

## First Chair For Father's Day

It's been almost 25 years ago at a Promise Keepers rally that I watched John Maxwell set three chairs on the stage and then share a powerful message for the men in attendance. I shared that message the following Father's Day and as I prepared for this service I felt directed to share some of those thoughts with you this morning.

I've never played in a band. We had a marching band at BHS but I played the piano and it was too hard to roll that upright around the football field so I never joined the band. However, I do remember the competition, the tryouts to see who would be 1<sup>st</sup> chair, who would be 2<sup>nd</sup> chair, etc. Position was important because it reflected who was the best in their section.

In the orchestra the first chair violinist is the concert master. He is the person the orchestra looks to. He tunes the orchestra. After the performance the conductor will shake hands with or have the first chair violinist take a bow. It matters what chair you are sitting in if you are in the band or the orchestra.

I've seen other examples where it mattered which chair you were in. I've been in meetings where chairs were arranged so the chairman was at the head of the table and the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command was at their right or left. It was obvious who was in charge and who was next in line. No one would dare come in and sit in one of those chairs. You knew who was in the first chair.

It's interesting that in the book of Revelation, Jesus had churches assigned to certain positions. Concerning the church in Laodicea, Jesus spoke of them as being neither cold nor hot but lukewarm and lukewarm made him sick. We could think of the churches as being

**1<sup>st</sup> chair = hot, 2<sup>nd</sup> chair = lukewarm, 3<sup>rd</sup> chair = cold.**

3<sup>rd</sup> chair church is cold, dead, lifeless, 2<sup>nd</sup> chair church is lukewarm, compromised. Only the first chair is hot and considered acceptable and on fire for God.

Spiritually speaking, where you are sitting is important to God. Think about it for a moment. Where are you sitting right now, in regard to your relationship with God? Is it in the first chair? Your relationship is current, hot, on fire, passionate about God and about serving Him? Or is your relationship more accurately reflected in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chair. Lukewarm, not really devoted, growing complacent about God and your relationship, maybe indifferent, apathetic. Or is your relationship more like 3<sup>rd</sup> chair? Cold. Turned off by God, by church, essentially rebelling against God and ignoring his word and his commands. You are living your own way with no regard for God and his word. These are tough questions, but they help us figure out in

which chair we belong spiritually speaking. It matters which chair you are in.

Since it's Father's Day, let me ask you men. Where are you sitting? You need to look at your own personal relationship with God. Are you in the 1<sup>st</sup> chair, 2<sup>nd</sup> chair or 3<sup>rd</sup> chair? And equally important if you are a father, what chair do you want your son or daughter to be sitting in? You see, what we find is, if you are sitting in 1<sup>st</sup> chair, the odds are high that your child will end up sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> chair unless you take care to truly be a spiritual leader in your home and raise up God's standard in your own life and before your children. And odds are high if you are sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> chair, just kind of lukewarm in your commitment to Christ, your child will end up sitting in 3<sup>rd</sup> chair. Cold, uncommitted and perhaps even turned away from the Lord completely. If you sit in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chair, your children likely won't have any knowledge of God at all.

It's not a rule. It's not always the case, but we've all seen it, haven't we? The first generation serves God but the second generation is barely committed to the Lord and the third generation cares nothing about God or about serving the Lord. So, where are you sitting and where do you want your children to sit in terms of their relationship with God? Let me illustrate with a couple of stories from the Old Testament. Turn to **Genesis 12** and the story of Abraham.

Abraham is called by God to leave his home and go to a land God promised to him and to his children. Abraham had been a pagan, but God spoke to him and Abraham became a follower of the Living God.

Genesis 12:4-8 tells of his leaving and those who journeyed with him. Notice verse 8 says, **"From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent. . . There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord."** **Genesis 12:8** Everywhere Abraham went he built altars to worship the Lord. God was the #1 priority in Abraham's life. He listened, obeyed, worshiped and sacrificed to the Lord. He was continually seeking God. Genesis 13 tells us he returned to Bethel, **"where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord."** **Genesis 13:4.** **"So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord."** **Genesis 13:18.** This was the pattern and priority of his life, to serve and worship God.

The Lord said of Abraham, **"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."** **Genesis 18:19.** Abraham understood the purpose and plan and call of God and surrendered himself to that. The

Bible then tells us that Abraham died at 175 years of age, full of years.

