

BIBLICAL PATTERNS FOR SPIRITUAL FATHERS AND MOTHERS

From *Father Cry: Healing Your Heart and the Hearts of Those You Love*

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JESUS, RESET MY FAMILY LEGACY

Jesus, refresh my gratitude for the spiritual fathers You've placed in my life. Help me remember all that I have received, and prompt me to give to others in the same ways.

PREFACE

Scripture gives impactful examples of men and women who have benefited from a spiritual mentor. Let these stories of faith inform your prayers to Jesus.

SPIRITUAL FATHERS AND MOTHERS

The Bible provides numerous opportunities to observe spiritual parents in action. A nuclear family model of teaching and disciple making is certainly crucial for the formational success of new generations. Biblical models for the nuclear, biological family should be taught and encouraged in Christian communities, since the principal place for disciple making should be in the home. What I primarily want to explore are non-familial models in which spiritual parenting and intergenerational mentoring occur. The most

trustworthy place to find examples of spiritual parenting is in Scripture.

MOSES AND JOSHUA

The account of Moses' mentoring relationship with Joshua begins after the exodus from Egypt when Moses selected Joshua to lead the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17). Following this first mention, Joshua's name appears periodically in ways that indicate a close relationship with Moses. Joshua was called Moses' minister and accompanied Moses to Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:13–14). He met Moses on his way down from the mountain (Exodus 32:17). He was called Moses' servant (Numbers 11:28). Joshua served as one of the spies chosen by Moses to go into Canaan and brought back a positive report (Numbers 13, 14). God commanded Moses to position Joshua as his successor, which Moses did (Numbers 27:18, 22). Joshua was lifted up in the eyes of the people and succeeded Moses, leading the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan.

Through these accounts, we witness Joshua fulfilling his destiny and Moses ensuring his legacy. *Success without a successor is actually failure.* Though he did fail at times, Moses avoided failure by having a viable successor in the person of Joshua. He passed the baton to Joshua during his lifetime, ensuring that God's work would continue into a new generation. This is nowhere more evident than in his mentoring of young Joshua to become a great leader. The intergenerational connection between Moses and Joshua was critical to the successful passage of a new generation into the Promised Land. Time spent together, teaching by example, a life of integrity, the influence of blessing, and the power of positive words are all seen in this biblical model.

LEARN to Encounter Jesus

Give as freely as you have received. (Matthew 10:8 NLT)

Take a moment to consider the mentors and “spiritual fathers” who have blessed and challenged you. Think about how they shared the love of Christ, taught by example, lived with integrity, or shared positive words with you. Then complete these sentences ...

I have received some of Christ's loving acceptance and support through _____ (name your spiritual father), particularly when he ...

I was blessed by _____ as he lived a life of integrity and taught me how ...

I have received some of Christ's loving encouragement through _____, especially when he shared positive words with me. I'm grateful that he said ...

Pause now for two prayerful moments:

First, express your gratitude — *Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me.* (Psalm 103:2 NLT)

Lord Jesus, my heart is moved with gratitude as I remember how You provided for me in my relationship with _____. I'm especially thankful for ...



Next, listen to Jesus — *Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.*
(1 Samuel 3:9)

Lord Jesus, because I am so grateful for how I have received from other spiritual fathers, I want to know who I could serve in the same way. Speak, Lord, I'm listening. Show me the person who needs me to give what I have received.

NAOMI AND RUTH

The story of Naomi and Ruth is ultimately a story of hope and redemption, but the story began with great struggle. Naomi and Ruth's immigration journey turned horribly wrong when every male family member died in the land of Moab. Naomi buried her family and then turned her heart toward home.

Ruth accompanied Naomi back to Bethlehem, where they lived together in relative poverty until being redeemed by Boaz (Ruth 3–4). Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the child of their union became a blessing to Naomi in her old age (Ruth 4:13–17). In this spiritual mother/daughter model, Ruth made the commitment of loyalty and faithfulness necessary to be a spiritual daughter. Naomi gave wisdom, insight, and discernment to Ruth. As a result, Naomi was blessed in her old age by the fruitfulness of her spiritual daughter.

The story of Ruth reveals the power of loyalty, the impartation of understanding from the aged, and the blessing of a spiritual daughter's fruitfulness. Again, the fulfillment of destiny and legacy occurs in this particular account of spiritual parenting. The story of Ruth and Naomi is an intergenerational testimony of hope in spite of the difficulties of life. God still takes the pain of loss and grief and turns it into joy and blessing, especially when generations love and work together.



