

What makes a person great? Is it the genius of a Stephen Hawking (**picture**), the athletic skill of a Tom Brady (**picture**), the acting ability of a Tom Hanks (**picture**), the business savvy of a Warren Buffet (**picture**)? Our world may gauge success in terms of fame, wealth, and power; God measures greatness by another standard, a far more important standard.

We've been told that figures don't lie, but sometimes they don't give an accurate picture. For example, some chemists figured out what the average man is worth. He contains enough fat to make seven bars of soap; enough iron to make a medium-sized nail; enough magnesium for one good dose of magnesia; enough potassium and sulfur to create a small explosion; enough lime to whitewash a small chicken coop; enough sugar to fill a shaker; and enough potassium to make 2,200 match tips. Chemists figured at the current rates that a man was worth about ninety-eight cents.

Others found that that same 98 cent man is worth \$85.5 billion. Researchers believe just his atoms have an energy potential of 11.4 kilowatt hours per pound, \$570 million per pound! Total value: \$85.5 billion. Some of us are worth more than we ever imagined!

When it comes to an eternal evaluation, a godly father who loves Jesus is priceless. The humblest Dad is great with God if he's a godly man. Nowhere is this more evident than in one's role as a parent. On this Father's Day, we want to look at one of the great Dads in the Bible – Abraham.

Abraham wasn't perfect, just a simple shepherd. Yet, Abraham had a heart for God. He's the only person in the Bible called "*the friend of God*" (James 2:3). He's a model for every Dad who wants to be a great man, a great husband, and a great Dad. In his life we find benchmarks for a successful father. In his life we find **God's Plan for a Great Dad**.

**1. Great Dads have a personal relationship with God.** Perhaps you're thinking, "Scott, you're only saying that because it's Sunday." But doesn't a good Dad seek to protect and provide for his children? What's the greatest gift you can give your children? Money, education, opportunities?

If your child doesn't know Jesus, what have you truly given them? Your child can be a zero even if they're successful in business, have a Ph. D or a gazillionaire. You may have provided everything they need for this life, but will that matter for even one second in eternity?

Romans 4:3, "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*" It's impossible to share what you don't have. If you don't have a personal relationship with Christ, you're not going to be able to share it. Worse, you'll focus on the temporary that has no lasting value. We all know someone who was going to make sure their kid was a great athlete. How did it work out?

Tiger Wood's (**picture**) Dad was determined that Tiger would be a great golfer and he is. But he's been a moral failure. The greatest gift you can give your children is your own personal relationship with Christ.

Abraham believed God. He looked in faith toward the cross. All of his wonderful character traits flow from that foundation of first knowing God.

**2. Great Dads are gracious.** Shortly after World War II ended, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of Europe had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities.

Early on a chilly morning, an American soldier was making his way back to his barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his Jeep, he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the baker was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts.

The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his Jeep to the curb, got out and walked quietly over to where the little guy was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the baker place them into the glass-enclosed display case. That soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son, would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "I sure would!" The soldier stepped inside, bought a dozen donuts, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply, "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, "Mister, are you God?" We are never more like God than when we're gracious and generous.

It is rare to find a Christian employer or business owner who lives like one. Abraham is a model of graciousness. In Genesis 13 Abraham's flocks are growing. His nephew, Lot, was his partner but there wasn't enough pastureland for both of their rapidly growing herds.

Abraham knew they had to split the business. But he's the uncle and older. He'd taken care of his nephew after Lot's Dad died. Here's what's amazing! When they were going to split up, Abraham told Lot, "You choose first." No trying to get the better deal. Just gracious selfless, "Lot, you choose first."

Over the years I've had the privilege of knowing godly men like that. They don't put on a show, just quietly put others first. When you find one, a man who puts his wife and children first, a man who puts his neighbor or co-worker or business partners first, you've truly seen something. My experience has been that you're seeing someone who's a friend of God.

**3. Great Dads take risks.** You'll never do anything for God if you play it safe. And no matter how hard you try, you'll never be totally safe or keep your family safe.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, didn't have Abraham's heart for God and moved into the wrong neighborhood. An invading army came and took Lot and his family as captives (Genesis 14). But do you know what Abraham did? He didn't say, "Well, Lot had it coming. He should have known not to move into that neighborhood." No, that's not Abraham. He mounts a rescue operation and saves Lot and afterwards, he won't even take compensation.

Eleanor Roosevelt (**picture**) said, "*Do one thing every day that scares you.*" Jimmy Carter (**picture**) said, "*Go out on a limb. That's where the fruit is.*" Race car driver, Mario Andretti (**picture**) said, "*If things seem under control, you are just not going fast enough.*" Hockey great, Wayne Gretzky (**picture**) said, "*You'll always miss 100% of the shots you don't take.*" Risk takers change the world and risk takers impact this world and reach others for Christ.

