

June 21, 2026

The Heart of a Father

Genesis 21:8-21

“The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.” — Genesis 21:11

Today is a wonderful day of celebration as we honor our new graduates and our fathers. We thank God for the amazing fathers who brought us into this world and for the hard work of our graduates in completing their courses and graduating. As I begin this sermon, I would like to start by celebrating the fathers for their selfless love and support!

Genesis 21:11 is a verse that feels very real for many fathers. Father’s Day is often filled with smiles, cards, and cookouts—but the Bible doesn’t give us a sentimental Hallmark picture of fatherhood. Instead, **it shows Abraham in Genesis 21:11: a father who is distressed, torn, hurting, and caught between competing voices.** This is fatherhood in the real world. Not perfect. Not simple. Not always celebrated. But deeply important. Abraham’s story reminds us that God meets fathers not just in their strength but also in their struggles.

Abraham was "greatly distressed," not mildly troubled or slightly upset, crushed, burdened, and torn inside. His distress stemmed not from work, money, or enemies, but from his son.

Fathers often carry burdens they don’t talk about:

The pressure to provide. The fear of failing. The desire to protect
The decisions that shape a child’s future and affect the whole family.
The prayers whispered late at night when no one is watching

Abraham shows us: **A father’s heart is tender, even when his face is strong.** And God does not rebuke Abraham for feeling deeply. God meets him in his distress.

A father’s life includes hard decisions. God asks Abraham to make a painful decision—one he never wanted to make. Abraham finds himself torn between various pressures: Sarah’s demands, his love for Ishmael, God’s instructions, and his own conscience.

This tension is familiar to many fathers. Fatherhood requires courage in different situations:

- Knowing when to hold on and when to let go
- Deciding when to discipline and when to show mercy
- Understanding when to allow children to face the consequences of their actions
- Determining when to protect and when to entrust them to God.

Fatherhood is not solely about strength; it also involves wisdom, discernment, and courage. Often, the right decision is the hardest one to make. It is important to understand that God meets fathers in their moments of distress. God does not ignore Abraham’s pain; instead, God speaks directly to him. **God reassures Abraham by saying, "I know this hurts. I know this is complicated. But I am with you, and I will take care of your son."** With this assurance, Abraham entrusted Ishmael to God’s care. This act of fatherhood—releasing your children to God—is one of the most challenging decisions a parent can make. Just as Abraham released Ishmael into God’s hands, every father must do the same. As a father, you cannot:

- Control every choice your child makes
- Prevent every mistake they might make

- Protect them from every hurt they may experience

However, you can trust in the God who loves your children even more than you do.

Abraham's legacy was not built on perfection; it was built on obedience, faith, and trust.

Fathers leave a legacy when they pray for their children consistently and love sacrificially, no matter the circumstances of the relationship.

Here is a message for fathers today: Like Abraham, many fathers endure hidden stress, quiet fears, difficult decisions, deep love, and unspoken prayers. Just like Abraham, you are not alone. God sees your heart, hears your prayers, strengthens your steps, cares for your children, and walks with you through every season of fatherhood. Your role is important. Your presence is important. Your love is important. Your faith is important. **Happy Father's Day!**

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To our graduates, congratulations on your achievement! As you take your next step, remember that God has a plan for you. Today is a significant milestone. You've worked hard, pushed through challenges, survived group projects, and endured late-night study sessions, experiencing all the ups and downs that come with growing up. Now, you're embarking on something new—whether it's exciting, scary, or perhaps a mix of both. **The good news is this: God is already there in your next step. Remember Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:15-20)!**

Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you a future with hope."* God doesn't say, "You should know the plan." God says, **"I know."** So, if you don't have everything figured out, that's okay. God's not asking you to know the whole map—just to trust the One who does.

Psalms 37 says, *"The Lord makes firm the steps of those who delight in Him... though they stumble, they will not fall."* That means you're going to have moments where things don't go perfectly. You might not get the job you wanted. You might feel lost for a while. But stumbling isn't failing. God's hand remains steady even when life isn't.

So here are three things to carry with you:

- 1. You are more than your achievements.** Your worth isn't your grades, your job, or your trophies. You are loved because you are God's.
- 2. God leads one step at a time.** You don't need a five-year plan. You just need to take the next faithful step— and God will meet you there.
- 3. You're not doing this alone.** God goes before you. God walks beside you. And this church is cheering you on.

Go into this next chapter with courage. Not because you know what's coming, but because **God goes with you wherever you go. Congratulations!**