In God We Trust - Part 2

# Under God’s Mighty Hand

## (1 Peter 5:6)

We are continuing in part two of our message series In God We Trust. And so, we’ve been talking about trusting God in a culture that is very divided, where a growing number of Americans no longer identify themselves as Christians. But the truth of the matter is, that our culture has made a shift in the wrong direction, and that’s why we have been called to focused and intentional prayer for America.

You see, our mission remains the same, we are still reaching, connecting, and equipping people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Our mission never changed, we’re still loving our neighbors, still praying for the sick, and still sharing the good news about God’s forgiveness in Christ. And so, now more than ever we need to resist the influence of our culture, praying for pastors, missionaries, church leaders and all the volunteers, so that we can continue to help unite and restore our communities.

I thought that today, since it’s Father’s Day, that maybe we should talk about someone like Billy Graham, because he was somebody who wasn’t influenced by culture, but instead he influenced America in great ways. But then I thought maybe we should just be real, because a lot of times churches don’t talk about real issues. And so, I thought maybe we should pull back the camouflage, lower the mask, and deal with the you that wonders if anybody really understands the burden, the stress, and the pain that you feel.

In other words, I want to speak to the part of you deep inside that wonders if you can keep going. Your worried what might happen if you stumbled and fell, but you keep going day after day for your son, your daughter, your spouse, and your grandchildren. You keep pressing on because you know that they need you now like never before, and while many in our culture seem to have lost sight of what it means to be a father, the Scripture tells us,

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Psalms 103:13-14).

And yet today, many children are not seeing fatherhood modeled for them. And so, they have all of these voices coming from all of these places telling us what we ought to be. And we all do, we get it at school, on the job, in the community, and on social media. Everybody is teaching us all kinds of stuff, we’ve got more people talking to us than we ever have had before, and it gets kind of confusing.

I think that is similar to the environment in which the apostle Paul was writing to the church in Corinth. It was a new church, a bunch of new believers that had this encounter with Jesus and they are growing into it, trying to figure it out, and they’ve been filled with the Holy Spirit, but they’re still struggling with the flesh. And so, Paul is discipling them and developing them which is what church is all about. The church is not a country club for perfect people, you go to church to learn and be discipled to become who God wants you to be. And so, Paul is writing to this crazy worldly church, and he said,

“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:14-16).

In other words, church is a type of family and it’s the family principal and model that Paul sets in place but he’s talking about the spiritual family and he reminds them that there are many people that will add to your life that are not your father. You have 10,000 guardians in Christ, but you do not have many fathers, because a father is a father partly because he has made a deposit. And so, there are many people who will instruct you that are not invested in you and so he says, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel I preached, because the Word is God’s seed, and when God’s seed gets into your heart you are begotten or born again.

In Genesis chapter 49, I want to show you an illustration of an elderly father named Jacob as he is dealing with his family. If you know anything about Jacob, you know that he wasn’t a perfect Father, with the perfect family, living their perfect lives. And so, Jacob wasn’t that guy who never broke the rules, never made a mistake, and as we find Jacob at the end of his life, the Bible says,

“Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. "Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob;

listen to your father Israel” (Genesis 49:1-2).

Now, I chose Jacob as our subject today, considering the topic of fatherhood, not because he was the perfect father, but because foolish, obnoxious, self-centered and deceitful. And so, I want you to know that you can be all of that and still end up being influential. In other words, you can start out on the wrong path, doing dumb stuff, making mistakes, and still end up being a great father.

Today, no matter what you had modeled for you or didn’t have modeled for you, no matter how you started, in Christ your life can be restored as you learn your way, working your way, forgiving and apologizing your way back into a healthy relationship. And so, you can resist the gravitational pull of your past and the influence of one parent, both parents, or no parents, and you can rise above the standards of our culture today.