PRAY and Experience Scripture

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4 NLT)

Recall a time when you were discouraged, saddened, or mistreated, but God brought a mentor or “spiritual father” to comfort and encourage you. How did this person reassure you and show their commitment to you so that you were not alone?

I remember a time when _____ and God brought _____ into my life to ...

Celebrate with a prayer partner or small group. Talk about the times when God brought people into your life to encourage, comfort, and reassure you. Acknowledge our great God and how He is at work to now open your eyes and heart to those who need your “spiritual fathering.”

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

The account of Elijah and Elisha is perhaps the most used scriptural example of the spiritual father/son relationship. Elisha is first mentioned in the life of the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb, where God instructed Elijah to recruit Elisha to take his place (1 Kings 19:16). Elisha committed to follow Elijah (1 Kings 19:21) and became his minister (2 Kings 3:11). Elisha faithfully followed his mentor until Elijah was caught up into the heavens.

Elisha took up Elijah’s mantle and entered into prophetic leadership himself (2 Kings 2). This prophetic intergenerational succession

forms a model that reveals much regarding spiritual fathers and mothers. We learn that spiritual sons must make a commitment, be willing to submissively serve, continue to be loyal through difficulties, be with the mentor, and be willing to assume responsibility as needed. We also learn that spiritual fathers must clearly hear God's voice in selecting those whom they will adopt as spiritual sons, live in a way that inspires emulation, continue faithful to the call of God upon their lives, leave something for the next generation to take up, and allow their spiritual sons the access needed to succeed.



SHARE with Others in Community

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25 NASB). His love compels Him to pray for us. He intercedes to the Father for our needs, for our hearts, in our struggles, and in our victories. Imagine Christ kneeling in prayer for you; imagine Jesus speaking your name as He prays to the Father. Imagine that you hear the Savior asking the Father for your victory as a dad and spiritual mentor.

What does it do to your heart to know that Jesus loves you so much that He always prays for you? What impact does it make on your life to know that Jesus prays for your heart to turn first toward Him, then toward your children and toward others who need a spiritual father? Take a moment to tell the Lord about your feelings and then share about this moment with a prayer partner.

Jesus, when I consider that You are praying for me, my life, and my children, it brings feelings of _____ to my heart.

PAUL AND TIMOTHY

The apostle Paul was a spiritual father in the early church. He notes this spiritual fatherhood with the Corinthian believers: “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15 κiv). Although he was a spiritual father for many early Christian communities, Paul’s personal spiritual fathering role is seen most clearly in his relationship with Timothy. Paul, heeding the advice of the brethren, selected Timothy to travel with his ministry team (Acts 16:2). Timothy came from a family in which his mother was a believer and his father was not (Acts 16:1). Timothy had a strong Christian heritage from his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). Yet Timothy needed a spiritual father in order to reach his full potential in Christ. Paul called Timothy his son (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1) in the faith.

The model of Paul and Timothy is one of the clearest in Scripture for defining the roles of spiritual parents and spiritual children. The writings recorded in 1 and 2 Timothy are instructions of a spiritual father to his spiritual son, and Timothy’s faithful discharge of service is a prime example of the commitment needed by spiritual sons and daughters. Timothy served Paul in the good times and the bad (Acts 16). Timothy could be trusted (Philippians 2:19–20). Timothy was empowered by Paul to do the work of ministry (1 Timothy) and was corrected by Paul in the midst of that work (2 Timothy). At the end of his journey, Paul’s spiritual son, Timothy, ministered to the aged apostle (2 Timothy 4:9–21).

Christianity has survived throughout history because one generation has passed the faith on to another. Sometimes we have been more successful at this than at other times. The

twenty-first century has brought us to a new season of spiritual transition, one in which the younger generation must not move too fast and the older generation must push themselves to get the baton passed. We are intersecting together in God's passing zone. If we follow the pattern of Scripture, spiritual fathers and mothers will not fail to impart to their spiritual sons and daughters the passion, purpose, and purity needed to finish the race. Together we can win. Apart we will be disqualified.

LOVE Others in Community

Make a plan to share about one of your spiritual mentors. Plan to share this aspect of your faith with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus.

I'm so grateful for the impact of _____ on my life. I'm grateful because he/she has a life that's been reset by Jesus. I can see the difference Jesus has made in his/her life because ...

I'm thankful that I get to do life with someone who ...