Some of you are saying, "*What a minute, godly people don't take risks!*" Really? Read your Bible. The individuals God uses are risk takers.

As John Piper (**picture**) writes: "*Is taking risks unwise and unloving? Maybe. But maybe not. What if the circumstances are such that not taking a risk will result in loss and injury? It may not be wise to play it safe. And what if a successful risk would bring great benefit to many people and its failure would bring harm only to yourself? It may not be loving to choose the comfort of security when something great may be achieved for the cause of God and for the good of others.*"

Can I challenge you to take one step forward of risk this week? Take a risk in your commitment. Maybe it means starting your day with time in the Word and prayer. Maybe it means praying big. Maybe it means committing to serving the Lord in a ministry. Maybe it's reaching out to a neighbor or co-worker. Maybe it's increasing your giving. The Christian life is not safe. You'll never grow in faith unless you take risks for Jesus.

Alexander the Great (**picture**) had a general who approached him after many years of service to ask if he'd pay for the wedding of his daughter. Alexander agreed and told him to obtain the funds needed from his treasurer.

But soon the treasurer came to Alexander, complaining that this general was taking advantage of Alexander's generosity. He was asking for an exorbitant amount of money, enough to host the largest wedding Greece had ever seen.

Alexander thought about it for a moment, then waved his hand dismissively and said, "Grant him his request in full." The treasurer looked bewildered. Alexander continued, "My general pays me two compliments: He believes that I am rich enough to afford his request and that I am generous enough to grant it. In assuming these two things, he honors me."

Our Heavenly Father is so good, gracious, and powerful we can never ask or assume too much. We don't offend him with large requests; we offend Him with small ones! God wants us to trust Him and take risks. Part of being a growing Christian is being a risk-taker.

**4. Great Dads are men of prayer.** Do you know one common trait of friends? They talk. Abraham was the friend of God. Throughout his life we find him constantly talking to God. Wherever Abraham went, he set up altars, places of prayer to God.

When Abraham learned that God was going to destroy the evil city of Sodom where Lot lived, he pleaded in prayer for it. His plea for Sodom is the first great intercessory prayer in the history of the People of God.

F.B. Meyer (**picture**), "*The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but un-offered prayer.*" Instead of prayer being something we do every day, like breathing, eating, walking, and talking, it's treated more like that little glass covered box on the wall that says, "*Break in case of emergency.*" Too often we only associate prayer with crises in our life.

Prayer is too often an untapped resource, an unexplored continent where untold treasure remains to be unearthed. It's talked about more, yet practiced less than anything else. For the believer it remains one of the greatest gifts our Lord has given us outside of salvation.

In 1952, Albert Einstein (**picture**) was delivering a lecture on the campus of Princeton. A doctoral student asked the famous scientist, "What is there left in the world for original dissertation research?" With considerate thought and profundity Einstein replied, "Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer." Prayer connects us with God and it changes us.

**Prayer internalizes the burden.** It deepens our ownership of the burden and our partnership with God. As we pray, we become aware of how God might use us to answer the prayer, how He might involve us in ways we'd not considered or foreseen.

**Prayer forces us to wait.** A vital part of prayer is learning to wait for God. God has three answers to prayers: *Yes, no* and *wait*. Yes and no are easy. Waiting is tough. Instead of getting frustrated that God isn't on our schedule, prayer forces us to learn to be on God's timetable.

**Prayer opens our spiritual eyes.** It enables us to get in touch with what God is doing and how He's doing it. It opens our eyes, enabling us to see things we're blinded to apart from prayer. We speak to God, God answers us, speaking to us, showing us His plan.

**Prayer enables us to move forward.** Prayer engages God, enables God's people, and enlarges His kingdom. Jesus said, "*without Me, you can do nothing.*" Once we've prayed, if it's God will and with His power, we can accomplish anything.

**5. Great Dads keep God first.** In Genesis 22 we find the account of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac. That wasn't just for Abraham. God asks us the same question: *Do we love Him enough to surrender our Isaac to Him?* The first of the ten commandments is: "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

Did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? Yes. Was it a legitimate request? Yes. Did Abraham know in advance how the story would end? No.

So, what was it that Abraham knew? He knew what God had asked him to do and that God had promised to give him a son through whom God would bless the world. What Abraham didn't know was how God was going to reconcile His promise (to bless the world through Isaac) and His command (to offer Isaac as a sacrifice).

Here we see Abraham's great faith. Even though God's command made no sense from a human perspective, Abraham intended to obey. He'd obey God's command even though it meant killing God's promise. How could a Dad do such a thing? Abraham believed that God could raise the dead.

What's our take-away? It's found when God commends Abraham saying, "*You have not withheld from Me your son, your only son.*"

Anything can be an idol. An idol is anything, even a good thing, that becomes more important to you than God. Even a spouse, a child, a business, or a thing can be an idol.