You can turn your life around, you can make a difference, and so what we want to do is take a step back and let God’s Word reset our hearts preparing us to be faithful. The Bible tells us in first Peter, chapter 5,

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

And so, recognizing that we’re not always right, that we don’t know everything, but we have a God that does. And so, we can trust him, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, because that is the best place to start in this struggle to be a father.

Thankfully, when we don’t experience the love of God in the family we grew up in, or when we crave what we didn’t get in the dysfunction of our own family unit, we can turn to God’s Word as the standard because God is more than just our creator, he is our Heavenly Father. And so, when God says,

"I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

He is revealing his intention for a deeper level of intimacy with his children. He is saying I begot you, you are kin with me, we are family, and your natural father may have planted the seed, but I caused you to live and brought you into the world.

In Matthew chapter 6, when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he starts out saying, "Our Father in heaven” to express the intimacy of that relationship (6:9). And so, we come to him as sons and daughters, that is our relationship, and understanding that he loves us and we have access to him, means that we have privileges because of that relationship.

In other words, we don’t have to approach God cautiously, hoping that we will be accepted, we don’t have to ring the doorbell, we don’t have to make an appointment, we can just walk boldly into the house, because we are his children. The Bible says,

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

This was God’s intention from the very beginning, and so when he got ready to make his first son, he created Adam with his own hand. Everything else he created by speaking, but when it came to his first formed son, he shaped him from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life.

Adam became a living soul; he has a spirit and a soul living in a body. As he became aware of himself, he became aware of the image of his Father, because he was created in the image of God. And so, when God said to the council of himself, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" we’re talking about Adam (Genesis 1:26). We’re talking about God’s son, not the only begotten son, but Adam his first formed son.

As we consider the fatherliness of God, there are actually four different occasions where we hear God talking about his sons. We just read the first occasion with Adam being his first formed son and then secondly, God told the Pharaoh,

“Israel is my firstborn son and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me” (Exodus 4:22-23).

And so, when God said, Israel is my firstborn son, it was because he had begotten Israel. He had waited until Abraham was an old man and his body could no longer produce seed and so it was God who gave him a seed. When God’s seed was planted in Sarah’s womb, her fertility was restored, and she got pregnant because that seed was Jesus.

We know that because when Jesus came 42 generations later, he said to the Jewish leaders,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

I know that is deep, but that’s exactly what the Bible says,

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

And so, it was Jesus who was the promised seed, it was he that brought Sarah’s womb back to life again, because he is the seed of Abraham. That’s why he said, “I am the resurrection and the life” because he touched Sarah’s dead womb and brought it back to life again (John 11:25).

And then third, Jesus Christ is the only begotten son. He is the Word become flesh and dwelling among us. The Bible says,

“For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him" (Hebrews 1:5-6, NKJV).

And then the fourth promise in regard to the fatherhood of God is in Galatians chapter 3, verse 26, where the Bible says,

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

We are all one in Christ Jesus, because he is the image of the invisible God, and so the Bible says,

“Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

And so, we can’t talk about fatherhood without talking about image, because God said we were created in his image and in his likeness. Therefore, a father’s image is his legacy, because his legacy carries his genes, his characteristics, and his name. It’s for that reason that the Bible says,

“A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7).

There is an unveiling that happens over time and especially for sons so that they can see their likeness and you can see yours in them.

Now, we don’t always get the benefit of seeing the image and glory of God in each other. Even those of us who have a father don’t always get to see it, we don’t get to see it in our lives, we don’t always get to see it in our relationship, because maybe our father was always at work, maybe he never came home, but whatever the reason the mirror is left without an image.

Now, I know this is taken out of context, but the principle remains the same and it is a powerful one. In first Corinthians chapter 13, the Bible says,

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:11-12).

And so, there is a process, a gradual unveiling that happens over time, but whatever that image is, maybe it’s just a poor reflection, but whatever it is the mirror reflects it. And in the absence of a father, anything that gets near a mirror will be reflected, whatever gets closest to the mirror, even if it is a mother will be reflected, because the mirror will reflect whatever you put in front of it.

