



## Award Winning Fathers

Text: Luke 1:5-25, 57-79

Father's Day

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Theme: **Award winning fathers are men of Godly character.**

### Introduction.

Everyone likes to be a winner. There is an old saying, “It’s not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game that counts”. There is some truth here, but we cannot escape the reality that everyone likes to be a winner.

Our culture celebrates and even creates *winners*. We reward winners in sports with fortunes, millions of dollars each year to play a game. According to the business magazine Forbes, the five highest paid athletes in the last year combining salary and endorsements made from \$90M to \$285 — in just the last year. And who is currently #1? Boxer Floyd Mayweather at \$285M.<sup>1</sup> Coaches are getting in on it. According to Forbes the five highest paid coaches are paid from \$7M to \$75M a year. And who is currently getting top pay among coaches? NFL coach Bill Belichick at \$75M — far ahead of the #2 paid coach, Mike Shanahan, also an NFL coach at \$7.5M.<sup>2</sup> Then there are television programs that crown winners in all sorts of fields from music to business, from baking to building. And how often do you hear politicians say that winning doesn’t matter? I’ve never heard a politician say that.

Everyone likes to be, wants to be a winner however they may define what that means.

Today is Father’s Day, a special day. Even so, we know that Father’s Day can’t compete with Mother’s Day. It never has. It never will. One man suggested to his wife that it would be nice to eat out on Father’s Day. She answered, “Okay, there’ll be a sandwich for you out on the front porch.”<sup>3</sup>

This is a special time to think about the importance of home and family, to remember and even to think ahead. One of the wonderful things about God and how He relates to us is that one person's success does not require another's failure. One winner does not equal one or more losers. It may be difficult to think in those terms even now when some people are pushing to do away with competition, top rankings, with winners and losers. God's perspective is qualitatively different. Again, one person's success does not require another's failure.

The Bible doesn't speak about a specific award for fathers, but in its examples and principles we can learn what pleases God. We are looking at one such example this morning. He is Zacharias, from the first pages of Luke's gospel. He was the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias was a priest. Most priests lived and served in their designated towns, travelling to Jerusalem twice a year for a week of service at the temple. When we meet Zacharias in Luke chapter 1 he is an older man. He was chosen by lot to go into the temple and burn incense—a special privilege experienced only once by a priest. On that day the angel Gabriel met him.

Zacharias was not a perfect man, but a man from whom we all can learn. He was an *award winning father*. He shows us that *award winning fathers are men of Godly character*. We see four specifics of Godly character in this account. Ladies, you can listen in.

First, award winning fathers are truly righteous. Verse 6, "They [Zacharias and his wife] were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." This is quite a statement!

Let's start by looking at the question "What does it mean to be *righteous*?" Look at a couple of verses from the Bible about righteousness. Psalm 11 verse 7, "For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face" (NASB). Psalm 14 verse 3, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (NASB). But then Genesis chapter 6 verse 9 tells us, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God" (NASB).

Okay, but still, *what does it mean* to be righteous? The word righteous is used in several different ways. The general meaning is to be and do right in line with standards, laws, expectations. God's character and actions never contradict, never fall short of or violate anything in His perfect nature. He is righteous.

Adam and Eve were created without sin. When they were tested in the garden and disobeyed God they lost their righteousness. Every person since has been born with a sinful nature inherited from them and is unable to meet God's holy standards, unable to be righteous by God's standards. Only Jesus Christ, God the Son, came into this world without a sinful nature. As well, only He met the perfect standards of character and conduct.

His death and resurrection made it possible for us to be *given* His righteousness by God's grace through faith. The Bible tells us "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."<sup>4</sup> Every Christian is righteous before God in and because of Jesus. As the Bible declares, "For He [God the Father] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."<sup>5</sup> And again Paul testifies of himself and by extension of us, "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."<sup>6</sup> We are declared righteous, we stand righteous before God in Christ *and*, as we follow God in light of the Bible, He will cause us to grow in being like Christ—the growing character and conduct of *righteousness*.

It is this last meaning which we find noted of Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. They displayed a consistent Godly character. They thought and acted in harmony with God, in harmony with His truth. While Zacharias was not perfect, people could not point to regular inconsistencies in him. He had a pattern, a character of righteousness.

But what does righteousness look like? The book of Proverbs paints a picture of righteousness in daily life. Note a few brush strokes. Chapter 10 verse 11, "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence" (NASB). Chapter 10 verse 32, "The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverted" (NASB). Chapter 12 verse 26, "The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray" (NASB). Chapter 13 verse 5, "A righteous man hates falsehood, but a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully" (NASB). One more, chapter 15 verse 28, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil."

