the father :26

Famine in the land 26:1

Move to Gerar :1

Promise of blessing :3-6

Wife as sister :7

Motivated by fear :7

Beautiful wife :7

Isaac summoned :9

"What have you done to me" :10

Orders given :11

Isaac became wealthier :13

Isaac sent away :16

11:27-12:20

"This is the account of..." 11:27

Terah fathered Abram :27

Abram married Sarah :29

Sarah was barren :30

The Lord said... 12:1

Predictions :2-3

Age of the father :4

Famine in the land :10

Moved to Egypt/Gerar :10 (20:1)

Promise of blessing :1-3

Wife as sister :13 (20:2)

Motivated by fear :12 (20:11)

Beautiful wife :14

Abram summoned :18; (20:9)

"What have you done to me" :18

Orders given :20

Abram became wealthier 13:2

Abram sent away 12:19

Dispute over land and herds :20	Dispute over land and herds 13:7
Isaac a man of peace :19-22	Abram a man of peace (13:8-9)
Agreement :28-31	Agreement 13:8-11 also 21:27
Promise reiterated :24	Promise reiterated 13:14-17
Isaac built an altar :25	Abram built an altar 13:18

In at least 23 ways Moses, the author, marks the similarities between the lives of these two men.

Point for point, event for event, promise for promise, and word for word, and even sin for sin the lives of these two men parallel each other.

It gives even greater meaning to our phrase, "Like father, like son!"

### **But why does Moses make this comparison?**

Certainly one reason is that Moses wants the people of his day (500 years later) to know beyond a doubt that they are direct descendants of Abraham through Isaac AND the privileged place that gives them.

In the earlier stories in Genesis they (and we) were told that God had a plan for a special people.

And those special people were chosen by God.

They would be the descendants of a son born to Abraham's barren wife, Sarah – Isaac!

And when Moses demonstrates the parallel lives of these two men, it clearly indicates that Isaac truly is the heir of the promises of God made to Abraham.

And thus Moses' people are likewise heirs of those promises because they are descendants of Isaac.

### **What's the obvious implication?**

Their physical relationship to Abraham through Isaac places them in a unique position.

There are advantages to being part of that family.

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul makes the case that just because a person is a Jew doesn't mean he's okay with God.

He emphasizes that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners deserving of God's wrath.

Then as if anticipating an objection, Paul asks, "What advantage then is there in being a Jew...?"

As we might ask, "If everyone is alike needing to become a Christian, what advantage is there in being from a Christian family?"

Paul answers the Jews saying, "Much, in every way!"  
Much advantage!

But what I want you to see next are several verses in particular in our text.

Look at Genesis 26:2-5

"The LORD appeared to Isaac and said... "... I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws."

You certainly recognize this as the same promise made to Abraham many, many years earlier.

Here Isaac is given the same promise.

But what I want you to particularly notice is one of the reasons WHY it is given to Isaac.

Verse 5 "because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws."

Look now at 26:24 when God reiterates his promise to Isaac some time later:

"That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants **for the sake of my servant Abraham.**"

Again God emphasizes that Isaac is placed in this privileged position of receiving the promises of God because of his father Abraham.

Abraham's obedience to God gave Isaac a place of privilege.  
Abraham's faith in God had a bearing on Isaac's life.

Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old (Genesis 21:4), obviously long before Isaac responded to God's grace and began to follow God.

Isaac was given the mark of belonging (circumcision) simply because he was part of that family.

The faith of his parents was highly significant for Isaac.

(see Michael Green chapter 5 [Baptism](#))

Being born into a believing family placed the child in a special sphere of grace.

Now I am not suggesting that Isaac's relationship with God resulted only from Abraham's earlier actions.

It is true that Isaac also needed to trust and obey God – and chapter 26 shows that he did.

But the greater point is that Isaac was the recipient of great spiritual advantage because of the life of his father (and we can add in his case, his mother as well).

Having Christian parents places us in a privileged position – it gives us spiritual advantage.

It alone does not save us, but it positions us to hear and see the gospel lived out in the lives of others – up close and personal – making it undeniably believable.

I was junior high age, old enough to know that our livelihood depended on the crops that we grew in the summer.

I remember a trip to church on a Sunday when it was nearly ready to rain and the hay was ready to be brought in.

Other farmers were out bringing in their hay but my father put us in the car and we went to church even though our hay crop was largely ruined by the late morning rain.

My father criticized no one, he made no speech about it, we simply went to church.

But the message was heard loudly and clearly –

Obedience to God was more important than one's income.