No matter whether you are a son or a daughter you are impressionable and so whatever gets closest to you, you will reflect that image. That’s why it’s so important, particularly for boys to have something to reflect, to figure out what I am supposed to be when I get there. And so, what we have today in our culture is just a shadow of what God had in mind, it’s just a poor reflection of what God had in mind, which leads us to question, whether or not imperfect people can still develop a functional relationship.

This brings us back to our text in Genesis chapter 49, and I wanted to use this text because like many of us, it took Jacob a lifetime to figure it out. He didn’t have the best models in his life to reflect, because both his father and his grandfather didn’t have it all figured out either. Both Abraham and Isaac were misguided and confused, repeatedly making poor choices, and they made a lot of mistakes along the way. And so, just like us, on the journey of life, little by little we become better.

Now, Abraham and Isaac were both chronic liars, but the Bible says,

“Abram believed the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

In other words, Abraham had such a strong faith that it canceled out all of his mistakes. God said, “Abraham is my friend, because he believed me” and therefore, he declared him to be righteous. Abraham’s son Isaac inherited that righteousness, even though he was a con artist, he walked right into it and he produced Jacob.

Now, Jacob was everything his father and grandfather were and more. He would tell a lie before he would tell the truth, and even though he didn’t understand who he was, God walked with him through it anyway, because there was royalty down deep inside of him. And so, Abraham produced seed, Isaac passed his seed, and Jacob multiplied the seed, producing the 12 tribes of Israel. Both Abraham and Isaac had a role to play to get Jacob where he was supposed to be.

When Jacob’s wife Rachel became pregnant and went into labor, the Bible says it was with great difficulty that she gave birth.

“As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin” (Genesis 35:18).

She called him Ben-Oni, meaning the son of my sorrows, but Jacob said you will not be born the son of my sorrows, but you shall be called Benjamin, because you are the son of my strength.

Jacob lived his life like all men live their lives, with high points and low points, strengths and weaknesses, wins and losses, but no matter the score, he was still God’s man. And God declared this to Moses,

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6).

In Genesis chapter 49, Jacob has come to the end of his life, he sat up in the bed, strengthened himself, and spoke prophetically over his 12 sons. No longer do we see the deceiver Jacob, nor the confused and angry Jacob, not the Jacob who wrestled with God, but we see Israel who had lost a son and been restored again. Jacob who had gone through such deep depression that he thought his sorrows would bring him down to the grave, but he was able to reconnect with his son Joseph, with his future, and his legacy.

As he gathered his sons around his bed, he blessed each one, giving the appropriate blessing to Ruben his firstborn, Simeon and Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. He laid his hand upon each of them, telling them who they were, and when he finished, he said let me tell you who I am. He gave them these instructions:

"I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 49:29-33).

Jacob understood that prophecy is something that you aspire to, but legacy is what you leave behind, it’s what you leave in the world as evidence that you were here. That’s what it means to be a father, to leave somebody on the earth as a testimony that you were here. And so, how you shape that person and develop that person is the mark of a father’s legacy. The conversations you have with them, the moments when you reveal your heart, unveiling your masculinity. It doesn’t happen all at once, but throughout the course of life, little by little you unveil yourself, until they are mature enough to see you as you are.

I want to encourage you father’s not to give up on yourself because you’re still trying to figure it out. I want to encourage the mothers, don’t give up on the father’s because it is complicated, but they will make it, they will figure it out. And I want to encourage the sons and daughters don’t be angry with your father, be strong enough to come to him hurt and broken. Because you’ll never understand yourself until you understand your father was hurt and broken too. Strengthen one another, stand together, because you are the legacy.

And therefore, all of us as followers of Christ must determine to humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand because we are the children of God. The sovereign hand of God rules the righteous and the unrighteous, he is the God who brings good out of all things, and so we know that no matter what happens in America our God is in control. We pray because we are followers of Jesus, we are people of faith, and we trust in our God.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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