Now, the question — do the positive descriptions of righteousness in these verses sound like, look like you? Are you *growing* in being like that, in being righteousness? Award winning fathers are men of Godly character. They are truly righteous. Are we? Are you?

Next, award winning fathers are devoted to prayer. Think about the situation of this righteous couple. In spite of their righteousness God had not granted one of their greatest desires — to have children. Even though God had not granted their request for those many years, they kept their faith in Him. They maintained their *righteousness*. They kept thinking, relating to God and others and living in godly ways.

Now after all these years the angel informs Zacharias, verse 13, “your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” Finally his prayers—I am sure his *many, many* prayers—were answered. He was *devoted* to prayer.

An *award winning father* is devoted to prayer. The apostle Paul directed us in Romans chapter 12 verse 12 to be “devoted to prayer” (NASB), or to “be constant in prayer” (ESV). Then in Ephesians chapter 6, to be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (verse 18). In Colossians chapter 4, “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart” (verse 2, NLT). And again in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul instructs, “pray without ceasing,” or “never stop praying” (chapter 5 verse 17, NLT).

What does it mean to be devoted to prayer? Yes, there are notable examples of people who pray many hours each day. Jesus prayed during His time on earth. Luke chapter 6 tells us that before He chose the twelve disciples He “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (verse 12). Reformer Martin Luther said “If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”<sup>7</sup> It is said that John Wesley who, with his brother and others founded Methodism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, got up each morning at 4 a.m., praying until 8 a.m. Then in his later years he spent 8 hours a day in prayer.<sup>8</sup>

Does that make you feel inadequate? like a failure? as having no hope? Time is important. But we are not in competition for the amount of time, nor does God grant our requests because we meet a *minimum-minutes standard*. No. It is a matter of desire, priority *and* practice. We are good at rationalizing desire to be sufficient, or what we do to be at least as good as, if not better than others. So ask yourself some questions: Do I desire to spend time with my heavenly Father? Do I have a pattern of regular, daily prayer, of prayer throughout the day—a phrase of praise or thankfulness here, a quick cry for help there? Do I spend extended time in prayer? Am I really devoted to prayer?

A third mark of award winning fathers is that they deal with doubts. That might surprise you. “Aren’t truly spiritual, *award winning* believers supposed to be past doubts?” One writer tells us, “We come into the world with question marks in our heads ... The question marks in our heads are never fully erased.”<sup>9</sup> Another writer states, “not only faith, but Christian growth and greater certainty, conviction, and service can result (and often does) from successfully dealing with one’s uncertainty.”<sup>10</sup> But you may ask, what about God’s promise to generously give us His wisdom when we “ask in faith with no doubting” and that if we don’t, we cannot expect to receive anything from God?<sup>11</sup>

Let’s begin to sort that out a bit as we see from the gospel record that Zacharias had doubts, and he dealt with them. Luke chapter 1, verse 18.

“And Zacharias said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this [that is, that he would have a son]? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.’ And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time’” (verses 18-20).

Any thoughts of Zacharias’ righteousness being perfection vanish right here. At first he did not believe God’s word through Gabriel. While we understand his questions and doubts, his unbelief was still just that: failing to believe what God told him.

Zacharias doubted God. But his doubting did not stop him. He acknowledged and faced his doubts. He shared them with the angel as he tried to work through them. His knowledge of and experience with God—with all the ups and downs, joys and heartaches—had developed this attitude of *dealing with*, working through his doubts.

Some people say that they have never had any doubts, any difficulties with God since coming to faith in God. Those statements concern me. A faith without questions, without any doubts, is a faith that has not truly faced the realities of life, has not realized how much we do not and cannot understand.

You recall the doubts that Moses the great man of faith, the great servant of God had. Exodus chapters 3 and 4 record God’s call of Moses to lead the people out of slavery in

Egypt. Moses' first response to God was "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (chapter 3 verse 11). That began a series of Moses' doubts and God's assurances to him. Moses' final protest to God was "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (chapter 4 verse 13). Then we read, "So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses" (chapter 4 verse 14). God sent Moses' brother Aaron with him to be his spokesman and Moses finally agreed and went. Moses had big questions and doubts.

But that wasn't the only time. Later, as recorded in Numbers chapter 11, when He and the people were out of Egypt on their way to the promised land, the people complained about lack of meat—God miraculously provided manna but they wanted meat. And Moses complained about the great burden of leading them. God instructed him to appoint leaders and told him that they would have meat to eat for a whole month.

Moses responded that with all these people "Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?" (verses 22). In other words, "Where will all of this come from? I don't see it as possible!" God told him "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not." And, as we recall the account, God brought in huge flocks of quail to provide meat for the people (verses 31-32). Once again Moses had big questions and doubts. But as slow as he may have been to learn to trust God on some points, he continued to work through those doubts and moved to trust God.