Having Christian parents places us in a privileged position – it gives us spiritual advantage.

It alone does not save us, but it positions us to hear and see the gospel lived out in the lives of others – up close and personal – making it undeniably believable.

And not so incidentally I also think it results in greater condemnation for those who reject it.

### **Is this concept taught or implied elsewhere in the Bible?**

Listen to II Chronicles 30:6ff "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to... If you return to the LORD, then your brothers **and your children** will be shown compassion...for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate.

Hear God in Deuteronomy 30:19 "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you **and your children** may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."

There are many other similar passages in the Older Testament but I want you to hear a significant verse in the Newer Testament.

I Corinthians 7:14 "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

The Apostle Paul was discussing the subject of a believer being married to an unbeliever.

Some were suggesting that the believer should divorce the unbeliever because of the bad influence an unbeliever would be.

But Paul says that the believer's influence is greater than the unbeliever's.

And then he uses a strong word to describe the unbelieving spouse and their children BECAUSE OF the believing spouse/parent.

The children of a believer are “sanctified” (the same word used to describe those who are in Christ).

Paul could have used a less significant word but he chose this one.

We know that the word “sanctified” means “set apart for special use”.

We know that such children are treated specially by God.

It can't mean that they are saved for in v16 Paul specifically refers to the possibility of the unbelieving spouse's future salvation.

Thus also in reference to children, while the “sanctifying” doesn't save them, it does confer on them some special blessing – which is obvious.

**But the point is that they live under the powerful influence of one who knows Christ.**

To Christian parents is given the awesome privilege and tremendous responsibility of living their faith before the seeing eyes of their children BECAUSE it makes a difference!

Theologian Hauerwas wrote, “I think we should not admire religious or non-religious parents who are afraid to share their values and convictions with their children. It is a false and bad-faith position to think that if we do not teach them values our children will be free to ‘make up their own minds’. What must be said and said clearly is that the refusal to ask our children to believe as we believe, to live as we live, to act as we act is a betrayal that derives from moral cowardice. For to ask this of our children requires that we have the courage to ask ourselves to live truthfully” – to live what we say we believe.

[A Community of Character](#) Hauerwas p166

Please don't become discouraged - It's not a matter of spiritual perfection.

It is not that we must live sinless lives or we condemn our children.

Look at Abraham's life and see its flaws and then see them reflected in Isaac's life.



It's not a matter of spiritual perfection but of spiritual **direction** - which way are you going?

Are you following Jesus?

Is it evident in your life?

Is it evident to your children?

God said it would make a difference.

In his book God of My Father, Jim Dobson wrote, "I recall watching my father pray when I was four years old. It was Sunday morning. Dad stood to pray. I was lying on the floor, looking up at him. Even now the memory is clear. I thought to myself, "He actually thinks he's talking to Someone. And whoever it is means more to him than anyone else does. I've received no greater gift from my parents than the realization that I was not then and am not now the most important person in their life." God is. God of My Father Dobson p42

Listen to Deuteronomy 6:

These are the commands...the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land...**so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God** as long as you live... Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **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.

Listen to Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, **bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**

**Why?** Because it makes a difference!

I have invited two men to join me this morning in driving home an application of this text.

**Dan Hash is the son of Tom and Dottie Hash of our church.** Dan and his wife Laura and their son live in Littleton now but have lived in Poland for a number of years serving as missionaries.

I think Dan's mother comes from a Christian home but on his father's side, I believe Dan is a second generation Christian.

**Steven Graber is the son of Larry/Anita Graber of our church.**

Steven serves as a pastor of the Conifer Community Church.

I didn't ask how many generations of Christians Steven's mother comes from but I know that on his father's side, Steven is a sixth generation Christian.

**Dan, please tell us what it means to you to have grown up in a home where your mother and father loved and followed Christ.**

What were the advantages, the implications of having believing parents?

**Steven, the same question to you – “What does it mean to you to have grown up in a truly Christian home?”**

What were the advantages, the implications?

**Steven, this concept of the influence of a parent on his child is both encouraging and staggering.**

It is an awesome privilege and a staggering responsibility.

**What comes to your mind when you think about the children you may have some day?**

**Dan, the same question to you – “What does this concept make you think of in terms of your own son?”**

**Conclusion:**

“Like father, like son!”

The way we live has tremendous influence on the spiritual lives of those around us, especially in our own families.

Joshua, the great leader of Israel, who succeeded Moses, wrote what I think is a fitting concluding remark for this morning:

Joshua 24:14ff

“Now fear the Lord and serve him in all faithfulness... Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But **as for me and my household**, we will serve the Lord.”