One Christian counselor points out that too often the problem with Christian families is that the husband and wife join hands to form a family circle. Then, a child comes along and they place the child in the center with the husband and wife still forming the circle. But now everything revolves around the child. A 2<sup>nd</sup> child comes and that child is also placed in the circle. Now everything revolves around two children. As the family becomes larger the center becomes so big that the hands of the father and mother are pulled apart and the circle is broken.

Instead he says that what we must do is form the circle, but with Jesus Christ in the center. Then, as each child is born, they join hands with Dad and Mom to make the circle bigger. The result is that the circle is never broken as long as Christ is at the center.

We must love God more than we love anyone or anything. He must be first.

Watchman Nee (**picture**) said that we approach God like little children with open hands, begging for gifts. Because He's a good God, He fills our hands with good things—life, health, friends, money, success, recognition, challenge, marriage, children, a nice home, a good job, all the things that we count at Thanksgiving when we count our blessings. Like children, we rejoice in what we've received and run around comparing what we have with each other.

But when our hands are finally full, God says, "My child, I long to have fellowship with you. Reach out your hand and take my hand." But we can't do it because our hands are full. "God, I can't," we cry. "Put those things aside and take My hand." "No, we can't. It's too hard to put them down." "But I am the one who gave them to you in the first place." "O God, what You've asked is too hard. Please don't ask us to put these things aside." And God answers quietly, "You must."

Until we surrender all, we will never have God's best. Jesus asked, "*What do you benefit if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?*" (Mark 8:36 NLT). That's our problem. We've gained so much we don't want to let go lest we lose the whole world. But in the process, we lose our own soul.

What's your Isaac? Are you willing to sacrifice it for Jesus' sake?

**6. Great Dads have a sin nature.** Twice Abraham lied and said Sarah was his sister, not his wife. Later we learn she's his half-sister. Though Abraham is the father of the faithful, he has chinks in his armor. We all do.

Sometimes Abraham acts with great faith in God. Other times he seems to forget God exists. This is important. We all have sin patterns. If we don't confess and repent of them, our children often repeat them. More is caught than taught. Our

tendency though is to rationalize chronic sin. Yet the sin pattern you have today can directly impact your children, your grandchildren, and even your great-grandchildren. It's a terrible truth to consider.

Abraham was a liar and his son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob, were also liars. We must deal with sin or it will often come back to bite our children. Abraham was a sinner and needed a Savior, just like you and me. Even great Dads have a sin nature. It's why we all need Jesus and God's grace.

**7. Great Dads plan generationally.** Church researcher, George Barna (**picture**) once asked 600 teens to name the most significant spiritual influencers in their lives. Number one was parents; number two was other family members, most typically their grandparents.

Grandparents have the potential to have a significant influence in their grandchild's life spiritually. Yet, it won't happen if we don't plan generationally. Abraham is our model for generational planning.

After Sarah died (Genesis 25), Abraham married a woman named Keturah. Isaac is the heir and the son promised by God. So, Abraham makes sure that Isaac won't have headaches from his other children. Genesis 25:6, *"But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country."*

Why did he do that? *"Because where there's a will, there's relatives."* Abraham didn't leave Isaac with a mess. He wisely planned ahead.

It's not enough to parent well. We need to also plan and prepare today for future generations. John Maxwell (**picture**) sums it up well: *"The best leaders lead today with tomorrow in mind by making sure they invest in leaders who will carry their legacy forward."*

A wise Dad works to make himself replaceable. Put things and systems in place so that when you're gone, your children are prepared.

We've all seen pictures of the passing of the Olympic torch (**picture**) from one runner to the next until the torch is finally lit at the next Olympic site. The "passing of the torch" is a good metaphor for life. One generation must pass the torch to the next.

This takes on added significance when we're talking about faith in Christ. Every generation has the responsibility to pass on God's truth to the next. God didn't design faith as something that can be passed along genetically. It must be done personally. If we don't actively pass along the faith, its flame will die. *"Christianity is potentially only one generation away from extinction."* Are you preparing for the next generations? **Great Dads plan generationally.**

**Conclusion:** Professional golfer, Curtis Strange (**picture**), was golfing in the Master's Tournament, teed up on the 12<sup>th</sup> hole, hit a beautiful shot, it rolled right up and dropped in the cup for a hole in one.

The crowd went nuts with applause. Then, Curtis Strange did something that seemed nuts. He leaned down, reached into the cup, picked up the ball and tossed it into the creek.

Now the media really went crazy. They asked him why he did that. "Why didn't you keep it? You could have left it to your grandchildren."

Listen to his response. Curtis Strange said, "I certainly hope that when I'm gone I have something better than a golf ball to leave to my grandchildren."

Leave a legacy. God wants you to be a great Dad. What are you leaving? How will you be remembered? What are you passing on to the next generation? Abraham lived for God and it made a difference for generations.