How do we respond to the tragedies of life? The injuries, illnesses, the untimely deaths, the torn relationships? I can *describe* sound Biblical, doctrinal answers, but along with all of us, I have had some questions and doubts to work through about some specific situations. No, we can't excuse our failure to believe and obey. Nor should we think of questions and doubts as some kind of *badge of honor*. Rather, we should face them and work through them with God. An *award winning father* demonstrates his faith, his godly character as he deals with his doubts.

The last mark of award-winning fathers we see in Zacharias is that they praise and thank God. We go back to the angel Gabriel's great news that Zacharias and Elizabeth would have a son and Zacharias' questions, doubts. Verse 18 in Luke chapter 1.

“And Zacharias said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.’ And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time’” (verses 18-20).

Think about what it would be like to be unable to speak for almost a year, as it was for Zacharias. I haven’t experienced that, but some of you know that a virus attack on my cranial nerves about six years ago resulted in my left vocal cord being paralyzed. I was left with a very faint, hoarse whisper, and the doctors said there was no certainty of recovery, no certainty that I would be able to talk again. Now that’s a problem for anyone, but especially for a preacher! Thankfully, God was gracious and gave a fair amount of my voice back to me after a few months. One morning I got up and checked to see, and there it was! Not as clear as it had been, but the voice you hear today. Being unable to speak for about 3 months was not an expected and certainly not a pleasant thing, but was a good test and teacher of patience and trusting God.

What would your first words be after almost a year of being unable to speak, of total silence? Your spouse may say, “I knew it was too good to last!” But what would *your* first words be? Perhaps, “What a relief! Let me tell you what happened! You don’t know how much I’ve wanted to tell you this!”

Let’s look at Zacharias’ first words. Eight days after the birth of his son—the time of circumcision and formally giving the child his name—we read, verse 64, “And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and *he began to speak in praise of God.*” We go on. Listen to the focus on God in what he said,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant” (verses 68-69).

There is no doubt that he was glad, even ecstatic that he had his voice back, that he now could fill people in on all that God promised and accomplished, all of God’s grace and mercy to him and his family. But his first, his primary focus was to praise God.

What about us? Whether we realize it or not, feel like it or not at times, God *has* been active in our lives, in our world, accomplishing many things day after day for which we can thank and praise Him. The question is, “Do we thank and praise Him?” Is our first, and regular, ongoing response like that of Zacharias?

## Conclusion.

*Award winning fathers are men of Godly character.*

The president of a large international corporation based in Chicago read a book titled *Men and Women of God*. He was so impressed by it that he contacted a major bookstore in his city and ordered 350 copies to give to all the executives in the company. A few days later the bookstore replied, “We cannot find 350 *Men and Women of God* in Chicago. Try Los Angeles.”<sup>12</sup>

Men and women of God *are* sometimes difficult to find. It shouldn’t be that way. It doesn’t have to be that way. Everyone of us, by God’s grace, can be a person of God.

Fathers, and all of us, thank God that you are not in competition with Zacharias, Paul, Billy Graham or anyone else—that God’s love and grace for you is unique, to build a Godly character within *you*. Determine to continually review of your character in light of the truth God gives us through the example of Zacharias. Commit yourself in a new way to God to follow Him more faithfully, know Him better, through prayer, to face life squarely and talk to Him about it openly, to see His blessings, to be a person of praise and thanksgiving.

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<sup>1</sup> Forbes. *The World’s Highest-Paid Athletes*.

<<https://www.forbes.com/athletes/list/#tab:overall>>. 2019. Accessed 21 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Highest Paid Coaches in Sports.

<<https://www.forbes.com/pictures/eddf45hdfm/bill-belichick/#26462e4f232b>>. 2019. Accessed 21 May 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Old story. Original source not known.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 3:9.



- <sup>7</sup> Growth Practices — Principles for Spiritual Growth. *How long should I pray daily? How many hours per day?* <<https://www.growthpractices.com/how-long-should-i-pray/>>. n.d. Accessed 22 May 2019.
- <sup>8</sup> John Wesley's Prayer life. <<http://micahcobb.com/blog/john-wesleys-prayer-life/>>. 27 June 2013. Accessed 22 May 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> Leon McKenzie, "The Purpose and Scope of Adult Religious Education" in *Handbook of Adult Religious Education*, edited by Nancy T. Foltz. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986, page 11.
- <sup>10</sup> Gary R. Habermas. *Dealing With Doubt*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990, page 18.
- <sup>11</sup> James 1:5-8.
- <sup>12</sup> Old Story. Original source not known.

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