His son Isaac was also a God-fearer, but if you read the account of Isaac's life, less is said about sacrifice and the building of altars. More is said about the digging and re-digging of wells. Of course this was essential in the dry desert climate in order to expand their flocks and the family empire. It wasn't a bad thing and God certainly prospered him. Genesis 26 says, "Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold because the Lord blessed him." God continued to bless him and he became very wealthy the Bible says. The Philistines became envious so they filled up all the wells that Isaac's father's servants had dug. Beginning in Genesis 26:17 the Bible tells us that Isaac moved away from there and reopened the wells that had been dug in his father's time. Then his servants dug fresh wells. And then in verse 21 they dug another well. And then he moved on to Beersheba and he dug another well. At Beersheba the Lord appeared to him and the bible tells us finally **"Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent and there his servants dug a well."** Genesis 26:25.

God certainly prospered him, but it appears his focus, his priorities were somewhat different than that of his father Abraham. His emphasis, his devotion to the Lord may have taken something of a backseat to his desire to expand the family empire with more land, more livestock, more wells. If you controlled the water, you controlled the land and the wealth. Abraham built altars and then wells, Isaac built wells, redug wells and then built an altar.

If Abraham occupied 1<sup>st</sup> chair in terms of his devotion and commitment to the Lord, his desire to obey God and hear from God, then perhaps we can say that Isaac occupied 2<sup>nd</sup> chair. He was slightly less devoted and committed. And then there were Isaac's sons.

Genesis 25 tells of the birth of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. The Bible tells us Esau was born first with Jacob "grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob." Jacob means "he grasps the heel" and figuratively it means "he deceives." Jacob was something of a deceiver. A con man. Without going into detail, Jacob deceived Isaac his father into believing he was Esau and then cheated his brother out of the first born's blessing and inheritance. While Jacob was a deceiver, Esau married a Hittite woman that drove his mother and father crazy. The boys were a mess really, and not exactly occupying the 1<sup>st</sup> chair.

Jacob lived by his wits rather than by his faith. He ran from his brother and while running for his life he had an encounter with God. He set up a pillar of stones as a memorial, but

he built no altar nor did he dig a well. He was more apt to look for someone to con into digging a well for him than to dig one himself.

The point is, for the early years of his life he seems to be doing things his own way rather than surrendering to God's way. It is not until he wrestles with the angel of the Lord in Genesis 32 and God humbles him and changes his name that he seems to truly become a God-seeker. I think we could say early on that Jacob and Esau occupied the 3<sup>rd</sup> chair. So here are the generations:

**Abraham is committed. Devoted to God. Built altars and worshipped. 1<sup>st</sup> chair. Hot.**

**Isaac is compromised. Devoted to work/empire. Dug wells. 2<sup>nd</sup> chair. Lukewarm.**

**Jacob is confused. Devoted to himself. Lived by deception. 3<sup>rd</sup> chair. Cold.**

I know it's a sweeping generalization, and thank God that Jacob and Esau were able to reconcile, and Jacob is humbled and becomes a God-seeker, but not without a lot of years of pain and misery that could have been avoided if they had walked close to the Lord. What would have happened if they had grown up occupying 1<sup>st</sup> chair in terms of their devotion to God and his plans? How different things could have been. It matters which chair you occupy today!

One more quick example. David was referred to as a man after God's own heart. Chosen to be Israel's king, David had a heart for God and sought the Lord above all.

David had a son, Solomon who knew the Lord and who built the temple of the Lord. But Solomon's heart got drawn away from the Lord and he began seeking after pleasure - wine, women, wealth, fame, splendor - rather than seeking after the Lord. Solomon had it all, but chose to disobey God's instruction after God had appeared to him twice! **"His wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been...so Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord..." 1 Kings 11:4-6** How sad that the wise king Solomon didn't follow the Lord as his father David had. 2<sup>nd</sup> chair.

Solomon had a son named Rehoboam. You can read about his reign in 2 Chronicles 10-12. Rehoboam had a heart for power rather than for God. He rejected the advice of the elders after his father died and instead followed his own lust for power. As a result, the kingdom his grandfather David had united and his father Solomon had ruled was divided into two nations, Israel and Judah. Rehoboam, stubborn and cruel, ruled Judah and the bible says **"He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord." 2 Chronicles 12:14.**

**David had a heart for God and united the Kingdom. 1<sup>st</sup> chair. Hot.**

**Solomon had a heart for pleasure and played with the Kingdom. 2<sup>nd</sup> chair. Lukewarm.**

**Rehoboam had a heart for power and divided the Kingdom. 3<sup>rd</sup> chair. Cold.**

We see it throughout Scripture. The 1<sup>st</sup> generation knew God and sought after the Lord. They occupied the first chair. The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation knew about the works of God. They sought after his works, but they didn't seek after him. They sat in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chair. The third generation didn't know God or his ways. They sought only their own way. They occupied the 3<sup>rd</sup> chair. Hot, lukewarm, and cold.

Hear me again. It matters how you are living life today. Dad, it matters in which chair you are sitting. If I sit in the 1<sup>st</sup> chair, in terms of my relationship with God, the odds are high my children will sit in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chair and their children in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chair, UNLESS, I take care to guard my heart and raise the standard in my own life. Unless I truly purpose to be a man of God.

So what do I do as a father? What do I do to get in 1<sup>st</sup> chair and stay there and make sure my sons and daughters follow me in the 1<sup>st</sup> chair as well? Very quickly let me share 6 things.

**Be a God seeker!** Put God first in your life. Let him rule the throne of your heart and seek after him and his will above everything else in your life. Make sure that nothing is as important as surrendering your heart to the Lord, seeking after and serving him. Nothing!

This is not a one time thing. This is not a Sunday morning relationship. This must be a lifestyle. A lifestyle of pursuing God – of serving him and walking in fellowship with him everyday. Consistently. Faithfully. **This must be a purposeful, determined, unrelenting, consistent, uncompromising choice to put God first and keep God first in your life!** This means you are going to pray, read God's word, worship, obey God, attend church, participate in the life of the church. Your future and the spiritual life and future of your children are at stake.

**Be a man of prayer!** If you don't know how to pray, the way to learn is to start praying. Talk to God on behalf of yourself and your family. Pray for your children. Pray for their lives, their souls, their future. Pray protection over them. Not only pray for your children, pray with your children. Let them see you praying. Let them hear you praying. They will learn how to pray by listening to Dad (or Mom) pray and cry out to God. Let them know you pray for them everyday. Be a man (a person) of prayer.

**Live the life!** Dad, men, everyone, don't just talk the surrendered life, live it. Let your family see your life. They can spot a phoney. Let your life be an example of holiness, purity,

integrity, godliness, faithfulness, consistency. Live a godly life. Start today! It's not too late.

Men, don't tolerate sin in your life. Get rid of the impure stuff. Don't tolerate pornography, filthy language, vulgar stories and jokes. Don't open the door to sin or addiction. What parents do in moderation children do in excess. Maintain integrity in your business and personal dealings. Speak the truth all the time. Keep your word. Let your family see that you keep your word, your promise, your covenant with them, with your spouse, with children, with others. Stop tolerating sin and compromise and be a man! Recognize the power of example and influence. Your children are watching your life! Be a man of God. If you are married,

**Work on your marriage relationship!** Honor your spouse and model for your children what commitment, unconditional love, acceptance, forgiveness, patience and kindness are all about. Show your children what a godly marriage is all about. There is so much at stake. It's worth the hard work. If you are a single parent, don't dishonor your "ex" in front of your children. Keep showing them love and kindness and God's mercy at work.

**Keep your sights on the eternal!** Everything looks important, essential, but few things are of eternal consequence. There are few things here that will last into eternity, but what you do for Jesus, your service to him, and how you treat your family and how you raise your children, that effects eternity. Don't build your life on stuff that is temporal. Watch your priorities. Someone said if you teach your child to keep their eye on the ball but don't teach them to keep their eye on Jesus, you've failed as a parent. Invest in eternity. Teach your children to invest in eternity by making godly choices. Model it for them. Our culture seems to value almost everything except God and the eternal. Keep your focus and help keep your children's focus on God and on serving him and living for him.

Remember, this life isn't all there is. We weren't created for this life alone. There is a life yet to come. Keep your eyes on that heavenly calling and that heavenly prize. Keep that hope before you. Finally,

**Accept the responsibility for being a man of God and the spiritual leader in your home!** It's not up to anyone else. It's up to you. God won't hold anyone else responsible or accountable but you for your choices and how you lived your life. No one else can be the father and husband you can be to your children and your wife. No one else can lead your family and serve your family the way you can. Accept that responsibility.

Dad, what chair are you sitting in today? 1<sup>st</sup> chair? 2<sup>nd</sup> chair? 3<sup>rd</sup> chair? What chair do

you want your children to sit in with regard to their relationship with God? 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>?

**It matters where you sit today.** Dads, raise the standard. Guard your heart and your soul and your family. Some of you are helping raise your grandchildren. Raise the standard in your own life for those grandchildren as well.

3 chairs. 3 options. And this isn't just for Fathers although that's been my focus in this message. But for all of us. What chair are we sitting in? What influence are we having on others?

3 chairs. 3 options. But by your choices you can eliminate the other 2. Live so that 2 and 3 aren't even an option. They aren't even on the horizon. There is no other way to live. You can decide today that there will be no other lifestyle, no other way presented or modeled except a life that is sold out and committed to Jesus. Joshua told the people, **“Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped and serve the Lord...but if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24: 14-15.** Men and Dad's, throw away the other options. Throw away the other chairs, the other gods and let's make a pledge to God and ourselves: “Whatever it takes Lord, in my life, as of today, there is just one chair – there is only 1<sup>st</sup> chair!”